WHAT TO COMPARE WHEN COMPARING INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS? BEYOND SCHOOL DISPARITIES, SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Silvia Verónica Valdivia-Yábar 1
Alfredo Pelayo Calatayud Mendoza 2
Liceli Gabriela Peñarrieta-Bedoya 3
Tania Roxana Aguilar Portugal 4

ABSTRACT

Objective: International comparisons influence educational policies, but their foundations are seldom examined. The academic dimension is emphasized, despite the goal of integrating youth into the social and economic life of most countries. This research supports this perspective and aims to assess the role of educational systems in the reproduction of social inequalities in Latin America.

Theoretical Framework: The research is grounded in the theories of social reproduction and conflict, addressing concepts such as school segregation and the valuation of diplomas in social mobility.

Method: A qualitative and comparative methodology was adopted, focusing on the educational systems of Latin America. It was structured into four components: literature review, comparative analysis, analysis of public data, and synthesis of findings. Data collection involved the analysis of secondary data.

Results and Discussion: The results revealed persistent educational inequalities in the region, such as school segregation and differences in diploma valuation. The discussion highlighted how schools and diplomas perpetuate social inequalities, influencing the social and economic trajectories of young people.

Research Implications: It emphasizes the need to evaluate educational systems beyond academic performance, considering their impact on social integration. It underscores the urgency of reforms for inclusion, equity, and intersectoral collaboration.

Originality/Value: This study offers a new perspective on educational inequality in Latin America, examining the impact of school segregation and diploma valuation on social mobility. It enriches academic dialogue and educational practices.

Keywords: Education Inequalities, Social Reproduction, Comparative Assessment, Socioeconomic Integration, Educational Policies, School Segregation.

O QUE COMPARAR AO COMPARAR AS DESIGUALDADES NA EDUCAÇÃO? ALÉM DAS DESIGUALDADES ESCOLARES, A REPRODUÇÃO SOCIAL

RESUMO

Objetivo: As comparações internacionais influenciam as políticas educacionais, mas raramente se examinam suas bases. Enfatiza-se a dimensão acadêmica, apesar do propósito de integrar os jovens na vida social e econômica da maioria dos países. Esta pesquisa apoia esta perspectiva e propõe-se a avaliar o papel dos sistemas educativos na reprodução de desigualdades sociais na América Latina.

1 Universidad Nacional del Altiplano, Puno, Puno, Perú. E-mail: svaldivia@unap.edu.pe
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9665-5022
2 Universidad Nacional del Altiplano, Puno, Puno, Perú. E-mail: apcalatayud@unap.edu.pe
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1213-0035
3 Universidad Nacional del Altiplano, Puno, Puno, Perú. E-mail: liceligabriela@unap.edu.pe
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9457-8564
4 Universidad Nacional del Altiplano, Puno, Puno, Perú. E-mail: taguilar@unap.edu.pe
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6482-1401
Referencial Teórico: A pesquisa se baseia na teoria da reprodução social e na teoria do conflito, abordando conceitos como a segregação escolar e a valorização dos diplomas na mobilidade social.

Método: Adotou-se uma metodologia qualitativa e comparativa, centrada nos sistemas educativos da América Latina. Foi estruturada em quatro componentes: revisão de literatura, análise comparativa, análise de dados públicos e síntese de descobertas. A coleta de dados consistiu na análise de dados secundários.

Resultados e Discussão: Os resultados revelaram desigualdades educacionais persistentes na região, como a segregação escolar e diferenças na valorização de diplomas. A discussão destacou como a escola e os diplomas perpetuam as desigualdades sociais, influenciando as trajetórias sociais e econômicas dos jovens.

Implicações da Pesquisa: Destaca a necessidade de avaliar os sistemas educativos além do desempenho acadêmico, considerando seu impacto na integração social. Ressalta a urgência de reformas para a inclusão, equidade e colaboração intersectorial.

Originalidade/Valor: Este estudo oferece uma nova perspectiva sobre a desigualdade educacional na América Latina, examinando o impacto da segregação escolar e a valorização de diplomas na mobilidade social. Enriquece o diálogo acadêmico e as práticas educativas.


QUÉ COMPARAR CUANDO SE COMPARAN LAS DESIGUALDADES EN LA EDUCACIÓN? MÁS ALLÁ DE LAS DESIGUALDADES ESCOLARES, LA REPRODUCCIÓN SOCIAL

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Las comparaciones internacionales influyen en las políticas educativas, pero rara vez se examinan sus bases. Se enfatiza la dimensión académica, pese al propósito de integrar a los jóvenes en la vida social y económica de la mayoría de países. Esta investigación respalda esta perspectiva y se propone evaluar el papel de los sistemas educativos en la reproducción de desigualdades sociales en América Latina.

Marco Teórico: La investigación se fundamenta en la teoría de reproducción social y la teoría del conflicto, abordando conceptos como la segregación escolar y la valoración de los diplomas en la movilidad social.

Método: Se adoptó una metodología cualitativa y comparativa, centrada en los sistemas educativos de América Latina. Se estructuró en cuatro componentes: revisión de literatura, análisis comparativo, análisis de datos públicos y síntesis de hallazgos. La recolección de datos consistió en el análisis de datos secundarios.

Resultados y Discusión: Los resultados revelaron persistentes desigualdades educativas en la región, como la segregación escolar y diferencias en la valoración de diplomas. La discusión resaltó cómo la escuela y los diplomas perpetúan las desigualdades sociales, influyendo en las trayectorias sociales y económicas de los jóvenes.

Implicaciones de la investigación: Destaca la necesidad de evaluar los sistemas educativos más allá del rendimiento académico, considerando su impacto en la integración social. Resalta la urgencia de reformas para la inclusión, equidad y colaboración intersectorial.

Originalidad/Valor: Este estudio ofrece una nueva perspectiva sobre la desigualdad educativa en América Latina, examinando el impacto de la segregación escolar y la valoración de diplomas en la movilidad social. Enriquece el diálogo académico y las prácticas educativas.

Palabras clave: Desigualdades En La Educación, Reproducción Social, Evaluación Comparativa, Inserción Socioeconómica, Políticas Educativas, Segregación Escolar.
1 INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar for individual and collective development, acting as a vehicle for social mobility. However, structural inequalities limit the effectiveness of education systems, reflecting and perpetuating the socio-economic divisions of society. In Latin America, these inequalities are acute and manifest themselves through school segregation and the assessment of diplomas, affecting the social mobility and opportunities of young people.

Comparisons of education systems have multiplied, adopting qualitative approaches in some countries and quantitative approaches in most. These studies analyze how education systems work in their historical and social contexts. But it is not always clear whether the comparisons directly affect students and their achievements. Demonstrating causality in achievement inequalities is complex, as many studies use correlational approaches that do not always clarify the influence of specific educational factors.

Moreover, what aspects to compare in educational studies are rarely specified, and perspectives vary by academic discipline. Educators focus on student achievement and inequalities, while sociologists examine how education perpetuates social inequalities through socialization and job allocation. Hadjar and Gross (2016), highlights that this double perspective helps to understand the interconnections and variations of social and educational inequalities between countries, highlighting the usefulness of international comparisons to develop effective strategies against these inequalities.

Given the context and relevance of these findings, a research question arises: How do education systems in Latin America contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities, specifically through school segregation and the assessment of diplomas, and what is the impact of these factors inside and outside of school?

This study is justified by the urgent need to understand and redesign educational structures to promote greater equity. Educational inequalities reflect broader social inequalities, so analyzing these patterns is crucial to developing interventions that promote social inclusion and equity. This will contribute to the development of more equitable and inclusive educational approaches that address social reproduction and help break cycles of inequality.

The study establishes the objectives: to evaluate the role of education systems in the reproduction of social inequalities in Latin America, to examine the beginning of social reproduction in the school context, to investigate the role of diplomas as an instrument of social
reproduction and to analyze the impact of education on social reproduction beyond the school environment.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis of the role of education systems in the reproduction of social inequalities in Latin America requires a theoretical framework that incorporates diverse sociological and educational perspectives. This framework is based on the intersection of theories on social reproduction, school segregation and the assessment of diplomas, to understand how these factors influence social mobility and opportunities of young people.

From the perspective of social reproduction, Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) argue that education is a key instrument in the perpetuation of social inequalities, where inherited cultural capital affects educational success, promoting the reproduction of existing power structures. This approach highlights how educational institutions reflect, perpetuate and even amplify existing social inequalities in a society.

Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" complements this idea by referring to the ingrained patterns of thought, behavior, and taste, acquired through socialization in a given social context. In the educational field, this suggests that internalized provisions influence how students relate to knowledge and educational authority, which can reinforce social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1984).

On the other hand, the theory of conflict, represented by Bowles and Gintis (1976), holds that education serves to reproduce the power and labor relations necessary for the capitalist economic system. This approach highlights how schools inculcate values and competencies that perpetuate class structures, keeping social inequalities intact.

Contemporary research has also expanded on these ideas to consider how education policies and school practices can work to mitigate or exacerbate inequalities. For example, studies have shown that policies such as school choice and monitoring can increase segregation and educational disparities (Krüger, 2019). In addition, globalization and changes in national economies have influenced the valuation of education as an economic good, affecting expectations about its purpose and measurement of educational success (Dix-Carneiro & Kovak, 2023).

On the other hand, school segregation, defined as the unequal distribution of students according to socioeconomic, ethnic or academic characteristics, is a critical factor that exacerbates educational inequalities. Studies such as Carrillo's (2020) demonstrate how
segregation contributes to unequal learning environments, affecting students' academic performance and future opportunities.

The social and economic importance attached to diplomas varies between cultures and education systems, directly affecting social mobility. Bourdieu (2016) explores how educational credentials function as signals in the labor market, influencing career paths and social stratification.

The relationship between education and social mobility is complex and mediated by institutional and economic factors. Authors such as Hout (2012) have investigated how education contributes to upward social mobility, highlighting the crucial role of education policies and the economic context in the effectiveness of education as a driver of mobility.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative and comparative methodology focused on Latin American education systems to examine how they contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities. The data collection consisted of the analysis of secondary data. The methodology was structured in four main components: literature review, comparative analysis, analysis of public data and synthesis of findings.

3.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review examined academic publications and reports from entities such as UNESCO and ECLAC to analyze educational inequalities in Latin America. It focused on persistent challenges and effective solutions, delving into aspects such as school segregation and the impact of diploma assessment on youth opportunities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020; Economic Commission for Latin America [ECLAC], 2022).

3.2 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The comparative analysis systematically evaluated previous studies on educational policies and school segregation practices in Latin America, focusing on their effectiveness in combating inequalities and segregation (Krüger, 2014; Valenzuela et al., 2014; Costa, 2019).
Patterns, trends and discrepancies were identified, comparing results, methodologies and socioeconomic contexts to provide an overview of challenges and opportunities in the region.

3.3 PUBLIC DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of public data focused on sources such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), carrying out a qualitative evaluation. The methodology involved the selection and interpretation of these data to analyze the relationship between education and social mobility, using a contextual analysis without applying complex statistical techniques, to understand their relationship with educational inequalities and social mobility (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018).

3.4 SYNTHESIS AND COMPARISON OF FINDINGS

The synthesis and comparison of findings analyzed the results of different components of the study. Data were collected from the analysis of academic literature and public data, identifying patterns, trends and discrepancies in the reproduction of social inequalities in education in Latin America (UNESCO, 2020; ECLAC, 2022; OECD, 2018;).

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the research provide a detailed analysis of educational and social dynamics in Latin America, focusing on persistent educational inequality. This includes school segregation, disparities in the valuation of diplomas and the impact on social mobility in the region.

4.1 CHALLENGES AND PERSISTENCE OF SCHOOL SEGREGATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA

The review of academic literature and reports from entities such as UNESCO and ECLAC shows key challenges and promising practices around education and inequality in Latin America. The region presents a marked educational inequality, influenced by socioeconomic origin and geographical location, with significant differences in access to quality education, as observed in Brazil and Mexico (UNESCO, 2020). The COVID-19
pandemic has exacerbated these challenges and threatened progress towards the 2030 Agenda goals, causing setbacks in countries such as Argentina and Colombia due to the suspension of in-person classes and the lack of digital educational resources (ECLAC, 2022).

School segregation, both in terms of resources and student composition, reflects and amplifies existing social inequalities. In Chile and Peru, there is significant segregation between public and private schools, which affects the quality of education and perpetuates inequality (Krüger, 2019). On the other hand, the perception of the value of diplomas affects the expectations and opportunities of young people in contexts of high inequality and low social mobility. In countries such as Uruguay and Ecuador, access to job opportunities for young people is closely linked to the prestige and reputation of the educational institutions from which they come (UNESCO, 2020).

However, there are inclusive education policies in Latin America that promote quality education for all, regardless of socioeconomic background. In Costa Rica and Honduras, programs have been implemented to reduce access gaps and improve educational quality (ECLAC, 2022). In addition, innovative methodologies and pedagogical approaches for equity and inclusion are being applied in several countries of the region. For example, bilingual intercultural education programs that value cultural and linguistic diversity are implemented in El Salvador and Guatemala (UNESCO, 2020).

Comparative analysis of education policies in Latin America reveals that school segregation is a persistent and systemic phenomenon in the region, exacerbated by education policies that do not address the roots of socioeconomic inequalities. In Argentina, despite efforts and investment in social programs, educational segregation remains a significant challenge (Krüger, 2014). Studies show that socioeconomic status is directly related to the quality of education received. In Chile, low-income students are often in schools with fewer resources and lower academic outcomes (Valenzuela et al., 2014). In addition, reforms such as school autonomy and education vouchers in Brazil have increased segregation, allowing families with more resources to choose better quality schools (Costa, 2019). Students in rural areas and indigenous communities face significant disadvantages, limiting their educational opportunities and perpetuating cycles of poverty. In Mexico, for example, indigenous communities have lower school enrollment rates and face linguistic and cultural barriers in the education system (Tapia & Valenti, 2016). In addition, results-based funding tends to favor institutions that already have high-performing students, leaving schools with higher needs behind. In Colombia, regional inequalities in educational investment have maintained and aggravated school segregation (Murillo & Carrillo-Luna, 2021).
Despite this, there are promising practices that could reduce segregation and improve educational outcomes in marginalized populations. The implementation of bilingual intercultural education in Peru is a positive example towards the inclusion of native communities (Balarín & Escudero, 2018). It is essential to address these challenges comprehensively, recognizing the need for profound transformations in policy and resource allocation for education. Collaboration between governments, international organizations, and educational communities is also crucial. This will help overcome the education crisis aggravated by the pandemic (ECLAC, 2022).

4.2 DIPLOMAS AND INEQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA

The comparative analysis on school segregation and educational policies in Latin America shows how these dynamics affect the assessment of diplomas and opportunities for social mobility of young people. Through case studies in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Mexico and Peru, it is explored how the socio-educational environment influences the perception of the value of diplomas.

In Argentina, despite efforts to implement inclusive policies, educational segregation persists, negatively impacting the valuation of diplomas (Krüger, 2014). Chile faces a similar problem, where school segregation mainly affects low-income students, questioning the equity in the valuation of diplomas (Valenzuela et al., 2014).

In Brazil, school choice policies and performance-based financing have exacerbated segregation, affecting the valuation of diplomas in disadvantaged settings (Costa, 2019). In Mexico, barriers in education for indigenous communities affect the assessment of their diplomas, highlighting the need for policies that address structural inequalities (Tapia & Valenti, 2016).

In Peru, bilingual intercultural education has proven to be a successful initiative, improving the valuation of diplomas in marginalized communities and promoting educational equity (Balerín & Escudero, 2018). Regional examples underline the critical importance of education policies in the perception of the value of diplomas and the need to address inequalities to improve the social mobility of young people in the region.
4.3 EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA: THE PERSISTENT SCHOOL SEGREGATION AS A SYSTEM OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

The synthesis of the analysis highlights that school segregation and variable assessment of diplomas play crucial roles in the perpetuation of social inequalities in Latin America. These phenomena are profoundly influenced by the interaction between the educational environment and broader socioeconomic structures.

School segregation, compounded by socioeconomic and geographical disparities, leads to inequalities in access to education. This is particularly notable in Brazil and Mexico, where differences between urban and rural areas, as well as between different socioeconomic strata, are significant. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis has intensified these challenges, compromising progress towards the 2030 education targets (UNESCO, 2020; ECLAC, 2022).

The perception of the value of diplomas, influenced by the reputation and prestige of educational institutions of origin, significantly impacts the expectations and job opportunities of young people, especially in Uruguay and Ecuador (UNESCO, 2020). Inclusive education policies and innovative practices, such as inclusive education programs in Costa Rica and Honduras, and bilingual intercultural education in El Salvador and Guatemala, represent promising strategies to mitigate educational inequalities. These initiatives highlight the importance of promoting cultural and linguistic diversity to achieve equitable education (ECLAC, 2022; UNESCO, 2020).

In summary, the results highlight the complexity of the social dynamics that are reproduced in the Latin American education system. Addressing school segregation and disparities in the valuation of diplomas is essential to move towards greater educational equity in the region. The comprehensive implementation of educational policies and practices that promote inclusion, equity and the recognition of diversity is crucial to interrupt cycles of inequality and move towards a fairer society in Latin America.

The discussion highlights that social reproduction finds its origin in the educational system, where diplomas function as essential tools to perpetuate inequalities. However, this phenomenon is not limited only to the school environment, as it extends and amplifies beyond formal education, influencing the social and economic trajectories of young people in their post-school life.
4.4 HOW REPRODUCTION BEGINS IN SCHOOL

Social inequalities in student achievement are widely recognized through PISA surveys. In recent work (Amarante, 2015), the relationship between these school inequalities and the Gini index in samples from Latin American countries has been explored, finding a significant and high correlation between both series. This finding seems to validate the model of reproduction, since disparities in the educational field are comparable with social inequalities.

Differences between students are also influenced by the level of social and school segregation in institutions, which results from the way students are grouped, in turn determined by school policies and the level of spatial segregation of social inequalities. It is important to highlight two synthetic parameters, as noted by Demeuse and Baye (2008). One of them measures the segregation of students at age 15 from multiple perspectives: school, social and linguistic origin. The other assesses the segregative nature of school structures, considering student groupings, the proportion of private resources, school choice by parents, and the repetition rate. These two variables are closely correlated, as expected. However, social and school segregation between institutions, prevalent in many countries, is linked to strong educational inequalities. The degree of segregation of students emerges as an important parameter to differentiate education systems in terms of social inequalities in achievement. These inequalities and segregation, which are interconnected, can result from educational policies such as free school choice. By contrast, less unequal systems include countries where school choice is regulated, decentralization is limited, and private participation is limited.

In short, different forms of educational organization play a crucial role in the construction of social inequalities in school performance, a well-documented phenomenon. However, both education researchers and sociologists make two important observations. First, most analyzes focus on the comparison of achievements (PISA), which is understandable, but this does not cover all the objectives of educational action. It is always sought to develop in students certain attitudes, although more difficult to measure, that do not exactly follow the hierarchy of achievements. For example, there is no correlation between scores on knowledge tests and students' positive perception of school or the quality of their relationships with teachers (Duru-Bellat et al., 2008).

On the other hand, achievements are not considered only because of the acquisition of knowledge in itself, but because they imply a more or less satisfactory economic and social
insertion. In this sense, the inequalities that mark these achievements and diplomas become the vehicle for the social reproduction of positions, transmitted from parents to children.

4.5 THE ESSENTIAL INSTRUMENT OF REPRODUCTION

However, there are few comparative analyzes that empirically explore the role that school inequalities, certified by diplomas, play in the formation of social inequalities endorsed by the educational institution. Some societies are likely to value diplomas more or less and develop alternative training and/or qualification systems to school, modulating the strength of the relationship between school diplomas and subsequent social positions (Shavit & Müller, 1998). Therefore, comparisons between education systems should extend their analysis to the insertion process and how young people take advantage of their diplomas.

To achieve this, it is crucial to study how the diploma translates into income and social status, which is called the influence of the diploma (Dubet et al., 2010). It can be conceived that the variation in the intensity of the relationships between school achievement inequalities and social inequalities is explained by the unequal incidence, depending on the country, of school achievement and diplomas in people's professional future. In this context, the role of the school in the process of social reproduction will depend as much, if not more, on the socio-economic value of the degrees it offers, as on the social inequalities in the obtaining of such degrees. Moreover, it is likely that when the influence of diplomas on social positions is strong, there will be intense competition among social groups to ensure the best possible position for their children, and favored groups will have more opportunities to achieve this.

To test this hypothesis, a variable called "influence" was constructed, which addresses the scope of the economic benefits provided by the diploma, specifically a higher level diploma, which is the most discriminatory when working with a sample of countries enrolled at this level. The first observation is that the "performance" of diplomas is uneven across countries. The second observation is that the influence of diplomas correlates with the magnitude of income inequalities. The relationship can also be in the opposite direction: when wage inequalities are strong, it is more necessary to justify them with a criterion considered legitimate, and in societies where what Krüger (2019) calls meritocracy-based education prevails, diplomas are the ideal criterion.

Importantly, a meritocratic society would combine an absence of school social inequalities and pure equality of opportunity. In this scenario, the classical scheme of the analysis of the allocation of places in modern societies - the Origin-Education-Destiny scheme
- foresees that, in the case of a purely meritocratic society, "destinations", i.e. places, would derive from the education received. Therefore, there would be strong relations between Education and Destiny, which is designated here as a strong influence.

It is true that other features of education systems may be associated with uneven levels of influence of diplomas. Amarante (2015) shows that countries with strong influence have more centralized and hierarchical education systems than others, making diplomas more visible to employers and contributing to their "performance". Finally, there is a very strong positive correlation between the influence of diplomas and youth unemployment, which reinforces the idea that the influence of diplomas is all the more necessary in contexts where there is strong competition for scarce jobs; in other words, in a context of strong competition for scarce jobs, the criterion of diplomas helps to organize the waiting line of young people. In general, the way in which diplomas are articulated with social positions is part of a set of country-specific relationships.

4.6 SOCIAL REPRODUCTION PLAYS MORE AFTER SCHOOL THAN IN SCHOOL

In the sociology of reproduction, which analyzes how social positions are transmitted from parent to child, a central role was given to the school institution, particularly with the theses of Bourdieu and Passeron (1970). This has led to the school's reproductive function being considered a constant in modern societies, which seek in school verdicts and individual merits the justification of their social inequalities. However, the development of comparative surveys in recent decades has revealed that the relationships between school inequalities and social inequalities are not uniform. This raises the question of whether school plays the same role in all contexts and with the same magnitude.

To understand these variations, two lines of research can be followed. On the one hand, the organization of school systems transforms social inequalities into inequalities of achievement. On the other hand, the way in which countries value school diplomas is less explored. Reproduction theses suggest a continuity between social and school inequalities, as well as between school inequalities and inequalities of students' social positions.

Recent comparisons show that this string is not automatic. To understand the role of school in the production and reproduction of social inequalities, it is necessary to study the social effects of school inequalities, in addition to the school consequences of social inequalities. School-based inequalities in achievement and diplomas may play a different role depending on the weight given to diplomas and the extent to which alternative systems of
professional qualification and/or access to employment are developed. It is in the interaction of these two mechanisms that the differences between countries in terms of social reproduction lie.

To assess the extent to which the influence of diplomas contributes to a more or less pronounced social reproduction, it is necessary to have an empirical indicator, although imperfect. In the economic literature, this variable has been operationalized by the impact of the father's salary on that of his children (Hadjar & Gross, 2016). Specifically, it measures the fraction of the income difference between adults at any given time that is passed on to their descendants. The higher this fraction, the higher the reproduction, indicating strong intergenerational income transmission and lower intergenerational income mobility. Education plays an important role in that the transmission of income from one generation to another depends on the returns from education.

Regardless of the magnitude of school inequalities in achievement and degrees, these contribute to social reproduction in different ways depending on the role of school degrees in accessing social positions in different countries. In this sense, national specificities, rooted in history and reflected in the functioning of the economy and the labor market, are essential.

While it is probably trivial to point out that education pursues multiple purposes, giving primacy, even exclusivity, to one of them is questionable, and the weighting between these purposes may be less consensual (Apple, 2016). International comparisons are limited to comparisons of academic performance, which can be considered questionable, since it refers to the conception of the role of the school (Sahlberg, 2011). If we consider that achievements are goods in themselves, the competences for life, it is essential to evaluate them and identify the parameters that make them vary, knowing that in the matter comparisons are indispensable (Fullan et al., 2018). A first observation is that large-scale comparisons can indeed polarize into what is easier to measure, thus neglecting the observation of attitudes, not only more difficult to apprehend but also perhaps less easy to compare from one country to another (Hargreaves, 2003). Forging certain attitudes is still at the heart of educational goals, especially if education is considered as the main vector of social cohesion (Fullan, 2015). This type of research would be even more valuable, as attitudes and performance are relatively unrelated, with the consequence that some countries could more or less explicitly make the choice, favoring certain objectives of attitudes over certain cognitive objectives, and starting from comparative evaluations based solely on performance (Hattie, 2008).
5 CONCLUSION

Educational systems in Latin America are directly involved in perpetuating social inequalities, mainly through mechanisms of school segregation and inequality in access to educational resources. For example, in Brazil and Mexico, data show considerable gaps between urban and rural areas in terms of access to and quality of education, affecting the social mobility possibilities of students from less favored regions (UNESCO, 2020; ECLAC, 2022). This phenomenon highlights the need to consider both the effectiveness and profitability of human capital in the design of educational policies (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

School segregation manifests itself in marked differences in the quality of education received. In Chile, it significantly limits the social mobility of low-income students, demonstrating how current educational structures initiate patterns of inequality that extend beyond the school environment (Sistema de Mediación de la Calidad de la Educación [SIMCE], 2019). Metrics that assess educational attainment, such as tests at age 15, should be considered with caution, as they do not always reflect long-term capabilities or true opportunities for social mobility (Carnoy, 2017; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970).

Diplomas continue to function as powerful indicators of social status. In Uruguay and Ecuador, diplomas function as strong indicators of social status, where the prestige of educational institutions plays a crucial role in determining the employment opportunities of graduates, perpetuating inequalities between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds (UNESCO, 2020). This use of diplomas as tools for social differentiation highlights the importance of critically reviewing policies that disproportionately value academic results over other types of achievements and competencies (Messina, 2017).

Inclusive education policies and bilingual intercultural education initiatives in El Salvador and Guatemala show how negative social reproduction practices can be effectively countered. These policies have proven to be beneficial in improving the valuation of diplomas and educational equity in marginalized communities, promoting greater social and educational inclusion (UNESCO, 2020). Adopting more inclusive and critical approaches to education, which value diversity and equity, is essential to enable all young people, regardless of their background, to reach their full potential.

These conclusions underline the need for education policies that actively promote equity and inclusion at all levels of the education system. Addressing these issues is not only critical to undoing cycles of inequality, but also to moving towards a fairer and more equitable society in Latin America.
REFERENCES


Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (2022). *Panorama Social de América Latina y el Caribe*. CEPAL. Panorama Social de América Latina y el Caribe (cepal.org)


