

**Public-Private Partnerships in Latin America:
A Review Based on Four Case Studies**

José-Ginés Mora
Technical University of Valencia

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Introduction

This paper takes a look at public-private partnerships in education in Latin America. Our analysis is based on four case studies carried out in four different countries: Colombia, Venezuela, Chile and Brazil. These four countries are different and varied and this leads us to believe that this study is, therefore, fairly representative of the general situation in Latin America. In general terms, there are close links between public and private education in all the countries. Around 20 percent of students in primary and secondary education study at private schools and around a third of students in higher education attend private universities. The ways private education is financed is of great importance when aiming to encourage equality and efficiency in these countries' education systems. In addition, given the relatively poor resources and quality of education in these countries, private-public partnerships in education is a frequent experience which aim to improve the management and quality of educational centers. Both of these aspects will be dealt with in this paper.

The paper has been divided into the following sections. Firstly, we will take a look at the political, social and economic background of the four countries involved, we will then move on to briefly analyze the public-private partnership in each of the four countries and finally we will offer a global analysis of the situation and put forward some initial conclusions.

Basic characteristics of the countries

Before we take a closer look at the educational situation of the four countries involved in the study, it seems logical to briefly highlight some of the basic characteristics of the social, political and economic background of these countries. Table 1 shows some basic data which gives a general idea of the socioeconomic background of the countries we are dealing with. The data shows that the gross domestic product of these four countries (corrected by Purchasing Power Parity) is between 6,000 and 11,000 dollars. These figures fall way short of the GDP of the main industrialized nations but are also way ahead of the most underdeveloped countries. The relatively "intermediate" position of these countries is also reflected in the Human Development Ranking (an indicator which includes countries' economic, educational and health standards). We can see that Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil are between numbers 63 and 75 in the world ranking. This means that these three countries are at the top of the countries which are at intermediate stages of development. Chile, on the other hand, ranks 37 on the list and it is included among the highly developed group. Literacy levels for the adult population stand between 88% in Brazil and 96% in Chile, which, although not ideal, are certainly way ahead of many other developing countries. In short, the economic and educational development of these countries is not as advanced as the most developed countries but is above average when all the

countries in the world are taken into account. The case of Chile is different. All the indicators show that the situation is much closer to that of the developed countries.

Table 1. Socio-economic indicators

	COL	VEN	BRA	CHI
GDP (\$PPS)	6,600	5,800	8,100	10,700
Hum. Dev. Ranking	69	75	63	37
Adult Literacy	94%	93%	88%	96%
Gini Index	0.58	0.49	0.59	0.57
Population 0-14 yrs.	32%	32%	28%	26%
Exp. in Edu. (%GDP)	5.2%	5.6%	4.2%	4.2%

Source: *HDR (2004), WFB (2005)*

However, there is one indicator in all the four countries which is cause for considerable concern. The Gini index is an indicator which shows economic inequalities. Its values are 0 (which represents total equality) and 1 (total inequality). The Gini index in the four countries under study is very high and is way above the figures for developed countries. For example, in countries which are very equal, such as the Scandinavian countries, the Gini index is around 0.25. In countries which are not as egalitarians, such as Spain, the figure is 0.33. The levels of inequality in the countries under study, and in Latin America in general, are very high and are way above the average for developed countries. The high levels of inequality in Chile, for example, stand out from the rest and are incompatible to a certain degree with its proximity to the most developed countries on other socioeconomic indicators. The significant level of inequality in Latin American countries is an important aspect which should be taken into account when defining public policies, whether on education or on other areas.

Expenditure on education, calculated as a percentage of GDP, is not high but can be considered average. Spain, for example, spends 4.5% of GDP on education, which is similar to the four countries under study. However, in Spain only 15% of the population is under 14 years of age,

whilst in these countries this figure is between 26% and 32% of the total population. This means that, although the proportion of spending on education is similar to that of developed countries, Latin American nations have to cater for twice the number of children in the education system. The lack of resources needed to provide for a large young population is another of the serious problems faced by Latin American countries.

The problems of poverty and inequality are exacerbated in some cases by political issues and territorial disparities. The difference between rural and urban is extremely significant all over Latin America. The opportunities for education for the rural population are much more limited than the opportunities for city dwellers in general and especially inhabitants who live in large cities. In Brazil, there is the added handicap of territorial inequalities, which creates regions whose education indices are up to three times worse than in other parts of the country. Political problems are highly relevant in two of the countries under study. The permanent insecurity that a large part of the Colombian population has to live with on a daily basis is a fact which affects all sectors of the country's activities, including education. The current political divisions in Venezuela affect all social aspects of life and education is obviously no exception.

In short, inequality and lack of resources are possibly the most serious problems facing education in Latin America. The implementation of efficient public policies which improve equality is the most important challenge facing these countries. In this sense, the public-private partnership in education is extremely relevant as improvements in this partnership may be the way to achieve both objectives.

The Chilean case

Basic education

Basic education in Chile is provided by three types of schools: municipal schools, subsidized private schools, and non-subsidized private schools. Additionally, there are some technical-vocational schools with special fiscal funding managed by business corporations (MINEDUC, 2004).

Prior to 1980, the administration of the Chilean school system was fully centralized in the Ministry of Education (Delannoy, 2000). The Ministry was not only responsible for the curriculum of the whole education system, but also for the administration of public schools, which accounted for 80 percent of all schools in the country. The Ministry also appointed public school teachers and principals, as well as approving and paying expenses and salaries. In 1981, as part of the Pinochet government's sweeping market-oriented reforms, Chile introduced a nationwide school voucher program with financial incentives for both public and private institutions. This initiative had three main components:

(i) decentralization of public schools. Municipal schools were transferred from the Ministry of Education to roughly 300 municipalities, such that they became known as municipal schools; (ii) public school funding. Municipal schools continued to be funded centrally, but each municipality started to receive a per-student payment for every child attending the school. As a result, enrollment losses came to have a direct financial effect on the municipal education budget; (iii) public funding for private schools. The size of the voucher payment each school receives varies according to the educational level at which it operates, whether it offers special programs, and its distance from urban centers. The most important, non tuition-charging, subsidized private schools began to receive exactly the same per-student payment as the municipal schools (McEwan and Carnoy, 2000).

The objectives of this reform were twofold. On one hand, the idea was to bring educational decision-making closer to the different territories and on the other, to generate competition for student enrollments between municipal and private school as financing was linked to the number of students enrolled at each school. The aim of a free-choice schooling policy should lead to improvements in the quality of education since it means that parents can choose whichever school they wish and thus force schools to compete against each other. Free-choice schooling changes the incentives that schools are faced with and encourages them to deliver better quality schooling at a lower cost (Levin, 2002).

One of the results of this reform was the large-scale transfer of students from municipal schools to subsidized private schools. The subsidized private sector grew from 15% to 33% over a period of ten years (MINEDUC, 2003). There was a similar decrease in the budget percentage for public education over the same period. Public and private education currently account for 90% of enrollments in Chile (MINEDUC, 2004). This public-private combination has meant that the Chilean school system has been able to take in and retain a lot more students in education than in previous years. The current schooling system is more capable of taking in, providing for and retaining the children of the poorest 40% of the population in education than in the 1980s.

Up until 1992, subsidies were the only formal source of income for educational establishments financed by the State. After this, changes were made to the law to allow private contributions to be made to subsidized schools via two mechanisms: financing shared by parents and business donations to non-profit making schools (Gauri, 1998). Subsidized schools can opt for the shared financing system if they wish. The shared finance system allows schools to charge parents a monthly fee for the education of their children, in addition to the subsidy they receive from the State. The system is regulated so that parents' initial contributions mean a direct increase in income for the school, whilst subsequent contributions entail a decrease in public subsidies. This means that schools which take in the poorer sectors of the population prefer students not to contribute any further, at least once a certain threshold is attained. To prevent greater inequalities, an aid system was set up in 1997 for students who were unable to pay shared financing (García-Huidobro and Bellei, 2003). Municipal

schools can also resort to this type of financing, although only in secondary education, and only as long as each institution's stakeholders agree. Municipal schools can also receive additional resources for infrastructure and even running costs.

In 1988, Chile implemented a system to measure the quality of education. The results of this system show that private schools with no public financing obtain the best educational results. In turn, subsidized private schools had better results than municipal schools. Other performance-related measures such as the drop-out and repetition rates followed the same trend (MINEDUC-SIMCE, 2005). However, in the light of the differences in the socioeconomic level of the students in the three types of schools, the validity of this comparison has been strongly challenged.

Recent studies show that the results of free-choice schooling in Chile are contradictory (Gauri, 1998; Hsieh and Urquiola, 2003; Mizala, Romaguera and Ostoic, 2004). The system of free-choice schooling has undoubtedly contributed to the fact that some children with limited resources have been able to enroll in schools which they otherwise would not have been able to attend. However, generally speaking, the Chilean experience demonstrates that free-choice schooling policies tend to favor middle and high income families. It is not clear whether subsidized private schools are more effective than municipal schools when socioeconomic factors are taken away. Competition is not linked to an improvement in municipal school performance as the subsidized private schools choose the students with the most resources and abilities and leave the disadvantaged students in the low performing municipal schools. In this case, the competition has not improved municipal school performance or the system as a whole. In fact, the free-choice system and competition may even have prompted greater segmentation in the system.

There is a positive aspect of the Chilean model: the use of private resources to make free education available to the greatest number of students possible whatever their socioeconomic situation. It is not as clear whether equality has been respected as the education system has been extended, especially since private schools have been allowed to charge their students high fees. There are two challenges facing education in Chile at present. On one hand, it needs to maintain education coverage and maintain the levels of quality reached in basic education. On the other, it needs to effectively correct the possible social student segmentation and performance results. Specific support programs for schools, although effective, are not sufficient to reduce structural inequalities which require a new systemic approach.

Higher education

Although the main object of our study is primary and secondary education, it is interesting to mention higher education in the case of Chile. There are private and public universities in Chile, just as

in other countries. However, the major difference between universities does not lie in the nominal ownership of the institutions but rather in the way they are financed. There are two types of universities; the so-called “*Consejo de Rectores*” universities on one hand and the rest of the universities on the other. The first group is made up of old, well-established public and private universities which are partially financed by the state. The second group are all private and do not receive public funding. They all charge enrollment fees but in the first group this only covers part of the tuition fees whilst in the second group, these fees cover practically the totality of the institution’s costs. On the other hand, all the universities, whether public or private, are eligible for research funds. This university model is particularly unusual. Some countries, such as Belgium and The Netherlands, subsidize public and private universities in the same way, and as far as the State is concerned there is no difference between them. What is unusual in Chile is how differences are made between some universities (the older, well-established private universities and the public universities) and the rest of the universities (all newly established). This is especially unusual when the levels of quality of some universities in the second group are on a similar footing to those of the *Consejo de Rectores* universities. If subsidies are granted on quality criteria and not simply for reasons of seniority, it would seem logical for the system to include other private universities.

The Colombian case

The education system

Colombia has around 9 million students, 60,000 schools and 400,000 teachers in primary and secondary education. The access to schooling indicators have improved considerably over the last few years and the adult illiteracy rate has dropped to 6%. However, primary education is still not universal and the coverage indicators for secondary education are only 63% (IPE, 2003). Access to and the quality of educational services in Colombia differs greatly across geographic regions and income groups.

Private sector share in education is high: approximately 20% of students in primary, 35% in secondary, and 65% in higher education. The private sector is very varied and ranges from excellent schools, especially in Bogotá and other large cities, to very poor quality private schools. This is the norm at all educational levels, including higher education.

One of the most important changes, which began to be implemented 15 years ago, was a process of administrative and economic decentralization of the education system to regions and municipalities. All the regions and municipalities with large numbers of inhabitants have their own school districts which are independently organized even though they receive funds from central government. However, real levels of autonomy are still low and the system is highly inefficient. The

process is still new and in some cases, the authorities of the districts and municipalities are not capable of taking control of the whole education process.

The outcomes are troubling: countrywide, only one third of children who start school complete basic education. This percentage drops to 16% in the rural areas. Internal studies show that the students' educational performance is below expected and the number of poor quality schools taking part in state exams has gone down. International studies show that the levels of educational achievement in Colombia are low compared to the most developed countries. However, Colombian students' results are average when compared to other Latin American countries and are on a par with countries such as Brazil and Mexico. The issue of the quality of education is particularly important in the case of the poorest sectors of the population and of the rural areas. Experts have put forward three possible causes for this poor performance:

- a) The use of inappropriate teaching methods which offers unappealing training for students.
- b) Inefficient time management at school despite the increase in the annual number of school hours over the last few years. Evidence suggests that enforcing discipline, other activities carried out by teachers, etc. take up a large part of school time.
- c) The lack of materials and resources such as libraries, laboratories, computer rooms, etc. which reinforce teaching.

Teachers are another of the problems in the Colombian education system. Critical aspects of this profession include (IPE, 2003; Villa and Duarte, 2004):

- a) First of all, teaching qualifications. There is still a large proportion of teachers (38%) who are not qualified to work as teachers. These teachers mainly work in rural areas, which ironically are the areas where greater quality teaching is required.
- b) Secondly, the incentive system for teaching staff is almost non-existent. The status of teachers has improved over the last few years and salaries for public school teachers are still 15% higher than private school teacher salaries. However, there is no efficient incentive system to motivate teachers to perform their job more effectively or to make improvements to the education system. A teaching staff assessment plan and the implementation of incentives designed to motivate improved performance has not yet been put into practice, despite having been designed several years ago.

- c) Third, the selection system. The rules establish, for example, that teacher selection and appointment must be made on merit, through public contests, and that transfers must not affect children's studies. However, evidence indicates that a good part of public school teachers are still being appointed via political recommendations. Political bias also intervenes in administrative aspects such as transfers, promotions, pension payments and other social benefits. The intermediaries are the regional politicians from traditional parties and, in some cases, union leaders. On the other hand, the relations between teachers and the state are highly politicized by the influence and strength of the teachers' union, the Colombian Federation of Educators. Ironically, these relations are characterized as being extremely conflictive.

The country has made significant efforts to prioritize education and the percentage of public expenditure devoted to this sector has risen to 5.2% of GDP. However, the misallocation and poor management of these resources continue to obstruct significant progress in the sector. Close to 90% of education funds are spent on salaries, while less than 2% is spent on educational materials.

Public-private partnership in education

In the recent past, programs for expanding coverage outside the traditional public system framework have been promoted. There were two types of programs: direct subsidies to students (vouchers) and purchase of enrollment. Direct subsidies to students were predominant as a strategy to expand coverage during the 1990's and were promoted by the central government. The program operated with a system of subsidies for low-income families, co-financed by the central government and the territorial entity. At the time of highest coverage, these programs reached approximately 250,000 enrollments. The second modality was the Purchase of Enrollment in Private Schools which was used by departments and municipalities (Bogotá, Antioquia, Medellín, Cartagena,...) to respond to the demand for new enrollments. These authorities contract education services with private schools and pay for each child admitted according to defined standards. These initiatives tried to increase enrollment by contracting private schools and responding in a quick and flexible fashion to the social pressures for broader, better quality coverage, especially in the less favored social sectors. Nevertheless, evaluations have shown that this scheme faces serious restrictions due to the characteristics of the market in which it is implemented, particularly the restrictions on availability and information in the poor areas they operate in (Villa and Duarte, 2004).

There are currently three main active experiences of public-private partnerships in education:

- a) *Mission schools*. An education modality provided by the Catholic Church and financed by the government since the 19th century, developed in remote areas (especially in

the Amazon region and other jungle-like areas of the country), where the State has little presence and the church carries out missionary activities. Within the public education system, interesting experiences with more schooling autonomy and community participation are being developed to optimize resources and infrastructure.

- b) *Subsidies based on the demand.* Programs to provide schooling for young people from the poorest spheres of society when they cannot be catered for at primary and secondary public schools. The authorities sign agreements with private educational institutions which undertake to achieve and maintain suitable quality levels (checked by assessments) and to maintain infrastructures in good condition. The maximum subsidy for each subsidized student in 2004 was 1.2MCOP (\$450) per year per awarded student in the Bogotá district. These subsidies were around 0.8 MCOP (\$350) per student per year in the country as a whole. These schools can levy additional charges for the same concepts and values that are authorized for public schools (between \$15 and \$30). The educational achievement of these schools is assessed on an annual basis and the subsidy is not renewed if agreed minimum quality standards are not met.

- c) *Colegios en Concesión.* The public school concession program in Bogotá, Colombia, is an experimental program which began in 2000. Bogotá has a large concentration of private schools (28% of national private school enrollment), and many of these are among the best-performing in the country (46 out of the 96 best performing schools in a recent national achievement exam). Hoping to capitalize on the concentration of successful private institutions locally, the Secretariat of Education for the Bogotá District (SED) launched a concession program, through which a private school, organization, or group takes over the management of one or more public schools. Thus far, schools eligible for the program have been newly constructed by the SED, largely in low-income neighborhoods in need of additional school space. The opportunity to manage the schools was then offered in a public procurement process, where bidders (private educational institutions) were evaluated on their proposed management plans. A total of 26 *Concession Schools* have been opened.

Concession Schools are subsidized with 1.3 MCOP per student (slightly higher than the maximum subsidy on the demand in Bogotá). These schools are built in new buildings with better services and the management is much more professional. In addition, these schools keep students the whole day (as opposed to public schools which have morning or afternoon sessions). There are no evaluations of these schools as yet, but it is quite likely that the levels of quality, performance (drop outs

and retention) will be better than in many of the public or private schools with students from a similar family background. On the other hand, concessions have been given to the best pools of private institutions (schools and universities) in the area. This has an obvious advantage: to apply the experience gained from managing quality schools to the new schools in the poorest neighborhoods. Concessionaries have already produced striking results in management improvements: they allocate on average 55% of the per capita remuneration to human resources, well below the 90% allocation by the public school system, freeing up 27% for nutritional support and 5% for textbooks and educational materials. This is positive, but it has a disadvantage. The salaries and working conditions of teachers in these schools are lower than in the public sector. In consequence, they may be motivated to leave these schools when they have the chance with the consequent negative effects on the school. In the long run, this may be a source of conflict. On the other hand, the model has a possible disadvantage: it provides the poorest students with educational models that do not match the real needs of this population group. An elitist educational model (for instance, only focused on gaining access to higher education) may not be suitable for children who have no chance of taking advantage of this model.

The following figures for the city of Bogotá offer a quantitative idea of the importance of the different mechanisms which subsidize private education: 683,000 students in this city go to non-subsidized private schools; 860,000 students are financed by the district, of these 115,000 attend private schools which receive a subsidy per student; finally 25,000, less than 2%, go to the concession schools. The importance of these subsidy systems is low and is even more insignificant in small municipalities and rural areas.

Private activities in partnership with public education

In Colombia, private sector initiatives to improve the quality of public schools are just as interesting as the public sector's plans for the private sector. These activities show just how dynamic the society is and highlight the widespread social concern about education in certain sectors of Colombian society. There are many activities of this type we could cite but we will mention only three cases which are especially relevant.

Firstly, there is the case of *Escuela Nueva*. *Escuela Nueva* is a teaching method which has been used in Colombia since the mid seventies. It is based on students taking part in their own learning, teaching projects, fostering links between school life and the community, the development of self-esteem and democratic participation in school decision-making. It uses material especially designed for this purpose: teaching guides for teachers and for self-learning. Moving up a year is

flexible and is based on the progress made by each child at his/her own pace. The teacher is the education facilitator, he/she is constantly trained via workshops and participation in networks. Several national and international studies have demonstrated the efficiency of this method, especially as far as learning results are concerned compared to the results obtained at other traditional rural schools (Psacharopoulos, et al., 1993). Over 2,000 schools have benefited from this teaching reform. The cost of this initiative was covered initially by the coffee companies, although in recent times the project is financed at a specific time for a specific action plan, although it still enjoys the support of a group of companies. *Escuela Nueva* is a school management model which has enjoyed great success both in Colombia and in other developing countries. It is also an excellent example of how private initiative can help improve both public and private education.

Another activity of interest is that of the *Cajas de Compensación* (equalization funds). They are privately managed institutions which receive financing from companies. These firms have to contribute 4% of their workers' salaries to these compensation associations. The resources obtained must be used to benefit their members, i.e. the company's workers and their families. A large part of these resources are used on education. This allows them to set up very well financed private schools which are attended by members' children. For example, COLSUBSIDIOS, whose headquarters is in Bogotá, has several private schools in which the cost is 3.5 MCOP (almost triple the cost of a public school or a concession school). In these schools, the students contribute around 30% of the cost. COMFAMA, in Medellín, has a cost per student of 1.5 MCOP. In addition, the *Cajas de Compensación* carry out a wide range of activities in the educational environment: kindergarten for the children of poor families whose mothers need to work, adult education (in this case financed by the actual companies they work in); vocational training using the school premises outside school hours; training courses for young people who are not part of the school system; libraries, museums, theatres and many other cultural activities. The *Cajas de Compensación* are an excellent example of the use of private funds for public goals, even though they especially benefit their own members.

Another initiative we would like to mention in Colombia is the *Empresarios por la Educación* (Entrepreneurs for Education). Colombian entrepreneurs have become more conscious of the need to support public education. They are aware of the problem of the lack of quality due, to a large extent, to management deficiencies in the system and at school level. Entrepreneurs from different regions all over the country decided to create the *Empresarios por la Educación* association with three basic objectives in mind: taking the regional lead in education; using the professional resources of their own companies to help improve management in educational centers and supporting educational centers via philanthropic resources. The association is divided into 12 decentralized regional groups. Each region works on three areas: improving educational management by supporting educational authorities, training the people who manage educational centers and working to improve the

employability of school leavers. These activities are carried out in many different ways, including a volunteer program. Staff from the companies involved takes part directly in the schools' management. The companies also organize co-operation programs with schools which supply students to go on work placements in these companies. The effects of this bilateral relationship between schools and companies improve mutual understanding between both systems and help teachers to be more receptive to more efficient management systems. This initiative, which is not the only one of this kind in Colombia, shows the vitality of Colombian society and the collective interest in education.

The Brazilian case

The education system

There are around 60 million students in the Brazilian education system in infant, primary, middle and higher education. The system is highly regulated by means of federal and state laws, in addition to being extremely decentralized both in terms of powers and resources. The 1988 Federal Constitution increased the independence given to municipalities, allowing them to organize their own education systems free from state supervision. The states and municipalities play a key role in certain levels of education, being responsible for the management of schools in addition to funding systems, defining the curriculum and providing pedagogical guidance. At certain levels, responsibilities overlap, as is the case of municipalities and states with regard to elementary education, or states and the union with regard to higher education.

Expenditure on education is similar to that of many developed countries. However, a lack of legal criteria defining the responsibilities of all the parts involved has created a serious problem in terms of the poor distribution of resources between the three administrative levels involved in education.

The combination of various factors (a country of continental dimensions, high levels of social and regional inequality and a highly decentralized education system) is a major obstacle when it comes to designing and implementing national policies which aim to expand or improve the education system. What is more, the concepts of ethics, transparency and efficiency in public schools vary just as much as the country's economic and social differences (Souza, 2005).

In 1995, 12% of 7 to 14-year-olds did not attend school. This figure rose to 25% among the poorest sectors of the population. The problem was not only one of access to education, but also of quality. Over 30% of students repeated a year in elementary education and only 40 % of the students finishing secondary education were the right age, i.e. 17 years old. The number of students who finished the eight years of elementary education was half the number of those who started. Primary

teacher training was extremely poor. In most regions in the north and northeast of the country, a quarter of the teachers involved in the first phase of elementary teaching did not even fulfill the legal requirements to teach at that level.

Over the past decade there have been extremely important changes in the Brazilian education system. Public education at primary and secondary level has undergone exceptional growth. At present, private education at primary level represents 9%, whereas at secondary level the figure is 13% (compared to 12% and 22% in 1995). However, in this same period private higher education has increased from 60% to 71%. During these ten years, the overall growth of education has also been outstanding. The percentage of 7 to 14-year-old students attending school has grown from 88% to 97%. The most important element is the fact that the percentage of 7 to 14-year-old students who come from the poorest sectors of society has risen from 75% to 94%. Likewise, with regard to students from the same age group, the percentage of native Brazilians attending school has risen from 77% to 87% and the percentage of black students has increased from 79% to 93%. The efficiency of the education system has also improved over the past decade. Thus, for example, the number of students having to repeat has fallen from 30% in 1995 to 20% in 2000. There have also been improvements in the quality of the teaching staff: the proportion of teachers without higher education qualifications has dropped from 24% in 1995 to just 6% in 2002.

Public-private partnership in basic education

Public-private partnerships in education are rare in Brazil. Public funding of private education is not legally permitted. However, there are various private-sector, social responsibility initiatives involved in the public sector, as well as some incipient initiatives by the public sector towards the private sector of the education system. Among others, the public sector has promoted the following programs: a) the *Acorda Brasil* program, promoted by the Ministry of Education with the aim of encouraging large corporations and institutions to help improve public schools and in particular the way they are managed; b) the program recently promoted by the local authorities of Sao Paulo aimed at improving the management of public schools with the collaboration of private administrators; c) the PROEP program, which has built new vocational training schools with public funds and provided these institutions with economic support for technical development, teacher training and administration. Some of these new schools are public, but others are community schools. In legal terms, these schools are private, non-profit-making institutions and their owners are community institutions (Ministerio da Educaçao, 2002).

There are also two notable cases of public-private partnership in higher education: a) the first is a recent program aimed at helping students with low resources to gain access to higher education in private institutions. This is called the University for All program. It offers tax exemption to private

universities which use 10% of their income to provide grants to students with limited resources. The program currently provides free access to 112,000 students and there are plans for this figure to reach 300,000; b) the second is the case of community universities. These universities, which are almost all situated in the south of the country, have been set up by community associations as private enterprises in legal terms but with fundamentally public aims. The local authorities of the cities where these universities are located have provided land and funding to construct the buildings and to set up the universities. Once they are up and running, these universities are privately funded and managed.

On the other hand, private sector initiatives in the public education system are relevant in Brazil. An interesting case is that of GIFE, an association of 80 large corporations which pledges around 400 million dollars per year to support public schools (GIFE, 2003). This association began in 1985, when democracy was established, out of business leaders' interest in trying to resolve the country's social problems. Some foreign companies were the first to start these initiatives. Although to a certain extent this is a marketing exercise of the large corporations involved, it is the result of a clear awareness of the low quality of the public education system and the fact that the companies themselves need to invest in education to improve the quality of the human resources that they employ. GIFE focuses aid on additional training programs outside formal school hours (students of Brazilian public schools, just like the majority of countries in the region, have a part-time school timetable). *Comunidade Solidaria* is a similar initiative carried out by private organizations with the aim of developing solidarity programs with lower status students.

An interesting phenomenon in Brazil is the fact that some big corporations from the private sector of the educational system also work in the public sector. We shall look at two cases: *Pitágoras* and *Positivo*. These big private corporations are an innovative effort by the private sector to support both private and public schools through an integrated school improvement package offering administrative and technical support to affiliated schools. The integration of both managerial and pedagogic support is a cornerstone of the philosophy and approach to school improvement. They have their own curriculum and provide textbooks for each grade and subject which are updated yearly and sold to the parents of children attending the network schools. Besides providing schools with an integrated curriculum and textbooks, they offer principals and schools a wide range of professional development opportunities and management support. Administrators receive management support and teachers have access to training courses, videos to complement classroom teaching, and a web-based information and question hotline. In the case of public schools, the participation of these companies is funded by selling books to the schools. In addition, *Pitágoras* provides training in quality management in schools which are funded by collaborating corporations.

The case of Venezuela

The education system

In Venezuela, all aspects of the education system are rigidly controlled by the central government by means of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD), which has standardized public school administration. In addition to national schools, which are directly dependent on the Ministry of Education, there are schools managed by the state authorities, by the municipal authorities, by other State institutions and also private schools (many of which belong to the Catholic Church, and others which are non-religious). With the exception of private education, the other schools follow strict teaching, administrative and financial guidelines established by the national government. There have been various unsuccessful attempts to decentralize the education system in order to improve management. With the arrival of the current government led by President Chávez (who came to power in 1999), the process to decentralize the education system was suspended.

Overall, private schools account for 17% of primary education and 30% of secondary education. Private schools are divided into non-subsidized schools, which receive all their funding from the contributions made by the users, and subsidized schools, which are partially or totally funded by the State. Most of the latter are Catholic schools which belong to the Venezuelan Association of Catholic Education (AVEC). Not all the schools belonging to the AVEC receive subsidies, and what is more, there are some schools which do not belong to the AVEC yet still receive subsidies.

Expenditure on education has increased enormously over the last few years. The current government considers education to be a prime objective and has substantially increased the resources set aside for education. Thus, for example, in the mid-1990s expenditure on education was under 2.1% of GDP, whereas it is currently over 6%. However, such spending does not necessarily lead to a better organized or better planned educational model, but rather to a series of poorly-structured initiatives with a certain populist tone.

Just like in other countries of the region, one of the most serious problems facing the education system is that of the teaching staff. An excessively high proportion (24%) of teachers does not even have the qualifications legally required to teach. The lack of training and an inability to efficiently manage the centers is one of the major problems of the Venezuelan education system. Until a short time ago, the economic and social status of teachers was very low. Recently, teaching salaries have increased, but just like in other countries of the region, the organization of teaching staff is highly bureaucratized and teachers lack incentives to improve their teaching performance. The Venezuelan education system does not have any means of assessing the performance of teachers and schools.

An attempt to implement an assessment system a few years ago was not pursued by the current government.

Public-private partnership in education

One of the most striking characteristics of Venezuela is the fragility of civil society. There is, therefore, no hope for the active participation of business leaders or other social players in education, as is the case in Brazil or Colombia. In fact, the only public-private partnership in education is the state funding of certain private educational sectors. The most important partnership to come under this umbrella, although it is not the only one, is the agreement between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and some of the Catholic schools in the AVEC.

The AVEC-MECD Agreement

The AVEC is made up of over 700 Catholic schools, the majority of which are involved in teaching the poorest sectors of society. The MECD-AVEC Agreement lays down a set of regulations governing the State's contribution to supporting private education by means of subsidies to non-profit-making legal entities which aim to promote education and strengthen the education system. The MECD-AVEC Agreement is aimed at the following types of schools: a) schools providing free education: schools which provide educational services without receiving any contribution from the students enrolled ; b) schools of special public interest: schools which offer schooling to train students in different technical disciplines, farming and livestock in farm schools, and other vocational oriented schools; c) schools with insufficient resources: schools whose income only covers up to 85% of the expenses required to run smoothly. Certain projects affiliated to these schools also receive subsidies.

It is important to highlight the fact that the financial support given by the Venezuelan State to private education, and in particular to Catholic education, goes back a long way. However, the organizations interested in receiving subsidies from the State used to have to negotiate the terms of the financial aid every year and there was no guarantee that they would receive anything and no certainty about how much they would receive. From 1990 onwards, the partnership between the MECD and AVEC was institutionalized. In 2001, the subsidy amounted to 106 B VEB and the aid benefited 459,000 students. In 2005, the figure rose to 175 B VEB and the aid benefited 483,000 students. During this period there has been an interesting change in the government's attitude. Whereas at the beginning of its term of office the government was reluctant to continue supporting Catholic schools, it has recently offered its full support, increasing the resources available and maintaining excellent relations with the AVEC and especially with *Fe y Alegría*, one of the most important pillars of the AVEC.

The *Fe y Alegría* school network stands out among the institutions affiliated to the AVEC. It is a religious institution which is mainly involved in providing educational services to low-income students. Its motto reflects this philosophy: “*Fe y Alegría* begins where the street ends”. It is a Jesuit initiative which began its work in Venezuela in 1955 and since then, its programs have spread through various Latin American countries in which it has also acquired a significant presence.

Fe y Alegría is mainly involved in the formal education system at elementary level. However, it has managed to convert its schools into real community centers and social service centers and has given them a prominent position in the areas they operate in. *Fe y Alegría* is funded by contributions from the State and from private individuals. It is not easy to determine exact quantities in monetary terms since an important component is the voluntary work of students, representatives and communities whose value has not been calculated. Neither has the value of the premises and the furniture and fittings of the schools been accurately estimated, all of which are provided privately.

The advantage of subsidized schools over public schools is clear to see in Table 2, which presents a set of educational results.

Table 2. Comparative indicators between public and AVEC schools

	AVEC	Public
Repetition	2.8%	8.6%
Dropouts	1.7%	3.2%
Maths Achievement* (0-100)	35	53
Writing Achievement* (0-100)	40	27
Teachers HE Diploma	59%	46%
Cost/student/month in USD	155	160
Expenditure not on personnel	12%	1%

*: These data only corresponds to *Fe y Alegria* schools

Source: Gonzalez and Arevalo (2004)

The results are striking. Costs are lower in schools affiliated to the AVEC. Moreover, there is less expenditure on personnel in AVEC schools because the AVEC teachers' salaries are lower

despite the fact that they are better qualified. On the other hand, the two performance indicators (repetition and dropout rates) are better in AVEC schools, as are the academic results in mathematics and writing (in this case the results only refer to *Fe y Alegría* schools). Considering the fact that the socioeconomic level of students in AVEC schools is inevitably lower than the average of public schools (since they only work with the poorest sectors of society), the only conclusion that may be drawn is that AVEC schools are considerably better managed than public schools.

There are various reasons for such a difference in favor of the AVEC schools. Firstly, it is due to the dedication of the religious orders, which have a clear vision of education as a public service, especially for those most in need. Secondly, the established agreement model means they are constantly accountable for their actions. In contrast to the unconditional “contract” between the State and public schools, there are “conditions” to the contract between the State and AVEC schools. Private schools are obliged to periodically provide statements on the use of the transferred funds and AVEC has to present a yearly report on its management. In terms of monitoring and supervision there are also fundamental differences. In public schools there is very little supervision, whereas in AVEC schools supervision is constant. Twice a year, each school receives a visit from an AVEC supervisor in order to assess both academic aspects (syllabi, timetables, staff wages, qualifications and positions of teaching staff) and administrative aspects (where funds are allocated, evidence of expenses, company contributions, reserves for the payment of welfare benefits). A dossier is drawn up for each school, in which the AVEC compiles the information collected so that it can later be analyzed and verified. Technical and pedagogical assistance is also provided by the Training School. In the case of *Fe y Alegría*, the headquarters of the institution also provides additional supervision and assistance. By means of its decentralized system organized into regional administrative areas, each regional department interprets and transmits the syllabi and objectives put forward for a particular period to the educational centers, in addition to assessing and supervising schools when formulating and implementing their educational projects and when planning their activities and strategies. It is important to emphasize the way in which the AVEC works in relation to the State and the schools themselves. It acts as an intermediary: as an agent, regarding the government, and as a principal, regarding the schools, obliging them to act in accordance with the general objectives laid down in the agreement. This double role of the association means that they are highly respected by the government, allowing them to improve their standing year upon year.

Other agreements

The agreement between the Ministry and the AVEC is a stable one, in such a way that although it is renewed each year it provides the schools with stability. Similar agreements which do not enjoy such stability are signed by the Ministry and other private non-Catholic schools on an individual

basis and on the condition that they fulfill conditions similar to those of the AVEC, particularly in terms of providing assistance to underprivileged social groups.

The Ministry also has agreements with Catholic vocational training schools which are part of another association called APEP. This is an association of vocational training schools attended each year by 130,000 students from the poorest sectors of Venezuelan society. This agreement is not as stable as the agreements with AVEC, although in actual fact the agreements are renewed every year without any major hitches. Along the same lines, the government subsidizes higher institutes of technology belonging to Catholic organizations, although this is funded by means of individual agreements with each institution according to the type of students and the services each one provides.

Conclusions: problems, lessons and solutions

At the beginning of this paper, we mentioned that inequality and lack of resources are the two biggest problems facing education in Latin America. As a result, the implementation of educational policies which simultaneously improve both efficiency and equality is absolutely fundamental for the future of education in the region and for the future of the region itself. The question we need to ask, however, is to what extent are public-private partnerships in education the way to achieving both objectives? Let us analyze the experiences studied in this paper to try to draw some conclusions.

First of all, let us take a look at where the problems lie. In Latin America, as in other regions, debates often centre on ideological issues rather than on real life. Two of these debates affect educational development. The first issue concerns the debate over public or private. In highly unequal societies, certain social and political groups' fear of all things private is quite understandable. It is true to say that in Latin America the fact that the virtues of all things private have been praised to the hilt has generated even greater inequality. However, this does not necessarily have to be the case. A good example of this is the many private schools in Venezuela which function as public schools and which in many cases are more effective than the actual public sector. This example has its parallels in some highly developed countries, in which the ownership of the educational institutions does not influence the public objectives of the institution or public support for these institutions. This occurs in highly equal countries with a highly developed welfare state. The problem does not lie in the public or private ownership of the institutions but in its objectives. Some educational institutions have a clear-cut private bias, i.e. its objectives benefit a small part of society and they are not open to society as a whole. In this case, there is obviously no reason for the state to support these institutions. However, many other privately-owned institutions, possibly the majority, have public objectives. They are open to society as a whole, although they may have a specific bias (religious, pedagogical, etc.). There is no reason for these institutions not to receive public funds. In fact, with public financing these institutions

make it easier for the rest of society to gain access to them. In a strict sense, financing private institutions is not a policy aimed at privatizing education as is often thought. The opposite is actually true. We can say that it "*publicizes*" education or makes education more public. A "*publicization*" policy may help, the case of Chile is an example, to efficiently extend the coverage of the education system. This policy is especially useful in countries which have a large private education sector. Not using existing private resources and simply trying to make the public sector grow is a highly inefficient policy without a shadow of a doubt. Obviously, care needs to be taken so that the implementation of these policies does not decrease equality; one of the most serious problems in Latin America. Equality and efficiency are not mutually exclusive as we can see from the Colombian and Venezuelan case studies. However, it must be said that the case of Chile may actually be increasing social inequalities. On the other hand, there are many examples around the world in which equality and efficiency in education systems have been achieved by treating public and privately owned schools similarly.

Another relevant issue centers on quality. A certain paralyzing pessimism is apparent in Latin America with respect to the quality of its education systems. International indicators clearly show that learning performance in Latin America is below more developed countries. Although we should remember that these studies are developed by and for developed countries in which some less developed countries are also included. Bearing in mind how these learning processes work, the results are not that surprising and are not a serious cause for alarm since the large social and economic differences partly explain them. For example, in the majority of Latin American countries, the school day is much shorter than in the developed countries. Students not only dedicate less time to studying but, what is worse, in many cases teachers do both the morning and afternoon sessions which logically diminishes their performance. Family background, another of the most important variables behind educational performance, is significantly different in Latin America. Finally, it is even possible that the exams which are put forward are culturally biased and results are not suited to cultural environments which are different from those the tests were designed for. It is even feasible to speculate that the academic approach which prevails in developed countries is not applicable to Latin America where education may possibly require an approach which is closer to the environment in which the students live. Concerns over quality are obviously important, but from a social point of view, quality is the sum total of the whole society's education. The global quality of the system is increased simply by extending educational coverage. Logically enough, the quality of education received by each person has to be improved as well. Quality can be improved in many different ways but all the cases of public-private partnerships we have mentioned here are examples of increased quality.

One of the worst problems in all the countries studied is the teaching staff. There are some important issues which need to be dealt with: firstly, the lack of training is common to all the countries. Whether as a possible consequence of rapid expansion or of the increasing needs of the education

systems, the teaching staff has been taken on without the necessary qualifications. This fact is not that alarming either in the sense that it has happened in all the countries in which educational growth has been very fast. However, this does not mean that it is not a serious problem or that improving teacher training is not one of the biggest challenges in all Latin American countries. Another important aspect to be taken into account when trying to get a grasp on some of the problems is the teachers' working conditions. In the countries under study, there have been considerable improvements in teachers' working and economic status over the last few years yet this has not necessarily resulted in an improvement in their efficiency. The general improvements in teachers' working conditions should have generated a favorable climate for greater responsibility, but if improvements are not linked to assessment and incentive mechanisms, the global effect may be wiped out. Improved labor conditions for teachers are necessary but not sufficient to improve the quality of their work. The case of the subsidized schools in Venezuela is a good example of this. In these schools, even though the teachers are paid less than public school teachers, performance is better and the satisfaction surveys carried out show greater levels of satisfaction with these teachers than with public school teachers. When the subject of incentives for teachers is raised, we are not necessarily talking about financial incentives. There are many other incentives which are effective in improving teachers' efficiency at work. Strangely enough, this type of incentives is more frequent in privately managed centers.

There is a great deal of discussion in the countries under study as to the role of the teaching unions in the running (or deficient running) of the education systems. For a foreign observer it is difficult to perceive exactly what the reality of the situation is, but the perception is that the educational trade unions, despite being social agents concerned, in theory, about the collective good of their members, their corporatist behavior is highly biased towards the protection not only of its members (which is legitimate) but also of the least efficient part of its collective, which curbs improvements. The marked bias the actions of these trade unions involve is one of the problems facing education in these countries.

All the results of our study show the importance of school management in obtaining better performance in education. The case of the *Colegios en Concesión* in Bogotá, the AVEC schools in Venezuela and the centers tutored by the *Pitagoras* and *Positivo* schemes in Brazil, are examples of how good teaching, resource and facility management in conditions which are relatively similar to public schools can lead to much better results. It seems that a large part of society is aware of the management problems facing education both as a system and at school level. This explains the decision of entrepreneurs and private institutions in Brazil and Colombia to implement programs aimed at improving management. The case of *Empresarios por la Educación* in Colombia, in which companies send their own managers to public schools to help to improve management is paradigmatic. However, management improvements are only possible if the actual schools themselves

become more independent. In countries such as Colombia, decentralization is, in theory, very advanced but in practice the levels of autonomy are particularly low, possibly because schools are not actually capable of taking on the responsibilities that go with autonomy. In other countries, such as Venezuela, decentralization processes have recently been put on hold by the government, which prefers to control a centralized system. Finally, both schools and teachers need incentives to run smoothly. This leads us to the case of Chile in which a general system which assesses the educational performance of each school provides a stimulus for improvement and for open competition between public and private schools.

Another relevant characteristic of the Latin-American education systems is the type of student, especially those from the poorest strata of society. It is important to take in account the student's family background, the labor market conditions, the students' chances of staying in the education system and so on, when trying to analyze the education systems in these countries. Many educational programs in these countries (*Colegios en Concesion*, for instance) provide students with food as a way to ensure that basic alimentary needs are covered. It is easy for us to understand this type of basic needs, but it is more difficult to be aware of (and, even more difficult to find solutions for) other types of cultural needs (libraries, computers, cultural activities, etc.) which are also necessary to improve the personal situation of the poorest students. Only a few schools (*Colegios en Concesión, Fe y Alegria*, for instance) provide this type of additional service to a certain extent. Finally, the students' economic situation and surrounding labor market are also important factors to be considered. If, for economic reasons, the majority of these students in these schools are likely to have to join the labor market very early on, to what extent must the educational model they follow be similar to the model that it is used for other social strata which have different horizons? If they cannot identify with the model, the learning process will become an uphill struggle. Surveys carried out in some countries show that many students who have dropped out of the education system say that they left mainly because they were not interested in what they were learning. Only a few models (*Fe y Alegria* is one of them) seem to be conscious of this problem. Sometimes it seems that when some people talk about quality in Latin America, they have an elitist vision of this word, identifying quality with an academic approach to learning. Quality should have another dimension such as "added value" or "fit for the purpose". In this sense, excellent systems rooted in satisfying the real needs of students will never perhaps achieve high marks in standard assessment exercises.

It is not easy or wise to propose solutions for systems which are so complex and which have so many problems. Moreover, the educational stage is dogged with ideological prejudices which, in many instances, lack credibility in an objective analysis of the real situation. Despite this, we would like to put forward a few ideas which we believe are important in trying to improve education systems in Latin America.

Firstly, there is no place for the continuing dilemma between public and private education. If we logically exclude the cases in which education is provided as an exclusive service for certain social or ideological groups, the majority of the educational services available have a public objective, or could have one with the co-operation of the state. On the other hand, all evidence shows that private, autonomous, independent management of educational centers produces better economic and educational performance. Why not make public education private (management-wise) and make private education public (access-wise)? How can public education be managed privately? There are a wide range of mechanisms available, from directly transferring management to private entities or to the teaching staff through to the creation of quasi-market mechanisms which, without actually formally handing over management duties, create the right conditions for management to be carried out as though schools were private companies. How can access to private schools be made public? By providing funding for private education which ensures all children have access to these schools, widening parents' choice of schools and making the most of existing resources to extend education. The only important factor which must be taken into account is that these mechanisms must not create social divisions. This would prove to be highly negative in societies that are already highly segmented. We have seen positive examples of both these mechanisms in the previous pages yet, although they are still a very small minority. There is still much work to be done in this area in Latin America.

Secondly, teachers and schools must be given the importance they deserve. Efforts aimed at motivating and persuading teaching staff to change must be made. It is true to say that when people simply work to survive it is impossible to make changes yet this does not seem to be the general rule nowadays in Latin American countries. Labor conditions for teachers are now relatively acceptable which means that active policies aimed at transforming teaching attitudes to give them greater responsibility for educational processes and consequently making them more motivated in their job are now more feasible. How can we explain the fact that teachers express greater job satisfaction in private systems which pay them lower salaries and possibly give them more work? Because there are other incentives (which are not monetary) which motivate them. Public schools should adopt quasi-market mechanisms which make them more attractive to their employees and more efficient and effective for society. The introduction of greater autonomy in schools, personal and group incentives, and increased co-operation with companies and corporations makes the creation of new, more motivating conditions for all, and especially the young citizens in these countries, a real option.

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