

DECENT WORK IN EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS: AN ANALYSIS DURING AND POST-PANDEMIC

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Decent Work SDG is the productive activity of individuals in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity. These conditions must be adjusted to possible contingencies, such as what happened to the field of education during the last pandemic. Many experiences have been recorded regarding how teachers resolved their adaptation to the online modality¹. However, there still needs to be more evidence on how educational organizations ensure teachers have relevant working conditions and organizational climate to perform their functions. It is crucial to note that throughout these adaptations, maintaining labor rights has been a paramount consideration. Furthermore, there needs to be more monitoring of how these modifications that were made persisted in the period of what is now called the new normal. This is important because it can demonstrate how the schools have taken advantage of the organization's eventualities and how they have adopted new practices to be prepared for adopting measures more

¹ Diego Fernando BECERRA RODRÍGUEZ, Oscar Rafael BOUDE FIGUEREDO y Marcela BENÍTEZ MENDIVELSO (2020) p. 130.

linked to active education and based on ICT, without leaving aside labor rights. Rest assured, this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of these complex issues.

Thus, this crucial work aims to describe Decent Work condition's in education professionals in Mexico during and after the pandemic. Other secondary objectives that were proposed involve characterizing the organizational climate perceived by teachers in the two moments mentioned above (specific objective a); as well as their self-assessment of their digital competencies focused on the insertion of ICT in their teaching practice and the use they currently give it, focusing on the different modalities that exist today (specific objective b).

1.1. SDG and Decent Work

SDG aims to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. This goal is part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015.² Regarding to decent work, the SDG claims that every country member needs to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value at the same time substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training.

Since the first time the phrase «decent work» was used in the late nineties by Juan Samovia, it has been a strategic objective that should have been under the global scope to fight poverty³.

Decent work delivers a fair income, ensures security in the workplace and social protection for families, it offers better prospects for personal development and social integration, and allows freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decision that affects their daily lives. There are certain points that decent work must represent for this to work properly such as: employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. These points aim to achieve broader goals of reducing poverty, promoting social inclusion, and taking care of sustainable development. Decent work is essential not only for individual well-being but also for social and economic development. The creation of decent jobs can drive economic development and improve quality of life. It also contributes to other SDGs by promoting gender equality and reducing inequalities.

² THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM (2023).

³ Jorge Armando GARCÍA GARCÍA y Cesar Alveiro MONTOYA AGUDELO (2023), p. 12.

Overall, Decent work, under SDGs, is about ensuring that economic growth benefits everyone, by providing opportunities for all people to have jobs that are productive, provide fair income, and offer security and rights.

In terms of the region, there's been significantly changes to the decent work politics specially during the covid lockdown. The economic slowdown driven by shutting down production activities, limited public gathering, and physical distancing life- and health-protecting policies, resulted in lower investment rates, increasing Decent work deficits and increasing levels of domestic and external debt, and became the worst economic, social and production crisis the region has experienced in 120 years. In 2020, it is estimated that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the region contracted by 7.7 %⁴

The crisis has had an unprecedented impact on the world of work in Latin America and the Caribbean, causing job losses, the bankruptcy of companies of all sizes and a sharp drop in people's incomes. It also highlighted the decent work deficits in the region, reflected in a high rate of labour informality. An inclusive, resilient, and sustainable recovery will require addressing structural issues such as insufficient investment in public health and education systems, and high levels of informality, decent work deficits, limited coverage of social protection systems.

1.2. Organizacional climate

Organizational climate, it refers as a cluster of perceptions and feelings share by the members of an organization about their work environment. These perceptions goe from certain aspects such as politics, practices and procedures of the organization, therefore human relationships and the conditions both physical and emotional of asocial and work environment. A positive and healthy organizational climate cand boost satisfaction and commitment towards employees, improve performance and reduce rotational workforce⁵.

Also, organizational climate can be a crucial concept in the organizations, and it can be a powerful ally that can show an overall health of people inside such places. Understanding this, there are certain points that it need to be covered, like: structural humans, administratives and culturals. These objectives can demonstrate that organizational climate has a crucial impact on several aspects, key to organizational life, such as satisfaction and motivation, which it means that a positive climate can upgrades satisfaction in the workplace and motivation towards

⁴ UNITED NATIONS (2020).

⁵ Milena Margarita VILLAMIZAR REYES y Delio Ignacio CASTAÑEDA ZAPATA (2014), p. 18.

employees, which it means in can improve their life and performance in their workplace⁶. It also can improve productivity and efficiency in their daily work.

A positive climate can reduce the risk of talent and labour workforce goes away, making an employee loyal to the workplace and commitment towards the organization. Confidence and openness facilitate innovation and creativity too. Furthermore, to have a better understanding and improve the climate, it's crucial measure regularly through polls, interviews or focal groups, and direct observation. This requires a strategic and continuous focus.

1.3. ICT, online education, and the pandemic in Mexico

The integration of ICT in education, a process that has been ongoing for several years, holds immense potential. Since the advent of multimedia, schools have been utilizing resources such as information repositories and, more recently, even social networks to bring knowledge to students in an alternative way. This practice has gained momentum in the last decade, thanks to the increased accessibility that students now have to electronic media —laptops, smartphones, and tablets— and the widespread availability of internet service in many institutions for the use of their academic community. This potential, when fully harnessed, can revolutionize the way we educate our students.

In Mexico, some efforts have been observed by the Ministry of Public Education so that schools at different educational levels have access to ICT and can use it as a means to educate themselves. An example was the Enciclomedia Program (2006-2012)⁷, which aimed to provide a digital tool for consulting information linked to textbooks and educational content at the preschool level. Later, various public spaces, such as schools, were integrated into the México Conectado program⁸, which intended for people to use the Internet for free, thereby reducing the digital divide. However, none of these measures were aimed at making the use of the Internet or instructional platforms part of everyday practices in the classroom.

Thus, in 2020, with the mandatory isolation due to COVID-19 and the transfer to a remote education format⁹, the conditions of the Mexican educational system came to light. The vast majority of public institutions needed digital support to teach courses, and for that year,

⁶ Madalena VILAS-BOAS (2019), p. 8.

⁷ SECRETARÍA DE EDUCACIÓN PÚBLICA (2007), p. 11.

⁸ GOBIERNO DE MÉXICO (2015), p. 1.

⁹ FRANCISCO JOSÉ GARCÍA-PENALVO, Alfredo CORELL, Víctor ABELLA-GARCÍA y Mario GRANDE (2020), p. 2.

only 13 universities had official government recognition as institutions that teach online courses¹⁰. On the other hand, the profile of the teaching staff at that time stood out for having an average age of 40 years, and just over 70 % were between 30 and 59 years old¹¹. From the data available on the use of ICT, it is known that 44 % of teachers had a B1 level of the DigitCompEdu Framework Progression Model, which means that they can apply, expand, and structure a class considering the digital sphere, while less than 15 % were at a leader or pioneer level. This reflects the training teachers' level at the beginning of the pandemic¹². It should be added that 6 out of 10 teachers created digital content, such as presentations or digital notes, for their classes.

In contrast, only 20 % of public school students had a computer or tablet at home, while for students enrolled in private institutions, the proportion was 50 %. This digital divide posed a significant challenge for students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Likewise, although young people are great consumers of digital content—primarily tutorial videos—their adaptation to the online modality was complex. Many students struggled with the lack of face-to-face interaction, the need for self-discipline in managing their time, and the technical challenges of online learning. As a result, by the summer of 2020, more than 300,000 people had already dropped out of university¹³.

Despite these challenging conditions, educational professionals have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of the greatest contingency in the area of education that not only Mexico, but many countries faced. They have been at the forefront, making and continuing to make adjustments to their online work dynamics, such as the constant training of their staff in hybrid methods, the adoption of virtual spaces for learning, and the modification of the forms of academic management, among others. However, once they returned to the new normal, some institutions and teachers continued with pre-pandemic practices, showcasing their adaptability and dedication.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was meticulously crafted with a descriptive, transversal, and non-experimental approach, with the sole aim of fulfilling the set objectives. This design allowed for a comprehensive description of the main conditions experienced by education professionals, particularly

¹⁰ UNIVERSIDAD MEXICANA (2021), p. 1.

¹¹ GOBIERNO DE MÉXICO (2023), p. 1.

¹² Claudia Marina VICARIO-SOLÓRZANO y Froylán LÓPEZ-VALENCIA (2022), p. 34.

¹³ STATISTA RESEARCH DEPARTMENT (2024), p. 1.

their adaptation to the online teaching modality during the COVID-19 crisis. The study also focused on assessing their experiences, with a particular emphasis on Decent Work, the organizational climate, and the use of ICT and the effects of the pandemic in educational organizations, which are the key variables of interest in this research.

For this initial phase of a national study, we were worked with a convenience sample of 32 dedicated education professionals from 17 of the federal entities that comprise Mexico. These professionals, all teachers at the upper secondary and higher level, voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, demonstrating their commitment to advancing our understanding of the challenges they face in their work. While the sample size may be relatively small, it is important to note that it was carefully selected to ensure diversity and representativeness, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

The survey was the research technique used, with a self-administered digital questionnaire as the instrument. This questionnaire, consisting of 45 items addressing the study's variables, was rigorously validated by a similar sample and subject matter experts. The data was collected during the first half of 2024, primarily through electronic means such as email, social networks, and instant messaging. The collected data underwent a thorough descriptive and inferential statistical treatment using the Excel program, which involved summarizing the data and drawing inferences about the population from the sample, ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings.

To further support the research, the responses obtained between two subgroups were contrasted around the variables of interest. A confidence level of 95 % and 30 df was considered (1 697), and the following hypotheses were proposed, which, if confirmed, could provide valuable insights into the experiences and adaptation of education professionals to online teaching. The hypotheses used were:

— H0. There are no significant differences between the opinions expressed by teachers with more than 15 years of service and those with fewer years of work experience.

— H1. There are significant differences between the opinions expressed by teachers with more than 15 years of service and those who have fewer years of work experience.

3. RESULTS

As part of the characterization of the sample, it was identified that 22 % of the respondents are men, the rest are women, and 47 % are married. 44 % have a doctorate, 53 % are teachers, and the rest only have a bachelor's degree. 47 % have remained in the institution for 15 years

or less, and 3 % are attached to a private institution. Additionally, 8 out of 10 say they felt comfortable working from home. 50 % acknowledge that the migration to the online modality generated a high-stress level; however, just over 80 % stressed that they could quickly adapt to this modality. 31 % mentioned that working from home negatively affected their productivity, and 43 % perceived that working this way affected their emotional well-being.

Considering the categories proposed for the study, the results obtained by variables of interest are presented. In the first instance, regarding Decent Work, there is a tendency in the opinion of the study participants to «Agree» with the favorable conditions they had during the pandemic. Among these conditions that were verified include the perception that the educational centers provided sufficient job security that involved taking care of their health, the possibility of maintaining a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives, as well as having their profile enabled, a fair salary level and the motivation they received from their superiors within the organization. The indicator that obtained the highest score was the one that refers to the fact that they perceived that their position at school was secure. Another indicator that draws attention is that, according to those surveyed, the gender to which they belong was not a factor that affected their work life during the pandemic —see Table 1 for more information—.

TABLE 1. DECENTE WORK

Item	15 years or less		More than 15 years		p-value	Ho Accepted
	Average	Category	Average	Category		
Overall, working from home during the pandemic had a positive impact on my professional life.	2.67	Agree	3.18	Agree	0.058	Yes
I felt supported by my institution during confinement.	2.60	Agree	2.82	Agree	0.267	Yes
The educational organization provided sufficient resources to handle challenges related to remote work during the pandemic.	2.60	Agree	2.82	Agree	0.273	Yes

Item	15 years or less		More than 15 years		p-value	Ho Accepted
	Average	Category	Average	Category		
During the CO-VID-19 pandemic, my superiors supported me in balancing my work and my personal and family responsibilities.	2.67	Agree	2.94	Agree	0.223	Yes
During confinement, I felt confident about my job retention.	3.00	Agree	3.41	Agree	0.050	Yes
During online classes, the organization implemented adequate measures to guarantee my health and well-being.	2.53	Agree	2.94	Agree	0.146	Yes
I received a fair salary for the work done during confinement.	2.67	Agree	3.12	Agree	0.124	Yes
Due to my gender status, my work was affected during the pandemic period.	2.07	Agree	1.94	Agree	0.347	Yes
The educational organization demonstrated flexibility regarding schedules and tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic.	2.73	Agree	2.94	Agree	0.287	Yes

Note. Own elaboration based on the responses of the participants.

Regarding the organizational climate, the subgroups in our sample have differing assessments. Notably, they all agree on one point—they felt motivated during the past contingency, as highlighted in Table 2. However, a stark contrast emerges when we look at the experiences of teachers with less than 15 years at the institution. They reported a less positive work environment, inefficient communication, and a lack of recognition for their work from the employing institution.

TABLE 2. ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE.

Item	15 years or less		More than 15 years		p - value	Ho Accepted
	Average	Category	Average	Category		
During the COVID-19 pandemic, communication with the educational organization was clear and compelling.	2.47	In disagreement	2.65	Agree	0.312	Yes
The organizational climate was adequate for me.	2.20	In disagreement	2.88	Agree	0.041	Yes
I felt motivated with my work.	2.73	Agree	3.00	Agree	0.208	Yes
In the last confinement, I received appropriate recognition for my work and efforts for my institution.	2.20	In disagreement	2.76	Agree	0.082	Yes
In general, I consider that the organizational climate during the COVID-19 pandemic was positive.	2.27	In disagreement	2.94	Agree	0.042	Yes

Note. Own elaboration based on the responses of the participants.

The use of ICT by teachers was also a variable of interest for this study. Teachers agree that, after the pandemic, they perceive it essential to insert these resources to teach their courses. Likewise, digital tools have become part of the resources they use daily in their classes. Teachers consider that many in-person courses can be migrated to other modalities. Another element that stands out about using ICT is that the pandemic constituted a period of many challenges in this field. However, it made them develop many skills to be better prepared for a future contingency —review table 3—. This is reaffirmed by the fact that 69% mentioned that communication in their classes was affected by the poor Internet reception that students have.

TABLE 3. USE OF ICT

Item	15 years or less		More than 15 years		p - value	Ho Accepted
	Average	Category	Average	Category		
In the new normal, ICT and digital tools are already part of my daily routine.	3.60	Strongly agree	3.35	Agree	0.153	Yes
After the pandemic, it is imperative to insert ICT as a resource for teaching classes.	3.67	Strongly agree	3.65	Strongly agree	0.455	Yes
Many of the courses that we teach in person can be migrated to a hybrid modality or completely online.	3.53	Strongly agree	3.24	Agree	0.148	Yes
Nowadays, I apply work policies in classes, considering ICT.	3.13	Agree	3.47	Agree	0.114	Yes
Teachers should increase their digital skills to teach classes.	3.47	Agree	3.35	Agree	0.264	Yes
This experience of adapting my teaching work to the online modality allowed me to identify my potential for managing ICT.	3.20	Agree	3.41	Agree	0.181	Yes

Note. Own elaboration based on the responses of the participants.

Another point of interest for the researchers was to review the impact of the pandemic on specific actions being carried out in educational organizations. Table 4 shows that, in the opinion of the teachers, working conditions did not improve due to the experience with the

pandemic. They do not even consider that there were pertinent modifications in the policies of their workplaces, taking into account the ‘new normal’ of increased reliance on technology and remote work. Nor do they believe that the organizational climate improved upon returning to their institutions. On the other hand, respondents issued positive evaluations linked to their quality of life. That is, they have reflected on the number of hours they dedicate to work, which is why they are prioritizing allocating more time to their family and taking care of their health, above their academic activities.

TABLE 4. POSPANDEMIC EFFECTS IN LABOUR

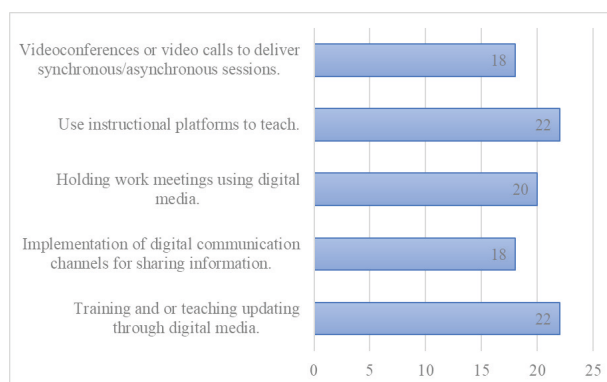
Item	15 years or less		More than 15 years		p - value	Ho Accepted
	Average	Category	Average	Category		
Working conditions improved as a result of the pandemic experience.	1.87	In disagreement	2.35	In disagreement	0.102	Yes
The institution where I work made pertinent adjustments to improve working conditions based on our experience during the pandemic.	2.07	In disagreement	2.53	Agree	0.137	Yes
It seems that, currently, it could face a contingency like COVID-19 in a better way than in 2020.	3.27	Agree	3.59	Strongly agree	0.089	Yes
The organizational climate has improved since we reintegrated into the new normal.	2.00	In disagreement	2.35	In disagreement	0.171	Yes

Item	15 years or less		More than 15 years		p - value	Ho Accepted
	Average	Category	Average	Category		
The educational institution adjusted work policies and labor regulations, considering the pandemic's experience.	2.00	In disagreement	2.59	Agree	0.070	Yes
Given the confinement, I now prioritize family and health more.	3.00	Agree	2.71	Agree	0.178	Yes
The pandemic made me reflect on the hours I spent at my educational institution.	2.73	Agree	3.24	Agree	0.097	Yes
Confinement led me to take measures to improve my quality of life.	3.00	Agree	3.12	Agree	0.361	Yes
With the pandemic, it became clear that there are various processes that I can do from home.	3.73	Strongly agree	3.47	Agree	0.136	Yes

Note. Own elaboration based on the responses of the participants.

Furthermore, the survey participants emphasized the role of digital resources in the post-pandemic educational landscape. They advocated for the continued use of instructional platforms (68 %) for course delivery and continuous training in digital resources. The importance of videoconferencing for teaching and work meetings was also highlighted (60 %). These findings, illustrated in Figure 1, underscore the significant shift in educational practices brought about by the pandemic.

FIGURE 1. ACTIVITIES MUST CONTINUE TO BE CARRIED OUT THROUGH VIRTUAL SUPPORTS AS PART OF DAILY ACTIVITIES, ACCORDING TO THE SAMPLE



Note. Own elaboration based on the responses of the participants.

Finally, the sample was asked to mention the practices currently being carried out in their institutions. Figure 2 shows how 50 % of the participants indicated that in their institution, administrative management is carried out in the same way as before the pandemic. 12 % agree that educational spaces have not been enabled with ICT, 16 % point out that there is little use of technological tools in their classrooms. However, it is crucial to note that 40 % said that ICT training has become part of the processes that are carried out continuously within their institution, underlining the urgent need for its widespread implementation in the current educational landscape.

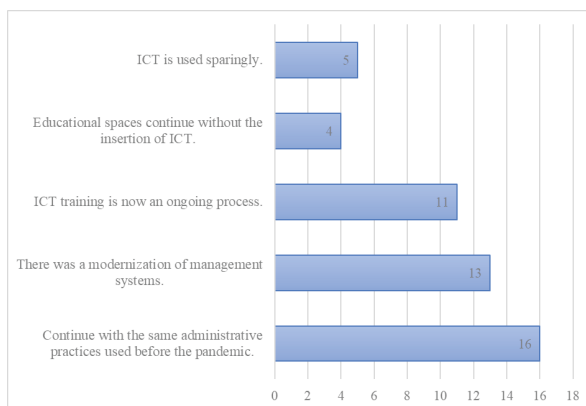
4. DISCUSSION

Educational institutions, must provide sufficient conditions so that their teachers feel that they are working in a space that provides them with favorable conditions for their professional development; with this, the service provide by teachers will be better¹⁴. ‘Decent work’ here refers to a work environment that is safe, provides fair compensation, offers opportunities for personal and professional growth, and allows for a healthy work-life balance. At the same time, substantial personal needs must be covered, such as a good salary level and the possibility of balancing work with daily life, so that the different areas of life are

¹⁴ Jesús Guillermo SOTELO ASEF y Ernesto Geovani FIGUEROA GONZÁLEZ (2017), p. 24.

not neglected¹⁵. In this sense, educational institutions become promoters of the quality of life of their teachers, which is part of what the SDGs seek today.

FIGURE 2. PRACTICES THAT PREVAIL IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, ACCORDING TO THE SAMPLE



Note. Own elaboration based on the responses of the participants.

Based on the background left by the last pandemic, it is a fundamental interest for many workers to have social security services and have the possibility of caring for and sharing quality time with their families. Thus, currently, this is one of the great demands that must prevail in educational institutions, even more so because teaching work represents not only the activities that are carried out within the classroom but also those activities that must be carried out externally that have to do with planning and its updating on various topics related to teaching. Therefore, the responses of this ‘instrument’, a survey conducted among educational professionals, highlight the importance of applying ICTs to optimize and facilitate teacher updating and the sharing of information they have about the organization. With this, decent work should not be just a millennium objective but rather a fundamental part of the conditions every educational organization should cover.

Another element that stands out in this research is the organizational climate; in this area, very disparate responses were found regarding the perception of it during the pandemic. In the case of educational institutions, it is a priority that the necessary information is made known so that professionals can perform their functions. Furthermore, the messages issued by superiors must have a positive and motivating

¹⁵ Karimov Bahodir UKTAM O‘G‘LI y L. M. ESHMUXAMEDOV (2023), p. 1165.

meaning for those who perform the teaching function¹⁶. Although financial incentives are significant, it is also essential to have assertive feedback processes, which are crucial for the continuous improvement of educational processes, so that teachers carry out their tasks appropriately and take into account what they can improve without fear of losing their jobs.

Regarding ICT, it is clear that teachers found many areas of opportunity when facing the demands placed on them by the pandemic. This period involved significant improvements in the management of information technologies and, of course, recognizing the advantages of inserting technology when teaching classes¹⁷. Additionally, they recognize that ICTs allow them to carry out administrative processes in a simpler way, and allow them to be updated and in contact with their institution without having to travel with a lower investment of time and money for these processes. However, for this to really be optimal, it is essential that educational institutions also recognize the advantages that this has so that the post-pandemic period does not represent a regression to old practices that in many cases are not necessarily equally productive. Here, it is necessary to point out that innovation in educational organizations must respond to regulations and policies that contribute to Decent work and ensure that teachers and managers have better working conditions that have a positive impact on their emotional well-being and their lives in general.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study offers a novel perspective on Decent Work for education professionals, particularly in the context of the pandemic and the «new normal». It underscores their evolving perceptions of the organizational climate and the imperative to adapt labor policies to benefit teaching staff, irrespective of their employment type or tenure. This fulfills the specific objective a of the study.

Specific objective b of the study delves into the professionals' ICT competence, a crucial factor with a direct correlation to their classroom performance. The study also reveals their positive reception of these technologies in the administrative processes of the academic community. These insights are vital for institutional managers to enhance work efficiency and align with the SDGs.

As the study acknowledges, this work represents an initial step in the assessment of Decent Work, based on a non-significant sample. To advance the research, it is crucial to apply the research instrument to

¹⁶ Tung-Ju WU, Lian-Yi WANG, Jia-Ying GAO y An-Pin WEI (2020), p. 3.

¹⁷ Hyunyoung CHOI, Soh-Young CHUNG y Jangwan Ko (2021), p. 7.

a representative sample, enabling a comparison of opinions between public and private institutions. The authors also propose extending this study to other Latin American countries, a step that would significantly enhance our understanding of Decent Work in the region.

Finally, the authors consider it essential to carry out studies that allow monitoring of the working conditions of education professionals, in which the actual situation and the desirable one are contrasted by international standards and those proposed in their own countries. Likewise, studies should be carried out that provide evidence of the administrative practices that are executed based on the demands that society has for this field of work, in synchrony with the virtual environment, and at the same time contribute to the quality of life of this productive sector.

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