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Impact of Covid-19 on Vocational Training Institutions

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A decentralized entity, which acts under delegation from the State, a non-profit technical institute for professional training. It is the specialized technical body of the State, at the service of the Nation in collaboration with the private sector, for the development of human resources and increased productivity.

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SUMMARY

The effects of the health crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the measures of social distancing, a state of calamity and restrictions adopted by governments to contain the contagion, have resulted in the closure of training centers and the suspension of face-to-face training sessions.

To face the crisis, Vocational Training Institutions -VTI- looked for alternatives to continue with the training, applying virtual training as a support tool through electronic and remote means.

As a direct consequence, both learners and facilitators/instructors are in a process of adaptation to the new training modality and teaching-learning methodologies.

Friendly strategies and platforms have been implemented to interact with users and develop training, which contribute to overcoming the resistance of entering the new modalities by making training more flexible.

The institutions face great opportunities and challenges within them to ensure the formation of competencies that allow them to be inserted in the labor field and the continuity of the strategies already mentioned, to develop semi-face-to-face and distance training with the use of new methodologies and technologies.

INTRODUCTION

Six months after the suspension of face-to-face training in Vocational Training Institutions given the mobility restrictions and social distancing due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which affects Guatemala and the world, the evolution and consequences of the crisis are observed including how it has affected various fields of the daily life of the population, impacting health, the economy, education, coexistence, personal development, and much more.

This article describes the impact of Covid-19 on VTIs and the various actors involved, learners, facilitators/instructors, institutions; making inferences in the short and medium term on the opportunities and challenges that arise in the reactivation and reopening of education in classrooms, workshops and laboratories.

The general panorama of behavior and trends in the implementation and monitoring of health, safety and hygiene protocols is analyzed, as well as compliance with the requirements and needs of the general population in the face of adaptation to the new normal.

The Guatemalan population has been affected, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, including the VTIs since thousands of young people in our country left the classrooms, due to the closure of the facilities, given the restrictions on mobility and social distancing, decreed by the local government, as measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

The main actors involved within these institutions have been impacted; However, each of them has adapted to the current context to continue providing vocational training services and care for apprentices, in accordance with their available resources.

1. Impact generated on learners

In the first months of the pandemic, instability, concern for health and the economic situation, created uncertainty for students about their professional future and the pursuit of the development of their abilities, who had to react and create adaptation mechanisms that would allow them to continue with the virtual training processes available. They faced the dilemma of analyzing their reality and of procuring and having technological resources, but mainly of modifying their thinking and attitudes to insert themselves into the new models of online training or else, as occurs in a high percentage, abandon the professional training programs given the limitations that arose during the process.

The apprentices who were immersed in a face-to-face training methodology, accustomed to classes within classrooms and workshops, given the restrictive circumstances; had to adapt to virtual training, without prior preparation, those who did not achieve the transition abandoned their training process for various reasons, due to the lack of technological resources, connectivity or insufficient adaptation to changes in methodologies that distance training requires.

It is worth mentioning that in addition, many young people have been emotionally affected due to confinement, the perception that their job opportunities are reduced, and a bleak future; concentration problems, depressive feelings, anguish, increased study hours, difficulty in carrying out their learning tasks and additional difficulties, in cases where practical training is essential for the acquisition of skills; since in this modality it is more complex for educational institutions to provide follow-up and guidance.

The closure of educational centers not only in Guatemala, but around the world represents a real risk for the future of youth, mainly in rural areas or living in adverse economic conditions. The most affected seem to be those young people with vulnerable profiles, due to their living conditions they are affected by economic and cultural reasons and by the lack of support from parents who in some cases had the need to send their children to work in the countryside, as a result of the lack of employment opportunities and the low income received to support the household, which leads to a significant increase in the abandonment rate, lack of equity and inequality in access to new training methodologies online.

2. Impact generated on the facilitators/instructors

The crisis has had a strong impact on the facilitators/instructors, mainly those who had not acquired the skills of virtual tutors, transforming from one moment to another into teachers of teaching-learning processes by electronic and remote means; so it has been a real challenge for the facilitators/instructors facing a new work modality to adapt to the change.

Some facilitators/instructors face internal limitations in the skill of information technology management to teach distance classes, for which they must be trained in parallel to their current role and job performance, which has doubled their workload and time dedicated to training. In addition to these factors, there are also external factors that affect them, for example: lack of interaction with learners; when they do not have access to technology, their capacity to respond to the process is diminished; the monitoring of families in the processes when parents are not involved, those learners who do not have autonomous learning abilities and the limitation or lack of provision of technological and material resources for the development of activities.

Communication problems with apprentices do not allow them to control the ideal development of the training processes and the digital divide that exists due to the lack of connectivity creates inequality in the process; In addition, with the use of telephone communication, the variability of the monitoring of the apprentices has been seen in the need to attend them during non-working hours, in order to provide the best service, which implies individualized attention to the students.

On the other hand, there are those facilitators/instructors who, due to various circumstances, did not adapt to the change from face-to-face to virtual training, who created resistance under the premise that competencies and skills cannot be achieved through virtual training, ceasing to carry out training activities and choosing to dedicate themselves to other jobs; creating a vacuum of human talent and reducing the capacity to attend to virtual demands.

3. Impact on the methodologies and delivery modality of the training service.

Despite the limitations and impact generated by the pandemic, VTIs sought to maintain their status and quality by rapidly adapting to new virtual teaching methodologies, the expansion and management of platforms, potential resources for collaborative learning, etc.

Before the pandemic, distance training units and virtual tutor training processes were available, anticipating technological development and futuristic trends, which had been developing in a slow and programmed manner, with a greater content design focus on human development, administration, English and ICT. Considering that the demand for distance training was minimal,

due to the low confidence of the apprentice towards the acquisition of technical skills through this modality and the preference for face-to-face training, so this resource had not been used to the fullest.

However, the crisis forced the acceleration of these processes to quickly enter the distance training modality of the programs of different specialties that were in execution, being developed independently in each VTI.

In terms of methodologies and interaction with users, a transition has been made in several aspects: from the use of printed manuals to digitization, from the facilitator/instructor who guided the performance and face-to-face training to the virtual tutors, the work table of the educational center was changed to the dining room table or bedrooms, from the material resources and technological equipment available in educational centers to the limited reality within homes, in which several family members share, if they have the opportunity, a computer or a smartphone, and in many cases, students without access to an internet connection, being more evident in rural areas of the country.

The main training modality in technical training organizations was face-to-face training at 95%, online training (e-learning) only 3%, with the specialty of computer science standing out; 1% distance training and 1% DUAL training (company-centered). In order to confront the crisis and enhance the opportunities to provide training services and continue the training processes underway, this percentage changed radically to develop to date in 100% distance training.

To adapt, the VTIs created spaces for remote learning, they provide support to learners and facilitators/instructors; They seek emerging digitalization strategies for the training on offer, reinforcing distance and online training mechanisms, synchronously and asynchronously; adapting and expanding virtual spaces and the population's access to information and platforms to generate admission, registration, and training development processes; innovating and adjusting services to the training needs of the population, projecting actions, modifications and adjustments relevant to the problem and perspectives of change for social and economic development.

4. Observations and relevant aspects that are projected given the crisis

The scope of vocational training is no longer limited to the facilities and installed capacity of training centers, which allows reaching a greater number of people interested in learning skills mainly in the area of commerce and services, due to the expansion of the geographic coverage, considering that the internet has no borders that limit the scope of services, which presents us new opportunities:

• Increase the requirement of support and approach to innovative entrepreneurship since people require training to generate income, employment and self-employment, to solve the personal, family and social economic crisis.

• There is a tendency for greater demand to provide assistance for women, which will promote the inclusion and implementation of more programs to assist their training in the labor market.

• The need to adapt the training offered to new economic trends stands out, since after the pandemic there will be greater needs for professional training in various areas and specialties.

• The development of short-term training is imperative, since the youth and the economically active population need to acquire skills in the shortest possible time to enter work and reactivate the economy, thereby managing to build a future that allows them to have a decent life.

• Promote alliances with institutions and support programs aimed at apprentices in technical careers to meet connectivity needs.

• Implement constant monitoring of hygiene measures, social distancing, and physical and emotional health programs as a preventive measure for the spread and containment of Covid-19 infections and encourage the development of a healthier lifestyle.

It is expected that as of the crisis, all VTIs will adopt the development of training in semi-face-to-face and distance mode, reducing the crowding of people within the facilities. It will be necessary that, to return to the classrooms and training workshops, the readjustment of areas, the application of protocols, occupational safety guides for the attention of students and administrative staff, be already available.

5. Challenges for vocational training institutions

One of the main challenges that VTIs will face is to achieve coverage and care for vulnerable groups so as not to exclude them, since as a result of the pandemic, problems related to the lack of equity and inequality in access to training will increase. Likewise, they must achieve the availability and understanding of the use of digital resources, when the candidates and the population that requires training present themselves with a low level of competence and do not understand or adapt quickly to the processes used in digital platforms.

The apprentices who manage to enter and train within the new learning facilitation model, the challenge will involve the acquisition of technical and specific skills by way of self-training and blended training, the development of soft and transversal skills, as well as the VTIs, face the challenge of configuring new scenarios for the development of the evaluation and certification of these skills.

They must also generate confidence that VTIs will be safe places to deal with the psychosocial effects manifested by some people, due to the fear of contagion and its consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Vocational training in VTIs has not stopped, despite the crisis resulting from the pandemic, the facilitators/instructors have played an important role in adapting to the change of distance face-to-face modality, in the teaching-learning process. In addition, relevant platforms and instruments have been implemented to find a viable solution to strengthen digital skills for facilitators/instructors and learners.

2. It is necessary to streamline the design of distance learning programs, considering the flexibility of the curricular contents, the appropriate pedagogical methods, based on the context of each VTI regarding the contagion index.

3. Given the circumstances of the distance training modality, the scope of attention to people has been expanded, mainly in the area of commerce and services; that previously did not have the time and the possibility to attend the VTIs in person.

4. The training needs, closing gaps, circumstantial limitations and the psychological effects on the apprentices, must be considered in the new training proposals and distance training mechanisms, to guarantee inclusion in professional training programs.

5. In order to reactivate their operations, the VTIs must strengthen the communication mechanisms and institutional coordination, training both administrative and teaching staff on the procedures and guides for the application of protocols to Covid-19, as well as the provision of human and economic resources, signaling and equipment to ensure occupational health and safety.

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Infographic:

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---cinterfor/documents/article/wcms_741941.pdf

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