Emergencies in Higher Education Reflections on Equity and Educommunication

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Abstract

This situated and contextualized approach to institutions and the higher education sector beyond the indicators of access, permanence and graduation, is part of the study Mediations from educommunication, towards a culture of equity: languages and narratives in the context of higher education of the Tecnológico de Antioquia, University Institutionwhich reflects on the characterization of communicative processes as a necessity to look head-on at the place of subjects in terms of equity and inclusion and recognize participation, democratization and dialogicity as alternative possibilities towards empowerment and the construction of meanings in education.

Keywords: *educommunication, equity, inclusion, higher education.*

Introduction

To understand educational gaps as the emptiness and distancing of human groups from knowledge, from the capacity to make decisions about their own life and educational projects, from autonomy or access: separated from these possibilities by what is meant by the rupture of the shores created from the spheres of economic power over education to result in impoverishment, This is what the World Bank states in its report as follows:(2021)

(...) These losses are not the same for all sectors, but mainly affect the bottom quintile on the income scale, which the report says could have widened the already high socio-economic gap in educational outcomes by an additional 12 per cent (para. 9).

The impact of this global milestone caused by Covid-19 has been mitigated from educational environments through connection strategies and with an adaptation to the possibilities offered by ICTs, according to the realities of the communities. However, this paradigm of connectivity also highlighted the contextual, communicative, environmental and relational barriers of the subjects, beyond the limitations in educational tools, media and infrastructure.

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In this case, considering education as a right, based on international declarations and the regulations of each of the Latin American countries, it is based on the general processes of analysis such as access, curricular structures, institutional pedagogical models, however, it is vital to expand the purpose of unveiling the relational and dialogic factors with the subjects. that they can contribute beyond the criteria that are weighted such as quality in education, permanence, graduation; and stimulate an active link such as dialogicity, participation and democratization in the context of higher education, and which will be developed in this chapter from the notion of educommunication as a category of analysis and basis for reflection.

This section proposes an approach to educational realities in university contexts with priority populations, posing new ethical, political and communicative challenges in action, interaction, mediations, languages and narratives aimed at strengthening equity as an axis category, from the perspective of the dimension of educational justice.

Echoes of inequalities, resonances in higher education

Latin America is a territory of diversity, with young independences, but with deep and permanent struggles of nations historically subjected to "conquests"; with segregated and expanded communities in the peripheries and their subjectivities, cosmogonies, identities as dissimilar as the landscape of its geography itself. It has dealt with the historical wounds of colonization in terms of inequalities, exclusion, discrimination, impoverishment, as well as its vast social and cultural configurations.

Adhering to this debt, it poses a challenge, to narrate it beyond oppression and inequality, which seems naturally unified in a homogeneous view of the region due to the visible similarities, however, its disparities make it abysmally complex and powerful like no other area of the world. Castro-Gómez states that "this 'Latin American authenticity', confronted with the processes of modernization, seeks to ask about the way in which these have been culturally assimilated in our environment, and about the type of hybrid identities generated in the process" (p. 54). (2011)From the geopolitical perspective of Latin America, one could reflect on the systematic crisis that has penetrated deeply from the colonial legacies and the uprooting introduced in all spheres. precariousness of the region can tend to traps that do not allow for one's own approach, and continuity to the Eurocentric vision where the south of the world is ranked from modern lenses to configure what they have framed as territories of inequalities by all accounts.

In what Dussel (2015, p. 81) has called South-South dialogues, the need to establish interaction between "other" agendas detached from those hegemonic and dominant is raised, transcending the general idea of Latin America's limitations, as a terrain that can be slippery if it is considered the only starting point to argue the need to rethink one's own priorities. as in this case education from the categories of equity and inclusion, as an argument that starts from Enrique Dussel's philosophy of liberation, refuting the imposition of modernity and with it the perspective of what has been measured in the same yardstick of the North.

It has been part of the horizon and the path traced in the continent, an education in trinomial with the banners of the State-Church and hand in hand with its lessons and prayers, perpetuating what is considered normal, normative, civilized and moral in the discourses and curricula, the same ones that for years excluded the different and the other. This political hegemony of education is elucidated as a risk factor since it has been in force and in symbiosis rooted in the educational project during the last decades without achieving greater practical advances in the insertion, permanence, recognition and participation of other subjects, which continues to be a utopian effort.

Macropolitical agendas have appropriated inclusion and equity as an urgency, the millennium goal, the development goal, among others, to their discourses over the years, as they put it De Sousa "(2011)The growing world inequality, of course! Because there is

a growth of inequality in the world; But if these gentlemen are so worried, why don't they fund the solutions themselves?" (p. 12).

Thus, the question arises as to who finances inequalities as a consequence of the economic and political system and who insists on establishing a global agenda in the field of education, with the implication of confronting the gaze and discourse of inclusion, in order to recognize it within the framework of what system or structure? What do we want to include subjects in education in the modern narrative of the classroom? school, training for working life? It is therefore necessary to walk along the paths of equity and justice of one's own, looking inwards, as Dussel proposes in an introspicĕre.

Therefore, more than a territorial reading of the region, it is the possibility of situating oneself in a framework of diverse realities as the breeding ground for the systemic outbreak of inequality, but also as a resonance to identify how education anchors, configures it, conditions it or drives it.

Why is it important to think about equity discourses in higher education contexts in Latin America, at a time of global crisis?

Linking the global trajectory in the exercise of researching equity in nations, with the current scenario that contextualizes Latin America, it is a priority to recognize the findings and results of inequalities, even more so, considering the historical aggravation of the health emergency and what this impacts on education.

In the publication, Pedró relates in the university context the severity of the crisis and the gradual, even long-term impact that could be inflicted on the populations that are referred to as being at higher risk and that refers to it from the retention and persistence rates, emphasizing women, the population of low socioeconomic levels, ethnic groups, with disabilities "In the case of vulnerable groups, the sacrifices and trade-offs required to achieve enrolment in tertiary education initially may not be sustainable after the personal and financial shocks that the pandemic is causing." (p.31).(2021)

Even today, the figures are of the disastrous, the shortcomings, the gaps and barriers, and do not powerfully narrate the achievements and capabilities of what has been championed worldwide by the discourse of inclusion in education, Pedró also addresses in the report other factors associated with these population groups in the framework of the aftermath of the pandemic:(2021)

Students who risked leaving home initially, who are unable to remain academically active or are falling behind their better-connected classmates, or who were employed at or near school and have had to take on new jobs in new places, all of them will find it difficult to uproot once again and return to school. (p.31).

In this case, and if these narratives had depth in culture, politics and educational practices, we would be exalting as normal young people from ethnic groups, with diverse identities or those who have a disability in experiences, achievements or transits through research, academic empowerment, as political actors that influence the educational system or that lead educational scenarios. their questions and initiatives transformed into functional public policies, all this beyond being represented in figures of access, permanence or graduation.

Therefore, although the figures paint a clear picture, which drives, demands and guides the global agenda, the network of the unmeasurable, the unsaid and what still needs to be transformed in the cultural sphere and which has not been achieved persists in inequality.

The panorama in Colombia and the reproductions of the inequalities that result in educational segregation are the subject of analysis by Fergusson and Flórez, who propose it as a system of inequality, especially political: (2021)

This failure of our political system reflects, among other problems, the predominance of clientelistic exchanges as a way of doing politics, which erodes state capacities, including that of providing quality public education to broad sectors of the population. (p. 101).

The segregation that places it in social classes, García and Fergusson call it (2021)Educational apartheid making the distinction between economic access and the decision to access private institutions and the only possibility of accessing public institutions for those who are more impoverished, public education that associates low quality by its indicators, as follows:

Instead of helping to reduce class gaps, the education system reproduces them. Not only does this violate the constitutional principle of equal opportunities, but it also entails a loss of human capital for the economy and society, since a large part of the population sees its possibilities for social advancement, creativity and production frustrated. (p. 131)

García and Fergusson map how students inherit inequities and their subsequent consequences in terms of progress in secondary education and their possibility of access to higher education.(2021)

Zoom on educommunicative mediations: the power of languages against the backdrop of democratization

Despite the rhetoric and thanks to it, the education system must be continuously rethinking, going one step further than the attention or recognition of diversity, to deal with its interactions and other mediations.

The crisis derived from the Covid-19 pandemic reoriented, worldwide, educational systems towards emerging, diverse, alternative and conditioned communicative dynamics in the face of the possibilities of access of population groups from their realities and contexts. This not only limited the interaction in the educational act mediated by the screens, it was also permeated, until now, by unfavorable economic and social determinants that were quickly fed by the crisis and highlighted educational inequalities, related to impoverishment, problems associated with culture, socio-affective, emotional, family, etc. gender, vulnerabilities, environment, among others.

In the specific case of higher education, the pandemic has been a breeding ground for other mediation processes, and training to which teachers have been limited by the screens of technological devices, excluding the necessary human contact that must exist in training and mediation processes. Likewise, from an institutional perspective, the different problems in terms of resources, means, pedagogical/didactic proposals and the management system, which were not previously visible in person, have been revealed. In the report Let's act now to protect our children's human capital (2021), the World Bank states:

Before the pandemic, only 19 percent of higher education programs in the region were delivered virtually, and 16 percent used hybrid modalities. The limited recurrence of virtual teaching in higher education has created a situation where only one in four teachers feel prepared to fully adopt digital tools in their classrooms (p. 47).

Similarly, the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean [IESALC], in its most recent study COVID-19 and Higher Education: From Immediate Effects to the Day After. Impact analysis, policy responses and recommendations (Giannini, 2020), analyses the current situation of young people in education and is a key reference for emerging policies and decision-making.

The percentage of households with an internet connection shows the low connectivity in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, which, respectively, barely reaches 17% and 45% respectively. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, this is as much as saying that only one in two households is connected (p.20).

However, and recognizing the complexities of the education system, the structural rigidity and the fragility of being without the classroom, it is from the actors of the academic environment that education must continue to be reinvented according to realities, as a kind of ethnographers of practice. Social professionals, educators and teachers are key and vital subjects in whom there is hope to resume the processes from other angles. This entails challenges such as accompanying the population at risk, anticipating the aftermath of the crisis, projecting actions, impact and new possible methodologies, looking for the inputs and communicative resources that can make a difference in the ability to establish bridges, to approach the story of each young person who is going through some social risk.

It has been revealed that educational and institutional actors require not only new languages, but also differential pedagogical and communicative mediations, which once again welcome, name, recognize, and include those subjects who have been excluded in the process. Although the World Bank warns that barriers to access to ICTs, related to socioeconomic status, geography, ethnic group, age, gender and disability, must be addressed (p. 14), the perspective of the tool would have to be overcome, since countries, despite their efforts, would not be able to nuance this need. Therefore, it is the mediations that go beyond the tool, giving a new meaning to the current educational dynamics. (2021)

Figure 1. Measures for students at risk of exclusion from distance education in LAC. In original Spanish language
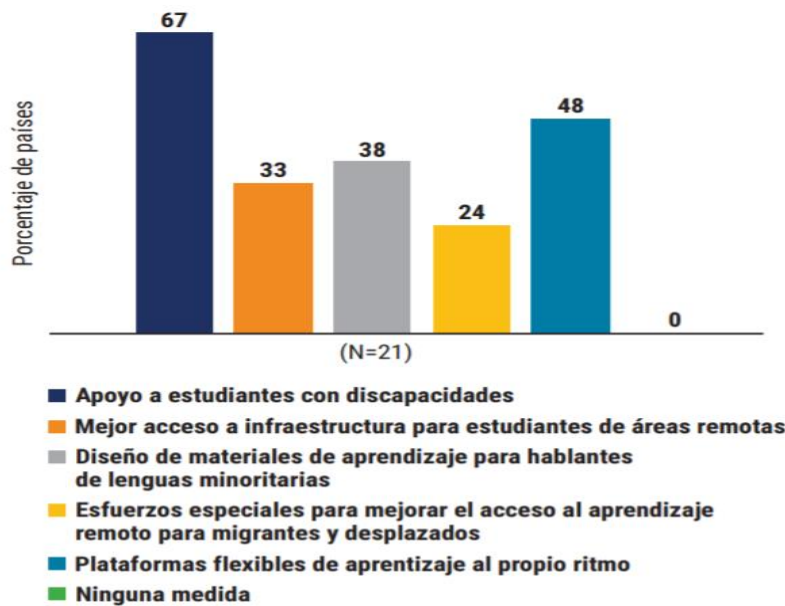
Note. Taken from Measures for Students at Risk of Exclusion from Distance Education, by World Bank (2021, p. 52).

Therefore, this research proposes mediations, which transcend the media and ICTs and interlocution between the actors of education to create different places for the subjects of the institutions, the administrators, teachers, students, thus seeking to resignify the relationship, the media, the channels, scenarios, languages and discourses in the face of otherness.

From there, educommunication as a trend and category of analysis is proposed as an environment for interaction that creates two-way and horizontal bridges, not only because it reflects on the roles of power in educational scenarios, but also because it determines actions in the face of empowerment, the right to participation and is an input to build alternatives for equity from the realities of the context.

A research experience that pursues the opportunity to dislocate oneself in educational practice between opacities and spotlights, to give light and shine to what is urgent, necessary and emerging: Otherness, Vulnerabilities, Differences, Education, Equity, pluralities... Keywords that, as coordinates, are inscribed in the roadmap towards small chimeras that inspire transformation, which, in real terms, here and now, mix felt communication with education situated and contextualized in favor of otherness.

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