

Educational Inequalities among Latin American Adolescents: Continuities and Changes over the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s

Letícia Marteleto^{a,*}, Denisse Gelber^a, Celia Hubert^a, Viviana Salinas^b

^a Department of Sociology and Population Research Center, University of Texas at Austin

^b Universidad Católica de Chile

Received 10 June 2011; received in revised form 14 December 2011; accepted 18 December 2011

Abstract

The goal of this paper is to examine recent trends in educational stratification for Latin American adolescents growing up in three distinct periods: the 1980s, during severe recession; the 1990s, a period of structural adjustments imposed by international organizations; and the late 2000s, when most countries in the region experienced positive and stable growth. In addition to school enrollment and educational transitions, we examine the quality of education through enrollment in private schools, an important aspect of inequality in education that most studies have neglected. We use nationally representative household survey data for the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s in Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay. Our overall findings confirm the importance of macroeconomic conditions for inequalities in educational opportunity, suggesting important benefits brought up by the favorable conditions of the 2000s. However, our findings also call attention to increasing disadvantages associated with the quality of the education adolescents receive, suggesting the significance of the EMI framework—*Effectively Maintained Inequality*—and highlighting the value of examining the quality in addition to the quantity of education in order to fully understand educational stratification in the Latin American context.

© 2011 International Sociological Association Research Committee 28 on Social Stratification and Mobility. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: education; inequality; Latin America; adolescents

1. Introduction

Recent research has shown that the trends in inequalities in educational opportunity in Latin America sharply depart from those reported for the industrialized world (Torche, 2010). Latin American countries exhibit an unprecedented strengthening of the association between parental resources and educational attainment among cohorts growing up in the 1980s; this has been attributed to the economic crisis that overwhelmed the region

during the “lost decade”¹ (Torche, 2010). The 1980s were a peculiar time in Latin America because of severe debt crisis and structural adjustments (Carrasco, 1999; Thorp, 1998). During this period, the region experienced a sharp slowdown in schooling progress (Behrman, Duryea, & Szekely, 1999), and both short- and long-term inequalities in educational opportunity widened. Parents reacted to high unemployment by taking children out of school and often sending them to work (Duryea, Lam, & Levison, 2007), which led to a widening of the long-term inequality in educational opportunity, particularly

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: marteleto@prc.utexas.edu (L. Marteleto).

¹ The 1980s are often referred to as the “lost decade” for Latin America because per capita income levels at the end of the decade were generally below those at the start.

for low-income children (Torche, 2010). Another consequence of the overall reforms of the 1980s and 1990s was a widening of earnings differentials, with increasing wage inequality across schooling levels, which reinforced disparities in rates of return to education (Behrman et al., 1999). The consequences of the economic downturn were so staggering that Behrman and colleagues claimed that “unless there is a substantial surge in schooling accumulation after ages 15 and 18, which is unlikely, the slowdown in schooling accumulation would continue and was likely to intensify” (1999: 10).

After two decades of slow social and economic growth, several Latin American countries have shown significant economic stability and steep growth in the 2000s. Although inequality still remains high, particularly relative to other countries with the same per capita gross domestic product (GDP), several countries in the region have shown signs of declining inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient (Lopez-Calva & Lustig, 2010). At the same time, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the region experienced an unprecedented expansion of educational systems, with most countries—most notably Brazil and Mexico—achieving universal enrollment in primary education and consistently high enrollment levels in secondary education (Velo, 2009). Chile and Uruguay had already reached universal levels of primary schooling in the 1960s, and recent decades witnessed a steady expansion of secondary school enrollment.

Because macroeconomic conditions are critical determinants of changes in social, economic, and educational contexts, the favorable conditions of the 2000s have likely led to lower levels of inequalities in educational opportunity, particularly when compared to the adverse conditions of the 1980s. With a few exceptions, Uruguay being the most notable, those growing up in the 2000s have seen decreasing levels of unequal educational opportunity.

The goal of this paper is to examine changes in inequalities in educational opportunity for recent cohorts of adolescents in four Latin American countries: Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay. Together, these four countries have more than half of Latin America’s population. Comparing inequalities of educational opportunities in these countries is interesting also because Brazil and Mexico have traditionally had lower levels of education, while Chile and Uruguay have presented the region’s higher levels of schooling. We analyze recent trends in educational stratification for adolescents growing up in three distinct periods: the 1980s, during severe recession; the 1990s, a period of structural adjustments imposed by international organizations; and the late 2000s,

when most Latin American countries experienced positive and stable growth. We examine school enrollment and educational transitions. We also examine differences in the quality of education through enrollment in private schools, an important aspect of inequality in education that most studies have neglected.

2. Recent Social, Economic and Educational Trends in Latin America

Table 1 shows social, economic and educational indicators for each country for 1985–2005. The 1980s low levels of GDP per capita in all four countries illustrate the unfavorable economic conditions of the “lost decade.” With the exception of the 1995 crisis in Mexico and Chile’s response to the Asian Tiger crisis, all countries experienced significant economic growth throughout the 1990s, as measured by GDP per capita. Uruguay’s significantly lower GDP in 2005 than in 1995 reflects an early 2000s economic crisis. Because of such unfavorable economic conditions, reflected by a decline in GDP per capita, Uruguay is the exception among the countries we examine.

Table 1 also shows that the economic growth of the 2000s is not associated with decreases in economic inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient. Latin American countries have persistently ranked among the most unequal in the world. The Gini coefficient increased from 1985 to 1995 in Brazil and Chile but decreased slightly by the mid-2000s (Lopez-Calva & Lustig, 2010). This decline suggests that we may see improvements in educational opportunity by the late 2000s. The Gini coefficient increased consistently in Mexico and Uruguay throughout the period, revealing the same persistent and pervasive accumulation of resources in fewer hands that has plagued most of Latin America for decades.

Table 1 shows significant differences in educational expenditures in the four countries. Mexico is the only one of the four that significantly increased public spending on education, from 3.6% to 4.9% of the country’s GDP. In 1992, Mexico introduced major educational reforms², including decentralizing and introducing a new financing plan. There was also a push toward evaluation and extending the number of school days (Zorrilla, 2002). The two most important reforms were to make secondary education compulsory in 1993 and a change in curriculum in 2006, creating the National Baccalaureate System

² National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/998661>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/998661>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)