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The Use of Time During COVID Confinement. Transformation in the Lives of Mexican Teachers

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis seriously impacted the Mexican education sector. Even though its effects cannot be calculated yet, worn out teachers are returning to classrooms after facing changes for which they were not trained and to which they had to react and adapt quickly during the long confinement. Some studies have pointed out time as a variable that ought to be highlighted. Fulfilling new job responsibilities while experiencing declines in quality of life, regardless of commuting time savings, certainly is at stake. In this paper we analyze teachers' perceptions concerning their tasks and time use during the lockdown. A systematic review of the literature (SRL) was conducted to assess: 1) differences in time devoted to teaching practice; 2) perceptions about the use and management of time; and 3) gender differences. The results of our study validate that time directly impacted teachers' productivity and well-being, females being the most affected.

Keywords: COVID pandemic, teaching, time management, gender.

1. Introduction

Three years have passed since the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus began and, surely for this reason, there is abundant literature validating many of the difficulties teachers have faced and the ways sought to solve highly complex situations all over the world. On the one hand, some

studies have shown that preexisting large social inequalities were amplified by the fact that very few schools were able to offer a complete virtual academic experience, among other reasons, due to lack of universal Internet access, low digital adoption among teachers, and a prevailing school culture far from the technical and pedagogical requirements needed for digital learning (Morgan, 2020). On the other hand, a considerable number of studies have focused on the perceptions of students and teachers regarding teaching and learning processes as well as experiences undergone during the long confinement, the use of digital tools, attrition and retention rates, and the advantages and disadvantages of remote education (Abbasi, et al., 2020; Casero Béjar y Sánchez Vera, 2022; Hernández Ortega y Álvarez-Herrero, 2021; Montenegro, et al., 2020; Syauqi et al., 2020).

However, time management was significantly transformed in this period as well as school performance, not only affecting the usual relationship among the two key actors of the education process, but also involving family members and those belonging to adjacent social circles of teachers and students. Interestingly, there are not that many research papers published focusing on its management and traits both in the duration of the working days as well as in the adjustment of schedules previously established for school and personal matters.

To address the impact of virtuality on the 'time' variable, two angles were considered helpful to assess other variables useful for a cross-sectional analysis to be carried out through a systematic review of the literature:

- a) Time, from a quantitative perspective, could be approached through indicators showing changes in the number of working hours, even though commuting time savings when working from home are well acknowledged. Indeed, teachers' working hours were spent in class preparation, training processes, providing individual attention to students, attending management and clerical matters, and communicating with school managers, among many other undertakings.
- b) Time, in its qualitative dimension, is also appraised through the loss of hours previously devoted to endeavors such as family care and coexistence, social activities, leisure and rest, which could be interpreted as difficulties for setting limits for balancing personal life and work.

These two angles allowed us to answer some of the questions guiding our study: Has time invested in teaching been affected and how? Did Mexican teachers' perceptions of their use of time changed during the pandemic? What gender differences arose out of time management and its effects on both female and male teachers?

Under those questions, we set out to analyze with a gender perspective teachers' perceptions regarding their practice and use of time once mobility restrictions were imposed by the COVID-19. Based on published literature, we set up two specific objectives: 1) to analyze the perception of teachers regarding time allocation to teaching and student advisory services, and its impact on the distribution of time devoted to other activities; and 2) to investigate teachers' perception regarding the quality of that time.

2. Transition to Virtuality

To alleviate some of the consequences arising from lockdowns in Mexico, multiple initiatives were put into practice, in addition to those directly focusing on teacher training both at the institutional and governmental levels. Some of them were aimed at improving infrastructure conditions – in many cases by providing equipment for remote work; others, to the expansion of Internet coverage and capacity; some others included free licensing for several online platforms and for developing digital resources while extensive television programming was launched only for basic education (Compañ, 2020; Schmelkes, 2020).

Indeed, new teaching practices were suddenly referred to as "Emergency Remote Education (ERE)" including different modes and diverse meanings. A good definition is provided by Hodges et al. (2020, s/p) when expressing that it is

... a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as blended or hybrid courses and that will return to that format once the crisis or emergency has abated.

There is no doubt that some actions effectively contributed to improve working conditions for some educational institutions when confronted to the initial challenges derived from the pandemic. Education professionals in Mexico, with greater or lesser efforts and resources, tried to continue – almost always from home— with their teaching endeavors. Pretty often they were also able to handle information, to work collaboratively with peers, and to communicate with colleagues and students, as well as with school authorities (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [INEGI], 2020). Nonetheless, a major concern prevailed regarding major learning losses since different studies have confirmed the gap widened while fears have escalated regarding the outcomes from social isolation and violent family environments.¹

Indeed, the impacts of such diverse initiatives in building and managing new educational realities were rapidly experienced by both teachers and students, just to mention the two most important actors in the teaching and learning processes. (Comisión Nacional para la Mejora Continua de la Educación [MEJOREDU], 2021; Miguel, 2020).

Other effects were also recorded in the transition from classroom-centered learning to what started to take place mostly at home. Improvised measures often ignored prevalent inequalities in digital literacy, various levels of acceptance and appropriation of technologies among teachers and students, yet they were also shown amid public and private institutions, different socioeconomic groups, geographic location, age groups, educational levels, and in many other variables.

In 2022, the educational crisis caused by the pandemic entered a new phase when Mexican authorities declared that schools should move from remote teaching to a new model with "hybrid" characteristics, sometimes meaning either blended learning or a model where students just alternate class attendance with remote sessions. In August 2021, the return to face-to-face education was decreed but not every school observed that mandate since varying conditions were

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¹ Numerous indicators of educational achievement denote that learning gap.

still faced in some settings, groups, and regions. Outcomes of that decree were expressed in intermittent physical attendance with greater or lesser intensity, according to class size, school infrastructure, virus contagion rates, its coexistence with other viruses, among other conditions.

3. Teaching practices in times of lockdown

It is in teaching practice where teaching and learning processes take place and where teachers and students participate and interact according to specific curricular objectives. Teaching practice takes on social and cultural significance and importance in schools, but its multiple relationships with environments, situations, and agents must also be acknowledged in some direct and indirect ways. Examples of these practices include contact with educational authorities, management activities, and experiences with parents, but also dealing with political and regulatory conditions. In this complex network of interactions different factors must be considered like social, curricular, school, and regional traditions and behaviors, as well as the selection, use and interpretation of resources to support education. They encompass the ground where teaching and learning processes are organized and carried out (Rockwell, 1995).

Teaching practices can be understood as institutionalized actions whose existence are prior to the moment in which teachers undertake the commitment in front of a group. The concept of teaching practice also encompasses other dimensions: the global institutional practice and its undeniable links with teachers' social practices (De Llela, 1999). That is, teaching actions transcend the classroom and expand to other living spaces beyond those where interaction with students takes place. It is also understood as a highly complex social practice (Angulo, 1994; Contreras, 1994; Carr, 1993; Schön, 1997), supported by diverse perspectives from which we derive some characteristics related to uses, traditions, techniques and dominant values in a given educational setting, and in a specific historical moment (Sacristán, 1998; Sacristán y Pérez, 1998; Furlán y Remedi, 1981; Ezpeleta, 1989).

Obviously, this set of definitions and concepts was inevitably disrupted when the Mexican government decreed the COVID health contingency in March 2020. The official instruction was phrased as "Stay at home", and it meant that physical spaces inhabited by teachers had to endure serious transformations. While the acceptance and use of personal technological devices, often shared among family members, reported a significant increase, time availability also underwent serious variations to accommodate new teaching activities to be carried out at home.

Indeed, teachers faced situations they were not prepared for, even though there was a considerable deployment of programs focusing on the use of platforms and other tools that would facilitate their task, in addition to bio-psycho-social health courses, practices with innovative teaching strategies, and some other initiatives. Despite these efforts, social inequalities deepened since very few schools were capable to offer a complete virtual academic experience whose students owned personal electronic devices, teachers knew how to design functional online lessons, and a culture embracing digital learning (Morgan, 2020). Several authors revealed great imbalances in the implementation and management of these new educational realities just as clearly as some others showed preexisting inequalities in technology acceptance and appropriation, public and private

schools, age groups, sex, urban/rural region, educational level, among other factors (Compañ, 2020; Schmelkes, 2020).

In schools where teachers routinely use technology in the classroom, it was witnessed that they only replicate traditional practices (Coll, 2011). Therefore, innovation in teaching practices during the long COVID lockdown was repeatedly absent in Mexican educational systems, both public and private. Moreover, support from different institutional areas was also conceived from traditional schemes; some examples cite licensing processes to "teach a course" and technical training methods to use specific software and applications such as platforms and videoconferences (Miguel, 2020). Discrepancies obviously arose between those with skills and autonomy in digital technologies and those with limited or no experience at all, given that courses were designed for face-to-face modes. UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), the largest Mexican higher education institution, is a good example of a university where only half of its professors had previous experience in distance education (Sánchez, 2021). From this example, one can draw conclusions for basic and upper secondary education where the percentage estimated is lower.

4. Time and teaching practice

It has already been said that teachers had to face multiple difficulties as has been widely studied in recent literature. Published research frequently explores the use and appropriation of digital technologies, stress at work, depression, excessive workloads, increased working hours (and schedules) and blurring boundaries between private and professional spaces.

Indeed, available literature covers these issues from a wide range of perspectives. Their findings involve adaptation strategies and problems that, though highly localized and thus not widely applicable, estimate a third of the teaching staff faced difficulties, so it must be accepted that a significant segment of the teaching population went through them. All school environments and social groups had to make changes in their daily dynamics, ranging from restrictions imposed top down to consensual decision making; the education sector was clearly no exception.

Evidently, this problem is crossed by the variable time: the increase in hours dedicated to working and care activities, work schedules in periods previously dedicated to home and caring responsibilities, intermittency of intervals to advise students, among others. Time management has been a recurring factor in professors' opinions about their job situation and working conditions in various published research papers during the pandemic stage. In a meta synthesis study of narratives during the pandemic, Escudero-Nahón (2021) points out the inability of people to manage time and to organize themselves according to the principles of teleworking.

In other study carried out at UNAM, it was found that more than 80% of high school and undergraduate teachers declared an increase in working time dedicated to their teaching activities (Sánchez, 2021). In other Mexican public University (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, BUAP), working conditions most affected during the pandemic were the amount of time worked, its organization and workloads, along with time devoted to material and technical resources, coupled with efforts to adapt to institutional policies (Jiménez et al., 2021).

It has already been mentioned that teachers were not prepared for these changes; despite guidelines, recommendations and strategies adopted by educational institutions, improvisation played a central role. It is also common to point out that these changes have generated effects of all kinds on educational actors, from students to teachers and education administrators. Nowadays, while returning to face-to-face, blended or hybrid activities, time has been observed to keep on playing a decisive role, so it is imperative to include it in the design of innovative programs for these new realities that already seem weary and show delays in students' learning.

5. Methodology

For this paper we conducted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as proposed by Kitchenham (2004), along with contributions from Okoli (2015) and Linnenluecke et al. (2020). Based on these works, a search and analysis protocol were built to answer the following questions: 1) During the COVID-19 lockdown, how was the time devoted to teaching practices affected? 2) What were teachers' perceptions of their use of time during the pandemic? 3) Were there any differences in time management and in its impacts among teachers? Figure 1 indicates the four steps followed to carry SLR.

Planning

Draft protocole

Apply practical screen

Selection

Search for literature

Extract data

Extraction

Appraise quality

Synthetize studies

Analysis and synthesis

Execution

Write the review

Presentation of results

Figure 1. Steps for the Systematic Literature Review

Note: Adapted from Okoli (2015) and Linnenluecke, et al. (2020).

5.1. Search strategies

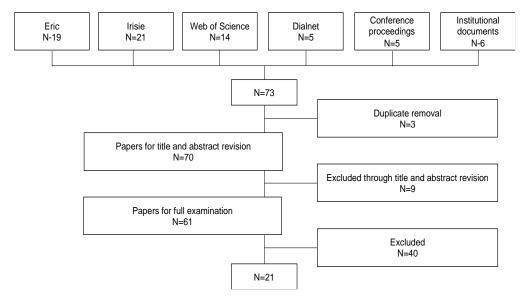
The search step was carried out electronically from digital academic repositories. The following descriptors were used in both, Spanish and English:

- Time* (times)
- Workload* (workloads)
- Hour* (Hours, hourly dedication)
- Teach* (Teacher, teachers, teaching)
- Professor* (Professors, professorship)
- Pandemia (confinement, lockdown, remote education, COVID-19)

Search strategies were conducted online with digital databases as well as other literature sources, under three criteria: 1) documents published in the last two years; 2) papers and studies

fully available; and 3) referenced to Mexico. With these criteria, 73 texts were initially found; in the appraisal step we found similarities which led us to fully analyze 21 documents related to the questions previously established. Figure 2 show documents found, their sources and consulted repositories:

Figure 2. Documents found



5.2. Quality appraisal

Although only 73 texts were found meeting the criteria, it was possible to identify similarities, but no literature was located involving the way in which teachers managed time; it was frequently associated to other variables such as work stress, routine disorders, work—life imbalance, anxiety, and work overloads.

To assess the quality of those selected studies we looked at their methodological approaches. It was found that more than half of those papers (52%) were described as quantitative (mostly based on non-probabilistic surveys); while the remaining ones fell quite uniformly in four groups: a mix approach (2 out of 5 papers applied a questionnaire and interviews; one designed a questionnaire and a seminar; another one used a questionnaire with open and closed questions), and there were those which included a qualitative approach (one with focal groups, another with testimonies, one more developed an open questionnaire, another one used interviews, and the last one stated a "non-classical production").

Another relevant aspect is that of the 21 documents selected, 14 referred to higher education, 2 included all educational levels, and only one to secondary education, another one to rural education, one more to basic education, and 2 did not specify. These differences, in which studies referring to higher education are predominant (67%), reveal that COVID-related research projects have been mostly developed for this level, thus showing that academics found it easier to access their immediate work environments, highlighting the need for further studies on lower educational levels.

Another way to appraise information was through its closeness or approximation to our research questions. By doing so we found 17 papers related to the same question (How was the time spent in teaching practices affected during the COVID-19 lockdown?); 13 papers referring to the second question (What were teachers' perceptions of their use of time (paid vs. unpaid) during the pandemic compared to those in previous days?); and only 5 documents somehow dealing with the third question (Were there any differences in time management and in its impacts among teachers?). Obviously, some texts exhibited results answering more than one question, which explains why the sum of this classification exceeds the total of the 21 selected texts.

5.3. Literature analysis

To analyze the content of the 21 selected articles, the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014) was structured as a cyclical process in which 3 stages interact:

- a) Data condensation: using a qualitative analysis matrix the most relevant material was retrieved, data fragments (called "units of meaning") were gathered to summarize resulting information.
- b) Data visualization: for data coupling, a system of predetermined categories was built according to our research questions, and some subcategories emerged from the information collected.
- c) Structuring and verification of conclusions: the results and conclusions were elaborated through a narrative synthesis for each of the analytic categories constructed in the previous stage.

5.4. Data Visualization.

To systematize the findings, three predetermined categories were constructed based on the research questions, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Information categories

Research question	Category	
How has time spent in teaching practices been affected	Differences in time spent	
during the COVID-19 lockdown, compared to previous	in teaching practices	
periods?		
What are teachers' perceptions of the use of time (paid	Perceptions about time use	
versus unpaid) during the COVID-19 confinement stage in		
comparison to previous periods?		
What differences are there in time management and in	Differences in time	
teachers' bearings during remote education and of what	management and bearings	
kind were those demeanors?	among teachers	

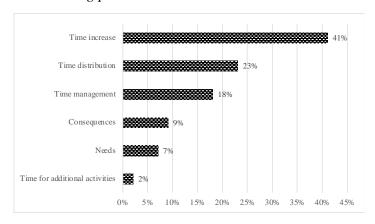
Subsequently, from the analysis of the information collected, units of meaning (UM) were codified through statements expressing a complete idea. These units were grouped into emergent subcategories that were structured according to the semantic relationships, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: System of categories, subcategories, and units of meaning

Category	Subcategory	UM	%
%Time spent on teaching practices	Increase of time	18	41 %
	Time allocation	10	23 %
	Time management	8	18 %
	Consequences	4	9 %
	Needs	3	7 %
	Time for additional activities	1	2 %
Perceptions about the use of time	Work overload	12	29 %
	Feelings	12	29 %
	Advantages	6	15 %
	Public and private space	4	10 %
	Tome managemente	3	7 %
	Difficulty	2	5 %
	Retos	2	5 %
Diferencias en el	Academic work and teaching	8	32 %
manejo del tiempo	Consequences	8	32 %
entre profesoras y	Domestic chores & care work	7	28 %
profesores	Extension of working day	2	8 %

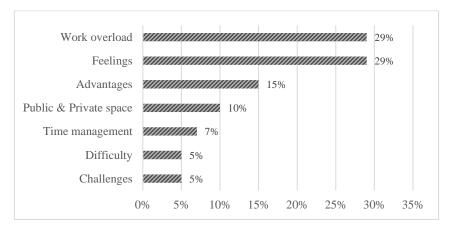
Graphical representations of this data are revealing. Regarding the question about the time invested in teaching practices, its increase in both quantity and quality is evident: 41% of the studies reveal an increase in the workload in terms of hours invested, while 23% refer to the distribution of time and 18% to its management or organization.

Figure 3. *Time spent on teaching practices*



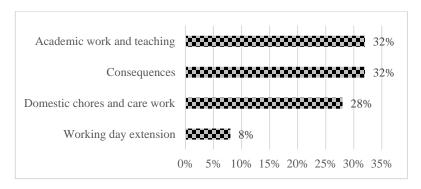
As for teachers' perceptions, those that refer to feelings generated by their use of time, as well as work overload, stand out, both with 29%.

Figure 4. Perceptions about time use



Finally, and despite we sought to carry out an analysis with a gender perspective, few studies made explicit reference to different ways of time management between male and female teachers. Even so, it is revealing that those papers are concentrated in only four subcategories, with the extension of the working day being the least mentioned, as indicated in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Differences in time management between male and female teachers



6. Structuring of results

This section results from qualitative analysis are presented, according to our research questions from which three categories were derived.

6.1. Category A. Time spent in teaching practice

Workload was considered the most affected factor during confinement (Jiménez et al., 2021; Juárez-Díaz y Perales, 2021; Astudillo y Chávez, 2021; Ocampo y Cuéllar, 2022; Sánchez, 2021). Teachers interviewed in these studies reported time invested in teaching at least doubled, as the main health contingency impact (Lozano y Rafael, 2021; Lozano y Paparisteldi, 2021). They also mentioned course and lecture planning, among many other activities carried out in addition to teaching; those arising from educational managerial authorities like filling out formats and reports; individual and group evaluation and interaction with students (Janssen y Herman, 2020; Lozano y Rafael, 2021; Zapata Garibay et al., 2021; Juárez-Díaz y Perales, 2021; Sánchez, 2021; Jiménez et al., 2021; Silas y Vázquez, 2020) and sometimes with tutors and parents, too.

Secondly, the consequences of excessive work time stand out: chronic exhaustion due to overwork, stress, and deterioration of work-life balance. On this last point, teachers declared difficulties in reconciling time devoted to domestic and care responsibilities, postponing time previously allocated to relax, leisure and enjoyment due to extended working hours, and invasion of privacy (Silas y Vázquez, 2020; Cabrero et al., 2021).

Additionally, in terms of time management, they declared poor organization of time in which they lost the possibility of self-organizing their schedules (Olguín, 2020; Didou, 2020; Hernández, 2022). However, some teachers found advantages in considering their time turned out to be more flexible to look after personal and professional matters (Ocampo y Cuéllar, 2022).

Finally, they expressed training needs to improve organization and to take advantage of the potential of digital technologies which may shorten times (Said-Hung et al., 2021; Giovanella et al., 2020).

6.2. Category B. Perceptions of time use

Analogous to the previous category, perceptions focused mainly on work overload: teachers spent more hours of extra-classroom work (Padilla et al., 2021; Silas y Vázquez, 2020), perceived insufficient time to redesign pedagogical strategies, and in some cases declared their number of working hours tripled. In addition, they expressed their feelings were generally associated to negative emotional states such as tiredness, saturation, stress, overwhelm, abandonment, frustration, anger, and uncertainty (Miguel, 2020; Zapata-Garibay, 2021; Juárez-Díaz y Perales, 2021; Lozano y Paparisteldi, 2021). In some cases, just a few, joy and confidence were reported (Silas y Vázquez, 2020). Others reported lack of balance or control between teaching time and household chores, causing them dismay (Hinojosa et al., 2021; Didou, 2020; Zapata-Garibay et al., 2021). Some others indicated reduced autonomy –in terms of flexibility– to organize their work activities' schedules and expressed doubts about covering their whole syllabus (Hinojosa et al., 2021; Lozano y Rafael, 2021).

Nonetheless, some advantages were also acknowledged, like developing digital skills, designing didactic strategies according to virtual contexts; there were also a few related to organization as well as time and money savings from not commuting to work (Miguel, 2020; Silas y Vázquez, 2020). Finally, other informants recognized challenges arising from pandemic conditions such as common didactic processes and actions which, if addressed collaboratively, would facilitate a more efficient time management (Sánchez, 2021).

6.3. Category C. Differences in time management between male and female teachers.

Significant differences were found between both sexes in terms of time spent on domestic and care tasks (DCT) when compared to that allocated to academic and teaching work. Household chores concentrate more hours and are less equally distributed by sex-gender than care work (Hernández, 2022). The few studies found in this category agree that time spent on these tasks among women almost doubled, which widened the DCT gendered gap (Benavides et al., 2021). Similarly, regarding professional tasks, differences were found between men and women, the latter being the ones who dedicate more time. Although teaching hours are similar in both sexes, women were

more sensitive to issues related to the learning transmitted and acquired as well as to students' quality of life, so that activities related to interactions with students, evaluations and preparation of classes implied more hours for them than for men (Benavides et al., 2021; Didou, 2020; Hinojosa, et al., 2021).

The consequences for women when compared to those of men are, among others, higher technostress and depression, lower work-life balance, and higher dissatisfaction (Zapata-Garibay et al., 2021; Hinojosa et al., 2021).

7. Conclusions

Although there was not abundant literature with clear reference to time as a research variable, the documents found profusely explore the consequences of the transition from face-to-face academic activities to those put in practice during the lockdown. However, we also found research papers marginally referring to time in one or two items of questionnaires designed for surveys. On the one hand, and from an academic point of view, the lack of attention to time, its management and implications is notorious since it certainly is a key variable in studies regarding teaching practices, especially in times of confinement. On the other hand, from the very practice itself, the question regarding whether this variable should be considered as a factor to be assessed in the educational scenarios being constructed once children and students return to classrooms, will inevitably require adjustments and transformations.

Based on what has been published with respect to time and its effects, it is worth to mention that three possible sources of bias could limit or distort the understanding of the global panorama of the phenomenon being analyzed. First, as noted before, one third (67%) of studies refer to higher education, which considerably limits the analysis of the Mexican education sector, leaving basic, upper secondary and teachers' formal education at a clear disadvantage, in which apparently there has not been enough research, regardless its importance in general terms, and in relation to higher education. This shortcoming inhibits the appraisal of the whole picture since conditions of greater inequalities and thus greater difficulties were experienced in these levels, preventing teachers and schools to implement new educational dynamics during the pandemic lockdown.

Secondly, half of the consulted studies (52%) were carried out with quantitative methodologies, using the survey techniques, and not always indicating whether they were designed probabilistically, derived from a representative sample or if they only used a questionnaire to interview some teachers selected randomly. Hence, we presume their findings refer exclusively to representations of surveyed people and cannot be expanded to whole groups or populations.

Thirdly, only one fourth of the papers considered for our study were conducted from a gender perspective, addressing the differences between male and female teachers, despite significant contrasts between both sexes.

This study presented findings that allowed us to identify repetitions in the data for each category. Briefly, a) the increase in the number of hours devoted to work, perceived as an overload; and b) the invasion of private space and poor distribution of time to look after professional activities,

domestic chores, care work, relaxation, and leisure. In addition, negative emotional states are disturbing teachers' lives frequently.

Today, nearly three years after the outbreak of the health – and education – crisis, it is appropriate to question how this problem will be managed given that most schools have already returned to the (poorly) called "new normal life" through different schemes:

- a) Hybrid classes (a sort of blended learning) where teachers, in addition to the hours dedicated to face-to-face classroom practice, must develop materials and make them available to their students for work at home;
- b) Small groups, in which teachers are working with half or just a part of the class and later repeat the whole experience with the rest of the group; and,
- c) Some subjects are taught face-to-face and others virtually, which lead to the struggle for equal working conditions for both groups of teachers if they are assigned exclusively to a single modality.

During the lockdown, several proposals emerged from different educational actors that included those schemes. However, there is strong evidence indicating that the return to educational realities prior to the pandemic will not be accomplished in the short run. Even if no transformations are carried out in the teaching modes and educational models where time management intervenes, the learning gap caused by two years of not attending a classroom and not having implemented a strong distance model will require teachers to dedicate more time, in addition to the one already stipulated in their class schedules. Even if they were kept unchanged, attention to individual cases, planning, evaluation and implementation of compensatory strategies will demand a significant investment of time from teachers.

Although it's still early to present final conclusions about the changes school dynamics will go through in the future. Given that the return to face-to-face learning no longer has a turning back, it does not seem untimely to venture that the challenge of reducing backwardness and inequality – amplified in the last two years— will undoubtedly mean an increase in the workload of teachers. Moreover, with female teachers being the most affected, it is foreseeable that the gaps will not only remain but rather they will be expanded.

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