

Issue: Improving Education in South American Slums
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1. Description on the problem/ Background Information

Today, almost all Latin American children receive a primary (elementary) school level education and access to secondary (high school and college) education has increased considerably. As a result, the average teen in 2014 received two more years of education than his or her parents had. But, although the South American governments, NGO's and foreign governments support and constantly introduce educational reform in the region, there are still 23 million children in the region between the ages of 4 and 17 outside of the formal education system. This has been estimated to cover almost 30% of children between 3 and 5 (preschool age) on a regional basis and all the way up to 45% of the same age group in the poorest and most rural areas.

Along with the inability for education to reach the poorest and most remotely located population, the quality and knowledge of the teachers in the most remote areas is very low and as a result even the children who complete a full public school education (primary + secondary) have a poor understanding and limited knowledge.

Another issue that needs addressing in the bettering of the South American school systems is the schools lack of infrastructure as well as access to basic services such as water, electricity and sewage systems. Not to mention the lack of Internet and telecommunications, which leaves the school isolated and the children's knowledge to be even further restricted.

Hand in hand with this issue, goes the inability to count on educational inputs such as proper textbooks and other educational tools. In fact, the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory study (SERCE) found that the average 3rd through 6th grade student only has access to three educational

Elementary Schools in South America:

21% lack access to clean water

40% lack draining systems

11% lack electricity

53% lack phone lines

32%v lack proper bathrooms

40% lack libraries

88% lack science labs

65% lack computers

35% lack gymnasiums

books per student in those years. Meaning that in four years of the child's education, only three books will be available for his or her educational advancement. But of course, this is only on average as the study also showed that students from lower socioeconomic regions only had access to an average of one book pr. student, whereas children from higher socioeconomic regions had access to an average of eight books pr. Student – in the years 3rd through 6th grade. Meaning that a child's education and knowledge is largely based on his or her background as well as his or hers family's socioeconomic background.

This, socioeconomic difference is a major issue that needs solving, if the educational standard of Latin American is ever supposed to reach the ones of western countries. At the moment the rich get richer and the poor gets poorer, which creates the famous socioeconomic divide which many countries experience. This is a very serious issue and as history and all prognoses show the only way to close this gap is through education. However, with the higher middle class and the rich receiving much better, longer and higher quality educations than those less fortunate, the gap is seeming to get only wider, and harder to close. Therefore it is vital that the lower socioeconomic community start receiving an education at the same standard as the higher socioeconomic community.

One of the examples of higher, longer and better quality educations, which are only available to the better socioeconomic community, is private schools. All studies show that South American children who attend private schools receive a much more effective education. This effectiveness—which has also been called the “private school effect”—is defined as “the difference between public and private school outcomes, net of students' socioeconomic status and other factors pertaining to their family background”¹. In other words, children who attend private school receive a much better education than those who do no, regardless of their background and socioeconomic status. However, because the schools are private, they are also expensive, so not many students from the lower socioeconomic status gets to experience this effective education. In 2013 only 14 percent of all Latin American children in the school system attended private schools, and of those only 5% came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN LATIN AMERICA

TABLE 1
PRIVATE ENROLLMENT (as a Percentage of Total Enrollment)

	Primary		Secondary	
	1990	1996	1990	1996
Argentina	. . .	20
Bolivia	10
Brazil	14	11
Chile	39	42	42	45
Colombia	15	19	39	. . .
Dominican Republic	. . .	16	. . .	33
Mexico	6	6	12	11
Paraguay	15	14	22	27
Peru	13	12	15	16
Venezuela	14	18	29	. . .

SOURCE.—UNESCO, *World Education Report 2000* (UNESCO Publishing, 2000).

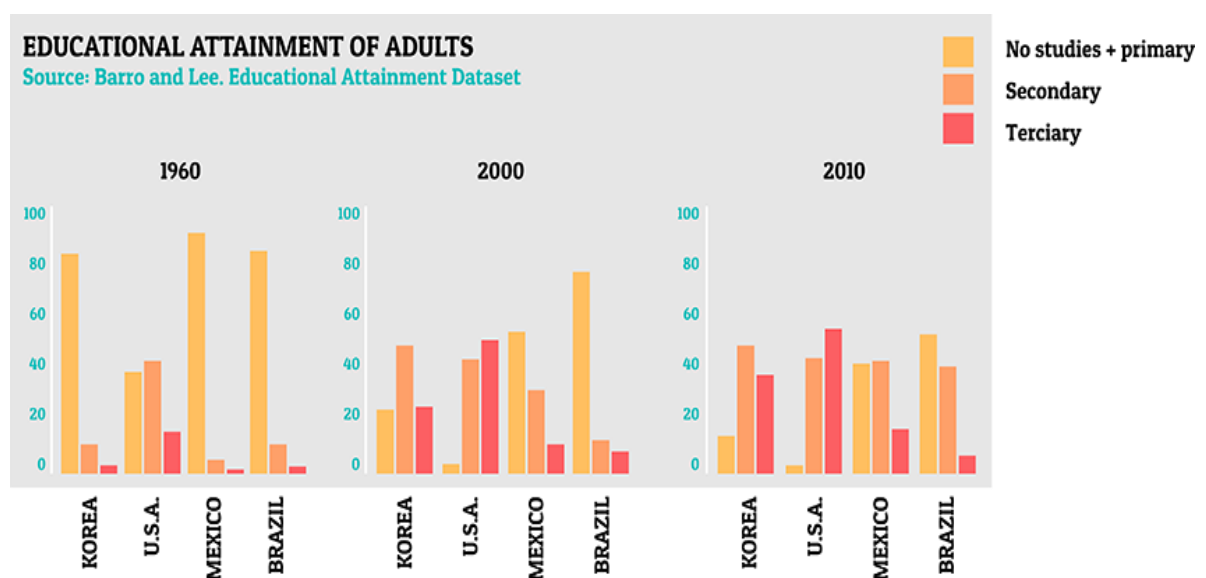
¹ <http://academics.wellesley.edu/Economics/mcewan/PDF/howeffective.pdf>

Many of the South American Countries have tried to change this through scholarships called “vouchers” and funding for private schools in order to make them more affordable. The latter method is especially seen in Argentina and Chile, where the governments contribute to 20% of the Private Schools annual budget.

When comparing Latin American countries to the rest of the world, it is no secret that they are falling behind in education. When looking on international tests such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests the highest scoring Latin American country was Chile, which scored more than 10% below average in all categories being Mathematic, Reading, Science and Problem Solving.

Also in the length of the school year, difficulty of the curriculum and amount of progress made in the school system, is South America falling behind. The majority of Latin American countries have a shorter school year than Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Take Japan, for an example. Here the elementary school year last 240 out of the 365 days of the year, whereas in Argentina it only lasts 180 days and in Honduras it is as short as 125 day a year.

Also when looking back historically – no further than 50 years ago - countries like South Korea, had similar, if not worse, levels of education than those of Latin America. However, by severe educational reform and a boost of the school system, they managed to not only create a school system better than those in South America, but better than most of the worlds school systems.



2. Definitions of important key terms

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

South America and Caribbean zone

UNICEF's mission is of particular importance in this region since more than 40% of the total population is under 18 years of age and more than half of the regions children and adolescents live in conditions of poverty. As in regards of Education: UNICEF supports government and community based initiatives that guarantee everyone access to schools. They also help provide improvement of education and learning in order to reduce drop out rates and thereby creating responsible citizens.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Since its creation in 1945, UNESCO's mission has been to contribute to the building of peace, poverty eradication, lasting development and intercultural dialogue, with education as one of its principal activities to achieve this aim. The Organization is committed to a holistic and humanistic vision of quality education worldwide, the realization of everyone's right to education, and the belief that education plays a fundamental role in human, social and economic development.

UNESCO Medium Term-Strategy

Education Strategy 2014 – 2021

UNESCO's Medium Term Strategy on Education is passed every 6 years and the newest edition is The Education Strategy 2014 – 2021, which was passed at the 37th session of UNESCO's Education Sector's General Conference in November 2013. The plan elaborates on areas of education, which still needs serious improvement and attention such as literacy, teachers and vocational skill development. The purpose of this is for UNESCO to help lead learners to be creative and responsible citizens in a world where every individual is called upon to contribute to his or her community. The following are the goals for the current Education Strategy:

1. Developing education systems to foster quality lifelong learning opportunities for all
2. Empowering learners to be creative and responsible global citizens
3. Shaping the future education agenda
4. Promoting the interface between science, policy and society and ethical and inclusive policies for sustainable development
5. Strengthening international science cooperation for peace, sustainability and social inclusion
6. Supporting inclusive social development and promoting intercultural dialogue and the rapprochement of cultures

7. Protecting, promoting and transmitting heritage
8. Fostering creativity and the diversity of cultural expressions
9. Promoting freedom of expression, media development and universal access to information and knowledge

Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)

The Program for International Student Assessment – commonly known as PISA – tests were developed in 1997 by the OECD as a way of testing and comparing all nations school systems and skills. Every three years, 15 year old students from every country in the world take tests in reading, mathematics, science and problem solving, in order to create an overview as to which countries are developing their school system, which are falling behind and which need help making progress.

As of 2009, the PISA tests showed that 48% of children in the south american region had difficulties performing remediation tasks and did not have the essential skills needed to participate effectively and productively to society. However, in the same years tests, Chile, Columbia and Peru were among the countries that displayed the largest advancement compared to previous versions of the test.

UN Millennium Goal 2

Achieving Universal Primary Education

The UN Millennium goals were a set of 8 goals set by the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 after the passing of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. All 189 members (at that time) as well as 23 international organizations agreed to try and accomplish these before the end of 2015. The second of these goals reads to:

“Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling”¹

Although there has been taken great measures to achieve this the recent report “Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children” made by the UNESCO institute for Statistics in collaboration with UNICEF found that the world has missed this 2015 goal as there are currently 58 million children, of primary school age, out of school worldwide.

3. List of relevant solutions

I. Making a proper curriculum and standard rules

First there need to be decide exactly what it is students should learn and how well they should be able to use what they learn. This also includes deciding what resources are needed for this to not only be knowledge, but for it to be quality knowledge.

Along with a proper curriculum comes ensuring some standard rules as to how the system should work. Should preschool be optional? Mandatory? How long do you need to go to school? 5 years? 7 years? 9 years? All of these things need to be decided in order for the South American school systems to truly blossom. Science shows that early childhood learning sets the standard for a child's ability to develop and learn for the rest of his or her life.

II. Better education of teachers.

The quality and knowledge of the teachers and teaching methods in the region is very poor and as a result the quality of the education is very low. Seeing as studies on student life and students ability to learn show a direct link between the quality and knowledge of the teacher, and how much is learned and remembered by the student, this needs to be dealt with right away.

However, Latin American countries have little or no selectivity when it comes to the teaching profession, compared other countries with outstanding primary education. Most teachers in the region are women or men who have (possibly) taken a lower secondary school education (High School) and therefore have the "ability" to teach. In Brazil, for example, a third of the employed teachers barely passed high school and in Mexico 70% of the teachers failed the National Teacher Examination.

There are many ways to improve the teacher's knowledge. One is going in the direction of most western country where teachers need not only a degree in the subjects, which they wish to teach, but also a degree in education and/or pedagogy. Another is making quotas as to which people are allowed to teach like we see in Korea, Finland and Singapore, where teachers need to graduate among the respective top 5%, top 10% and top 30%, in the topics which they wish to teach.

III. Spending more money on education

Investing more money in the education system of the respective countries is an obvious step in its improvement. Like shown in the fact box on page one, schools in South America are in serious need of an upgrade. They need running water, electricity, books, gymnasiums, science labs, computers etc. Investing in all of these will help create a better learning environment in which no student will be held back by lack of material goods.

Money spent by government on each student in the country's primary education system:

USA = \$ 9.98

Brazil = \$ 2.16

Chile = \$ 2.72

IV. Creation of a combined work and school program

Many countries in the western world promote internships, work release and spare time jobs in order to ease the transition from studying to working once the student enters the workforce. However, for many children in remote areas of Latin America working is a must in order to keep the family's economy afloat. Therefore many Latin American countries have made programs in which the student can combine work and school. Supporting and developing these programs will help increase the number of graduates in even the poorest of regions, and thereby it will be a start in closing the gap between the poor and the educational elite.

V. Other solutions

Obviously there are a million ways to handle an issue such as improving education. Other solutions besides the ones mentioned above, may be to increase the length of the school year in the struggling countries. Or to support private schools even more so they become cheaper and more accessible for all socioeconomic communities. Some also suggest making scholarships so that children can go abroad to take their high school and/or college degree.

4. **Helpful links**

OECD – Education GPS

Here you can find an outline of selected countries' education systems as well as their score at the Program for International Student Assessment tests (PISA tests).

<http://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile>

Worldfund – Latin American Countries

This page provides a brief introduction to the issue as well as a lot of statistics on the difference between Latin American countries and western and/or South Asian and Asian Pacific countries.

<https://worldfund.org/en/about-us/education-gap.html>

UNESCO- Interactive map

Good for providing basic information about your country's education and literacy.

<http://en.unesco.org/countries>

UNESCO – Education in the 21st century

This page provides up to date information and news in the field of UN education programs.

<http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-21st-century>

UNICEF – Education in South America and the Caribbean

This website provides information about UNICEF’s work in South America

http://www.unicef.org/lac/english_9821.htm

5. How to prepare as a delegate

Before showing up at the conference you should have read this research report, as well as conducted your own research as to what your country’s opinion on education and education reform is. Make sure you can answer the following questions:

- What does my country’s education system look like?
- How well is ranked on a worldly basis?
- What does my country do to help develop education in other countries?
- Does my country even help develop education in other countries?
- Which programs and reforms has your country supported and ratified?
- Anything else that may be relevant to the debate

6. Sources

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Latin_America

<https://worldfund.org/en/about-us/education-gap.html>

<http://www.focal.ca/publications/focalpoint/258-june-2010-tamara-ortega-goodspeed>

http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/mdg_goals/mdg2/