



Regional progress toward Quality Education for All in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Challenges 2015 and Beyond

The Latin America and the Caribbean region has made important progress towards Education for All and Millennium Development Goals, due in 2015. This has been internationally valued. Nonetheless, there are still important challenges to be met. Among them:

- Improve quality and equity in all educational levels
- Expand coverage and quality of early childhood care and education
- Improve policies and programs that will ensure access and completion of quality compulsory education and skills for life in society, labor and human development
- Make progress towards gender parity and avoid unequal chances and learning outcomes, early dropouts, child labor, early motherhood and other social exclusion
- Make progress towards quality education for all using regular evaluation mechanisms that include learning metrics and measure soft skills
- At national level, promote normative frameworks that may help the countries in meeting the EFA goals

Early Childhood Care and Education

There are huge disparities in preschool access in the LAC countries and this has negative impact on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, particularly those belonging to lower income families living in poorer areas, of either rural or indigenous settings. Regional average indicates that gross enrolment ratios in pre primary education increased from 55,5% in 1990 to 66% en 2010. With variations, this was a common trend for 22 of the 26 countries with comparable information.

Primary Education

Access at this level is practically universal in the region. Nonetheless, the past decade shows a highly contrasting situation and it is not possible to ensure that by 2015 all children will access and complete free and compulsory education of good quality. While some countries increased primary enrollments and number of out of school children in primary education among 2000 and 2010, others suffered reductions it in the same period. In overall terms, 7 out of 26 countries with comparable information significantly decreased their net enrollment ratios in the primary level during the past decade.

There are no big differences among the number of children who attend primary education and the income quintile of their families. Most of the children who are old enough to enter first grade do so at the right time. By 2010, the gap separating children from the richest and poorer quintiles reached 3%. By the year 2000, this gap accounted for a 7%. Repetition rates decreased from a 6.8% by 2000 to 5% in 2010, indicating progress in the region.

Survival rates in 5^o grade, in average, increased from 83,5% to 91,8% in the decade 2000 - 2010. Available data and trends show that higher income countries, according to their GNP – have higher retention rates in the 5th level. Average dropout rates in the region diminished from 13 to 8,3% from 2000 to 2010. This trend was observed in 15 from 18 countries with comparable data. Unequal opportunities in the region, though, are still highly significant. While in some countries dropout rates in primary education was 1% by 2010, in other countries drop out in this level accounted for a 15% or more of students in this level.

*This abstract is based on the regional monitoring report on progress towards quality education for all in the LAC region entitled *The State of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: Towards Education for All – 2015*. A joint initiative of OREALC/UNESCO Santiago, CIAE and ECLAC.*

Secondary and Higher Education

One out of ten Latin Americans do not complete primary education. This situation is particularly difficult in rural areas: on average, 16% of rural youth, aged 15 to 19 years, did not complete this educational level. In these areas progress is more evident due to the fact that 30% of the population which belonged to an older generation aged 25 to 29 years, ten years older than the former one, did not complete this educational level.

By 2010 the region was highly heterogeneous with net rates lower than 50% in some countries and higher than 80% in others. In average, for 18 countries with comparable information, 53,5% of youngsters aged 20 to 24 years had completed secondary education. Only 21,7% of youth aged 20 to 24 years in the poorest quintile had completed secondary education. By contrast, 78,3% of their peers in the richest quintile completed this level of education.

The important expansion of higher education in the past decade has also been unequally distributed within the population: while completion of tertiary studies in the 25-29 age group reached 0,7% of the lowest income quintiles in Latin America, the richest quintile accounted for 18,3% completion rates. Major progress in this direction during the decade benefited the higher income quintiles and equity gaps tend to persist.

Low quality in learning outcomes

In average, one out of two students in third grade in math and one out of three in reading does not reach the minimum levels of OECD countries. Disparities among countries, in turn, are highly pronounced.

According to PISA 2009, in average for the nine Latin American countries who participated in the test, 58% of students in math, 45% in reading and 48% in sciences did not comply with the minimum requirements of the evaluated contents. **In general terms, for the countries in the region the rate of low performing students in the different disciplines was two to three times higher than those of the OECD countries.**

Gender Disparities

In average, girls perform better than boys in reading both in 3rd grade and in 6th grade. Boys perform better in math in both grades and in sciences in 6th grade. The estimated gap in favor of boys in math was higher and more systematic than the favorable gap of girls in reading. According to regional outcomes of SERCE 2012, in average, girls obtain lower outcomes than boys in sciences. Important gap disparities in learning outcomes were also detected in PISA tests 2009.

Education for Young People and Adults

By the year 2000 the region had high adult literacy levels (89,6% on average). These continued to increase reaching a 92.9% by 2010 on average terms. From 23 countries with available information, by 2010, only four had literacy rates below 90% and one had rates below 80%.

Multicultural and Bilingual Education

Schooling in primary and secondary levels for indigenous populations and afro descendants is lower than those children who do not belong to these ethnic groups. Unequal chances exist in primary and secondary education for these groups of the population. In primary education Cuba, Brasil and Chile have higher rates of school completion, more than 90%. In secondary level, Chile has a smaller gap insofar a 60% of indigenous populations vis a vis a 75% of non indigenous groups achieve secondary completion. Panamá and Guatemala increased their ethnic parity indexes in the younger groups with variations of 0, 63 to 0, 75. By contrast, in Nicaragua the ethnic parity index has decreased when referred to younger populations. Paraguay and Panamá show some progress particularly among younger segments as opposed to an older population. No country in the region has achieved ethnic parity in secondary completion.

2015 AND BEYOND

Shaping a new educational agenda beyond 2015 demands a shift in policies and practices in order to establish, on sustainable bases, better learning outcomes and equal opportunities for all. This by means of introducing:

New approach for the teaching profession. The importance of teachers in teaching has been widely recognized on regional and global terms. A UNESCO report on teachers and teaching, based on expert consultations, existing evidence, updated literature and data analysis on national and regional case studies identified an important number of policies and practices to improve the teacher profession. Four challenges were highlighted for the above purposes: to introduce new criteria for teacher recruitment, improve initial and continuous training, and improve the teacher career and the institutional bases for policy making and policy improvement.

Support for schools to improve learning outcomes. Parents and local community participation and teacher performance in learning may improve working conditions, learning outcomes and school based management. Effective schools, learning communities as well as school principals in poor areas may lead to better education, better schools and better lives. Schools that do not perform well, generally, have weak linkages in these areas.

Effective use of new technologies of information and communication (ICTs) in education. Access to technologies in Latin America and the Caribbean is strongly determined by socio economic levels and family income. Thus, dynamic incorporation of all to information society is limited to certain social sectors in certain countries only. ICT's development in the last decades requires an update in practices and content of education in order to align them with the requirements of an information society.

Improve school leadership and management. School improvement and effectiveness depend heavily on school leadership and management. Without these elements, Latin America will never have better schools. New leadership and new managerial styles are needed at classrooms and schools. It is necessary to invest in training a new generation of school leaders and school principals. And introduce new practices such as certification and accreditation of best practices and outcomes.