

EMMA LETICIA CANALES RODRÍGUEZ & TIBURCIO MORENO OLIVOS**COMPENSATORY PROGRAMS IN MEXICO TO REDUCE THE EDUCATIONAL GAP****Abstract**

In this paper we approach the issue of compensatory education programs to reduce the backlog in basic education. We address the population living in rural areas, because the Compensatory Programs (CPs) are aimed at them. The presentation is divided into three parts. The first section presents an approach to basic education in Mexico, the second provides information on the development of such programs and compensatory measures whilst the third part discusses the findings, conclusions and challenges that our country is facing to educate this segment of the population.

Introduction

Mexico is a vast country with multiple cultures, there are 63 ethnic groups distributed in 33 indigenous zones of the country. Over the last 40 years, the Mexican educational system has moved towards the enhancement of quality universal education for its heterogeneous population, and the creation of an administrative system that allows innovation rather than hinders it. Traditionally, Mexico has a highly centralized educational system but the extraordinary growth of enrolments has delayed both its functioning and its ability to meet the needs of diverse groups that compose Mexican society (Arnaut, 1998). Until the 1970s, the government's main concern was the expansion of the system, aiming for universal coverage. The 1980s testified to the government's attempts for launching reforms towards educational decentralization and also for achieving the modernization of curriculum and pedagogy. These efforts were channeled into the National Agreement of Modernization of Basic Education, signed in 1992 by the Federal and State Governments, besides the powerful National Union of Educational Workers (SNTE, for its initials in Spanish). All these actors were committed to a new cycle of reforms based on decentralization and towards improving the efficiency and quality of the system. Moreover, reforms were introduced to incorporate marginal social groups and to spread the use of modern technology into the Educational System.

In this paper we shall approach the issue of the Compensatory Programs (CPs) to reduce the backlog in basic education. We shall also address the population living in rural areas, because the CPs are aimed at them. This presentation is divided into three parts. The first section presents an approach to basic education in Mexico; the second provides information on the development of such programs and compensatory measures whilst the third part discusses the findings, conclusions and challenges that our country faces in the education of this section of the population.

Since the onset of the Rural School Program, these kinds of schools have been an important part of the educational network in 21 out of 31 states. Professors at these schools, emphasize the notion of nationalism so that all students have a strong sense of what it means to be Mexican. Even though students already have previous

cultural and identity roots, teachers have become a valuable resource for students to make them think about their identities, in addition to learning about their cultures.

The Mexican education system is one of the largest in Latin America. In 2005/06 it consisted of over 35.2 million students of school age, the great majority of whom were educated in government schools.

Mexico has three types of public education administered at four different levels. These are:

Basic Education, Upper Secondary, and Higher Education. Basic education has the following organization: 25,666,451 pupils (about 79% of all the students) and over 1,175,535 teachers working in over 226,374 educational establishments. Basic education is divided into three levels: a) Preschool that provides early education for children aged between 3 and 5; b) Primary education that consists of six grades; in general, children are registered when they reach 6 years of age in primary school and finish somewhat at the age of 11; c) Lower Secondary Education, that consists of three grades and serves students aged between 12 and 14 (Santibañez, Vernez, Razquin, 2005: 6-7).

The Compensatory Programs in Mexico

CPs in Mexico set out different provisions governing its operating rules and is part of the activities of the National Council for Educational Development (CONAFE, for its initials in Spanish), created in 1971 to attend rural communities so that its population could attend basic education. Initially, its work was realized through the programs set by the Secretary of Public Education (SEP). For this reason, it was necessary to make a teaching fitness permitting access to primary education to children of the scattered and marginalized villages of the country, promoting their retention and academic success. Moreover they offer educational opportunities that allow students to complete their basic education. In this situation are the rural schools, urban-marginalized and indigenous communities. They are divided into two groups: those seeking to improve educational opportunities and those that aim to increase demand. The first group programs seek to improve school conditions and supervision offices, also involved in the development of the different capacities of human resources working locally and in the general education system. The second group programs are designed to strengthen the educational demand, offsetting the high opportunity costs to attend the school in which children and adolescents incur.

The CPs to improve education for disadvantaged populations in Mexico began in 1992. The objective of the CP named Programme for Reducing Educational Backwardness (PARE, for its initials in Spanish) between 1992-1996 assisted 4 states of the Mexican Republic that presented major educational backwardness and marginality in comparison to the national average. These states were: Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo and Oaxaca. Various national and international studies have been conducted to understand its scope and results. This program intended to reduce educational backwardness in initial and basic education (Santibañez, 2004; SEP, 2008).

PRODEI, started in 8 states, sought to develop programs for early childhood education-schooling and was subsequently absorbed by PAREIB, financed by the World Bank. This programme started its Project to Fold Backwardness in Basic

Education Development and to support the continuity and transit of children from preschool through high school to successfully conclude their compulsory education (1998-2007). At this moment, the program selects schools based on their drop-out rates, school population, teacher student ratio as well as failure and repetition. This program is operating to reduce the backlog in the basic education development project and currently operates in all states of the Republic since January 1st 2011, when it came into force on the Agreement 567 (Acuerdo 567). This document set out different provisions governing its operating rules.

PIARE operated in 9 states from 1996 to 1998. It integrates programs for reducing educational backwardness.

PAREB was a program for improving levels of education in early childhood and basic levels in 10 states (1994 – 1998).

PAREIB program selects schools based on their dropout rates, school population, teacher student ratio as well as failure and repetition. According to the results of ongoing assessments, it provides compensatory actions to all indigenous and multi grade schools (CONAFE, 2000). This program has two main components: (1) the improvement of the quality of the Basic Education Development Project, and (2) the strengthening the Institutional Capacity Management. The component of improving educational quality PAREIB aims to improve the quality of education through improvements in infrastructure, school materials and training (Santibañez, 2004: 3).

CPs aimed at increasing the demand to seek and to improve education by engaging parents in decision making at the school in order to develop their opportunities to use information and resources.

PROGRESA, known as well as “Oportunidades”, provides cash payments to the beneficiary families to help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. It also focuses on the promotion of capacity building in education, health and nutrition. The scholarships consist of educational support to purchase school supplies for each child, to encourage their enrollment and regular attendance at school and to encourage the completion of educational levels. The amounts will increase as the pupil continues his/her studies to a higher level. In 2011 scholarships were awarded ranging between 11.50 to 23 US dollars from third through sixth grades and 33.84 to 43.46 US dollars in lower secondary. The amount is slightly higher for girls in this level; two dollars in the first year and 8 in the third, because in some communities parents do not allow girls to continue their studies (Oportunidades, 2011). This is because girls in these communities are usually kept at home to help out with house chores. The result of this program was that a major number of girls can finish their secondary school education. CPs aimed at increasing the demand to seek and to improve education by engaging parents in decision making at the school in order to develop their opportunities to use information and resources.

Discussion and Conclusions

In the past 40 years Mexico has made education policy reforms in different aspects. In the organization and distribution of financial resources for education many changes have occurred, the curriculum and approaches to all educational levels have been re-structured.

Mexico received financial contributions from international organizations when the country joined OECD in 1994. They were deeply concerned to encourage improvements in the most vulnerable people in Mexican schools. This situation has led to extensive discussions on education policy issues such as national coverage, equity and quality.

Several research groups worked in some states of the Mexican Republic and have commented on the following findings.

Lopez (1999) examined the impact on student learning, she found that the PARE program increased learning achievement in rural and native schools, where students had typically not performed as well as other students (in Spanish). Not only did students' cognitive abilities improve under the PARE program, but the probability of their continuing in school improved. In rural areas where the PARE design was fully implemented, test scores for the average student increased considerably in several states, which have the highest incidence of poverty and the lowest education indicators in Mexico. The most disadvantaged schools in these states are those serving rural and Native (non-Spanish-speaking) students. Control data were collected from comparable schools in the state of Michoacan, which did not implement PARE.

Parker (2004) found that "Oportunidades" had an important impact on student enrollment in rural secondary schools, and that the impact has grown over time. This increase has been on TV and general secondary schools, with increases of 24% in the cycle 2002-2003.

The National Institute of Educational Evaluation in Mexico (2003) report important differences in achievement between different areas of the country. In urban schools, 45% and 15% of the sixth graders in Mexican public schools achieve satisfactory competency levels in reading and math on the national reading and mathematics achievement tests administered by SEP (INEE, 2003).

The proportions of students achieving satisfactory competency in reading and math is much lower in rural (29% and 9%), community (18% and 6%), and indigenous schools (12% and 4%), with the latter reporting the lowest achievement levels of all four groups. These differences have prompted the government to shift the education policy discourse from issues of coverage to a focus on educational quality and equity. In the state of Hidalgo we notice a significant improvement between the years 2006 to 2011 in the Test of ENLACE (is the National Assessment of Academic Achievement in Schools conducted every year in Mexico by SEP to all public and private schools basic level, to know the rank of performance materials in Spanish, and mathematics and the field of Natural Sciences (SEP, INEE, 2011).

These averages mask important regional differences. Mexico's public spending on education amounts to 5.9 percent of GDP per capita, above the OECD average of 5.6 percent. Between 1995 and 2001, Mexico's public spending on basic education grew by 36 percent, among the steepest increases of all countries in the organization (OECD, 2004).

Lastly, for over 17 years, SEP has had in place a wide range of compensatory programs. Most of these have been funded with loans from the World Bank. The programs operate under the umbrella of CONAFE (*National Council for Educational Development*) — a department within SEP — and target schools in isolated rural and poor areas. Most of these programs are aimed at improving school

infrastructure, equipment, and materials, and providing incentives to teachers and school principals in order to decrease teacher absenteeism and improve school supervision functions. The budget for these programs is estimated around \$200–300 million per year.

Some researchers, organizations nationally and internationally agree that the Mexican system suffers from lack of transparency and objective evaluation. The research system in Mexico has severe limitations.

Nevertheless, despite their relevance, the impacts of compensatory programs have declined in recent years: the budget fell from \$282 million per year in 2000 to \$183 million in 2008. As a proportion of education spending federal funds channeled compensatory programs decreased from 1.0% in 2000 to 0.54% in 2008.

This shows a picture where the uneven qualities of education from the supply side (teacher quality) are compounded by the demand side (households with low levels of schooling). Faced with a similar (even schools to obtain functional literacy and the quality show uneven distribution by zones and strata), notes that the low quality of school inputs and operation of the education system (which coincides with the poor expectations generated by the demand for education) creates a situation that not only perpetuates the shortages, but making things worse (Schmelkes, 2005).

However, given the results presented and the difficulties in defining and measuring the quality of education, it is necessary to analyze the relationship between spending and quality of teaching (Desarrollo Humano, 2011: 130).

The Mexican experience in compensatory programs has been one of constant evolution and adaptation. The original model has undergone many changes but the original spirit remains intact: to reduce the educational gap for children in more economically disadvantaged areas. Over 18 years this has required a complex interplay between local, state, federal and international efforts to achieve the implementation of a model that has not always been consistent or successful in all cases. Regions or countries seeking to use compensation programs to improve educational equity for their populations need to take into account all these layers of complexity within their own settings to increase your chances of success. (Santibañez, 2004).

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