

Changes, impact and consequences of the pandemic from the teaching perspective of a University for the Elderly

Modificaciones, impacto y consecuencias de la pandemia desde la perspectiva docente de una Universidad para Personas Mayores

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Abstract

Population aging is an achievement and a challenge for public and private institutions. Within active aging, the World Health Organization has promulgated lifelong learning as the fourth component of a better aging where the University Programs for the Elderly are the most affected by confinement. The teachers of these programs had to adapt to the change and modify their teaching-learning methodologies. Therefore, the objective of this study is to understand the meanings and senses of the teachers' experiences as a result of the pandemic in the University System for the Elderly of the University of Guadalajara. A qualitative methodology was used, referring to a case study with phenomenological interpretation that allows a construction of the meaning that a person gives to an experience. The results show that the virtual transition complicates the transmission of knowledge, the teachers of the University System for the

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Sinergias educativas

January - March Vol. 7 - 1 - 2022

<http://sinergiaseducativas.mx/index.php/revista/>

eISSN: 2661-6661

revistasinergias@uteq.edu.ec

Page 124-133

Received: June 08, 2021

Approved: December 02, 2021

Elderly had to modify the teaching-learning methodology, and the pandemic was able to enhance losses as well as gains.

Keywords: Pandemic, teachers, University for Older Adults.

Resumen

El envejecimiento poblacional es un logro y un reto para las instituciones públicas y privadas. Dentro del envejecimiento activo, la Organización Mundial de la Salud, ha promulgado al aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida como el cuarto componente de un mejor envejecer donde los Programas Universitarios para Personas Mayores son los más afectados por el confinamiento. Los docentes de los dichos programas tuvieron que adaptarse al cambio y modificar sus metodologías de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Por lo anterior, el objetivo de este estudio es comprender significados y sentidos de las experiencias de los docentes a raíz de la pandemia en el Sistema Universitario para el Adulto Mayor de la Universidad de Guadalajara. Se realizó una metodología de corte cualitativo referente a un estudio de casos con interpretación fenomenológica que permite una construcción del significado que una persona le da a una experiencia. Los resultados refieren a que la transición virtual complica la transmisión de conocimientos, los docentes del Sistema Universitario para el Adulto Mayor tuvieron que modificar la metodología de enseñanza-aprendizaje, asimismo la pandemia logró potenciar pérdidas como ganancias.

Palabras clave: Pandemia, docentes, Universidad para Mayores.

Introduction

Currently there is a great scientific, technological and industrial progress by contemporary society, thus producing a high life expectancy in relation to past decades. Old age and the concept of aging became important in the second half of the 20th century as a social issue, a concern for aging in a good way and without the least possible decadence. Thus, providing opportunities for a dignified life with a perception of a good quality of life became a necessity for a large part of the population. The task of reversing this deficit begins with the exercise of rights, enforcing the framework of constitutional guarantees without discrimination based on age, physical condition, social status, gender, which are part of the struggle for civil and human rights, where the issue of education is vital.

In the case of the elderly, special designs and programs are required to realize and fulfill the right to education. Thus, the University Programs for Older Adults (PUAM) should be based on a new model of development of old age, where this stage is understood as a time

of life full of possibilities, in which activity and participation become the basis for personal development to go through old age with energy.

Beliefs about the conditions for learning in old age are strained by the meanings of learning acquired in early socialization and the change in perspective that older people experience with respect to learning. Thus, more and more older adults are entering higher education to learn more than just the contents of the subject matter, so the reasons that this age group seeks education and the challenges they face in doing so are very important.

In 1968, one of the most important books on pedagogy in the world was published under the authorship of Scagnoli, (2006). This text was the spearhead to understand under what guidelines education was, its foundations, didactics and what was the course to be taken from the point of view of the author, who made a division between society, what he called: oppressors and the oppressed. Camacho Gutiérrez & Vega Michel, (2016) In this text, he makes a division between society, what he called: oppressors and the oppressed. In the first group, the aim is to become aware of the reality in which the individual lives, how the oppressed would always be subject to the determinations of the oppressors. At the other extreme, it underlies the initiative of the oppressed to confront the oppressors and free themselves from the malpractices that were present.

From the point of view of Quijije, (2018) we are faced with an education with a banking concept. The banking conception of education aims to transform the minds of individuals so that they can better adapt to real situations and thus master them more easily.

Therefore, the more passive they are, the more creativity and freedom are diminished, thus stimulating innocence and setting the tone for oppressors to emerge as generous subjects. It is there where the individual stops fighting for their interests and convictions, denotes little openness to the curiosity of learning, as if life had no meaning to be lived. (Marúm-Espinosa & Reynoso-Cantú, 2014, p. 23).

In today's education, it is necessary to transcend to virtuality, the methodology proposed by the teachers is really admirable in these educational programs for the elderly. However, in this transition there were some specific events that are relevant as an educational experience after the pandemic, among those mentioned, we can highlight the losses that this confinement had in relation to the modification of

face-to-face classes for the elderly and how it was transited in this journey. Another issue is, incredibly, the gains that were made when the pandemic took over the face-to-face classes and turned them into virtual ones, the seniors emerged and opted for this modality so as not to lose the sense of belonging they have with the University, with their classmates, but above all, with themselves.

Lifelong learning is an organizing principle of all forms of education, including formal, non-formal and informal settings. Formal learning is understood as learning that takes place in education and training institutions, leading to the achievement of diplomas and qualifications. On the other hand, non-formal learning occurs in addition or alternatively to formal education, generally in local community contexts, the workplace and through the activities of civil society organizations. Informal learning is experiential learning, also called incidental or random learning, which occurs in daily life, the family, at work or in the community and is mediated by people's interests or activities. Tobón, (2019) This concept is based on the fact that learning is not pigeonholed to a specific period of life, but rather that it forms a corpus of two senses, on the one hand horizontally, which includes learning from the cradle to the grave. On the other hand, vertically, under humanistic and democratic values such as emancipation and inclusion. The key point is to ensure relevant learning beyond a traditional schooling system. Thus, lifelong learning should be offered under a range of accessible possibilities, favoring the incorporation of age groups with fewer educational opportunities, including uneducated adults, the female population, the elderly, the unemployed, among others.

The above, inviting the generation of action links by various groups at the international, national and local levels, including universities, governmental and non-governmental organizations, which recognize, value and favor lifelong learning.

Although some educational programs for the elderly have been consolidated within the Mexican territory, there is still a need for this action to reach all corners of the country, given that the times of the elderly are different, and therefore, these educational contexts become a reason to want to continue living and not grow old.

There are 18 universities in our country that offer an educational program for seniors, which are located in the following institutions: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (UABC), Universidad Autónoma del

Estado de México (UAEMx), Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL), Universidad de Guadalajara (U de G), Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP), Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán (UADY), Universidad Mexiquense (UMEX) and Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala (UATX).

Another four in private universities: Universidad Regiomontana (UR), Universidad Iberoamericana de Puebla (IBERO), Universidad Marista, Universidad del Sur (US). And five more by public administration agencies, the Mexico City delegations (Xochimilco and Benito Juárez) and two state DIFs (Puebla and Edomex).

The above have had to reinvent themselves as a result of the pandemic, which has left various signs of both losses and gains towards a hybrid or blended education that allows interaction between students and teachers. On the other hand, the teachers of the Universities for Older Adults have had to modify the way of transmitting knowledge and how to get older people to learn even in the virtual world.

Materials and methods

Type of qualitative study. In the field of social sciences, readers can conceive this methodology as the way to acquire knowledge about the social world. Qualitative research has specific relevance for the study of social relations, due to the fact of the pluralization of life worlds. This pluralization requires a new sensitivity to the empirical study of problems. Villagómez, (2016) case study design with phenomenological interpretation. Berríos & Omaira, (2009) points out that the case study is an empirical investigation that studies a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. A case study research successfully deals with a technically distinctive situation in which there are many more variables of interest than observational data.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 6 teachers of the University System for the Elderly (1 woman and 1 man) to learn about their experience as a result of the pandemic and how their teaching-learning methodology was modified in the various workshops, courses and diploma courses offered to the elderly.

Subsequently, a phenomenological analysis was carried out in the Atlas ti version 7 software, which aims at a literal transcription of interviews for a subsequent content analysis divided into 3 phases:

- Coding phase. The transcripts will be read to generate the first codifications of the text and group them into categories. And thus assess whether there is a saturation of content.
- Category triangulation phase. A consensus will be reached among those responsible for this research on the categories of analysis.
- Phase of obtaining and verifying results. A content analysis will be carried out at the pragmatic, semantic and syntactic levels.

Results

Through the in-depth interviews conducted with teachers of the University System of the Elderly, it has been possible to categorize 3 major themes that arise around this topic. The first of these has to do with the main changes in teaching that have arisen as a result of the pandemic and, in addition, the responses that the main actors in this study were able to implement. The second theme is the effects on the University System of the Elderly in its transition to virtuality. And last but not least, are the gains left by the change from face-to-face to virtual, which must be mentioned.

It is inevitable to mention that in the transition from face-to-face to the virtual world, new forms of learning had to be implemented, especially in the platforms that allow concentrating a group of people to carry out a class. Thus, teachers in the first instance had to develop new fields of action, new teaching-learning tools, which implied an important challenge not only for teachers with more years of experience, but also for young people who were having their first approaches in front of a group, and in this specific case of a group of older people.

Another great challenge was to transfer the knowledge that was provided in person and had that human contact that characterized the SUAM classes to a new way of transmitting the contents where the main medium was a computer "transferring all the lectures from physical to virtual was also a great challenge, fortunately we were already doing it but it was a very big challenge, to digitalize

everything, to have the equipment for the lectures.... and the other thing is that the experience, although virtually is very good, it does not replace the experience, that is, we know that they do not learn as much or there is not as strong feedback as we have in person, virtuality has the limitation that you cannot live in the same way as in person, there is a transmission of knowledge but being two hours in front of a flat screen, in 4 walls is boring... tiring and even more for an older adult" (Luis, SUAM teacher).

Consequently, the teachers' problem with virtuality is precisely that they do not manage to get older people interested in the course, so they have implemented certain strategies to promote greater creativity in the dynamics of the classes, so that older people do not have an overload of work and do not become disinterested in a virtual semester. "Virtuality does not help our classes, it limits them a lot, so we have tried to put more experiences, different videos, change teachers so that it is not just one teacher, but two or three, we have had to look for creativity".

Affectations in the University System for the Elderly in its transition to virtuality. In order to achieve a concentration of SUAM students, it was necessary to manage accounts in digital platforms that would allow them to enter a sufficient number of students without time limit, which implied a significant expense for the University System, considering that the aforementioned does not charge any fee for teaching the classes and the material is fully covered by the University of Guadalajara through SUAM.

On the other hand Gavilanes et al., (2019) y Barros-Bastidas & Gebera, (2020) the main affectations of SUAM are related precisely to the digital platforms of education and their lack of knowledge on the part of the elderly "in the first classes, the answers are always very homogeneous: they cannot connect to the internet, the internet is bad, they do not have access to the program, that is frustrating for them, entering the classes with a mood that is not ideal, in person they are very happy, very cheerful, now they are worried because they do not press, or they want to participate and the audio is not heard or they have muted their microphone, 15 minutes later they find out that they were not being heard, things like that".

Despite having interactive videos for seniors to learn how to familiarize themselves with the platforms and at the same time to potentiate lifelong learning, the lack of knowledge of the digital era was very specific in this group, causing problems that could occur

on one or more occasions during the course. "the technological part affects a lot to this generation of older people, to express themselves, to coexist in the way they want, what we try to do is the first classes to focus on those limitations that we know will not be solved in 2 or 3 classes, it can be continuous throughout the semester".

It is important to highlight that for the teachers, the gains they had in these virtual semesters is that they managed to reinvent the teaching-learning methodology that they had planned and that not only made it possible for seniors to stay in SUAM, but also for the number of students to grow thanks to the fact that the platforms can host a large number of students at the same time.

On the other hand, not only were students from the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area registered, but 6% of the total number of SUAM students from different parts of the Mexican Republic were able to enroll and remain, which implied breaking down educational barriers and which resulted in a monumental enrichment of the classrooms, both for students and teachers.

"The gain was to make our virtual courses, books, videos... we believe that this can reach more people we increased the quantity, maybe not the quality, but it reached more people, the goal is that SUAM is the starting point but not the goal, that is to say that more older adults can be trained in gardens even if they do not go to SUAM, they can download it from Facebook, YouTube or even in another language so they can download that activity or that workshop."

Discussion

It is important to note that an educational experience involves various elements that can condition it, in this case for example, as a result of the pandemic there were many changes within a University for the Elderly, which implied new challenges for teaching that will undoubtedly remain for history.

While there are disadvantages to a virtual environment, there is also the desire to remain in an educational context, older people ask to be heard to return to the presence and to share with their peers a little sparkle, anecdotes and love that make old age and aging more enjoyable.

Admiration for all those teachers who faced new strategies and tools, the training of these systems undoubtedly highlighted the differences

and disadvantages that we have in our country to generate distance education.

Reaching more corners of the country with SUAM is the most notable achievement that the teachers envision, since the overall objective is that the elderly obtain tools for a better aging and enhance their quality of life. The simple fact of having more than 100 students per class spread throughout the country is simply fabulous. On the other hand, more and better socio-political and administrative conditions are required for older people to continue to participate in these university systems. Learning from the experiences of other countries is important, but in Mexico, lifelong learning as an essential component of active aging is gaining strength and it is extremely important to guarantee the rights of older people to exercise their education, only then will societies be able to transcend.

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