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EGEL'S TRANSITION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN MEXICO, CASE: OPEN EDUCATION SYSTEM OF UNIVERSIDAD VERACRUZANA

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Abstract: In Mexico, the General Graduation Exam (EGEL) is a national-scale exam that evaluates the level of knowledge and academic skills of a series of recent bachelor's degree graduates. This way, it can be determined whether graduates of a bachelor's degree have the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively begin professional practice. Upon passing this exam, two results are awarded, the most valuable is Outstanding, which ranges from 1150 to 1300 points and The one with the least value, but if it has the passing category, it is Satisfactory, which ranges from 1000 to 1149 points. If you fail, the result is Not Satisfactory and the score is 700 to 999. This type of exam is part of the options that many universities in the country have, whether public or private, students can opt for this type of degree completion or credit completion to complete their degree. During the time of COVID-19, the attention and application of this type of exam was stopped, which was originally in person and from that time on it was applied online, this to comply with the provisions of the Secretary of Health in Mexico for avoid person-to-person contact. **Keywords:** Exit exam, bachelor's degree, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

For the application of the General Examination for the Graduation of the Bachelor's Degree (EGEL), a specific type of exam is offered for the 39 bachelor's and engineering programs. In addition, one more of a professional - technical nature is taught. The test is applied at the national level, testing the knowledge and skills of graduates of the university community who have all the credits, including those from the last semester of the degree.

At the Universidad Veracruzana, which is a Public Higher Education Institution in the country of Mexico, there are options to

complete the credits of the bachelor's degrees it offers. When students have reached 70% of their credit progress, they can enroll in the subject or educational experience. called Reception Experience which is accredited through: average, for reception work of this option are derived mainly from the most chosen by the students which are Thesis, Thesis and Monograph and by general CENEVAL knowledge exam, in the case of study that will be carried out is first a review of the transition from EGEL to EGEL PLUS during the pandemic, and will be applied to the students of the Accounting and Administration Educational Program since they encountered uncertainty in the way the exam would be administered. as well as the dates on which it would be applied. (Student Statute 2008 Universidad Veracruzana Article 94)

Prior to the contingency, the application was carried out in person at the headquarters of the Universidad Veracruzana, Veracruz Region, Mexico. But with this situation, the majority of the students found themselves in a process of resilience. Many factors influenced this paradigm shift, from physical, social, economic, work health problems, etc.; to the point of forgetting the knowledge acquired due to the long waiting periods for the official application of the exam.

THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF THE CENEVAL TEST

In 1993 and based on CENEVAL bulletin 35 when its creation was approved, one of the objectives of this civil association was defined as evaluating higher education graduates through an exam. The General Examinations of Professional Quality, which would later be the General Examinations for the Graduation of the Bachelor's Degree (EGEL), were created in order to address various recommendations, such as designing and applying examinations

of the careers and specialties that for professional practice. They are required to have a degree and a professional license, as well as those with the highest demand for entry.

It is important to recognize the changes that the test has gone through since its inception, thus giving us a look at how it has adapted over time. In the year 1994, to be more exact on April 28, the National Evaluation Center for Higher Education, A.C., would be formally created. (Hernández Ruiz & Macías Díaz, 2017)

Later, in 1971, and already within the framework of the General Assembly of the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions of the Mexican Republic, A.C. (ANUIES), the idea of a “national examination system” was considered. (Díaz, 2022) However, this vision had already been raised since 1959, only nine years after the creation of ANUIES. At that time, an attempt was made to establish this exam as a standard for the few universities in the country.

As expected, its beginnings in Mexico were slow and with great setbacks, but that did not prevent it from becoming one of the most reliable evaluation instruments over time. It was not until 35 years later that the evaluation could finally begin to be applied throughout the country. (Hernández Ruiz & Macías Díaz, 2017).

The purpose of creating the exam has remained intact since its creation, because as we will see later, the only thing that has been updated is its vision based on administrative changes. Quoting verbatim from how it is described (CENEVAL, 2022) on its website, “CENEVAL is a civil association whose main activity is the design and application of instruments for evaluating knowledge, skills and competencies; as well as the analysis and dissemination of its results.”

The mission, which we will take literally from (Hernández Ruiz & Macías Díaz,

2017) in their book “Origin and evolution of CENEVAL” tells us the following: Contribute to improving the quality of upper secondary and higher education and special programs by promoting a culture of evaluation and carrying out external evaluations of the learning achieved at any stage of the educational processes, independently, with the highest quality standards and in addition to those carried out by the institutions to which they are assigned. Provide service.

The vision planned for 2025, of the General Director of CENEVAL, Antonio Ávila Díaz, is: To be the organization in Mexico with the broadest national and international recognition, for its social responsibility and proven professional and technical capacity for design and application of a wide and diversified offer of valid, reliable and innovative measurement instruments for the evaluation of learning and skills with the highest international quality standards.

In January 2020, there was talk of a disease that was spreading slowly in Greater Asia, China. Although the true beginning of the pandemic is traced back to 2019, it would not be until March 2020 that the disease would reach Mexico. In those months, as a precautionary measure, two weeks of total closures were decreed to prevent the spread, measures that, unknowingly, would end up becoming almost two years of confinement. The outlook given by the pandemic was extremely discouraging. The days began to turn into weeks, and the weeks into months. The lifestyle we had known had practically disappeared. Society had to adapt to what we would call shortly after, the “new normal.”

In its first months, COVID-19 cases were in the hundreds, later in the thousands. The student community and workers were sent to the comfort and safety of their homes, the activities they would normally carry out at the university or in their work areas, having to adapt to the new way of working.

The effects of the pandemic were not

only physical health, but also mental health, economic problems in all nations, climate problems that worsened and, above all, uncertainty. That overwhelming feeling of desolation that we had never faced before, not being able to know if tomorrow would come, if you could survive the next week, and in some cases, the loss of a family member would make you the leader of the home.

In the educational field, the outlook was not more favorable. According to a study published by (IMCO, 2021), the Coronavirus pandemic (SARS-CoV-2) caused the loss of an average of two years of schooling. Quoting verbatim the research center's statements: "Before the pandemic, Mexicans achieved on average learning corresponding to 3rd grade of secondary school. Today their knowledge will only reach the equivalent of 1st year of secondary school."

If the data that this same institution provides us is taken into account, at least 628 thousand young people of school age, from 6 to 17 years old, abandoned their studies due to the economic crisis that the pandemic brought with it. For greater precision, we have the data provided by (INEGI, 2022) on school dropouts in times of pandemic, 33.6 million people between 3 and 29 years old were enrolled in the 2019-2020 school year (62.0% of the total). Of them, 740 thousand (2.2%) did not finish the school year: 58.9% for some reason associated with COVID-19 and 8.9% due to lack of money or resources.

At the higher technical level, it was concluded that in the 2019-2020 school year, school dropouts were 2.2% of the population. Of this percentage, 44.6 abandoned their studies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the reasons that (INEGI, 2022) highlights as specific reasons for dropout due to Coronavirus are the following:

- Loss of contact with teachers or not being able to do homework.
- Loss of job or reduction in income.
- Definitive closure of the institution.

- Not own a computer or other devices with an internet connection.
- Consider that distance classes are not very functional for learning.
- The father, mother or guardian could not be aware of the student.

This way, it would not be risky to say that the educational community in Mexico went through one of its worst moments. This also affected the students who needed to graduate during the start of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. As mentioned previously, CENEVAL EGEL had to adjust to the situation. Although in the more than 25 years that it had been applied it had already undergone changes, during the pandemic it had to go through the most forceful of all. Since its first application to accounting degree graduates in 1994, it had only been carried out in person and uninterrupted for almost 25 years. So now, both the graduates and the staff of the National Evaluation Center for Higher Education were at a crossroads. How to adapt to change? The calendar that had been presented for the application dates and results were as follows:

Pre-registration period	Application	Delivery of results
December 9 to 17, 2019 and January 6 to February 5	March 27, 2020	April 28, 2020
May 4 to June 28, 2020	August 21, 2020	September 21, 2020
August 19 to October 14, 2020	December 4, 2020	January 4, 2021

Table 1. Own elaboration. Source CENEVAL

At the time, the disease that was beginning to spread was not considered to be of great magnitude. Therefore, those interested continued to register even in the month of February.

With just four days left before the first application of the exam, confinement measures were applied that would last 28 days (from March 23 to April 21, 2020). Its

first application was delayed from March 27 to May 8. The date was quickly reassigned to June 26. It was later reassigned to September 4. Finally, it was applied on October 9, 2020.

For the first time, the exam was administered from home, a modality that would bring with it uncertainty due to everything that it entailed in expenses due to the demands of taking the exam, from having a computer equipment with an internet connection, to having a stable connection so as not to suffer disconnections during the exam.

CENEVAL EGEL 2020 FROM HOME

The students had another problem. As we can see in the guide for the candidate that CENEVAL provided for the exam from home, several extra tools were required. For the student community that for years only needed pencil, eraser and sometimes a pen that could be bought in a store for less than \$20 Mexican pesos, now they found themselves in the cumbersome situation of a much larger investment.

Quoting verbatim from the Supporter's Guide, certain general considerations regarding computer equipment are pointed out.

- You must have functional computing equipment (desktop or laptop).
- The equipment can be your own or borrowed.
- The equipment must have a web camera (webcam) and internal or external microphone.
- You must have a stable internet connection.
- You cannot use an electronic tablet or cell phone.
- Internet connection sharing data from a cell phone is not feasible, since, in addition to the high risk of connection intermittency, it is not possible to have a cell phone in the space

where the exam will be answered.

The results of these requests are that the students had to make an extraordinary expense which had an impact on the students' finances, for example: doing a quick search on Amazon, we can find that a Windows laptop with the recommended features at the most economical price, could be found for no less than \$8,199 MXN. In addition to this, an internet connection and an Ethernet cable are required. Doing a quick calculation, a month of cable service with the average provider ranges between \$500 and \$700 MXN, and a 1-meter Ethernet cable costs \$159 MXN. This means that just by purchasing a device, one month of internet and a cable to connect, the student must cover an expense of more or less \$8,858 MXN. All this without counting on the purchase of a good resolution webcam and an additional microphone to the one included in the computer equipment.

Some students who took their Bachelor's Exit Exam during the times of the Open Education System pandemic were informally interviewed and some of them mentioned:

- They already had a computer equipment and considered it essential at the higher level, but due to the pandemic they were forced to share their work tools with the other members of the household.
- School and work activities at home forced those who did not have more than one work tool to buy new devices.
- The expense of more than 8 thousand pesos, which is the price of a very simple computer equipment, was not something easy to face, understanding that the average salary of Mexicans is \$6,310.00 Mexican pesos per month (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, 2022).
- We must also add the cost of the exam, which during the online modality consisted of a payment of \$1,715.00

MXN. Currently, and due to the gradual decrease in mortality, the application of the exam was resumed in person with a cost of up to \$2,575.00 MXN.

RESULTS

Below is the result the CENEVAL exams taken by the Administration and Accounting students of the Open Education System in Veracruz, Mexico, during the period February 2018 to January 2020, which was before the pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. It covers February 2020 to January 2022, subsequently the data from February - July 2022 was post-pandemic.

Administration Educational Program			
Period/ Semester	Satisfactory	Outstanding	Total
February - July 2018	7	2	9
August 2018 - January 2019	3	1	4
February - July 2019	4	7	11
August 2019 - January 2020	6	1	7
February - July 2020	5	0	5
August 2020 - January 2021	2	0	2
February - July 2021	5	6	11
August 2021 - January 2022	7	2	9
February - July 2022	8	0	8
Total	47	19	66
Percentages	71%	29%	100%

Table 2. Own elaboration. Source: Open Education System Files

Accounting Educational Program			
Period/ Semester	Satisfactory	Outstanding	Total
February - July 2018	9	1	10
August 2018 - January 2019	7	0	7
February - July 2019	4	3	7
August 2019 - January 2020	3	0	3
February - July 2020	11	1	12
August 2020 - January 2021	3	1	4
February - July 2021	12	3	15
August 2021 - January 2022	7	0	7
February - July 2022	8	0	8
Total	64	9	73
Percentages	88%	12%	100%

Table 2: Own elaboration. Source: Open Education System Files

The results vary by Educational Program, Administration, the decrease in students who took the exam is seen and in Accounting there were not many changes.

It can also be seen that the majority of students have Satisfactory results, while relatively few have outstanding results. It is worth mentioning that according to the School Services regulations of the Universidad Veracruzana, students whose result is satisfactory obtain a grade of 9 and those who have an outstanding result reach the maximum grade, which is 10.

CONCLUSION

After reflecting on the hard data presented through this short work, we can conclude that the effects of the pandemic cannot only be reduced to human losses. Those who fortunately did not die from complications related to Covid-19, found themselves with uncertainty regarding the application of their

exam, since they were exhausted both in mind and spirit, expenses increased as unforeseen situations such as layoffs, deaths and even diseases that threatened their mental health were present.

The world had changed and students, in most cases, were saturated with their personal problems and yet they were burdened with such a considerable expense since it was essential to be able to take the online exam that many had already paid for before the pandemic.

It is understandable that a situation like this took us all by surprise, but the weight of the problems cannot fall solely on the students; contingency measures must be considered in case a similar situation arises in the future.

From what we can learn from this study and analysis that even in the COVID-19 pandemic, students never lost sight of their goal, which was to graduate from university despite the adversity that occurred both in Mexico and in the world.

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