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Artículos científicos

Ser estudiante de posgrado en contextos de incertidumbre. La experiencia de los investigadores educativos en formación

Being a Postgraduate Student in Uncertain Contexts. The Experience of Educational Researchers in Training

Ser estudante de pós-graduação em contextos de incerteza. A experiência de pesquisadores educacionais em formação

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Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo fue recuperar los significados en torno a la experiencia de tres generaciones de estudiantes de un posgrado en investigación educativa de la Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez frente al acontecimiento de la pandemia covid-19. El proceso investigativo cualitativo de tipo microetnográfico se realizó en tres momentos: aproximación al campo, recogida de información y análisis. Para la recogida de información se recurrió a tres técnicas: la observación participante, los diarios del investigador y el análisis de documentos. Este momento se desarrolló entre abril de 2020 y abril de 2021 con la intención de recuperar la experiencia estudiantil desde una mirada endógena, situada y plural. Para el estudiantado participante, covid-19 significó un punto de inflexión en la concepción sobre sí mismos (temporalidad); una oportunidad para comprender/se en el mundo (inteligibilidad); un suceso vital que afectó de formas diversas su existencia (experiencia), y una ruptura mediada por las emociones (dimensión emocional). Pese a las dificultades, el proceso de formación para la investigación educativa les permitió fortalecer diversos conocimientos, habilidades y marcos de referencia para investigar la realidad educativa en situaciones de emergencia. A partir de la experiencia analizada se reconoce a los estudiantes de posgrado como agentes disruptivos de su tiempo, su historia y de la realidad educativa que investigan; el anhelo es convertir la experiencia en aprendizaje personal y colectivo para actuar en escenarios de calma e incertidumbre.

Palabras clave: beca estudiantil, estudiante adulto, investigación pedagógica, pandemia, universidad, vida del estudiante.

Abstract

The objective of this work was to recover the meanings surrounding the experience of three generations of graduate students in educational research at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative micro-ethnographic research process was carried out in three stages: approach to the field, data collection and analysis. Three techniques were used to collect information: participant observation, researcher's diaries, and document analysis. This moment was developed between April 2020 and April 2021 with the intention of recovering the student experience from an endogenous, situated and plural perspective. For the participating students, COVID-19 meant a turning point in their conception of themselves (temporality); an opportunity to

understand/understand themselves in the world (intelligibility); a vital event that affected their existence in different ways (experience), and a rupture mediated by emotions (emotional dimension). Despite the difficulties, the educational research training process allowed them to strengthen their knowledge, skills and frames of reference to investigate the educational reality in emergency situations. From the experience analyzed, graduate students are recognized as disruptive agents of their time, their history and the educational reality they investigate; the desire is to turn the experience into personal and collective learning to act in scenarios of calm and uncertainty.

Keywords: student grants, adult students, educational research, pandemics, universities, student life.

Resumo

O objetivo deste trabalho foi recuperar os significados em torno da experiência de três gerações de alunos de pós-graduação em pesquisa educacional da Universidade Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez diante do evento da pandemia de covid-19. O processo de pesquisa qualitativa do tipo microetnográfico foi realizado em três momentos: aproximação ao campo, coleta de informações e análise. Para a coleta das informações, foram utilizadas três técnicas: observação participante, diário da pesquisadora e análise de documentos. Este momento decorreu entre abril de 2020 e abril de 2021 com o intuito de recuperar a experiência discente numa perspectiva endógena, situada e plural. Para os alunos participantes, a covid-19 significou uma virada na concepção de si (temporário); uma oportunidade de compreender/se no mundo (inteligibilidade); um evento de vida que afetou sua existência de diferentes maneiras (experiência), e uma ruptura mediada por emoções (dimensão emocional). Apesar das dificuldades, o processo de formação para a pesquisa educacional permitiu fortalecer diversos saberes, habilidades e referenciais para investigar a realidade educacional em situações de emergência. A partir da experiência analisada, os pós-graduandos são reconhecidos como agentes disruptivos de seu tempo, de sua história e da realidade educacional que investigam; o desejo é converter a experiência em aprendizado pessoal e coletivo para atuar em cenários de calma e incerteza.

Palavras-chave: bolsa estudantil, estudante adulto, pesquisa pedagógica, pandemia, universidade, vida estudantil.

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Introduction

In Mexico, the 2019 coronavirus disease (covid-19) represented a health emergency that convulsed all areas of social life, especially educational processes. In March 2020, after the presentation of the National Day of Sana Distancia (Mexican Institute of Social Security [IMSS], March 23, 2020), the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) supported the measure of temporary suspension of school activities and ordered higher education institutions (HEIs) to "establish a distance or blended teaching strategy to avoid the mass transfer and crowding of community members and, thereby, reduce the probability of contagion" (National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education [Anuies], July 28, 2020, p. 5).

In advance, the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ), located on the northern border of Mexico, implemented as of March 18, 2020 the Virtual Academic Continuity Program (PCAV) as a preventive measure on all campuses of the city and the multidisciplinary divisions located in the cities of Cuauhtémoc and Nuevo Casas Grandes, in the south and northwest of the state of Chihuahua (UACJ, March 17, 2020). After the first month, the transfer of face-to-face activities to virtuality meant difficulties for undergraduate university students due to Internet connectivity, lack of computer equipment, personal, health or work problems, and lack of communication with some teachers (Gómez, June 22, 2021).

Faced with the various positions in addressing the pandemic, this study takes up the idea of social disaster in the form of a "dramatic interruption of normality that exceeds the risk threshold of a society (...), threatens its forms of integration social and systemic (...) and precipitates emerging realities that precede new forms of adaptation" (Espinoza, 2021, p. 2); and the notion of event (Beck, 2017; Gómez-Esteban, 2016) as an analytical category that understands the pandemic as an unexpected irruption characterized by four features: "a) it marks a break in temporality; b) introduces a break in everyday life; at the same time that c) opens up new possibilities in the field of intelligibility and d) causes an experience charged with emotion" (Tavera-Fenollosa and Martínez, 2021, p. 316). From this perspective, it is interesting to recover the subjective dimension in the face of the disruptive event of normality that tested people's ability to adapt, adjust and innovate and provoked various experiences, emotions and learning.

The work is part of a larger investigation on the training processes for educational research in Chihuahua, Mexico; In particular, this text analyzes the experience of students, as subjects of events, of a postgraduate course in educational research in the face of the pandemic.

Being a graduate student. Condition in plurality

Being a graduate student reveals the intersection between being a student, an adult, a parent, and a worker. Following Weiss (2015), in the theoretical framework that allows explaining the confluence of these conditions, the concepts of socialization emerge, which implies the integration of values and norms; sociability, which refers to the interactions of students with their peers, and subjectivation, which refers to the development of their own tastes, interests and abilities (agency). From this perspective, the university constitutes the space of life where the previous concepts materialize.

From French student sociology, promoted since the 1960s, "one cannot speak of a unitary and homogeneous student condition since, although university students agree on the common task of studying, it cannot therefore be concluded that they acquire the same experiences" (Guzmán and Saucedo, 2005, p. 653). In research on university students, the analysis commonly focuses on undergraduate students (Mancera, 2013; Saraví, 2015; Tavera-Fenollosa and Martínez, 2021). In the case of postgraduate studies, students have usually left youth, in the strict sense, to enter a stage of emerging adulthood, understood as a period of life —beginning at age 18 and extending to age 30— where people they explore multiple possibilities in life, love, work, and their view of the world (Arnett, 2000). It is a culturally constructed stage and, therefore, diverse and variable, linked to social, economic, political and demographic changes. At present, the postponement of marriage and parenthood, the search for economic independence and the prolongation of studies are examples of this stage of identity exploration that marks the path towards established adulthood - the period between 30 and 50. 45 years— (Mehta, Arnett, Palmer y Nelson, 2020).

At an international level, the evidence shows that enrollment in the postgraduate program is getting younger, while "at the end of the last century, the population of postgraduate students was made up of adults and older adults, today it is basically taken over by young people between 20 and 30 years" (Piñero, Esteban, Rojas and Callupe, 2021, p.

130). Thus, a new type of student stands out: young adults (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 1999). These are people with characteristics different from their peers in the undergraduate; Young adults face various demands: personal —solving daily needs, organizing finances, living with friends—, family —providing resources, caring for children/parents, participating in events— and academic —attending classes, preparing assignments, participating in forums, analyze cases, prepare exhibitions, attend consultancies—, which, together, generate physical and emotional exhaustion (Benítez and Barrón, 2018; Tacca and Tacca, 2019). In the public postgraduate, the plurality of roles involved in the identity of the students —woman/man, full-time/worker, mother/father, son— are imposed, while the centrality of the student condition is weakened (Suárez, 2017). . Although postgraduate students have a cultural and experiential background to deal with different problematic situations, only those over 30 meet the conditions of biological maturation to develop executive skills such as planning, self-regulation, decision-making, among others (Tacca and Tacca, 2019).

In the country, the results of educational research have recognized students as subjects located in specific sociohistorical contexts —particularly the university—, with experiences, their own voice and agency capacity (Guzmán and Saucedo, 2005; Suárez, 2017). In the Mexican context, in principle, "being a university student means being part of a select group" (Suárez, 2017, p. 40), either in symbolic or statistical terms; image that is exalted by being a postgraduate student and scholarship holder of the National Council of Science and Technology (Conacyt).

Being a postgraduate student in Mexico. Approaches from research

In Mexico, educational research in the first decades of the 21st century has been characterized by a central interest in students —their personal, socio-family, academic and work conditions, interests, activities, values, meanings and experiences—, which has revealed the complexity of its study (Guzmán, 2017; Mancera, 2013). The accumulated evidence shows that the student condition is configured at the intersection of gender, social class, and ethnicity —giving rise to new student figures: indigenous, first-generation, foreigners, young adults, adults, *second chancers*,¹ *second biters*,² parents, exchange parents

¹ Estudiantes que ingresan a la educación superior en plena madurez, ante la imposibilidad de realizar sus estudios en el período normal (OCDE, 1999).

² Estudiantes que vuelven a la educación superior para ampliar su formación (OCDE, 1999).

and migrants (Guzmán, 2017; OECD, 1999). In general, student heterogeneity materializes among pioneer students, those with parents —especially the mother— whose schooling is lower, who depend on family support or the study-work combination to participate in higher education and with permanent risk of school exclusion. , and heir students with family cultural capital, academic habitus and conditions to sustain an academic trajectory until graduation (Mancera, 2013).

Based on the review prepared by Mancera (2013), it was found that although variables such as age, previous schooling, experience in high school —infrastructure, equipment, knowledge and teacher training—, family context —socioeconomic level, schooling and occupation of parents—and personal academic competencies—study habits, English proficiency, aspirations—shape the student experience, are insufficient to determine student trajectories. Due to the above, "perhaps it is more useful to consider not only who the students are but how they are, inquiring about the processes, actions, strategies and expectations that they put into play to move through the university" (Mancera , 2013, p. 52), which implies a shift from descriptive studies to comprehensively oriented research (Guzmán y Saucedo, 2005).

The experience of the Mexican graduate students has been analyzed in various contexts and with different referents. Prior to the pandemic, Becerra (2017) concluded that, in the case of the Autonomous University of Nayarit, the training of young people as high-level professionals is a priority that has been addressed through the offer of postgraduate courses recognized in the National Register of Quality Postgraduate Programs (PNPC) and Conacyt scholarships; Benítez and Barrón (2018) reviewed, from the notion of resilience, the case of postgraduate students in Pedagogy at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) with the intention of identifying the factors, construction and implications of resilience in their training as educational research specialists; For his part, Pedraza (2018) pointed out that in Mexico, frequently, studies on the training of researchers in education offer, above all, diagnostic and statistical information, leaving aside the experiences lived by students during the training process that "goes through in an adaptive process (...), an anchor of interaction and contrast, of their academic skills and personal conditions with the supports of the program and the coverage of the study plan" (p. 1). With emphasis on the pandemic situation, the works of Cardoso, Cortés and Cerecedo (2020), Contreras, Espejel and Flores (2020), Infante, Peláez and Giraldo (2021), Rivera (2020) and Tavera-Fenollosa and

Martínez (2021) are located.) whose results coincide in recognizing the adjustment process that the student body experienced to face the postgraduate course in confinement.

Method

The work is located in a postgraduate program of the UACJ, located on the northern border of Mexico and with a presence in three of the most important municipalities in the entity: Ciudad Juárez, Nuevo Casas Grandes and Cuauhtémoc. According to official information, during 2020, an enrollment of 36,107 students was attended, of which 1,140 were postgraduates —369 specialties, 598 masters, and 173 doctorates. These figures made the UACJ the institution in the region with the "greatest educational offer" (Mexican Association of Control and Surveillance Bodies in Higher Education Institutions [Amocvies], 2021, p. 15).

The purpose of the master's degree in Applied Educational Research (Minea), registered in the PNPC of Conacyt, is to "train high-level scientists, specialists in the field of education" (UACJ, s. f.). For admission, applicants require: a) have a bachelor's degree; b) professional experience in any of the fields of education; c) general knowledge about education; d) critical capacity for the study of the different sources of information; e) ability to write and speak in Spanish and English, and f) willingness to work and learn. In addition, to access the scholarship offered by Conacyt it is necessary to sign an exclusive dedication letter where the commitment to be a full-time student is accepted.

Since its constitution, each generation has been made up of a limited number of students, probably as a result of the problems that postgraduate studies present in the region —low terminal efficiency, low demand for applicants, high student desertion, among others (Gutiérrez and Martínez, 2016)—, which has made it possible to offer close accompaniment to the student body in their training process (Table 1). In addition, within the framework of the internationalization of higher education, in the 9th generation a student from Cuba was received and in the 10th generation another from Colombia, together they are the first foreign students in the program.

Table 1. Number of students enrolled in Minea by generation

| Núm. | Total de alumnos matriculados | Hombres | Mujeres | Generación |
|------|-------------------------------|---------|---------|------------|
| 1 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 2011-2013 |
| 2 | 11 | 6 | 5 | 2012-2014 |
| 3 | 17 | 8 | 9 | 2013-2015 |
| 4 | 10 | 3 | 7 | 2014-2016 |
| 5 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 2015-2017 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 2016-2018 |
| 7 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 2017-2019 |
| 8 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 2018-2020 |
| 9 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 2019-2021 |
| 10 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 2020-2022 |

Source: Own elaboration based on Amocvies (2021)

The objective of the work was: to recover the meanings around the experience of three generations of Minea students, endorsed by the PNPC, in the face of the pandemic event. The analytical exercise was carried out based on three specific objectives: 1) to identify the meanings that the student body gives to their status as postgraduate students; 2) explore the experience of the student body in the face of the health emergency, and 3) analyze the assessment that students make of their training process in scenarios of uncertainty. Consequently, the experience of the students regarding the postgraduate course, the pandemic and the training for research was inquired, understood as an “experience of meaning that can be narrated, mapped and historicized; but, above all, understood” (Gómez-Esteban, 2016, p. 139). In a transversal way, an approach was sought to what it means to be a postgraduate student and their experience in the face of the pandemic (rupture/opening in temporality), its implications in the relationship with others (sociability/subjectivation) and with their own identity (break/opening in intelligibility), as well as the emotions involved (emotional dimension).

Thus, the study is attached to qualitative research, understood as an active, systematic and rigorous process of naturalistic inquiry through the detailed description of situations, events, people, interactions and behaviors that, together, allow the interpretative understanding of the human experience based on the voice, experience and beliefs of the participants (Sánchez, González and Esmeral, 2020). In the form of a microethnography

(Spradley, 2016), the interest was focused on a specific social situation: the experience of postgraduate students in educational research in the face of confinement.

The investigative process was carried out in three moments: approach to the field, information collection and analysis. The approach to the socio-educational reality of Minea allowed us to identify the sources of information and define the techniques for data collection. Thus, through an intentional selection, which occurs when the researcher is part of the community where the event to be investigated occurs (Sánchez et al., 2020), the 15 students were considered —after four withdrawals (one due to death and three due to personal situations)— that made up the last three generations of the program. Of them, three are men and 12 are women, with ages ranging from 25 to 32 years, although the case of a 51-year-old student stands out; they have diverse formative trajectories —arts, law, physical education, education, engineering, literature and critical theory of art—; six are married and three have children; two are first-generation students, that is, the first in their family to access higher education (Guzmán, 2017). Also, 10 students are the first in the family group to enter graduate school.

In April 2020 —the period in which the PCAV began—, the 8th generation was in the middle of the last semester of the program, focused on completing the thesis and delivering the final papers; meanwhile, the 9th generation was in the second semester, shaping the theoretical framework and designing the methodological strategy that would guide their research work. In August of the same year, the 10th generation joined the program which, contrary to its original design, was offered in a virtual mode.

Considering that the event as a methodological category as an "experience of meaning (...) can produce completely different modes of existence" (Gómez-Esteban, 2016, p. 133), three techniques were used to collect information: observation participant, researcher diaries and document analysis. This moment took place between April 2020 and April 2021, with the intention of recovering the meanings of the student body from an endogenous, situated and plural perspective.

- a) Participant observation: characterized by the insertion of the researcher in the life of the community or group (Sánchez et al., 2020). The process was selective and intermittent through continuous periods of observation in class, which allowed us to explore life in the now virtual classroom, to intentionally analyze specific aspects of student interaction and understand their experience. The information was documented in field notes in which "the points of view and personal reflections arising from the

observation of a situation or from conversations with the study participants" were recorded (Massot, Dorio and Sabariego, 2009, p. 355).

- b) Researcher's diary: this type of diary is a useful tool in the investigative process that makes it possible to make visible the decisions, procedures, circumstances, decisions, interests, biases, and reflections of the researcher (Sánchez et al., 2020); it is the "researcher's life story during the investigation" (Camas, 1997, p. 43). During the three courses that make up the research axis of the program, each student prepares a diary in the form of a travel log in which they write down both the data linked to the research—dates, names, suggested readings—as well as the researcher's reflections—hunches, occurrences, doubts and proposals—(Ramos, 2014). In adherence to the ethical principles of privacy, through anonymity and confidentiality, each reference to the newspapers was accompanied by a code according to the student number, sex, generation number, month and year, for example: E1MG9280420.
- c) Analysis of documents: consisted of the review of official documents, which includes a variety of official and public records and materials, both internal—generated by the institution and available to the university community: reports, communications, regulations—and external—prepared by the institution for dissemination abroad: magazines or general communications—(Sánchez et al., 2020).

The third moment was oriented to the analysis of the data through the classic process of three phases: 1) data reduction, consisting of the separation of the material into units of meaning according to the objectives and research questions; 2) disposition of data, based on certain thematic components and the elaboration of a qualitative analysis matrix, progress was made in coding and categorization, and 3) obtaining and verifying conclusions, implied "reassembling the differentiated elements in the analytical process to rebuild a structured and significant whole" (Sánchez et al., 2020, p. 614) that made it possible to situate the results, contextualize them and, with this, advance in the understanding of the reality studied.

Results

This section presents the results around the three analytical dimensions: "Being a postgraduate student", "Experiences facing the pandemic" and "Training for research in uncertainty scenarios". Quotations are included from field notes, the journals and documents reviewed in order to situate the experience of the student body that is theoretically discussed.

Be a graduate student

In Mexico, being a postgraduate student in one of the PNPC programs is a privilege, especially if one takes into account the low percentage of the population that accesses them and, especially, that concludes them (Rivera, 2020). The multiple causes of postgraduate school dropout —individual, sociological, socioeconomic, institutional, and academic (Hernández, Pérez, and González, 2014)— demonstrate the complexity of this period. In the opinion of the participants, the formative journey takes place in moments of difficulty and satisfaction: "I finally reached my last semester in the master's degree, something that seemed very long has come to an end, and here I am, with difficulties both personal and emotional, physical (...), I went through things that I would never have imagined" (E5MG8280320). Likewise: "The third semester of this roller coaster that has been the Minea is almost over, who would have thought that time would pass so quickly. I must state that personally it has turned out to be a difficult period" (E9MG9281020).

The training experience is characterized by the diversity of tasks, especially during the first two semesters of the program, which are made up of five subjects, and intensify at the end of each course and in view of the proximity of the Research Advances Colloquium. The colloquiums are semester academic events for the purpose of students presenting their thesis advances to be evaluated mainly by a group of readers —researchers with experience in the lines of generation and application of knowledge (LGAC) of the program— and the director of thesis with the "formative intention of (...) that students become familiar with criticism as a fundamental element for the enrichment of the products" (Moreno, 2011, p. 66). "We are so close to the end of the semester, oh no! I get so bad on these dates for delivery of final projects, exhibitions, qualifications" (E4MG8230420).

I am in the second vacation period since I started the master's degree, but this is not supposed to be a time of rest, since today, a few days after the colloquium, I prepared the report of changes and began to attend to some of the recommendations of my readers (E9MG9010620).

Although the Conacyt scholarship —the most important scholarship program in the country to carry out high-level studies in academic institutions of excellence (Rivera, 2020)— constitutes an important benefit, its application refers to a bureaucratic process that generates anguish. among the student body, especially among foreign students.

We are at the end of the 4th semester and the group is beginning to show restlessness. What should be a moment of personal and collective satisfaction becomes a common concern. With the culmination of the program they know that, without the financial support of the scholarship, they need to look for a job (Nota de campo, 210421).

"During the development of this week, I did not have advice because I was carrying out various administrative procedures in the [Tax Administration System] SAT, which have me a little stressed" (E13HG10050321).

On balance, the students value their journey as educational researchers in training as positive. For Moreno (2011), research training processes include a series of activities that, even though they are common to all students, are experienced differently by each one. On this point, in her narratives the conviction that studying the master's degree constitutes a part of his life project and the biographical effect of the researcher on scientific activity is distinguished. "Today I am very happy because I have just presented at the colloquium (...). I think that only experience will allow me to get closer to this trajectory for my training as a researcher. (E4MG8250520).

One of the things that nobody tells you when you enter a master's degree (or when you start an investigation) is that your life is intertwined with it (...). I begin to feel that this thesis is just the beginning of a life journey, and that excites me. (E9MG9210421).

In the case of the 8th and 9th generations, an emerging aspect refers to professional expectations. The subject is logical before the culmination of the program, which implies the making of decisions of a labor and academic nature. In the students' discourse, two options are observed: 1) seek admission to a doctorate, preferably outside the university considering that it lacks doctorates in educational research and the institutional policy against academic inbreeding that eliminates the possibility of being a professor their own graduates or 2) return to work —some students have the possibility of returning to their previous employment, however, the majority will have to seek employment, either because they have always been students or because they quit the job with intention to apply for the scholarship. Job search is a challenge because the pandemic scenario is characterized by "a depressed labor market due to the crisis (...). The job prospects of young graduates are uncertain, [especially for] the group of young people seeking to enter the labor market for the first time" (UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education [Iesalc], 2020, p, 19).

The students suggest that in the next session I share some options for studying a doctorate. The invitation is recurring at the end of the 4th semester. At the moment it is difficult for me because the alternatives are limited (...). In the region there are similar doctorates—even the university has some—, however, they lack support or recognition (...). I will look up how to animate them (Field Note, 040521).

[A classmate] began to question me about what I would do once I finished my master's degree. I hadn't really thought about it in depth, I was just thinking about finishing and looking for a job. But after that conversation the panorama opened up for me. He encouraged me to seek a doctorate, he told me that he thinks I have the capacity and that I should not waste the circumstances of my life to continue growing. Virtuality had made me forget that my colleagues are not just moving images that I see a few times a week (E9MG9120421).

For Suárez (2017), anguish is part of the postgraduate student experience; “they live in a situation of 'lack', that is, they are invaded by the anguish of 'not being' or 'not being able to have’”, especially because in Latin America “the social and political environment has not been favorable to youth nor does it transmit security and confidence to university students” (p. 61).

Experiences in the face of the pandemic

At the international level, in the covid-19 era, the main concerns of the student body refer to social isolation, finances, Internet connectivity and the anxiety situation related to the disease (Iesalc, 2020). The pandemic as an event, "that unique and singular occurrence that marks a before and after in the flow of history" (Beck, 2017, p. 49), altered the personal and family lives of students. Gradually, the academic life merged with the personal. In the opinion of the students, the confinement allowed the reunion with the intimate space, with time at home and coexistence with the family. This reveals that previous student life took place in other spaces—particularly the university campus—, outside of home and family. Given this, it is understood the tendency of public universities to reconfigure around the idea of total schools, those private universities that offer their students the full campus experience,

where, in addition to class hours, they have access to spaces for meeting friends, listening to music, reading, exercising, drinking coffee, among others (Saraví, 2015).

With everything that is currently happening, I have not had the opportunity to express how I have felt in the face of the global contingencies of this pandemic caused by covid-19. I must confess that I am indeed very afraid. On February 14 [de 2019] I wrote (...) that I would love to be working online, from home, close to my husband... but not like this, not at this price (E4MG8240320).

Although in the academic and research part I find myself in an "unstable" moment, it is a very different situation in my personal life. Fortunately the coronavirus is without severely affecting my family and friends. The pandemic has allowed me to visit my home, live with my wife and meet my family; It might seem like a joke, but even before living this experience, the pace of life was exaggeratedly fast. (E7HG9180820).

While there is a reunion in personal space, confinement has normalized physical distancing with others —friends, university classmates, colleagues. The social disaster caused by covid-19 threatened the conventions of social integration and precipitated the emergence of realities that require new forms of adjustment from the student body (Espinoza, 2021).

It was difficult for me to adapt, it has been, although it is true that I greatly enjoy my time in solitude, I also do it with the one that I dedicate to my friends and family; just as I value face-to-face discussions in school classrooms (E9MG9250420).

Family is important, especially in these worrying circumstances (...), I remember when we could walk to the park together and see the giraffe taste some delicious carrots, the joy on my nephews' faces was so deep, that even walking through the cobbled path was unmatched (E11MG10040421).

During the first month of the pandemic, the news about the rapid spread of the virus, the multiple deaths, the lack of answers about the origin and cause of the disease, the doubts about how long the confinement would last and the non-existence of treatment, all of this contributed to understanding the coronavirus as a matter of life and death. Soon the insecurity turned into general anguish. Feelings of fear and uncertainty appeared repeatedly in student

speeches. According to Rivera (2020), the pandemic and its effects constituted a new factor that was added to the list of causes of postgraduate school dropout.

I constantly place my hand on my forehead to see if I have a fever, every cough and every sneeze worries me. That awakens the hypochondriac in me. What will happen? How long will this crisis last? Will the colloquium dates be postponed? (E4MG8240320).

“There is a lot to say, covid-19 has affected me and my family as well. Fortunately we are moving forward and recovering health. These have been difficult days, since my mother spent days in very bad conditions” (E7MG9281020).

According to the participants, concern for family, friends and university colleagues, in addition to the violent response from a society that has lost its certainties, contributed to the socialization of fear.

I don't know when everyone's life changed so drastically, I fear for the well-being of my family, my classmates, my teachers, the whole world (...). I fear the lack of supplies, the chaos, looting, robbery, extortion and violence to a greater degree than was already experienced in the city. And I am locked up here analyzing the results of my research without knowing if we will survive this situation. (E4MG8240320).

According to Tavera-Fenollosa and Martínez (2021), "the experience of the event is charged with emotion" (p. 329). Thus, frustration, sadness, stress, anxiety, tiredness, despair and anger are terms that students use to describe the contingency. In this line, the work of Infante et al. (2021), who found that the pandemic has affected women and men differently.

I am aware and, at this time, I am trying to do everything in my power to finish the thesis, but emotionally I am not well... how will our lives continue? (...) Life will definitely change for a while, but for how long? why is this happening? I'm scared (E4MG8240320).

For me, the "old normality" represented a challenge for analysis (...) and the way in which the investigation will be approached has me somewhat discouraged. Perhaps it is because of the cloudy environment and the uncertainty that exists in these times (E7HG9180820).

On the international stage, confinement disrupted the socio-emotional balance among HEI students, particularly those students with previous anxiety and depression problems

(Iesalc, 2020). Minea's student speech points out that the pandemic has affected their physical and emotional health.

The pandemic has affected me in many ways. Emotionally I feel distanced from some of the people I love, we have distanced ourselves because of a virus that has not yet been fully controlled, and we really don't know how long it will stop. The truth is, I never thought that the master's degree would be from my home, in the warmth of the four cream-colored walls that in these months—since I started— have served as company, which silently harbor the stress and incessant back pain that two semesters have left on my body (E11MG10090521).

For Rivera (2020), graduate students suffer from stress and anxiety as a result of the pandemic. Correspondingly, various HEIs have support instances and programs; however, they frequently do not make use of this resource. In addition, they have implemented different measures such as the reduction of registration fees, help with the degree, financial support for students without a Conacyt scholarship, scholarship extension, ease of procedures, among others. Despite the efforts, it is necessary to design actions that contribute to "reducing the inequity of the effects of pandemics (...), especially in public universities in third world countries" (Infante et al., 2021, p. 190).

At the UACJ, new students have at their disposal the Information Guide for new postgraduate students (UACJ, 2019) and the PADEP has recently been implemented, consisting of complementary training, through courses, workshops and activities of human development, tending to “contribute to different aspects of their personal well-being throughout the postgraduate school career; as well as in the development of professional skills that allow them to make the most of the academic training offered in their programs” (UACJ, 2020, p. 1).

For Beck (2017), inspired by Reinhart Koselleck (2007), the event is "between the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation', that which transcends the 'space of experience', and by opening the field of historical possibility unexpectedly produces a new and amplified 'horizon of expectation'" (p. 54); thus, the event is translated into possibility. In this line, the pandemic can be disruptive, an event that breaks a situation, or disruptive, an event that in the break supposes a process of renewal. "The event condenses what up to that moment we have become, inevitably leading us to make changes" (Gómez-Esteban, 2016, p. 139).

Training for research in uncertainty scenarios

The immediate impact of covid-19 on higher education has been the virtualization of educational processes. At an international level, synchronous activities —those in which teachers and students coincide in time and virtual space— are valued as positive by the student body, probably because they reproduce the dynamics to which they are accustomed; In addition, the evidence indicates that graduate students show greater openness to participatory methodologies that demand a greater degree of interaction (Iesalc, 2020). At the national level, according to the survey carried out by Rivera (2020), HEIs have resorted to the use of virtual tools for synchronous or asynchronous work such as Zoom, Google Meet, Moodle and Google Classroom. All in all, 50.5% of the student population surveyed indicates that their learning has been affected —36% believe that virtual classes limit the discussion of topics, 19% are easily distracted, 14% have a poor internet connection—; while 2% find in virtuality the advantage of accessing courses or seminars from other institutions.

With the purpose of sustaining the educational trajectories of the student body in the midst of the health emergency, the UACJ transferred face-to-face classes to virtuality through the use of Microsoft Teams —only in the first week of the PCAV 2,537 teachers, 7,913 groups and 33,551 students were migrated to this platform (Cabullo, March 19, 2020)—. In this regard, Minea students report that the online work caused them surprise and the challenge of adapting to a new school setting.

Working remotely, virtually and online causes me strangeness, I can even say that the motivation that existed in the previous semesters is not the same. The interaction with the world through technologies limits the capacities that I have developed and the way in which I manage to interpret people and situations. It seems that I am facing a professional challenge; once again, adapt to a drastic change and leave behind the expectations built (E7HG9180820).

March was a huge surprise and a great challenge for the country's educational systems (...). A stage of virtual classes began for us postgraduate students (...). It was a different reality from that moment, because up to the date I write the situation has not changed, and it does not seem that it will happen in the following months. It was difficult for me to adapt (E9MG9250420).

According to Moreno (2011), among the institutional conditions in research training, counseling occupies a key role both in the preparation of the thesis and in the completion of the program. In the specific case, advice in the form of a thesis supervision is the responsibility of a researcher with a recognized track record, preferably by the National System of Researchers (SNI) of Conacyt. According to the student body, the consultancies were limited as a result of the pandemic, pausing the progress of the thesis. "I have not had the necessary amount of advice (...), I feel that I am going to the middle of Mount Everest and the work feels extremely steep and cold" (E4MG8240320).

So work, classes, tutorials, everything became virtual. I remember that the two sessions I had with my thesis director during those months were one virtually, the other by phone, and nothing more; with the complications that this meant (E9MG9250420).

In the training process for educational research, students require the development or strengthening of a series of knowledge, skills and reference frameworks to intervene and investigate the educational reality (UACJ, s.f.), among which the ability to work stands out. autonomous (Moreno 2011), especially because in Ibero-America educational processes often do not encourage self-regulation of learning (Iesalc, 2020).

Due to social distancing, the research work represented a challenge to achieve some of the objectives set within it. I will be very honest, I had never done research, therefore the adaptation was relevant as time went by (...). The study was limited by the drastic change of living, but, in the course of this time, abilities were obtained that can be used in the future (E7HG9140521).

Within the framework of Minea, the degree option consists of defending a thesis that is carried out during the four semesters of the program, under the expert supervision of a researcher according to one of the three LGACs, and that must be presented at the end of the school period, which promotes terminal efficiency (UACJ, s. f.). In general, the thesis offers students the possibility of learning "to formulate research questions, define objectives and design strategies to solve a problem" (Rivera, 2020, p. 9). In the program studied, the thesis works vary according to the theme —literacy, right to education of indigenous communities, artistic education, sexual education, socio-emotional education, teacher training, educational inclusion, promotion of school health—, the subjects addressed —students, teachers, parents, indigenous youth, educational authorities, specialists—, educational levels —preschool, primary, secondary, higher education—, methodological approaches —quantitative,

qualitative, mixed— and theoretical perspectives. In this regard, the students point out that preparing the thesis represents a path that is built with small steps, sometimes backwards, which requires perseverance and recognition of achievements.

“I recovered information in the field about this and I am about to finish analyzing the data that responds to this objective. Alright, I'm almost done (congratulatory self-pats on my back) Wooo!” (E4MG8150420).

When you start the path of construction in a thesis, at the beginning it seems that there is no fixed path, that the thesis does not take direction, that the decisions that are made are not entirely indicated and, even, that it is necessary to travel through other paths where stress takes over many situations. The sacrifices are great, but the rewards are often better (E11MG10210221).

Considering that all theses require field work, through observation periods, surveys, interviews, focus groups, among other techniques, attention to sanitary measures forced students to reconsider the plan of activities for this purpose. "I think that the schools will be working with a sense of urgency and will not even be able to receive me in the near future, which could be too late to add it to the methodology before the end of the semester" (E7HG9220420). Another testimony indicates the following: “I had to let go of things that I wanted to do in the field work. For example, the observation of space. The spaces are still there, but uninhabited, there are no interactions, there is nothing. That was the main adaptation that I had to make” (E9MG9100521).

Among the students, the biggest change referred to the original plan for data collection. Traditionally, the success of a research project depends on the will of the people, however, it is common for some informants to decline the invitation. In the pandemic, the participation of people was complex because it required face-to-face meetings mediated by the screen or repeated, which demanded not only the previous conditions, but also "a network of informants and participants willing to share ideas, resources and online knowledge” (León, Chavarría, P. and Méndez, July 28, 2020, para. 8) and opportunity, that is, that they had the conditions to participate —internet service and computer or telephone equipment—, and space to attend the video call, since by the simple act of turning on the camera the other was admitted to the intimate space.

Doing the interviews was a bit complicated since there were times when they canceled me and set another date to carry it out. For me that was very stressful because I had time to do the field work (E5MG8230420).

Long live Mexico! How life has changed! The meetings for the national holidays are still canceled and here I am writing, filth virus! But hey, I'm making progress in the construction of my instruments (...). They are already waiting for me at school and we agreed to start the interviews in the first week of October (E7HG9160920).

Faced with the need to continue with the research activities, the students found an alternative in the different virtual platforms to establish interaction with their informants and collect the necessary data. However, "adapting communication technologies and the Internet space to field work entails challenges for the researcher and the participants (...), it requires much more empathetic approaches and technological skills" (León et al., July 28, 2020, para 8).

It is the first time that I will do an interview, and apart from that, it must be done electronically (...). It should be noted that the speed of the Internet is a limitation, since, in the case of the [informant], the signal was sometimes cut off (E7HG9121020).

[Although] my feeling is that the work would have been more complete if it had been done under conditions of the old normality (...) doing e-research is interesting, I find too many advantages, and I think the participants in my research did not feel uncomfortable using these media (E7HG9140521).

For Merino (June 7, 2021), it is a set of new digital skills called screen skills that allow you to work flexibly through the monitor and overcome the absence of physical contact, such as asynchronous collaboration, digital empathy, autonomy, task prioritization, creativity development, continuous learning, contextual intelligence, among others. "I think that these moments have re-educated the actors in society to work from digital platforms, something that was unthinkable two years ago" (E7HG9140521).

One of the research skills that is encouraged in the program is the socialization of the results through student participation in internal events, such as the Colloquium on Research Advances, and external events such as congresses, meetings and seminars that not only allow the dissemination of the research, but to create collaborative networks. In the case of Minea,

participation in a congress is a priority issue given the Conacyt requirements; requirement that was omitted before the cancellation of said events.

In other news, it has been published that the Congress was "postponed" to September 2021 as a result of the current situation (...). I am concerned that I do not comply with the Conacyt requirement regarding participation in an event of this type (E9MG9010620).

"During this week I worked on the thesis, but especially on the paper that I was planning to send to the Puebla congress, ultimately, due to the situation, I decided not to send it" (E13HG10230421).

Discussion

Being a postgraduate student has a double meaning: for the student body, taking a master's degree refers to a privilege as an experience full of satisfaction, as Rivera (2020) concludes; while alluding to a period of various obstacles. On this point, he agrees with Benítez and Barrón (2018), for whom studying a postgraduate course constitutes an experience that takes place in the midst of a series of difficult situations that students can face and resolve. As stated by the students, the postgraduate experience is linked to the construction of the thesis and the continuation of their professional project. Around the thesis, advice and colloquiums on research advances stand out as key aspects. Regarding the colloquium, the student assessment is similar to what was found by Pedraza (2018), as an "academic support and pleasant-unpleasant experiential contrast for the student" (p. 25). When graduating from the program, the student expresses doubts about his professional life and the job or training opportunities that he can access. The foregoing coincides with the work of Tavera-Fenollosa and Martínez (2021) regarding the concern of the student body about their future. In this way, subject and future are constituted through the experience of the event.

In the face of the pandemic, the student experience focused on the tensions between personal, family, and school life. In principle, the transfer of face-to-face activities to virtuality generated various responses among its main actors -students, teachers, management and administrative staff-. The experience studied finds similarities with Cardoso et al. (2020), whose results show that the change was made "with not always enough online resources, connectivity problems [and] readjustment of face-to-face activities for virtual ones" (p. 2). In addition, the results of the work show that the student's experience was made up of moments

of frustration, sadness, stress, anxiety, tiredness, despair, and anger. For Tavera-Fenollosa and Martínez (2021), the students' concern for coexistence and interaction with other people revealed that the areas of socialization and sociability —proposed by Weiss (2015)— are the spaces where the pandemic printed some of its most important traces. Various studies at the national and international level show the absence of motivation, stress, depression and anxiety as effects of the health emergency in the life of postgraduate students (Cabezas, Herrera, Ricaurte and Enrique, 2021; Rivera, 2020). On this point, the work of Infante et al. (2021) and Tavera-Fenollosa and Martínez (2021), who found severe symptoms of anxiety among Mexican students.

Training for research in the pandemic required the rapid adaptation of the student body to the development of virtual activities and tools. Thus, it agrees with the results of the work by Contreras et al. (2020), who warn that in programs with an interdisciplinary and theoretical-practical approach, close communication between students and teachers is essential, however, this "is difficult to achieve in virtual learning environments" (p. 100). To face the challenges, the student body mobilized a series of competencies for research that exceeded the demands of postgraduate studies and personal skills. According to the analysis of Mancera (2013), the school trajectory is not only the result "of real or supposed 'capacities', material resources and family conditions, but also of actions determined by the subjects" (p. 52). On this point, he agrees with Tavera-Fenollosa and Martínez (2021), who found that, for a group of students from the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of the UNAM, the pandemic meant "the opportunity to get to know each other better, obtain new knowledge , and develop new skills" (p. 338).

According to the findings, one of the main effects of the health emergency on the postgraduate experience was the need to reconfigure the work plan —time, techniques, informants— for the collection of information. Situation that was common for postgraduate students in the country. According to Rivera (2020), the student body restructured their research work: they reduced the experimental work, lowered the objectives, changed the topic of the thesis, eliminated stays, compressed the field work, modified the study design. Another effect alludes to the need to postpone the socialization of the results in a congress. For Rivera (2020), at the national level, these activities were canceled or virtualized as a result of the pandemic.

Among the limitations of the study, two stand out: first, the diaries respond to a course evaluation criterion, so it is likely that the information shared by the students highlights

achievements and reduces difficulties, and second, the experience is recovered only from the perspective of the student body, to understand it in its complexity it will be convenient to include in future studies the vision of the teaching staff and the administrative staff of the program.

Conclusions

Covid-19 was an extraordinary event for which there was a lack of preparation. Based on the analytical category of event, for postgraduate students the pandemic meant a turning point in their conception of themselves, their training, their affections and their life in general (rupture/opening in temporality); an opportunity to understand/oneself in the world (rupture/opening in intelligibility); an event in the trajectory of life that affected their existence in various ways (experience), and a rupture mediated by emotions (emotional dimension). In addition, in the interruption of normality, students deployed new forms of adaptation in the form of learning and skills for online education and educational research in confinement.

The theoretical review allowed us to identify two questions about the uniqueness of postgraduate generations in times of covid-19: "Will it (...) be a different generation, opening up different possibilities than those known in terms of managing their emotions, the social interaction with their peers and their families, as well as their didactic and learning skills? (Tavera-Fenollosa and Martínez, 2021, p. 339); and their ability to demonstrate the competencies developed: "Will the students who graduate in this health contingency period be teachers and doctors capable of performing with quality in the different fields of action of their specialty?" (Rivera, 2020, p. 26). Based on the experience analyzed, graduate students are recognized as disruptive agents of their time, their history and the educational reality they investigate; the desire is to turn the experience into personal and collective learning to act in scenarios of calm and uncertainty. For this, a living university is required, one that listens to its students and strengthens its creativity, commitment and spirit, especially since a university that serves the needs of the market, instead of the concerns of its students, becomes a meaningless institution.

Future lines of research

Faced with the need to develop new research on the subject, it is proposed to analyze the PCAV, implemented by the UACJ, through a comprehensive evaluation that allows identifying areas for improvement, especially since up to now there is a lack of an evaluative exercise that distinguishes learning. acquired in order to incorporate them into improvement actions for the future. The assessment exercise will make it possible to design pedagogical measures for the formative evaluation of learning and generate support mechanisms for disadvantaged students, document pedagogical changes and their impacts, identify errors and advance proposals for digitization, hybridization and ubiquitous learning, as well as promote Internal reflection on teaching and learning. Said information will be useful in view of the next evaluation of the program before Conacyt and the ongoing curricular redesign.

In addition, given that the pandemic has affected women and men differently, new studies with a gender perspective are required to deepen the student experience with an intersectional approach that makes it possible to identify alternative ways of approaching to recover their reactions, learning, achievements and difficulties in order to generate actions for their attention.

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