

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN EDUCATION: WELL-BEING & INEQUALITIES

Author: Oriol Serra Miñarro

Tutor: Cristina Corcoll López

FPCEE Blanquerna - Universitat Ramon Llull

Academic year: 2021-2022

ABSTRACT: In 2020, the world unexpectedly stopped due to the COVID-19 pandemic which caused many damages in every corner of society and humankind itself. This historic episode, characterised by the uncertainty and fear of people, has worsened the issues that already existed in our educational system and has put in check many human rights. This dissertation explores the consequences of lockdown and social distancing in Primary Education, a momentous life period in which children build their personality and start to understand the world. Moreover, this paper analyses how COVID-19 has impacted education by comparing two schools from Barcelona belonging to diverse contexts, placing the focus on children's rights, teacher and student well-being, equality gaps and online schooling. The results obtained at the end of the investigation clearly show that the equality gap between public and private centres is indeed worrying. The educational challenge we are about to face within the following years is fundamental.

Key words: pandemic, COVID-19, impact, education, inequalities, children's rights, well-being, academic effects, socioemotional effects.

RESUM: El 2020, el món es va aturar inesperadament a causa de la pandèmia de la COVID-19, la qual va causar danys per tots els racons de la societat i a la mateixa humanitat. Aquest episodi històric, caracteritzat per la incertesa i la por de la gent, ha empitjorat els problemes que ja existien al nostre sistema educatiu i ha posat en escac molts dels drets humans. Aquesta tesi explora les conseqüències del confinament i el distanciament social a l'Educació Primària, un període vital transcendental en què els nens construeixen la seva personalitat i comencen a entendre el món. A més, el present article analitza com la COVID-19 ha afectat l'educació comparant dues escoles de Barcelona pertanyents a contextos diversos, posant l'accent en els drets dels infants, el benestar de professors i estudiants, les escales d'igualtat i l'escolarització en línia. Els resultats obtinguts al final de la investigació mostren clarament que la bretxa d'igualtat entre centres públics i privats és realment preocupant. Així doncs, el repte educacional que hem d'afrontar en els propers anys és cabdal.

Paraules clau: pandèmia, COVID-19, impacte, educació, desigualtats, drets dels infants, benestar, efectes acadèmics, efectes socioemocionals.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the recent COVID-19 pandemic has caused a dramatic change in many areas of society. Lockdown and social distancing have played a highly negative role to humankind as a whole and have jeopardised our social links to the extent of dividing us for several reasons. The present research explores the multiple consequences of these facts in a field that concerns particularly teachers, pedagogues and students. How has this pandemic affected the world of education? Which are its immediate, mid-term and long-term consequences? Recent studies show that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused frequent closures of educational centres worldwide and has prevented at least 1.2 billion students from attending school in 2020 and 2021 (OECD - International Education, 2021). In the following pages, I will analyse different agents that play an important role in addressing the issue of maintaining a solid educational environment that pursues equality and overcomes the adversities of external issues, placing the focus on children's rights, their well-being and inequalities. Moreover, the straight impact and consequences of the lockdown to children are also a spotlight of concern in this essay.

Researchers Imran, Zeshan and Pervaiz (2020) assert how vulnerable children are when suffering from this phenomenon. They point out limitations such as the understanding of complex events in infancy and childhood or their sometimes low capacity for communication. These facts may cause stress and anxiety among students who got suddenly separated from their friends and schools, and whose routines changed radically overnight. “Although the number of affected children by the disease is small, and most of them show only mild symptoms, the disease and the containment measures are likely to negatively impact their mental health & well-being”. Some serious impacts highlighted by these researchers are regressive behaviours (such as thumb sucking or becoming clingier and demanding), excessive screen and social media usage, emotional distress, sleeping disorders or generalised fear.

The issue of COVID-19 has been a controversial and much disputed subject within the field of education. In the light of recent studies, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the urgency for searching alternatives to long-distance education (especially in Early-childhood and Primary Education). “The transition from a face-to-face educational model to a virtual school environment has blown up the many inequalities that run through our education system” (Tarabini and Jacovkis, 2020). Further on, I will be exploring the causes that may

accentuate these inequalities. Besides, another great disadvantage of the virtual school environment is our untrained sense of emotional and academic management over the phenomenon. “The ignorance of the pedagogy of distance evaluation, suspension of evaluation and monitoring of students in confinement times generate contexts of insecurity both in teaching teams and in families and students’ perceptions on learning” (Hernández Ortega and Álvarez Herrero, 2021).

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The child in school as a person with rights

Children’s rights are at the heart of our understanding of education. We can’t conceive an educational system that violates them, as they are universal, interrelated, interdependent and indivisible. This means that all of these rights are equally important and innate to absolutely every human being, and the system is responsible for guaranteeing them in their entirety. However, recent evidence suggests that many of these rights have been endangered in many ways. Luis Pedernera, president of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, affirms that “children and adolescents have been physically, emotionally and psychologically affected by the measures taken at the beginning of the pandemic, especially in countries that declared states of emergency and compulsory confinement.” (Institut d’Infància i Adolescència de Barcelona, 2020). “Scientific evidence indicates that COVID-19 (in terms of disease) does not significantly affect youngsters. However, the decisions that have been taken to deal with the pandemic are significantly affecting the lives of children”, affirms Pedernera (Institut Infància i Adolescència de Barcelona, 2020). According to him, the responses to the pandemic were taken under an adult-centric and classist gaze, neglecting the real necessities of children and their rights, decisions that may have mid and long-term serious consequences. Under this critical vision, it is key to analyse the impact of the pandemic following the 4 basic principles of the UNCRC (Convention of the Rights of the Child).

The first principle, known as “Principle of the superior interests of the child”, states that “any decision, law or policy that may affect children must take into account what is best for them” (art.3, Convention of the Rights of the Child). As previously said, the decisions to deal with the pandemic have significantly affected their lives rather than the disease itself. Therefore, this first principle has not been accomplished at all. In order to enhance the Educational Department’s response in the future, the Institut d’Infància i Adolescència de Barcelona

suggests that “mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that decisions made at a municipal level take into account the interests of children over those of adults” (2020).

The second principle, known as “Principle of participation and right to be heard”, states that “minors have the right to be heard and consulted on situations that affect them and to have their views taken into account” (art. 12, Convention of the Rights of the Child). Besides, the possibilities of participation must increase as youngsters reach maturity. In my opinion, this principle is key if we want to act in accordance with the opinions and real needs of children. “We need to ensure that we don’t just listen to them, but society itself takes into account what they are willing to tell us” (Institut d’Infància i Adolescència de Barcelona, 2020).

The third principle, known as “Principle of non-discrimination”, states that “all children have the same rights: in any case, at all times and without exceptions. It doesn't matter what their skin colour is, religion, background or parents' ideas” (art. 2, Convention of the Rights of the Child). No matter how obvious this statement may seem, its understanding can be a double-edged sword. We can’t continue treating children as a homogeneous collective, with exactly the same rights and resources, as their needs can be tremendously diverse depending on where they live, their cultural background or their social status. According to Carbonell (2018), invoking neutrality is a fallacy that does not hold up, as it hides reality and does nothing but reproduce the established order and interests of the most powerful sectors. Therefore, it is key to bear in mind that we “must put inequalities as a structural axis of all social intervention so as not to discriminate children in the most vulnerable situation and to adequately attend to all the specificities they demand” (Institut d’Infància i Adolescència de Barcelona, 2020).

The fourth and last principle, known as “Principle of a dignified life, survival and maximum development”, states that “children and adolescents have the right to satisfactory quality of life standards for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Their parents are responsible for giving them everything they need to live, and in the case they can't afford it, the authorities must do so” (art 27, Convention of the Rights of the Child). The measures applied by the governments have been so dramatic that these life standards have been clearly threatened, since children are a particularly vulnerable collective due to their limited understanding of the events. Experts Imran, Zeshan and Pervaiz (2020) reflect on this idea, adding that the “response of a child to a crisis situation depends upon his prior exposure to emergency situations, his physical and mental health, socio-economic circumstances of the

family, and cultural background”. Thus, we find an extremely wide variety of experiences that are mostly conditioned by the context of each individual, leading us into a framework of an heterogeneous educational situation that is quite complex to deal with. In their article “Educational management of confinement due to COVID-19: teachers’ perception in Spain” (2021), researchers Hernández Ortega and Álvarez Herrero reflect on several circumstances that must be considered to understand and face this phenomenon.

First, they point out the sudden interruption of the learning processes. “Confinement generates big inequalities in learning and developmental opportunities, which doesn’t happen so much in the face-to-face school model” (Hernández Ortega & Álvarez Herrero, 2021). The unnatural and accelerated transition to digital learning platforms has shown multiple weaknesses in the digital competence of many teachers, as well as a general lack of adaptation of the curriculum. The transition from face-to-face learning to virtual learning environments shouldn’t be improvised. It is a challenge that encompasses everyone from the higher government bodies to the smaller educational institutions, being all of them responsible for overcoming the technical and social limitations that have been uncovered in recent months. Furthermore, many children have lost their learning rhythms (especially those at an early age) and their reinsertion to school can become a complex situation. “Concerns about the impact of academic closure on learning rhythms have focused much of the initial efforts on finding tools to ensure a certain link to the curriculum. Face-to-face schooling has been replaced by digital platforms, virtual meetings, and online tutoring. However, none of these matched the value or meaning of early childhood nor primary education” (González Motos & Bonal Sarro, 2020).

Secondly, these researchers highlight the lack of digital and competencial resources that many families suffer. “Lockdown has shown the heterogeneous situation in access, knowledge and management of the digital environment by families” (Hernández Ortega & Álvarez Herrero, 2021). This is one of the key points to understand the educational inequalities accentuated during the pandemic, since they were already existent. Stephen J. Aguilar (2020) states it in his interesting article “Guidelines and tools for promoting digital equity”: “I emphasise that the digital gap is not new; it is, in fact, a wound on our educational system that has been left to fester. The consequences of it are being felt more acutely by vulnerable communities, now that added pressure has been applied”. According to the Institut d’Infància i Adolescència de Barcelona (2020), children who suffered the most when passing through this situation are

those who belong to socioeconomically disadvantaged families with complex conditions for formal education at home, as well as those whose parents lack time to dedicate to their necessities. This study also affirms that a major part of these children are of foreign origin, live in lower-income districts and are enrolled in public schools (2020). In this sense, I would like to mention a concept that plays a decisive role in the understanding of the problem: the digital gap. “4 out of 10 children and adolescents in a vulnerable situation don’t have a computer or tablet at home to follow virtual education. In addition, almost half of those who have the necessary gear have to share it with their relatives” (Institut d’Infància i Adolescència de Barcelona, 2020). This is the main reason why resources should be adapted to real necessities and reveal the socioeconomic conditions of the educational centres and their students transparently. Furthermore, other public institutions such as libraries or community centres should have remained open in order to offer their services to those in need of them. “The current digital equity gap is characterised by what sort of technology students have access to, where they access it, and what kind of infrastructure is in place to enable its use. Before COVID-19, for example, libraries provided a mechanism for students to access technology they would otherwise be unable to use” (Aguilar, 2020).

Experiences from private and public centres

As previously mentioned, the focus of the inequalities accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic in education passes through the variety of resources that the educational centres and families dispose of. “First of all, in public schools, around 60% of teachers consider that the lack of a computer or Internet connection is the reason for monitoring difficulties; this percentage is around 48% in the case of private centres. Secondly, poor living conditions and difficulties in meeting basic needs are barriers indicated in percentages relevant to the public schools (35.1% and 13.6%), but much lower than the private ones (20.7% and 3.2%)” (Tarabini & Jacovkis, 2020). Several studies have shown that, although the digital gap is more than obvious, the barriers to ensure quality distance education are not only technological. They go beyond the strictly educational field. In this sense, public schools had to deal with something that most private ones didn’t: emotional support and accompaniment. “When we asked teachers which were the priorities of their schools during the pandemic, the overwhelming majority opted for the emotional and personal well-being of students (81.5%) and family support (77.6%). [...] However, the results of the survey show that there is often a false dichotomy between teaching and accompaniment that runs through the education system

and has profound implications for the reproduction of social inequality” (Tarabini & Jacovkis, 2020).

This data shows that centres with higher concentration of social inequalities had to focus their aims in carrying out this emotional support and accompaniment. In other words, the centres that attend major social complexity can't only stick to content transmission, but need to make an extra effort to look after social necessities. On the other hand, the mid and high-class students followed a more academic approach in the virtual schooling environment. In addition, “more than 60% of the private centres have sent compulsory activities to their students, while this percentage in public schools is around 25%. [...] Thus, as the socio-economic status of students increases, more compulsory activities have been sent to schools” (Tarabini & Jacovkis, 2020). The study concludes that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (and the disease itself) on families with resources is much lower than to vulnerable families who do not have the living conditions to increase their physical distance, nor to confine themselves properly due to the amount of people living in the same house.

Face-to-face education

The COVID-19 pandemic has evidenced that face-to-face education is irreplaceable. One of the most significant reasons for this is the emotional and affective bonds that the educational community creates, which are one of the strongest sources for learning. Furthermore, society has seen how people resorted to artistic creation, cooking or physical activity during lockdown in order to maintain themselves productive and occupied. This has also opened a window for self-reflection and an opportunity to move towards a different educational model where creativity and imagination hold a much more important role. “Just as the coronavirus has evolved, so has human sociality. Our playful responses to this crisis have shown the best of human endeavour, demonstrating creativity and innovation in an effort to stay connected in these extraordinary times” (Tonkin & Whitaker, 2021). Hence, we may rethink education and start giving value to those subjects that unfortunately don't seem to be as important as others. In addition, spaces for social interaction and playful activities may be also extended in some way, either inside or outside the school's enclosure. Tonkin and Whitaker add that “the benefits of community life and social connections are integral to health and wellbeing and are known as important facilitators of public health” (2021).

Moreover, the benefits of face-to-face education approach all the stages of education, but they are especially important for the early-age students. González Motos and Bonal Sarro (2020) reflect on this idea by stating that “it is very difficult for early childhood and Primary Education to fulfil the three social values assigned, since children of such young ages have very little ability to use new technologies and a significant impossibility of doing independent work”. Firstly, they point out the logistical-instrumental task of taking care of children, which facilitates the participation in employment to adults. Obviously, this can’t be carried out as they need to look after children when they cannot attend school. Secondly, they consider that early childhood education has experienced “a progressive social recognition as a privileged space for the socialisation and education of children. Collective learning is especially important in the early stages of life, where curiosity and imitation act as triggers for new discoveries” (González Motos & Bonal Sarro, 2020). Certainly, isolation is a clear obstacle for this approach. Lastly, these authors claim that “early childhood education has become an important instrument in the fight against social inequality, as the positive effects of early education are emphasised among children living in disadvantaged families with low education levels” (González Motos & Bonal Sarro, 2020).

2. AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Several research questions have been drawn in order to know the different realities faced by two different schools in Barcelona. These questions aim at discovering the point of view of teachers who pertain to contrasted educational centres regarding children’s rights, social inequalities and academic and socioemotional consequences on students. Furthermore, the voice of students has also been a focus of interest in analysing the perceptions they have towards their school lifes during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they reflect on positive and negative aspects about it. The starting research questions are the following:

- RQ1: What is the perception of teachers and management teams regarding the measures approved by the Government?
- RQ2: How did teachers deal with the situation of virtual education and which are their opinions towards its application in Primary School?
- RQ3: Which are the academic and socioemotional consequences that teachers have been able to grasp among Primary Education students?

- RQ4: What are the feelings of students regarding the radical change they suffered in their school lives?

According to these questions, three main objectives have been formalised as elements of research:

- To contextualise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Primary Education, placing the focus on childrens' rights and inequalities.
- To explore and compare teacher's perspectives regarding the effects of COVID-19 in a public school and a private school from Barcelona.
- To discover how primary school students experienced the pandemic in their school lives, both in a public and a private school.

3. METHOD

The present paper proposes a descriptive and explanatory cross-sectional research, from an interpretative paradigm, in a field-study framework. Mainly qualitative (but also quantitative) methods have been used for this dissertation. The main research tools that have been employed are interviews and on-line open questionnaires in two different educational centres in order to gather the necessary information for analysis.

4.1 PARTICIPANTS

In order to know the reality of two schools of differentiated social and educational contexts, two headmasters have been interviewed: (1) Itziar González Alburquerque, headmaster and teacher in The English School of Barcelona, private centre situated in Vallcarca, and (2) Celestina Freixas Folch, headmaster and teacher in Escola Calderón de la Barca, public centre situated in Nou Barris. Both have been carrying out the role of headmaster for some years and have been teaching for their whole lives. This factor is important to draw out notions from both the management and teaching points of view.

Targeted Primary School teachers for the survey's participation were: (1) 7 Primary Education teachers from The English School and (2) 10 Primary Education teachers from Escola Calderón de la Barca (17 teachers in total). The criteria for selecting the schools has been the contrasted social and cultural environment of their families and students, their certainly diverse economical incomes and the educational approach of the centres.

Targeted Primary School students for the survey's participation were (1) 38 students from The English School distributed in the following way: 13 from 1st of ESO, 12 from 2nd of ESO, 6 from 3rd of ESO and 7 from 4th of ESO; and (2) 39 students from Escola Calderón de la Barca, all of them in 6th of Primary. This adds up to a total of 77 students (49'35% pertaining to a private centre and 50'65% pertaining to a public one).

4.2 INSTRUMENTS

Three instruments have been applied in this project in order to gather as as much qualitative information as possible: (1) on-line interviews of around 45 minutes were conducted with both headmasters of The English School and Escola Calderón de la Barca, (2) mixed on-line questionnaires delivered to both teaching teams, including 5 closed questions and 7 open questions, and (3) mixed on-line questionnaires delivered to the students of both schools, including 2 closed questions and 6 open questions. All the questions included in these instruments pretend to inquire about 7 key dimensions for the understanding of the educational situation in both centres: student and teacher well-being, children's rights, equality gaps, dining room scholarships, perceptions on distance learning, academic effects and socioemotional effects. It is important to remark that some of these dimensions weren't initially taken into account, although they appear in the process of data collection. Finally, mainly qualitative data

has been gathered. Due to some repeated answers, though, I decided to transform some of them into quantitative data which are significant to understand some contrasts on the perceptions of both teachers and students from the different centres.

4.3 ETHICAL CONDITIONS

This research guarantees the principle of autonomy and the ethical conditions required for the legality of the dissertation. Informed consent documents have been signed by the interviewed participants with no incentives nor compensation for their cooperation. Moreover, all the agents have been informed accurately about the aims of the study, which only answer to research and academic purposes. No fake data has been used during the process of analysis in order to achieve the expected results and all the information has been faithfully transcribed.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout this section, the results will be presented in relation to the objectives previously set. Furthermore, they will be contrasted with the theoretical framework in order to accomplish a more homogeneous vision of the study and give more accurate conclusions.

5.1 Objective 1: *To contextualise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Primary Education, placing the focus on childrens' rights and inequalities.*

To fulfil this first objective, headmasters and teachers were questioned about their perceptions on how several children's rights might have been threatened during the pandemic (such as the Right to education, the Right to play and recreation or even the Right to be heard). According to the results, most of the educational community that participated in the study (both in private and public centres) considered that these children's rights were not threatened during the pandemic. They affirm that the situation was extremely exceptional and the first right to prevail was protecting society as a whole. However, some of the participants (especially in the private centre) state that some of the measures seemed at times contradictory and were difficult to reasonably enforce and agree at 100% that the preventive measures should have been proposed in a fairer way for children. Surprisingly, this opinion is much more diversified in the public centre (see Figure 1), where students are exposed to wider equality gaps due to their sometimes low amount of resources. Furthermore, they all mostly agree that the measures implemented by the Government certainly affected childrens' well-being in a negative way as regards to their reflections on qualitative questions, especially to socioemotional factors. These negative effects mainly emerge from isolation, fear, uncertainty and routine break off. These perceptions match with the opinions that Imran, Zeshan and Pervaiz state in their article "Mental health considerations for children & adolescents in COVID-19 Pandemic" (2020), which were taken into account in the initial theoretical framework of this study.

“Do you think that these preventive measures could have been proposed in a fairer way for children?”

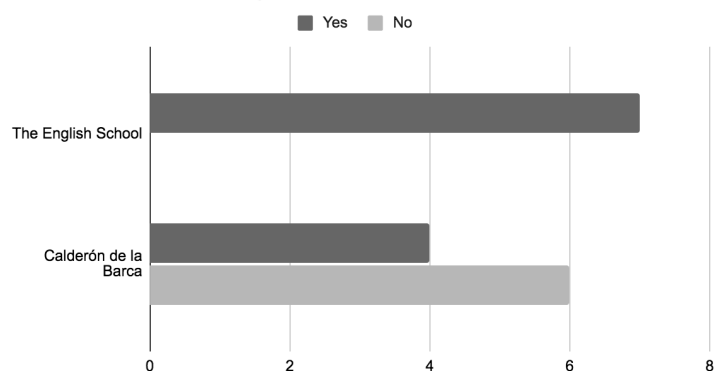


Figure 1. Perceptions on the measures and restrictions applied.

Concerning the inequalities related to the social and educational realities of students and teachers during the pandemic, drastic differences have been detected. The hypothesis of the strong distinctness between the resources and academic performance in relation to distance education for both collectives has been certainly confirmed. These inequalities span from academic consequences to social or emotional effects and economical and educational family resources. In the following graphic, teachers from both centres answer the following question: “Concerning your school context, have you been able to perceive strong inequalities between students when it comes to dealing with the period of distance education?”

Concerning your school context, have you been able to perceive strong inequalities between students when it comes to dealing with the period of distance education?

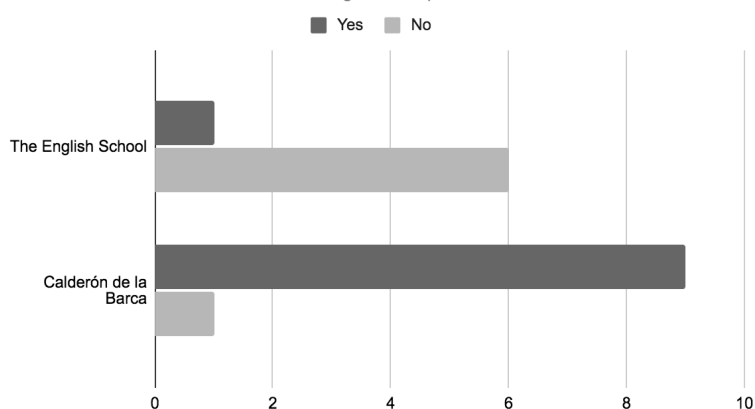


Figure 2. Inequalities perceived among students.

As seen in Figure 2, the public school has presented stronger inequalities than the private one. However, many statements of deep impact must be considered from both perspectives. On one hand, the private school community confirmed that almost no inequalities were detected among students, as far as they mostly belong to wealthy families endowed with digital and

personal resources. “The possible negative effects of non access to Wifi or no PC to work with were not apparent”, states a teacher from The English School. In fact, private school teachers’ perceptions on this matter are that they personally had a worse experience than their own students due to the lack of digital competence and excessive amount of work and stress. Additionally, families magnified this pressure among teachers by demanding strict routines and the same level of content transmission as in ordinary schooling. Apparently, the school had no chance but to accept these attitudes as parents pay high school quotes. “Cuando ya llevábamos un poco de rodaje, la comprensión desapareció. Ya exigían mucha organización, mucha rutina... a veces nos decían: “Ey! Que hoy habéis empezado a y 5!”.”¹, states Itziar González, headmaster of the English School.

On the other hand, the Calderón de la Barca teaching and management team had to centre their efforts in providing as much resources as they could in order to maintain a minimum of educational and social dignity for the students and their families. The diversity of situations in this context is extremely broad. “Teniem el que tenia un suport per a cadascú i famílies de 5 persones que amb un mòbil feien els deures tots. [...] I hi havia gent que senzillament va quedar desconnectada”², states the headmaster of Calderón de la Barca, Celestina Freixas. Most of the teaching team from this school points out that the main inequalities emerged from the lack of digital resources, however some of them also highlight the social means of families in order to support their children. Economic precariousness and poor living conditions are also huge barriers for effective home schooling. Furthermore, the closure of public resources such as libraries also had a great impact, as Aguilar comments in his article (2020). These factors clearly affected the capability of teachers to deal with new content during the long virtual schooling episode, having to centre their efforts in offering emotional support to not only their students, but also their families. As for the well-being of the family, it has a direct impact on the child’s well-being. “En aquest cas ens va tocar escoltar molt. I escoltar sense poder donar solucions és molt frustrant.”³

Apart from all these barriers for an optimal and fair educational scenario, Celestina Freixas highlights an issue that was not considered in the theoretical framework of this paper: dining

¹ Translation: “After some days of experience, comprehension disappeared. They demanded a lot of organisation, routine... sometimes they complained: “Hey! Today you started at 5’ past!”

² Translation: “Some had a support for each one, but there were families of 5 people who all did their homework with a single mobile phone. [...] There were people who simply got disconnected.”

³ Translation: “In this case we had to listen a lot. And listening without being able to give solutions is highly frustrating.”

scholarships. “Es va fer una marató per aconseguir unes beques menjador mitjançant unes targetes que no havien existit mai. Només aconseguir el suport de plàstic, ja va ser una marató. Imprimir-les, gestionar-ho amb un banc i que arribessin a les famílies va ser una altra marató.”⁴ The educational department and the schools' management and teaching teams had to coordinate themselves and get physically and emotionally involved in guaranteeing a minimum capital to cover primary needs such as providing food for a big number of families. After seeing this complex situation, it is not surprising that this centre stopped focusing on content transmission and curricular aims.

Before finishing this first block, I would also like to highlight some ideas about virtual schooling in which both teaching teams mostly coincide. Firstly, they agree on something that may seem quite obvious but that I consider of great importance, especially in the coming years: long-distance education should never replace face-to-face schooling (at least in early childhood and Primary Education). This pandemic has reminded us how important social links and affective bonds are when it comes to effective teaching. It has been demonstrated that classroom atmosphere and real experiences are definitely one of the most powerful tools for learning. Nevertheless, COVID-19 has also driven us to learn new technological tools faster and this is something positive that will remain in every sector of society. The capacity of adaptation that both schools showed during this journey has been extraordinary. Finally, teachers were asked about possible aspects to take into account for better curriculums after passing through this tough experience. The following graphic shows the results:

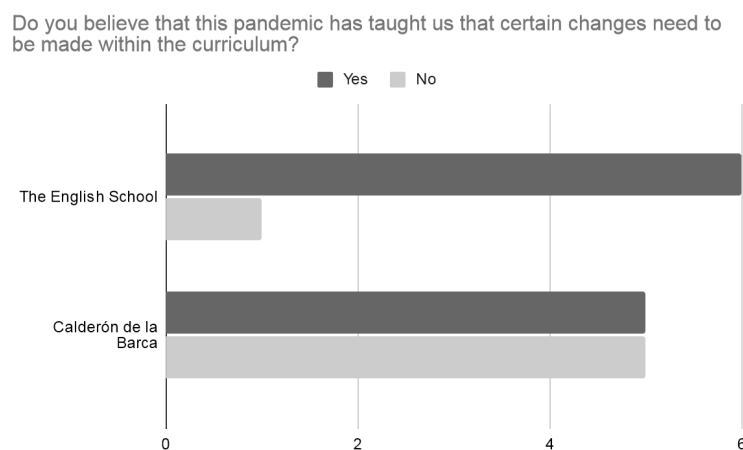


Figure 3. Need for curriculum change.

⁴ Translation: “A marathon was held to get dining scholarships using cards that had never existed before. Just getting the plastic support, it was already a marathon. Printing them, managing them with a bank and getting them to the families was another marathon.”

While the Calderón de la Barca teaching team has a diversified opinion on changing the curriculum, The English School one clearly considers it a good idea to rethink some aspects of it (only one teacher considers it unnecessary). Moreover, most teachers agree with the idea of reducing traditional methodologies and content in order to devote more time to experimentation and ethical and emotional education. “Teaching children to become disconnected from an online environment and to be able to discover their latent creative talents in hands-on activities” is the proposal of a teacher from The English School. Finally, teachers mostly demand deeper content in ICT resources.

5.2 Objective 2: To explore and compare teacher's perspectives regarding the effects of COVID-19 in a public school and a private school from Barcelona.

This second objective covers two fields of study. Teachers were asked about different agents that may affect their perception on how COVID-10 affected their students and teaching workflow. The focus has been placed in the academic effects and the socioemotional effects observed during the much long-awaited presential school return. After the data analysis, results show that the educational community is mainly concerned by this second factor. Regarding the academic effects, both schools coincide in observing a significant change in the school performance of students after the lockdown (86% & 80%). However, private school students seem to show these symptoms in a milder way and have had a faster recovery from those. The following graphic shows the perception of the impact of lockdown on students’ academic performance of both school teaching teams.

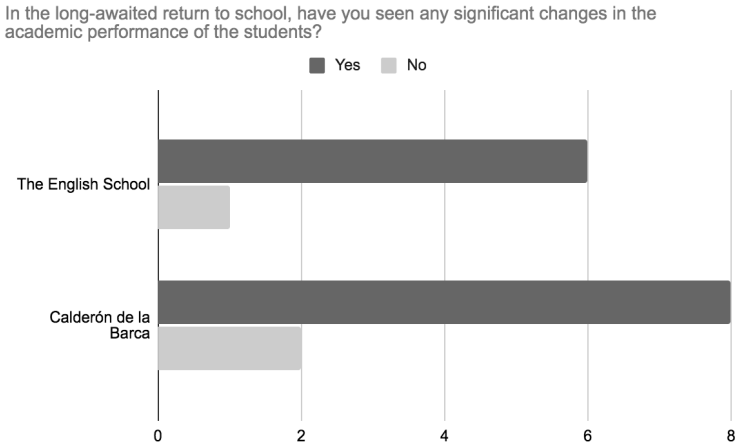


Figure 4. Academic effects on students.

The significant changes in the academic performance of students are also similar in both schools. They are mostly centred on attitudinal aspects which negatively affect their practice, such as lack of concentration and constancy, passivity, apathy, lack of routine... In the public school, some teachers have also perceived a considerable diminution in literacy and reading routines due to a higher exposure to screens. But there are also positive outcomes. Both schools affirm that students came back to school with higher knowledge on technology and ICT resources.

On the other hand, this study also explores the possible emotional and social effects on students after the lockdown. This is a major concern for teachers as it has a direct impact on academic performance too. Furthermore, some participants felt unsure and worried about the long-term consequences that this period could cause on the social skills of students. The following graphic shows the answers of both school participants when asked about these effects:

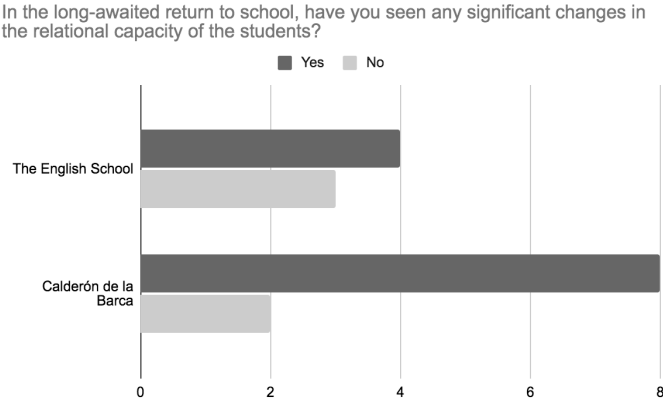


Figure 5. Emotional & social effects on students.

The need for socialisation has been latent among children from both schools. Teachers match opinions when stating that their students are more demanding towards their peers and tutors. However, individualism and isolation are also new and high preoccupations for teachers. Some of them highlight that they are generally more socially closed and their communication habits have changed. Moreover, few students have also shown a certain increase in shyness, using the mask as some sort of comfort zone in order to hide their emotions and avoid participation.

5.3 Objective 3: To discover how primary school students experienced the pandemic in their school lives, both in a public and a private school.

This last block gives voice to upper cycle and ESO students and tries to explore how they perceive the experience of lockdown related to their school lives. A total of 77 students participated in this questionnaire (38 from The English School and 39 from Calderón de la Barca). The data collected provides validity to the results gathered throughout the teachers' questionnaires. On one hand, when asked if they felt comfortable when taking distance classes, private school students agreed at 42%. On the other hand, public school students felt mostly uncomfortable when dealing with the long-distance schooling period at 51'25%. The following graphic shows the results of this inquiry:

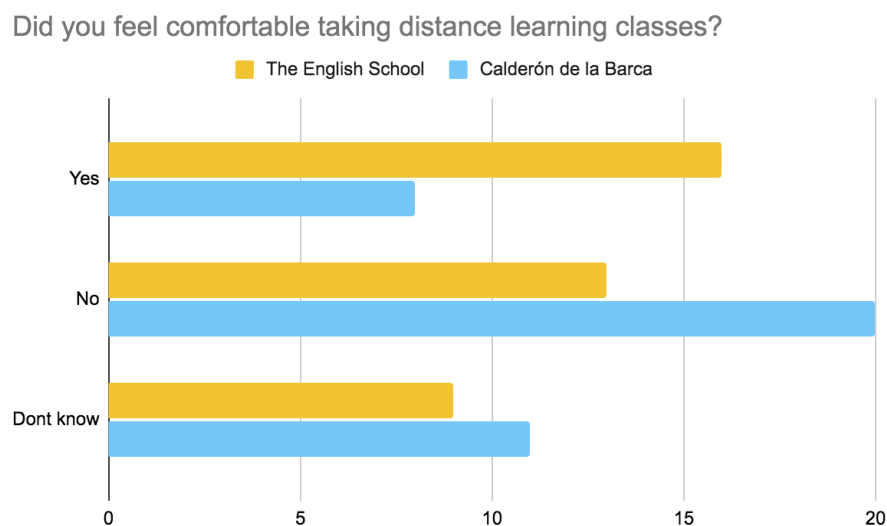


Figure 6. Distance learning perceptions.

As seen in this graphic, most students from The English School seem to have had a positive experience towards distance learning, while the ones from Calderón de la Barca clearly have not. This may be caused by the fact that only some of them enjoyed certain resources. Furthermore, concerning what they missed the most during lockdown, students from both schools match with the idea of lack of social interaction with their friends. In the question “What did you miss the most from school during lockdown?”, nearly 95% of the students from Calderón de la Barca mentioned the word “friends” or “mates”, while 76% did so in The English School. Similar numbers appeared when asked about what they liked the most about the return to attended lessons (77% and 81'5% respectively). These numbers clearly show

how important school atmosphere and socialisation are for children, no matter which their social context is.

On the other hand, differences emerged again when asked about what they liked the least about returning to school. In the case of Calderón de la Barca students, nearly 77% of the students mentioned words related to social distancing among peers, such as “mask” or “divided groups”. Around 15% pointed out the fact of having to wake up early or do more homework, which could be related to the laziness and apathy that some teachers observed. Moreover, 52,6% students from The English School mentioned aspects related to the efforts that require waking up earlier, going to the school or attending classes. Apparently, most of them missed the comfort they had at home. In fact, only 23 '6% had words towards the social distancing inside the school. These results show that private school students didn't need social interaction as much as the ones from the public centre, who mostly didn't have access to the necessary resources to communicate with their friends. Certainly, we can see here how differently the lockdown has affected each one of these communities, being public centre students the ones who most suffered when following class dynamics and keeping in touch with their mates.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has answered the research questions and covered the objectives that were settled since the very beginning. I have been able to know the perceptions of two communities that belong to very different social and educational contexts and draw conclusions throughout data analysis and comparison between the answers from both groups. Concerning the first aim, the study has been able to explore the wideness of the equality gap between these two centres. Public school students, families and teachers have been certainly more affected by the pandemic than the private school ones by many means. The second and third aims wanted to give voice and discover which were the perceptions of teachers and students in both contexts. A few general coincidences have been met, but the results mostly show that these collectives have been passing through very different experiences. Data details and results are commented above in detail. Furthermore, some limitations must be taken into account in this study.

Firstly, this essay has given voice to only two different educational centres. The opinion of such a small group of people is not enough to analyse the reality of the impact that COVID-19

has caused in education. However, bigger studies achieved similar results. Students' questionnaires have been answered by two slightly different age collectives: 6th of Primary in the case of Calderón de la Barca (as specifically asked) and ESO students in the case of The English School, who gave deeper and more reflexive answers. Nevertheless, I believe that the data and results obtained are significant enough to have a general idea of the unequal distribution of educational and social resources that society suffers. As educators, we need to find the way to reduce this gap as much as we can to live in a world driven by equality and justice.

Secondly, theoretical framework research has been mainly restricted to articles written from 2020 on. Since the case of study is something highly recent and it still keeps triggering changes in society, the scientific information is quite limited. Notwithstanding, thousands of opinion papers have been published around the world on a problem that has caused different effects depending on location. In this essay, I have centred my attention on the most meaningful and approachable context.

Finally, I would like to talk about further research within this field of study. The consequences of the pandemic have clearly had a negative short-term impact on students and teachers, as it has set a focus on many inequalities that must be attended to. However, the educational community has shown great capacities of overcoming such a tricky and unpredictable situation through flexibility and adaptation. This is something that we all must be proud of. Furthermore, the hidden mid-term and long-term consequences strongly worry the educational community. Undoubtedly, the path that we take in the following years will leave a footprint in the history of education.

5. REFERENCES

- Aguilar, S. (2020). Guidelines and tools for promoting digital equity. *Information And Learning Sciences*, 121(5/6), 285-299.
- Carbonell, J. (2018): *L'educació és política*. Barcelona. Octaedro.
- González Motos, S., & Bonal Sarro, X. (2020). La primera infància en temps de pandèmia: desigualtats educatives i reptes per a un futur immediat. *Guix D'infantil*, 106.
- Hernández Ortega, J., & Álvarez Herrero, J. (2021). Gestión educativa del confinamiento por COVID-19: percepción del docente en España. *Revista Española De Educación Comparada*.
- Institut Infància i Adolescència de Barcelona (2020). COVID-19 I INFÀNCIA A BARCELONA: Què ens diu la recerca social d'urgència sobre els impactes de la covid-19 en les vides i drets de la infància i l'adolescència? Quina resposta hi ha donat el govern de la ciutat? IIAB-IERMB - Ajuntament de Barcelona
- Imran N, Zeshan M, Pervaiz Z. Mental health considerations for children & adolescents in COVID-19 Pandemic. *Pak J Med Sci*. 2020;36 (COVID19-S4):COVID19-S67-S72.
- Linor L. Hadar , Oren Ergas , Bracha Alpert & Tamar Ariav (2020): Rethinking teacher education in a VUCA world: student teachers' social-emotional competencies during the Covid-19 crisis, *European Journal of Teacher Education*
- OCDE - Internacional de la Educación (2021), Principios para una recuperación educativa eficaz y equitativa, Internacional de la Educación, Bruselas.
- Tarabini A., Jacovkis, J. (2020), «Ensenyar o acompanyar? La tasca docent durant el confinament». *El Diari de l'Educació*, 16/06/2020.
- Tonkin, A., & Whitaker, J. (2021). Play and playfulness for health and wellbeing: A panacea for mitigating the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19), ELSEVIER, Stanmore College, Elm Park, Stanmore, Middlesex, HA7 1LR, England, UK

6. APPENDIX

Relation to SDG

This study is related to the following SDGs: (3) Good Health & Well-being, (4) Quality Education and (10) Reduced Inequalities. Even though this article is not focused on COVID-19 itself, SDG 3 is indirectly related as the cause of the problematic study is a disease that expanded to the point of locking down the entire population. Health and well-being are the reasons why all the preventive measures were applied, however some people struggled in many ways when going through these restrictions.

Secondly, the paper reflects on the 4th SDG “Quality Education” as it focuses on the educational outcomes that the pandemic has caused. It has been demonstrated that distance learning is no longer an option for children, as it does not follow their educational needs. Children need social interaction, building affective bonds and experimentation in order to learn meaningfully. Besides, lockdown has triggered a series of attitudes among students which appear to be quite negative, such as apathy, lack of concentration, individualism or laziness. In order to accomplish this point of the SDGs, we must bear in mind the importance of presence in schools and try to shorten the equity gaps that have been analysed in this essay.

Lastly, this article is also centred on the 11th SDG “Reduced Inequalities”. Many equality gaps have been explained during the theoretical framework and demonstrated through the data analysis and its results, such as the digital gap or the unequal distribution of resources and learning opportunities. It’s true that these inequalities go far beyond the educational system, but children are certainly one of the most vulnerable collectives that suffer from this unfair situation. Whatever our role is in society, we must give everything in our hands to guarantee the same opportunities for children.