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Educational gap between high school and public university students in El Alto

Brecha educativa entre estudiantes de Secundaria y Universidad Pública de El Alto

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to determine the educational gap between secondary and higher education students in terms of curricular, economic, technological, and social factors in Municipal District 14 of El Alto, highlighting the role of teaching staff in producing well-rounded graduates capable of successfully facing university challenges. The methodology employed was a quantitative study in which a survey was administered to 100 students, divided equally into groups of 25 participants, from the following areas: Health Sciences, Engineering, Productive Technological Development, Financial and Administrative Economics, and Social Sciences at the Public University of El Alto. The results showed a significant educational gap of 90%. Therefore, it is concluded that it is necessary to implement training programs for teachers and students to improve educational quality and increase the chances of their admission and retention in university.

Keywords:
Educational gap; Secondary education; University; Educational quality; Program

RESUMEN

El objetivo de la investigación fue determinar la brecha educativa entre estudiantes de educación secundaria y educación superior en sus factores curriculares, económicos, tecnológicos y sociales en Distrito Municipal 14 de El Alto, dando relevancia a la tarea que tiene el personal docente de formar bachilleres íntegros y capaces de enfrentarse satisfactoriamente a los retos universitarios. La metodología empleada fue un estudio cuantitativo donde se le aplicó una encuesta a 100 estudiantes divididos equitativamente en grupos de 25 participantes en las áreas de: Ciencias de la Salud, Ingeniería, Desarrollo Tecnológico Productivo, Ciencias Económicas Financieras y Administrativas y Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad Pública de El Alto. Los resultados evidenciaron una brecha educativa significativa del 90% por lo que se concluye con la necesidad de implementar programas de capacitación a los docentes y estudiantes para mejorar la calidad educativa y aumentar las posibilidades de su ingreso y permanencia en la universidad.

Palabras clave:
Brecha educativa; Educación media; Universidad; Calidad educativa; Programa

INTRODUCTION

The educational gaps are a wake-up call for the secondary education system in the Plurinational State of Bolivia to take a closer look at educational institutions and teaching staff to determine the viability of increasing student opportunities to enter university and continue their professional training. This can be achieved through improved education and curriculum planning that meets university requirements.

Therefore, the goal is for students to have access to a quality education that motivates their learning and provides the necessary knowledge to guide them in continuing their university studies, since they must be able to contribute significantly to solving the problems and needs of the society in which they live.

However, the current situation is very different from the ideal, since the existence of an educational gap prevents students from achieving their goals in higher education. The Educational Gap is understood as the inequality of opportunities in access to education due to the lack of correct application of Education Law 070 with the vision of transforming students into well-rounded graduates capable of facing university challenges (Navia, 2018). Therefore, the objective of this research is to understand the educational gap in training between secondary and higher education, to demonstrate the need to optimize the knowledge required by students for university admission.

Although the curriculum is open and flexible in secondary education, it is necessary to highlight the importance of open content, which should foster research, science, and technology. In this regard, the research seeks to reveal the difficulties that exist in secondary education in implementing the teaching and learning process for university admission.

It should be noted that Bolivian education has historically faced a variety of problems, such as the implementation of a curriculum that responds largely to contextual needs, educational environments with infrastructure problems, a lack of technological equipment, and poorly trained human resources, among other factors that significantly impact higher education. One of the factors under constant analysis regarding this issue is the composition of the curriculum, framed within a law currently named Avelino Siñani and Elizardo Pérez, which recognizes that education is a priority of the State, but does not detail the curricular links between secondary and university levels.

Thus, the interpretation of a closed, rigid, and mechanical curriculum proposed in traditional schools may have worked in times when education was framed by rigidity and based on strict rules that required students to faithfully comply with them, starting with the acquisition of knowledge without objection to the teacher. The idea of a closed, strict, and imposing curriculum demarcated teaching as the filling of information or knowledge for its replication, as the concept establishes.

However, various authors, from Franklin Bobbitt, Ralph Tyler, Hilda Taba, and other educators, have stated that the process of receiving information is based on the assimilation that educators make with their students. These elements were what influenced the construction of a curriculum for Bolivian education based on the everyday social life in which children and adolescents develop in national schools. This characteristic prior to the implementation of the Avelino Siñani and Elizardo Law Perez has had an impact on the educational processes of secondary school students who have now been promoted to high school.

However, an analysis of the curriculum reveals a difference in the way objectives are presented, leading the university system to consider moving to a competency-based curriculum and abandoning holistic objectives, a situation that does not occur in secondary education. Thus, the problem of remaining in the gap continues.

Indeed, there is a lack of public policies at the Municipal, Departmental, and National levels for the development of the Bolivian Education System in each region, where "the physical conditions of secondary schools are, for the most part, precarious; but one aspect is even more worrying: regional reports state that teacher training and education is one of the main problems to be overcome (PREAL, 2006). For this reason, it can be said that the problem with the Ministry of Education's curriculum is that it is not consistent with university requirements, and the lack of

trained personnel to take action on the matter undermines the quality of education.

In this regard, there are three curricula: the core curriculum, issued by the Ministry of Education and which cannot be changed; the regionalized curriculum, based on the characteristics of each region; and the curriculum developed by the teacher. Teachers are required to implement the Ministry of Education's core curriculum; otherwise, they are subject to administrative proceedings and sanctions.

This topic is extremely important, since each year, educational institutions promote high school graduates with the hope that they will continue their vocational training at universities. Many of these aspirations are frustrated in pre-university courses, as the knowledge acquired in regular education was insufficient. Therefore, as a current topic, it is considered a relevant and pertinent issue that has already been studied by various authors. The following are considered the theoretical foundation and background for this work:

At the international level, Martínez's (2014) study, "Education for Development in Initial Teacher Training. Case Studies in the Subject of Education for Peace and Equality," aimed to understand the attitudes, values, and prior knowledge about development among students pursuing degrees in Early Childhood and Primary Education. The results of the research demonstrate that students enter these degrees with little knowledge of global reality, poverty, hunger, its causes, and consequences. It concludes that it is important and necessary to implement development education with global focus at all educational levels, enabling its objectives to have a social impact. Most students display passive and unsupportive attitudes regarding their role in society. Furthermore, growing social inequality is increasing public indignation, discontent, and indifference toward the political, economic, and social system.

At the national level, there is the study by Farfán (2015) "Teacher training in the use of information and communication technologies to improve the teaching-learning process in Bolivia" whose objective was to analyze the teacher training process for the use and adaptation of information and communication technologies (ICT) to improve the teaching-learning process in Bolivia. This work showed that the training received allowed teachers to include the use of ICT in the teaching-learning process, however, these did not generate an active learning process, but rather, they encourage lectures and limitations in terms of equipment, connectivity and training, slow down academic dynamics.

And, at the local level, we can mention the study by Ergueta Quispe (2018) "Technological tools and virtual platforms applied in higher education to improve the quality of learning and close digital gaps at UPEA" with the aim of analyzing the impacts of technological tools and virtual platforms. The results showed that students enter education degrees with little knowledge of the global reality, poverty, hunger, its causes and consequences.

Other relevant aspects to consider in this research relate to the meaning of education, higher education, and, of course, the educational gap, since these topics form the theoretical basis of the study. These are briefly described below.

Education

Etymologically, education comes from the Latin educare, which means "to raise," "to nourish," or "to feed," and from educate, which means "to draw out," "to carry," or "to lead" from the inside out. According to Nassif (1974), education is a dynamic and real act carried out in three areas: in natural life, where spontaneous education develops; in the cultural sphere, when learning is oriented and guided by conscious or unconscious intentions of the subject's surrounding environment, by acquiring values that give meaning and individualization to human and social beings.

Regarding higher education, it includes "all types of studies or training at the post-secondary level, provided by a university or other educational establishments that are accredited by the competent authorities of the State as higher education centers." (Cajias, 2001)

Educational Quality

This term refers to the degree of efficiency of the teaching-learning process. In this sense, it takes

into account how much the student learns and the significance of their knowledge, depending on the current trend or paradigm of the educational system. Furthermore, according to Toranzos (2000), in the educational field, quality can be considered in several ways, according to several dimensions:

In a first sense, the concept of quality can be understood as "effectiveness": quality education would be one that ensures that students actually learn what they are supposed to learn at the end of certain cycles or levels. This dimension of the concept emphasizes the learning outcomes actually achieved by educational action.

A second dimension of the concept of quality refers to what is learned in the system and its "relevance" in individual and social terms. In this sense, quality education would be one whose content adequately addresses the individual's needs to develop as a person and to function adequately in the various spheres of society.

Finally, a third dimension refers to the quality of the "processes" and resources that the system provides students for their educational experience. From this perspective, quality education would be one that offers an appropriate physical environment for learning and a faculty adequately trained for the task of teaching.

Educational Gap

The educational gap, also known as the learning gap, is the difference that exists between students who have different levels of social and economic advantages throughout their development, which allow them to advance in their studies. (Rodríguez, 2022) The term refers to the differences between equals in access, trajectory, progress, and educational outcomes within development. The concept was coined by the United States Department of Commerce in the 1990s to explain the unequal distribution of access, use, and appropriation of Information and Communication Technologies among individuals, communities, states, or countries. Currently, this concept includes other aspects such as people's digital skills, the values associated with their use, and the political and economic factors that influence their distribution, among others (Lloyd, 2020).

It is also worth noting that educational gaps constitute quantitative differences, positive or negative, measured in years of schooling or quality of education, between people who are part of previously defined population groups. For the purposes of this study, these population groups are: the population living in urban areas and the population living in rural areas. Their study allows for the analysis, in one way or another, of the transmission or dissolution of socioeconomic inequalities that can occur with access to higher levels of education by the population (Burgos 2007).

Higher education

This is the education received at a university after completing high school and leads to professional degrees. The fundamental components and functions of the university are: training, research, and outreach or outreach. From there, it is possible to advance with specific topics within each university, whether public or private, specialized by sector or level, taking into account the environmental factors with which they interact.

Unfortunately, according to the study, in Bolivia, neither the State nor the universities have been the main promoters of educational research. The State lacks a comparatively usable educational information system, and the university is almost entirely dedicated to the transmission of knowledge whose characteristics are far removed from the scientific activities of researchers and their history. The Bolivian University is a transmitter and repeater of knowledge, not its producer. Schools teach subjects based on textbooks or based on the knowledge of teachers whose training and experience are limited and come from the Higher Education Schools.

Therefore, higher education in Bolivia faces difficulties in its training policies, including: massive enrollment and admissions policies for young high school graduates; unsatisfactory results or promotion of graduates and degree holders due to a lack of employment upon completion; and a lack of adequate procedures for managing training processes: students complete their higher education studies below the stipulated threshold, with repeat or dropout rates reflected in the low graduation or qualification rates. Indeed, the

"quality" of training is highly questionable, although no studies were found that specifically define and address this issue.

Another new university space is that of the three indigenous universities dependent on the Ministry of Education, created by Supreme Decree 29664: the Quechua University "Casimiro Huanca", the Aymara University " Tupac Katari" and the Guaraní and Lowland Peoples University " Apiaguaiki Tupa". In these universities, three key concepts of the educational approach can be highlighted: intraculturality, which aims at identity; and interculturality, which refers to the construction of knowledge based on the criterion of equality with others or otherness (Ampuero and Aparicio, 2015, pp. 4-10).

As noted in the previous paragraph, the aforementioned studies do not clearly address the three components of the university: training, research, and interaction. Regarding training, the relationship between graduates and employment has been mentioned, but little is known about the admission of young high school graduates, their schools, social and linguistic background, and their performance in their training. Curricular policies and the type of knowledge that universities and professors offer are also poorly understood. A similar situation exists with didactic processes in teaching and learning, which, now more than ever, are essential to investigate in the context of the digitalization of distance learning.

Even less well-known is the component relating to university professors: their training, admissions, selection, academic and research output, teaching work, etc. Academic and institutional policies are also unknown, aside from autonomy, which occasionally resurfaces in the debate. The research component is even more worrying. The few reports that exist (Padilla, 2010) express many limitations: a lack of data because there is no organized information at the national level or within the universities themselves; shortcomings or biases in research itself (a very dogmatic conception of research); it is unknown whether funding policies exist, how researcher training is carried out, and whether their results are disseminated. The third component, university outreach, also requires analysis. It is part of the university approach and policy extended internationally: the discourse of interaction between university and society. However, it is unknown whether there are significant contributions to society.

Despite this, Article 103 of the Political Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia guarantees the development of research and innovation activities and the execution of strategies for the incorporation of knowledge and the application of new Information and Communication Technologies for the benefit of the Bolivian population. The document issues a constitutional mandate to the government, universities, public and private productive and service companies, and indigenous and peasant peoples, to develop coordinated processes of planning, organization and execution of research, innovation and technology transfer activities with the objective of strengthening and changing the productive and economic base and promoting the integral development of society. In addition, according to the Academic Model of the Bolivian University System, in order to fulfill its historical social role, it defined at its highest instance of Faculty-Student Co-Governance, the Mission and Vision approved at the XI Congress of the Bolivian University and expressed in the Organic Statute, where it is stated that:

Its mission is to "train qualified professionals of recognized human quality and scientific excellence, with a critical conscience and the ability to create, adapt, and enrich universal science and technology for sustainable development, driving progress, national integration, and social interaction; promote scientific research and humanistic studies, recovering ancestral knowledge; participate in social processes, defending resources and human rights; disseminate and enhance cultural heritage, and contribute to the defense of the country's sovereignty and commitment to national and social liberation."

And its Vision states that "The Bolivian University is a public and autonomous institution of higher education with national leadership, international recognition, economic stability, and academic excellence, based on foundations of equity and opportunity that support lifelong

learning through an integrative educational model relevant to the social demands for the country's sustainable development. Its faculty and students are committed to the country's human, cultural, and social values; they generate science and technological innovation through research to contribute to the sustainable human development of the Bolivian community and efficiently consolidate their interaction."

Causes of poor performance in high school students

According to the Ministry of Education (2004), the most important factors associated with the low academic performance of secondary school students are:

The characteristics of young people

Many of them work, and this affects their attendance, which necessarily results in less benefit from educational activities and less learning.

Aspects linked to structural conditions of a family and social nature.

This is affected by the fact that parents have a low level of education, because they cannot help with homework; also, the limited access to books and the need to leave home to continue secondary education in a different place than where the students live, whether in boarding schools or alone, and without adequate supervision.

The future vision that graduates face upon completing secondary education

It is the expectation that students have about the usefulness of secondary school. As long as it is considered useful, the expectation positively influences student performance; otherwise, it influences negatively.

To understand what is really happening in schools with the implementation of the curriculum proposed by the 2010 Education Reform, it is urgent to conduct qualitative and quantitative research on curriculum design and implementation in schools from the perspective of technical experts and grassroots stakeholders (teachers, students, and parents). They are the ones who experience pedagogical practice day in and day out. The proposal to conduct qualitative and quantitative research means taking into account both the procedural and subjective aspects of school work and those of the material and technical environment from the perspective of students, teaching staff, and representatives.

From the students' perspective, learning problems are often restricted to psychological or cognitive problems, two important and widely studied dimensions, but without conclusive results. Therefore, it is time to understand the diverse conditions in which children, adolescents, and young people develop, their forms of socialization and learning, their attitudes toward school and knowledge, and also those of their parents. In other latitudes, the social and academic trajectories of students have already been studied as processes of acquiring the skill of being a learner, a scholar. Siñani role in the implementation of Law 070 is unknown.

From the perspective of parents, they have increasingly become co-responsible for education, not only in domestic and social matters, but also in academic and school matters, especially in these times of confinement and distance learning. Another understudied problem in this area is the conflict of values that students have in relation to parents and teachers, and with those of their local peers and those emerging on social media.

Now, from a historical and structural perspective, it is necessary to study curricular policies that involve ideologies, projects, and criteria for selecting content and knowledge, which implicate the power relations and influences of the social groups that hold state power. Educational reforms could be the subject of political science and political sociology. The political economy of educational reforms should also be considered.

Considering the automatic and territorial proposal of the Plurinational State and Law 070, one of the topics to be investigated concerns the articulation of the three major types of officially established curricula: the core curriculum, the diversified curriculum, and the regionalized curriculum. More than ten years have passed since its design, but society remains unaware of its functioning and application, and even its characteristics.

In this way, curricula are translated, among other means, into educational materials that form part of the teaching resources for teachers. These

materials become more valuable and useful when social and cultural contexts are unequal, changing, and unstable, or when teacher training and qualifications are weak and diverse, as is the case in Bolivia.

To understand the progress of the curriculum, it is necessary to investigate learning assessments or other components of the education system. It has been said that both quality and assessment are transversal, that is, applicable to any level and dimension of the education system; and although assessment is usually associated with the quality of learning, performance, and output, it also responds to certain educational and societal models. Indeed, assessments have their own history, emergence, and institution (Yapu, 2010), they involve certain processes of legitimation and justification, and there is no agreed-upon single assessment model.

Ultimately, these issues directly impact the educational gap that exists between high school and university education. Many factors must be taken into account to address the problem and provide more development opportunities for those aspiring to pursue and complete university studies. Therefore, the following proposal is considered in this research.

Proposal: Articulation Strategies in the Training Process of Secondary Education and Public University Students in El Alto

In view of the problems affecting the students participating in the research, who refer to the need to receive information that allows them effective guidance for their admission to university and continuing their studies in higher education, a proposal is made to motivate the training of qualified human resources from the different programs offered by public and private universities, with a greater emphasis on the areas of scientific and professional training related to each profession.

In this regard, the objective of the proposal is to develop coordination strategies in the educational process of students in secondary and public university education in El Alto. This responds to the need to reduce the existing gap between secondary and university education, which generates a lack of coordination in school processes due to limited knowledge of technological and scientific resources.

Recognizing this reality and with the aim of narrowing this educational gap and improving teaching and learning processes, we propose to design and implement a methodological strategy for articulation in the training process of students at the secondary education and public university levels in El Alto. This strategy can significantly generate a training process with professional ethics and quality that contributes to the country's development.

Implementation strategies

The program would be implemented through objective dialogue with students, enabling meetings and discussions to be organized that allow for the investigation of educational units and the identification of factors that hinder the assimilation of knowledge related to science and technology. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop a system for measuring educational quality, with principals and the state administration at the center.

Once the study problem and its supporting theoretical foundations have been described, it is pertinent to explain how the data were collected and analyzed, which is explained below in the method.

METHOD

This study is quantitative, follows the positivist paradigm, and is descriptive with a non-experimental transactional or cross-sectional design because the information on the variables was obtained at a single point in time. The research method used is hypothetical-deductive, which is why the formulated hypothesis will be studied and subsequently verified through deduction. Throughout this process, it will be possible to conclude whether the assumption is accepted or rejected.

For this research, the information sources used are primary and secondary. The survey and documentary review were employed. The study population includes universities that belong to the areas of Health Sciences, Engineering and Productive Technology, Social Sciences and Economic, Financial and Administrative Sciences of the Public University of El Alto. The sample is

non-probabilistic, of simple random type, made up of a total of 100 first-year students divided equally into groups of 25 participants in the areas of: Health Sciences, Engineering, Productive Technological Development, Economic, Financial and Administrative Sciences and Social Sciences.

In the first phase of the study, an analysis was conducted of the status, progress, and setbacks of secondary education in Municipal District 14 of the City of El Alto and Higher Education at the Public University of El Alto. Fieldwork was then conducted, during which the survey and questionnaire were administered, allowing for the collection of quantifiable information. The results were then systematized for subsequent interpretation and discussion.

RESULTS

Once the questionnaire was administered to the study sample, the results of the 30 questions were systematized, which explored the gaps in each area. Below are the results for the specific areas based on the following factors: curricular, economic, technological, and sociological.

In the end they are synthesized in a general gap.

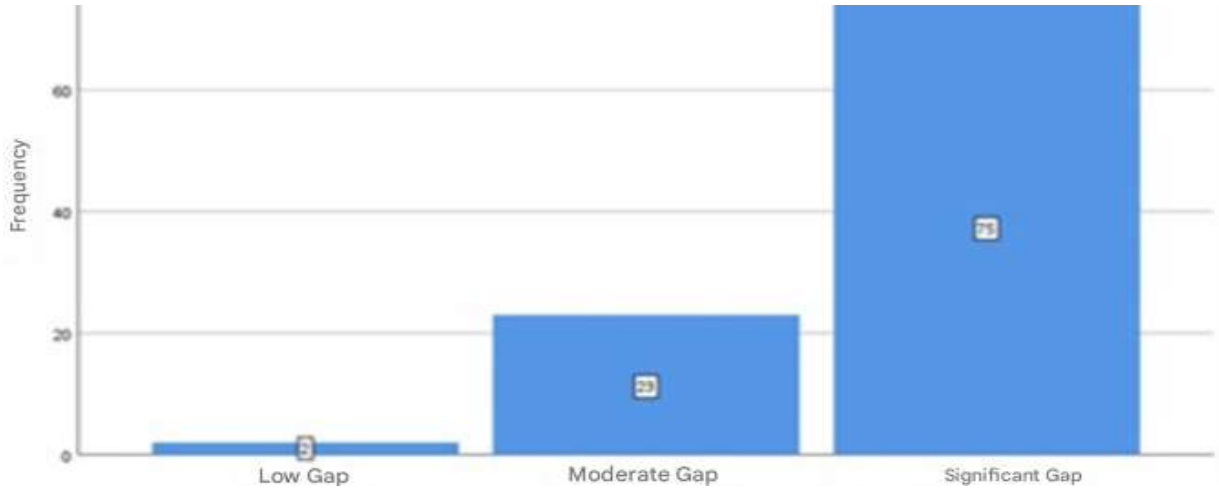

Figure 1. Gap by factors or areas

Figure 1 shows the levels in the area of the curricular factor, where the highest frequency is represented by a significant gap at 75%, corresponding to 75 students respectively; followed by a moderate gap at 23%, corresponding to 23 students; and finally, a low gap at 2%, corresponding to 2 students.

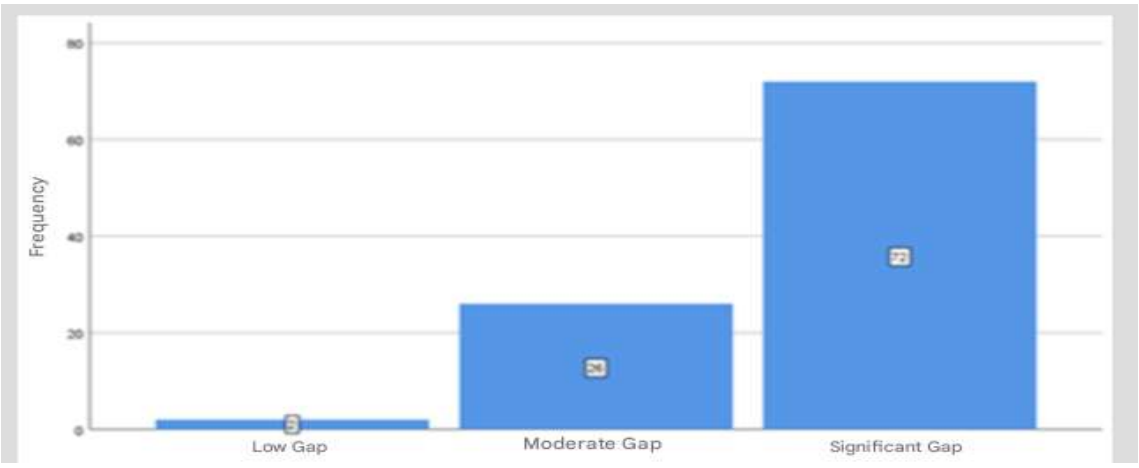

Figure 2. *Gap by Economic Factors*

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Figure 2 shows the gap levels in the Economic factor area, where the highest frequency is represented by a significant gap at 72%, corresponding to 72 students respectively; followed by a moderate gap at 26%, corresponding to 26 students; and finally, a low gap at 2%, corresponding to 2 students.

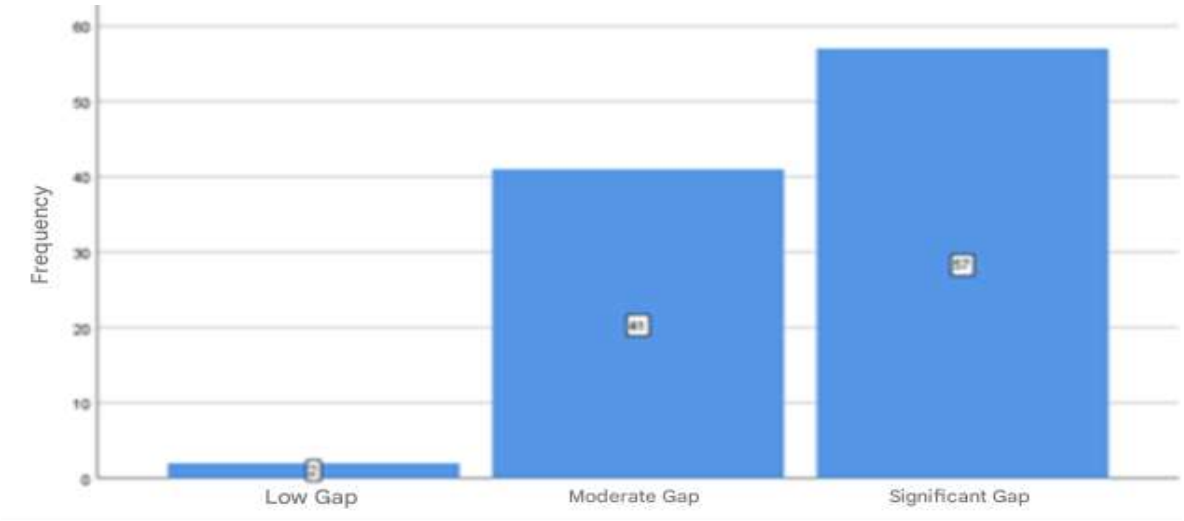

Figure 3. *Gap by Technological Factors*

Figure 3 shows the gap levels in the area of the Technology factor, where the highest frequency is represented by a significant gap at 57%, corresponding to 57 students, followed by a moderate gap at 41%, corresponding to 41 students, and finally a low gap at 2%, corresponding to 2 students.

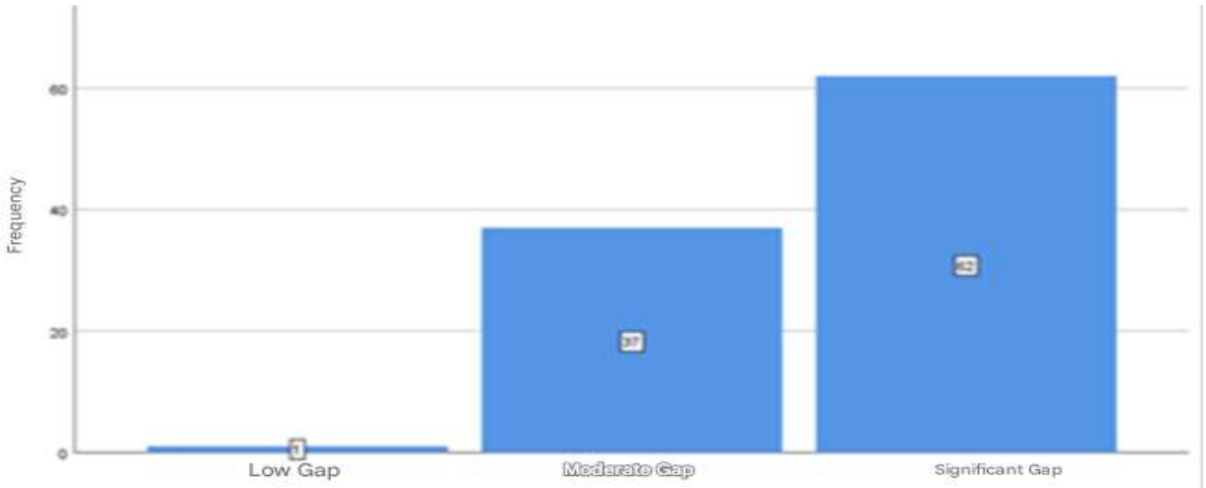

Figure 4. *Gap by Sociocultural Factors*

Figure 4 shows the gap levels in the area of the Sociocultural factor, where the highest frequency is represented by a significant gap at 62%, corresponding to 62 students respectively; followed by a moderate gap at 37%, corresponding to 37 students; and finally, a low gap at 1%, corresponding to 1 student.

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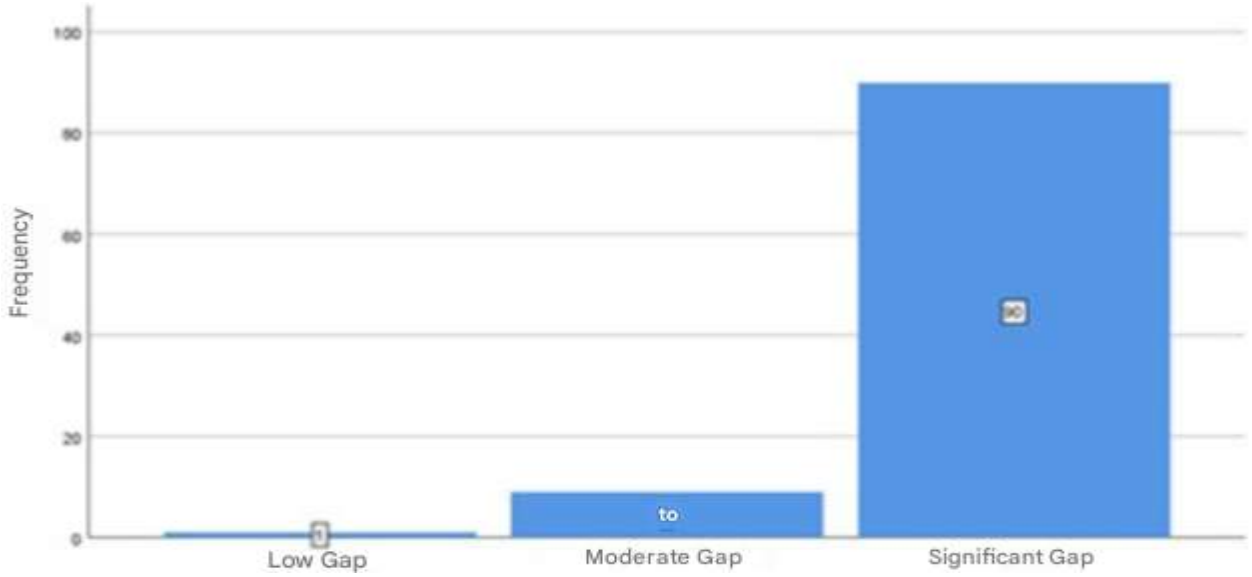

Figure 5. *General Gap*

Figure 5 shows the overall gap levels, with the highest frequency being a significant gap at 90%, corresponding to 90 students, followed by a moderate gap at 9%, corresponding to 9 students, and finally a low gap at 1%, corresponding to 1 student.

Chi-Statistics Test Results

The score obtained in the Chi statistical test is 66.275, which is greater than the critical value 5.99, so the alternative hypothesis (Hi) is accepted and the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected.

It is demonstrated that, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, an educational gap exists in training, and this affects high school and university students in Municipal District 14 of El Alto.

DISCUSSION

The gap analyses revealed a significant 75% gap in the curriculum between secondary school and university, and it can be said that there is no concordance between the content of the necessary subjects that are logically related to university access.

In the economic factor, the significant gap of 72% is due to the fact that the budget levels for university permanence are higher, according to the perception of the students, which is why they take up occasional or part-time work, since their families could not afford the full cost of the degree.

Regarding the technological factor, a significant gap of 57% stands out regarding the use of virtual platforms and the implementation of ICTs in the educational context. It is worth adding at this point that the COVID-19 experience marked a new era in higher education, where the use of technologies became almost indispensable for many teachers and students, who were affected by their lack of knowledge and access to them. These technologies have now become highly relevant pedagogical tools.

Regarding the sociocultural factor, where the highest frequency is represented by the significant gap at 62%, there are a number of myths and prejudices in the student's family and social environment that seem to condition the idea that studying a degree is a difficult task, which becomes an academic demotivation that must be overcome.

Finally, the educational gap, which amounts to 90% across all established factors, highlights the need to optimize the educational process through pedagogical proposals that counteract the impact these gaps have had on the relationship between secondary and university education, particularly at the curricular level, where the inconsistency of content is worrying.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study on the gap factors, whose reliability is 95% according to the statistical test, allow verifying the hypothesis that there is an

educational gap that affects the student population and teaching staff in secondary and higher education institutions in the different factors described above, from which the following is concluded:

To address the curricular gap, it is necessary to have specific subjects that aim to promote university access. Concerning this, appropriate curricula must be developed and implemented for secondary and university education, ensuring that the content is interrelated. Regarding the economic gap, it is understood that, while students' employment is a pressing need, this should not imply a decline in the quality of education. Therefore, it is advisable to train students for jobs related to their majors and ensure they know how to manage their time to accommodate all their activities. Furthermore, distance learning courses can also be a good alternative to reduce the costs of the educational process.

Regarding the technological factor, it is important to normalize virtual education. Therefore, both faculty and students must receive training in this methodology. Institutions must provide them with a space with the necessary computer tools. Communication technologies with which students are most familiar, such as cell phone messaging, chat, Facebook, etc., must be considered an additional teaching resource. Besides, in the sociocultural area, where beliefs persist that, according to families, high school graduates have greater difficulty entering university, the values and responsibilities necessary for entering the academic world must be strengthened. This deficit must be addressed and countered through university-access training proposals.

Ultimately, to close the educational gap, it is also necessary for teachers in secondary education units across all curricular disciplines to emphasize the impact of research, science, and technology as activities that strengthen the knowledge of each student with a view toward higher education. In this regard, it is determined that the difficulties that exist in secondary school stem from the implementation of curricula with an emphasis on traditional approaches. Sixth-grade students need more comprehensive and in-depth guidance in each of the curricular disciplines, emphasizing what is taught in universities. Finally, it is necessary to implement appropriate tools and instruments consistent with reality to improve the quality of education.

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