Spanish education policy in pandemic times. Decisions and consequences for families and students from an inclusive perspective

Inmaculada González Falcón[*] [a]   Katia Álvarez Díaz [b]

[a]   University of Huelva (Spain)
[b]   University of Cádiz (Spain)

La politica educativa spagnola in tempo di pandemia. Decisioni e conseguenze per le famiglie e gli studenti rilette secondo una prospettiva inclusiva

Through an interpretative phenomenological perspective, this article analyses the education policy implemented in Spain following the declaration of the state of alarm due to Covid-19 pandemic. It questions the measures implemented (i.e. the confinement of the population to their homes and school closures, others related to the right of minors to study and to managing the school year), and the main effects on children and families from an inclusive standpoint. Three main categories emerged from the analysis: 1) access to education, 2) the relationships between, and the participation of, members of the educational community, 3) learning acquisition. The results underline that the effects have not been the same for different families, especially among more vulnerable groups. Marginality and socio-educative inequality have increased. It is essential to make more flexible policies to accommodate diversity and ensure the principles of equity. In this direction, family's socio-educational role has to be acknowledged and their needs assumed as a priority.

L'articolo prende in esame la politica educativa adottata in Spagna a seguito della dichiarazione dello stato di allarme dovuto alla pandemia da COVID-19 attraverso una prospettiva interpretativa fenomenologica. S'interroga sui principali effetti che tali provvedimenti (dal confinamento della popolazione alla chiusura delle scuole, dal diritto allo studio alla gestione dell'anno scolastico) hanno avuto per l'infanzia e le loro famiglie in una prospettiva inclusiva. Dall'analisi sono emerse tre categorie: 1) accesso all'istruzione, 2) relazioni e partecipazione dei membri della comunità educativa, 3) acquisizione di conoscenze. I risultati sottolineano come le conseguenze non siano state le stesse per le diverse famiglie e, in particolare, per le più vulnerabili. È aumentata l'emarginazione e la disuguaglianza socioeducativa. È necessario creare politiche più flessibili al fine di tener conto della diversità esistente e garantire equità. In questa prospettiva, va riconosciuto il ruolo socioeducativo svolto dalle famiglie, e le loro esigenze devono essere una priorità.

Keywords: Education policies; Covid-19; Families; Inclusion; Spain.

*   ✉ inmaculada.gonzalez@dedu.uhu.es

1. Urgent educational responses to an unprecedented global health crisis

The state of alarm in Spain due to Covid-19 began on March 14, 2020 and lasted, in a first phase, until June 21, 2020. During this period, two of the measures with the greatest impact on the population were the lockdown and school closures (Royal Decree 463/2020). Spain decreed remote working and online education and thus joined the policy active in much of the world to contain the virus. According to reports by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (hereinafter UNESCO), as of March 30th, 2020, 166 countries had closed their schools and universities. In the global scope, 87% of the student population was affected by these measures, i.e. some 1.58 billion students (UNESCO, 2020a). As of April 28th, the government announced a three-phase de-escalation plan (Ministry of Health, 2020), which the different territories followed according to their coronavirus infection and mortality figures. Some of the restrictive mobility and lockdown measures were gradually eased and in the last phase the reopening of schools was considered.

The return to school took place unevenly, also depending on the educational policies defined by each autonomous community.[1] In Galicia and the Basque Country, schools reopened on May 26th, 2020, although not in all educational stages (Zafra & Silió, 2020). As of June 2020, the bulk of the communities were incorporated. The last to do so, such as Andalusia, joined in September 2020. The majority of the student body returned, however, as of September. It had been more than three months of online teaching and five months since the closure of the schools.

Four levels of alert were issued for a safe return to school and different measures were taken, mainly affecting: 1) the organization of methodologies, spaces, materials, resources and school timetables; 2) coordination and participation of the educational community members; 3) health promotion for minors; and 4) complementary and extracurricular activities. These included: the mandatory use of masks from six years of age upwards; recurrent hand washing with soap and/or hydroalcoholic gel; and continuous ventilation, disinfection and cleaning of spaces and materials. In addition, "bubble groups" of pupils were organized to avoid the interaction of different classes; the differentiated use of spaces and times at school entrances, routes and exits was signaled; and a classroom and person responsible for the management of positive cases in the schools was appointed. Likewise, telematic coordination with the students' families was recommended, as well as holding sports, cultural and complementary activities only when the minimum safety distance and the rest of the rules to prevent contagion could be guaranteed (Ministry of Health & Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2021).[2]

After the state of alarm, a transition plan defined as the return to the "new normality" was implemented. In this phase, the measures adopted previously were eliminated, except for the mandatory use of masks indoors and outdoors and the maintenance of 1.5 meters of social distance. After the summer, and in view of the rise in the number of infections, serious cases and deaths, on October 25th, 2020, the Council of Ministers reinstated the state of alarm and extended it until May 9th, 2021. This time, the measures were less strict, essentially: curfew from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., prohibition of travel between autonomous communities, and limitation of groups to six people not living together (Royal Decree 926/2020).

The government's aim with the various educational measures enacted at the onset of the pandemic was to contain the spread of the coronavirus, as well as to prevent students from missing the academic year and to avoid increasing inequality and inequity in the educational system. However, many of these actions were not free of controversy and their effects have not always been the most appropriate (Bonal & González, 2021).

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1. In Spain, competences in education are decentralized. Each community has autonomy to decide on the matter. However, during the state of alarm, the policy was dictated by the central government. The autonomous communities gradually recovered their functions during the de-escalation process. The return to school was organized jointly with the central government, although the communities decided when to open schools.

2. In schools, the different measures are made more flexible in the case of Early Childhood Education (children from 0 to 6 years of age) and pupils with special educational needs, in order to meet the particularities and characteristics of these students.

One major concern is the negative impact that the coronavirus has had on students' educational inclusion. According to UNESCO (2017, p. 2) inclusive education consists of "taking action to prevent and address all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparity, vulnerability and inequality in educational access, participation and completion, as well as in the learning processes and outcomes". Booth and Ainscow (2015) defined it as the process which: a) increases possibilities for all students to access the curriculum, culture and education; b) lets pupils feel recognized and actively participate in the teaching/learning process; and c) helps them achieve better academic results.

The aim of inclusion is to remove all barriers to learning, coexistence and participation for all students in a given community, regardless of where they arise or who causes them (Arnaiz, De Haro, & Maldonado, 2019). The personal, social or cultural conditions of students cannot, therefore, be an obstacle to their development, learning and participation (Stainback & Stainback, 2001). The focus is on the school institution, on its environments, and not on the efforts that pupils and their families must make to adapt to the new school environment. Inclusion analysis must begin with an assessment of the capacity of school settings and learning environments to support a wide range of diverse learners (Naraian, Chacko, Feldman, & Schwitzman-Gerst, 2020).

In that sense, research has highlighted the need to design new policies, cultures and practices (Booth & Ainscow, 2015) that favour inclusion by considering the reality of the pupils and their families. In this endeavor, the role played by educational administration as a promoter of more or less inclusive actions in schools and their communities is highlighted. The policies, resources and measures promoted by the different governments can favour school improvement or, on the contrary, slow down innovation and hinder change (Santelli & Isidori, 2021). As stated by Arnaiz (2019), it is essential to create a true political conviction that covers inclusive education and takes it into account in all of its decisions, management and actions.

Currently in Spain we have overcome the sixth wave of Covid-19, after being hit with different variants (mostly delta and omicron and, to a lesser extent, alpha, beta and gamma). Virus prevention measures continue to be maintained at school, although since February 10th, 2022, the use of masks in the schoolyard has been discontinued, provided that 1.5 meters of distance is guaranteed (Royal Decree 115/2022). Fortunately, the numbers of infections, severe cases and deaths have decreased significantly in Spain since the start of the pandemic. Today, roughly 91.1% of the population over 12 years of age has had at least two doses of the vaccine (Sánchez-Hidalgo, 2022). Despite this, new lockdowns are not ruled out in the future due to the arrival of other variants, limited vaccine coverage or new viruses.

Given all of the above, it seems appropriate to analyze the consequences that such measures have had for families and their children's education from an inclusive standpoint. This paper analyses the educational policies adopted by the government during the months of March to September 2020, coinciding with the first phase of the state of alarm, distance education and the beginning of the return to school.

2. Methodology

This study is framed in the literature review of the R+D+I project PID2019-106250RB-I00, about improving educative inclusion in compulsory education in Spain. The aim of this study is to help analyze and understand the effects of Spanish educational policy in the face of Covid-19 for families and their children, from a socio-ethical-political position (García-Bravo & Martín-Sánchez, 2013). We rely on the methodological framework of interpretative hermeneutics, as it allows us to "interpret and understand educational reality in a critical manner and establish appropriate intervention measures adapted to the educational context" (Sanz-Ponce & López-Luján, 2021, p. 153). As Moreu and Prats (2010) point out, hermeneutics reminds us that education, as a human act, is a thinking and rethinking, a reading and rereading, a multiple, ongoing and constant interpretation. And it is precisely in the search for consensus with other researchers and, above all, in the impact that consequences and meanings have on new practices, that hermeneutics finds its validity (Flores, Porta, & Martín, 2014).

From these standpoints, we ask ourselves about how educational policy in times of health crisis affects educational inclusion. Or, to put it another way, what are its effects in terms of: 1) access to education and the curriculum of pupils in Spain; 2) the relationships, socialization and participation of students and their families; and 3) the acquisition of learning, especially by the most vulnerable students.

These questions apply mainly to the compulsory educational stages: Primary Education (0–6 years) and Secondary Education (12–16 years), although inferences are also made for Early Childhood Education (0–6 years) and Post-Compulsory Secondary Education (16–18 years). The methodological scheme advocated by Guba and Lincoln (2002) was followed, based on the formulation of key questions, such as those mentioned above, and their response in the light of the analysis of texts (Amilburu, 2008) that make up the bibliographic documentation. For this purpose, we selected national and international research from various entities and groups linked to children, families and education; Spanish government regulations and reports on the measures and consequences of Covid-19; and press releases and other publications on the impact of the coronavirus on the educational community and day-to-day school life. The different sources were selected intentionally, guided by the plurality and diversity of publications which, in the researchers' opinion, best help to understand the object of study (Planella, 2005). Other criteria were also considered, such as accessibility and availability of the information; credibility of the data; and the veracity, validity and reliability of the studies used (Codina, 2020).

The institutions and groups analyzed included, among others, reports and research from the Foessa Foundation (*Fomento de estudios sociales y sociología aplicada*), the Santa María Foundation (SM) or the *Plataforma Infancia* (Childhood Platform). Non-governmental organizations included Save the Children, the Red Cross and UNICEF-Spain. On the government side, the plans, measures, legislation and documents issued by the Ministry of Health (coordinator of Spanish policy on the Covid-19 pandemic in the different areas) and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training were analyzed. Publications followed in the research included the Journal of Sociology of Education and the International Journal of Education for Social Justice, by opening monographic issues dedicated to the effects of the coronavirus on education and dedicating their different sections and issues to this topic during lockdown. As for press reports, we reviewed those of the most prestigious newspapers with national circulation, such as *El País* and *El Mundo*. To analyze the information, we followed Fairclough's (2008) critical discourse analysis model consisting of: a) reading texts and identifying main themes and categories; b) relating themes and categories to each other; and c) relating commonalities and divergences between categories and themes and intertextual interpretation. Both researchers analyzed an initial set of texts separately, discussed the categories identified, agreed on their definitions and proceeded with the final analysis of documents. The contrast of information between researchers enabled us to carry out a double coding and categorization process: deductive and inductive. Based on the three dimensions agreed upon regarding the effect of the Covid-19 policy on inclusive education: a) access to education and curriculum; b) relationships and participation; and c) learning outcomes, the different categories of analysis emerged. These include: class attendance and follow-up, teaching materials and resources, time and space for play, movement and sports, family-school collaboration, homework support, etc.

In the following pages we give an account of the effects that the educational decisions adopted in the face of Covid-19 in Spain have had, and continue to have, in the educational sphere for families and their children. The data are structured on the basis of the questions and principal dimensions described above. The last part highlights some of the critical points detected and a series of proposals to foster educational policies in favour of equality, equity and social justice.

3. Access to education, the first prerequisite for an inclusive education policy

The first requirement to ensure the right to education and an inclusive education policy is that all students must have access to school, curriculum and culture (Booth & Ainscow, 2015). However, one of the first consequences of lockdown was the closure of schools and other socio-cultural, sports and recreational services (libraries, museums, parks, gymnasiums, theaters, cinemas, etc.).

In Spain, more than 8 million minors remained locked in their homes for six weeks. It was one of the strictest and most severe lockdowns for children and teenagers in Europe.[3] The rules were the

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3.   In Germany, for example, children were allowed to go out on the street accompanied by their family or an additional person, while respecting the minimum safety distance. In France, they were also allowed to go out in the vicinity of their homes and schools were kept open for the children of healthcare workers (Lucas & De Benito, 2020). In Spain, however, they remained

same for all sectors of the population, with the exception of basic services (hospitals, security forces, basic necessities, transportation, etc.). In relation to childhood and adolescence, their special needs for movement, physical activity, play and socialization were not considered (Freire & Paricio, 2020). Nor were the characteristics of the most vulnerable collectives, such as single-parent families, children under 6 years of age or pupils with special educational needs and disability. Many of these families felt ignored by the policies proposed and criticized the conflict situations they experienced when they had to take to the streets with their children. In this regard, they complained that children were not part of the government's anti-Covid policy at any time. "The decree was drawn up from a productive and sanitary point of view. Neither children nor the elderly came into the equation" (Lucas, 2020, p. 2). In fact, the flexibility of the mobility rules and the departure of minors from their homes as of April 26th came after a strong demand by the Spanish federation of large families, the family forum and other entities such as the ombudsman, the platform for children's rights or the Spanish Pediatrics Association (Hernández, 2020; Lucas & De Benito, 2020).[4]

Along with the school closures, the government also decreed distance teaching. From one day to the next, teachers had to adapt their pedagogical model to online teaching. Teachers and families were faced with the enormous challenge of "doing school without school" (Farné, 2020). There were many obstacles that emerged. Among them: the low digital competence presented by most teachers and families, the few digital resources and materials available, or the very complicated family, social, economic and health situation that lockdown and coronavirus imposed on the different households, especially on the most vulnerable.

From a pedagogical point of view, the move to online teaching underlined the enormous effort that the teaching staff made in record time to try to provide an educational response to students and their families. The effects achieved, however did not have the same reach in all cases. The schools that adapted best were those that already had training and experience in virtual teaching and those that opted for global, interdisciplinary methodologies, focused on the child and not on the textbook (Torres-Menárquez, 2020). Such experiences were not, however, the majority. A quick and superficial adaptation to online teaching predominated. As emphasized by Rodicio-García, Ríos-de-Deus, Mosquera-González and Penado-Abilleira (2020), Spain did not adopt a distance education model, but rather tried to continue doing what was already being done, but using digital platforms. The training needs of teachers in terms of active methodologies and digital literacy were highlighted, as well as the scarce resources available to schools and families.

The study by Gortazar *et al.* (2020) pointed out the difficulties many students have in accessing a computer, adequate study space and a smooth Internet connection. Many families had to reconcile the remote working of parents with their children's education, without sufficient digital resources or space to do so. As noted by Bonal and González (2021) and Cabrera (2020), the most affected families were those with the lowest economic and/or cultural capital. They had worse Internet access, worse connectivity at home and lower digital literacy skills. Despite the emergence of various solidarity and educational initiatives that sought to prevent these children from being disconnected from school,[5] the fact is that this was not always achieved. As reported by Sanz-Ponce and López-Luján (2021), many of these minors remained forgotten, excluded and invisible in their homes, isolated from educational influence for several months. Their opportunities to learn were thus reduced and their fragility and risk of educational exclusion increased (Foessa Foundation, 2020).

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in lockdown from March 14th, 2020 until April 26th, 2020.

4. As of April 26th, 2020, children under 14 years of age could go out for a maximum of 1 hour for a walk within 1 km of their home, accompanied by an adult of their family unit, respecting the minimum safety distance and from 9 am to 9 pm. Parks and other sociocultural, sports and recreational services remained closed. The same rules applied to those over 14 years of age as to adults. They were only able to go out for essential activities such as going to the supermarket, pharmacy, walking the dog, etc. Their emotional and social needs were not taken into account either.

5. To name a few, parents' associations of some schools contacted municipalities and community services to obtain more laptops; teacher training students from several universities offered support classes for families and students in digital content; and teachers and educators from different areas of Spain launched the 'Adopt a teacher!' campaign to provide online educational reinforcement (Retrieved July 11, 2022 from https://exitoeducativo.net/solidaridad-en-tiempos-de-coronavirus-adopta-un-maestro/). Certain educational administrations also distributed data cards and computers to some students.

4. Relationships and participation of students and families faced with Covid-19

Online teaching did not always facilitate the communication, relationship and participation of families and students in the teaching/learning process. According to Milana (2021), the use of traditional methods in online format evidenced the dearth of methodological responses that catered to diversity and adapted to the needs of the most vulnerable students. In consequence, there were frequent absences and lack of connection, motivation and participation of Early Childhood Education pupils and/or students with special educational needs. Disaffection with school grew during lockdown (World Bank, 2020a). The teachers made real efforts to ensure family-school communication and were highly appreciated by the families themselves (Serrano-Díaz, Aragón, & Mérida-Serrano, 2022), but even so, they did not manage to reach all pupils (Save the Children, 2020).

The socioeconomic and cultural situation of the families also had an impact on the educational responses and on the monitoring of homework that they were able to perform during lockdown (Martínez-Muñoz, Rodríguez-Pascual, & Velásquez-Crespo, 2020). During this period, the need for coordination between school and family became even more evident, increasing the requests for teacher collaboration to support homework at home. Many families, in fact, felt overburdened and others did not know how to respond to the new demands of online teaching. The increase in the amount of homework to be done by students was one of the reasons for the higher tension between families and schools (Muñoz & Lluch, 2020). The greatest stress was experienced by families whose children were finishing school and had to face external evaluations, due to the special implications for the academic future of the students. The strong pressure from the educational administration to work on the different curriculum contents did not help either. Finally (assailed by the complaints and demands from a large number of families, students and teachers), the government allowed the evaluation system to be made more flexible and lowered — not without controversy — the standards and levels of demand.[6]

The accompanying, supporting and caring functions of families were also undermined during lockdown. The data from the study by Gortazar *et al.* (2020) showed that the children of families with fewer economic resources and lower digital competence made greater use of technology in number of hours, although their interaction was of lower quality. In many cases, students were left in charge of their own learning and took on tasks that belonged to their fathers and mothers (State School Council, 2021). This gave rise to the concept of "self-sufficient student" (Plá, 2020, p. 34), which Sanz-Ponce & López-Luján (2021) emphasized to highlight the lower level of protection of these pupils in situations of risk and social exclusion. In the study by Martínez *et al.* (2020), students stated that they needed to feel that their parents were present, communicative, and reassuring to better cope with the lockdown and online education. They demanded basic protection, relationship and affective care, which, however, were not always ensured. Many children suffered hardship due to the loss of their parents' jobs and the reduction of their economic income (Foessa Foundation, 2022). Others were more fragile in the face of family situations of abuse and mistreatment (Save the Children, 2020).

The stressful and anxious situations experienced in many homes have had a significant impact on the educational, psychological and emotional development of many children and young people (State School Council, 2021; Muñoz & Lluch, 2020). But, in addition, the fear of contagion by Covid-19 and disease has also had an impact on the forms of relationship between students, families and teachers (Fundación SM, 2020). This was most clearly observed when the schools reopened after lockdown. Cases of child anxiety, stress and fear were detected which, in the most extreme situations, resulted in children being unable to leave home and return to school (Save the Children, 2020). Among the schoolchildren who did, fortunately, the desire and joy of seeing their friends, teachers and relatives again prevailed (Martínez *et al.*, 2020). However, most of their play, socialization and physical activity activities

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6. As Díez-Gutiérrez and Gajardo (2020) point out, the educational authorities moved between two main approaches, one more progressive and the other more conservative. The first, more oriented towards consolidating the basic and most relevant learning, emotional support and formative assessment in which the results of online education would not be conditioned; and the second, focused on advancing content, assessing it and promoting students according to their results. Finally, a series of measures gave rise to pedagogical consensus and the evaluation requirements and systems were made more flexible so as not to leave any student behind or penalize them academically.

were severely affected by the distancing measures, bubble groups and Covid-19 prevention rules implemented by the government and schools (Plataforma Infancia, 2020). As pointed out in the School Council report (2021), most schools chose to use their indoor spaces and only 33.49% of the schools held curricular teaching sessions or activities outdoors. The percentage of out-of-school activities was even lower, with complementary and extracurricular activities practically cancelled during the 2020–2021 school year (School Council, 2021). Consequently, the participation of families —traditionally linked to this kind of actions— also declined. According to Freire and Paricio (2020), there was very little active participation of pupils and their families and their opinions were not considered in the design of educational measures for the return to school and transition to the "new normality".

On the other hand, changes are beginning to be observed in the configurations that teachers and families project about each other according to their personal positions in the face of the government's anti-Covid policy. These symbolizations are more clearly manifested in the case of families who are opposed to vaccines or who express their disagreement and doubts about the effectiveness and benefits of vaccination in minors. These families feel judged by the educational community and denounce situations they consider discriminatory in schools (Latorre, 2022).[7] This new element should be taken into account due to its special implications in the family-school relationship and future analyses should be carried out on the incidence of health and education policy in the configuration of this relationship.

5. Learning acquisition and educational competencies for life

The above analysis shows the unequal impact that education policy has had on access to education, participation and monitoring of homework by students and their families, affecting the most needy and vulnerable more negatively. Among them: immigrant families, single-parent families, families in rural areas, students with special educational needs and disabilities, children under 6 years of age, children from broken homes or victims of abuse and mistreatment and adolescents and young people between 14 and 18 years of age (Cabrera, 2020; Save the Children, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). In the case of adolescents and young people, the special needs of socialization among equals, access to the first affective-sexual experiences during this period of life and the crisis or tension that usually describes the relationship with their parents, have increased the sense of discomfort and anxiety of many students during the pandemic. An increase of self-harm, anorexia and suicide attempts has even been observed (Reinoso-Mena, 2022); in addition, that happened in a very critical period for the implications for the academic future when facing the final exams to choose further training itineraries or the access to the University. In consequence, different results are observed in the educational success of students, understood as the acquisition of learning and socio-emotional wellbeing that enables their educational participation and inclusion (González-Falcón, 2021).

Regarding learning, the study by Bonal and González (2020) showed the impact that school closures had on the learning of schoolchildren from different social backgrounds in Catalonia. Middle-class families were able to maintain higher levels of educational quality in a critical context, while children from socially disadvantaged families had few learning opportunities, both in terms of time and diversity of experiences (homework and extracurricular activities, etc.). Different studies emphasize the learning loss of students during lockdown and the return to "normal" in schools and highlight its impact on reduced learning opportunities in the medium and long term (World Bank, 2020a; Sanz-Ponce & López-Luján, 2021). According to the Foessa Foundation report (2020), lockdown led to a substantial decrease in the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to lead a normal life for the most vulnerable students, which could also lead to an increase in the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Precisely, the increase in child poverty has been one of the effects of Covid-19 with the greatest impact. The profile of poor families has changed. The lowest links in the chain are included (large families, immigrants, families supported only by women, etc.), but also families living in middle-class neighborhoods, headed by a

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7.   Unlike in other countries, in Spain vaccination is not mandatory in order to attend schools and the anti-vaccination movement is a minority. Even so, certain measures imposed by the educational administration are criticized. One of the most cited is that non-vaccinated students are not allowed to attend classes if they test positive in the bubble group, but vaccinated students are allowed to attend classes (Latorre, 2022).

man, of Spanish origin, who has a job, albeit a precarious one (World Bank, 2020b; Fundación Foessa, 2022).

In terms of student wellbeing, some of the most evident physical consequences of lockdown have been a decrease in vitamin D due to less exposure to the sun, less sport and movement, and poorer nutrition in the children of families with economic difficulties (UNICEF, 2020).[8] Likewise, reports such as that from Save the Children (2021) underline the mental health impact of the pandemic on children and adolescents and the increase in childhood depression, eating disorders, self-harm and suicides. The impact on emotional health and childhood and adolescent needs for play, physical activity and socialization were also not prioritized in the back-to-school. In fact, most of the socio-cultural resources (museums, libraries, theaters, cinemas...) were still closed, as were the parks, gardens and plazas. Once again, the families with the least resources were the hardest hit by this situation. Their children have had fewer options to compensate for the learning difficulties and losses of school closures and to play an active role in their educational processes and community involvement.

6.   Conclusions and proposals

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic led to the adoption of urgent measures to try to respond to the health crisis. It was a period of great uncertainty and turmoil that gave rise to an enormous amount of regulation and controls in all areas, including education. The report by the State School Council (2021) gives a good account of the number of measures adopted by the Spanish government to avoid educational disconnection. The pandemic, however, has reinforced the situation of inequity that already existed in the Spanish educational system and has exacerbated the digital, educational and social gap for the most vulnerable students (World Bank, 2020a; Save the Children, 2020; UNICEF, 2020).

As Milana (2021) points out, the effects generated have evidenced the fragility of the entire system, with repercussions at the individual, group and macro-social levels. According to Tarabini (2020), not only has it been observed that there are broad gaps between families in the exercise of their educational function, but also that there is a great distance between the schools themselves in the development of their equalizing role. Factors linked to the economic, cultural and educational level of families have influenced the educational responses and support they have been able to provide to their children (Bonal & González, 2020). In addition, the resources, experience and training in digital competence, active methodologies, attention to diversity and emotional education of teachers have also been added to the development of more or less inclusive actions (Sanz-Ponce & López-Luján, 2021). The outcomes have affected the opportunities to guarantee access, participation and educational success of pupils, with repercussions on the learning and wellbeing of the most needy and vulnerable students (SM Foundation, 2020).

Therefore, there is a pressing need for initiatives that seek to recover and improve the equity of the Spanish educational system. In our opinion, some of the measures that should be prioritized are linked to the technological field (García-Fernández, Rivero-Moreno, & Ricis-Guerra, 2020). Not only must digital resources be increased and the Internet connection of pupils and their families improved, but also quality digital training for teachers, students and families must be guaranteed.

Another essential point is flexibility of the curriculum and the adoption of globalized methodologies based on the active participation of pupils, research, experimentation and cooperative and community learning. This highlights the need to emphasize experiential teaching as opposed to other more rote methods (World Bank, 2020b). Children and adolescents need to recover the normality of social, academic and family life. In this sense, we consider it essential to promote face-to-face programmes that encourage a wide variety of school activities, the use of outdoor spaces, contact with nature and the opening of the school to its environment (Freire & Paricio, 2020). Attention must also be paid to the

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8.   The Foessa Foundation report (2022) notes the increase in households with children who cut their food spending during the first wave of Covid-19. Many of the children relied on the food provided by the school. During the first days of lockdown and closure of the school canteens, Save the Children (2020) denounced the children's fragile situation. The solidarity of neighbors and associations and the food vouchers distributed by the school made it possible to overcome this situation, although not without difficulties.

socio-emotional development of pupils, increasing the number of programmes and actions aimed at the physical and emotional health of students (Plataforma Infancia, 2021).

For all this, it is crucial to strengthen the links and relationships between the school, the family and the community, encouraging family participation initiatives that really embrace the opinion of the families and are adjusted to their circumstances (UNESCO, 2020b). We advocate continuing to strengthen the online communication and information systems that were bolstered during lockdown, but without supplanting the in-person participation of families in schools and reinforcing their roles in the school, play, recreational and life transitions of their children. In this endeavor, it is essential to acknowledge the active role that families and associations have played as social and educational catalysts during the pandemic and the contributions that they, and their children, have made to the development of their communities (Plataforma Infancia, 2020), and can continue to make for a more inclusive education and society.

Most of these actions are in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations General Assembly. Objective four rightly calls for inclusive and equitable quality education to be ensured promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (Arnaiz, 2019). The lines were already drawn, but, once again, the effort and commitment of everyone involved is needed to make them effective. The pandemic has emphasized the importance of these guidelines not remaining mere declarations. The most negative repercussions always affect the most vulnerable groups. And in times of greater uncertainty and fragility, such as those experienced during the pandemic, educational policy and action must be prioritized and defined on the basis of inclusion and equal opportunities for everyone. As emphasized by Verdugo and Parrilla (2009), these are not partial or sectoral challenges, but rather profound and systemic ones. Systematic institutional and governmental action in favour of educational inclusion is needed.

With respect to education policy, the analysis carried out has underlined the important role played by schools and school management, for better or worse, in the education and life of pupils. It is essential to emphasize the social, and not only educational, function of the school and its important contributions as a guarantor of equal opportunities, equity and social justice. Future research on the effects of anti-Covid health policy on education should be continued, weighing the appropriateness of decisions and actions against the benefits and risks assumed. Among the topics of analysis, we underline the consequences of health and education policy for the family-school-community relationship. Factors related to the fear of possible contagion and attitudes towards vaccines may be modulating the conceptions and practices of family-school-community collaboration.

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Inmaculada González Falcón – University of Huelva (Spain)

🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0294-4246

✉ inmaculada.gonzalez@dedu.uhu.es

Inmaculada González Falcón is Associate Professor of Inclusive Education and Teaching Methods at University of Huelva (Spain). Her research mainly focuses on inclusive and intercultural education, didactic analysis and qualitative methods in educational organizations. She has carried out research on family-school relationship and on immigrant students' inclusion in Spanish schools.

Katia Álvarez Díaz – University of Cádiz (Spain)

🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6886-2921

Katia Álvarez Díaz is Adjunct Professor of Inclusive Education and Early Childhood Education at the University of Cádiz (Spain). Her doctoral thesis analyses the family-school relationship and early childhood education in times of pandemic by covid 19. She uses ethnography as a research framework.