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FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS VIRTUAL:

Where does that leave pedagogy?

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LATIN AMERICAN PEDAGOGICAL MOVEMENT

FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS VIRTUAL: WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE PEDAGOGY?

Contributions towards reflecting on the didactic-pedagogical challenges of teaching-learning processes in latin america in times of Covid-19: the cases of Honduras, Costa Rica and Paraguay

José Manuel Valverde

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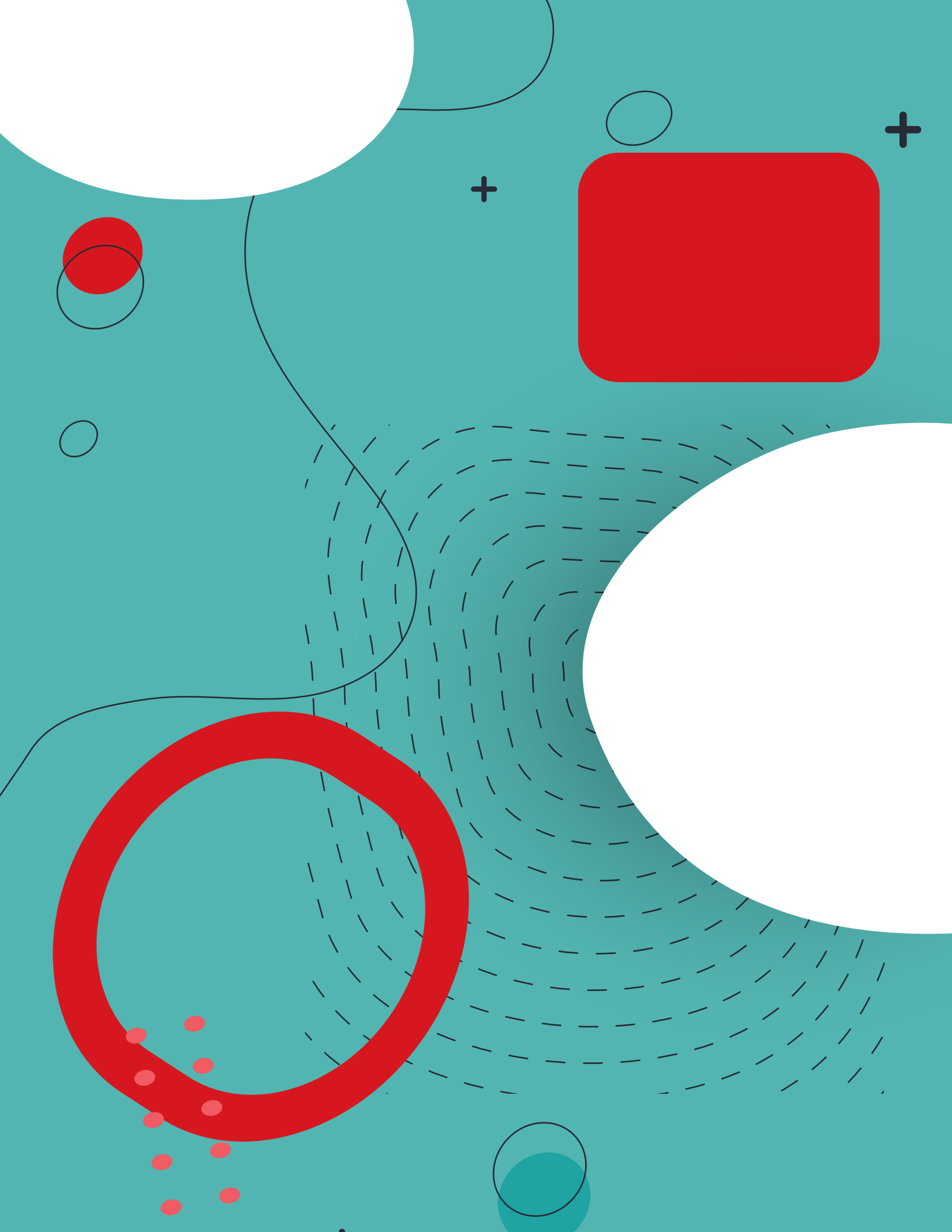
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANDE	*Asociación Nacional de Educadores y Educadoras* (National Teachers' Association, Costa Rica)
APSE	*Asociación de Profesores de Segunda Enseñanza* (Highschool Teachers' Association)
COLPROSUMAH	*Colegio Profesional Superación Magisterial Hondureño* (Honduran Teachers Professional Training Association)
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EHPM	Household and Multi-Purpose Survey, Costa Rica
ENAHO	National Household Survey, Costa Rica
EPHC	Continuous Permanent Household Survey, Paraguay
FEREMA	*Fundación para la Educación Ricardo Ernesto Maduro Andreu* (Ricardo Ernesto Maduro Andreu Foundation for Education, Honduras)
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
INE	*Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (National Institute of Statistics, Honduras and Paraguay)
INEC	*Instituto de Estadística y Censos* (Institute of Statistics and Censuses, Costa Rica)
GTA	*Guías de Trabajo Autónomo* (Autonomous Work Guides, used in Costa Rica)
OTEP-A	*Organización de Trabajadores de la Educación del Paraguay-Auténtica, Sindicato Nacional* (Authentic Paraguayan Education Workers' Organization, National Union, OTEP-A-SN)
OUDENI	*Observatorio Universitario de la Educación Nacional e Internacional* (University Observatory of National and International Education)
USA-AID	United States Agency for International Development
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNE-SN	*Unión Nacional de Educadores Sindicato Nacional* (National Union of Educators, National Union)
WB	World Bank



FOREWORD

Combertty Rodríguez G.
Principal Regional Coordinator
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The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in Latin America and the health emergency it triggered led to the interruption of educational processes throughout the region. Millions of students and teachers witnessed the closure of the schools they had attended on a daily basis as they were forced to take shelter in their homes.

The use of technological tools and the internet appeared to be the only alternative for the continuation of classes in the midst of the isolation measures promoted to contain the spread of the SARS-COV-2 virus. The resumption or prolonged interruption of teaching-learning processes thus came to depend on the availability and cost of internet connectivity and the availability of computers, tablets or cell phones for teachers and students.

The commitment of educational authorities to virtual classes without ensuring the required conditions of internet connectivity, equipment availability and training in its use resulted in the exclusion of important segments of the population, so exacerbating existing inequalities. At the same time, teaching staff saw their workload increased given the huge efforts required to maintain communication with their students.

The impact of the pandemic on education systems in Latin America also occurred within a context of increasing privatizing interests that promote the commercialization of public education. Governments and the private sector, with the support of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, have promoted private profit from public funds through initiatives such as public-private partnerships. Precisely during the pandemic, public-private partnerships emerged in several countries as a response to the implementation of virtual classes.

Despite the efforts made, structural conditions of inequality and the failure of the state to ensure equitable access to low-cost equipment and connectivity has limited the scope of virtual classes. In addition, with pressure from business groups to reactivate economies, some governments hastened the opening of educational institutions without adequately guaranteeing security measures, access to services and infrastructure conditions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The slowness of the vaccination process due to the unequal distribution of vaccines between the

countries of the global north and peripheral countries also put at risk the teachers who had to attend students in face-to-face or blended models.

Given the scenario described above, the Regional Committee of Education International Latin America (EILA) considered the relevance of conducting research framed from the perspective of the Latin American Pedagogical Movement focusing on pedagogical aspects in the context of the pandemic. Thus, going beyond simply examining the modalities created to give continuity to the educational processes (virtual, blended or face-to-face), this study focuses on assessing the essential pedagogical aspects of these. This objective is reflected in the title of this document, which presents the main findings of the research undertaken in Costa Rica, Honduras and Paraguay with the support of trade union organizations affiliated with EILA in each country.

The debate on "face-to-face classes versus virtual learning" featuring the powerful voices of political and economic interests invested in promoting the privatization and commercialization of education has overshadowed reflections and proposals on the pedagogical approach to schooling during the pandemic. In response to this situation, the Latin American Pedagogical Movement is committed to opening a forum for all the voices making up educational communities with the central objective of defending secular, free, quality public education, guaranteed by the State as a social right.

Education International Latin America holds it to be essential to evaluate the impact of the various didactic-pedagogical strategies used in each teaching-learning modality implemented in the countries of the region, as these could determine the future of public education systems in Latin America.

Aware of the importance of this concept, EILA conducted this study in three countries in the region (Honduras, Costa Rica and Paraguay) with the aim of discovering first-hand, that is to say, by consulting the direct stakeholders (teachers, students, and parents) regarding their assessment of the scope, achievements and challenges of the teaching-learning modalities applied in these countries, with special reference to didactic-pedagogical aspects. The idea is that this effort can additionally feed into the Latin American Pedagogical Movement's new educational policy proposals made in the countries of the region.

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America at the beginning of 2020 forced most countries to immediately suspend face-to-face classes for several months. Given the prolongation of the pandemic, after a time governments began to design strategies to resume schooling in a non-face-to-face fashion (using virtual, blended, remote, community, and home modalities, among others)[1].

Information and analysis on the difficulties of implementing non-face-to-face modalities since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has been abundant. There has been ample discussion about the difficulties faced by schools, especially public ones, in successfully dealing with this new challenge, since most countries lack the necessary educational infrastructure (especially in the technological area), with teachers and students alike lacking the necessary training in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) management in the educational field, given that public education until the advent of COVID-19 had essentially been face-to-face.

Although the events of these months have served to focus debate (analysis and reflection) on the weaknesses of public education systems in this field, a pedagogical perspective has been absent, at least insofar as the following question: What is the impact made on the teaching-learning process, specifically regarding didactic-pedagogical aspects, of the implementation of the new educational modalities employed by the region's countries in the wake of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic?

This study is a first descriptive-exploratory attempt to motivate and promote reflection within EILA's Latin American Pedagogical Movement on the didactic-pedagogical implications of non-face-to-face educational modalities, and the challenges these modalities pose in terms of the teaching-learning process, both for teaching staff and for students and their families.

In order to discover basic aspects of the social and educational conditions of each country, a documentary review was carried out for the subsequent application of semi-structured interviews to a total of 53 key informants (Table 1).

[1] *Chapter 2 describes some of the education modalities that countries are employing for the resumption or continuance of the school year.*

Table 1
Informants

Informant Type	Honduras	Costa Rica	Paraguay
Teachers	4	5	8
Students	4	6	7
Mothers	3	4	7
Trade union leaders	2	1	2
TOTAL	**13**	**16**	**24**

Interviews were semi-structured, that is, for each type of informant a certain number of questions were prepared. These were then applied in a flexible manner, adjusting to the particular characteristics of the informant while maintaining the primary objective of the interview.

The document is made up of five chapters. Chapter 1 defines some concepts that are used repeatedly in the document, such that there is clarity about the meaning these are attributed while recognizing that other definitions may exist. In Chapter 2, a characterization of the impact of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic on the region's public education sectors is made, with special reference to the issue of the transition from the face-to-face modality to non-face-to-face modalities (virtual, remote, reduced-face-to-face, home, and community, among others).

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present the case studies of Honduras, Costa Rica and Paraguay, respectively. In all three cases, after contextualizing the situation of education the class modalities that are being implemented are presented. In order to learn how teaching staff are addressing or attending to the didactic-pedagogical aspects of these new teaching modalities, it was considered necessary to consult both teachers and students and their families (parents), as well as to consider the conditions (educational environment and resources) in which the educational act takes place.

Finally, in Chapter 6 some reflections are made about the didactic-pedagogical challenges posed the educational community (teachers, students and families) and the Latin American Pedagogical Movement by the teaching-learning modalities that educational systems have had to devise to maintain the continuity of schooling.

We wish to acknowledge our gratitude to all the people who collaborated to make this study possible, especially the teachers, mothers and students who were willing to be interviewed. All participants, without exception, showed a great willingness to share their experiences. We would also like to thank the following teachers' organizations for their support: In Honduras, COLPROSUMAH; in Costa Rica, ANDE; and in Paraguay, OTEP-A and UNE-SN. Thank you so much!

We hope that this work will be useful in informing decision-making with respect to the support that teachers, students and parents require to ensure the continuity of schooling, but above all, to overcome the obstacles faced for the teaching-learning process to be successful.

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

For the purposes of this work, it was considered important to define some concepts and terms that will be used repeatedly in addressing the topic of the didactic aspects used in the non-face-to-face modalities (virtual, remote, reduced-face-to-face, home, others) that are being applied by the educational systems in the region due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

An important first concept to define is education. Education has been commonly defined as the action of educating (teaching). In this work, when we talk about education, we will be referring to the formal education modality. UNESCO defines this educational modality as follows:

Formal education is that institutionalized intentional education organized by public entities and accredited private bodies, which together constitute the formal education system of the country (...) Formal education usually takes place in educational institutions whose primary function is to impart full-time education to students within a system conceived as a continuous trajectory of schooling. Formal education is related to the pre-labor market stage of education and has been described as that (formal) education that a person attending school full-time would normally receive, prior to his or her insertion into the labor market. (2011, p. 14).

Nicoletti (2020) points out that every "formal" educational process is made up of several components and agents, namely:

a) The teacher.
b) The student.
c) The interaction between these two.
d) Interaction with the institutional environment.
e) The spatial context.
f) The temporal context.
g) The sociopolitical-economic context.
h) The objectives.
i) The contents.
j) The means of knowledge transfer.
k) The mechanisms of knowledge assimilation.
l) The evaluation mechanisms.

In one way or another, all these elements influence the characteristics of the educational process and determine its results. In this work, although the diversity of components and agents involved in any formal educational process is recognized, focus will primarily be

made on analysis of the implications for the **didactic-pedagogical** field of the non-face-to-face education modalities that are being implemented by the region's public education systems as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, emphasis will be placed on the means and mechanisms of the transfer and assimilation of knowledge, according to the particular contexts and conditions of each country and educational institution.

This approach involves two concepts that are important to define: pedagogy and didactics. **Pedagogy** has been commonly defined as the discipline that studies the educational act (Suárez, p. 4). **Didactics**, in contrast, refers to the art of teaching:

> Didactics is a discipline of pedagogy inscribed in educational science, which undertakes the study of and intervention in the teaching-learning process in order to optimize the methods, techniques and tools that are involved in it. Didactics has two approaches: the first is theoretical and the other is practical. On a theoretical level, didactics studies, analyzes, describes and explains the teaching-learning process so as to generate knowledge about educational processes and to postulate the set of rules and principles that constitute and guide teaching theory. Meanwhile, on a practical level, didactics functions as an applied science in which, on the one hand, teaching theories are employed, while on the other, intervention is made in the educational process, proposing models, methods and techniques to optimize teaching-learning processes (Didáctica).

For the purposes of this work, consideration is made of the didactic techniques and resources used by teachers in non-face-to-face teaching-learning processes that are being put into practice in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic. Specifically of interest are:

- the **techniques** that teachers employ to carry out the teaching-learning process; and
- **didactic resources**, that is, the educational materials and technologies employed in support of the educational process.

Therefore, in this document when we talk about the didactic-pedagogical dimension, we are referring to the means (didactic techniques and resources) that teachers employ to ensure that the educational act occurs and produces the expected results.

1.1. TEACHING-LEARNING MODALITIES

In the first days and weeks after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a disruption of classes occurred in the majority of the region's schools. After a time had elapsed, the educational authorities of the different countries saw the urgent need to resume schooling by using non-face-to-face modalities (virtual education, distance education, remote education, among others). Some of these concepts are reviewed below with the purpose of guiding the identification and analysis of the teaching-learning modalities that are being implemented by the selected countries in the region.

A first concept that it is important to define is **digital**. For Venegas:

> the computer has become the central

> axis of information exchange, as it is a machine capable of processing millions of data per second as well as encoding and decoding information in binary language (...) Therefore, the digital tends to generate forums in which data converge and are transformed into information (2020, p. 11).

The outstanding point in this conceptualization of the digital is its ability to generate, store and share data through the use of computers and digital platforms.

Quoting a statement by the European Parliament and The Council (2006, p. 15) with respect to the digital, Venegas adds the following:

> Digital competence involves the safe and critical use of information society technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is based on basic ICT competencies: the use of computers to retrieve, evaluate, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet. (p. 15)

Digital thus basically refers to the technological capacity that exists to retrieve, store, produce and exchange information, through the use of computers and digital platforms.

Another of the terms most used in the current context is virtual education. Lévy (1998) defines **virtuality** in the following terms:

> When a person, a collective, an act, or information are made virtual, they are placed "outside", they are uprooted. A kind of disconnection separates them from ordinary physical or geographical space and from the temporality of the clock and calendar. Then again, they are not totally independent of the space-time framework, since they must always depend on physical supports and they materialize here or there, in the present or later on. And yet being made virtual has made them lose their tangent. They only intersect classical space-time here and there, escaping its "realistic" trivialities; ubiquity, simultaneity, fragmented or massively parallel distribution. (p. 14)

From this definition it is interesting to stress two things: on the one hand, the idea that virtuality refers to the phenomenon of uprooting a communicative act, overcoming or exceeding the variable of being grounded as a result of the existence of synchronized electronic networks; on the other hand, the operation of that act occurs in real time, integrating in time processes that occur in different places (spaces) (Levy, 1998).

Thus, when we talk about the virtual in education, this is the act in which students and teachers communicate through the use of digital platforms or synchronized electronic networks. Some of the advantages which we can recognize in the virtual education modality are: the possibility of instant (synchronous) communication and of delayed (asynchronous) communication; the possibility of communication and interaction between teacher and student, and between students themselves; access to materials in a practically limitless fashion; access from any place so desired (home, work, school, other) and at any time so desired.

Currently in most schools, both students and

teachers call the online education modality (actually the most practiced) a virtual education modality. From these two concepts (digital and virtual), two models of communication arise that are applicable to the educational field: online education and offline education.

Ibáñez (2020) defines **online education**:

> as that in which teachers and students participate and interact in a digital environment, using technological resources that make use of the facilities provided by the internet and computer networks in a synchronous fashion, that is, the schedules of these must coincide for the session. (emphasis added, Ibáñez, 2020)

This model requires technological resources such as computers or tablets, internet connectivity and the use of a multimedia platform. The same author defines the model of **offline education** as follows:

> offline education works asynchronously, that is, teachers do not have to coincide in schedules with the students for the sessions. This method is similar to distance education, but strictly uses technological resources only. Course materials or documents are uploaded to the chosen platform for students to review, and questions are usually discussed in public forums for the whole group. (emphasis added, Ibanez, 2020)

Guadalupe and Rivera (2020) point out that while it is true that many of the forms of education that have been used in the wake of the pandemic are called distance education, virtual education, or online education, in reality what has occurred has been the remote provision of educational services. According to these authors, remote service delivery "allows regular programs to be conducted in a manner similar to practices that have been designed for classroom instruction in an educational institution." (p. 9) [2]

Ibáñez, coinciding with Guadalupe and Rivera, attributes the birth of the concept of remote education to the COVID-19 crisis:

> Education faced a situation of extreme difficulty since it had to adapt its methods in a very short period of time to continue teaching classes to all students. The main objective of this type of education is to transfer the courses that had been taught in person to a remote, virtual, distance or online classroom. (Ibáñez, 2020)

On the characteristics of this teaching-learning model, Guadalupe and Rivera add:

> currently not all contents and aspects involved in learning designed for physical presence can be replaced with the use of digital media, especially the interpersonal dimension that complements bidirectional feedback between teacher and student. This, once again, raises

[2] *For these authors, remote education differs from what is known as distance education. "Distance education emerged in the mid-nineteenth century as a mechanism of inclusion regulated and supported by the provision of educational study materials for people who had other occupations or work and could not attend regular programs in schools. It is characterized by an individual study model without schedules in which the person organizes his or her own learning experience from the materials provided by the educational institution" (p. 8).*

> the question about the capacity of the remote provision of educational services to achieve the same objectives that were established for face-to-face classes. Ignoring this analysis can lead to the assumption that something radically different is being done, when in fact what is being neglected is the influence of non-verbal communication, gestures—which allow capturing and receiving signals about learning progress—and the feedback possibilities derived from classroom practices. (p. 9)

This conceptual distinction is extremely useful for the purposes of this work, since the objective of the study is to discover the repercussions on the teaching-learning process of the didactics that teachers are using in the modalities employed to provide educational services as a result of the impossibility of teaching face-to-face classes.

It is important to highlight two aspects. First, the importance of correctly referring to the modality of educational service provision that has been used in the region's different countries as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, as Guadalupe and Rivera and Ibáñez point out, in several cases in Latin America, what is actually happening is the transfer of courses that were being taught face-to-face in the classroom to a remote model to achieve the same objectives that had been defined for in-person classes.

In some cases, the remote model for the provision of educational services includes virtual, on-line and/or offline modalities, which are blended or occur in a bundled fashion as part of the teaching communication strategy used to reach the physical location of the students.

Additionally, in some of the region's countries, the modalities described above are used in combination with educational modalities such as "reduced face-to-face", "community" and "home" modalities, in which digital media is not used, or the teaching-learning process is not structured based on that resource[3].

The **community education** modality consists of a visit by the teacher to the community to teach students who lack the necessary technological means to receive classes online or remotely. In this modality, lessons are taught in the living rooms or the yards of houses, or in rooms facilitated by a member of the community. The main reason for the use of this modality is that the population where the educational center is located lacks connectivity and/or the necessary technological means (computers, tablets, cell phones), due to being located in a population with very few resources. This modality was mainly found in Honduras and Paraguay.

The **home** education modality is characterized by the students staying at home during school hours, where they carry out their work (tasks, assignments, exercises) and from where they communicate with the teacher. Like the previous modality, this modality is mainly employed due to the lack of or deficient connectivity and adequate technological means (computers or smart phones) available to the student population and their families. There

[3] *These other modalities, which we have called "reduced face-to-face", "community" and "home" modali-ties, arise from the lack of connectivity and/or technology resources (computers, tablets or cell phones) on the behalf of the students due to their economic status (low-income families or those liv-ing in poverty).*

is the possibility for some part of the student body to use WhatsApp, if necessary, but in a limited fashion. This model is present mainly in Paraguay and Honduras.

The **reduced face-to-face (blended)** model is present in the three countries studied. This model basically consists of a combination of face-to-face classes (in a reduced/limited schedule) with non-face-to face classes (whether home, online, or remote), which are almost always undertaken with the support of the WhatsApp tool used to send audios and messages to students, and to send and receive materials and tasks.

Table 2
Teaching-learning models identified in the countries studied

Honduras	Costa Rica	Paraguay
Reduced face-to-face learning	Reduced face-to-face—online	Home
Remote	Reduced face-to-face—remote	Reduced face-to-face learning
Reduced face-to-fa-ce—online		Online
Community		

It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced the region's education systems to implement other forms of education, the main characteristic of which are that teachers and students interact in an environment dominated by physical distance and in some cases, using some digital resources (computers or cell phones).

Given this new educational reality, it is appropriate to ask some questions:

1) How is the educational act redefined, from a didactic-pedagogical perspective, with the implementation of the non-face-to-face modalities for the provision of educational services?

2) As a result of the new teaching-learning modalities, in what way have the didactic strategies used by teachers been redefined?

3) How do the new teaching-learning modalities redefine the role of the educational institution (teacher[4]) , of the home[5], and of the students themselves in the educational process?

4) Is it possible to think of achieving the same educational (teaching-learning) objectives on changing the modality of educational service provision?

5) What new (didactic-pedagogical) challenges do the new teaching-learning modalities pose teachers and students?

These are questions that deserve reflection on behalf of the organizations and teachers participating in EILA's Latin American Pedagogical Movement. To this end, this work is designed to provide input that can encourage and contribute to such reflection.

4 Teachers trained in face-to-face education become teaching operators of digital environments, designers of materials, tutors, companions, and facilitators, in order to make the educational act feasible, (Guadalupe and Rivera, 2020).

5 For the family (mother and father) who must assume new and greater responsibilities in the educational process; and for the students them-selves who must adapt to a new educational space (the home) and assume different roles.

2. CHARACTERIZATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE REGION'S PUBLIC EDUCATION SECTOR

Over the months, a great deal of evidence has emerged about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the public education sector in Latin America. According to a study by ECLAC-UNESCO (2020), by the month of July 2020 suspension of face-to-face classes had occurred in more than 190 countries around the world in order to prevent the spread of the virus. Specifically in Latin America, this same study points out that:

> by mid-May 2020, more than 1.2 billion students at all levels of education, worldwide, had ceased having face-to-face classes at school. Of these, more than 160 million were students from Latin America and the Caribbean. (p. 1)

The suspension of face-to-face classes forced educational institutions to resort to other forms of non-face-to-face learning (using virtual, remote, and online models, among others), making use of technological resources such as the internet and technology platforms, as well as the implementation of new teaching strategies, or old ones which had to be quickly adapted to the circumstances.

According to the results of the ECLAC-UNESCO study (2020), of the 33 countries consulted, 32 suspended face-to-face classes at all educational levels and 29 maintained a suspension of classes on the national level. At the time the information was collected, 165 million students had been affected by the measures taken; in addition to the suspension of classes, the closure of schools affected the food and nutrition of the population, especially the most vulnerable.

The study in question indicates that in 29 of the 33 countries analyzed different modalities of distance education have been devised:

- 26 countries offer online learning (internet);
- 24 countries offer offline learning;
- 22 countries offer learning using both mo-

dels (offline and online);
- 4 countries offer exclusively online learning; and
- 2 countries offer offline learning only.

As can be seen from this study, the vast majority of countries developed the online or offline modality, or both, but it became clearly necessary to resume the continuity of the educational process.

According to a study by UNICEF (Nov. 2020) the prolonged closure of schools meant that about 137 million children and adolescents were not receiving lessons in person (p. 5).

Based on UNESCO projections, this UNICEF study indicates the following:

> more than three million children and adolescents are in danger of dropping out of school, which adds to the fact that a high percentage of pupils that are not getting any kind of education, whether through face-to-face or distance classes, in part caused because millions of families have lost their jobs and livelihoods, especially those working in the informal sector. (p. 5)

The same report notes that while three quarters of private school students are accessing distance education, only half of those attending public schools have this option (p. 6). In addition, the prolonged interruption of preschool and early childhood education services is indicated:

> this deprives children of learning experiences necessary for their full development, especially at this stage of their lives when they need them most (...) Generally speaking, the closure of schools is having a significant negative impact on each student's learning and on their ability to develop critical thinking and social skills. (p. 6)

UNICEF (2020) mentions that in coordination with national governments and other partners, it has been supporting nearly 42 million students to receive distance and home learning through media such as radio, television, the internet and other platforms, but recognizes that much more needs to be done to reach all students. According to different sources, by October 28, 2020, only thirteen countries had fully reopened schools, and 38% of countries had yet to decide when schooling would resume (p. 9).

With the information presented so far, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic initially forced the closure of educational institutions in virtually all countries in the region, to subsequently initiate a partial opening process under strong regulations.

- Risks associated with prolonged school closures:

The consequences of the prolonged closure of schools have been one of the main concerns of governments, educational authorities, international organizations, and in general of the entire educational community (teachers, students, and parents).

a) UNICEF (2020) indicates that the prolonged closure of schools means that about 137 million children and adolescents are not receiving face-to-face classes. On average, this population has lost 174 days of classes and is at risk of losing an entire school year (p. 5).

b) According to UNICEF data, one third of children and adolescents do not receive quality distance education. "Learning methods through the internet, television, radio, smartphones and SMS require access to technology that is not available in homes." Those most affected are children and adolescents in vulnerable conditions (p. 13).

c) UNESCO projects that more than 3.1 million children and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean may never return to school as a result of COVID-19 (p. 14)[6].

UNICEF (2020) indicates some of the consequences of not attending classes:

- Loss of a schedule of daily activities and school routine.
- The impossibility of socializing with friends.
- The loss of school nutrition services.
- Exposure to child labor, trafficking, teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence, etc

- Structural conditions in public education systems for the implementation of the remote education model:

Clearly the return to classes is an extremely positive and necessary event. This is agreed upon by most of the countries' educational authorities, as well as the educational community itself (teachers, students, and parents). However, various sectors also agree on recognizing some structural constraints faced by public education systems to the adequate implementation of non-face-to-face modalities of education.

Below is a list of some of these conditions:

a) In most of the national public education systems in the region there is a deficit or lack of educational proposals using digital means employing information and communications technology (ICT). It was not until the COVID-19 pandemic arose that educational institutions have made an effort to allocate greater human and material resources to address this aspect, however up to the present time this has been insufficient.

b) In most of the region's countries, unequal (or no) access to quality internet connectivity and electronic devices (computers, tablets and cell phones) exists among the student population and even among teachers, which makes it difficult or impossible to maintain contact with some population groups of students, especially those of lower economic resources.

c) In most public educational institutions, teachers lack the knowledge and experience necessary to implement the remote teaching-learning modality. Many countries are making strenuous efforts to overcome this weakness, but the lack of resources for this purpose, as well as the existing lack of preparation and accumulated experience become difficult obstacles to overcome in the short term.

This list of elements is not exhaustive, but it does give an idea of the structural conditions required for the effective implementation of other non-face-to-face teaching-learning modalities.

[6] *In the UNICEF/UNDP study entitled COVID-19 and primary and secondary education: the impact of the crisis and public policy implications for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNDP LAC C19 PDS No. 20), authored by Sandra García Jaramillo, an extensive account is given of the repercussions of the total or partial suspension of lessons in the region.*

2.1. DIDACTIC-PEDAGOGICAL PROBLEMS OF NON-FACE-TO-FACE TEACHING-LEARNING MODALITIES IN LATIN AMERICA

While it is true the return to classes under non-face-to-face modalities (virtual, online, or remote education, among others) can be regarded as a very positive event for millions of students in the Latin American region, it has also meant having to face a lot of difficulties and new challenges for teaching and administrative staff, students and their close family members.

In the first place, although it may seem obvious, it is important to mention the change in the model of teacher-student relationship/interaction. From face-to-face communication between students and teachers, a change has been made for communication almost always mediated by technological equipment. This change in the channel or means of communication, in itself, has very important didactic-pedagogical implications and very different educational results to take into account.

En la modalidad presencial, para el docente eIn the face-to-face model, it is easier for the teacher to assess if a student is following the subject being dealt with, if students are not focused or paying the necessary attention, or any other aspects that may be affecting the students' learning process. It is also easier to supervise the work assigned in class, either individually or in groups. In the other modalities mentioned, part of this possibility is lost or significantly reduced. To overcome this difficulty, teachers are forced to devise other didactic-pedagogical strategies. A similar situation happens to students. In the face-to-face modality, it is easier for them to raise their doubts, queries or concerns with teachers. In the other modalities it is also necessary to think about strategies or techniques to ensure that students can raise any doubts.

Second, schools have had to make adjustments to the curriculum (redefining learning objectives and reorganizing and prioritizing content), both because the teaching modality has varied, and because new learning needs have arisen in this new reality.

Third, in all countries educational institutions have had to make changes in class times and schedules to adjust to these to new conditions. In the first few weeks after the school year ended, countries began to implement other teaching-learning modalities, such as reduced face-to-face learning, combined with some other models (virtual or online, for example).

Fourth, in the remote modality, teachers are forced to redefine or adapt the didactic strategies that they had been using in the face-to-face modality, so that these fit with the new teaching-learning modality. This re-engineering or re-defining is not something mechanical or automatic or that can be found written down anywhere; on the contrary, it demands that teaching staff (and educational assessors) rethink pedagogical strategies in accordance with the new conditions, defining new didactic resources or readjusting those that they had been using in face-to-face classrooms according to the defined learning objectives and the new educational environment.

On this point, Dougherty makes the interesting assertion, "the biggest change that virtual learning requires is flexibility and the recognition that the controlled structure of a school

is not able to be replicated online" (cited in Villafuerte, 2020).

Fifth, this pedagogical exercise involves a redefinition, whether conscious or otherwise, of the role of the teacher in the teaching-learning process. Their role in the educational process moves from being teachers prepared to design and conduct face-to-face teaching-learning modalities, to that of designing, facilitating, tutoring, and controlling virtual or online educational environments. Likewise, the role of the student is redefined such that being physically present gives way to working in the virtual modality, depending much more on students' capacity to work autonomously.

Several specialists in this field have highlighted the problems involved in the implementation of the non-face-to-face class modalities, both for teachers as well as for their students and family members (mothers and fathers).

3. THE RETURN TO CLASSES IN HONDURAS

3.1. POVERTY AND CONNECTIVITY IN THE HONDURAN SCHOOL POPULATION

Face-to-face classes in Honduras were suspended throughout the country and at all educational levels (both public and private) on March 13, 2020, by means of the enactment of Executive Decree PCM-018-2020. In this country, as in many other Latin American countries, the situation of the public education sector provides a reasonably faithful mirror to the situation of inequality and poverty that characterizes the country. According to WB data from 2019, at the end of 2018, 52% of the Honduran population lived in poverty, while 17.2% lived in extreme poverty (cited by Alas et al., 2020, p. 3).

This reality is confirmed by the report by FEREMA (2017), which indicates the following:

> The proportion of students attending and remaining in each level of education is conditioned by the level of family income; this is valid for the four educational strata considered (...) but is accentuated in: Early Childhood Education, in the third cycle of Primary Education (grades five and six of primary or elementary school) and in secondary (high school) education. The differences in attendance between the first- and fifth-income quintile are of approximately 20% to 30%.

Table 3

Proportion of population with access to each level of education, according to income quintile. Honduras, 2016

Educational Level	First Quintile	Fifth Quintile
Early Childhood	26,4 %	64,2 %
Primary (Cycles I and II, grades 1 to 4)	91,1%	94,8%
Third Cycle of Primary Schooling (Grades 5 and 6)	52,9%	71,0%
Secondary Level	27,2%	62,4%

Source: FEREMA, 2017

Honduras shows educational differences in relation to geographical area, with major differences seen in urban as opposed to rural regions. These differences are small for Cycles 1 and 2 of Primary Education (grades 1 to 4) as can be seen in Table No. 2, but there is about a 20% difference in the coverage in rural versus urban areas at the levels of the third cycle of Primary Education (grades 5 and 6) and of Secondary Education.

Table 4

Comparative coverage according to urban-rural region, by student age

Category	3-5 years old (Early Childhood)	6-11 years old (Primary School Cycles I and II) (grades 4–6)	12-14 years (Primary School Cycle III) (grades 5–6)	15-17 years (Secondary School)
Urban	33,7%	93,4%	66,2%	43,1%
Rural	35,5%	92,7%	39,9%	20,2%
Nacional	34,6%	93,0%	52,1%	31,7%

Source: FEREMA, based on data from the EPHPM (INE, June 2016).

The UPNFM's Observatorio Universitario de la Educación Nacional e Internacional (University Observatory of National and International Education, OUDENI) estimated that by the end of 2019, 900,000 of the 2.9 million Honduran children between 3 and 17 years of age were outside the education system (Alas et al. 2020, p. 2). Added to this scenario is the low levels of student learning revealed by some studies.

This social reality is compounded by low internet connectivity in the country, especially among the population living in poverty. According to data from the Honduran INE (EHPM, 2018), only 16.6% of Hondurans have access to the internet at home and only 12.8% access this service from a computer, while 87.2% do so using cell phones (cited by Alas et al., 2020, p. 3). This reality, as will be seen below, negatively affects the opportunities of the school population to access the virtual education model.

3.2. DETERMINING FACTORS FOR THE RETURN TO SCHOOL

As part of the aforementioned study, OUDENI conducted a survey of 31,426 teachers from different educational levels all over the country, both in the public and private sector[7]. The data obtained allow us to get a reasonably complete idea of the limitations that both students and teachers face in maintaining an active school year.

With respect to the internet connectivity of teachers, the situation that was found to be the following:

- Only 60% have computers in their home for personal or family use (72.2% in urban areas and just 51.9% in rural areas).
- More than 90% of teachers surveyed said that they have a cell phone with internet service, however it is well known that cell phones are not appropriate tools for the preparation, sharing, and review of materials and classwork (p. 4).
- Regarding fixed internet connections, the situation is as follows: 77.8% of all teachers on a national basis have this service: 85% in urban areas and just 70.3% in rural areas. It was also possible to determine that teachers living in urban areas and in private schools are those with the best conditions of connectivity (p. 4). According

[7] *The information presented below has been taken from the study by Alas et al. (2020), unless otherwise noted.*

> to information released by the IDB's Social Digital webpage, public schools do not have digital interactive educational platforms, while 70% of private schools do use such tools.

With respect to the means of communication used by teachers in their classrooms, the study found a wide range of these, with the most frequent being cell phones, but also revealed other media such as recording videos with lessons for secondary school, which are then broadcast on Secretariat of Education channels. They also use the educational portal Educatrachos, programs on Suyapa TV Educativa, Facebook pages belonging to the Secretariat of Education, etc. However, they mainly use their own means such as phone calls to students or parents, WhatsApp groups for students and/or parents, and the use of other apps for virtual meetings and emails (p. 5).

With respect to the management of virtual tools, a large majority of respondents representing almost 75% of teachers indicated that they require training in the management of educational platforms such as Google Classroom, Moodle, Blackboard, etc. 67% said the same regarding the development of educational videos, and slightly fewer said they needed training in the management of apps for virtual meetings (p. 6).

With regard to student connectivity, the teachers consulted indicated that they have only maintained contact with about half of their students, although there are important differences by region. In the urban area, communication has been greater (45% have managed to contact the majority of students), while in the rural area this is much less, with only 29% having communicated with the majority of their students (p. 7). As can be seen, the possibilities of communication between teachers and their students have decreased significantly due to the suspension of the face-to-face modality and the implementation of other modalities.

In January 2021, in statements to the SWI news agency, researcher Mario Alas referred to the difficult situation facing children in Honduras, as further aggravated by the pandemic, as follows:

> We already had about 700,000 children between the ages of 5 and 17 outside the (educational) system before the pandemic and, as of August 2020, according to figures from the Ministry of Education, another 350,000 students had dropped out.

Researcher Alas additionally warned about the risk that at the beginning of the 2021 school year, only 1.5 million of the almost 3 million children and young people between 5 and 17 years old will be enrolled, representing a rate at which educational coverage would be reaching only 50% (SWI, January 13, 2021). In this same news segment, Alas adds the following information:

> According to figures from the Honduran National Institute of Statistics, only 16.6% of the 9.3 million Hondurans have access to the internet at home and only 12.8% access this service from a computer, while 87.2% do so using cell phones.

One year after the suspension of face-to-face classes in the entire Honduran educatio-

nal system, it was decided to start the 2021 school year in March in a health environment still dominated by the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3. TEACHING-LEARNING MODALITIES IN HONDURAS: THE RETURN TO CLASSES

In 2021, once again, schools have implemented the virtual modality and/or the reduced face-to-face modality, however, as has been pointed out, in most of the country's regions there is still a lack of connectivity, which is why the educational authorities proposed on March 26 of this year to resume the school year by employing two educational models:

- the remote modality, which proposes teaching students through radio, television, the delivery of workbooks, internet platforms, and the distribution of tablets. This modality has been implemented along with the strategy "Te Queremos Estudiando en casa" (We Want You Studying at Home).

- the reduced face-to-face (blended) modality, in which students attend face-to-face classes once a week (provided this is approved by their parents), and the rest of the time they work at home with the accompaniment of the teacher via various means (phone calls, WhatsApp, home visits, among others)[8]. A minority of students with access to internet connectivity and who do not attend face-to-face classes (by decision of their parents) communicate with their teachers virtually to review materials and receive guidance (Tiempo Digital, 2021).

It is worth mentioning that with the technical and financial support of USA-AID, the government of Honduras prepared a proposal for the safe return to classes in the face of the COVID-19 crisis (Secretarat de Educación, 2020). The proposal includes three very important components, namely: 1. School biosafety protocols; 2. Psychosocial care processes; and 3. The means to adapt the teaching-learning process. These three components are presented in the document considering the different risk scenarios, the conditions existing in the educational institutions, and the schooling needs of the students[9].

3.4. NEW EDUCATIONAL MODALITIES IN TIMES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In this section, based on the information ob-

[8] *Two things are sought through this blended learning modality: on the one hand, managing to teach some face-to-face classes as a safer way to meet the objectives of the teaching-learning process; on the other hand, a way to minimize the lack of connectivity or the deficient quality thereof that most students experience which prevents them from receiving online classes.*

While it is true that this proposal is technically sound, it is far removed from the country's economic, social and, in particular, political reality.

[9] *Si bien es cierto esa propuesta es técnicamente muy sólida, está muy alejada de la realidad económica, social y especialmente política del país.*

tained in interviews with a group of key informants, the way in which teachers, students, and parents in Honduras are coping with this educational reality is discussed.

As explained in the previous section, in Honduras a high percentage of the population attending the public education system is of limited economic resources. This reality determines the conditions in which children, adolescents and young adults access the education system, in particular the difficulties they face in accessing internet connectivity or in having access to electronic devices (computers or cell phones).

All those interviewed in the framework of this study (thirteen people)[10], mentioned this factor as the main limitation to teaching or accessing non-face-to-face lessons (in online and remote models). The most common utterances among teachers, students and parents were along the following lines: "The internet reception is terrible", "Students don't have access to the internet", "We can't communicate due to having no internet reception", "Children don't have cell phones."

According to some testimonies, in rural areas families face greater difficulties in securing internet connectivity either because there is no service, the reception is very bad, or because they lack the financial resources to cover the costs of the service when it does exist. While it is true that in urban areas the possibilities of accessing internet connectivity are greater, often the reception is not of very good quality and families also face economic problems in covering the service costs.

In addition to the problems associated with internet connectivity, families have difficulty in providing their children with electronic devices (computers, tablets, cell phones). In the vast majority of cases, learners have access only to their parents' devices. In this regard, the interviews performed were able to identify three limitations:

- The possibility of using cell phones does not occur until the father returns home from work. It is not until that time (after 5:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m.) that students can work using these devices to read the instructions (work guides, readings, among others) that their teachers have sent them.
- These are often prepaid mobile devices with very low levels of credit due to the financial constraints of the family, which represents a significant limitation for making telephone calls of a certain duration or making use of the internet.
- Mobile devices tend to be very simple ("They are not smartphones") with limitations against running powerful applications, downloading information, or being able to read documents directly on the device, either because of screen size or image quality.

As is the case in practically all countries in the region, it is clear that educational institutions in Honduras were not prepared to implement other teaching-learning modalities than the face-to-face modality. This largely explains the difficulties currently being faced in returning to classes with some regularity and efficiency.

10 In the selection and location of the interviewees, we had the valuable collaboration of COLPROSUMAH, an organization affiliated to EILA. The responsibility for providing this support was taken on by Héctor Núñez, to whom we wish to express our gratitude.

This study emerged precisely from the desire to learn the repercussions that the implementation of non-face-to-face modalities was having on the teaching-learning process. To learn more about this topic, a group of teachers, students and mothers were interviewed[11]. The main conclusion that can be drawn from these consultations is that the forced adoption of educational modalities other than face-to-face ones is having a negative impact on the teaching-learning process of children, adolescents and young adult students. All the opinions obtained in this consultation coincide on this point.

Nonetheless, given the profound limitations of internet connectivity and access to electronic devices (computers or cell phones) that predominate among the student population, teachers and parents, different strategies have been devised to ensure that the school year is taught. As discussed below, it is not possible to say that a single modality of delivering lessons exists in this context, but rather that there are several modalities being employed (reduced face-to-face, virtual and remote), and often a combination of these (reduced face-to-face and online), along with other variations, such as the community modality.

From the interviews conducted, it was possible to identify four teaching-learning modalities. It is possible that more exist, but given the scope of the present study, it was not possible to learn of these.

The modalities identified are the following[12]:

- The reduced face-to-face model
- The reduced face-to-face–online model.
- The remote model.
- The community model.

A characterization and analysis of each model identified is made below.

3.4.1. CLASS MODALITY: REDUCED FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING

The fact that the majority of children and adolescents do not have internet connectivity, together with restrictions on the mobility of people dictated by the health authorities forced many educational institutions to devise the reduced-face-to-face class modality. Basically, what characterizes this modality is that students attend face-to-face classes in a reduced schedule, that is, with a reduced number of hours of face-to-face classes, combined with work or homework assigned and supervised by each teacher, in some cases with the support of WhatsApp and telephone calls.

In one of the selected schools, the teacher (T.3) relates that last year the virtual classes were a total failure because the community was very isolated and internet reception was terrible. After trying to teach lessons by other means (sending assignments via WhatsApp,

11 En total, en Honduras se entrevistaron trece personas: cuatro maestros y maestras, tres mamás, cuatro estudiantes y dos dirigentes sindicales del COLPROSUMAH. No fue posible entrevistar a ningún padre de familia, básicamente porque son las mamás las que se encargan de acompañar o apoyar a escolares en sus estudios. Por diversas razones los papás no se ocupan de esta labor. Por esa razón, es este caso no se utiliza el lenguaje inclusivo (papás y mamás).

12 Cabe aclarar que esas modalidades no se corresponden exactamente a lo que la teoría indica. En la realidad, cada modalidad asume o reviste diferentes matices (híbridos).

leaving these at school for parents to pick them up, among others), meetings were held with the students' mothers to consider other options. This is how an agreement was arrived at to implement the reduced-face-to-face modality[13].

The teacher interviewed describes this modality as follows:

The female student population goes to face-to-face classes at the school three times a week (Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays) for one hour for reinforcement.

- From 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. first and second grade attend classes.
- From 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. third and fourth grade attend classes..
- From 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. fifth and sixth grade attend classes.

In separate groups, one teacher, for example, works with the first grade, while the other teacher works with the second grade. Each day, a different subject is taught. For example, for first and second grade on Mondays classes are given in Spanish, on Tuesdays in mathematics, and on Wednesdays in natural and social sciences.

In addition, the teaching staff gives each student weekly work guides (booklets) to review the subject and perform the exercises at the end of each document. When attending the classroom, the student gives the teacher the exercises to be graded.

13 It is very important to stress that this case occurs in the case of a two-teacher school, that is, a school with only two teachers who give classes to a total of 43 students from first to sixth grade.

The teacher (T.3) explains that currently they are only focused on teaching the subjects of Spanish, mathematics and natural and social sciences because the number of teaching hours (one hour per subject per week) does not allow coverage of other subjects, nor of much content. "That which is essential is taught, or less than that which is essential." The teacher points out that for now this is the only option for children to receive classes: "At least we can see them and support them for a little while, even if the time is very limited."

A similar opinion was expressed by the mother of a student participating in this educational modality who was consulted (T.6). She states her opinion that while this modality represents a great effort for her, "the most important thing is that her child is receiving classes."

The teacher (T.3) mentions a wide range of difficulties that this modality causes, despite also recognizing the importance of its existence.

- In this reduced-face-to-face modality, only 25% of the original curriculum is imparted.
- Most parents do not help in working with the students. Parents working with their children are really rare. Some don't do so because they work, others because they just don't care, and others because they don't feel they can because of their low academic level.

In the case of the mothers and their students, the most frequent opinions were given on two aspects: the little time allocated for face-to-face classes which prevents teachers from covering more content, and the excessive burden of assignments that have to be done. The students' mothers point out that "they are

not prepared or sometimes don't even have the time to provide support to their children in doing these tasks" (T. 6).

With respect to this modality, emphasis should be made on the enormous efforts that the teaching staff has to undertake to produce and copy the work guides (booklets) that they give to students, as well as getting these to attend classes. They indicate that despite the lack of commitment of the family with respect to the education of their children, the teachers must be willing to make all efforts necessary to ensure that these stay within the education system, because if they drop out, then it will be more difficult for them to return (T.3).

3.4.1.1. Didactic aspects of the reduced face-to-face modality

As explained by one of the teachers (T.3), in view of the limited time devoted to each subject per lesson (one hour) focus must be made on covering the essential contents, leaving a small amount of time to explain the tasks or assignments students must complete at home. The greatest effort in the short time they have is focused on teaching the contents, usually making use of the whiteboard or materials (text and images) in the book (booklet) that is being used.

The didactics used are very simple. For example, if the subject is Mathematics, then the teacher works some exercises on the board, and then leaves the students some similar exercises to complete at home. If the subject is Social Studies, the teacher addresses a topic in class by reading a text and leaves for home the completion of the reading or additional reading on the topic. The following week review is made of that seen the previous week, very briefly, and another topic is continued with. There's no time for anything more. Basically, that is the didactics that is used.

Of course, depending on the grade, the teacher introduces some changes to adapt to the level. In the case of first, second and third grade, explanations last longer (about 30 minutes) because the teacher works on the board and covers more work in class because the students require more accompaniment.

In the specific case of first grade, homework is checked on the following day, because children at this level are restless, and since they are starting out, they are anxious to show their homework. The problem is that checking the homework of each student can take up all the class time, so sometimes it is necessary to explain the reasons for not being able to do this review with everyone.

For students in fourth, fifth and sixth grade, the teacher explains the topic on the board and asks them if they have any doubts, so that they can then work individually at home. In this case, it is necessary to go slower and change the didactics a little, because those who are in first grade don't know how to read, and even those in second and third grade also have some difficulty reading.

With the exception of first grade, the assignments of the remaining grades accumulate over the week: if homework was left on Monday, students are asked to bring this the following Monday for review, so that less time

is wasted[14].

Como apoyo a las clases presenciales, ella As a support for the face-to-face classes, the teacher makes a brochure (or booklet) and gives these to the students, telling them the day when they should bring the completed work. The teacher always tries to give students enough time so they can work slowly and learn as they do so. However, one of the problems often faced with these tasks is that the children say that they did not understand properly what they had to do, and the mothers say the same thing, so they do not complete all they were asked to. The teacher thinks the problem is that mothers do not support or accompany the students for the necessary time, or do not understand how to do so because of their low level of schooling. The point is that with very few classroom hours, the teacher does not have the time to make explanations to each student separately about any errors or what they have failed to complete. And given this, the student doesn't know what to do.

Obviously, very great time constraints for teaching lessons are faced by this teacher, taking into account that this is a two-teacher school, working with all grades (first to sixth grades). This time limitation restricts the teacher in terms of the ability to address the different topics in sufficient depth, and also the ability to complete exercises in class to reinforce learning, however, the teacher points out that doing so would be impossible. "You are just coming to the end of class, and the other group is already waiting to come in. And with the COVID issue, that's not allowed."

The teacher consulted recognizes a lack of experience in imparting classes in this reduced-face-to-face class modality, in which she has very little time and has to prepare many assignments to be worked on at home. She therefore identifies the following areas in which training is required:

- The development of educational materials that are attractive and motivating for schoolchildren. She believes that she has not yet succeeded in achieving this, but that it is very important to do so. She indicates that she performs searches on the internet, but that the material she finds is not always appropriate to the reality of the students she works with.
- Mastery of technological programs to teach classes in the virtual modality in a way that is attractive to students.

It is clear in this case that giving lessons with so little time and resources available makes teaching extremely difficult. Contents can be taught are limited, as are subjects and contents that can be successfully covered. However, the important thing is that this teacher has managed to get children to attend school for classes. This, without a doubt, is extremely valuable in a social context in which the permanence of the link with the educational institution is key. It is also clear that there is a need to provide teacher training in the development of didactic-pedagogical teaching-learning strategies in face-to-face and virtual class modalities.

[14] *It is worth mentioning that the teaching activities with each grade vary in a logical fashion according to the curriculum to be covered. For each subject a booklet is made and explanations are given to the children and their parents as to the day on which the task or assignment has to be completed so that they can have these ready in time.*

3.4.2. CLASS MODALITY: REMOTE CLASSES

Several strategies are combined in this class modality: WhatsApp, online classes, work at home. One of the teachers consulted (T.2) teaches using this modality because there exists an express prohibition against teaching face-to-face classes. The teacher is in charge of a group of twenty-five preschool children (4-5 years old).

The teacher has organized the lessons as follows:

- Mornings. She sends (the twenty-five children) edited videos on WhatsApp at 8:00 a.m. with the respective instructions to work on these at home. In addition, she leaves work guides at the local photocopier so that the parents can go to pick them up for their children to work on at home.
- At 12:00 a.m., they send her evidence of the work they did using WhatsApp.
- Afternoons. In the afternoon she communicates with the students via ZOOM to reinforce some content. Since they are young, they only connect up for 40 minutes (from 2:00 p.m. to 2:40 p.m.).
- For those who do not have internet connectivity, she takes the booklets to their houses for them to do the work and then she comes to pick these up and checks them.
- ZOOM is used to work with eighteen students and seven others are worked with using WhatsApp and booklets. If necessary, the teacher send students an audio with instructions or any explanations she considers pertinent[15].

The teachers consulted did not mention any strengths for this modality. The reason is very clear: the lack of internet service or stable connectivity makes it practically impossible for most students to receive lessons via this medium. Only in the case described above (T.2) is this modality used to reinforce some contents, although this is for a short period of time (40 minutes), and only occurs with those who have a device (computer or cell phone) with which to communicate. This modality is complemented by sending messages and videos to students via WhatsApp, as well as with the delivery of booklets to be completed at home. Completing assignments at home takes up an important part of class time, and it is where the mother plays a crucial role in accompanying the child.

Of the students consulted (five), only one expressed enjoyment of virtual classes, because it gives students the opportunity to see their teachers and to have the opportunity to learn (T.10). The remaining students did not make any favorable comments. In the case of the mothers, although they mention numerous difficulties faced by the children in having lessons under the virtual modality, they assess these positively because at least “they can interact with their teachers”, “They manage to

[15] *The teacher explains that the booklets are prepared by the teaching staff, which they elaborate based on textbooks, and these are given directly to children. The booklets contain two weeks’ (ten days’) work, with one for each working day, so ten sets of photocopies are made per student every two weeks. Teachers usually do this using their own resources, or in some cases with financial help from parents, but often the scarce resources of these families prevent them from covering these expenses (T.4).*

see them and give continuity to their studies and they can continue progressing" (T.5 and T.6).

One of the mothers (informant T.5) comments that she has assigned a space in the house for her three schoolchildren to connect to the internet and work on the development of the tasks left them in some comfort. She recognizes that this modality of communication entails a great deal of effort, because they only have one cell phone, so she has to coordinate with teachers the times in which they can connect up, such that connection times between one and another child do not coincide. Additionally, in this remote modality, reports, communications, assignments and videos are frequently sent via WhatsApp. She indicates that WhatsApp works as the most important means of communication with teachers "24/7", that is, every day and every hour of the week (T.5).

As has just been mentioned, the main difficulty faced by teachers, schoolchildren, and parents when they have to communicate is the poor internet connectivity that exists, so they agree on using other means (WhatsApp, booklets, videos) to teach lessons. With respect to the aforementioned problem, the teachers consulted add others that they face when teaching remotely (T.1–T4):

- Little availability of parents to accompany their children.
- The lack of family resources to acquire materials, given that these have very limited resources, or because as a result of the pandemic they have been left without work.
- Difficulties of the students in connecting to the internet, which hinders covering lesson contents with the whole group of students.
- Students without connectivity only have the use of booklets, so only part of the most important content can be covered.
- This modality fails to include the human dimensions of contact between schoolchildren and the teacher, seeing others and relating together. And at these ages, these aspects are very important.
- In some cases, it is not until parents return from work at 5:00 p.m. that teachers can work with schoolchildren.
- The population is not learning the same contents, they learn much less.

The opinion of the children (T.7, T.9) about the classes they receive in the virtual modality tends to be equally negative:

- He doesn't like anything about virtual classes.
- It is a little more difficult for her when learning in virtual classes.
- At school they can learn more than in the virtual modality.
- He likes face-to-face classes better because learning is better, and teachers explain things better.
- You can't socialize in virtual classes.

In their opinion, it is better to do work at home with the teachers sending them the instructions on what they have to do via WhatsApp. However, they also think that under this modality "it is difficult because the tasks accumulate a lot, because they send so many." (T.7).

The opinion of the mothers consulted (T.5 and T.6) does not differ in essence from the previously noted ones, as we see:

- She has three children and only one cell phone. It's not enough. The telephone does not have the capacity to receive and download all the information that teachers send.
- Internet interruptions don't allow their children to take the classes. Some of them end up getting anxious because the internet drops out so often.
- The lack of child interaction is evident, because at some point they have all said, "No more, mom! I can't take it anymore, I'm tired. I want to go to school." Her youngest son is the one who most says that he wants to go to school and see his friends and classmates.
- Parents do not have basic technological knowledge, so there is very little they can do to help.
- It hasn't been difficult for her to adapt, she cares about the education of her children and has sought the means to follow through with it, but it is difficult.

3.4.2.1. Didactic aspects of the remote modality

Based on the testimony given by one of the teachers interviewed (T.2), it was possible to systematize some of the didactic aspects entailed by the implementation of this modality, which we have called remote, basically because it includes online and offline classes, and is based on educational materials produced fundamentally for the face-to-face educational modality.

According to the information provided by this informant, lessons are developed as follows: the teacher is in charge of a preschool group of children of between four and five years of age, a time when the educational process is primarily focused on three areas:

- The communication area: skills (includes mathematics and Spanish content for primary school).
- The socio-affective area (individual integration into society).
- The area of social and natural environments.

In the opinion of this teacher, preschool is the time when students are becoming integrated as social beings (as persons). This is when the child begins its integration into society as an individual (developing aspects such as tolerance, the management of frustration, sharing and teamwork, among many other aspects that are developed). Thus, it is not so much the contents studied, but the socio-affective aspect that is essential.

The teacher notes that the socio-affective dimension and skills cannot be fully developed in the virtual modality, giving some interesting examples of this. She points out that at these ages children are taught the correct way to hold scissors, which has to do with fine motor coordination, essential to develop at this age. She notes that often parents are not interested in how schoolwork is performed, only that it is completed, so the child is acquiring erroneous skills that later it will not be possible to correct. She tries to overcome some of these difficulties with the elaboration of some materials and techniques, for example:

She has the group divided into two subgroups:

- With one group of eighteen students, she works using ZOOM and WhatsApp.
- With a group of seven schoolchildren she works using a booklet.

She has organized the classes as follows:

• Edited videos are sent via WhatsApp to all twenty-five schoolchildren at 8:00 a.m. with instructions for work at home. In addition, schoolchildren who do not receive classes through ZOOM are left booklets at the local photocopier service every two weeks, so that their parents can pick them up and schoolchildren can complete these at home.

• At 12:00 midday. The twenty-five schoolchildren must send her evidence of the work they did via WhatsApp.

• Working with each subgroup of schoolchildren:

i. Working via ZOOM: In the afternoon she communicates with eighteen schoolchildren via ZOOM to reinforce some content. As they are such young schoolchildren, they only connect for 40 minutes (from 2:00 p.m. to 2:40 p.m.).

ii. Working with the booklet. Those who do not have internet connectivity work at home with the reinforcement booklet (with some extra content) that their parents have already picked up at the local photocopy service[16]. The teacher later picks up the booklet to review it and make observations to the preschooler[17].

With schoolchildren who work with ZOOM, she teaches the topics by sharing a screen where she presents the subject matter and does some exercises. She also uses this means to share some videos that she herself edits[18] explaining and reinforcing that content that she considers necessary, but in addition, via this resource she avoids boring the young children ("The videos entertain them more. If she talks too much, they fall asleep. That has already happened."). In these materials it is important that the "image of the teacher" is clear[19]. If suitable material is not found, then the teacher records a video to illustrate a topic: for example, how to hold scissors, how to brush your teeth, how to hold a pencil, how to make paper balls, etc. These are very important skills that children must learn at this age[20].

For evaluations, a quarterly exam is made. It

16 All children have a textbook from the Ministry of Education with the contents or topics to be addressed at this level. In addition, in this specific case, the school produces another textbook with some contents that they consider important to deal with (this book is made from images downloaded from the internet).

17 The booklet is different from their workbook. The contents are explained in the booklet, while the workbook only has a sheet of paper, the name or title of the task and underneath a drawing, because preschool children mainly acquire knowledge through practice and sight (be-cause they cannot read yet).

18 When the teacher says that she edits the videos, she means that she searches for videos on YouTube related to the topic to be dealt with, downloads these (there could be several videos), edits them (selects the sections of interest and crops these if necessary) to a duration of no more than 15 minutes so that there is no problem for them to be downloaded by the parents using cell phones.

19 As part of the teaching strategy, "...care must be taken not to distort the image of teacher. Therefore, the videos are only for illustrative pur-poses on the topic, they should not replace the figure of the teacher."

20 In these exercises the idea is to focus on the image of hands, for example, and not on the person (teacher).

is left for the student at the local photocopy service so that the mother can pick it up, have the child complete it, and then the mother leaves it at the school. The teacher notes that this type of evaluation is not very reliable to measure knowledge, because it is possible that the parents complete the exam, nonetheless it works to provide feedback or content review. Reliable evaluation is performed directly with each student through a video call using ZOOM, or by cellphone if ZOOM is not accessible to the child. Children are called on a one by one basis for an hour and the evaluation is undertaken. This has given very good results and has made it possible to determine the progress and the level of achievement of each student (T.2).

As with the community modality, this modality makes clear the great effort, commitment and creativity which the teachers consulted have had to employ to be able to impart the classes making up the school year. There are many things that could be said about this experience, but the most important thing is the fact that because these are very young schoolchildren (between four and five years of age) it has been necessary to innovate the didactic-pedagogical aspects, seeking to adapt the contents to the selected teaching-learning modality (virtual and remote).

It is also worth mentioning that in the school where this teacher (T.2) works, there are three other teachers, so they have being using the strategy of dividing the work of preparing videos, notebooks, evaluation exercises, etc. among themselves in order to reduce the workload, since they currently work practically every day of the week until late at night, except on Sundays, which they try to leave free so that they and the students can rest.

In this experience, as in the previous case, there is a clear need to offer teacher training courses in areas such as: the development of training materials for working with preschoolers in non-face-to-face modalities (for example, using virtual and remote modalities); and exchanging good didactic-pedagogical practices for preschool teaching, and pedagogical strategies for non-face-to-face teaching-learning modalities.

The experience of teaching in non-face-to-face modalities implemented in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic definitely imposes a need for reflection on behalf of the educational community about the pedagogical implications of teaching using non-face-to-face modalities (virtual, remote, among others) for the different actors involved in the educational process (teachers, students, families, community and educational institutions).

In summary, although the remote teaching modality represents a great opportunity for a significant number of schoolchildren given the impossibility of receiving classes in person, there are numerous problems in terms of connectivity and obtaining materials faced by teachers, mothers and their children. The bottom line tends to be negative.

3.4.3. CLASS MODALITY: REDUCED FACE-TO-FACE–ONLINE[21]

This modality results from a combination of two others: the reduced face-to-face modali-

[21] *People tend to call online classes "virtual" classes. Thus, sometimes in this text when virtual classes are spoken about, online classes are actually meant, so this should be understood according to the context.*

ty and the online modality. Students are given reduced face-to-face–online classes, that is, they attend in person according to a reduced schedule, and at other times they connect up to attend classes online.

As an example, in one of the cases studied, the teacher (T.4) explained how this modality is organized: grades and student groups are organized according to their internet connectivity opportunities and the possibility of attending school (there are parents who prefer not to send students to school for safety reasons due to the COVID-19 issue).

3.4.3.1. Reduced face-to-face classes:

• Three days a week (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) there are face-to-face classes from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. The days commence at 8:00 a.m. so that schoolchildren arrive at the school after already having had midmorning snacks and they return home at 11:00 a.m. for lunch (in some cases, students live far away from the school). This is done to prevent them from removing their masks during their time at school.

• Those who do not have access to the internet in their homes work on tasks in the classroom taking all the required biosafety measures[22], and they are visited at their homes.

3.4.3.2. Online sessions:

• Two days a week (Tuesdays and Thursdays), between 8:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. teachers connect up with the schoolchildren online to teach them classes. The connection time is limited (45 minutes maximum) because the majority of the students are of limited economic resources and do not have much connection time available.

• With some students it is necessary to work at other times (Saturdays and Sundays), because that is when they can access their parents' cell phones since many do not have their own phone. Schedules have also been set up on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons or evenings according to the parent's time availability.

The teacher consulted (T.3) explains that, like her colleagues, she goes to school every day to teach both face-to-face and online classes. Teachers also go to the houses of students who do not have access to the internet to follow up on and support these with the assignments they have been given.

The teachers consulted said that the positive thing in this combined modality (face-to-face–online) is that they manage to give classes to the children:

> • The positive thing is that it has been possible to teach students who do not have another form of communication, for example, the virtual one (T.3).
>
> • Support has successfully been given to students who have some possibility to communicate briefly using virtual means. That helps somewhat, in addition to face-to-face classes. The important thing is to maintain communication, not to lose it, so students remain in the system (T.4).

However, this teacher identifies some weak-

[22] *Los implementos de bioseguridad es un gasto que está cubriendo el centro educativo, ya que los padres y madres de familia no cuentan con los recursos económicos necesarios, porque muchos han perdido su trabajo.*

nesses to working in the online modality:

- She points out that in the virtual modality of teaching lessons there is a lack of human warmth, affection, passion that can only be really achieved if you are face to face (with teachers, students, and parents).
- There are greater learning difficulties, in part because schoolchildren and their parents are unprepared. Schoolchildren often find it difficult to engage, in keeping their attention on what is being talked about, and they have difficulty delivering their work on time.
- There are educational topics, such as formation in values, love and respect which is difficult to address in the virtual modality. Little can be done in this regard.
- In person, the teacher becomes familiar with situations that schoolchildren and adolescents may not even share with their parents, but they do have the confidence to share with their teacher. That's been lost. When they are online it is virtually impossible to address those issues with a child, because others are listening, so it doesn't occur.

A estudiantes consultados (dos en esta modalidad), evidentemente les gustan más las clases presenciales que las clases virtuales, además, agregan que las clases en línea les cuestan más.

One of the children consulted (T.11) said that she liked face-to-face classes more "because she is with her teacher, with her classmates, they have recess"; "She finds virtual classes a little more difficult, she does not take in much, it is difficult for her to understand and learn, and if the internet drops out it becomes more difficult."

Another child consulted (T.10) says that in face-to-face classes

> she likes what the teacher does on the board because she explains things better, they are all there and they look at what she does on the board and they understand it faster. Whereas in virtual classes, it is more difficult, a lot of work accumulates.

In relation to this educational modality, one of the mothers consulted (T.6) said that clearly her children like to go to school much more but given the situation with COVID "they prefer not to send them to school and what they are doing is settling in and familiarizing themselves with the situation."

She would like them to go back to face-to-face classes because she thinks they would learn more. She does what she can, because it really is the teacher who has control of that in the classroom. Another problem is that everything that teachers used to explain to schoolchildren on an everyday basis falls to parents to do and they don't always know how to do so.

A further problem that this mother points out is the cost of paying for internet service. They spend about 700 Honduran lempiras (about US$28) a month on this in exchange for a signal that barely works, and they don't always have the money for it. In addition, sometimes she doesn't have enough credit to cover the needs of receiving and sending materials, partly because she has two children.

Virtual classes are complemented by sending and receiving materials to students. This works as follows:

The teacher sends the materials to each student's WhatsApp account. Then she (the mother) downloads these and sends them to be printed (representing another expense). In the case of one of her children, she prints the materials on a weekly basis, and in the case of the other child, she prints booklets for the whole term.

When her children have completed the exercises, they take a picture of these and send them to the teacher. The teacher then receives them and sends back observations and instructions for the next exercise, and so on. "So, one problem we have is that the phone gets filled up very quickly with so much material that is received and that has to be sent, so it's necessary to be deleting things. It's hard, but you have to do it to get them to learn."

In summary, in this modality face-to-face classes are combined with the virtual modality. Logically, all the parties consulted agree that face-to-face classes are best, but they concede that at least in this modality students can continue studying. The three types of informants consulted also coincide on the same disadvantages of the virtual modality, since its implementation is extremely cumbersome and there are constant communication problems using the internet.

3.4.3.3. Didactic aspects of the reduced face-to-face–online modality

In this modality, a distinction from a didactic point of view that must be made is that two modalities are undertaken in a coordinated fashion: reduced face-to-face and online classes.

The reduced face-to-face learning modality is so called precisely because the time spent in face-to-face lessons are shorter than usual. In this case, classes are only held three days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Using the virtual modality, they work two days a week, from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

The teacher consulted recognizes that teachers had no training in the use of the technologies employed, which has forced them to look for people to assist them. Since it has not always been possible to find help, she has had to do a little research on the internet to learn how to reach schoolchildren through this means.

Given the short time available for communication due to the cost to families (45 minutes maximum), in this modality basically what the teacher does is as follows: She greets the students, says a prayer of welcome, makes a short reflection on a topic related to values (friendship, tolerance, or respect, for example), she holds a short conversation (review) about a topic being worked on, clarifies doubts and answers questions, and gives instructions for the completion of assignments. That is the most that can be done according to the teacher consulted (T.3).

In a complementary way, given the connectivity problems of some students, the teacher sometimes goes to their homes to give them the materials (booklets)[23] with the topics seen online, so they can study on their own. In this case if they have any questions or queries, they can send the teacher a message via

[23] *In this case, the booklet contains the following: the topic, the objective, the exercises, and real-life questions about what is being experienced. These are short, containing just the essentials.*

WhatsApp and she answers them, or if necessary and the possibility to communicate with the student by cell phone exists, she calls the student to address their doubts. The important thing is that they are not excluded, says this teacher (T.4).

Evaluations are done using the Moodle platform when schoolchildren have internet connectivity. She sends the evaluation task to them using this platform, they respond to it and return it to her for review. If they do not have internet connectivity, they do the assessment in person at the school, in small groups. The majority of students prefer to do the assessment in person, but this is not possible due to the restrictions that exist.

This experience makes quite clear the difficulties encountered by teachers in giving lessons in the virtual modality, not only because they do not have the necessary technological resources (computers, cell phones with internet credit) and the minimum connectivity required, but also because they confess to not having enough mastery of the relevant technology and they consider that there are topics that it is extremely difficult or inappropriate to address by this means.

The need is therefore clear for the development of teacher training courses in the management of technologies (equipment and programs), as well as in the management of didactic techniques to assist in teaching lessons more appropriately according to the demands of the current context in this field. This teacher (T.3) considers that if they mastered the didactics, they could develop materials to reach those who do not have access to the internet and who do not attend school. Materials that can help them learn, through play[24].

Also, as another teacher (T.4) commented, it is necessary to offer information, awareness and training activities for parents so that they become aware of the importance of studying and the need that exists at this time for support in the home, so that their children can remain in the educational system. For example, this can be achieved by working with the "Escuela para Padres" (School for Parents) forums that exist in many of the country's schools.

3.4.4. CLASS MODALITY: COMMUNITY CLASSES

This is a very particular modality that some educational institutions in Honduras are implementing largely as a result of the ingenuity and commitment of the teachers themselves. This modality is designed basically for three reasons: the schoolchildren come from families very scarce in resources ("slum" areas), and consequently they do not have access to the internet (often not even via cell phones) and are prohibited from attending classes because of the danger of contagion. This is a very unique modality, which assumes very different forms and therefore is important to be made visible.

In one of the cases studied, in order to main-

24 Some teachers from the same school mentioned that they have agreed to work together to produce some materials for schoolchildren who cannot access the internet. Additionally, they mentioned that this week (in the last week of May 2021) they had received a visit from three USAID consultants who offered them help with training in the technological aspect and the provision of booklets for schoolchildren. They also met with two alumni who want to help them set up "virtual classrooms."

tain continuity of the school year, the teacher (T.1) divided the community into three sectors, with each sector catering for a certain number of children (between ten and fifteen children maximum). This is how the teacher from that school describes the way in which she gives lessons to her students:

> I've organized myself to work with schoolchildren as follows:
> • Mondays: I visit the La Sabana neighborhood near the school. I teach fourteen schoolchildren in a house loaned by a parent.
> • Tuesdays: I visit the neighborhood of Colonia Milagro de Dios. I teach ten students in an unoccupied house arranged by one of the parents. Parents provide snacks (fruit juice and cookies) to those attending.
> • Wednesdays: I visit the Los Almendros community. There I teach ten schoolchildren. A mother rents a room and the owner of the boarding house has arranged for the teacher to be given her parking space and lends her a table. Schoolchildren sit on the floor or sometimes manage to loan chairs.

With each subgroup the teacher works for two hours, complying with all biosafety measures (masks, gel, bleach with which they fumigate the space provided by parents; they even have masks for schoolchildren who do not have them).

Schoolchildren buy their booklets at the local photocopy service and during the two hours she visits them they work on this: she explains the contents and the exercises. After she leaves, the schoolchildren complete the exercises at home and the following week, on the next visit, she reviews these and assigns them new tasks.

For this teacher it is fundamental:

> that the children can see her, that they feel that she can truly explain a topic to them because their parents may not be able to do so because they haven't completed their schooling, may not understand the work, or don't have time because they have too many children. (T.1)

The teacher's assessment of this experience is positive. She considers that they are doing better today (using this modality), even if only in those two hours of class once a week. She believes that with this modality the students are learning, even if it is half of the subject material, but this is thanks to doing what she does: going to the neighborhoods, to the communities.

In her opinion:

> it is important for the students that she is present, that they see her, that they feel that she can explain a topic to them, because their parents may not be able to do so because they may not have completed their schooling, do not understand, or they have many children in school and do not have time. (T.1)

This teacher closes her reflection by saying the following: "Schoolchildren feel the joy of being with their classmates even if it is not in the classroom, but they are together, they talk and laugh during those two hours while maintaining the necessary distance" (T.1).

Regarding this experience it is important to highlight the enormous effort on behalf of the teacher that the implementation of this modality of giving "lessons" represents. It is, so to speak, going from house to house, or from

community to community, to arrive directly where the teacher's schoolchildren are. Certainly, as the teacher herself recognizes, the subject matter that can be successfully covered is slight, but the most important thing achieved is "that the child retains an affective formative bond."[25].

3.4.4.1. Didactic aspects of the community education modality

Based on the testimony offered by one of the teachers interviewed (T.1) as part of this study, exploration is made of the didactic aspects involved in this teaching-learning modality with schoolchildren from a school located in the vicinity of an urban community of scarce resources.

Our informant points out that in the urban areas of Honduras there are many neighborhoods that are extremely poor and lack access to the internet, which is why lessons cannot be taught in the virtual modality. And since students are not allowed to go to educational institutions by government order, some parents lend the yards of their houses or some rooms they have available for groups of a maximum of fourteen schoolchildren to work in.

What this teacher does is send homework to school children via WhatsApp and once a week she goes to collect this[26]. When she goes to pick the work up, she gives a small explanation to the group and takes the opportunity to work with the booklets for two hours[27], complying with all biosafety measures[28]. She explains the content and exercises that come in the booklets, so that students can then complete the exercises at home. The following week she checks these and makes observations. And so on. Given the limited time available to work with the group of fourteen schoolchildren (two hours once a week), the teacher brings copies[29] with some summarized notebook contents that are attached to the student's notebook. In this way they learn faster and do not have to copy things down from a whiteboard because the little time available does not allow this.

Only two subjects can be seen in class (Spanish and mathematics). The other subjects are covered with homework that students complete at home and which is integrated into the subjects of Spanish and mathematics[30]. Obviously, the main difficulty faced is not having enough time to study more content, since there are only two hours of classes per week.

The didactics that this teacher uses are simple, very basic, but these are used with the certainty that she is doing that which is possible in the conditions in which these "classes" must be taught. The strategy is simple: students are sent tasks via WhatsApp; the

25 For this modality it was not possible to obtain testimonies from parents and students.

26 Videos cannot be sent because parents say that what internet credit they can afford to pay for runs out on downloading a video.

27 School children buy their booklets at a local photocopy service.

28 Masks, gel, and bleach with which to fumigate the space that parents lend them; they (the teachers) even take masks to give to schoolchil-dren who do not have them.

29 Teachers make copies at home with money out of their own pockets.

30 Under this work modality, at most they manage to cover 50% of the material of each subject.

children complete the tasks at home (possibly with the support of a family member); the teacher reviews the tasks when she arrives to teach the class in the community (for two hours), bringing photocopies with summaries of the subject (Spanish or math) contained in the notebook, and briefly explaining the contents of that summary. Later, the children review the subjects at home and if they have any questions, they can raise these at the teacher's next visit; or they may ask the question via WhatsApp, something which the teacher is usually prepared to answer. In short, the didactics used when working with the students are basically explaining the topics under study, dealing with any questions they ask, and giving instructions for the next week's work.

From the description of this teaching experience, it is possible to make some reflections about what is happening with the teaching-learning process of schoolchildren in these times of pandemic.

First of all, it is necessary to recognize the effort, commitment and creativity to which the teaching staff has had to resort in order to be able to make a reality that which is often talked about, but commonly forgotten: the right to education. It is clear from this experience that this right, even under the most difficult conditions, must be pursued. Not only because it is a human right, but because if this right is lost, it cannot always be recovered.

Secondly, another relevant aspect is the importance that this teacher attaches to the fact that the children not only see her, look at her, but that they feel that there is someone who can help them[31], explain a topic to them, so that they continue to make an effort to study. This simple fact may be the key between children continuing their studies or dissociating themselves from the education system.

Thirdly, possibly the easiest thing would have been to accept the government's decree to suspend face-to-face lessons, but this teacher decided to take the most difficult path to figure out a way to continue teaching her students, a task in which she is succeeding. Without a doubt, this will bring benefits to this group of schoolchildren.

3.5. TEACHING WORKLOAD

All the teachers consulted believe that the implementation of the different teaching modalities that have had to be devised in the current context has had an impact on them in three areas:

3.5.1. INCREASED STRESS

Increased stress, basically for two reasons. They have had to look for ways to give lessons in a very tense social environment caused by the increase in COVID-19 infections among the population. Stress is further caused by the biosafety measures they have been forced to take to protect their own health and that of the schoolchildren and having to use lesson delivery modalities for which they lacked the

31 In the words of this teacher: "For her it is very important that the students are present, that they look at the teacher, that they feel that she can give them the explanation of a topic because possibly their fathers or mothers can't do so because maybe they didn't attain full schooling, they do not understand, or they have many children and do not have time."

necessary knowledge and the required technological means.

3.5.2. INCREASED WORKLOAD

The increased workload teachers face is generated by at least the following factors: having to teach lessons by drawing on different strategies such as the subdivision of the class into two or three sub-groups to impart lessons to each one separately; the elaboration of numerous work guides (booklets) for the different materials and/or modalities (face-to-face, virtual); the distribution of educational materials to each child, often having to take these to their houses; and maintaining communication with each child via WhatsApp, phone, or mail, according to the possibilities of each one.

> Tuesday is a very tiring day for her because the neighborhood (Colonia Milagro de Dios) is very far away, and she has to walk as if it were a rural area to go to seek out the schoolchildren. The workload has gone up about 50%, because after being with students it is necessary to see how the other group is doing. It is as if you have three grades in one (T.1).

3.5.3. INCREASED ECONOMIC EXPENDITURE

As a result of the pandemic and the implementation of the new class modalities, teachers have seen their expenses increase due to different items. For example, they have had to purchase internet services for their homes or increase their internet speed to be able to provide classes (under the virtual modality) or to maintain communication and get materials to their students.

> It has affected them economically because they have had to hire a company to give them good internet service and on many occasions they have had to facilitate internet credit for parents so that their children can have connectivity. There are even teachers who have given parents cell phones (T.2).

Additionally, the purchase of materials (paper, ink, markers, etc.), printing and copies of booklets and other teaching materials for students implies a greater economic expense:

> She has to get the printed materials to the school population using her own money. The school does not provide support, it comes out of her own pocket. There is the advantage that first grade has only five students, so it's not so expensive, although she also has other grades (third and sixth grades). What she does is talk to the mothers to ask them for the money for the copies and some accept this, but there are others who are more irresponsible who turn a blind eye and so she pays for the copies herself, because she's not prepared to leave the schoolchildren without materials (T.3).

One aspect in which the teachers interviewed agreed upon is that to carry out all these tasks, they do not receive support from the school where they work, nor from the Ministry of Education of Honduras. They themselves have to resolve how to meet and pay for these needs. "They don't get any support, only what they can do for themselves. Only the efforts of the teacher and the parents."

3.5.4. INCREASE IN ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

As a result of the pandemic, education authorities have increased requests to fill out forms and prepare reports on any number of topics, which increases teachers' workloads and takes away time to devote to their most important work: that of teaching and accompanying students.

3.6. TEACHER TRAINING NEEDS

The teachers consulted were also asked about the areas or topics for which they consider that they need support and/or training to be able to professionally face the educational-pedagogical challenges of teaching lessons in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The three main ideas were:

- Receiving training in didactic aspects to give lessons under the virtual modality.
- Attending training courses in the management of technological platforms such as ZOOM, Moodle, Google M, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Canva, among others.
- Receiving training in the development of educational materials to teach virtual and face-to-face classes, which are innovative, attractive to students and easy to make.

Clearly, the needs of the teachers consulted are very directly related to the weaknesses they are facing at this moment in teaching classes using virtual forums, and also in reaching students that do not have internet connectivity and also are unable to attend face-to-face classes due the problem of COVID-19.

3.7. REFLECTIONS ON THE HONDURAN EXPERIENCE

Based on the exploration of the experience of Honduras, the following reflections can be made:

The poverty in which the majority of the Honduran population lives (as explained in Chapter 2) as a result of neoliberal economic policies explains the enormous difficulties being faced to exercise the right to education under the minimum conditions required.

The studies cited in this report, as well as the information provided by the teachers and mothers interviewed, make the following clear: lack of financial resources prevents students from accessing electronic devices (computers or tablets) and causes difficulties for those who manage to access cell phones and internet connectivity. It is in rural areas that families face the greatest difficulties in having internet connectivity, either because there is no service, or the signal is very poor, or because they do not have the necessary economic resources to cover the cost of prepaid cell phone services. While it is true that in urban areas the possibilities of accessing an internet signal are greater, often the signal is not of good quality, or families do not have the necessary resources to cover the costs of the service.

Despite numerous announcements by the government of Orlando Hernández regarding the support it provides to schools and students to meet the needs they face in this context, in reality this is not really occurring. Teachers practically unanimously agree on the lack of support received from the Ministry of Education and the government. This has forced tea-

chers to become creative in figuring out how to continue teaching lessons.

Based on the interviews conducted, it was possible to identify some of the modalities taken up during the school year in Honduras. Most certainly there are more modalities being used than those identified in this study, however, the modalities identified show the difficulties (material and institutional) that exist in this country in keeping the school year underway.

All the teachers interviewed acknowledge that they face numerous difficulties in delivering lessons in the current context. The most mentioned aspects are:

- The modality used to teach classes represents a work overload for teachers due to: the diversity of schedules and strategies used to reach every student (face-to-face and virtual classes, home visits, sending messages by WhatsApp, among others); the variety and quantity of didactic material that they have to create, photocopy, and distribute; the different assessment models they must resort to; the amount of hours they have to work (often the effective schedules extend to nights and weekends).

- Lack of knowledge and experience in the field of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT). While in the process of teaching, without much or any support or professional advice in this field, teachers have had to search the internet for information, download programs, and train themselves to be able to work in this new environment. Teachers who do not do so face greater problems in this regard.

- There is widespread complaint from teachers about the lack of support many parents give their children in accompanying them in their studies. The reasons for this situation are varied, although the most frequent are lack of time due to work and the low level of education of many parents.

The mothers interviewed coincided in pointing out the enormous undertaking that falls to them in having to support their schoolchildren in their studies (completing assignments and tasks) because they are not (professionally) prepared to perform this function, nor do they have the necessary knowledge about the subjects. In addition, and very importantly, classes at home represent an enormous additional burden of work, which generates stress and fatigue.

The implementation of other non-face-to-face class modalities forced teachers to innovate (create) didactic strategies that adapt to the new educational scenarios (reduced face-to-face, virtual, remote, and community modalities, among others) as well as the socioeconomic conditions of students and their families. Some of the didactic resources used include the preparation of booklets and videos on specific topics, audios with instructions, and messages via WhatsApp, etc. In addition, teachers have had to devise ways to deliver content (to cover the subject matter) in less time, which entails an additional effort in the definition of the essential contents to be studied and in the means of delivering these and reviewing them with their students.

All the students consulted in the framework of this study agreed that they prefer the face-to-face class modality and not the virtual modality. The reasons for this opinion are essentially twofold: the lack of stable, secure,

uninterrupted internet services; and the learning difficulties that the virtual modality causes. On this last aspect, students gave numerous examples of the learning problems that the virtual modality causes them. In contrast, they indicate that the face-to-face modality is better because they see the teacher, they can ask questions more easily, he or she explains the material to them better, they work in class, etc. Additionally, they note that having classes in their homes is difficult because these lack ideal conditions (there is a lot of noise and interruptions, they don't have an adequate workspace, they find it difficult to concentrate, they get bored, etc.).

The teachers interviewed were also very clear in pointing out that in the modalities currently used to teach lessons, students' learning is greatly compromised compared to what they achieve under the face-to-face (traditional) modality. There are many reasons to hold this opinion: in general, the number of class hours is currently much smaller; also, the amount of material that can be covered is less (between 25% and 50% of what could be covered in face-to-face classes), and in some cases the material from only two or three subjects at most is barely covered (there is no opportunity to cover more); and the exercises and work carried out by students also demonstrates the learning difficulties that they face. Despite all this, all the teachers consulted were of the opinion that although it is under the current deficient conditions that classes take place, it is vital that these students maintain their links with their educational institutions.

It is on the topic of didactics that the teachers interviewed most require training and accompaniment. While they have made progress in this field, they still feel that they need training, especially in order to be able to deliver virtual classes more effectively.

The main recommendations that could be made in the case of this experience are:

- The provision of training to teachers for the better use of ICT for educational purposes.

- The promotion of forums for the exchange of teaching experiences in the didactic-pedagogical field.

- The provision of forums for reflection on and analysis of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic with regards to the teaching-learning processes of the class modalities used to teach primary and secondary students.

4. THE RETURN TO CLASSES IN COSTA RICA

4.1. THE RECOMMENCEMENT OF THE SCHOOL YEAR AND CONNECTIVITY AMONG THE COSTA RICAN SCHOOL

On March 16, 2020, following the WHO's declaration of a global COVID-19 pandemic, the Costa Rican Government decreed a State of National Emergency and immediately established, among other measures, the suspension of classes in all public and private educational institutions in the country, a little more than a month after the beginning of the school year[32]. For several weeks classes were completely suspended, and then returned under the blended modality, as the Ministry of Public Education called it[33], until the end of the 2020 academic year on December 23, 2020[34].

On February 8 of this year (2021), after almost a year of suspending the face-to-face class room modality, the MEP began the school year using the bimodal modality (face-to-face and online classes). The number of students in the public education system who began to receive classes, according to data from the MEP itself, was 1,173,000 enrolled students (La Nación, April 16, 2021).

From May 24 until July 9, 2021, the MEP decided to suspend face-to-face and virtual classes altogether, arguing that the intention is "to collaborate with the Government in reducing the mobility of people and thus reducing the number of COVID-19 cases at the national level" (La República). According to a report by the Minister of Education, the reason for not maintaining classes exclusively in the virtual modality was due to the quantity of students who still lack connectivity. "More than 400,000 students have no possibility of connectivity in their homes, despite the efforts we have made as a Ministry." The Minister added that existing gaps "cannot continue to widen through the provision of education of differing quality."

According to MEP data, in March 2020 the number of students enrolled in public schools in the country was 1,067,091, while in July 2020 only 57.8% of students (616,918) had connectivity in their homes and 372,033

32 The 2020 school year had only just started on February 10, 2020.

33 That is what the Costa Rican Ministry of Public Education (MEP) called the combination of face-to-face classes with virtual classes. It has also called it a bimodal modality.

34 As stated in Section 1 of this report, strictly speaking, it is incorrect to call this method of delivering lessons distance classes. It should more rightly be called remote or online classes, depending on the conditions in which the lessons are given.

(34.86%) students lacked such connectivity (MEP, August 2020).

In the context of the decision to suspend the 2021 school year, the Minister of Education announced that for students who do not have connectivity, that this Ministry together with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Telecommunications (MICITT) and the Costa Rican Superintendence of Telecommunications (SUTEL) committed to the provision of computers and/or internet to students under the "Hogares Conectados" (Connected Homes) Program developed by the IMAS (Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social, Mixed Social Support Institute). In addition, the signing of an agreement between the MEP and the Omar Dengo Foundation (FOD) was announced with the aim of providing high-quality internet service to 2,120 educational institutions (47% of the country's total educational institutions) nationwide, which would benefit about 721,947 students, that is, about 67% of the school population.

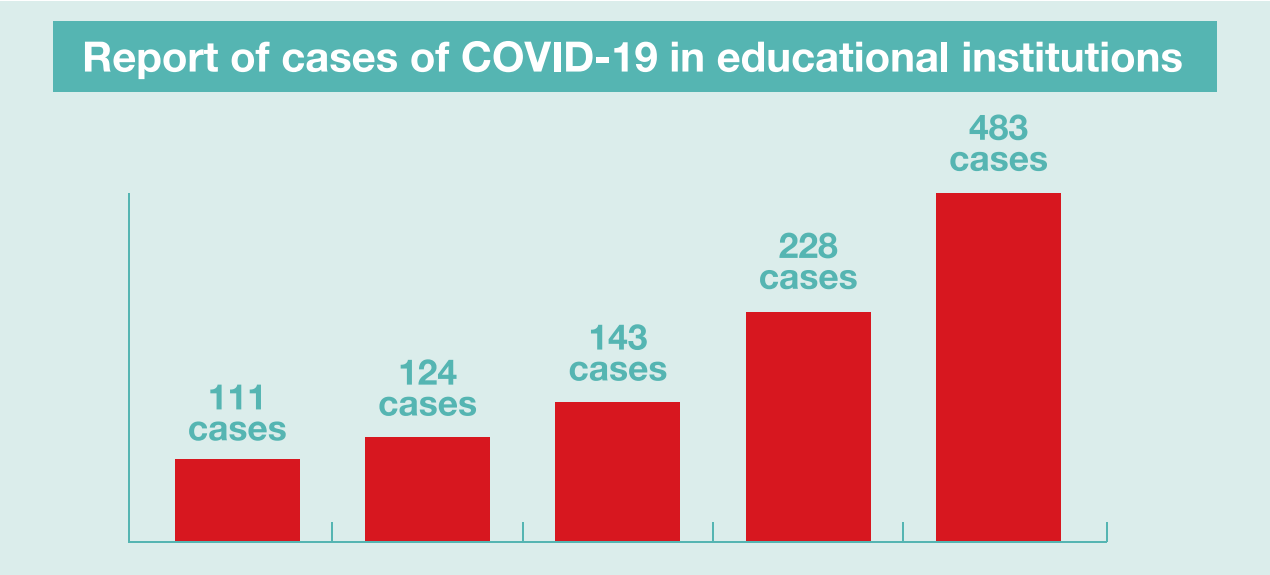
Despite everything thus promised, the reality is that little or no progress has been made towards providing internet connectivity to students who lack this service. On May 31, 2021, the Minister of Education announced in the media that "there has been no progress in the connectivity of students in the pandemic because the country lacks telecommunications infrastructure, especially in the most remote areas," adding that SUTEL "confirmed that they have problems connecting more than 47,000 families due to the lack of coverage." (MEP, 2021)[35].

Once the 2021 school year began under the blended modality, teacher associations expressed their concern in April and early May especially because there was a significant increase in the number of COVID-19 infections. At the end of April (specifically on April 29), MEP authorities reiterated the decision to maintain the school year under the blended modality, issuing the following statement:

> The Ministry of Public Education, in the light of the health regulations issued today, reiterates that educational services are not suspended and will continue to be offered under the blended modality as they have been up to now (...) In addition, reminder is made that the closure of educational institutions is exclusively to be made by the Minister of Education (crhoy.com. The MEP clarifies).

However, various sectors of the population expressed their concern and discomfort at the insistence on behalf of the educational authorities on continuing with the school year under the face-to-face modality. Specifically, teachers' associations such as the ANDE and the APSE expressed their concern that the school year would not be suspended, given the evidence of the increase in the number of infections in educational institutions.

[35] *In that same article, SUTEL clarifies that things are not exactly as the MEP says. But, beyond the (technical) reasons on one side or the other, the reality is that today these students do not have internet connectivity.*



Source: Based on graphic recovered from https://www.crhoy.com/nacionales/contra-criticas-y-presiones-mep-se-aferra-a-postura-de-no-cerrar-escuelas/

Finally, with an increase in the number of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths adding to the argument of the lack of internet connectivity of a high percentage of students, the MEP decreed the suspension of the school year (face-to-face and virtual classes) from May 24 to July 9, 2021, and set a new calendar to end the school year[36] (La Nación, May 17, 2021).

• Poverty and connectivity

The problem of connectivity faced by a percentage of the student population is clearly not due to technical reasons, as some people and entities seek to imply, but rather is fundamentally an economic and political problem. It is precisely the lower-income families who lack internet services, and these are the ones who do not have electronic devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones.

The Costa Rican Instituto de Estadística y Censos (Institute of Statistics and Census, INEC), drawing on the results of the Costa Rican National Household Survey (ENAHO, July 2019), revealed that the pandemic has had a strong impact on the increase of poverty in the country as a result of the measures taken by the government for the confinement and restriction of movement of people in order to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, the data indicate that Total Poverty went from 21.9% in 2019 to 26.2% in 2020, that is, there was an increase of 4.3%, while extreme poverty rose from 5.8% to 7.0%. In urban areas, poverty reached the figure of 26.4% with an increase of 5.2% over the previous year, while in rural areas it went from 24.2% in 2019 to 25.5% in 2020. In urban areas, extreme poverty rose from 5.4% to 6.9%, while in rural areas it rose from 6.9% to 7.3%. In short, poverty has increased significantly in the country and, as a result, families do not have enough income to meet their most basic needs. Jimenez et al. (2020) rightly

[36] *Students will return to classes on July 12, 2021, and these will run until January 21, 2022, with a one-week break between December 23 and January 2, 2022.*

draw attention to this reality experienced in the country, with respect to social inequality and the impact this has on the impossibility of accessing internet services for the poorest families.

> Approximately 335,900 households (21%) were in poverty before the crisis, of which 93,500 did not even have the minimum income to meet basic nutritional needs. The economic constraints faced by many low-income families contrast with the quarantine experienced by those with higher incomes. In Costa Rica, the richest 10% of households have an income 25 times higher than that of the poorest. (PEN, 2019).

Because of this, Jimenez et al. add

> While 79% of higher-income households (the 5th quintile) have computers in their homes, in lower-income households (1st quintile) this indicator is 25%. In addition, it is important to consider that 40% of homes in the country do not have access to the internet via coaxial cable, fiber optics, or landlines.

These data allow us to see that in reality we are talking about a structural problem (poverty) that prevents a significant sector of the population from accessing essential goods and services. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, having internet access became a crucial issue so that students can access the virtual and/or remote education modality that was implemented as of the suspension of the face-to-face modality. In addition, the problems mentioned above by the authorities (MEP and MICITT) also highlight the lack of political will that has existed to provide the student population with internet connectivity[37].

4.2. MODALITIES FOR TEACHING LESSONS IN TIMES OF COVID-19

In Costa Rica, as in many other countries in the region, two education systems coexist: the public and the private. In public schools, most students belong to the middle- and lower-income sectors. It is important to recognize that among public educational institutions there is a kind of social stratification, that is, some educational institutions (either due to geographical location or greater state investment in educational infrastructure and basic and/or technological services) enjoy better conditions than others.

This differentiation shows that, although a single public education system exists, some educational institutions lack internet connectivity, or the surrounding communities where students attending that school live lack that service or this fails to be of sufficient quality, or their families lack the necessary resources to meet this need, which in the current context has become indispensable to remaining within the education system. Most of the people interviewed mentioned this factor as the main limitation to continuing with the school year.

According to the testimonies obtained, there are basically three factors that affect the possibilities of receiving classes for many primary and secondary school students:

[37] *In our opinion, there is no valid justification for the fact that after fourteen months, the Government has not had the capacity to solve the seri-ous problem of thousands of students lacking internet connectivity.*

a) Having access to an internet connection (that is stable and secure);
b) Being able to cover the cost of internet services; and
c) Having access to an electronic device (cell phone, tablet or computer).

In Costa Rica, the teaching modality used has been predominantly "blended", that is, a combination of face-to-face classes (the traditional method) with virtual classes[38]. There are some other modalities, such as the remote modality, which some educational institutions implement due to particular conditions that may exist, for example, the absence of internet services, or the impossibility of payment for this on behalf of the students.

It should also be said that each school organizes classes according to the particular conditions that it has (availability of internet connectivity of the students and the willingness or otherwise of the parents for their children to attend face-to-face classes). These two factors largely determine the organization of the school year, and even the way in which each teacher organizes his or her group of students.

Thus, the most widespread modality employed is the blended one but there are some variations in the way in which each teacher implements this. In this study, two basic modalities were identified[39]:

- The reduced face-to-face–online modality.
- The reduced face-to-face–remote modality.

A characterization and analysis of each of the identified modalities will now be made based on interviews with key informants.

4.3. CLASS MODALITY: REDUCED FACE-TO-FACE–ONLINE

This is the official modality defined by the MEP for the imparting of lessons in the current school year (2021). However, the implementation of this modality varies according to the two particular conditions that exist in the school and the community. Three variations were identified in this study, although more probably exist.

The division of the student group into two subgroups (A and B) (T.1)

In this variation, each group is divided into two subgroups with the idea of complying with the health recommendations defined by the Ministry of Health. Each subgroup has two full weeks of face-to-face classes and two full weeks of online classes. After the first two weeks, the class type is reversed for each subgroup. For example, during the two weeks that group A receives face-to-face classes, group B receives online classes, then group B receives two weeks of face-to-face classes, while group A receives online classes.

- Face-to-face classes are held from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
- Online classes are held from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (It is not possible to hold these for any longer because students do not have internet in their houses, they work with prepaid connections and they do not

38 The blended modality is what the MEP calls this combination of face-to-face classes with online classes.

39 In the selection and location of the interviewees, ANDE, an organization affiliated to EILA, provided its valuable collaboration. The responsi-bility for providing this support fell to comrade Vinicio Rojas Nájera, to whom we are most grateful.

have money to recharge the service after a short period of time).

- This teacher (T.1) also has two students who only receive online classes, because their parents do not allow them to attend face-to-face classes. In this case, after completing face-to-face classes, she connects up to give the class to those two students online, obviously over a shorter period of time.

Division of groups by day, at different times (T.2)

In this second variation, the entire school works according to four different schedules.

- Week 1: Two days of face-to-face classes and three days of online classes.
- Week 2: Four face-to-face days and one day of online classes.
- Week 3: Two days of face-to-face classes and two days of online classes.
- Week 4: Four days of face-to-face classes and one day of online classes.

Both face-to-face and online classes are held from 7:00 a.m. to 12:10 p.m. There are six lessons per day.

The division of groups into alternating classes (T.3)

In this third variation, the school arranged for classes to be organized as follows:

- On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays there are face-to-face classes from 7:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
- On the same days (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays), the same group receives online classes (each student at their respective home) from 12:10 p.m. until 2:20 p.m[40].
- On Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7: 00 a.m. to 2: 20 p.m. the whole group receives classes under the online modality. Time is given around noon for students to have a snack. .
- Virtual classes for four students. The teacher has four students who do not attend face-to-face classes (their parents prefer them not to do so), so they only receive online classes. The teacher (T.3) points out that the number of students who receive only online classes has been increasing due to the increase in COVID-19 cases.

While students receive the special subjects, the teacher, along with other workmates, prepares the work guides, reviews the work that the students do online, prepares materials for the face-to-face and virtual classes, and plans the next class sessions.

4.3.1. DIDACTIC ASPECTS OF THE REDUCED FACE-TO-FACE–ONLINE MODALITY

The didactics used by each teacher vary greatly depending on the educational environment, the level of training or ICT management that the teacher possesses and the socioeconomic status of the group of students in the teacher's charge[41]. In this modality, the teachers consulted (T.1 to T.3) agree that they have a good management of ICT, largely because they have a natural affinity to this and have been interested in becoming trained in

[40] *Many of the students have told the teacher that they almost do not have time to connect to the virtual class, because they barely have enough time to get home.*

[41] *In this case all students have a computer, and in some cases, even cell phones.*

this subject.

For example, in the first variation (two subgroups), the teacher interviewed (T.1) points out that she has quite a simple, but attractive and fun way of imparting lessons so students don't get bored. She develops the contents of each subject using the PREZI application, adding text and images to each presentation as necessary. She then presents this and explains the presentation. If students have questions or queries, they can ask them after she finishes speaking. She also uses other apps like Kahoot to demonstrate some topics and maintain schoolchildren's attention. When she works with Microsoft Teams, she uses the whiteboard and explains as they go. This is an additional resource she has but doesn't always use.

She believes that this method is the best one, because it streamlines the time she has to dedicate to each subject, and thus she can then have time to undertake other tasks, such as the elaboration and revision of GTAs (Guías de Trabajo Autónomo, Autonomous Work Guides). This teacher indicates that to streamline the workload, the elaboration of the GTAs is shared with another colleague each week (each one does the GTA for two subjects). In this way each teacher must prepare two GTAs per week. First thing on Mondays she sends the week's four GTAs, and at the end of that week students send them back to her (using Microsoft Teams)[42]. The preparation and delivery of the GTAs form part of each student's assessment.

In the second variation (division of groups by days), the teacher (T.2) mentions that last year she had taught sixth grade and was frustrated because the students did not have support books. This year the parents understood the problem that this represented to the learning process, and therefore they made the effort to buy textbooks. Currently, with virtual classes, the teacher considers it essential to have support books so that students can read the contents they are seeing in class and review the subject at home.

She holds classes mainly using Microsoft Teams and when necessary supplements these with textbooks. She sends students GTAs every week. If the GTA is difficult, she resorts to videos or audios with additional explanations and sends these to parents via WhatsApp to support the schoolchildren a little in completing the GTA[43]. In addition, she has a WhatsApp group to communicate with parents as necessary, and uses a cell phone with a dedicated number for these purposes[44].

In the third variation (division of the group into alternating classes), the teacher (T.3) com-

42 Mientras el grupo A, por ejemplo, está haciendo las GTA de las materias académicas, el grupo B está haciendo las GTA de las materias artísticas. Así se van alternando las semanas.

43 She clarifies that she usually prepares the GTAs alone, because this ensures that they conform to the level and characteristics of the group under her charge.

44 This teacher complains that in a meeting with the school administration, they told her that she has to give virtual and face-to-face classes simultaneously. She argued that there is a MEP document called Pedagogical Guidelines, which discusses distance work, but never mentions virtual classes. The administration refuted this information saying that the MEP had already made a second part of that document (Pedagogical Guidelines), which said that now they have to give virtual and face-to-face lessons simultaneously. She consulted the document, and realized that now indeed they have to give virtual and face-to-face lessons simultaneously (Teacher T.2).

ments that she likes ICT very much and that is why she handles it rather well, although she recognizes that she still has a lot to learn. She indicates that for each class modality and subject she uses different didactics. For example, if the class is math, she starts with an example, and then gives students exercises to complete. In this case she uses the Kahn Academy platform a lot, where examples are given that she then explains. She also uses Jamboard as a whiteboard to highlight certain points. If the class is Spanish, the didactics used consists of making readings together, with each student reading a section of text. If the class is science, she often presents students with images of animals, for example, and then asks them questions about what the animals eat, how they breathe, how they live, what their habitat is like, etc. In this case, she frequently uses challenging questions and the exchange of ideas between students.

The teacher mentions that she uploads everything they study in each subject to Teams so that students can clarify any doubts they have. Finally, she highlights that her classes are usually very participatory, and that she even assigns some support tasks to students on a rotating basis, for example, calling on people to speak or writing down questions.

As can be seen, the didactics used in the virtual modality by these teachers relies heavily on the use of various applications with the purpose of facilitating the learning of primary and secondary school students, making sessions more dynamic, participatory and motivating, as well as to support the completion of GTAs. In general terms, the impression that remains is positive, however, some of these teachers recognize that the possibilities of learning in this modality are greatly reduced. They believe that the students learn less and often become very bored. This aspect is further developed in the following section.

4.3.2. INTERVIEWEES' ASSESSMENT OF THE REDUCED FACE-TO-FACE–ONLINE MODALITY

The testimony of teachers, mothers and students was obtained on this modality. Two of the teachers consulted (T.1 and T.2) coincide that online classes do not have any positive aspects, because they consider that the teaching process becomes very slow, less subject matter is covered, and internet connectivity problems faced by students are frequent.

They point out many problems, but those that particularly should be mentioned due to their importance are basically the following:

- Often the teacher does not know if students are paying attention, because it is not mandatory to have the camera on. "Maybe he's connected but he's asleep."
- Students can't always connect up to the internet because the connection fails or they don't have enough credit on their phones.
- Some parents do not monitor their children in connecting up and teachers can do nothing about this.
- There is a lot of improvisation because no one was prepared to give lessons under this modality. .
- Students do not have the same concentration, nor do they achieve the same level of learning as in a face-to-face classes. "They get bored and tired quickly."
- Remaining in the same position is not healthy for schoolchildren.

Only one teacher (T.3) gave a very favorable opinion on this modality[45]. She highlights basically two positive aspects:

1. She feels that many students have had the benefit of learning about technological tools, because even though they take computer classes, a number of teachers had to teach them how to copy and paste an image, how to use Teams, etc.
2. It has permitted many parents to conquer their fear of computers. She took the time to make explanatory videos to this end.

In the case of this teacher, clearly her opinion is favorable because she likes ICT and also considers it important that her students learn to manage this type of technology.

Of the four mothers consulted, two (T.6 and T.8) believe that the online teaching modality has some advantages. The points they highlight are:

- • Their child is learning a lot about using educational computer programs. Now they know how to log in and navigate some of these, and even how to do Google searches.
- It's easier to check that they're actually studying, to check their notebooks, and see what they have to do.
- It is possible to maintain communication with the teacher via WhatsApp, which enables them to clarify and resolve many aspects of their child's education.

The other two mothers consulted (T.7 and T.9), consider that online classes represent many problems for both them and their children. The only positives they mentioned was that with online classes their children do not have to leave home so they are not exposed to COVID-19, and that they can get up a little later because they do not have to travel to school.

However, all the mothers consulted (T.6 to T.9) agree that virtual classes represent many disadvantages for their children and for themselves.

The main drawbacks they mentioned are:

- There tend to be many distractors in their homes so it is difficult for students to concentrate and maintain their attention levels. The teacher may be very good, but students still struggle to pay attention.
- They do not learn the same as if the classes were face-to-face. They learn much less.
- It is not very easy to clear up doubts, or to make queries in this modality.
- The anxiety generated by being locked up and almost not being able to go out.
- There are usually connection problems (unstable signal, outages), and sometimes problems occur due to poor handling of the application, sometimes by the children but also sometimes by the teacher.
- There is clearly an overloading of work on them (moms), since they have to be very aware that their children are being atten-

[45] *This teacher clarifies that the school where she works is located in a middle-income sector, so "her students do have technological means to connect up, but that is not something that is repeated in every school where lessons are held." In addition, the teacher said that she has spent a lot of time getting training in the use of various technological platforms to be able to teach virtual classes, since she likes these and consid-ers that it is essential to do so to be able to teach using the online modality.*

tive, connected, taking the class, helping them solve problems related to the internet connection, downloading materials (for example, GTAs), making copies, supporting students in the completing their work, etc.

In addition, the moms also agree that online classes entail additional expenses, which they cannot always cover, for example: having to buy a computer or a cell phone, having to pay for internet services at home, or making the payments for cell phone internet credit.

All students consulted (T.10 to T.16) expressed similar opinions. The only advantage they see with online classes is basically not having to get up so early and not having to travel to school. Otherwise, they see no advantages.

In contrast, when asked about the drawbacks of online classes, they mention many aspects. Some of these are:

- They have trouble concentrating because of noise and other distractors in the home.
- They find it much harder to understand and ask questions.
- They get bored of having to sit around for so long listening to classes, as these are often not very participatory. They get bored and tired.
- Frequently they cannot hear well because of connection problems, or the signal is cut off so it is difficult to understand what is being said. Or it can also happen that the computer or cell phone fails.
- They don't like GTAs because they are sent many of these and sometimes these become confusing.

In summary, the predominating opinion among the people consulted is that online classes cause problems that lead to serious learning problems.

Both students and mothers are totally in favor of face-to-face classes. The mothers consulted (T.7 to T.9) highlight the following as positive aspects of face-to-face classes:

- In the face-to-face modality, students learn more because more material is covered and, additionally, they understand this much better. They can even ask questions and have their doubts clarified more easily.
- In face-to-face classes, the issue of technology management does not affect the development of the classes, neither for teachers nor students. Classes can be taught more securely in a normal fashion.
- In the face-to-face modality the teacher sees the students and more easily realizes if they are paying attention and if they are understanding the class, and if necessary, calls on students to give them explanations, either on the blackboard or at the students' desks.

On being consulted about why they like face-to-face classes better, the students (T.10 to T.16) indicated the following:

- They better understand the subject they are studying.
- The teacher explains more thoroughly and better (giving more examples, doing exercises in class and working in groups, and that helps students better understand the topics they are studying).
- In face-to-face classes students can see their peers, socialize, and even talk about a topic that they don't understand and help each other.

- Face-to-face classes are more orderly in terms of the schedule, the lessons, the subject and the work they have to do. In the virtual modality all this is very disorganized.

In summary, there is a non-favorable opinion among the people consulted (teachers, students and mothers) regarding the online class modality. Only two people consulted (a teacher and a mom) consider online classes to be a good experience because students learn how to use ICT. Problems in connecting to the internet and/or getting a stable signal are indicated as one of the problems faced by schoolchildren and adolescents in this modality, but they also mention problems in being able to concentrate and not get bored, and in getting support from their mothers, among others. .

4.4. THE REDUCED FACE-TO-FACE–REMOTE MODALITY

This modality exists as a result of the lack of connectivity or deficient connectivity in homes, or the impossibility for many families to cover the economic costs that this service entails. In this case, clearly the socioeconomic status of families is a determining factor in the conditions in which their children can access education. In fact, the school where one of the teachers consulted works (T.4) is located in a rural coastal area, where very low-income families reside; and in the case of another teacher consulted (T.5), the school is located in a marginal urban area in the Greater Metropolitan Area (GMA). This largely explains the impossibility of these two schools teaching lessons in the virtual modality, and their having to resort to the remote modality.

Variation 1.

The teacher interviewed (T.4) mentions that in their school they divide the groups into two subgroups: A and B. In the example below, the organization of the classes is as follows:

Face-to-face classes:

- Group A attends face-to-face classes every Monday.
- Group B goes to face-to-face classes every Tuesday.

The classroom schedule is 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. The teacher considers that the day of face-to-face classes practically becomes a kind of tutoring, since class time is barely enough to clarify doubts and review the subject matter.

Remote classes.

When the students attend the classroom, the teacher gives them work to do at home, and if they have any questions or queries, they can write to him via WhatsApp for clarification.

Due to the very difficult conditions in which this school operates, they cover less than half of the corresponding subject matter, which occurs in a superficial fashion, given the serious difficulty represented by the few teaching hours and the situation of poverty of many families.

Variation 2:

In this variation, informant T.5 indicates that in his case the class schedule is organized as follows:

The group is divided into three subgroups A, B and C. Each subgroup might consist of 8 to 10 students, depending on the number of students in the class. Each subgroup receives classes in a separate classroom in order to comply with the health regulations defined by the MEP/Ministry of Health.

- *Face-to-face classes:* Two days of face-to-face classes (e.g. Mondays and Tuesdays) from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and from 12.00 midday to 3:30 p.m. Each subgroup receives classes in one subject, while the other receives classes in another subject, and then they rotate.

- *Remote classes:* This modality basically consists of students completing the Autonomous Work Guides (GTAs) given them by the teacher at home. On giving these to the students, he explains the characteristics of the work. The GTA is reviewed by the teacher in the next class according to the subject covered

The interviewed teacher explains that by order of the MEP, at least once a week he has to gather the entire group of students under his charge. That is supposed to represent the only time they communicate with students in virtual form, however:

the only students who can attend virtual classes are those who have access to connectivity and mobile devices, and additionally have the desire to do so, because a large part of the students do not attend because they don't want to (they're not interested), and there is no way to force the population to do so. It is thus common that of a group of 30 students, barely eight or ten connect up for virtual classes[46].

4.4.1. DIDACTIC ASPECTS OF THE REDUCED FACE-TO-FACE–REMOTE MODALITY

The teacher consulted (T.4) indicates that due to the scarce economic resources that his students' families have, there is practically not much that can be done at the didactic level. It is not possible to ask students to buy a newspaper or to download a video or a documentary or to connect up for a time to the internet to discuss a topic, so there is very little that is achieved to cover the subject matter. Given this reality, he notes that in face-to-face classes what he manages to do is present a topic, motivate students to participate with questions or comments, and thus he enriches the topic and manages to address others. That's basically what he achieves in face-to-face classes. In the remote modality, the most he can do is leave very simple written work (GTAs) for students to complete for later review and the making of observations. He even mentions that they have problems with GTAs because sometimes there are no resources to photocopy these and give them to students.

In this case it is clear that the characteristics of the school's environment condition the possibilities that the interviewed teacher visualizes for imparting lessons. These are extremely precarious conditions, which greatly limit what can and cannot be done. Despite the enormous difficulties that this teacher faces in giving lessons, he considers that it is important to keep the school year active, so that the link with the education system is

[46] *This teacher indicates that "of the total number of students enrolled in this school, more than 70% of these do not connect up for virtual clas-ses at all."*

maintained.

As in the previous case, this teacher (T.5) points out that at the didactic level there is little that can be done, because the time spent in face-to-face classes is very short and barely enough to review and give instructions on the new assignments (GTAs). He says that most of the student's time in class and at home is invested in the completion and revision of GTAs, since so many of these are demanded. Each student must complete on average two GTAs per subject per month. Finally, this teacher points out that due to the different difficulties faced, they barely cover 25% of the contents provided for each subject. Even so, he also considers that it is still important to keep the school year active.

4.4.2. INTERVIEWEES' ASSESSMENT OF THE REDUCED FACE-TO-FACE–REMOTE MODALITY

In this modality, the testimony of just two teachers was obtained (T.4. and T.5)[47]. In this case, it must be remembered that virtual classes cannot be provided in these schools, mostly because of a lack of internet service in homes or via cell phones due to the cost this represents that cannot be covered by students' families.

In this modality, the teachers consulted agreed that the main difficulty they face in being able to teach lessons in the online modality is the lack of internet service for students either because it does not exist, the signal is very poor, or they cannot cover its cost. For this reason, teachers have had to resort to teaching lessons in the remote modality, that is, students are assigned work (GTAs) to do at home, and these are then reviewed by the teacher in class.

One of the teachers consulted (T.4) also highlights as a significant difficulty faced in the community where the school is located (a rural coastal area) the fact that parents have very low educational levels and are very dedicated to their work, and therefore do not really worry about their children studying, completing their tasks or attending classes. "There is no culture of studying." In addition, he points out that the houses where many of the students live are very small enclosed spaces without divisions, with a lot of noise in the environment, so it is very difficult for students to study in their homes.

The other teacher consulted (T.5) believes that the other major difficulty faced is problems of communication and coordination with the MEP. He considers that everything has been imposed on teachers overnight, without the guidance and support required. He adds that the planning might be very good, but it does not meet the reality that is lived in his school and the community where he is located.

In these two cases, teachers clearly indicate that the teaching-learning process has been affected in a very negative way. The following are the main problems they highlight:

- Very little subject matter is being covered. They cover perhaps 25% of the total content provided in the program. Concentration is made mainly on basic subjects.

- Students are unmotivated and disinterested. As the goal is that no students are

[47] *It was not possible to interview mothers or students on this modality.*

to be kept down, this has the effect that students do not make the necessary effort to attend classes and study. Absenteeism has increased.

As can be seen from the above, in schools where the population is of lower income, the problems to successfully complete the school year multiply. The structural problems facing this population are added to others that tend to aggravate social problems to even greater degrees, and consequently, affect the possibilities of accessing quality education.

4.5. WORKLOAD AND TEACHER TRAINING

All the teachers consulted indicate that their workload in the context of the pandemic has increased, and additionally the tasks that they have to perform have become more complex, all while they do not always have the necessary support from the MEP.

With regard to their workload, they indicate the following:

- They have an excessive amount of work: they have to plan face-to-face and virtual classes, make and review GTAs, search for materials on the internet for some classes, and send WhatsApp messages at all hours to deliver materials (T.1).
- They have to coordinate many activities with school students, and even with parents (T.1). In addition, the teacher adds that teaching from home is more difficult, since household chores are easily mixed with work tasks and it is not easy or possible to separate one thing from the other.

One issue that concerns some teachers is that the MEP is now asking teachers to teach face-to-face and virtual classes simultaneously, which they consider extremely difficult and pedagogically inappropriate, since these are different educational scenarios that require different planning and didactics (T.2). The teacher explains that she questioned this guideline but the school management showed her the MEP document of new pedagogical guidelines (MEP, 2021) where this guideline is established for teachers. In her case, she explains that what they are asking for is the following:

> The administration wants her to give face-to-face classes, take her device and send the GTAs via WhatsApp to students in the home, so that they can work simultaneously. She would be getting out of face-to-face classes at 11:25 a.m. and would connect up to clarify the doubts of students working on the GTAs from home.

She concluded by saying that in the face of such arrangements, she felt helpless and powerless. As if there is nothing for it but to abide by the established norms and that's it. A similar point of view was expressed by another teacher (T.3), who pointed out that:

> dcreating each guide according to the skills you want to develop takes a lot of time, sometimes an hour per subject, plus another four hours if you have to make curriculum adaptations for the cases that require it. He thus feels that sometimes he doesn't have the time to review work, and that's why he asks that certain things be delivered to him physically and others be sent in virtual form, because if he reviewed everything

> in the classroom he wouldn't have time to make explanations and address other topics.

Some teachers add to the list of problems raised the lack of clarity that sometimes exists as to the guidelines that the MEP provides. They point out that in some cases there is no guidance on how to solve a problem, and in others, the problem is that the guidelines are issued without any kind of consultation with the teachers, they simply have to comply, although the conditions to do so do not exist.

> There has actually been a lot of disorganization; it may be that things are planned or that they have tried to plan them, but this is not seen in reality. There are no agendas, objectives or content prepared for the virtual environment, and there are also high percentages of students who do not have an internet connection or mobile devices. The teacher says you can have very nice planning, but if students don't have access to the internet or mobile devices, none of that is going to help them. And the case is that you have to get to know the reality in which these students live to know that what is asked cannot be done. So what is lacking is more communication, more dialog with teachers. (T.5)

In summary, the teachers consulted agree that their workload has increased, but also that the tasks that they must complete are ever-more complex, because the educational settings have changed (virtual classes, remote classes), and as a consequence, designing the lessons on a didactic level and in terms of resources is a much greater task than it was before.

The teachers consulted agree that they have not received the required training from the MEP in order to undertake these new activities. Some teachers indicate that in their own cases and those of other teachers they know, much of what they now know has been arrived at through their own initiative. They have had to look for training courses on the internet, especially in the area of the use of technological platforms such as Classroom, Moodle, and Kahoot, among others.

Only one of the teachers consulted (T.3) mentioned having received some training with the MEP (*Centro Nacional de Recursos para la Educación Inclusiva*, National Resource Center for Inclusive Education), with the Colegio de Licenciados y Profesores (Association of Graduates and Teachers, COLYPRO), and the Universidad Estatal a Distancia (State Distance University, UNED), in coordination with the Instituto de Desarrollo Profesional Uladislao Gámez Solano (Uladislao Gámez Solano Institute of Professional Development, IDP). She took three courses there: one on basic Power Point and another on the use of different applications which was very good but was for a limited time (they were taught to use some tools). Additionally, of her own accord, she has watched videos on the use of many applications on YouTube to learn how to use Canva and Teams properly and how to perform different activities to use forms, carry out tasks, etc.

In another case (T.4), the teacher recognizes having received training from the MEP in the use of the platform Teams, and had been using this, but as the platform is updated with some frequency, and they don't give updated courses, that has made it difficult for her

to continue using it. That is why this teacher recommends that the MEP should teach refresher courses in ICT management on an ongoing basis, because applications constantly change.

It could be concluded that some teachers have received some training from the MEP and other allied institutions, especially in the area of ICT management, but that this training does not reach everyone nor is it undertaken in an ongoing fashion.

4.6. ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE MEP TO SUPPORT TEACHING STAFF IN EMPLOYING THE VIRTUAL MODALITY

The role of the MEP in this whole process has been strongly questioned by various sectors. Some teachers' unions question the lack of forums for dialog and consultation on decision-making, or do not support some of the measures adopted, for example, the return to classes, because adequate conditions for this do not exist, or because of the poor results in terms of providing internet connectivity and computers and/or tablets to students. They also make serious criticisms of the MEP's lack of technical support for giving classes in the context of the pandemic, and for the lack of planning and timely information of the decisions taken.

The position expressed repeatedly by the MEP is that the policy they have sought to follow is to maintain the continuity of the school year throughout the national territory using those modalities that the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic allows. They argue that they therefore decided to start the school year in 2021 using the blended modality (face-to-face and virtual). In addition, the MEP authorities point out that they have taken numerous measures to ensure the return to classes. Specifically, the MEP website, dated March 8, 2021, lists the measures it claims to have taken to ensure the continuity of the school year, both in 2020 and 2021. The details of some of these measures are as follows:

- The development of new ways of teaching and approaching education, as well as strengthening the didactic tools and skills of teachers.
- The implementation of the "Aprendo en Casa" (I Learn at Home) Strategy as of April 2020
- The implementation of "Autonomous Work Guides" (GTAs), which became the main pedagogical instrument used for the design and implementation of distance learning support and to promote the development of skills and attitudes from the context of the home..
- Supply during 2020 and up to the present of around 1200 examples of guides, 1400 planning templates for all levels and subjects, and 1400 basic learning templates, created by an expert pedagogical team from the Directorate of Curricular Development[48].
- Implementation of the "Aprendo en Casa" (I Learn at Home) Strategy, which in 2020 provided a series of guidelines, specific guides and support resources for the country's entire educational community in order to promote the continuity of the lear-

[48] *The guides and templates are available to teaching staff at https://cajadeherramientas.mep.go.cr. This is an instrument designed to help teachers in the process of pedagogical mediation, especially for didactic planning in the classroom.*

ning process, as well as the emotional and social well-being of students in their homes.

- Development during the first year of the pandemic, in coordination with other institutions, of complementary educational intervention actions aimed at students, teachers and families[49].
- Implementation of the "Regresar" (Return) Strategy to address the continuity of the face-to-face educational process in the context of COVID-19. To this end, five strategic premises were established to facilitate the creation of a typology composed of four variables related to basic health infrastructure and the infrastructure of educational institutions, through an analysis of the educational context and students' conditions, so allowing the establishment of a series of scenarios for the safe, controlled and gradual return to classes[50].
- Development of strategies and relevant actions to evaluate the distance education process carried out during 2020 and, in this way, establish the guidelines for the combined pedagogical mediation process for 2021, as well as follow-up on the expected learning of all students while guaranteeing the right to education.

The teaching staff consulted in the framework of this study recognize that especially at the beginning of the present situation (March 2020 onwards), they received some training from the MEP, for example, on the use of the Teams platform and Google Meet. They also received some training and materials with pedagogical guidelines for the elaboration of GTAs. They also recognize that there are various materials on the MEP website that they can use to prepare their lessons and develop teaching materials. For example, they mentioned the Caja de Herramientas (Toolbox) and the database of learning templates, among others.

Nonetheless, they indicate that with the passage of time and the continuing COVID-19 situation, the scenario for teachers has become very complicated. In addition to an overload of work and the difficulties of teaching lessons under the virtual and/or remote modality due to these being modalities in which they were not trained, they mention three additional problems:

- Lack of participation of and consultation with teachers in decision-making, which affects motivation levels and adds to the lack of understanding of the relevance of the decisions made by the institution. An example of this is the recent decision by

[49] *For example, the development of daily television programs on Café Nacional, Channel 13, Costa Rica Televisión SINART, aimed at guiding families in dealing with issues related to coexistence in the home, professional teacher development, as well as didactic activities to be carried out in the homes, as suggested by teachers. Reinforcement made with Aprendo en Casa TV: 636 programs aimed at all educational levels (REPRETEL); in addition, the development of programs such as Aprendo en Casa, Primera Infancia/ Plaza Sésamo (SINART): 120 programs broadcast from Monday to Friday, twice a day from April 2020 to the present, and on Juguemos!: 11 TV programs with UNED/ SINART broadcast on seventeen channels affiliated with CANARTEL.*

[50] *Along with this strategy, a process of coordination with the Ministry of Health was also begun for the approval and development of guidelines for the re-commencement of classes in public and private educational institutions, as well as the development of specific sanitary protocols to ensure the fulfillment of sanitary measures for a safe return.*

the institution to suspend the school year[51], and decisions that have been made regarding the evaluation mechanisms that are being employed.

- Lack of ongoing training for teachers in the use of ICT so they can teach classes using the virtual modality in a better way, with greater knowledge and certainty that what is being done from a pedagogical point of view is appropriate.
- Lack of provision to primary and secondary school students of internet connectivity and electronic devices to help bridge the gap that currently exists between public and private education[52].

The central point seems to be the lack of dialog, participation and accompaniment on behalf of the MEP with the teaching staff, who are partly tired and partly frustrated at the difficulties they are facing in teaching lessons.

4.7. ACTIONS TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED

Some of the recommendations made by the teachers and mothers consulted are:

- Providing connectivity and electronic equipment (computers) to all students who require them as soon as possible, since many students are being left out of the educational system for this reason. "They are being marginalized, excluded from the education system due to a lack of connectivity" (T.4). For example, through an agreement with companies that manufacture this type of device, a kind of credit or loans could be extended for parents to obtain this equipment (T.6).
- Testing schoolchildren on the impact of having to sit for so many hours in front of a computer or mobile device. For example, test their physical condition, their eyesight, and their emotional state. "He feels that now schoolchildren have almost no time for their recreational activities, they spend all their time doing GTAs and then in virtual classes. They don't have a moment to enjoy their childhood." (T.3)

Primary and secondary school students consulted on this point made very relevant suggestions, among others:

- Make the classes more dynamic, fun and participatory (T.10).
- Have teachers improve the organization of classes. "Sometimes everything is a little chaotic." (T.11)
- Have them hold work sessions in which it is possible to ask questions, clarify doubts, or simply make consultations on a specific topic. (T.12)
- Don't send so many assignments (GTAs). There are too many, so all the time is used up completing them, but very little is learned. (T.13).
- More training should be provided to teachers and to the students themselves on the use of the platforms. Classes are often interrupted by a lack of technology management. (T.14)

[51] *Some teachers consider that the decision to suspend the school year is wrong because of the nega-tive repercussions it will have on the teaching-learning process for students. Other teachers believe that classes should have continued being given in the virtual modality with some alternative measures taken for those who do not have internet connectivity.*

[52] *One teacher draws attention to the fact that, for example, at the moment while the school year in public educational institutions is suspended, lessons are being taught in private educational institu-tions.*

In summary, the two basic recommendations are: providing connectivity and electronic equipment to students who lack these resources, as well as developing the provision of training for teachers and students on ICT use so that classes can become more participatory and dynamic.

4.8. REFLECTIONS ON THE COSTA RICAN EXPERIENCE

From the presentation of the results of the interviews, the following points can be made:

The rates of poverty and inequality that characterize Costa Rica are two unavoidable realities that determine or give rise to many other social problems facing the country (for example, unemployment, lack of social guarantees, lack of housing and access to basic services, increased crime, among many others). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has added to this reality the problem that a high percentage of Costa Ricans lack connectivity or internet services; this is despite the fact that all the necessary resources exist to provide this service to all Costa Rican families with limited resources. SUTEL has a wealthy fund kept in reserve for years, while being unable to invest this to overcome what has been called the "digital divide."

The MEP has recently recognized that the reason for the early suspension of lessons is due to the fact that 33,000 students across the country lack internet service. The pandemic revealed this reality, but worse still, this declaration arises and has been repeated after more than fifteen months have passed since the suspension of classes was decreed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, after all that time, nothing has been done to solve this problem, which is largely the same problem that ended up forcing the MEP to decide on the temporary suspension of the 2021 school year.

The pandemic forced an initial suspension of the school year. This was later resumed under the online modality until practically the end of 2020. In March 2021 the new school cycle began under the so-called blended modality (face-to-face–virtual), only to have it suspended again in May 2021 given the impossibility of providing the necessary guarantees to teachers and students in the face of possible contagion with COVID-19 and the persistent lack of internet access and equipment for a significant percentage of students.

As explained in the previous sections, the face-to-face-online modality that has been applied by most educational institutions has faced difficulties of many different types, but the most important of these are:

- Many students, although they may have internet connectivity at home or on their mobile devices, often face connectivity issues (outages, poor or low-quality signal).

- The lack of adequate conditions in students' homes to be able to have lessons (excessive noise and interruptions, lack of an adequate workspace, among others).

- Primary and secondary school students who do not have the necessary accompaniment in their homes to clear up doubts and complete their work, either because their parents do not have the time to do so, because they don't know how to provide them support, or simply because they are not interested.

• In particular, the students' mothers consulted almost unanimously stated that virtual classes represent an additional workload to that they already have. Additionally, they recognize that they do not have the necessary knowledge to provide the accompaniment that their children need to do the work assigned to them.

• All the people consulted agree that in the virtual modality, schoolchildren learn much less than in the face-to-face modality, and that they tend to get bored and find this much more difficult. Practically no members of the student group consulted gave a favorable opinion regarding virtual classes, and many problems were mentioned.

• The remote modality of teaching is a modality that teachers use to teach students who lack internet connectivity, and often even mobile devices. These are often students from low-income families who also attend schools with very limited infrastructure and services.

• In this study, testimonies were obtained from teachers who have made great efforts to train in and achieve improved ICT management. They have attended training courses and have continued to train of their own initiative. This greater training is allowing them to innovate in their courses in terms of didactics and didactic resources, especially in the case of the face-to-face–virtual modality. However, these same teachers admit to facing issues in teaching classes under this modality, with some of these derived from lack of preparation or due to the habits of the students themselves, due to the constant changes that occur in the programming of the school year (fewer class hours, the suspension of lessons, among others), and due to the restrictions that the obligatory biosafety measures represent to the normal development of the teaching-learning process.

• At the didactic level there is little that teachers can do because face-to-face class time is very scarce and barely adequate to enable reviewing work and giving instructions on new assignments (GTAs). Most of the students' time in class and at home is spent on the elaboration and revision of GTAs, since many of these are set. On average, each student must complete two to four GTAs per subject per week.

• The teachers consulted coincide in stating that their workload has increased, but also that the tasks they have to undertake are evermore complex, because the educational settings have changed radically (online classes, remote classes, reduced face-to-face classes) and in consequence, the number of hours of work that they must devote to the planning lessons on a didactic level and to prepare materials is much greater than it was before (for face-to-face classes).

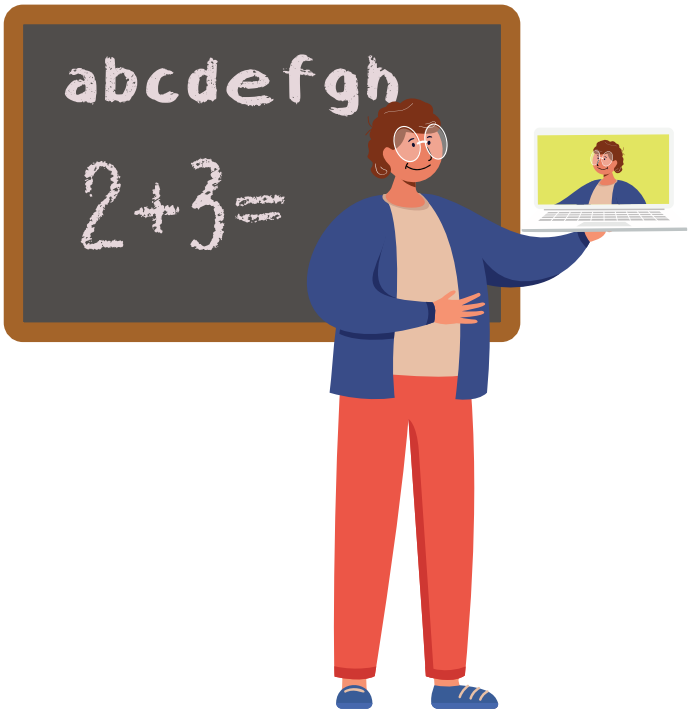
Finally, it is clear from the testimonies obtained that teachers also resent the limited information and participation they have in decision-making regarding how the school year is to be continued. Basically, they receive information about what they have to do, but at no time do they participate in the analysis and search for solutions to the problems they directly face as educational personnel. This also affects the proper development of the educational process.

Many lessons have been learned from this experience, but if we want to make progress in overcoming some of the difficulties noted in the context of the pandemic, progress needs

to be made in at least five areas:

- The provision of internet connectivity and electronic devices to students who so require them.
- Providing teachers with ongoing training in ICT, especially in didactic-pedagogical strategies to teach classes under a virtual modality.
- Defining differentiated strategies for the return to face-to-face and/or virtual classes according to the particular conditions of each educational institution and of the students attending it.
- Implementing mechanisms of teacher participation such that they can contribute to decision-making with their greater knowledge of the educational reality that is lived in each of the country's regions, localities and educational institutions.
- Testing schoolchildren on the psychosocial impact of having to sit for so many hours in front of a computer or mobile device (e.g., test their physical condition, their eyesight and their emotional state).

In conclusion, it is necessary to create and implement a new educational policy for a new educational context.



5. THE RETURN TO CLASSES IN PARAGUAY

5.1. POVERTY AND CONNECTIVITY AMONG THE PARAGUAYAN SCHOOL POPULATION

Paraguay posee una superficie de 406.752 Paraguay has an area of 406,752 km². By 2021, the population of Paraguay was 7,353,038. The urban population (62.9%) is larger than the rural population (37.1%) (Expansion).

The United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), used to measure the progress of a country and its inhabitants, indicates that Paraguay is ranked 103rd (Expansion). According to data published by the Paraguayan National Institute of Statistics (INE) based on the results of the Permanent Survey of Continuous Households (EPHC for the initials in Spanish) in the last quarter of 2020, 1,921,721 Paraguayans lived in poverty. This figure represents an increase of 264,000 poor people with respect to 2019 (COPROFAM, April 2021).

In the words of Iván Ojeda, the national director of the INE, at the presentation of the EPHC 2020:

> Total poverty in 2020 showed an incidence of 26.9%, increasing by about 3.4% compared to 2019, however this would have been higher had it not been for cash transfers from the social assistance programs integrated last year (COPROFAM, April 2021).

Of this total, 1,017,185 people live in urban areas and the remaining 904,536 live in rural areas. The incidence of total poverty increased, especially in urban areas, where 247,427 people fell under the poverty line last year. On the other hand, extreme poverty had an incidence of 3.9% compared to 4.0% in 2019, so at the national level this remained unchanged. The numbers indicate that about 279,609 people live in extreme poverty, and of these around 82,710 live in urban areas and 196,899 in rural areas (COPROFAM, April 2021)[53].

[53] *The official measurement of poverty used in Paraguay is monetary poverty, which is calculated by comparing the per capita income of households (PCI) with the poverty line (constructed on the basis of a 2011/2012 survey and updated prices by the Central Bank's PCI). The total poverty line is equal to the cost of the Basic Food Basket (BFB) which includes, in addition to food, the cost of other non-food goods and services considered essential, which is calculated to be 712,618 Paraguayan Guarani in urban areas and 506,201 Paraguayan Guarani in rural areas. Extreme poverty represents the cost of a Basic Food Basket (BFB) that includes a set of foods and non-alcoholic beverages whose caloric content meets the minimum caloric requirements (for healthy living), which comes to 272,000 Paraguayan Guarani and 248,460 Paraguayan Guarani for the urban and rural populations respectively (COPROFAM, April 2021).*

5.2. EDUCATIONAL LEVELS IN THE PARAGUAYAN PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Paraguayan public education system is organized into two levels: Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education.

5.2.1. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

This level of education comprises two cycles: the first cycle goes up to the age of three and the second cycle until the age of four.

Early childhood education takes place using two modalities: formal and informal.

• The formal modality. This consists of three stages: Maternal Care (which attends to infants from 0 to 2 years old, to whom comprehensive care and stimulation is provided during half days or full days. Complementary health and food services are offered); Kindergarten, aimed at children from three to four years of age. This includes educational activities aimed at developing all dimensions of infants' personalities. It also includes the preschool level, which caters for five-year-olds. It seeks to stimulate the integral development of schoolchildren in all aspects of their personality.

• The informal modality. This caters to schoolchildren aged three to five who do not have access to formal Early Childhood Education. This is imparted in "Children's Homes", which operate in family homes, schools, churches, municipalities, clubs and others, provided that these institutions offer the basic conditions necessary for children's development.

5.2.2. PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary Education is compulsory and free in government-run public schools. It comprises nine grades and is taught to schoolchildren aged 6 to 14. This level is divided into three cycles of three years each:

- First cycle (1st, 2nd and 3rd grade).
- Second cycle (4th, 5th and 6th grade)..
- Third cycle (7th, 8th and 9th grade).

Secondary Education in its various modalities is aimed at the active integration of students into social life and productive work, or their accessing higher education. This lasts for three years and is of a single cycle, consisting of three courses. It consists of the following modalities:

- Scientific baccalaureate (with an emphasis on letters and liberal arts; with an emphasis in social sciences; and with an emphasis in basic sciences and technology).
- Technical baccalaureate (industry, services, agriculture, health, etc.)

It should be noted that Paraguay is made up of a diversity of distinct peoples with their own histories, cultures and languages (it is a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual country)[54]. According to the DGEEC-2012 Census, in Paraguay there are nineteen indigenous peoples and approximately

[54] *Indigenous School Education in Paraguay is guaranteed under Act No. 234/93, which approves Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Dependent Countries.*

117,000 indigenous individuals[55 56].

Recent data indicate that by 2019 the total number of students enrolled reached the figure of 1,480,000 children and adolescents. Of this total, 78% are enrolled in the public system, 12% in the subsidized private system and 19% in the private sector.

Numerous studies have given account of the difficult situation that education has historically gone through in Paraguay as a result of its different governments. Specifically, Corvalán and Portillo (SRPAJ PY, 2020) have published a study with very eloquent data on the magnitude of the problems experienced in the field of education in Paraguay. Some data from this study are presented below.

Figure 1

Public and private student enrollment, 2018

Student enrollment by education level, according to sector and sex							
Management Type	**Sex**	**Informal Early Child. Ed**	**Formal Early Child. Ed**	**Primary 1st and 2nd Cycle**	**Primary 3rd Cycle**	**Secondary (Baccalaureates)**	**Total**
Official	Female	146	62,262	245,259	120,796	95,248	523,711
	Male	144	65,453	266,612	122,922	92,835	547,966
	Total	**290**	**127,715**	**511,871**	**243,718**	**188,083**	**1,071,677**
Private	Female	181	13,643	28,120	11,755	17,209	70,908
	Male	200	14,190	29,635	11,830	15,646	71,501
	Total	**381**	**27,833**	**57,755**	**23,585**	**32,855**	**142,409**
Subsidized Private	Female	24	15,620	42,959	19,375	10,675	88,653
	Male	46	15,709	43,962	18,044	9,155	86,916
	Total	**70**	**31,329**	**86,921**	**37,419**	**19,830**	**175,569**
Grand Total		**741**	**186,877**	**656,547**	**304,722**	**240,768**	**1,389,655**

Source: MEC, 2021.

- Early childhood education coverage is at 41%, that of preschool is 75%, primary education in the first and second cycles is at 80% and 74% for the third cycle, while for secondary education coverage is at 46%. A gap continues to exist between the corresponding age population for each cycle and their percentage of enrollment in the cycle. In addition, although enrollment has increased, attendance at an educational institution does not necessarily guarantee learning: seven out of ten students do not reach the minimum expected standard in the mathematics, Spanish

[55] *The Paraguayan Constitution recognizes the existence of Indigenous Peoples, defined as groups of cultures existing prior to the formation and organization of the Paraguayan state, and it enshrines rights such as health, education, identity and participation for these peoples.*

[56] *The General Directorate of Indigenous School Education belonging to the Paraguayan Ministry of Education and Science (MEC for its initials in Spanish) is the agency responsible for ensuring the educational rights of indigenous peoples within the framework of the legal guidelines establishing the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples in constructing of their own educational model.*

and Guarani language tests, obtaining lower results than those achieved in the previous measurement made (in 2015) in almost all levels and subjects.

• Although the average number of years of study for adolescents aged 15 and over has increased from 6.7 to 8.3 between 1998 and 2019, there is a difference in the averages in rural as opposed to urban areas. The population aged 15 and over living in urban areas studies for approximately 3 years longer than the same age group in rural areas. The poorest population attains only 5.8 years of education and the richest attains, on average, 10.8 years, while indigenous peoples only attain up to 3 years' education.

• 61.8% of adolescent women who do not attend an educational institution say that they do not do so for "family reasons." 1,000,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 29 who did not finish school do not attend any educational institution. Some 20% of these people neither study nor work, and most of these are women. This is because women are tasked with taking care of household chores, raising schoolchildren and caring for seniors.

• Illiteracy rates have increased from 4% to almost 7% between 2014 and 2019, mainly affecting indigenous women. The increase in illiteracy and difficulties in reading and writing are closely related to the imposition and primacy of teaching in Spanish. In 2018, 37% of the population over five years of age spoke Guarani at home, 29.3% spoke Spanish and 30.7% combined both languages, making Paraguayan Guarani the most widely spoken language at home. (pp. 225-227).

In addition to the problems mentioned above, many educational communities have been facing other problems for several years that either add to this situation or contribute towards causing it. The figures on sexual, gender and domestic violence are alarming; seasonal floods displace an important sector of the population; and for more than a decade, three of the country's poverty-stricken departments have been living in militarized situations due to the conflict between narco-livestock groups, irregular armed groups, hired assassins, and the Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta (Joint Task Force, comprising of police, military and anti-narcotics agents) (Covalán and Portillo, 2020, p. 226).

5.3. THE SITUATION OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PARAGUAYAN PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM[57]

Following the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, the Paraguayan education authorities decided to suspend the 2020 school year both in public and private educational institutions (Resolution No. 308/2020). At that time, the MEC adopted the "distance education" modality, or more correctly, the "home education" modality for all levels and modalities of the national education system.

To implement this modality, the Ministry presented the document "Educational Plan for Times of Pandemic: Your School at Home," while enabling a digital platform for online

[57] *As of July 12, 2021, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 was 438,764, and the number of deaths due to this amounted to 13,964, with only 138,116 people vaccinated (Expansión, online).*

classes. The proposed methodology basically consisted of the following: sending and downloading content (subject matter) and assignments and exercises. This strategy, as Corvalán and Portillo point out, omits approaching education "as a pedagogical process through which teaching activities are generated in a way that is appropriate to the context, the characteristics of the students, and in accordance with the possibilities/limitations existing regarding digital resources" (p. 228)[58].

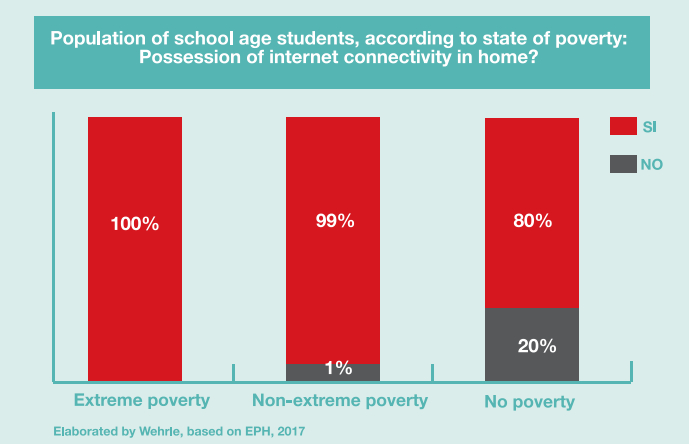
The possibilities of accessing digital resources for the Paraguayan school population may precisely be the biggest obstacle to achieving the continuity of the school year using alternate modalities such as virtual, online, remote, and distance models, depending on how you want to call these. Although there are differences in the data, most sources coincide on recognizing how enormously behind the country is in this field.

Based on data from the Permanent Household Survey-EPH (2017), the researcher Wehrle points out that in Paraguay, 87% of the school population aged five to seventeen do not have an internet connectivity at home, thus making the availability of an internet connection a first barrier (2020)[59].

> If we consider the conditions of poverty in which this population finds itself, this limitation is even larger since 100% of the school-age population in extreme poverty and 99% of those in non-extreme poverty do not have access to the internet. With this first element, access to distance education is inequitable, being doubly discriminatory for that population that is in a situation of greater vulnerability (Wehrle, 2020).

Figure 2

Population of school age students, accoding to state of poverty: Possessions of internet connectivity in the home?



Nota. Tomado de Wehrle, 2020

58 *"The closure of schools meant a food crisis for most families accessing public schools, as access to sufficient nutrients for many school-age children depends on the school nutrition program. In 2017 alone, 102,851 children under the age of five required nutritional supplements from the Programa Alimentario Nutricional Integral (Comprehensive Nutritional Food Program, PANI) because their families cannot provide them with the necessary nutrition" (Corvalán and Portillo, 2020, p.228).*

59 *According to the figures used by Corvalán and Portillo (based on Tedic, 2020: What is the internet infrastructure like in Paraguay?), 92% of students enrolled in the public system do not have internet connectivity at home while the same is true for 50% in the private system (p. 229).*

In the case of Paraguay, the policy of the educational authorities has been to promote the use of cell phones to access some form of education. According to Wehrle:

> Although 93% of the school-age population (ten to seventeen years of age) uses the Internet through this medium, its use for educational purposes cannot be guaranteed. To this limitation is added the fact that the use of the internet through cell phones is greater among the population over fourteen years of age, leaving out a sector of the school population that does not have access to this resource at all.

Finally, according to this same source, only 20% of the school-age population has a computer (possibly of shared use) at home, which demonstrates the limited availability of this type of equipment among this population. To the above is added the following information:

> Similarly, a very low percentage of students (2%) who have access to computers and the internet in relatively good conditions in their institutions use these resources as part of the classroom work required by their teachers; resources such as audio recordings and video players, radio and television are also not used in literacy, math or science classes. That is, the majority of teachers who could use these resources on having them available in their institutions do not take advantage of these as part of their class activities (MEC, 2018, p.120, cited by Wehrle, 2020).

Finally, Corvalán and Portillo (2020) indicate that since the national government issued the decree suspending face-to-face classes, up to the time of writing public schools have not been able to return to this modality. Protocols for the return to reduced face-to-face classes continue to be discussed in the country, however, the sanitary conditions of the educational institutions do not guarantee the health of students and teachers, as many of these schools do not have minimum infrastructure conditions for this, or require repairs or adjustments to be able to comply with the biosafety norms that are meant to be implemented.

5.4. CLASS MODALITIES USED IN PARAGUAY DURING COVID-19

Currently it can be said that in Paraguay the main teaching-learning modality being employed in the public education system is the "home" modality. This report has already explained the differences between the varying education modalities (Chapter 1) that have been used in different countries. The online modality is also practiced, although in very few educational institutions and over very reduced schedules, since this requires students to have good internet connectivity and good electronic devices (computers or high-end cell phones).

To facilitate education in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MEC set up a digital platform where teachers can download materials in PDF format (materials should be understood to mean the subject matter and exercises or assignments corresponding to the level and respective program of each course), print these out and send them to their students via different means: using WhatsApp, asking parents and family to pick them up at the school, or the teacher going directly to

each student's home to drop off the materials. Only in the case of one of the interviewee's schools are classes taught in a reduced face-to-face manner, given the profound economic limitations of the school and students. This is a Guaraní native community.

I. Home modality. There are two variations of this modality:

a. The teacher sends the materials to the student via WhatsApp. The student then studies the subject matter and performs the exercises or tasks, and then returns these to the teacher in the same way for review and for the respective feedback.
b. The teacher takes the photocopies of the material to the student's home, or the parents come to pick these up at the school. When the material is given to the student at home or at school. The opportunity is also taken to collect the tasks or exercises that have been previously given to students. The delivery/reception of these materials varies: it could occur once a week, or two or three times a week, depending on the circumstances. The use of WhatsApp in this modality varies depending on the availability of cell phones in the students' families and the capacity that these might have.

II. The reduced face-to-face modality. In this modality, students attend the school according to a reduced schedule.

III. The online modality. In this modality, students receive online classes for a few hours, and in some cases WhatsApp is used as a supporting resource.

In the interviews conducted as part of this study with teachers, students and mothers, it was possible to corroborate that the "home modality" is the predominant one used, although not the only one. Specifically, of the eight schools consulted[60], the teaching staff in seven of these reported that they taught classes using the "home" modality, with the variations described above. Only in one school did the teacher indicate that in his community (Guaraní native people), classes are taught in a reduced face-to-face fashion. That is, students attend the educational center to receive classes two hours a day, from Monday to Friday.

5.4.1. CLASS MODALITY: HOME

The "home" modality is placed in inverted commas because it is a very sui generis model, even though it is the most practiced in Paraguay. Of the eight schools consulted, five of these employ this modality. In this modality, students study at home (in some cases with the help of their parents) using the materials provided by their teachers through one of the two models described above: a) The teacher sends materials to the student via WhatsApp, or b) The teacher delivers the printed material to the student's home.

Teachers working using this modality (T.1, T.2, T.3, T.14 and T.15) expressed their students' lack of internet connectivity as the main reason why they work in this fashion.

[60] *In the case of Paraguay, a total of twenty-four people were consulted (eight teachers, seven parents, seven students, and two union leaders). Two organizations affiliated to EILA assisted with the localization and selection of the families interviewed: OTEP-A and UNE-SN. In the case of OTEP-A, Jorge Arévalos provided us with his support. On behalf of UNE-SN, Roberto Ramón Villar provided his collaboration. We thank both comrades for all the support provided.*

- In recent months they have had to give "distance" lessons, taking copies and giving these to students at home, because the connectivity is very bad, students don't have computers, and the cell phones are of a very low range (they do not allow downloading videos or the use of zoom, and additionally are phones with prepaid credit for internet which belong to their parents, and which students can only use once their parents return from work. Classes primarily consist of the delivery and review of assignments (T.1).
- At first, there was total suspension of classes, then, after many months, a pseudo-virtual modality was implemented, that is, the subject matter and the tasks were sent via WhatsApp. There is no other choice because no one has internet connectivity, nor a computer (T.2).
- We give classes using WhatsApp[61] damos clases. That's the only way to teach them, because students have no connectivity. Only their parents have cell phones. That's what students use to do their work with once their dad comes home (T.3).
- There are many parents who do not have cell phones, or if they do, these are not high-end enough and, in any case, they take them off to work (T.14).

The moms consulted had practically identical opinions on this issue:

- Since they have no internet coverage (the signal is bad), teachers come to us with the copies of the work the students have to do. These contain the subject matter and the exercises. They choose a day or two a week and on that day the teachers deliver and collect the work at the same time (T.5).
- Her daughter had not attended face-to-face classes since January 10, 2020. Classes are taught via WhatsApp; she prints the PDFs, does the exercises and sends them the next day to the teacher (T.6).
- They have no internet connectivity. They send the work to students' homes via WhatsApp, or the teacher delivers it in printed form to their homes. They only work with cell phones, but they can't receive audios or videos, because they don't have that capacity (T.7).

As can be seen, given the lack of good connectivity and/or appropriate electronic devices, in no cases is it possible to teach classes using the online modality. Consequently, in accordance with the conditions that are available, the following is done: the materials are received via WhatsApp, students download them and do the exercises, or the teaching staff takes them to the home in printed form for students to complete the exercises and on the next visit the teacher picks these up to review them.

Teachers, parents and their children agree that this educational modality has no advantages. Only a few teachers point out that at least with the continuity of the school year, it is possible to avoid the greater dropout of students (T.1 and T.14) and that "even if it is not much, they

61 *"Home" classes are taught in this school from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 midday, Monday to Friday. As of 7:00 a.m. the subject teacher sends the PDF, the student downloads it, reviews the subject and does the exercises. The task is delivered the day after it was received. There were also cases in which the class is taught only one or two hours a day, in which basically only instructions or clarifications are given, and the rest of the time is dedicated to performing the exercises individually, at home. Those exercises may need to be delivered by the end of the week or sent at the end of each day. It all depends on the way the teacher wants to work.*

learn something and keep busy doing tasks" (T.2 and T.15).

The problems most emphasized by the people consulted about this teaching modality were as follows:

• Virtually all teachers, mothers and students agree that using this education modality students learn much less (between 30% and 50%, at most).

• It is impossible to replace the teacher at home. If the father or mother helps, perhaps students learn a little, but otherwise they learn much less or nothing (T.2).

• Most learning opportunities are lost in this modality because you have to keep moving on to cover the programmed subject matter, so you cannot waste time. If the child does not understand, you continue on seeing new material because it is a standardized system, the same for everyone (T3).

The moms consulted stated:

• It is very difficult to put themselves in the teacher's place, because mothers do not have the necessary training to do so, so you have to be constantly calling the teacher for an explanation on what they should do (T.6).
• It is very difficult to put yourself in the role of the teacher. They are not familiar with the teaching strategies, that is very difficult. Students in this modality learn very little, or nothing (T.7).
• He learns less and it's more difficult. It is not possible to reach the level of learning that is required, because not much is understood (T.5).

Students consulted expressed their opinions as follows:

• This modality is very difficult, because the teacher is not present and sometimes you don't understand the material or the exercises that have to be done, and it is not always easy to communicate with the teacher (T.8).

• Some teachers send assignments without explaining them, without videos or anything, so it is more difficult to understand the subject matter. That is why students often have to Google the answer, or consult the teacher but they respond very late, like at nine or ten at night, and at that time it is difficult to do the homework (T.9).

Downloading the information sent by teachers via WhatsApp is a difficulty that was mentioned by many students (and their mothers) because the phones are of very low capacity, so often communication is cut off, or when they download the document it is incomplete or has errors, or student has to wait for their parents to return from work to be able to download the information and do their work. In this regard, several moms and students said that this was one of the most difficult aspects:

• The main problem is the constant failure of the internet. Some families don't have access to the internet, so they can't download PDF documents and have to go looking for someone to download them and copy them onto a flash drive. Then comes the problem of sending the task, that is a real trial (T.6).

• They have trouble downloading information, because the files are heavy and the

phone fails to download the information. So they have to be trying at different times to see when they can achieve this (T. 5).

One student expressed the following opinion on the same subject: "Downloading information is very difficult and uncomfortable, but we have to do it in order to study" (T.9).

In summary, virtually none of the respondents acknowledge anything positive about the educational modality that is being implemented in Paraguay, however, they do mention the numerous disadvantages and drawbacks of this, mainly related to the low level of learning that is achieved in this modality and the difficulties faced downloading the information due to connectivity issues and lack of suitable electronic devices.

5.4.1.1. Didactic aspects of the home class modality

The teachers interviewed agree that in the didactic aspect there is very little that they can really achieve, due to the modality used to "teach" the classes. The mechanism that is used largely imposes the didactics employed, if the term could be said to apply in this case.

The two strategies that teachers basically use to maintain the school year active were described in the previous paragraphs.

- Sending educational materials in a PDF format via WhatsApp to students for them to review the subject matter, complete the exercises (assignments, as they are also called), and send them back to the teacher by the same means for review and comments.
- The delivery of educational materials in printed form by the teacher to each student's home, for students to review the subject, complete the exercises, and return these to the teacher for review and comments when the teacher returns to the home once again.

In either case, when possible (if the capacity of the student's mobile device so allows), the teacher sends short audios or videos to clarify doubts or expand on topics. Or, likewise, students can ask the teacher via WhatsApp for explanations or clarifications of any doubts they have regarding the subject matter.

Two of the teachers consulted on this topic said that the didactics of this teaching model are extremely difficult:

- The didactic aspect is very limited. You can't force students too much. One task per day or two at most, otherwise they don't complete the work. Only very short videos or audios can be made (two minutes maximum). Basically, what we can do is give them printed materials to review the subject, do the homework, and an occasional short explanatory audio (T.1).
- The didactic aspect in these conditions is impossible to fulfill or attend to, because communication is one directional, you are not in front of the students, and you have practically no means of content delivery. The materials are already provided by the MEC, and we apply them. Basically, that is what we can do (T.2).
- As a music teacher, didactics are quite difficult. Usually what I do is give students materials via WhatsApp and send them short videos or audios so that they see how the instrument is held, or so that they listen

to the musical notes (signs, tones, language). But unfortunately, in this modality they do not even get to touch an instrument, everything is at a distance (T.3).

- It is impossible to make use of didactic resources, since the minimum resources are not available (T. 15).

Several teachers pointed out that in some cases they make adjustments to the materials provided by the MEC to adapt these to the level of education of their students, especially when it comes to schools located in rural communities where the level of education tends to be lower (T.14 and T.15).

5.4.2. CLASS MODALITY: REDUCED FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING

Of the eight schools included in this study, only one (a school located in a Guaraní native community) is taught under a reduced face-to-face modality, that is, students attend school for two hours a day from Monday to Friday[62]. It should be said that this modality is used as an exception in some schools, mainly because community conditions allow no alternatives due to reasons such as lack of internet connectivity in the community, the lack of basic equipment in the school (computers, printers, photocopiers, paper) and in homes, given that the population exists in conditions of extreme poverty.

The teacher interviewed (T.4)[63], reports that last year the responsible teacher took the materials to the students' houses every day and the next day left others and picked up the completed tasks. But that didn't work because of a lack of the necessary means (computers, printers, papers, ink, photocopiers, etc.). Later, after a community meeting, it was agreed that reduced face-to-face classes should be taught while complying with all relevant health measures.

This teacher definitely considers that the educational results under this (reduced face-to-face) modality are better, because students understand better and can easily clarify doubts, as per usual in face-to-face classes. In addition, he comments that students have expressed positive opinions regarding this modality. The only limitation they recognize is that of time since only two hours of classes a day are not enough to cover all the subject matter. In this sense, they recognize that they learn less because they receive fewer classes.

5.4.2.1. Didactic aspects of reduced face-to-face class modality

The didactics usually used by the teaching staff of this school is mainly the presentation/explanation of the subject matter by the teacher in charge. When time permits, exercises are performed on the board and in small groups. In addition, students always have some homework, but they try not to set too much of this, because it is difficult for the family to support or accompany students in completing it (T.4).

Due to lack of time to cover the whole subject, other teaching techniques cannot be used (T.4). In this sense, the lessons taught are essentially presentations in nature. In terms of didactic resources, only whiteboards and

[62] *Before the pandemic, students received four hours of classroom instruction a day.*

[63] *In this case, since the population of this community speaks mainly Guaraní, it was not possible to interview the parents and students from this school.*

markers are available. “They have no other didactic resources, but additionally, there is no time to allow the use of any others” (T.4). As can be seen, teachers can only manage to teach some lessons, as they lack the necessary means and resources to do more.

Also in this case, the teacher consulted affirms that the support they receive from the MEC amounts to very little or none at all. This year they gave each teacher a one-time payment of 750,000 Paraguayan guaraníes (about US$108) but teachers consider that this is too little and it runs out quickly (T.4). Apart from that, they have had no other support.

5.4.3. CLASS MODALITY: ONLINE

In two of the schools studied (both belonging to the same educational institution) located in the capital city of Asunción, the online class modality is employed, with some minor variations between the two.

In one case, because these are second grade students, at the request of the parents the decision was made to work as follows:

- Every day at 7:00 a.m. the teacher sends the parents the subject matter that will be studied and the tasks or assignments that must be done during the course of the day via WhatsApp.
- Three times a week (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) a one-hour virtual class is given, as these are students who get tired or bored if longer classes are imparted using this modality. This was also agreed upon at the request of their parents, who need their cell phones for other activities.

In the other case, because these are older students who are already in grade five, the classes are taught as follows:

- On Mondays and Tuesdays, online classes are taught from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. On these two days they receive classes in two subjects per day.
- On Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, classes are taught from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. Each lesson lasts 40 minutes. On these days they receive classes in one subject per day.

Regarding the availability of electronic equipment (computers or cell phones), the teachers consulted indicated that the situation is always very varied. Most students usually have access to a computer, while some (a minority) only have access to a cell phone, although not all the time because these belong to their parents, or they don’t have much internet credit. In cases that students do not have access to cell phones at least for a large percentage of the time, then materials are sent via WhatsApp to be downloaded, printed and worked on at home.

In these two cases, an interesting aspect to highlight is that the teachers (T.12 and T.13) carried out awareness-raising and training for parents, so that they can accompany and support their children in the performance of tasks. They have even organized activities specifically for that purpose. Both teachers consulted believe that this has been essential for schoolchildren to receive classes under this modality.

Among the main difficulties the teachers consulted working under this modality said that they faced are:

- The main problem is the internet in ho-

mes. It does not work well, or there are several schoolchildren in the house, so they don't manage to connect up regularly. We also have problems with the return of tasks, they do not come back to us regularly, they accumulate and then there are gaps in the learning process (T.12).

- It is very difficult using the virtual modality. There are schoolchildren who do not have computers, and with cell phones it is very difficult, among other things because these are low-end devices or because they cannot pay for more internet credit (T.13).

The mothers consulted expressed their commitment to supporting their children in studying and the completion of tasks. They recognize the great commitment of the teachers, as well as the training they have received, which they consider to have been fundamental to being able to play their role as "teachers at home", as one of these mothers called it (T.15).

5.4.3.1. Didactic aspects of the online class modality

In these two cases in which online classes are taught, the two teachers indicate that they have basic knowledge about the use of information technology[64]. They mention being familiar with some educational platforms, such as Moodle, Google Meet, and some programs specializing in literacy and mathematics.

The media they most often use are:

- a shared whiteboard,
- projecting videos downloaded from YouTube to address some topics of interest (history, social sciences, among others),
- the creation of audios and short videos to explain mathematical operations, pronunciation, etc.

One of the teachers consulted (T.2) said that she set up a space in her home to simulate a "home school", and that when she teaches online she puts on her teacher's uniform. In this way she says she achieves having her students (primary schoolchildren) motivated and identified with the school activities they carry out. She commented that one day she did not put on the uniform and schoolchildren missed it and asked her to put it on. Another important action that this teacher undertakes is the integration of the moms in the online classes, maintaining communication with them at all times[65]. These aspects, for this teacher, have been important details in achieving good results in the midst of the difficulties faced in teaching lessons.

Teachers mention that the main difficulties faced at the didactic level in the teaching of online lessons are the frequent connectivity problems faced, as well as the lack of adequate electronic devices on behalf of the schoolchildren. This prevents the use of some teaching resources, or forces the use of very simple ones. However, the importance that the children can see the teachers, and each other, should be valued. For this reason, they consider it positive being able to deliver lessons online, even if only briefly.

[64] *In one of these cases, the teacher (T.12) mentions that the school principal gave teachers very good training in the use of educational tech-nology platforms, which was fundamental to them being able to teach online lessons.*

[65] *This teacher considers that integrating parents into classes at home is essential so that they know what their role is, what knowledge they have to have, and how to teach or guide their students in the development of school activities.*

5.5. SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS AND TEACHER WORKLOADS

The teachers consulted agreed that they have not received any support from the MEC to teach in this modality. What the institution basically provides them with are educational materials for all levels and subjects of the education system using the platform enabled since the beginning of the pandemic. The rest of the offers that were made to them at some point did not come to fruition. They had been told that they were going to have support through the provision of internet connectivity and electronic equipment (computers), but this never occurred.

Teachers indicate that in fact they have had to pay for internet with greater "megas" from their own pockets and in some cases have even had to buy more powerful computers. They mention that, in general, they have to pay for printing the materials and making photocopies. In some cases they have some support from the school, but this almost never occurs (T.1, T.2, T.14 and T.15).

Similarly, with regard to their workload, all teachers agree that in this modality the workload is much higher, for reasons such as the following:

- They have to download materials from the MEC platform on a daily basis, and as the case may be, send these to all their students via WhatsApp, or else take these to students' homes.
- They have to follow up on each student, almost on a one-by-one basis, because each of these has a particular situation that must be addressed or taken into consideration, so as to ensure that they do the work and deliver it in a timely manner.
- It is necessary to be in constant communication with parents, to motivate them to support and accompany their children in downloading materials from the internet, studying, completing homework and sending this to the teacher.
- They have to send reports every week to the school accounting for progress in terms of the school curriculum, which involves a significant additional effort.
- And finally and very importantly, the working day has been extended a great deal, since teachers have to attend to consultations from their students often until late at night (because that is when some students manage to get access to mobile devices), or on weekends (Saturdays and Sundays).

In summary, in the home class modality, numerous difficulties are faced, mainly associated with the lack of internet connectivity and appropriate electronic devices on behalf of the students. This situation means that much less than half the student learning is achieved than that which was attained in the face-to-face modality. Likewise, teaching didactics are extremely restricted or almost null. Basically, teachers' efforts are concentrated on the delivery of materials (subject matter) and the review of tasks.

5.6. TEACHER TRAINING NEEDS

All teaching staff consulted agreed on this issue in two aspects:

- They have little or no knowledge of the field of ICT, let alone its uses for educational purposes.
- They have had to learn little by little to work with some applications (ZOOM, Goo-

gle Meet, among others), even WhatsApp itself to send audios and videos, download and print documents, and to access the MEC educational platform.

Some of the teachers consulted made the following comments:

- She knows very little about ICT, she has had to learn it on the go, and technical side of all this experience has been very difficult (T.3).
- She had to learn how to do it because she had no knowledge about educational platforms (T.1).
- He didn't have any knowledge in this field, so he had to hire a person to teach him the basics, starting from learning how to turn on the computer. Now, he has a computer, but he needs to learn more (T.12).
- She already had some training in these topics, but not enough, she is not familiar with the educational platforms (T.14).

As recommendations in this aspect, the teaching staff coincided in indicating that they need:

- Training in improved and more complete use of ICT.
- Support in acquiring adequate technical equipment (computers or high-end cell phones), and in securing higher quality connectivity.
- Provision of teaching materials appropriate to the type of teaching they are currently performing.

On this point, the teacher of the Guaraní native people interviewed clearly expressed his opinion on this issue in the following terms: "If a teacher does not handle ICT, he or she will not be able to continue working in education. This is the main and biggest challenge for teachers today. That is why we need training in this area" (T.4).

5.7. REFLECTIONS FROM THE PARAGUAYAN EXPERIENCE

The data presented in this report on the levels of poverty suffered by a large sector of the Paraguayan population, added to the lack of internet connectivity suffered by a very high percentage of the school population, assist the understanding the difficulties faced by this country to maintain the continuity of the school year in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since a large sector of the school population lacks connectivity (either partially or totally) and electronic equipment (computers, tablets, high-end cell phones), the MEC was forced to implement a teaching-learning modality that we have called "home" classes, in the absence of a better term to describe the situation. This modality, as explained, presents both teachers and students with a significant number of difficulties. The three most serious of these are:

- students learn much less (at most between 25% and 50% of that learned in the face-to-face modality)
- the enormous difficulties faced by students in accessing and using materials that teachers send via WhatsApp or deliver to students' homes
- the inability of teachers to use strategies and didactic resources adapted or adjusted to the needs of their student population.

These factors, among others, explain the very unfavorable opinion among the people interviewed (teachers, parents and students) regarding the educational results of this teaching modality that is being used in the country. These results have undoubtedly added to the structural problems that education in this country has suffered for several decades as a result of the abandonment and instrumentalization of which it has been a victim on behalf of the governments of the day, almost without exception.

The teachers' union is clear in pointing out that under this modality of giving lessons (home classes) there is very little that can be done from the didactic-pedagogical point of view. The student body can't be forced too much.

At most they can be set one or two tasks per day, otherwise they don't complete them. Only very short videos or audios can be made. The problem is that teachers have practically no contact with students, since much of the time is invested in the delivery, reception and review of materials, with very little being achieved in terms of teaching itself (teacher-student dialog and interactions).

The mothers consulted in the framework of this study were very clear in recognizing that they do not have the necessary knowledge, nor the experience to be able to provide the required support to their children in the elaboration of the exercises or tasks that have to be completed on a daily basis. The students consulted stated similar opinions. They recognize that this modality of "receiving lessons" is very difficult and that they learn less.

Teachers were also very clear in pointing out that the conditions of poverty in which a majority of the school population lives, together with the material shortages in the schools themselves, limit the possibilities of teaching lessons in a minimally adequate manner under the teaching modality that has been implemented in the country. Only in one case, as mentioned, is a reduced face-to-face learning modality employed, largely because the high levels of poverty in families and the material shortages of the school oblige this. Nonetheless, as in other cases, students' level of learning is limited or reduced, partly due to the number of class hours they receive.

Teachers are also clear in pointing out that under this class modality, there is very little that they can do from a didactic-pedagogical point of view. They have virtually no contact with students. Much of the time is invested in the delivery, reception and revision of materials, and very little is achieved in terms of actual teaching (teacher-student dialog/interactions). As already mentioned in this chapter, the teaching modality implemented by the MEC does not take into account that teaching activities "have to be appropriate to the context, the characteristics of the students and in accordance with the possibilities and limitations of digital resources" (Corvalán and Bustillo, 2020, p. 228). Some teachers have made efforts to adapt the materials to the particular reality of their students, but this does not happen in all cases, nor is it necessarily the solution to this problem.

Of the eight teachers consulted, only two teach online classes in an educational center on a reduced schedule, and there is one case in which the classes are taught in a reduced face-to-face manner due to the difficult social conditions faced (Guaraní native people).

In the case of online classes, the experience is assessed positively by the teachers, while recognizing the difficulties they face due to the lack of the appropriate didactic means and resources, especially of a technological nature, along with a lack of preparation for this modality, both on their own behalf and that of the parents. In the case of reduced face-to-face classes, these are assessed to be positive to the extent that at least the student's bond with the school is maintained.

Finally, the experience analyzed is very relevant to the support needs of the teaching population in two fields: on the one hand, in terms of connectivity and electronic devices (especially computers); on the other hand, in terms of training needs in the management of ICT. Practically all the teachers consulted acknowledged that they lack adequate mastery of ICT and need training in this area. Of course, that is not the main problem, and therefore, this aspect cannot solve the problems of Paraguayan education, although it could help to reduce to some extent the teaching-learning problems that teachers are facing at this juncture.

The optimistic note in this panorama is the commitment and dedication that the teachers interviewed expressed towards carrying out this work, because they understand that it is the only possible way at this time to avoid greater dropout levels, as well focusing on the fact that "students learn something, even if it is not much."

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This report is the result of an exploratory study, as mentioned in the introduction, on the didactic-pedagogical repercussions of non-face-to-face teaching-learning modalities (online, remote, reduced face-to-face, home, community, among others) that the countries of the region have been implementing to keep the school year active in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study covered three countries: Honduras, Costa Rica and Paraguay. The main findings of this study are reported in the sections corresponding to each country (see attached table with main conclusions by country). In this closing chapter, it is interesting to make some assessments from a comparative perspective between the three countries.

The first aspect is the coincidence between the countries studied in relation to the little or no preparation of public education systems for the implementation of teaching-learning modalities other than the traditional face-to-face class modality. At the time of the closure of schools due to the pandemic, these countries did not have the necessary technological infrastructure (connectivity, electronic equipment) to make possible the implementation of the virtual or online teaching-learning modality. The greatest shortcomings in this regard are in Paraguay, where about 90% of the school population lacks connectivity and basic technological equipment (computers or high-end cell phones). In Honduras, too, a very significant percentage of the school population lacks these services, and in Costa Rica, although the percentage is lower (34.86%), a sector of the school population also lacks connectivity.

As explained for each of the countries studied, the lack of connectivity and basic equipment of schools and families are closely related to the socioeconomic status of families, the geographical location of schools, and very significantly, the differentiated attention of the needs that the State and municipal governments provide to local populations. Hence, it is not by chance that it is the schools attended by students with less resources that face the greatest problems in giving lessons under these modalities. In general, these schools face difficulties in complying with the biosafety standards imposed by the health authorities, and lack the connectivity and equipment required, as do their students.

The second aspect is that although in each country the educational authorities have im-

plemented contingency plans to resume the school year under other modalities (online, remote, etc.), very often schools, and even the teachers themselves (sometimes through dialog with parents) have had to devise their "own" or different modalities to be able to teach lessons due to the particular conditions of their school population. The most sui generis cases in this regard are the models implemented in Honduras referred to in this study as the "community" modality, for example, and the "home" modality practiced in Paraguay. These are examples of extreme modalities used by teachers to ensure the continuity of the school year and thus prevent school drop-out.

A third aspect, probably one of the most worrying, is the opinion expressed and shared by teachers, students and parents, that in these class modalities, children and adolescents are learning much less when compared to the traditional system. In fact, it was very common for the people consulted to rate learning as at most between 25% and 50% of that achieved under conventional models, while they also question the quality of what is being learned. This assessment is all the more worrying when we know that even before the pandemic, the quality of education in the education systems of these countries, as for most of the countries of the region, has been highly questioned.

The most common and frequent problems mentioned by people interviewed in these three countries are:

- The constant internet outages and problems holding online conversations as a product of the low quality of service.
- The difficulties of students in understanding the subject matter and being able to clear up their queries and doubts. As is known, these are educational systems in which face-to-face student-teacher classes are the norm, and therefore, neither teachers nor students have the necessary skills to assimilate these other teaching-learning modalities.
- The mothers consulted are very clear in expressing the fact that they do not feel prepared or able to provide adequate support and guidance to their children in studying the subject matter and completing the exercises left them (tasks, assignments).

The fourth problem, common to the three countries analyzed, is the didactic-pedagogical component. This report makes mention of different studies indicating that given that educational systems are not prepared to teach lessons in non-face-to-face modalities (virtual, online, remote, among others), they have had to adapt the didactics they have been using to these other modalities. The point is that these contents and didactics were not intended for such use, which allows a clear understanding of the problems that teachers face in teaching lessons under such modalities; likewise, it explains the problems that the student population interviewed mentions having under these teaching modalities.

Obviously, these difficulties are not experienced in the same way in all countries, but exist in varying degrees of severity, while always being worrying, depending on the particular conditions of each educational environment. In this work it became clear that the didactics that are employed in the context of the process of teaching-learning, and particularly of the way in which these are combined, depend upon at least the following five aspects:

I. The availability of an internet connection (connectivity).
II. The availability of appropriate electronic devices on behalf of the teachers and students.
III. Knowledge and management of ICT on behalf of teachers and students.
IV. Knowledge and teaching experience in the use of digital platforms for educational purposes.
V. The interest in and commitment of teachers to learning about and employing critical and safe use of ICT.

If the first three or four conditions mentioned above are not met, it is practically impossible to consider that the results of the teaching-learning process from a didactic-pedagogical point of view can occur favorably or in a problem-free fashion. One result of this study is a view of the diversity of teaching resources that teachers have had to resort to in order to teach lessons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Paraguay is the country where teachers face greater limitations in introducing variations from a didactic point of view due to the lack of technology (connectivity and equipment) and material resources suffered by educational institutions and the school population.

Likewise, in Honduras, given the lack of connectivity and appropriate electronic devices, teachers do not have many options from the didactic point of view. The delivery of booklets, the sending of short videos and audios (using the WhatsApp application) are basically the techniques used to impart contents. The materials (booklets) are provided by the Ministry of Education and teachers often make some adjustments to the material to adapt these to some of the characteristics of their students.

In Costa Rica, although it was also found that the school population faces significant problems of connectivity and the lack of appropriate electronic devices (computers or high-end cell phones), the availability of connectivity in a greater number of homes, and especially, the availability of cell phones and/or computers to a considerable sector of the student population allows teachers to resort to online and/or virtual classes, using a variety of digital platforms (ZOOM, Moodle, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, among others), as well as sending materials by those same means or even by WhatsApp.

However, as in the case of Honduras, in Costa Rica there are very frequent complaints from the teachers, students and mothers interviewed regarding connectivity problems, downloading documents, printing these, working on them, sending them back, etc.

Finally, a fifth aspect, has to do with the subject of teacher training in ICT. Virtually all teachers interviewed in the three countries agreed on the need to receive training to achieve greater knowledge and use of ICT for educational purposes. Greater knowledge in this area would allow them to take greater advantage of existing platforms, as well as to be more innovative and creative in the development of teaching materials, to improve the teaching-learning process in the class modalities they are using.

Also, it is clear that from this experience of remote classes that it is very important to introduce training courses for students in the area of the safe management and critical use of ICT for educational purposes. Significant

knowledge deficits were also identified in this area by the students interviewed. Furthermore, although it may seem very ambitious to think about it, at some point it will be necessary to consider basic training in this area for parents with schoolchildren who are in early levels of the education system (first and second cycles). At present, it has been especially the mothers who have had to assume the "role of teacher in the home" without being prepared for this, as practically all those interviewed recognized with very few exceptions.

The problem of education in Latin America has definitely become even more complex. To the serious problems already faced, many others have been added by the COVID-19 pandemic. Certainly the biggest, most notorious problem is the suspension of the school year to which many countries have had to resort for long periods of time. Nonetheless, equally problematic is keeping the school year active under educational modalities such as those analyzed in this report, which do not meet the necessary conditions to guarantee a minimum satisfactory level of learning. That is why it is urgent that the Latin American Pedagogical Movement reflect on this educational reality and propose actions to assist the teaching population in facing this new challenge. The class modalities that have been used (remote, online, virtual, home, community, among others) represent a great opportunity to be more creative and innovative in terms of the pedagogy necessary and possible in these times.

In conclusion, it is necessary to make clear that any efforts made by the region's public education systems, including the educational community, require the education authorities of each country and their governments to seriously commit themselves to creating the conditions that allow the school population to enjoy connectivity and the use of high-quality electronic devices. Otherwise, the problems discussed in this report will persist. It must be remembered that the right to education, a concept which has been greatly diminished in these times of pandemic, can only really be exercised if the material and subjective conditions are offered to achieve this.

Table 5

Summary of findings by country

HONDURAS	COSTA RICA	PARAGUAY
CONNECTIVITY AND POVERTY		
In general, the school population in this country faces serious difficulties in receiving lessons in non-face-to-face modalities. It is in rural areas where families face the greatest difficulties in having internet connectivity, either because there is no service, or the signal is very poor, or because they do not have the necessary economic resources to cover the cost of prepaid cell phone services. While it is true that in urban areas the possibilities of accessing an internet signal are greater, often the signal is not of good quality, or families do not have the necessary resources to cover the service costs.	The remote modality is the most practiced by the country's educational institutions in order to teach lessons to students who lack internet connectivity and/or high-end mobile devices. These often tend to be students from low-income families, who also attend schools with very limited or poor infrastructure and services. In many cases, although students have internet connectivity on their mobile devices, they face connectivity problems (poor signal, service interruptions), or do not have the resources for prepaid services.	Teachers were very clear in pointing out that the conditions of poverty in which the majority of the school population lives, added to their lack of technological resources (computer equipment) and materials in the schools themselves limited the possibilities to impart lessons in a way that is minimally adequate under the teaching modality which has predominantly been implemented in the country (home classes). For the most part, families do not have the necessary income to have access to high-end computers, tablets, or cell phones with sufficient internet service credit.
TEACHER ICT MASTERY		
Most of the teachers consulted admit a lack of knowledge and experience in the field of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). With little or no support or professional advice in this field, teachers have had to search for information, download programs, and train themselves in order to be able to give lessons under the home and online modalities. Teachers who do not do so often face greater problems in delivering lessons under these modalities.	Teachers indicate that they have made great efforts to train themselves and achieve better management of ICT (they have attended training courses and have continued to train themselves). This greater training is allowing them to innovate in their courses in terms of didactics, especially in the case of the face-to-face–online modality. However, these teachers recognize that they face problems in teaching under this modality, some of them due to their own lack of experience, or due to the lack of training or due to a lack of habit on behalf of the students themselves.	The majority of teachers acknowledged that they did not have adequate ICT mastery and needed training in this area. They are also clear in indicating that in this modality of giving lessons there is very little that they can do from the didactic-pedagogical point of view. They have practically no contact with students, most of the time is invested in the delivery, reception and revision of materials, and very little is achieved in terms of the actual teaching-learning process itself.

HONDURAS	COSTA RICA	PARAGUAY
DIDACTIC-PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS		
The teaching strategy employed by teachers is very simple, due to the modality employed (home): basically what can be done is to send the students the tasks via WhatsApp (or in person) for completion at home, and when the teacher arrives to teach classes in the community, these are reviewed and more photocopies with new summaries of the subject matter contained in booklets are delivered. Each student reviews the subject at home and if they have any questions, they can ask these on the next visit made by the teacher; or it may be possible for them to ask the question via WhatsApp. In short, in the modality used to impart lessons, it is not possible to do much more from a didactic point of view.	Under the modalities practiced in this country, at the didactic level there is little that teachers can do because there is very little face-to-face class time, barely enough to review work and give instructions on the new assignments (GTAs). Most of the students' time in class and at home is spent on the elaboration and revision of GTAs, since so many of these are set. Each student must complete, on average, two to four GTAs per subject per month.	Teachers are emphatic in pointing out that under this class modality (home), there is very little that they can do from the didactic-pedagogical point of view. They can't force students to do too much work. At most they can be set one or two tasks per day, otherwise they don't complete these. Only very short videos or audios can be made. The problem is that the teaching staff has practically no contact with students, since much of the time is invested in the delivery, reception and revision of materials, with very little being achieved in terms of teaching itself (teacher-student dialog/interaction).
LEARNING LEVELS		
Teachers were very clear in indicating that in the modalities that are currently being used to give lessons, the learning of students and adolescents is much lower than that achieved in the face-to-face (traditional) modality. There are many reasons to believe this: in general, the number of class hours is much smaller; also, the amount of subject matter that can be covered is much lower (between 25% and 50% of that which can be covered in face-to-face classes), and the modality of imparting lessons itself doesn't allow more content to be covered. Essential content is delivered.	Teachers emphasize that the educational process of teaching-learning has been affected in a very negative way. The main problems they highlight are the following: The subject matter that can be covered is very little. Perhaps 25% of the total content provided in the curriculum is achieved. Concentration is made mainly on basic subjects. Students can be seen to be unmotivated and disinterested. As the goal is that no students are to be kept down, this has the effect that students do not make the necessary effort to attend classes and study. In addition, mention is made that school absenteeism has increased.	Virtually all teachers, mothers and students agree that students learn much less in this teaching modality (between 25% and 50% at most). Many teachers recognize that the most important thing they achieve in the predominant modality of teaching (home classes), is that students maintain the link with the school. But in terms of learning, very little is achieved.

HONDURAS	COSTA RICA	PARAGUAY
FAMILY WORKLOAD		
The mothers interviewed agreed on the enormous task that it represents for them to have to support their children in their studies (preparation of assignments and tasks) because they are not prepared (professionally) to fulfill this function nor do they have the necessary knowledge about the topics. Furthermore, and very importantly, classes at home represent an enormous additional burden of work, which generates stress and fatigue.	The mothers almost unanimously state that the virtual classes represent an additional workload. They also recognize that they do not have the necessary knowledge to provide the accompaniment that their children need to do the work assigned to them. Teachers commented that there are students who lack the accompaniment necessary to clear up doubts and perform tasks, either because their parents do not have the time to do so, do not know how to support them, or simply because they are not interested.	The mothers consulted about this teaching model were very clear in recognizing that they do not have the knowledge or experience necessary to provide the required support to their children in completing the exercises or tasks that have to be done on a daily basis. The students consulted expressed similar opinions. They recognize that this modality of "receiving lessons" is very difficult and that they learn less.
TEACHING WORKLOAD		
The modality used to teach classes represents an overload of work for teachers due to: the diversity of schedules and strategies used to reach every student (face-to-face and virtual classes, home visits, sending messages via WhatsApp, among others); the variety and quantity of didactic material that they have to create, photocopy, and distribute; the different assessment models they must resort to; the amount of hours they have to work (often the effective working hours extend to nights and weekends).	The teachers consulted coincide in stating that their workload has increased, but also that the tasks they have to undertake are ever-more complex, because the educational settings have changed radically (online classes, remote classes, reduced face-to-face classes) and in consequence, the number of hours of work that they must devote to planning lessons on a didactic level and to preparing materials is much greater than it was before (for face-to-face classes). In addition, they note that administrative tasks have also increased.	All teachers agree that in this modality the workload is much higher, among other reasons, they have to download the materials from the MEC platform on a daily basis, and as the case may be, send these to all their students via WhatsApp, or take them to the students' homes. They have to follow up on each student, almost on a one-to-one basis, because each of these has a particular situation that needs to be addressed; and because they have to be in constant communication with parents to motivate them in providing support and accompaniment to their children in downloading internet materials, in studying, and in completing and submitting assignments; and finally, because the working day has been extended a great deal given that teachers have to answer the queries of their students at all times, even in the evenings and on weekends.

HONDURAS	COSTA RICA	PARAGUAY
CLASS MODALITIES: FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS NON-FACE-TO-FACE		
All the students consulted in the framework of this study agreed that they prefer the face-to-face class modality and not the virtual modality. The reasons for this opinion are essentially twofold: the lack of a stable, secure, uninterrupted internet service; and the learning difficulties that the virtual modality represents. On the latter point, they gave numerous examples of the learning problems that this modality poses them.	All the people consulted agree that in the online modality, schoolchildren learn much less than in the face-to-face modality, and that they tend to get bored and find classes much more difficult. Practically none of the students consulted gave a favorable opinion regarding virtual or online classes, and they mentioned having many problems: lack of understanding of the subject matter, difficulties in completing assignments (GTAs), boredom, difficulties in concentrating, inadequate conditions in the house to receive lessons, and connectivity problems, among others.	Teachers were also very clear in pointing out that the conditions of poverty in which a majority of the school population lives, together with the material shortages in the schools themselves, limit the possibilities of teaching lessons in a minimally adequate manner under the teaching modality that has been implemented in the country (home classes). Only in one case, as discussed above, is the reduced face-to-face learning modality employed, largely because this is obliged by the poverty of the students' families. Even so, as in other cases, the level of learning achieved by students is very low.
RECOMMENDATIONS		
The provision of training for teachers to achieve a greater mastery of ICT for educational purposes; the promotion of opportunities to exchange teaching experiences in the didactic-pedagogical field; and fostering forums for reflection and analysis of the implications of non-face-to-face class modalities being imparted by educational institutions on the teaching-learning process of school students.	The provision of connectivity and electronic equipment (computers) to all students who so require as soon as possible, since many students are being left out of the educational system for this reason. Testing schoolchildren on the psychosocial impact of having to sit for so many hours in front of computers or mobile devices (e.g., test their physical condition, their eyesight and their emotional state). The provision of training to teachers and students in ICT use, so that classes can become more participatory and dynamic.	The provision of connectivity and electronic devices (especially computers) to students as an essential condition for the teaching of remote lessons. Provide training in ICT use, both for teachers and students. These measures could help to reduce to some extent the teaching-learning problems that teachers are facing in the current situation.

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