


Chapter 15

Educational and Social Inclusion: A Path to Equity for Families in Vulnerable Situations

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about social, economic, employment, and educational upheaval. This affected the welfare system and vulnerable families. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the repercussions and impact of the period of confinement on families and their children. The methodology was qualitative, based on in-depth interviews with families whose children were attending highly complex educational centres in the province of Malaga (Spain). Among the main results, it is worth highlighting that the families had certain difficulties in providing educational support for their children, the lack of technological tools, the existence of a digital divide, as well as various problems of family coexistence aggravated by the lack of routines and interpersonal relationships outside the domestic sphere.

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INTRODUCTION

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 transformed everyone's daily life and had a strong impact on the school, social, family and personal context. Schools had to adapt suddenly to a virtual teaching modality that did not favour all students and their families in the same way, especially those from different cultural backgrounds and in vulnerable situations. Cifuentes-Faura (2020) and Hortigüela-Alcalá et al. (2020) stated that the most socially and economically disadvantaged families found it difficult to cope with this change, mainly due to the inability to provide their children with the necessary curricular attention, limited communication with teachers and lack of digital resources.

Inequalities in access to and use of technological tools pose a challenge for today's society, with vulnerable people being considered the most affected by the digital divide (Fernández-Río et al., 2022). Thus, one of the problems faced by these students and their families is not the lack of knowledge of technological resources, but rather the lack of digital competences and the use of these resources applied to academic learning. Faced with this concept, digital inclusion arises, which aims to promote access to ICT and the development of technological skills in all individuals, regardless of their age, personal abilities, etc., and is therefore linked to equity (Gil-Quintana & Cano-Alfaro, 2020; Lago et al., 2019). Equity pursues social and educational justice, recognising and addressing the differences present, so the terms equity and inclusion have a direct relationship in pursuing the common goal of guaranteeing access to opportunities and resources in a non-discriminatory way.

Educational inclusion and education based on the search for social justice are configured as different paths that point towards the same explicit objective for organisations of such high relevance as UNESCO: quality education for all and with all. The achievement of inclusion in all its manifestations must be pursued through an education system with a social justice-oriented teaching staff (Albalá-Genol et al., 2021, p.178).

Education administrations play a key role in developing educational conditions and must ensure that technology does not further amplify existing gaps in access and quality of learning by providing the necessary training, resources and support, especially for those children who lack the resilience, learning strategies or commitment to learn independently (OECD, 2020; Save the Children, 2020). This requires restructuring pedagogical models and implementing pedagogical practices that address the diversity present in classrooms and foster cooperation among all members of the education community. Service learning, project-based learning and cooperative learning are innovative teaching approaches that promote participation and the shared construction of an inclusive curriculum (Azorín & Ainscow, 2020).

In this sense, a number of aspects can be identified to improve the situation of educational inequality suffered by students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020; UNESCO, 2020):

- Ensure access to and good use of ICTs.
- Select dynamic methodologies.
- Promoting collaborative work.
- Develop formative assessment processes with self- and co-assessment procedures.
- Controlling the learning process of students without overburdening families.
- Assist with weekly homework planning.

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