



The importance of mental health in the face of the challenges of education

La importancia de la salud mental frente a los retos de la educación

Gabriela Geovanna Guevara Enríquez

Magister in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Universidad de Guayaquil,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0375-0758>, gabriela.guevaraen@ug.edu.ec.

ABSTRACT

This article presents a reflection on the process and current state of education in the midst of various challenges. In sum, it discusses how global events and the crime wave are impacting education and how the need for a change in the educational approach is becoming increasingly evident. Currently, mental health has become an issue of growing concern in society, but especially in the educational context. The challenges faced by students and educators are increasingly complex, more difficult to control and many of them difficult to foresee. This has undoubtedly generated the importance of addressing mental health in this environment.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta una reflexión sobre el proceso y estado actual de la educación en medio de diversos desafíos. En suma, se discute cómo los acontecimientos globales y la ola delincinencial, están impactando la educación y cómo se hace cada vez más evidente la necesidad de un cambio en el enfoque educativo. En la actualidad, la salud mental se ha convertido en un tema de creciente preocupación en la sociedad,

pero especialmente en el contexto educativo. Los desafíos que enfrentan los estudiantes y educadores, son cada vez más complejos, más difíciles de controlar y muchos de ellos difíciles de prever. Esto sin duda ha generado la importancia de abordar la salud mental en este entorno.

Keywords / Palabras clave

Education, students, challenge
Educación, estudiantes, desafío

Introduction

We have not conducted a survey on the crime wave that the country is suffering. It is quite evident the discontent and rejection we have towards these armed groups and the authorities given their little participation in the cessation of these conflicts. The fear of being collateral victims of an armed attack or the product of a struggle in a robbery has caused a commotion, especially due to the impact on educational areas. In the canton of Durán, on May 22, 2023, threats to 12 public schools in Durán circulated on social networks, which caused many parents to decide not to send their children to school for fear of attacks and rumors of an explosive placed inside a school (Primicias, 23).

In the same year, on July 15, a video circulated in social networks and media about a shooting outside a school in Esmeraldas, in which it is obvious how parents try to keep different children off the ground while different detonations take place (Cadena, 2023). (Cadena, 2023)

All these antecedents contribute to a great extent to a discontent and stress towards parents, children, teachers, all affected by the different attacks. We overcame the confinement of the pandemic, now we must be protected for fear of being victims of crime. Currently there is no pronouncement from the authorities for school activities in areas that have suffered a high increase in crime, to return to virtual education and this is understandable because of how complicated it would be. Virtual education in times of pandemic left many gaps and returning to it may cause the same result, since the necessary tools have not been implemented.

In short, the pandemic that we are surviving at the cost of many human lives, inflation, job shortages, crime, among others, are factors that, no

matter how much academic preparation we may have, can hurt the most sensitive part of us and disturb our peace.

Teachers in the different conflict zones deal with the stress and fear of these attacks since many of these zones are mainly schools, it ends up being like a drop in the bucket.

Mental health is compromised, there is no emotional stability or certainty of a peaceful future. Worries keep growing and work and academic results diminishing.

At present, we have mentioned the main factors that have influenced mental health. However, it is important to note that there may still be other factors, as each individual is unique and maintains a unique lifestyle, as well as unique social and family relationships.

However, there are numerous ways to preserve and improve mental health. Some of these include:

Mindfulness practice: It is a practice that consists of a psychological process, which encourages the constant recognition of the sensations, emotions and thoughts of each person, directing our attention to what we are doing to be aware of our present. (Vasquez, 2016)
Mindfulness meditation is based on traditional Buddhist meditation itself that seeks to release the tension that we are subjected to daily, allowing the release of suffering and recognition as part of oneself. (Lagares, 2020)

Regular physical exercise: Physical activity contributes greatly to the prevention of psychological imbalances, mainly combating sedentary lifestyles, which is the main cause of many diseases. It helps to reduce anxiety and depression, impacting positively on people's lives. Exercise allows the release of endorphins, which in turn lead to emotional well-being. (Cornejo, 2022)

Hobbies and pleasurable activities: Spending time on activities that you enjoy can help distract you from stress and cultivate a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction. These can include: painting, writing, music, gardening, etc.

Professional therapy: Also known as psychotherapy, this is a conversation with a mental health provider who will offer advice and therapy, helping us to take control of our lives, given the exploration of our problems and see them in different ways and with different moods. (Mayo Clinic, 2023)

Balanced nutrition:

The expression "we are what we eat" perfectly encapsulates this point, an adequate nutrition will provide an adequate health, which will allow an optimal mood. But if it is neglected, it favors the gradual appearance of different physical discomforts, which in turn, depending on the severity, will lead to depressive conditions (Alfaro, 2022). (Alfaro, 2022)

Adequate rest time and sleep: Sleep gives the body and brain time to recover from the stresses of everyday life. (MedlinePlus, 2022) On the other hand, not getting adequate sleep greatly favors the increase of accidents and the appearance of diseases.

7. Time management: A correct time management allows managing the working day, seeking the highest possible productivity with the prioritization of tasks. (Ramos, 2018) We cannot separate our work life from our personal life, if there is any affectation in one of them, it will directly affect the other. Therefore, learning to manage time correctly will allow, develop our work, sleep and eat properly, exercise, among others.

8. Assertive communication: Assertive communication is a skill that allows us to make social relationships more satisfying, both for us and for those around us. (Escobedo & Ibañez, 2018).

Therefore, it is useful to avoid conflicts when relating to others, helping to improve self-esteem and self-confidence, by being able to dialogue calmly and respectfully, expressing our thoughts without hurting those with whom we talk, improving our relationships and significantly reducing conflicts that may affect our mood.

9. Emotional intelligence. When we talk about emotional intelligence (EI), we refer to the ability to understand and manage our emotions to reduce stress, in addition to helping you communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and reduce conflicts. (Garcia, 2021)

Let's remember that each person is different. Therefore, it is important to explore different tools to discover which ones are most effective for each individual. If you feel that your stress is overwhelming and is greatly affecting your mood, consider seeking professional help for personalized guidance and support.

Materials and Methods

We will use a survey-based approach to conduct this research. We have collected responses from a total of 50 individuals, covering a wide variety of questions designed to provide a comprehensive perspective on several aspects. However, we will focus closely on the following main points: emotional intelligence, the importance of assertive communication, the challenges we have faced during the pandemic due to the transition to forced virtuality and thus the advantages and disadvantages associated with it, as well as the amount of homework, among other relevant elements.

116

Results

As anticipated, the results showed similarities in certain aspects and divergences in others; these disparities in the results are attributed to the different advantages or disadvantages present in each of the respondents.

Clearly, the results of this study confirm the essential importance of mental health in all areas of life.

The research highlights how neglecting mental health can have a negative impact on overall health, which in turn directly affects work, education and personal environments. This ripple effect can lead to a cascade of consequences that eventually undermine a person's emotional stability.

Within the educational field, the issue of mental health has been a topic of growing concern. The relationship between mental health and education is vital, given that the ability to learn and teach is closely related to the emotional and psychological state of the individuals involved. In this context, we must consider that an impact on mental health will have repercussions on academic performance.

Technology has revolutionized teaching, allowing educators to access a wide variety of resources, yet digital tools remain a primary influencer in students' lives. Their ability to understand and address students' emotional needs can have a lasting impact on their academic and personal development.

However, in a world characterized by uncertainty and the complexity of a variety of factors ranging from emotional challenges

even socioeconomic situations themselves can hinder the achievement of an adequate educational environment.

Catastrophic situations have shown that they can drastically alter the overall educational landscape, forcing teachers, students and parents to adapt to new and unpredictable realities. In this sense, mental well-being becomes even more crucial, as it provides the resilience needed to face and overcome these challenges in a constructive manner.

In sum, mental health within the educational context should not be considered as an isolated aspect; on the contrary, it acts as a fundamental pillar that underpins overall well-being and academic performance. Recognizing the importance of this component is essential to ensure an enriching and sustainable educational environment where both teachers and students can thrive despite the challenges ahead.

Challenges of education in Ecuador today that affect mental health:

Student learning is developed both in the classroom and at home. Interaction with teachers in the classroom fosters social skills, while at home they develop a commitment that fosters responsibility. At home, students apply what they learn in the classroom, promoting problem solving and research. The key is to bring the knowledge back to the classroom to receive feedback.

However, challenges can arise. If the classroom environment does not facilitate learning, students may feel demotivated or dissatisfied. Factors such as the teacher's methodology or the absence of an optimal physical structure can generate different results.

Each student has different needs, and educators must create optimal environments and use tools that encourage learning. However, the lack of time in the teacher's schedule can be a constraint and at home, the overload of tasks can cause stress, exhaustion and therefore demotivation. Extracurricular activities that may seem monotonous or demanding will result in a lack of commitment, emotional fatigue and demotivation.

Lack of clarity in assignments or lack of communication with the teacher can lead to misunderstandings and confusion.

Communication and the relationship between teacher and student are fundamental to effective and sustainable education.

Unequal access to resources and the arrival of the COVID 19 pandemic.

At the end of 2019 the world received news that changed its course forever, the arrival of COVID-19 and its rapid spread around the world strictly forced everyone to live in an undetermined quarantine because of the cases of contagion and the high levels of fatality. The COVID-19 pandemic made no distinction between social classes, political parties, religious groups, it affected the entire population. But it is undeniable that the most vulnerable communities, those with scarce and limited resources, located in the most disadvantaged areas, were greatly affected and this was an inhospitable and challenging period for all. According to data collected by INEC, only 53.2% of Ecuadorian households had internet access in 2020. (INEC, 2021) This number indicates that many households were not prepared for the virtuality pandemic, according to the survey in question only 34.3% had access to a computer. By 2023, it is expected that 69.7% of Ecuador's population will have access to the Internet. (La Hora, 2023)

Educational institutions were forced to implement measures for virtual teaching in order not to affect the different academic calendars, which were already significantly delayed. The main disadvantage was reflected worldwide, the limited (scarce) access to internet and the lack of tools (technological equipment). According to the data collected, a total of 826 million students could not attend school due to the pandemic and 706 million do not have internet at home. (Unesco, 2020).

Figures show that the global status of students varies significantly due to economic situations at home. Unfortunately, many households lack the necessary resources to provide a quality education for their children, resulting in a frustrating situation that affects the mental state of the family group.

Incomes at a general level dropped, basic necessities became scarce and the freedom we had was gradually taken away. The stress of being locked up for fear of contagion had repercussions on mental health, according to data there was a 25% increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression (PAHO 2022).

During 2020 in Ecuador, 21.9% of the homes consulted do not have potable water. In addition, 11.8% do not have stable electricity.

(Pesantes, 2020) If the most basic resources for subsistence were scarce, the internet was even scarcer. It is a situation that evidences the need to address the structural challenges faced by these communities to ensure a more prosperous future.

In sum, the media El Telegrafo mentions that Ecuador had a reduction of learning in times of pandemic, it is reported that more than 10 thousand institutions reviewed, 2 thousand were below the acceptable level. (El Telegrafo, 2021).

On the other hand, according to statements in digital media by the Minister of Education, Maria Brown, she mentions that 150,000 students, including children and adolescents, dropped out of school as a result of the crisis. (Machado, 2021)

With the arrival of the pandemic, it was inevitable to be able to provide a quality service, with all the unfavorable conditions mentioned above. There were no adequate measures to withstand the consequences that the global pandemic brought in the labor, educational, and emotional aspects.

The problems of virtuality

The population that could be in the virtual classes ranged from infants to professionals. Of the group surveyed, 81.1% were at a higher educational level (university, high school or postgraduate).

We asked the main question to measure the level of learning satisfaction during the 2020 pandemic, the results showed that 45.3% considered it to be a good experience, 43.4% considered it to be average, 9.4% considered it to be excellent, 1.9% did not have access to online education.

On the other hand, 43.4% remained neutral to the measures implemented by their institution for the virtualization of classes. This suggests that it was not a gratifying action, but neither did they feel any discomfort.

Despite this, controversy exists in the level of effectiveness between online and face-to-face education, with 37.7% stating that online education was less effective than face-to-face education.

The main reasons range from lack of time due to other activities (66%), difficulty in understanding the tasks (34%), lack of adequate resources

(9.4%), lack of motivation (26.4%), stress or pressure related to homework (32.1%), monotony and repetitive tasks (15.1%).

In 2004 according to Ralón, he mentioned that in a virtual education the relationship between student and students, students and teachers, is affected given the social relationships that were previously formed, a small cost in exchange for much needed flexibility. (Ralón, Vieta, & Vásquez de Prada, 2004). Sixteen years later this statement had quite exemplary support given the pandemic.

Task overload.

Among the respondents, we have a group of people who always consider the tasks assigned by the educational area to be useful, but if we add the two response percentages 26.4% (most of the time they are useful) and 22.6% (sometimes they are useful, sometimes they are not). We have 49%, surpassing the 43.4% who consider the tasks useful. In other words, there is a clear dissatisfaction with the activities.

One such factor may be the amount of time spent on homework, which is too long for the activities, and these activities may be on the threshold of repetitive and boring or necessary. Much research finds positive relationships between the time spent on homework and achievement (Cooper, 2006) But if this time is extremely long, it will fatigue the student and lead to negative results. Or, on the contrary, if it is due to the overload of homework, the student will be demotivated, according to the results.

In first place is the aspect of task overload with 50.9%, while the other factors are: lack of recognition by the teacher (39.6%), lack of interest (37.7%).

Conclusions

In summary, this article is especially directed to teacher-researchers among our different readers, it is essential to keep in mind our role in the lives of students, from their school years to their university career. We are and exercise as one of the first professional models that they know and we represent what they could achieve. For this reason, it is critical to establish a solid foundation around mental health care, assertive communication skills and the development of emotional

intelligence. These pillars have a significant impact on their personal, work and academic lives.

It is important to recognize that we face dark and very challenging moments, which can lead us to an environment of complete discouragement. However, we must find the strength to persevere in our mission. Difficulties are an integral part of the journey and, despite the obstacles, we must keep moving forward to ensure our own success and motivate others to the same result.

At the national level, education in our country still needs to make progress in several areas. While we await new government policies and tools, it is crucial to address this issue through close collaboration between educators and parents. This union strengthens the generations to come and provides the necessary support.

References

- Alfaro, A. (May 15, 2022). *CNC, Center for Clinical Nutrition*. Retrieved from How Food Influences Mental Health: <https://cnosalud.com/como-influye-la-alimentacion-en-la-salud-mental/>
- Cadena, R. (July 25, 2023). *metro*. Retrieved from momentos de terror vivieron niños durante balacera en los exteriores de una escuela en Esmeraldas: <https://www.metroecuador.com.ec/noticias/2023/07/25/video-momentos-de-terror-vivieron-ninos-durante-balacera-en-los-exteriores-de-una-escuela-en-esmeraldas/>
- Cooper, H. R. (2006). *Review of Educational Research*. Retrieved from Does Homework Improve Academic Achievement? A Synthesis of Research, 1987-2003 Vol. 76, No. 1, pp. 1-62: https://assess.ucr.edu/sites/default/files/2019-02/cooperrobinsonpatall_2006.pdf
- Cornejo, R. (August 25, 2022). *University of Piura*. Retrieved from La actividad física, aliada de la salud mental: <https://www.udep.edu.pe/hoy/2022/08/actividad-fisica-aliada-de-salud-mental/>
- The Telegraph The Digital Dean (24 October 2021). *El Telegrafo El Decano Digital*. Retrieved from Ecuador had a reduction in child and adolescent learning during the pandemic: <https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/sociedad/6/ecuador->

- tuvo-una-reduccion-del-aprendizaje-de-ninas-ninos-y-adolescentes-durante-la-pandemia
- Escobedo, M., & Ibañez, Elisa (November 29, 2018). *IVANE HEALTH*. Retrieved from The importance of assertiveness in Mental Health: <https://www.ivanosalud.com/asertividad-en-salud-mental/>
- García, S. (July 8, 2021). *Institute for the future of education*. Retrieved from What is emotional intelligence and why do we need to teach it: <https://observatorio.tec.mx/educ-news/inteligencia-emocional/>
- INEC. (4 of 2021). *ecuadorencifras*. Retrieved from Indicadores de tecnología de la información y comunicación.: https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/Estadisticas_Sociales/TIC/2020/202012_Boletin_Multi proposito_Tics.pdf
- The Hour (01/01/2023). *La Hora*. Retrieved from Ecuador changed digitally during 2022: <https://www.lahora.com.ec/pais/redes-sociales-ecuador-tendencia/>
- Lagares, N. (June 10, 2020). *Udana Yoga*. Retrieved from BUDDHIST MEDITATION AND BUDDHISM: <https://udanayoga.es/la-meditacion-budista-y-el-budismo/>
- Machado, J. (November 11, 2021). *PRIMICIAS*. Retrieved from Pandemic pushed 150,000 students toward dropping out of school.: <https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/sociedad/clases-abandono-desercion-escuelas-covid/>
- Mayo Clinic (June 29, 2023). *MAYO CLINIC*. Retrieved from Psychotherapy: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/tests-procedures/psychotherapy/about/pac-20384616>
- MedlinePlus (November 8, 2022). *Medline Plus, National Library of Medicine*. Retrieved from Sleep and health: <https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000871.htm>
- PAHO Pan American Health Organization. (Mar 2, 2022). *PAHO*. Retrieved from Pan American Health Organization: <https://www.paho.org/es/noticias/2-3-2022-pandemia-por-covid-19-provoca-aumento-25-prevalencia-ansiedad-depresion-todo>
- Pesantes, K. (April 14, 2020). *PRIMICIAS*. Retrieved from Guayaquil: 21.9% of households surveyed say they do not have potable water: <https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/sociedad/guayaquil-hogares-agua-potable/>
- Ralón, L., Vieta, M., & Vásquez de Prada, M. L. (2004). (De)formación en línea: acerca de las desventajas de la educación virtual. In G.

- Comunicar, *Comunicar*, no. 22 (pp. 171-176). Huelva, Spain: Grupo Comunicar.
- Ramos, M. (January 2018). *Institute of Public Health, Government of Chile*. Retrieved from Gestion del tiempo. A tool to improve our productivity and quality of life: <https://www.ispch.cl/sites/default/files/NotaTecnicaGestionTiempo.pdf>
- Redacción Primicias (24 of 5 of 23). *PRIMICIAS*. Retrieved from Schools in Durán under threat from criminal gangs: <https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/sucesos/escuelas-duran-atentados-bandas/>
- Unesco (April 21, 2020). *Unesco*. Retrieved from <https://es.unesco.org/news/surgen-alarmanes-brechas-digitales-aprendizaje-distancia>
- Vásquez, E. (1 2016). *SciELO Peru, Rev Neuropsychiatr vol.79*. Retrieved from Mindfulness: General concepts, psychotherapy and clinical applications.: http://www.scielo.org.pe/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0034-85972016000100006