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Argentine Universities: Problems, COVID-19, ICT & Efforts

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Abstract

In this paper the general objective was to determine the situation of Argentine universities: Problems, COVID-19, ICT & efforts. Methodology, in this research, 36 documents have been selected, carried out in the period 2016 - 2021; including: scientific articles, review articles and information from websites of recognized organizations. The keywords used in the searches were: Argentine universities, COVID-19 and ICT. Results, Argentine universities have many difficulties, like other Latin American universities. The pandemic has reduced access to economic resources. However, Argentine universities are making many efforts to fulfill their social role. Conclusions, the oldest university in Argentina is the National University of Córdoba, founded in 1613. Higher education in Argentina is primarily public, where direct entry is offered to students. The professional careers preferred by Argentine

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students are engineering, law and administration. There are also very internationally recognized private universities. Many universities are struggling to quickly set up their virtual platforms, before classes start. The difficult economic situation that the country is going through for several years, the health emergency and social isolation due to the pandemic, have paralyzed public and private university activity. It is important and urgent that Argentine universities strengthen the adoption of ICT and also promote innovation.

Keywords: Argentine universities; COVID-19; ICT; health problems; public policies.

Universidades Argentinas: Problemas, COVID-19, TIC y Esfuerzos

Resumen

En este trabajo el objetivo general fue determinar la situación de las universidades argentinas: Problemas, COVID-19, TIC y esfuerzos. Metodología, en esta investigación se han seleccionado 36 documentos, realizados en el periodo 2016 - 2021; incluyendo: artículos científicos, artículos de revisión e información de sitios web de organizaciones reconocidas. Las palabras clave utilizadas en las búsquedas fueron: universidades argentinas, COVID-19 y TIC. Resultados, las universidades argentinas tienen muchas dificultades, al igual que otras universidades latinoamericanas. La pandemia ha reducido el acceso a los recursos económicos. Sin embargo, las universidades argentinas están haciendo esfuerzos para cumplir con su rol social. Conclusiones, la universidad más antigua de Argentina es la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, fundada en 1613. La educación superior en Argentina es principalmente pública, donde se ofrece ingreso directo a los estudiantes. Las carreras profesionales preferidas por los estudiantes argentinos son ingeniería, derecho y administración. También existen universidades privadas muy reconocidas internacionalmente. Muchas universidades están luchando por configurar rápidamente sus plataformas virtuales, antes de que comiencen las clases. La difícil situación económica que atraviesa el país desde hace varios años, la emergencia sanitaria y el aislamiento social por la pandemia, han paralizado la actividad universitaria pública y privada.

Palabras clave: universidades argentinas; COVID-19; TIC; problemas sanitarios; políticas públicas.

Introduction

In this paper the general objective was determine the situation of Argentine universities: Problems, COVID-19, ICT & efforts. Higher education in Argentina is mostly public... Because of historical trends and regulatory framework, the main characteristics of Argentinean HE is: first, the consideration of HE as a human right and a public (social) good. Secondly, publicly funded universities have no fees (gratuity), unrestricted access (without entrance exams or other conditions), are massive and open (no quotas, available for each person living in the country) (Perrotta, 2020).

The initial examination of the process of construction of the dominant model of higher education in Argentina presented above reveals the organic presence of indirect effects of the Cabanis Reform. The question that must be considered, therefore, is not whether the origins of Latin American higher education in health can be traced to the French model of education, but the degree to which it is a result of this historical process, mediated by the gravitation between *Idéologie* (Argentina) and positivism (Brazil) (Almeida-Filho & Di Pasquale, 2016).

For the Secretary of University Policies of Argentina, Perczyk, “in Argentina, the government has defined that the people are at the center of concerns and aspirations” and therefore, all the orientations of government policies revolve around this aspect. In this context, Argentine universities have adopted a number of measures since March 20 approximately (UNESCO – IESALC, 2020).

Argentina has reached the number one spot of all South American countries and number three in all of Latin America to receive university students from the U.S. (U.S. Embassy in Argentina, 2017). “57 universities and 4 university-level institutions were publicly funded. Unlike multi-disciplinary universities, institutions classified as ‘university-level’ institutions are typically mono-disciplinary institutions...” (Monroy, 2018).

The country’s oldest university is the National University of Cordoba, founded in 1613 and considered one of the largest and most capable universities in the country (THE, 2021).

“Created in 1821, the University of Buenos Aires is one of the most important public institutions of higher education in Latin America and is currently a national and international landmark for education and vocational training, research and university extension” (University of Buenos Aires, 2017).

In the figure 1, important information about the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) is shown.

320.000 undergraduate students
25.000 postgraduate students
31.500 academic staff
97 undergraduate courses
448 postgraduate courses
5900 high school students
5 high school
6 university hospitals
Over 7000 researchers and 2500 scholars
27000 research projects
61 research institutes
5 interdisciplinary programs

Figure 1. UBA in numbers.

Source: University of Buenos Aires (2017).

“UNSAM (Universidad Nacional de San Martín), Argentine state university founded in 1992, has become a leader in higher education, research, cultural development and social transformation” (UNSAM, 2021).

1. Method

This research presents a qualitative-interpretative design, of a documentary type, which specified the selection procedure and the data recording (Barrero y Rosero, 2018).

36 documents have been preferred, in the period 2016 – 2021. The keywords used in the searches were: Argentine universities, COVID-19 and ICT. The bibliographic matrix of table 1 was used to classify the works cited.

Table 1. Bibliographic matrix

Name	Type	Objectives	Conclusions

Source: Adapted from Barrero & Rosero (2018).

2. Results

• Problems

In Argentina, education in this environment has become even more difficult in the face of an economic crisis that has prompted budget cuts of \$10 billion to social services, including education (MacGoy, 2018).

“Nevertheless, we have also found indicators regarding the difficulties that these institutions struggle with. In particular, these linked to the economic crises that the country has suffered for decades, which in turn have changed the universities specific features” (Mendonça, 2020).

“The historical tension between the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research and the public universities. It describes the current structure of the scientific field in terms of researchers, institutes, publishing circuits, and institutional evaluative cultures” (Beigel, Gallardo & Bekerman, 2018).

We reflect on the role of the university librarian as a disseminating agent and provider of access to scientific information in Argentina (Fushimi, Pené, Unzurrunzaga, Sanllorenti, 2020).

Finally, based on some results of an investigation that we carried out at the National University of Rio Negro that give account of this problem, we will argue the hypothesis of certain (dis)agreements between the relations with the knowledge promoted by the university and that the new registrants (Vercellino, Bohoslavsky, 2020).

There are many pending problems to be solved in Argentine universities, which have been exacerbated by the difficult economic situation that the country is going through for several years.

• COVID-19

“Today, Argentina ranks ninth in the number of infected inhabitants and has experienced a notably high mortality rate, which has been estimated at 879 deaths per million” (Rabinovich & Geffner, 2021).

“The COVID 19 crisis struck Argentina at a particularly difficult time, in macroeconomic terms. Overcoming these challenges is therefore essential for stimulating the economy and bringing the country out of the crisis” (International Labour Organization, 2020).

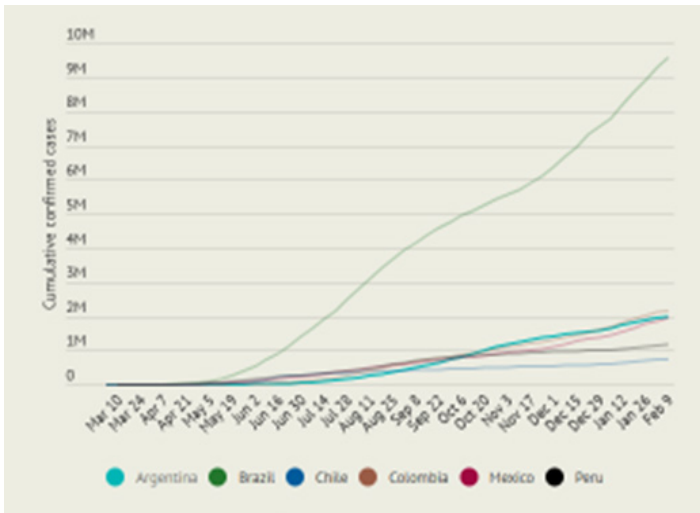


Figure 2. Tracking COVID-19 in Latin America

Source: Gonzalez (2021)

“We find that mobility (as a proxy for the effectiveness of the lockdown) has an impact on observed cases in Buenos Aires City with a lag of 8 days and deaths relate with new cases registered 16 to 19 days before” (Ahumada, Espina & Navajas, 2020).

“Throughout 2020, Argentina continues to implement stay at home measures and a stimulus package that includes assistance for workers in the informal economy” (U. S. Department of State, 2021).

“Argentina’s response to Covid-19 has been marred by a violent police response towards people accused of breaking the rules. In late March, the government imposed a nationwide lockdown requiring people to quarantine at home.” (Vivanco, 2021).

For the university sector, the current pandemic implied a quick turn to shift operations, now in remote mode. For Argentina it meant mobilizing more than 130 universities and almost 2 million students towards a mostly unknown universe (Fanelli, Marquina & Rabossi, 2020).

“Most universities are working against the clock to ensure that their virtual platforms are set up for the courses scheduled for the first semester of the year, supporting teachers and evaluating options...” (Marquina, 2020).

“In sum, the health emergency and the social isolation were far from paralysing university activities. Not only did they accomplish to advance in actions to mitigate the COVID-19 but also were able to redirect the different research lines” (Mendonça, 2020).

As in other Latin American countries, the scarce arrival of vaccines generates uncertainty in the population of Argentina. The pandemic has a negative impact on the economy, health, education and other aspects of society. Universities have migrated to a virtual education, to serve their student population.

- **ICT**

“Information and communication technology, abbreviated as ICT, covers all technical means used to handle information and aid communication. This includes both computer and network hardware, as well as their software” (Eurostat, 2016).







Compared to other economies in Latin America and the Caribbean, Argentina performs above average in four out of seven GII pillars: Human capital & research, Infrastructure, Business sophistication, and Knowledge & technology outputs. Top ranks are found in sub-pillars Education, Research and development (R&D), and Knowledge absorption where the country ranks in the top 50 worldwide (WIPO, 2019).

“They offer university degrees of the highest professional levels. Some of them also offer intermediate degrees and short courses of studies: Atlántida Argentina University (Computer Engineering, Bachelor’s Degree in Computing and Higher Third-level Degree in Computing) ...” (ATICMA, 2021).

Mr Carril is the creator and teacher of the course “International ICT Organizations” at Argentina’s National Technological University and is a member of the Impact of Technologies in the Environment Group at the National University of La Plata (ITU News, 2019).

Table 2 shows the report of some Argentine universities, which participated in the Huawei ICT Competition 2018-2019.

Table 2. Huawei ICT Competition 2018-2019 Argentina RoadShows

Status Report				
University	University Name	Location	Date	Notes
	National University of La Plata	La Plata, Buenos Aires Province, Argentina	TBD	1st Huawei authorized ICT academy in Argentina
	National Technology University	Various, Argentina		
	National University of Córdoba	Córdoba, Córdoba Province, Argentina		
	National University of Tucumán	Tucumán		
	University of National Defense (Aeronautical University Institute)	Buenos Aires		
	Arturo Jauretche National University	Buenos Aires		
	National University of Buenos Aires	Buenos Aires		
	National University of La Matanza (UNLaM)	Buenos Aires		
	Technological Institute of Buenos Aires (ITBA)	Buenos Aires		
	Blas Pascal University	Buenos Aires		
	National University of Luján (UNLu)	Buenos Aires		
	National University of Mar del Plata	Fernando Elias Llamamos 8400, N3304 Posadas, Mar del Plata		

Source: UNAJ (2018)

In spite of these similarities, certain differences were observed in the perceived competencies for academic purposes, which would be associated with different proposals for ICT uses promoted from the context by teachers (Bossolasco, Chiecher, Dos Santos, 2020).

“Finally, the results not only suggest the absence of the linear model of innovation, but the existence of a completely opposite relationship: scientific productivity is negatively associated with groups’ technological performance” (Barletta, Yoguel, Pereira, Rodríguez, 2017).

- **Efforts**

In Argentina, where public universities face huge enrollment issues, especially in first-year courses, the teachers of these classes emphasize the benefits of writing as a way of thinking, participating, sharing, and learning (Molina y Carlino, 2019).

The creation of The Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria (CONEAU) in 1995 opens a chapter about the evaluation processes that, 20 years from its functioning... or its evolution, or the increasing levels of quality achieved in the system, in the elaboration of university rankings, or in the taking of exams for teachers and students (Paulozzo, 2017).

Most students studying at Argentine universities mentioned that they had socialized and interacted with host nationals and rated these experiences positively (Blake, 2018).

“This paper proposes a methodology for evaluating efficiency in higher education institutions, which was applied at the National University of the South, in Argentina” (Ibáñez, Morresi y Delbianco, 2017).

“Argentine universities are interested in forming partnerships with U.S. higher education institutions to teach Spanish and Latin American studies courses to U.S. students coming to study in Argentina” (International Trade Administration, 2021).

Table 3. Current and planned activities under World Bank-supported higher education projects

Country/Activity	Supporting alternate modes for education delivery	Building teacher capability/skills	R&D/innovation	Equity	Other
Argentina: Improving Social Inclusion in Secondary and Higher Education Project			Supports the design and implementation of an action plan to overcome non-financial barriers for education progression and completion through different mechanisms. Among them: i) TA to develop online modules to: (a) close academic gaps in specific subjects or areas as identified by the diagnosis; (b) develop specific socioemotional skills and increase students motivation and belonging; (c) different interventions to close information gaps (e.g., information on returns to education and alternative career options).	Supports the PROGRESAR Scholarship program for 18 to 24-year-old vulnerable students in all education levels, including university and non-university tertiary by: i) improving the targeting, management, monitoring and efficiency of the program; ii) ensuring that HEIs submit academic certification for scholarship applicants on time; iii) improving the progression of students in their careers and the effectiveness of strategic career incentives in higher education.	Instrument: this is the first PforR in Argentina. The instrument provides clear incentives for a government program to achieve concrete results and allows dialogue during implementation to focus on institutional strengthening and capacity-building within the implementing institutions.

Source: World Bank (2020).

The World Bank supports some projects related to education in Argentina, as shown in table 3. It is an important support, which the different Argentine governments have requested.

3. Discussion and conclusion

Argentine universities have many difficulties, like other Latin American universities. The pandemic has reduced access to economic resources.

However, Argentine universities are making many efforts to fulfill their social role, which matches the claims of (Bernasconi & Celis, 2017) “public policy decentralization in Argentina, quality assurance models in Colombia and Uruguay, the emerge of new institutions and universities in Argentina...”.

The oldest university in Argentina is the National University of Córdoba, founded in 1613. Higher education in Argentina is primarily public, where direct entry is offered to students. The professional careers preferred by Argentine students are engineering, law and administration. There are also very internationally recognized private universities.

Many universities are struggling to quickly set up their virtual platforms, before classes start. The difficult economic situation that the country is going through for several years, the health emergency and social isolation due to the pandemic, have paralyzed public and private university activity.

It is important and urgent that Argentine universities strengthen the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and also promote innovation permanently.

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