

Physical Education in the Distance Learning Secondary School Context

Osiel Isaac Díaz Hernández
(Pablo García Ávalos School, Tabasco, Mexico)

Abstract: This qualitative study is focused on investigating practices and opinions about Physical Education in distance learning secondary School in the state of Tabasco. The main objective was to understand the challenges and opportunities that both teachers and students face in this educational environment, and propose possible improvements. An exploratory-descriptive research design was used. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with active teachers and focus groups with students of various grades in the selected long distance secondary school. The results revealed that Physical Education classes tend to follow traditional methods, focusing on activities such as throwing the ball without a clear pedagogical plan. Important challenges were also identified, such as the scarcity of resources and the perception that Physical Education is limited to recreation. A significant finding was the positive assessment of the collaboration with the “Pablo García Ávalos” Normal School of Physical Education, where interns are sent to continue their professional training in the long distance secondary schools. The participants considered that this cooperation enriches classes with new educational methodologies and approaches, in addition to providing support to both teachers and students. As a result, this study highlights the need to reevaluate Physical Education in long distance secondary schools, promoting more effective pedagogical methods and recognizing its capacity to contribute to the comprehensive development of students. The collaboration with the Normal School of Physical Education emerges as a promising strategy to raise the quality of this curricular component at the aforementioned educational level.

Key words: physical education, teaching, educational policy, interculturality

1. Introduction

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), long distance secondary schools are a form of secondary education prevalent in rural areas, where television is used as an educational tool and a single teacher teaches all subjects (INEGI, 2022). Under this dynamic, the classroom teacher is responsible for guiding the teaching and learning process in all areas of the basic curriculum. This implies that the teaching of Physical Education is carried out by a generalist teacher, not specialized in the area, but with basic knowledge for its theoretical teaching.

However, the educational work in long distance secondary schools is broad and complex. Teachers must meticulously plan each subject with responsibility and professionalism. This includes carrying out various diagnostics, tests and evaluations to understand students' learning styles and rhythms. This administrative burden can be overwhelming, sometimes leading to the neglect of curricular areas not mastered and perceived as less

priority or unnecessary.

In long distance secondary schools, many teachers follow traditional and popular practices in Physical Education, such as throwing the ball and allowing students to play without a clear pedagogical purpose. This is the approach that has predominated in the schools investigated. Physical Education sessions have become an extension of recess, where the evaluation focuses more on compliance with the uniform, the use of sports shoes and attendance, relegating the pedagogical component that should contribute to the comprehensive and harmonious development of adolescents. at this educational level. This situation, to a large extent, is due to the lack of attention and training that teachers in this context receive from the Directorate of Physical Education of the State of Tabasco.

Secondary education constitutes a crucial step in the comprehensive training of adolescents in Mexico. According to data from the INEGI Intercensal Survey (2015), the country is home to approximately eight and a half million adolescents between 12 and 15 years old. Of these, more than one million combine studies with work, while almost seven million dedicate themselves exclusively to studying. Furthermore, three hundred thousand young people work and half a million report not having any occupational activity.

Regarding school attendance, 93.3% of adolescents in this age group attend school regularly, and eight out of ten are enrolled in secondary education.

According to data from the National Educational Statistical Information System for the year 2020, long distance secondary schools represent 48% of secondary schools throughout Mexico, adding a total of 18,743 schools that serve 1,398,273 students between 12 and 15 years (Government of Mexico, 2020).

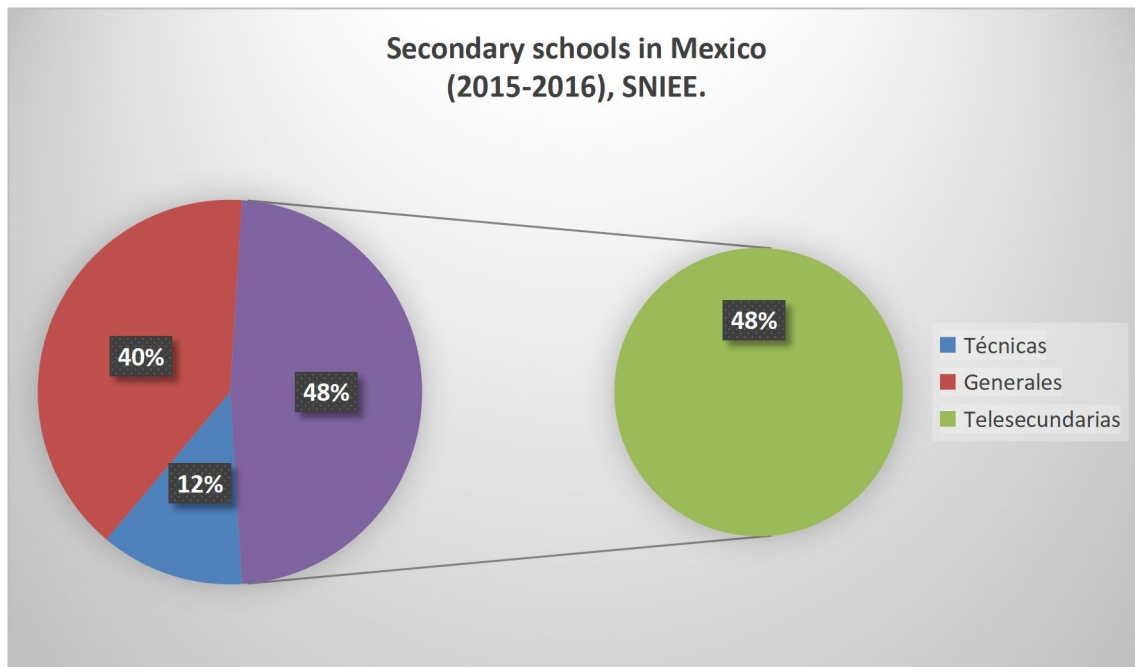


Figure 1 Graph of Secondary Schools in Mexico

In the state of Tabasco there are 5,569 schools, of which 818 are secondary and 459 belong to the long distance secondary school type. Of the latter, 7 are unitary, 67 are two-teachers and 385 are fully organized (Secretaría de Educación del Estado de Tabasco [SETAB], 2019). This implies that more than 50 thousand Tabasco adolescents receive Physical Education classes taught by teachers who are not trained or specialized in

this area. This raises doubts about whether the curricular contents are really being covered adequately and consciously, or whether it is limited to being a recreational space without clear pedagogical objectives. Statistics indicate that, in many cases, the only option to continue studying after primary school for a high percentage of young Mexicans is long distance secondary schools.

2. Historical Background of Long Distance Secondary Schools

The secondary educational level has made it easier to meet the demand of a large number of students who complete primary school to comply with the basic education cycle established as mandatory in Article 3 of the Constitution. The traditional secondary school model is characterized by requiring a significant number of teachers specialized in science or technology to teach predominantly the same subject. The demand for teachers to cover the secondary educational service would not be a problem if the enrollment of the national educational system were modest and the distribution of students was uniform in a territory with similar characteristics. However, this is not the case: the number of primary school graduates who need to complete their basic education is considerable. The country has a very varied social, linguistic and cultural diversity, with a dispersed population, poorly communicated and in many cases far from urban areas.

Long distance secondary schools has been essential to largely meet the demand of young people who wish to pursue this level of education, taking advantage of advances in information and communication technologies, such as television infrastructure and satellite networks. This allows young people from rural and marginalized urban areas to complete their basic education, to which they are entitled.

Long distance secondary school is an educational modality that establishes its schools in areas of high social marginalization. In this modality, a teacher is in charge of all the subjects and also assumes administrative responsibilities, since they generally lack support for this type of work. In addition, it has audiovisual, computer and printed resources that serve as support in the different subjects. Unlike other secondary school modalities in Mexico, Long distance secondary school facilitates close communication between the school and the community. This provides the student with useful tools for their academic growth or their insertion into the workplace. The teacher plays a crucial role as an agent of social and economic development in the environment where the school is located, seeking to benefit the student, the family and the community through this educational service, adapting to local resources and respecting the environment.

Among the numerous virtues that support and validate the existence of long distance secondary schools, its fundamental contribution to education in rural areas stands out. Its influence in these environments has marked significant transformations and advances, shaping the characteristics of this educational modality. In addition, it has played a crucial role in reducing educational lag, bringing learning to distant and dispersed places, benefiting young people of various ethnicities and languages throughout the country. In essence, long distance secondary school is positioned as an educational strategy that, in the last 40 years, has promoted the principles of Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution with inclusion and democracy, thus forging new generations of Mexicans.

Its journey, marked by transformations and changes, has not been in vain; On the contrary, it has been a period of preparation to create a better school, with deep critical reflection that respects the communities it serves and sincerely recognizes that there is still much to do. The data and stories in this document aim to clearly show some of the efforts, achievements and challenges that have been faced: from the changes in educational policy with the continuous implementation of studies and strategies to improve basic education at the national level, to

the current process of strengthening long distance secondary schools, which not only represents a final objective, but the beginning of a new direction to be established.

This educational model is managed by one teacher per group, who covers all the subjects of the basic education curriculum. Furthermore, in 2006 its pedagogical approach was renewed, allowing generalist teachers to use audiovisual materials according to their own planning, leaving aside predefined national standards. Currently, long distance secondary schools have demonstrated competitive performance compared to other general and technical schools (SEP, 2017, p. 77).

Finally, Long distance secondary school was created with specific objectives:

- Complete the secondary education service offered by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP).
- Test new audiovisual techniques for secondary school.
- Open new job prospects for Mexican teachers.
- Bring useful, pedagogically dosed and systematized knowledge to homes.
- Bring the benefits of the service to all Mexicans who, for various reasons, did not receive more than primary education.
- Provide teaching suggestions to secondary school teachers who consider it appropriate to use long distance secondary school broadcasts as teaching aids.
- Provide the opportunity to workers and housewives so that from their homes, as free students, they can follow the courses and have the right to request the exams as sufficiency from the Technical Department of Secondary Education of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP.) and in this way they can obtain the respective tickets and certificates.
- Grant the credits corresponding to secondary education duly legalized by the respective department. (Government of Mexico, 2020).

3. The Long-Distance Secondary School in Tabasco and Their Organizational Structure

Under the pedagogical model of 1968, the government of engineer Leandro Rovirosa Wade created the first long distance secondary schools in the State of Tabasco in 1974, which began operating in September of the same year. Five years later, in 1979, the first teleclassrooms were built in the entity, formally establishing the long-distance secondary schools school spaces (SETAB, 2019).

According to data from the Secretary of Education of the State of Tabasco:

Long-distance secondary school education is organized into seven sectors, each represented by a sector head who acts as the highest educational authority in the school zones under his influence. This academic and democratic leader has the responsibility of ensuring the right of all students to receive a quality education within their scope of action and responsibility (SETAB, 2019).

According to the Secretary of Education of the State of Tabasco, these 7 sectors are made up of 42 school supervisors, of which 35 are men and 7 women. The role of the school supervisor is to ensure the functioning of all schools in their area to guarantee the right to education of adolescents. In addition, this subsystem has the support of 10 Technical Pedagogical Advisors, including those in Physical Education, which represent 24% of total school supervisions (SETAB, 2019).

The educational mission of the long-distance secondary schools in Tabasco is to provide education to all young students who need educational services in rural and difficult-to-access areas in the state.

4. Physical Education in Long-Distance Secondary School

Within the educational scheme of the long-distance secondary schools, Physical Education occupies a significant place. This leads us to wonder if it is addressed in the same way as in technical and general secondary schools, or if it has a different treatment. In this sense, the Ministry of Public Education makes available for long-distance secondary school teachers a book of Physical Education notes for the three grades taught in this subsystem. According to the SEP (2013), “The Long-distance secondary school Bimodal Notes series is designed so that teachers and students share the same material through projects, case studies or resolution of problematic situations.”

Based on the above, the generalist teacher receives guidance through these bimodal notes to plan and organize Physical Education sessions. In addition, the SEP offers an online portal with audiovisual material to provide teachers with all the necessary tools to address this curricular area. However, this is not always enough, since some teachers lack specific knowledge in terms of Physical Education, teaching strategies, teaching methods and techniques, as well as the nature of the content, which can affect the fulfillment of the training objectives of this discipline.

Physical Education in long-distance secondary school requires receiving the same attention that is provided in other modalities of secondary education. Classroom teachers receive periodic support from a Technical Pedagogical Advisor who seeks to guide them in this subject; However, mentoring does not cover all school areas in the State of Tabasco. Currently, this modality has the support of 10 Technical Pedagogical Advisors, which represents 24% of the total school supervisions (SETAB, 2019).

5. Methodology

The approach of this research is qualitative, since it seeks to understand the practices and perceptions of teachers and students regarding Physical Education in long-distance secondary schools. This implies that this curricular space is not limited only to teaching itself, but is contextualized within a broader social, cultural and educational framework. Qualitative research allows us to capture these contexts and understand how they influence educational practices and the perceptions of participants. By using qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups, it is possible to explore a variety of perspectives and opinions. In this way, teachers and students can express their points of view and experiences more completely, thus enriching the comprehensive understanding of the topic.

On the other hand, qualitative research allows researchers to adjust their approaches and questions as they progress through the study. This is especially useful in contexts where little-known or evolving areas are explored, such as Physical Education in long-distance secondary schools. This qualitative approach is well suited to this study because it facilitates the exploration and understanding of the complex social and educational dynamics surrounding physical education at this educational level. Not only will it provide insight into current practices, but it will also capture participants’ perspectives and contexts, resulting in a deeper and more complete understanding of the problem we are investigating. For the research design we have used an exploratory-descriptive design to address the complexity of the situation and obtain detailed information. The sample includes the following participants:

- Teachers: Long-distance secondary school teachers in the state of Tabasco (Particularly Zone No. 24)

were intentionally selected. Representativeness was sought in terms of gender, seniority, geographic location and types of long-distance secondary schools.

- **Students:** Students from different grades in the selected long-distance secondary schools were chosen. Diversity was sought in terms of gender, academic performance and participation in Physical Education classes.

The following techniques and instruments were considered for data collection:

Semi-structured interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with classroom teachers at long-distance secondary schools, to explore their perspectives, practices and challenges. They were asked about their teaching methods, perceptions of the training they received and their opinions on the current approach to Physical Education.

Focus groups with students: Focus groups were carried out with students to inquire about their experiences in Physical Education classes, their preferences, perceptions about their learning and any suggestions to improve the teaching of this subject.

6. Data Analysis and Research Results

After collecting the interviews and focus group data, content analysis was conducted. This process involves a series of steps to identify emerging patterns, themes, and meanings in teacher and student responses.

a) Transcription and organization of data:

The recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was identified with a unique code to preserve confidentiality. The transcripts were organized in a digital folder for easy access and management.

b) Initial coding:

A thorough reading of all transcripts was performed to become familiar with the content. Units of meaning were identified, such as phrases or paragraphs, that reflected key concepts related to Physical Education in long-distance secondary schools. These units were coded with descriptive labels.

Codes: “Traditional practices”, “lack of resources”, “need for training”, “lack of time”, “stigma around Physical Education”.

- **Participant 1:** “Often we just throw the ball and let the students play without any real pedagogical focus.”
- **Participant 2:** “Normally, I just ask them to play soccer or basketball without any educational plan behind it.”
- **Participant 3:** “We have to meet certain requirements and that sometimes limits our focus in Physical Education.”
- **Participant 4:** “Time is limited, we often sacrifice Physical Education to focus on other subjects.”

6.1 Development of Thematic Categories

Coding labels were grouped into broader thematic categories. These categories emerged naturally during the analysis and represented recurring patterns in participants’ responses.

Thematic category:

- **Category:** “Challenges of teaching Physical Education in Telesecundarias”.
- **Subcategory:** “Lack of teacher training.”

6.2 Identification of Patterns and Trends

Patterns, similarities and differences were sought in the thematic categories and subcategories. Relationships between the data were explored and connections between the experiences of teachers and students were identified.

6.3 Results

As the data was explored and patterns were identified, narratives were written describing the experiences, perceptions, and challenges highlighted by the participants. These narratives were supported by quotes and concrete examples from the transcripts. Finally, the validity of the results obtained was verified. The identified narratives and patterns were compared to the original transcripts to ensure they were supported by robust and consistent data.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

The results obtained from this qualitative study shed light on the practices and perceptions around Physical Education in long-distance secondary schools in the state of Tabasco. Emerging patterns in the data provide a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by both teachers and students in this educational context.

Participants consistently indicated that traditional practices of simply throwing a ball and letting students play without an educational focus are common in Physical Education classes. This suggests a lack of planning and pedagogy in the design of these sessions. Teachers mentioned the lack of adequate sports equipment and resources as a major challenge. The lack of equipment and materials limits their ability to carry out more varied and enriching activities. Students also expressed that Physical Education is often perceived as a time for recreation and not as an integral part of their educational training. This highlights the need to reevaluate how Physical Education is presented and valued in long-distance secondary schools.

Both teachers and students agreed that a Physical Education more focused on learning could contribute to the general development of students. This vision highlights the underutilized potential of Physical Education as a tool to instill values, teamwork and discipline. The teachers expressed the need to receive more specific training in Physical Education. Lack of preparation in this area could be a major barrier to improving the quality of teaching.

On the other hand, in this context, Physical Education in long-distance secondary schools faces significant challenges that range from insufficient pedagogical practices to the lack of resources and teacher training. Traditional practices and the reductionist perception of Physical Education limit its educational potential and its impact on the comprehensive development of students. The implications of these findings suggest that a change is necessary in the conception and execution of Physical Education in long-distance secondary schools. Greater investment is required in training for teachers, promoting a pedagogical approach that promotes participation, meaningful learning and the development of socio-emotional skills.

Furthermore, it is essential that educational authorities reconsider their approach to Physical Education, recognizing its potential for the growth and well-being of students. This may include reviewing policies, providing adequate resources and promoting more innovative and effective pedagogical approaches.

Ultimately, collaboration with the “Pablo García Ávalos” Normal School of Physical Education by sending interns to continue their professional training at long-distance secondary schools emerges as a beneficial practice that could significantly contribute to addressing some of the challenges identified in this study. The incorporation of Physical Education practitioners could encourage an exchange of knowledge and experiences between

established teachers and professionals in training. This could result in greater pedagogical innovation and the implementation of more up-to-date practices in Physical Education classes.

Therefore, we consider that promoting and strengthening this collaboration could be a valuable strategy to improve Physical Education in long-distance secondary schools, complementing other measures such as teacher training and the review of pedagogical approaches. This collaboration could help fill the gap between academic training and educational practice in the field of Physical Education at this educational level.

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