



Methodology Article

The Education of Young People in Latin America: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

This article examines the education of young people in Latin America through a comparative analysis of educational systems, policies, and social realities across selected countries in the region. The study explores the main factors influencing youth education, including economic inequality, access to quality schooling, technological development, public investment, and cultural diversity. By comparing educational indicators such as enrollment rates, school completion, literacy levels, and access to higher education, the article identifies both progress and persistent challenges affecting young learners. The analysis highlights significant disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as among different socioeconomic groups, demonstrating how poverty and social exclusion continue to limit educational opportunities for many young people. At the same time, the article discusses innovative reforms and regional initiatives aimed at improving educational quality, digital inclusion, and equal access to learning resources. Special attention is given to the impact of globalization and technological change on educational practices and youth preparation for the labor market. The findings suggest that although many Latin American countries have expanded educational access over recent decades, structural inequalities remain a major obstacle to achieving inclusive and sustainable education. Characterization and comparison of policies and programs of such countries lead to the identification of common trends, exceptional cases and critical aspects.

Keywords

Education, Young People, Latin America

1. Introduction

"Our countries are young. There is, however, a clear process of cultural decolonization in the Latin American continent. Each time we look more like ourselves. Each time we imitate less. That is part of the process of searching for our own identity."

García Márquez, G. (2002)

There is a broad consensus about the need for more and better education to face the challenges of an increasingly complex and changing globalized world. In the advanced societies of this new century two phenomena are marking in a particular way the education of the new generations: the need to train throughout life and the process of digital transformation.

Today it is impossible for a person to acquire and maintain

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the knowledge and skills he will need throughout his life, if he has only the conventional training stages. People will continue to be trained in their adulthood to be able to update skills that are already evolving very quickly and to keep up with employment in a highly competitive job market [4].

The second phenomenon is the consolidation of digital technologies. The generalization of these technologies has changed the world as we knew it: the economy, industry, social practices, the way we communicate and relate to each other and, of course, the way we learn.

Happily, training throughout life has found a great ally in technology. Making training compatible with a job occupation and with other responsibilities of adult life would be nothing short of impossible, if it were not for flexibility and overcoming barriers. Today it is already possible to learn at any time and from any place, through online training systems or through systems that combine face to face with an intensive use of these technologies [8].

However, technology is of little use if it is not used within the framework of a broader educational purpose that responds to new needs. I do not know how to decorate obsolete educational methods and objectives with technology. It is mainly about defining the new educational challenges and identifying the most efficient way to achieve them.

Today, activities aimed at achieving sustainable development objectives emerge with equal or greater importance: the preservation of the environment, the consolidation of clean and renewable energies, the fight against inequalities or universal access to education, health and well-being, among others. The labor market and the future of employment will depend to a large extent on how this new automated industry evolves and the policies of sustainability, welfare and reduction of inequalities.

In any case, we have more and more evidence that a very significant part of the jobs of the future will be based on professions that do not exist today. We do not know how far the future is, but everything is rushing at a great speed [9].

From the educational point of view, the only way to deal with uncertainty is to prepare people to live in it. This means promoting the development of a series of transversal competences that enable a successful adaptation to constant changes. Among these competencies I would highlight the ability to think critically and creatively, the ability to solve complex problems, flexibility, communication skills, the ability to collaborate and work in a team and, of course, digital skills and the ability to learn autonomously.

The acquisition of these skills will be as important as having the specialized knowledge that each branch of knowledge requires and education must combine both types of knowledge wisely. A third phenomenon will characterize education in the near future. Digital technologies are a very powerful tool for students. These technologies provide immediate access to almost all the information and a great capacity of choice [10].

The new generations of students know that they can access this information at any time and from any place and they are

not willing to invest time in learning that does not interest them. An educational scenario that does not contemplate a high degree of flexibility and personalization does not seem to be viable in the future. Quite a challenge for educational institutions that have been under very rigid schemes for centuries.

The government is responsible for the management and regularization of the country's education system. Through the Ministry of Education or similar bodies, the rulers form the basis for the development of education in a territory. In this way the study programs are defined and the basic guidelines of schooling are established, among other issues. In the education system, however, the State does not act alone.

Although there are state-run educational institutions (which make up what is known as public education), there are also private actors that provide education as a service and, therefore, seek credit with their activity. "In the educational system, therefore, public schools and private schools, public universities and private universities, etc. coexist" [14].

Since access to education is part of human rights, the State must guarantee that the education system includes all people. All citizens should have the possibility of completing compulsory education and access to higher levels that allow them to train and develop successfully in society.

1.1. Aims and Objective

Enlightened by what [1], "The problems and purposes of education in general have become somewhat similar in most countries, the solutions are influenced by differences of tradition and culture of each". As a result, educators became much more careful in transferring ideas and practices from one country to another. Make us think that the important objectives are to explore, understand and internalize the ways of doing it, the national strategies used, the use of methodologies, understanding and internalizing how they put it into practice make readers reflect how to change reality and obtain better results.

About, "The nature of any particular comparative study of education depends on the purposes for which it was carried out and on the identity of the person conducting the research" [2]. Taking into account this thought of the author, we set as an objective the analysis of the educational systems of Cuba and Venezuela, the structure of the curriculum in the different levels of education in both countries will allow us to understand the similarities and differences, in addition, to compare in a quality approach, we will investigate how to implement some of the educational strategies of each country.

The comparative study conducted between Cuba and Venezuela, in spite of being countries with similar histories and educational systems, presents limitations in the comparison, since it is not 100% effective product to the political and economic differences in both countries.

1.2. Methods

In the comparative study conducted, the theories, concepts and methods discussed in this document have been collected mainly from the literature of the International and Comparative Education course, the consultation of different internet sites and the prior knowledge of the author.

Using Bray and Thomas Cube [2] as a model, the parameters to be compared are established: the phenomenon studied is the education system of Cuba and Venezuela, and the comparison will be based on the structure of the curriculum.

2. The Education System in Cuba

Since the discovery of Cuba in 1492 and the Spanish colonization, an educational policy was established, where the teaching of the Spanish language and Christian doctrine to Cubans and slaves from Africa was arranged. After independence from Spain in 1901, Cuba was controlled by the United States of America, a fact that led to Cuban education, covering only the needs of a capitalist system, so there was no educational program that allowed the massive incorporation of the population to the study.

Education was a privilege of the highest classes, so rural education and for adults was also marginalized. It should also be noted that there were many unemployed teachers, despite the fact that their work was necessary, since there were thousands of children who did not attend school [10].

After the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, education was a priority, aimed at eliminating illiteracy and extending educational services, especially in rural areas, this led to the mobility of teachers to cover this sector. As of 1959, the budget allocated to Education increased considerably, reflecting the interest on the part of the Cuban government to improve it.

This also dramatically improved teachers' salaries, which allowed teachers to no longer have to mobilize, to seek a better salary and to devote full time to teaching. In Cuba there is no Teachers' Union, nor private schools, this eliminates class distinctions, discriminations, inequalities and above all corruption to get teaching positions.

Since the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, the State has assumed the maximum responsibility in educational matters and has set itself the goal of achieving quality education. In the first place, illiteracy was eradicated in the country, an objective that was reached with the collaboration of the whole society. In addition, schools were built throughout the island in a way that guaranteed access to education for all children, both residents in cities and those in rural areas [9].

An education that is compulsory both in primary and secondary school and that includes not only intellectual development but also physical and cultural development. That is to say, efforts are directed towards the development of citizens with an integral formation, with solidarity and human values, with a sense of national identity and, finally, that are identified with their culture.

All these efforts have led the Cuban educational system to lead the statistics at the international level, with an average level of studies of After-University, a rate of school repetition of less than 4% and a dropout rate of slightly higher than 1%. In addition, the results of Cuban students in literacy tests and mathematics are much higher compared to students from other Latin American countries [13].

These positive results are endorsed by organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the United Nations Educational Organization (UNESCO). Therefore, the Cuban educational system is considered as a model to be followed not only in South America but also internationally and for this reason it has been the object of several studies. The Cuban educational system is structured as follows:

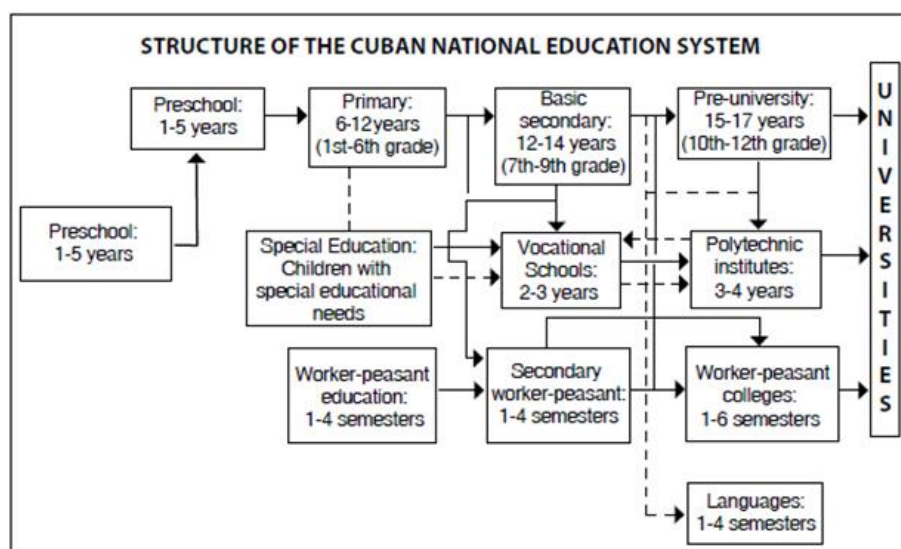


Figure 1. The Cuban educational system.

3. The Education System in Venezuela

The educational policy in Venezuela is oriented towards the improvement of quality, increased coverage and modernization of the administrative structure of the education system, through the revision and reform of all levels and modalities, reason why it has been given emphasis to the process of decentralization, as a strategy oriented to give greater autonomy of management to educational centers; and on the other hand, to generate profound changes in the teaching profession for the transformation of pedagogical practices.

The Organic Law of Education in Venezuela establishes in its article 3: "Education has as its fundamental purpose the full development of the personality and the achievement of a healthy, cultured, critical and fit man to live in a democratic, just and free society, based on the family as a fundamental cell and in the valorization of work, capable of participating actively and consciously and in solidarity in the processes of social transformation, consubstantiated with the values of national identity and understanding, tolerance, coexistence and attitudes favor the strengthening of peace among nations and the links of Latin American integration and solidarity " [18].

In Venezuela, the modernization of the education system is not conceived as the introduction of new techniques or the substitution of procedures that, although produce favorable consequences in the teaching-learning process, however do not touch the core issue such as the goals of education, common good par excellence and as a basis for an alternative of autonomous development. The Ministry of Education has its origin in 1870, when the then President of the Republic Guzmán Blanco, establishes by Public Order Decree, free and mandatory.

For the year of 1873, the Educational System only attended 3,744 students in 100 public schools. But in 1874, when the Directorate of Public Instruction and the Directorate of Secondary Instruction were created, the Figure of 15,000 students was reached and 336 federal schools and 383 municipal and private schools were built. Likewise, it begins with the creation of secondary schools, first and second category, which, years later, were authorized to grant higher education degrees [11]. In 1881, the Ministry of Public Instruction was created, which continued to be called that until the end of the dictatorship.

In the period from 1890 to 1935, Venezuela is dominated by dictatorial systems and education suffers stagnation. Reflection of this is the almost total paralysis of higher education. For the year 1936, when the period of the dictatorship ends, education becomes one of the priorities of the Venezuelan State and the Ministry changes its name to National Education. The process of adult literacy is promoted and in 1948 the Organic Law of National Education was created [17].

From the beginning of the 20th century until the end of the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1948-58), that is, the

schools that taught primary and secondary education, in addition to the other institutions such as higher education, grew slowly, but precisely at the beginning of the decade of the 60s, where Venezuelan education presented a spectacular expansion, stimulated by a process of educational massification that became favorable and an increase in access to education in a notorious manner for all social classes in the country.

A brief review of the educational evolution in recent years has: The literacy rate among people over 10 years old went from 51.2% in 1950 to 91.1% in 1995. In 1994, 695,320 children enrolled in pre-school education, served in 8,703 centers by a total of 42,267 teachers and assistants. The 15,984 schools of basic or primary education registered an enrollment of 4,262,221 students in 1996, with a workforce of 185,748 teachers. In a total of 1,774 centers of secondary, diversified and professional education, 377,984 students and 37,791 teachers were registered [11].

A total of 594,344 students were enrolled in more than one hundred institutions of higher education, national and private universities, pedagogical, polytechnic and military institutions, with a staff of 49,760 teachers and researchers. The educational system needs, to perform its work, increasing human, physical and financial resources; Therefore, in the last decades, different governments have given education the first priority, allocating, for this, important portions of the National Budget.

The Venezuelan educational system, however, has serious flaws, of which we can cite as the most obvious: illiteracy, the school deficit, extra age, low prosecution, desertion as excluded from school and repetitions. On the other hand, the coverage of education is not universal, it does not reach all the villages and hamlets, most of the school buildings are totally damaged, teachers are very poorly paid and classes are taught irregularly [16].

The current behavior of the rates in each one of the failures previously mentioned, allows us to think that, in spite of the remarkable impulse that has been imparted to the educational system as a whole, and the increase of the quality of the student has not been parallel: the performance is not good in any of the educational levels.

However, it is worth mentioning the systematic attempt of modernization that has been operating in recent years. The attempt to make Education respond to the development of the country and of the man and woman of the future, who tend to educate the real possibility of gradually and progressively enriching themselves in a culture that leads them to acquire a comprehensive and organic vision of the physical world, social and spiritual and that supports him for the projection of his personality.

The interest of the case derives from the fact that Venezuela, despite having been one of the countries that has allocated the most resources to education, faces very poor results from the education system. These failures of the education system to educate citizens and to obtain productive employment are not alien to the fragility of the political system [15].

Currently the government has implemented other forms of study, aimed mainly at people with limited resources; Older people who could not complete basic or higher education and people who are excluded in general are also given the opportunity. We will essentially refer to 2 of the 3 properly educational missions they have been implementing: the Robinson Mission and the Ribas Mission. The Robinson is a national program of mass literacy.

According to the 2001 census, there were a little over one million illiterates in Venezuela, of which 22% were over 55 years old. This is important, since those of that age did not benefit from the overcrowding of official education in the 1960s and 1970s. The rest are victims of the inability of the school and the educational system. They are illiterate who passed through the education system but were forced to leave the system very prematurely [6].

A national literacy program undoubtedly attacks a serious social problem, and it cannot be denied that it was necessary and very convenient. No information is available to comment on the veracity of the official Figures in this regard. There is talk of more than 2 million literate people and of declaring Venezuela a territory free of illiteracy in October 2005.

The low capacity of the Venezuelan State does not allow us to be very optimistic about the results of the Robinson Mission. Especially in terms of the quality of the results. As for the Ribas Mission, it is necessary to mention that it also attacks a serious social problem represented by hundreds of thousands of young people and adults who dropped out before the ninth

grade. But as we have argued, one of the causes of that abandonment is the low quality that characterizes education.

The information available about the Ribas Mission does not allow us to be sure that the quality of its contents and methods is better. Unlike. In addition to obtaining the bachelor's degree in only 2 years during which the student benefits from a scholarship of 160 thousand Bolivares per month, it is undoubtedly more attractive than the same in 5 years and without a scholarship. It will not be surprising, then, that the Ribas Mission is causing many young people to leave formal education prematurely.

For the rest, the education of those excluded from the education system would have required taking into account other variables such as the heterogeneity in age and experience of the enrollees and other variables that would allow designing varied programs within the framework of the same purpose that is the inclusion of Excluded.

As can be seen, educational policies are far from the orientation required to achieve the objectives of equal opportunities that justify the existence of the education system. Inequality in the distribution of quality severely affects those who most need to take advantage of formal education, and programs aimed at those already excluded do not seem to show much emphasis on quality. Coverage is important, but quality is the producer of social justice. If education is mediocre, what it produces is social injustice. The educational system of Venezuela is structured as follows:

		The Venezuela education system		Age
		Doctorate degree (PhD)		40
		Graduate School or Master's degree		35 30 25
Senior Junior Sophomore Freshman		College/ University Bachelor's degree		21 20 19 18
Humanities	6th year	High School 	Humanities	18
	5th year			17
Sciences	4th year		Sciences	16
	2do Sciences 1ro Sciences			15
9th Grade (Freshman) 8th Grade 7th Grade		Middle School		14 13 12
6th Grade 5th Grade 4th Grade 3th Grade 2th Grade 1th Grade		Elementary or Grade School		11 10 9 8 7 6
Kindergarten		Nursery or Pre-school		5

Figure 2. The educational system of Venezuela.

4. Comparative Analysis

To determine the dimensions and indicators to be compared, the criteria of different authors are taken as: [3, 5, 7, 12].

Table 1. Comparative analysis between Cuba and Venezuela.

Country	Cuba	Venezuela
Political system	Unitary socialist state	Presidential federal republic
Economy	Socialist	Capitalist
Cultures	The indigenous, the African and the European.	The indigenous, the African and the European.
Religious	Catholic Christianity and African	Freedom of worship
Values	Patriotism, freedom, justice, equality, solidarity, social responsibility and, ethics, honesty and laboriousness.	Freedom, justice, equality, solidarity, democracy, social responsibility and, in general, the pre-eminence of human rights, ethics and political pluralism.
Access to education	Public	Public and private
Curriculum	Centralized and contextualized at all levels of education	Centralized
Theories of learning and teaching	cultural -historical school and humanism	behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism
Educational achievements	eradication of illiteracy, education for all	on the way to total literacy

After a detailed analysis of all the ideas discussed above, we can extract the following regularities in the form of strengths and weaknesses:

- 1) The Cuban and Venezuelan education systems guarantee education for all and free of charge, although in the case of Venezuela, the gratuity does not include aspects such as material, transportation or food.
- 2) In the Venezuelan educational system, public and private education centers coexist, while in Cuba all schools are state-run.
- 3) Both systems have a structure that we can consider similar. This includes a non-compulsory pre-school stage, a compulsory stage comprising primary and secondary education, a non-compulsory secondary stage and higher education. However, there are small differences within each of these stages.
- 4) Both adult education and language teaching are included within both systems.
- 5) The objectives of education in Cuba lie in the integral education of the adolescent, while in Venezuela the student is prepared for an active life and in society.
- 6) At curricular level, in Venezuela minimum knowledge is established, through an express curriculum, and with a prioritization of sciences, while in Cuba, historical reflection, arts and sports are emphasized.
- 7) Cuba has one of the highest rates of teachers in the world while in Venezuela the educational needs demand more

teachers.

Latin America faces a critical education crisis where four out of five children struggle to read, despite high primary enrollment rates. A comparative analysis reveals deep inequities, with rural and low-income students suffering from lower quality, high dropouts, and low, mismatched skills, further stalling social mobility.

4.1. Key Findings in Educational Comparison

- 1) Access vs. Quality: While primary education is nearly universal, secondary education faces high dropout rates and low, stagnant quality.
- 2) Learning Deficits: Recent PISA results indicate foundational skill gaps (reading, mathematics, science) compared to OECD averages.
- 3) Persistent Inequality: Educational attainment is heavily stratified by income and location, with rural students and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds facing significant disadvantages.
- 4) Secondary School Dropout: A major challenge is the, with many students leaving school early, particularly among the 15-18 age group.
- 5) Regional Disparities: Data indicates that while countries like Costa Rica, Argentina, and Chile, as discussed in from the Inter-American Development Bank, have higher investment levels, others such as Guatemala and

Ecuador, also analyzed in that Inter-American Development Bank report, lag in expenditure per student.

- 6) Impact of Socioeconomic Background: Indigenous students and those from low-income households experience substantial gaps in achievement.

4.2. Regional Challenges & Context

- 1) Inequality Perpetuation: Education systems in the region tend to perpetuate, rather than bridge, income gaps.
- 2) Digital Divide: Access to technology for education is uneven, impacting learning quality.
- 3) Labor Market Disconnect: The curriculum often does not align with the skills needed for the current labor market, limiting employment opportunities.

5. Conclusions

The organization of educational structures designed to care for students depends on various factors (social, economic, geographical, etc.) and can configure different services and programs to respond to the characteristics and needs of children, their families and community.

In the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, alternative structures have a social character as well as an educational nature, because they are developed to support working parents and to compensate for children's risk situations, such as poverty and vulnerability, or the fact of living in marginal urban, rural or border areas, which implies a social development and the improvement of living conditions.

It is pertinent to highlight the treatment of these countries to education aimed at people with different abilities since they have policies and regulations in this regard. This trend responds to the inclusion policies of people who were usually excluded. Likewise, attention is paid to students who have exceptional talents. However, with the exception of Cuba, little progress has been made in creating mechanisms that make individual curricular adaptations feasible.

Finally, although no less important, we can point out that although it is true that in Cuba and Venezuela there are similar views regarding education, we cannot deny that we are talking about two different projects: one that seeks transformation not only in the educational order but also in the economic and social and a second project where knowledge acquires a commercial character being under the responsibility of those who have the capital to invest in education.

Abbreviations

OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Organization

Author Contributions

Yeran Leon Morejon: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources

Leidianys de la Caridad Alvarez Riol: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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