



COVID-19 and the Global Impact of School Closures

Education Response to COVID-19 in Peru

As of June 2020, the coronavirus pandemic had forced governments in over 150 countries to close schools and shift to virtual learning strategies for millions of students.¹ In Peru, over 9.9 million school aged children have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.² On March 16, 2020, the Ministry of Education (MINEDU) cancelled the beginning of the traditional school year and extended its normal summer vacation by an additional two weeks. On March 20th the government's distance education strategy, a program for all students in preschool, primary, and secondary school titled *Aprendo en Casa* ("I Learn at Home") was announced. *Aprendo en Casa* is a distance learning program that relies on multiple media channels such as the internet, TV, and radio to reach students.

To date, basic education students remain in quarantine trying to learn from their homes as teachers work to facilitate distance teaching and learning while managing their own limitations vis-à-vis technology and inexperience designing a distance learning curricular offering, as well as dealing with the daily challenges of the pandemic. The Peruvian MINEDU's response to the crisis was swift, and *Aprendo en Casa* has reached the majority of the school aged population with a generally favorable response and a reported 96% of the teachers participating in the program.³

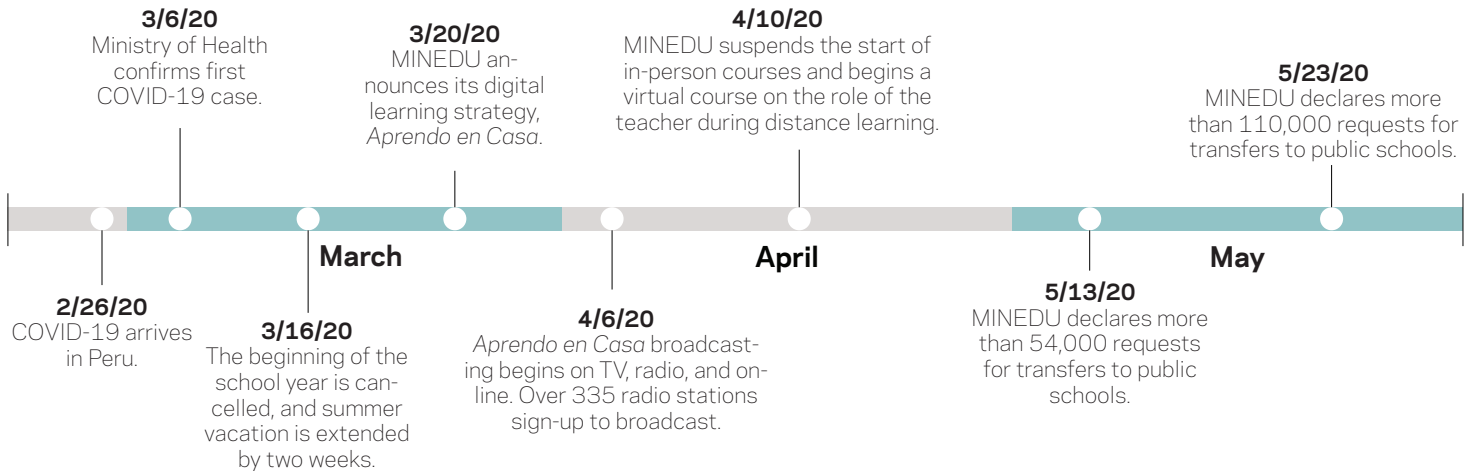
In light of the pandemic, the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child (GC-DWC) at the University of Notre Dame conducted a series of key-informant interviews at the national level to better understand the challenges facing the education sector and innovations that emerged within the first few months of the pandemic. Interview participants shared that even though the response was timely, *Aprendo en Casa* faces challenges that affect quality, learning outcomes, and access. The challenges include reaching households with limited or no connectivity, teachers' limited digital literacy skills, and an overall lack of technology at the household level. The pandemic has shifted the responsibility for learning primarily to parents and students, and new child protection needs have emerged. Finally, *Aprendo en Casa* needs to take into account the social and emotional well-being of all actors in the system in order to be successful.

1. [School closures caused by Coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#)

2. [School closures caused by Coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#)

3. [Encuesta sobre la realidad de directivos y docentes a partir de la estrategia de educación a distancia "Aprendo en casa", WIPEDHEP, Instituto Educa, lespp Crea, April 2020](#)

COVID-19 Response Timeline



Education System's Response

Rapid government creation of *Aprendo en Casa*, a distance learning strategy

On March 6th, the Ministry of Health confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Peru,⁴ and exactly one month later on April 6th, *Aprendo en Casa* was launched. The distance learning program has a number of resources including daily lessons for students in each grade level as well as resources for parents and students including links to digital reading platforms, educational games, and other learning tools. The *Aprendo en Casa* program, which is designed for all basic education students (pre, primary, and secondary school as well as alternative and special needs education), is distributed via internet, radio, and television in order to reach as many learners as possible. The solution was designed by the Ministry of Education but received significant support from private organizations and multilateral agencies.⁵

The challenges of organizing the launch of an education response in a matter of weeks were mitigated through extensive multi-organizational collaborations in Peru.⁶ Key organizations including UNICEF, the

World Bank, UNFPA, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and UNESCO came together to develop a coordinated and coherent education response from the Ministry of Education.

"...instead of each [organization] going off on their own in a different direction...we made getting organized among the key organizations the first priority."

—Erika Cuba, UNICEF

This collaboration involved a range of actors from universities working to produce educational content; private actors such as mobile network operators, television and radio stations bringing broadcasting commitments; and donors supporting the production of this new platform. This coordination ensured a smooth rollout of *Aprendo en Casa* and set a precedent for continued collaboration throughout the project involving regional governments and the Local Education Management Unit (UGEL).

To address cost factors associated with personal use of a digital platform for end-users, the MINEDU collaborated with the Ministry of Transportation and Communications and mobile phone operators in order to ensure that the *Aprendo en Casa* platform did not consume users' data, enabling users to navigate the platform free of charge.

"Aprendo en Casa is a monumental effort. In just a few short weeks [MINEDU] developed a platform that reaches students via radio, television, etc."

—Martin Vegas, UNESCO

4. Brote de nuevo coronavirus (COVID-19), Ministry of Health
5. ["Aprendo en casa" tendrá apoyo de grandes firmas tecnológicas y del sector educativo](#)

6. Cuba, Erika. Interview. Conducted by Patricia Cabrerizo, April 2020.

Accessibility of Aprendo en Casa

To prepare for home learning, the national curriculum in Peru needed to be adapted for use on digital platforms, while simultaneously taking into consideration language barriers and the learning curve of teachers, students, and parents adapting to technology-assisted platforms as the primary teaching and learning tool. Equity and access were primary considerations to ensure the inclusion of at-risk students in the program. There was a huge push to not leave any student behind and ensure that the program was accessible to everyone including to those whose first language is not Spanish as well as students with disabilities.

The MINEDU's pedagogical team worked to convert existing content into a format that could be used online in order to upload it to the *Aprendo en Casa* platform. The program is not meant to replicate a classic school day, and not all of the normal subjects were included in the curriculum: focus was placed on key basic education subjects such as literature, mathematics, social studies, and citizenship.

With 48 languages spoken in Peru, the majority of which are spoken in rural areas, significant investment was made to ensure new material was also put in the relevant languages as well as adapted to reflect different cultural characteristics. Out of the 1.2 million children living in rural zones around 520,000 have a mother tongue different from Spanish. To ensure that indigenous children would be able access educational content, MINEDU developed radio programs in nine major indigenous languages and is currently supporting the regions in the production of radio programs in additional languages. To promote accessibility for all, the *Aprendo en Casa* television programs are also broadcasted in sign language.

Connectivity and Collaboration around *Aprendo en Casa*

According to the December 2019 report from the National Institute of Statistics and Information Technology (INEI), only 39% of households in Peru have access to the internet, and in rural areas, less than 5% do.⁷ Furthermore, even in areas with digital

coverage, "...some families only have one cellphone in the house, which may not be available for the child's education"⁸ meaning that alternative educational channels needed to be developed in order to ensure that home learning was able to reach all households.

In order to address connectivity issues and ensure that all children would have access to education while quarantined at home, lessons formatted for television and radio were developed and became key resources for students and teachers in areas without internet coverage. Radio has proven to be especially adaptable to local contexts, and the low production costs mean that teachers and community groups can record programs to complement the content of *Aprendo en Casa*. At first, only the national TV and radio channels broadcasted the *Aprendo en Casa* programs, but private TV channels and regional radio stations quickly joined in and started to broadcast the programs as well. Local education secretariats worked closely with the regional and local radio and television channels, which ultimately were key in expanding coverage to rural households.

"...there are pictures of the municipalities erecting their own antennas, or speakers in the rural zones, very moving pictures that make you realize that truthfully everyone joined forces, both the private as well as public sector. Everyone was working within their own area so that [Aprendo en Casa] reached more and more people, and this illustrated the level of alignment of these programs." —David Vera Tudela, MINEDU

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There are pictures of the municipalities erecting their own antennas, or speakers in the rural zones, very moving pictures that make you realize that truthfully everyone joined forces, both the private as well as public sector.

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7. Acceso de los hogares a las Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación (TIC)

8. Cuba, Erika. Interview. Conducted by Patricia Cabrerizo, April 2020.

Closing the Connectivity Gap with Minedu Tablets

According to Nora Delgado, Director of Basic Education of Alternative, Intercultural, and Bilingual Services and Education Services in Rural Areas, there are an estimated 675,000 children between 8-18 years old without any form of connectivity living in Peru. In order to close the digital gap and reach rural areas unable to access any of the communication channels that *Aprendo en Casa* is distributed on, the government announced in April 2020 that it would purchase and distribute 719,000 tablets to be used in rural areas and nearly 123,800 tablets for children in urban areas living in poverty. MINEDU is currently working to load the tablets with educational material and estimates that the tablets will be ready to be distributed towards the end of June. Estimated to cost nearly 180 million USD (Perú repartirá 940.000 tablets),⁹ the tablets are rechargeable and will also be distributed with solar panels.

Communication Channels

Even the most well-designed program is not effective if it is unknown to its intended audience, and thus, a major component of the digital education strategy was the communication strategy used to raise awareness around *Aprendo en Casa*.

Communication tends to flow top down, with MINE- DU communicating to the regions, regions to school directors, directors to teachers, and teachers to parents and students. Social media platforms, above all Whatsapp, were consistently mentioned as key communication channels to share information, give updates and facilitate dialogue. There were numerous examples of Whatsapp groups being used by school directors to communicate with teachers and by teachers to communicate with parents and amongst themselves. MINEDU keeps teachers abreast of updated content in the *Aprendo en Casa* platform through notifications sent via social media and Whatsapp in order to ensure that teachers are aware of the new content. Another example of the use of Whatsapp as a communication tool is UNESCO's Horizontes program, which collects data around the

uptake of *Aprendo en Casa* via Whatsapp groups with teachers in their network.

The ubiquitous nature of communication channels such as Whatsapp and Facebook have proved to create an efficient and simple means to connect people; however, in order to be effective, school officials must have parents' contact details. There is a national database that supposedly contains the names and numbers associated with all students, but it has been reported to be incomplete, and as such, there are cases in which school officials are unable to reach families.

In addition to the complications of contacting students, some teachers in very rural areas are also unreachable because they have returned to their home communities to pass the quarantine where there is often no coverage.

"I spoke to a teacher [who] only had numbers for half [of his class], and only a quarter of the students had internet, so the teacher could do very little to contact the students." —Santiago Cueto Caballero, GRADE

Teacher Resources

MINEDU had previously developed a digital platform called PerúEduca for primary school teachers containing teacher resources and trainings on a variety of topics. The platform is now being used to orient, train, and relay information to teachers in three main areas: distance education strategies, technology, and social and emotional learning. According to David Vera Tude- la of MINEDU, many teachers have accessed PerúEduca during the quarantine period, and the response to COVID-19 related courses has been positive.

A number of interviewees noted that the role of teachers in the distance learning strategy was unclear at the beginning of the program, and teachers felt unprepared to deal with distance education. In response, MINE- DU developed informative courses and videos about COVID-19 and the role of teachers, as well as guidance on how teachers could take care of themselves as individuals and as citizens. A course titled "The role of the teacher in distance teaching and learning" was widely launched via PerúEduca in early April in order to help teachers adapt to virtual teaching. Within the course, there is a focus on developing strategies, which takes into consideration teacher needs and well-being and shares information on stress management, emotion

9. [Perú repartirá 940.000 tablets para educación en casa mientras aplaza clases presenciales por virus](#)

regulation, health, and use of information.

There are also examples of teacher-led initiatives such as “De Profe a Profe” (“Teacher to Teacher”), a Facebook group for teachers, which was started to support teachers with the transition to a digital environment and help them overcome barriers around the use of Internet and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Now nearly 3,000 members strong, De Profe a Profe has become a platform to share resources, information, and ideas on how to engage with students during COVID-19 crisis as well as to provide support for ICT related issues.

“...teachers are sharing so much with each other because they need ideas [on how to teach digitally]...”
—Pelusa Vilanueva, Co-Founder of De Profe a Profe

Apart from the formal resources provided to teachers from the government and other organizations, teachers, especially those in rural areas, have created their own resources in order to ensure that their students are able to continue learning. In one project led by teachers in Cusco and Worldvision, teachers created workbooks and audio CDs to distribute to children with no connectivity whatsoever and therefore no way of accessing *Aprendo en Casa*.¹⁰ There are also examples of teachers living in rural communities without access to the formal curriculum who created educational videos for children on daily activities such as harvesting local crops in order to ensure that learning in one form or another continues.¹¹

Future Considerations and Challenges

Digital Literacy

In addition to the connectivity challenges faced in the distribution of distance learning, the level of digital literacy among adults varies, and for many making the transition to digital learning has proven challenging. Whereas children and youth tend to be familiar with technology and have easily adapted to learning through digital channels, “...few [teachers] have a

solid command of ICTs and virtual resources.”¹² This adds an additional layer of complexity to digital strategies, requiring training for teachers in ICTs, resulting in the underutilization of digital platforms such as PerúEduca. To improve digital literacy among teachers the government is working to help them familiarize themselves with digital tools and has partnered with IBM to teach virtual tools to 2,750 teachers.

Going beyond Academic Learning

“...often when [we are] developing the core capacities like mathematics and communication...it is easy to lose sight of the central role that subjects such as emotional development and citizenship have, so we have started to talk about citizenship and emotional development as important goals as well...” —Nora Delgado, MINEDU

The importance of an integrated educational response that addresses social and emotional needs, child protection, nutrition, and teacher well-being was mentioned in the majority of the interviews, and there are a number of stakeholders working to strengthen MINEDU’s response in these areas. For example, UNESCO’s Horizontes program is collaborating with the government to ensure that the education strategy includes the social and emotional needs of students, taking into special consideration the well-being of adolescents and their specific needs during the crisis.

Education strategies responding to COVID-19 and quarantine also need to take into account a new reality in which parents, on top of working or supporting the household and caring for children, are now having to take on the role of teacher, adding additional layers of stress to an already difficult situation. Domestic violence has increased in Peru, in part “...due to the confinement and constant stressful living conditions...” brought about by the quarantine, making it crucial to include programs around violence reduction in the home.¹³

“As is occurring throughout the world...being in quarantine and being stuck at home is an extremely difficult emotional situation for children and adolescents....and requires [that the education system] focuses on socio-emotional issues.” —Daniel Yepez, Worldvision

10. [Docentes cusqueños diseñan cuadernos y audios para reforzar educación a distancia](#)

11. Vilanueva, Pelusa. Interview. Conducted by Patricia Cabrerizo, April 2020.

12. Uehera, Mirella. Interview. Conducted by Adriana Urrutia, April 2020.

13. Cuba, Erika. Interview. Conducted by Patricia Cabrerizo, April 2020.

The importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of teachers and equipping them with the necessary tools to support students and their families was also mentioned by over half of the interviewees as an important aspect of teacher training and support.

“One issue which is going to be very important to address is the role of the teachers in providing emotional assistance and support to students....teachers are going to receive this demand from students and their families, and the question is up to what point can they respond ... Teachers are not psychologists and shouldn't be required to be.” —Pilar Sanz, MINEDU

The importance of addressing the negative impact of losing the benefits of school feeding programs on vulnerable families was also a key consideration in the development of the education strategy. The government has confirmed that the Qali Warma school feeding program will continue and will expand to include vulnerable populations during the crisis period.¹⁴ As a response to COVID-19, measures have been put into place to distribute packaged food to parents who are then able to prepare the food at home for their children.¹⁵

Secondary and Higher Education

Despite the many challenges to implementing and rolling out a distance education program, the general consensus among interviewees was that the response for basic education was favorable. Secondary education however presented challenges specific to the educational needs of adolescents.

The uptake of *Aprendo en Casa* among adolescents appeared lower than their younger counterparts for a number of reasons. Adolescents are more likely to have household responsibilities and have less time to dedicate to their education. Additionally, adolescents may find traditional media education channels such as TV and radio unattractive and be unwilling to connect to these in order to learn.

There are also aspects of secondary education that tend to be more difficult to roll out digitally and at scale for adolescents, and it is unclear how the digital strategy will approach “areas such as socioemotional

training...how they will approach employability training... especially considering that the immediate future is very worrying [...] [and] how [...] youth are going to be able to insert themselves into the job market.”¹⁶

There is uncertainty on the part of students, particularly adolescents and their families around the evaluation of coursework completed through digital channels, with some parents and adolescents questioning whether their studies will be validated at the end of the year.

Higher education has additional factors associated with digitalization and rollout that are not easily addressed. According to David Vera Tudela, “...in basic [education] you have the program of “Aprendo en Casa” and you have structured content that is being developed across... multiple platforms; in the case of superior/higher education it is different. In [higher education] we function with courses and credits. It is more complicated because there are numerous paths-areas of study, and numerous types of courses...”¹⁷

Higher education professors also tend to be older, which contributes to lower rates of digital literacy.

Private Education

While parents’ reception of the public education strategy has been generally favorable, a dispute has developed between parents with children in private schools and the schools themselves. Private schools, ranging from high to low end pay schools, are facing push-back from parents who argue that they should not have to pay the monthly tuition fees if their children are not physically attending school. Schools are also forced to reconsider ancillary fees such as busing, meals, books, and examination fees despite some fixed costs remaining.

Parents themselves may be experiencing economic hardship, and requests from parents to transfer their children to public schools are growing. On May 13th, 54,000 requests to enroll in public schools had been filed by the MINEDU; on May 20th the amount had nearly doubled to 110,000.¹⁸

“There are many low-cost private schools, both large and small that are at high risk of closing.” —Luis Guerrero, Director of the Digital Journal Educación

14. [Coronavirus en Perú: programa Qali Warma podrá entregar alimentos a las personas vulnerables](#)

15. [Qali Warma distribuyó más del 80% de alimentos a nivel nacional](#)

16. Yopez, Daniel. Interview. Conducted by Wendy Smith, April 2020.

17. Vera Tudela, David. Interview. Conducted by Adriana Urrutia, April 2020.

18. [Ministro Benavides: más de 110 mil estudiantes han solicitado traslado a colegios públicos](#)

Conclusion

Despite the hardship that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused and will continue to cause for the foreseeable future on a global level, governments and communities worldwide have responded to the challenges with innovative responses. The Peruvian Government's response to the pandemic was hailed as one of the most decisive responses in the world,¹⁹ being both rapid and comprehensive.

Nevertheless, there are still issues to be addressed. The success of the tablet distribution project is yet to be seen, COVID-19 continues to spread rampantly within the country, and there is a fear that when schools do eventually re-open, parents will be afraid to send their children back to the classroom.

However, the changes to the education system are considered by many to be changes that will have a long-lasting and positive influence. The new digital strategy pushes teachers to ramp up their knowledge of digital technologies, and new approaches to communication that create connections and networks that will undoubtedly remain, even after the end of the pandemic.

The future is digital, and digital education has many advantages over a physical classroom. While digital technology has limitations related to connectivity, if these limitations are addressed through progressive initiatives such as the distribution of tablets and are combined with traditional in-class school systems, there is the potential to reach a significant number of students. In mid-May the Ministry confirmed that over 90% of students in the country had connected to *Aprendo en Casa*, and 60% of parents were satisfied with the strategy.²⁰ There is undoubtedly still a great amount of work to be done to create an equitable, high-quality system, which is accessible by all students, but, as Fátima Saldonid, the TV host of *Aprendo en Casa* states, "I think now we are at the start of a new process. We have an opportunity to take a fresh look at education. We have a great chance to create the type of society that we aspire to..."²¹

19. [Why Even Peru's Top-Notch Plans Failed to Stop the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)

20. [Ministro Benavides: "Más del 90 % de estudiantes ha tenido contacto con la estrategia Aprendo en casa"](#)

21. ["Listen, Watch, Learn: Peru's school system takes to the airwaves."](#)

Annex 1

List of participants interviewed

Name	Interviewer	Organization
Miguel Cruzado	Adriana Urrutia	Ministerio de educación. Director General de Desarrollo Docente
Daniel Yepez	Wendy Smith	Worldvision
Martin Vegas	Adriana Urrutia	UNESCO
Mirella Uehera	Adriana Urrutia	Fe y Alegría
David Vera Tudela	Adriana Urrutia	MINEDU, Head of the Office of Strategic Planning and Budget
Erika Cuba	Patricia Cabrerizo	UNICEF
Luis Guerrero	Patricia Cabrerizo	Director of the Digital Journal Educación
Nora Delgado	Patricia Cabrerizo	MINEDU
Pilar Sanz	Patricia Cabrerizo	MINEDU
Pelusa Vilanueva	Patricia Cabrerizo	Wiese Foundation (Fundación Wiese). De profe a profe
Santiago Cueto Caballero	Wendy Smith	GRADE