

Challenges of Teachers in an Rural Middle School in Yucatan, Mexico.

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Summary

This paper examines from the perspective of teachers the problems faced by a telesecundaria school for the achievement of its educational objectives, as well as the actions that have been implemented to overcome their problems, located in the state of Yucatán. The case was selected based on its actual results before the ENLACE test. The data collection included interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis and qualitative observation. The preliminary results indicate that there are individual and general factors that need to be taken into account in order to improve the education of the students: lack of effectiveness in the development of educational policy programs, lack of some resources and infrastructure, lack of technological resources, training teacher, management of the school center. The strategies the school makes to address these problems are helping to improve student performance.

Introduction

In Mexico, as in other Latin American countries, interest in the quality of schools has increased, mainly due to problems identified in the performance results of students. According to the National Institute of Educational Evaluation (INEE, 2010a and 2010b) the problems of education in our country, such as the poor quality of the results in the evaluations, educational lag (caused by high rates of failure and dropout) emphasize in secondary education, the last section of compulsory basic education.

Likewise, the performance of secondary school students is even lower when the school is located outside of the main cities. According to INEGI data (2010), the population living in rural areas shows higher rates of marginality and demand for services.

Although there is a large number of studies on secondary education, there is little research on the modality of telesecundaria. The telesecundaria is a school modality of the Mexican Educational System that offers secondary education to young people who live mainly in small and marginalized rural communities. A peculiarity of this educational modality is that a teacher is responsible for teaching all subjects that make up the curriculum corresponding to a grade level, unlike other modalities where each subject is taught by a different teacher.

In general, these schools do not have support for administrative work, a responsibility that is also assumed by teachers and students; and, at least as a proposal, they must have audiovisual and computer resources to support the different subjects. When it comes to telesecundarias with a maximum of three school groups, one of the teachers is designated as responsible for the school, which implies that he must perform the

functions of professor before the group and the director, with its corresponding administrative and management functions. The school, with the school community and with the authorities of this modality. The incipient research on telesecundarias indicates that these centers report the lowest level of academic achievement and other problems in relation to teacher training and responsibilities. Calixto & Rebollar (2008), affirm that the poor results in these schools may be due to the fact that teachers, in addition to their educational responsibility, must perform administrative tasks and even if they have mastery of a disciplinary field, they must teach more subjects than those they correspond to the school grade they attend, a situation that is complicated when a teacher works with more than one grade. On the other hand, Santos (2004), affirms that some of the problems faced by these schools are: lack of permanent updating and training actions for teachers, inadequate school facilities, delay in the delivery of bibliographic and audiovisual materials or lack of them, malfunction of the television signal, deficit of teaching personnel to attend the service as it is raised; as well as, the lack of commitment of some teachers regarding the educational activities that are carried out with the students and missing the linking actions that are organized with the parents and the members of the community

Conducting studies in telesecundarias schools is necessary both in those with poor performance, and even more in the case of schools that have achieved the expected results, despite being in conditions of marginality. As asserted by Kalman and Carvajal (2007), there have been no studies related to the school environment that predominates in these educational centers, collegial work among teachers, students, managers or how the teaching and learning processes are carried out.

Purpose and research questions

The research by case study, in which this paper is downloaded, focused on a telesecundaria school in southeastern Mexico, located in a context of high marginality and diversity, whose students have achieved the expected results in the standardized tests, especially in the ENLACE test. The objective of the study was to examine, from the perspective of the main actors of the school, the problems and challenges that the telesecundaria school faces in order to achieve its educational objectives, as well as the actions it has implemented to overcome them. For the purposes of this writing, partial findings of the study will be presented that are determined in the following research questions, specifically focused on the teaching staff.

- What are the problems and challenges that teachers of a telesecundaria school face in order to achieve their objectives?
- What actions have the teachers of a telesecundaria implemented to overcome the conditions and problems they face?

Importance of the study

A study of a successful telesecundaria school located in a rural area of high marginality is relevant because it can provide valuable information on strategies that can be used in other centers facing similar conditions. Given that schools of this type serve marginalized students, who speak an indigenous language and are located mainly in rural areas and small dispersed localities, it is important to examine the experience of a

school that has managed to succeed despite these conditions. Likewise, the results can be used to establish policies to support the development of other schools of this level. The research also fills a gap in the literature in secondary education, since research on telesecundaria is incipient. As Quiroz (2003) states, the growing importance of telesecundaria has not yet been made clear in a significant way in educational research (Quiroz, 2003).

Methodology

Regarding the methodology, this research was developed under a naturalistic paradigm, which reflects and interprets the educational reality in order to reach the understanding or transformation of said reality, based on the meaning attributed by the people who comprise it. The selected design is the case study. The specific techniques that were used for the data collection are the individual semi-structured interviews, the observation, the focus groups (or focus groups) and the analysis of documents.

The recording of the information was carried out with the taking of note or audio recording, with the acceptance by the parties involved, to obtain information as close to reality. In the same way, limitations in the responses of the participating subjects were avoided. The analysis of the results was carried out through the technique of content analysis, and the categories were generated by the technique of affinity diagrams of the KJ method, developed by Kawakita; by means of it it was possible to determine the problematic of the telesecundaria, as well as the actions by means of which it has tried to overcome the problematic and mentioned challenges.

Methodological and data triangulation was used, as mentioned by Denzin (1989), the former allows the involvement of different methods, obtaining the vision of the phenomenon from different perspectives; and the second allows using different data sources.

The case was a telesecundaria school in the eastern part of the state of Yucatán, located in an area of high marginalization. As stated by Creswell (2009) and Bisquerra (2009), the selection of the school was based on particular criteria, such as having a head of school, a teacher for each grade, its location in a rural community with a high degree of marginalization, with Mayan speaking population and that students have increased their performance in the ENLACE test in recent years. This research involved the three teachers who teach at one of the three school grades of the telesecundaria, one of which also plays the role of head of the school.

Likewise, second and third grade students were included, which together total twenty-two: eleven of second (seven women and four men) and eleven of third (two women and nine men). The decision to include the students of these grades and not the first ones was based on the fact that the latter have been part of the school only for a month, until the date of the realization of the focus groups, and could not provide enough information for purposes Of the investigation. It is worth mentioning that the students who started the current school year were thirty-seven. The age of the students is between the ages of twelve and sixteen.

Results

The problems identified by the teachers include those that refer to the very poor conditions of the context, given that the community is classified as highly marginalized, until the lack of effectiveness of the federal programs that should have a positive impact on student achievement. Below are the difficulties that the professors manifested, accompanied by some vignettes that evidence such experiences.

Lack of effectiveness in the development of educational policy programs, both in planning and execution, such as the Digital Skills for All program:

"Then, at the national level books are made, pilots are ..., electronic books ... first year, and the following year second year. They were not delivered. The change comes and they say: It's over, HDT disappears, there's no "(Mr. Antonio).

Lack of some resources and infrastructure, as there is no administrative and concierge staff available:

"We have to do the work, we do not have people here ..."

Lack of technological resources. Maestro Óscar alludes to the fact that they do not have a satellite television signal:

"... the satellite dish ... is not fulfilling its function, the parables rotted. Annually I report that I have no EDUSAT signal. "

Failure to update books to support teaching:

"And then we started to take the 2011 plan, with the books, because they were outdated, that is, our books are from 2009, and the plan that is being carried out is from 2011, because we were supposed to have books with HDT "(Teacher Antonio).

Teacher training In some cases, they do not have the necessary experience to transmit the contents effectively to the participants:

"... the Evaluation Center, starts to hire, that is, does a small 'evaluation', it is assumed, a selection, no; and the CEDE sends all its advisors ... they are inexperienced guys ... "

Management of the school center. Specific training is required for the performance of this function; and there is duality of functions (as responsible and as a teacher before a group), which can affect the effectiveness in the performance of both:

"Well the truth is enough, I've been responsible for ten years, I've tried to throw in the towel, it's too much work, it stresses because, since I'm talking about what it's like to give my classes, it's, I'll make it cheap for you: first keep all the paperwork up to date, answer all the information. " (Mr. Oscar)

When Oscar was asked what training he had received, he responded in a concrete way:

"There is no training. I assume the position, I put myself in the least attractive situation of my life, if you want to call it that, the truth (smiles). There we take it. "

Lack of prerequisites for the level of schooling. In the opinion of the teacher Georgina:

"The boy comes under level. It gives us a lot of work here at school to compose them ... the children come that God, God ... you are giving and giving, struggling, struggling a good time the first grade teacher is dedicated to see multiplications, readings, all that with elementary school children , which should not be our work anymore ".

Actions to address problems.

- For the teachers who work in the school, the initiative, the team work and the commitment they have are the main virtues that have allowed them to address some of the problematic situations they face as a school. Teacher Georgina:

"... the courses are already, I think, more appropriate, really, so that what you learn you use, transmit it to the boys, and really serve that knowledge ... the courses are more appropriate."

- Quality Schools Program (PEC), the contribution of the PEC in relation to the attention of training needs of students, specifically in the area of Information Technology, is described by the teacher Antonio:

"... seeing the need, then with quality school bought all that equipment, which is there, which are 11, 15 computers, which have been repaired, boots ... that is, with that, with quality schools".

- Construction of classrooms by the municipality, in particular the computer classroom. From the PEC a smaller contribution was destined for this purpose.

Support for students who lack prerequisites through the delivery of a propaedeutic course:

"It's twenty effective days of class. And that is one of the strategies that is used to level and compensate that level with which they come ... "(maestro Óscar).

- Development of materials and resource: Teachers have also designed compendiums of exercises to complement the official textbooks of telesecundaria, and thus comply with what is established in the 2011 curriculum, as well as providing this material to students, free of charge .

Establish a link with professors from other high schools, whose books are aligned with the official curriculum, with the purpose of getting books for their students. Maestro Óscar mentions:

"... we are now in contact with some teachers ... so that, to say, we separate a lot of books, talk to the students and their old books, to say ... Well, we need between 12 or 13 here, right? In other words, talk to 20 students, who offer them I do not know, \$ 50.00 for their package of books to give it to us. "

With the above, it is notable that the work of a teacher at the basic level, specifically telesecundaria, is surrounded by various factors that can hinder its function, causing the poor learning results that have already been known in recent decades. Even with this panorama, the road is not requested; studies of this type try to represent what is lived in those contexts, trying to achieve sensitivity to the scientific community as much as politics.

Conclusions

One of the main problems faced by the actors of the school is linked to teacher training, given that the selection of instructors does not follow criteria according to the needs and experience of teachers and heads of schools.

Educational policies, although they are proactive and ambitious, need to be accompanied by the technological and equipment requirements that ensure their correct implementation. The effectiveness in the implementation of programs derived from educational policies, linked to educational reforms, also affects the effectiveness with which schools can achieve their objectives, as was the case of the Digital Skills for All program. This is the opinion of the professors who participated in the study, an opinion that

agrees with the results obtained in the research of Cisneros-Cohernour, López & Canto (2007), focused on identifying the conditions that affect the teaching of sciences in high schools of Yucatan According to these authors, secondary teachers mentioned that educational reforms are not accompanied by the necessary resources for their implementation, especially when it comes to the use of technology for teaching and learning.

In a similar sense, Martínez-Otero (2009) adds that together with the endowment of technological and material resources, it is essential to train educational actors in the proper use of these resources, as well as their lack, misuse or abuse could adversely affect the effectiveness of the programs. Therefore, the implementation of this type of program should include an analysis of the conditions of the context and other characteristics that influence the performance of students, such as socioeconomic level or previous training, because when they are not appropriate limit the use expected in the students, because some of them fail to meet their basic nutritional needs.

The management work is demanding and the training and the necessary material and human resources that could allow an optimal operation of the school are not granted. Among the options to overcome the problems of the school are the initiative of the teachers themselves and the person in charge, team work with municipal authorities and other schools.

A factor identified as limiting to the achievement of the objectives of the schools is the lack of human, material and technological resources, especially in the telesecundarias schools located in rural communities with high marginalization. This situation was referred to from 2007, through a report made by García, Benítez, Huerta, Medina, & Ruiz for INEE. It shows that more than half of the schools in these communities lack services such as toilets, piped water or furniture in poor condition; and that the infrastructure is inadequate, since there are no laboratories and the few that exist have to be used as classrooms. In addition, 15% of schools do not have a satellite dish to receive the signal, 12% do not have enough television sets, which represents a great concern, since the use of educational television is considered the main feature of this modality.

Miranda and Reynoso (2006) conclude in their study that the realization of transformations for the improvement of the management of schools requires, more than the endowment of material, economic and human resources, an institutional commitment, which requires the participation of diverse actors and the integration of multiple wills. For this reason, it is very important to consider that to date this problem is still valid, with no solution yet, at least for the case studied, so greater efforts must be made to address it. It should be noted that since the study by García et al. It was carried out a presidential period has already elapsed and another is already halfway through its administration, in which two educational reforms derived from national policy programs have also been implemented.

The role of school directors occupies a central position in the effectiveness with which educational objectives are achieved in schools. Its function is to integrate the efforts of the different educational actors, such as students, teachers, parents mainly, as well as to manage supports and resources before governmental and educational authorities of the modality. Therefore, their training and updating should focus on the development of administrative functions, rather than pedagogical functions, to achieve a better functioning of schools, as Sandoval (2007) concludes in his research. Because in the telesecundarias the function of

some directors is double, as much as responsible of the school as teachers before a group, the solution to this problem becomes more challenging, since the directors only receive from the corresponding instances the training aimed at improving their pedagogical skills, like all the other professors, still pending the necessary specific training for the performance of the directive function.

It is important to emphasize that the effectiveness of schools is achieved by considering that they are part of a global school system, as mentioned by Fullan (2005). Thus, it must be considered that the school is part of a larger context, and that its objectives can only be achieved if the integration of three levels is achieved: the school / community, the district or region, and the center or level of the policy.

The telesecundaria modality in the Mexican Educational System represents a great opportunity for students from marginalized communities to complete the studies corresponding to the basic education proposed in Mexico.

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