

Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all

Focus on Latin America and the Caribbean



United Nations
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Introduction

The present document, based on the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4, “Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all,” and consists of a selection of data that express the current situation in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding teaching and learning, the focus of the Global Teaching and Learning Report.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report is a document commissioned by UNESCO on behalf of the international community. It is the result of collaboration that involves members of the Report’s team and numerous other individuals, agencies, institutions, and governments.

The aim is to facilitate the analysis of achievements and outstanding challenges regarding the Region’s education systems, in order to ensure the right to education.

Progress of the Region towards Education for All goals

Since the Education for All framework was established in 2000, countries of the Region have made progress towards attaining the goals that have been set. Nonetheless, by 2015, too many countries will be far from reaching those goals.

Also, achievements in education are not the same in all countries, and large gaps may be noted among countries and within each country. In fact, inequality within each country is serious, because it is more harmful for the poorest sectors, rural populations, and ethnic minorities, which turns it into a critical issue in the Region.

International criteria used to assess progress in education increasingly focus on quality, and not only on coverage. The concept of quality is broad, and does not only include learning achievements, but also processes, conditions, and outcomes. This concept takes into account academic, as well as psychological and civic aspects. In light of these criteria, the Latin American and Caribbean Region is falling behind.

The establishment of Post–2015 goals should be guided by the principles of defending education as a right, safeguarding access to education for all boys and girls, and recognizing learning stages in each individual’s life phases.

There should be a basic set of goals that match the global development agenda, accompanied by a more itemized set of goals that are part of the Post–2015 Education for All framework. Each of these goals should be clear and measurable, in order to make sure that no one falls behind.

Goal 1:
Early childhood care and education contribute to competence building at a moment in which the child’s intelligence is developing. This brings long–term benefits for children, particularly in disadvantaged sectors.

Pre–school education has grown considerably since 2000. The gross enrolment rate has gone from 33% in 1999 to 50% in 2011 worldwide. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the situation is also comparatively positive, increasing from 54% to 73% in the same period. However, inequality within many countries is very high. This is what prevails throughout the Region.

Although the early childhood care and education expansion agenda remains relevant, the greatest challenge for countries of the Region is ensuring a satisfactory quality level for these services. It has been demonstrated that expected positive effects do not happen –and there may even be negative impacts– if programs are low quality.

In 2000, the Dakar Framework for Action did not establish an exact figure. But if 80% is the desired gross pre-school enrolment rate, this would mean that in 2011 only 37% of countries in the world had achieved it. According to projections, in 2015, only 48% of countries will have attained this goal. Although most countries of the Region that possess the necessary data have reached this goal or are close to reaching it, some countries are far from achieving it.

Goal 2: Universal primary education

Progress towards universal primary education has not been steady worldwide, which makes it unlikely that this goal will be met by 2015. While globally, the number of out-of-school children was reduced by half between 1999 and 2011, in countries like Colombia and Paraguay the figure for children in this condition has grown significantly in recent years. The Region has not made substantial progress. The global adjusted net enrolment rate in primary education increased from 84% to 91%. But in Latin America and the Caribbean, that increment was only from 94% to 95% in the same period. Also, the number of out-of-school children decreased just 24% in the Region.

Considering coverage of 97% as a goal, counting the countries that possess the necessary data, those that had reached universal primary education had grown from 30% in 1999 to 50% in 2011. According to projections, 56% of countries will have reached the goal by 2015.

While it is estimated that most countries of the Region for which data is available will attain this goal by 2015, many are far from reaching it. Some, like Saint Kitts and Nevis, are very far.

Assessment of universal primary education must also take into account whether children have completed this education level. Throughout the world, progress in this respect has been almost non-existent. Between 1999 and 2010, the proportion of children who reached the last grade of primary school grew from 74% to 75%. Instead, in Latin America and the Caribbean, progress was more significant. It increased from 77% to 84%.

Nonetheless, projections are not promising. By 2015, of the 90 countries for which data is available, only in 13 of them at least 97% of children will have reached the last grade of primary education.

Goal 3: Skills for youth and adults

The most effective way of acquiring basic skills is attending lower secondary school. Worldwide, the gross enrolment rate for lower secondary school increased from 72% to 82% between 1999 and 2011. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this proportion grew from 95% to 102% (and it includes a high rate of overage students). Regarding gross enrolment in higher secondary education, the Region progressed from 62% to 77%, compared to a global advancement of 45% to 59%.

This means that, comparatively, the Region has made significant progress regarding this goal. In fact, the figure for out-of-school

adolescents decreased by 31% worldwide between 1999 and 2011. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this drop was 55%. Nonetheless, inequality within countries is very pronounced, and this is most harmful for the poorest populations, rural sectors, and ethnic minorities.

This goal was not clearly established in the Dakar Framework, besides the fact that there are numerous data problems.

If 97% is the set goal for the adjusted net enrolment rate in lower secondary school, an assessment of progress made in 82 countries shows that in 1999 only 26% had reached universal secondary education. In 2011, 32% of countries had reached that level, and it is expected that 46% will have attained universal secondary education by 2015.

Of the countries and territories for which information is available, it is estimated that most are far from achieving this goal by 2015: Aruba, Barbados, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Trinidad and Tobago. **However, it may be noted that most Central American countries have made great strides in this area, and Ecuador is among the countries that have advanced the most in the world.**

Goal 4: Adult literacy

Universal literacy is essential for social and economic progress. The best way to develop reading and writing skills is to do it during childhood through quality education. Few countries offer true second opportunities to illiterate adults. That is why countries that have had insufficient access to education in

the past, have not been able to put an end to adult illiteracy.

Throughout the world, in the last two decades, adult illiteracy has decreased by 12%. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this figure has dropped by 16%, although 35 million adults are still illiterate in the Region. The future looks more promising for Latin America and the Caribbean: youth literacy has increased from 93% to 97% in the last two decades, while this figure went from 83% to 89% worldwide.

The goal that was established in Dakar was reducing adult illiteracy by 50%. However, this objective should be more ambitious in the future; for example, achieving universal adult literacy. If the goal is attaining at least 95% literacy, based on the current slow pace of progress, the number of countries that have achieved universal adult literacy obviously has not changed significantly.

In 2000, out of 87 countries, 21% had achieved universal adult literacy. By 2015, only 29% of countries will have attained this goal, and 37% will still be very far from achieving it.

It is projected that most countries of the Region for which information is available will not reach this objective. It is estimated that Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru will be particularly far from achieving it, while Guatemala and Haiti will be very far.

Goal 5: Gender parity and equality

Gender parity –having the same enrolment rate for girls and for boys– is the first step to reach the fifth goal of Education for All.

It is important to note that gender disparity patterns are different according to the income group to which each country belongs. In low-income countries, disparities tend to be detrimental to girls, while in medium- and high-income countries, disparities affect boys as one goes up the lower and higher levels of secondary education.

Es importante notar que las pautas de las disparidades de género son distintas según el grupo de ingresos a que pertenece cada país. En los países de bajos ingresos, las disparidades suelen ir en detrimento de las niñas, pero en los países de ingresos medianos y altos las disparidades van aumentando en detrimento de los niños a medida que se va ascendiendo hacia el primer y segundo ciclo de la enseñanza secundaria.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the trend is that gender disparity in access to education affects boys, particularly in secondary school. In the Region, there are no countries showing extreme disparity against girls in primary or secondary school.

Out of 15 countries in the world that have less than 90 adolescent boys for every 100 girls enrolled in secondary education, nearly half belong to Latin America and the Caribbean.

In Argentina, for example, the situation has deteriorated rapidly. While in 1999, there were 95 boys for every 100 girls in secondary school, in 2010 the number of boys had dropped to 90.

In Honduras, the situation is more extreme, with only 88 and 73 boys for every 100 girls enrolled in lower and higher secondary education, respectively.

Of the cases for which data is available, it is estimated that, by 2015, 70% of countries and territories will have achieved the goal for primary school, and 9% will be close to reaching it. Aruba, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Guyana, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname will be far from attaining this goal, and the Dominican Republic will be very far. For lower secondary education, 56% of countries and territories will have reached the goal by 2015, and 7% will be close to achieving it.

Goal 6: Quality of education

Although the quality of education was at the core of the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000, **the challenges of increasing the rate of schooling and the absence of good information to monitor quality have prevented this sixth goal from receiving enough attention.**

Improving quality and learning will play a decisive role in Post-2015 world development.

According to one of the basic indicators used to monitor this goal, the Region of Latin America and the Caribbean has made some progress regarding the student-teacher ratio, and is in a comparatively favorable situation in a global context. In 2011, the number of students per teacher in pre-primary, primary and secondary was 18, 21, and 16, while

those figures worldwide were 21, 24, and 17, respectively. Additionally, between 1999 and 2011, the Region showed a faster pace of progress than the world average.

Nevertheless, in many countries, the number of teachers has increased quickly, because individuals without the necessary training have been hired to teach. While this is a way of getting more children to attend school, the quality of education is at risk.

In one third of countries for which data is available, less than 75% of teachers have been trained according to their own country's national standards. Up to one half of countries have that same shortcoming regarding secondary and pre-primary education.

The issue of uncertified teachers is particularly serious in several countries of the Region, even in primary education, for example, in Belize, Dominica, Guyana, and Nicaragua.

The Dakar Framework for Action did not establish a clear objective with respect to assessing the quality of education. **In the future, it will be very important to monitor that all girls, boys, and youth, regardless of circumstances, acquire reading, writing, and math skills. In order to address this need, countries will have to strengthen their national assessment systems and guarantee that those systems are used to inform policy-making.** Regional and international evaluations can play a significant role in this aspect: better global monitoring of learning can encourage governments to not only make sure that all children attend school, but also that all children acquire basic skills.

With UNESCO support, countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have made progress regarding this matter. UNESCO's Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of Quality in Education (LLECE) has carried out three comparative evaluations.

Funding Education for All

National spending in education has increased around the world in recent years, particularly in low- and lower-middle income countries, partly due to improved economic growth. On average, between 1999 and 2011, public spending in education has gone from 4.6% to 5.1% of the gross national product (GNP). In Latin America and the Caribbean, the situation is slightly better. As a proportion of GNP, public spending in education has risen from 5% to 5.5% in the same period.

If allocating 6% of GNP for education had been set as a goal, in 2011 only 27% of countries would have satisfied the objective.

The Region's most remarkable case is that of Cuba. Between 1999 and 2011, that country raised its public spending in education from 7% to 13% as a percentage of GNP. It was the largest increase among medium- and low-income countries.

It is broadly accepted that countries should allocate at least 20% of their public budgets to education. However, in 2011 the global average was only 15%, a figure that has barely changed since 1999. Only 18% of countries complied with this objective in 2011. In the Region, on average, public spending in education went from 14.4% of all spending in 1999 to 16.2% in 2011, still far from the goal. The countries of the Region that have significantly increased (at least five percentage points) spending in education as a proportion of public spending between 1999 and 2011 are Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Panama (while St. Lucia has gone in the opposite direction).

Governments, particularly those of the poorest countries, should broaden the tax base and commit one fifth of their budgets to education.

For example, an increase in tax revenue in Brazil explains why this country spends ten times what India spends on each child attending primary school. However, in many developing countries, powerful interest groups are given tax brakes, tax evasion is not curtailed (which benefits the fortunes of the elites), or bids are awarded at below real values for the exploitation of natural resources. Reforms have been implemented in the Region in order to collect more public resources and allocate them to education: Ecuador has renegotiated contracts with oil companies, broadened its tax base, and given high priority to education. This resulted in Ecuador increasing its spending in education three-fold between 2003 and 2010.

In order to achieve Education for All, it is also necessary to redistribute resources, so that those most in need receive the benefits. Often, resources are diverted to the most privileged sectors.

In order to focus spending on the most marginalized and close educational gaps and inequality, many governments have adopted funding mechanisms that allow the allocation of resources to a country's regions or schools that are most in need. **For example, Brazil guarantees a minimum level of spending per student, giving priority to schools in rural areas with significant indigenous populations. This has had a positive impact on those populations' enrolment and learning.**

Increasing spending in education among its different regions has been at the core of Brazil's reform since the mid-90's.

In some very poor countries, achieving educational goals has depended (and probably will depend in the future) on international aid. After growing steadily between 2002 and 2010, this assistance has unfortunately stagnated. The aid has never reached the level that was committed, and it is projected that it will decrease. Haiti is the country of the Region most affected by this process.

The learning crisis hits the disadvantaged the hardest

Insufficient attention paid to education quality and the fact that there are still marginalized sectors have led to a learning crisis that must be addressed urgently. Despite the impressive progress made regarding access to education in the last decade, comparable improvements in quality have not always been achieved. In many countries, children are not even able to attain the most basic reading and math skills.

There are enormous learning achievement gaps between the most developed countries and the rest of the world. At the same time, there are very large inequalities within countries.

Factors such as poverty, gender, place of residence, language, ethnic background, disabilities, and others, increase the chances that some children will obtain less support at school at the time of improving their learning.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, children coming from disadvantaged settings remain at a much lower academic level than children coming from high-income sectors. In El Salvador, 42% of children from poor homes complete primary school and possess basic skills, while this number rises to 84% of children coming from higher-income households. In some countries, the gap between the rich and the poor becomes more evident in the last grades. For example, in Chile, while the gap is not significant in fourth grade, in eighth grade, 77% of students from wealthy households acquire basic skills, while only 44% of pupils from poor backgrounds achieve the same.

Reforms implemented in Chile have not reduced inequities. Rather, those measures may have even increased the gap. This has led to street protests headed by students who demand changes in education.

Additionally, in some countries of the Region, among them El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, and Peru, disparities in learning achievement in math and reading between students from rural areas and pupils from urban areas are higher than 15%.

The discrimination that is suffered by some indigenous peoples and ethnic groups is worsened by the fact that the language that is used in the classroom might be other than their mother tongue.

In Peru, in 2011, Spanish-speakers were seven times more likely to reach a satisfactory reading level than speakers of indigenous languages. Only 4% of speakers of indigenous languages reached a satisfactory level.

It is often asserted that expanding access to primary education in the poorest countries means lowering the quality of education, but this is not necessarily so. Some countries have been able to include more children in school while making sure that they learn. For example, in Mexico, when access was increased, the proportion of students who surpassed basic learning levels also grew, going from one third in 2003 to half in 2009, with equivalent progress for pupils from rich and poor households. Behind these results are selective social protection programs that benefit disadvantaged families by providing additional funds, learning materials, and support for teachers who work in those underprivileged areas.

Results from the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (SERCE 2006), which focused on primary school students from 16 countries of the Region, show some serious shortcomings in learning. In the third grade, 36 out of 100 students possess a low reading level (with difficulties in text comprehension), and 49 out of 100 pupils present low learning levels in math (with difficulties in performing some of the basic operations). In sixth grade, 23 out of 100 students present a low reading level, and 19 out of 100 show a low learning level in math.

Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of Quality in Education (LLECE), OREALC / UNESCO Santiago

Making the quality of teaching a national priority

It is essential to have strong national policies that give high priority to improving learning and teaching, in order to guarantee that all children who attend school acquire the skills and the knowledge that they are supposed to obtain. Education plans must include goals and establish benchmarks that will make governments accountable and provide the means to reach those objectives. Improving learning, particularly among disadvantaged children, must constitute a strategic goal. Plans must include approaches aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching staff, and must be developed jointly with educators and their labor unions. Plans must also guarantee that strategies will be backed

up with enough resources. Unfortunately, national education plans rarely comply with these standards.

A four-part strategy aimed at having the best teachers

For the learning crisis to be solved, all children should have trained, dedicated teachers, who can identify and support students with learning difficulties. These teachers must also count on the support of well-managed education systems. The following four strategies may guide countries to achieve this objective.

Strategy 1.

Attracting the best teachers: It implies raising the –material, social, and symbolic– status of the teaching profession, in order to make it more attractive for talented young people, and also establishing more requirements for those who want to enter teaching.

Strategy 2.

Improving teacher training, so that all children can learn: It implies enhancing institutions in charge of initial training, with the aim of making them provide an education that is appropriate, both regarding content and the ability to teach that content, particularly to those students who experience more difficulties or who belong to underprivileged sectors.

Strategy 3.

Having teachers available where they are most needed: It implies counting on compensatory policies and focused incentives, in order to attract the best trained teachers to work with disadvantaged students and populations that are hard to teach.

Strategy 4.

Offering appropriate incentives to maintain the best teachers: It implies offering educators a challenging, attractive, well-paid career with good working conditions, that is also demanding with respect to what matters most: the quality of teachers' professional work with their students.

These strategies are in line with those established in the Regional Strategy for Teachers in Latin America and the Caribbean, led by the Regional Bureau of Education (UNESCO Santiago). The publication entitled *Background and Criteria for Teachers' Policies Development in Latin America and the Caribbean*, drafted jointly with numerous education stakeholders in the Region, offers a diagnosis and policy guidelines that expand and contextualize the mentioned strategies.

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Curriculum and assessment strategies that enhance learning

In order to improve learning for all children, **teachers need to apply curriculum / plan strategies and assessments that allow them to close gaps in school achievement, and offer all children and youth the opportunity to acquire key transferable skills.**

These strategies must be useful to develop sound basic skills, with an early beginning and an appropriate pace, that will let disadvantaged students catch up. **The key for children to be successful in school is to facilitate the attainment of basic core skills, such as reading and elementary math. Without these skills, many children will have to make enormous efforts to keep up with the curriculum, and learning disparities will widen, to the detriment of underprivileged students.**

The linguistic needs of ethnic minorities must also be taken into account. For children belonging to ethnic and linguistic minorities to acquire sound basic skills, schools must teach in a language that students understand. A bilingual method that combines ongoing teaching in the child's mother tongue with the introduction of a second language can enhance achievement in the second language and in other subject areas.

To this end, it is critical to promote the habit of reading, which involves providing relevant materials (including materials in the mother tongue for linguistic minorities),

implementing programs of support and promotion of reading at home and during off school hours, and creatively using new information and communication technologies.

Lastly, giving priority to basic learning cannot be considered as contradictory with a concern for higher skills. Education plans and curricula must ensure that all children and youth also acquire transferable skills, like those related to critical thinking, problem solving, advocacy, and conflict resolution, which will help them become responsible citizens.





The Latin American and Caribbean Region continues to advance towards the achievement of Education for All goals. However, inequalities within countries are very pronounced, and this is most detrimental to the poorest sectors, rural populations, and ethnic minorities, becoming a critical issue for the Region. Great progress has been made, for example, in attaining Goal 5 (gender parity and equality). There is no extreme disparity against female students in primary or secondary school. Nonetheless, although pre-school has expanded considerably in the Region since 2000, Goal 1 (early childhood care and education) is far from being reached in many countries. Progress towards achievement of Goal 2 (universal primary education) has stagnated in the last decade, and coverage has remained between 94% and 95%. While most countries of the Region have or are expected to attain this goal, several countries are far from reaching it.

With respect to Goal 3 (skills for youth and adults), comparatively, the Region has made significant progress. Nevertheless, boys and girls must complete lower secondary education in order to acquire basic skills. It is estimated that most countries of the Region will not reach this goal. According to projections, Latin American and Caribbean countries will not attain Goal 4 (adult literacy) either. Even though adult illiteracy has decreased by 16%, 35 million adults are still illiterate in the Region. Goal 6 (quality of education) requires urgent and special attention, particularly regarding the most disadvantaged sectors, because this situation has led to a learning crisis. In many countries of the Region, boys and girls are not even able to acquire basic reading and math skills. Additionally, there is a problem with teachers who are not professionally certified, a serious concern in many Latin American and Caribbean countries.



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