

Success of Public Education in Massachusetts and the Challenges of Public Education in Colombia

By Sergio Mauricio Páez Arenas. Ed.D.

Gloaleducationsol365@gmail.com

46 Newton St. Leominster Massachusetts, 01453
Chief Executive Officer, Global Education Solutions

Abstract:

Education is a fundamental right established by UNESCO and essential to combat poverty and promote equality. In Colombia, education guarantees basic skills such as reading and writing, allowing the comprehensive development of individuals and their integration into the world of work. In addition, it contributes to economic growth by training a skilled workforce, and fosters an informed and participatory citizenry. The article analyzes how Colombia faces important challenges in access to and quality of education, especially in rural areas. It also highlights the importance of adapting successful international models, such as that of Massachusetts, which has implemented reforms focused on quality and accountability. These experiences could inspire the implementation of teacher support strategies and the creation of charter schools in vulnerable areas.

The methodology of the article includes literature review, data analysis, and comparative studies to support recommendations that promote inclusive and equitable education in Colombia. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the creation of an educational system that is not only accessible to all, but also drives the social and economic development of the country.

Keywords: Education, Massachusetts, Colombia, Fundamental right, PISA.

Abstract:

Education is a fundamental right established by UNESCO and is essential for combating poverty and promoting equality. In Colombia, education ensures basic skills such as reading and writing, enabling the comprehensive development of individuals and their integration into the labor market. Additionally, it contributes to economic growth by creating a skilled workforce and fosters an informed and participative citizenry. The article analyzes how

Colombia faces significant challenges in terms of access to and quality of education, especially in rural areas. It also highlights the importance of adapting successful international models, such as that of Massachusetts, which has implemented reforms focused on quality and accountability. These experiences could inspire the implementation of teacher support strategies and the creation of charter schools in vulnerable areas.

The article's methodology includes a literature review, data analysis, and comparative studies to support recommendations that promote inclusive and equitable education in Colombia. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the creation of an educational system that is not only accessible to everyone but also drives the social and economic development of the country.

Keywords: Education: Massachusetts, Colombia, fundamental right, PISA.

Introduction:

The assertion that education is a fundamental right is one of the positions established by UNESCO. Education is conceived as a social instrument capable of generating changes in societies, and it has been stated:

“Education is a basic human right that works to lift men and women out of poverty, level inequalities and guarantee sustainable development, but around the world 244 million children and young people still do not go to school for social, economic and cultural reasons. Education is one of the most powerful tools to lift excluded children and adults out of poverty and is a springboard towards other fundamental human rights. It is the most sustainable investment. The right to a quality education is already firmly rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in international legal instruments, most of which are the result of the work of UNESCO and the United Nations.”

Now, education is considered a fundamental right in Colombia for several essential reasons, which are part of principles and values that aim to guarantee the well-being and progress of society as a whole. First of all, it is pertinent to speak of individual evolution, which provides people with the skills and knowledge necessary for full development as individuals. It allows them to acquire competencies that are necessary for everyday life, some of which are: reading, writing and mathematical skills, as well as more advanced skills for entering the world of work.

It is then that education is considered a basic human right because it guarantees that all people, regardless of their socioeconomic origin, have the opportunity to develop skills and talents. Education helps to reduce social and economic gaps, promoting equal opportunities for

all. It is important to consider education as a driver of economic development. It is estimated that an educated and trained workforce is essential to promote different economic and social dynamics in a country. Thus, it is intended to suggest that education provides the necessary skills to work in various sectors, which promote productivity and competitiveness at the national and international level.

Education also plays a vital role in the formation of informed citizens. Some specialized literature suggests that an educated population is more likely to participate in civic life, understand their rights and responsibilities, and contribute significantly to social development. Finally, the relationship between education and human rights can be considered. Education is part of a human right, as evidenced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These instruments establish that all people have the right to education, without discrimination of any kind.

The purpose of education is multifaceted and can vary according to individual perspectives and social contexts. Generally, education aims to provide people with knowledge, skills, and values that allow personal and intellectual growth. It plays a crucial role in preparing people for future careers, equipping them with essential skills and qualifications. Education also fosters socialization, promoting interaction and cooperation among people from diverse backgrounds. In addition, education helps develop critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to make informed decisions. It also promotes personal development, self-knowledge, and moral values. Ultimately, the purpose of education is to empower people to lead fulfilling lives, contribute to society and reach their full potential.

Taking into account the above, for the proposed research process it is essential to understand and analyze how it is possible to develop in Colombian students the essential skills and competencies to face the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities of contemporary society, through the implementation of educational strategies that include additional teaching support outside of regular school hours. This will improve academic performance and promote comprehensive learning that considers both the fundamental values of UNESCO and the educational and social rights of each individual. This objective is based on the premise that quality education is not only a human right, but also a key driver of economic development, strengthening a productive and trained workforce. It also seeks to understand how the successful experiences of Massachusetts can offer a model for strengthening the Colombian educational system in the 21st century, promoting equitable and accessible education that drives the country's growth and competitiveness. The relevance of this objective lies in the fact that, by identifying and understanding the skills and competencies

necessary for students to successfully face the contemporary world, as well as the impact of teacher support on their academic performance, it will allow us to design a reference framework that leads to improving educational practices in Colombia. By analyzing the successful experiences of Massachusetts, we seek to establish practical recommendations that adapt to the specific needs of the Colombian educational system.

In addition, the importance of promoting an inclusive and equitable educational environment that allows all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, to develop their potential and contribute to the growth of society is emphasized. In this sense, it is expected that the results of this analysis will not only benefit students and teachers, but will also influence the formulation of educational policies that promote equity and quality in education in Colombia. Methodology

The article uses a methodology that combines exhaustive documentary research with a comparative analysis of international cases and an evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data, in order to offer a well-founded proposal to improve the educational system in Colombia. First, a review of the literature and theoretical foundations on the right to education was carried out, taking as a reference the principles established by UNESCO and other international organizations. This review included documents on the role of education in social and economic development and its importance as a basic human right, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international treaties. Likewise, academic studies and official reports that explore the global educational situation were consulted, highlighting education as a factor of social equity and sustainable development.

Subsequently, an analysis of the educational context in Colombia was carried out, focused on identifying the main challenges facing the system. This diagnosis would have considered data provided by national agencies such as the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) and the Ministry of National Education, as well as the results obtained by Colombia in international assessments such as the PISA test. The analysis included the identification of regional disparities, the problem of school dropouts, the lack of access to quality education in rural areas and low literacy rates in some populations. This phase allowed us to understand the particularities of the Colombian educational system and the factors that affected its performance compared to other countries.

Following this, a comparative study of international cases was carried out, taking as a reference the experience of the state of Massachusetts in the United States, which has stood out for its long-term educational reforms and its focus on academic quality. Massachusetts would serve as an inspirational model for Colombia, as it has achieved significant improvements in its

educational results through the implementation of the Education Reform Law of 1993, which established academic standards, introduced standardized assessments, and promoted accountability in the educational system. The analysis of this case focused on the practices and policies that allowed Massachusetts to achieve outstanding performance, such as strengthening the curriculum, introducing charter schools, and prioritizing the comprehensive education of students. This comparative approach helped to identify elements that could be adapted to the Colombian context in the future.

To support the findings and strengthen the analysis, quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis was used. Information was collected from sources such as UNESCO, the World Bank and the OECD, focusing on literacy indicators, investment in education and performance in international assessments. These data allowed direct comparisons between Colombia and other regions, and provided a solid basis for identifying the areas in which the Colombian education system needs to improve. In addition, qualitative analysis of testimonies from education experts, reports from educational organizations and previous studies in the Colombian education field helped to understand the cultural, structural and socioeconomic factors that influence access to and quality of education in the country.

Based on these findings, the methodology includes an analysis of the specific challenges and opportunities for education in Colombia. This analysis allowed for the identification of investment gaps, the disconnect between urban and rural curricula, the lack of infrastructure in remote areas and the effects of armed conflict on educational accessibility. In addition, the impact of these factors on the equity of the educational system was studied, especially in regions affected by violence and poverty, and how these challenges limit opportunities for social and economic development in the country was explored.

Finally, practical recommendations and an intervention framework adapted to the needs of the Colombian educational system were formulated. These recommendations were inspired by the successful experiences of Massachusetts, proposing inclusive educational policies, innovative models such as charter schools for vulnerable areas, teacher support programs, and curriculum reforms that consider the particularities of each region. The implementation of programs that promote equity and inclusion was also suggested, with a focus on improving the quality of education and ensuring that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to meaningful educational opportunities.

The final draft of the article presents the theoretical foundations in the introduction, followed by the contextual and comparative analysis in the development, and culminates with concrete recommendations in the conclusions. Thus, this methodology allows us to offer a

comprehensive and well-founded vision of how Colombia could implement a new perspective in its educational system, promoting both social development and the country's competitiveness in the global context.

Thematic Development

1.1 Measuring education: the case of Colombia and the United States

Based on the results of PISA, which is a program for the international assessment of students that measures the reading, mathematics and science competence of 15-year-old students, the United States ranked sixth in reading and tenth in science, two and one higher, respectively, compared to the previous exam. The United States' score in mathematics was practically on par with the international average. Science and reading were slightly higher. More specifically, if the state of Massachusetts had been a country, it would have been number one in the world. This achievement can be directly attributed to an educational reform effort of more than 30 years with the educational reform of 1993. This new edition, based on the responses of 690,000 students from 81 countries and territories, gave Singapore the first place in the ranking, while the participating Latin American countries: Chile, Mexico and Colombia, only appear in the second half of the table.

The state of Massachusetts stood out as a pioneer in educational reform in response to deficiencies in public education in the United States, as noted by the federal report “A Nation at Risk” nearly four decades ago. Through the Education Reform Act of 1993, Massachusetts committed to setting high academic and curricular standards, as opposed to other agendas focused on job readiness. This rigorous approach included the development of curricular frameworks that emphasized liberal arts and classical literature, as well as the early introduction of algebra in secondary education.

The implementation of standardized tests, such as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), became a requirement for high school graduation, driving accountability and improving student performance. These initiatives resulted in a significant increase in SAT scores and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores, placing Massachusetts as an educational leader nationally and internationally.

The results of the reform were better than even the authors of the act expected. Beginning in 1993, scores on the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), which is taken by all students before Massachusetts high school graduation, rose for 13 consecutive years. The state's scores

on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) also soared—for example, in 2005, Massachusetts students became the first to score among the nation’s top performers in all four major categories of the NAEP (fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math). They have since repeated the feat in every subsequent NAEP administration except one.

While American students as a whole lag behind their international peers, results from the 2007 and 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study showed that Massachusetts students were competitive with their peers in places like Japan, Korea, and Singapore. In 2007, Bay State eighth-graders even tied for first place internationally in science. In addition to overall improvements, race- and class-based achievement gaps narrowed. E.D. Hirsch found that Massachusetts was one of three states that made the greatest progress in narrowing achievement gaps between 1998 and 2005. Between 2002 and 2009, African-American and Hispanic NAEP scores on fourth- and eighth-grade reading tests improved more rapidly than those of white students; low-income students also made gains.

1.2. Impact of Education Reforms: Academic Performance and Achievement Gaps

The Education Reform Act also created the best charter schools in the country. A Stanford University study found that Boston charter schools were doing more to close achievement gaps than any other group of public schools in the country.

Charter schools operate independently of local school districts, but they are not “privately run.” They are run by public governing boards, which follow the same laws and rules as district schools and are overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Key features include the use of public funds that are allocated based on student enrollment. Rather than being allocated to regular public schools, charter schools are allocated to the charter school. This budget freedom provides flexibility to select teachers who must have high qualifications but are not bound by union contracts. Unions are also, in many cases, part of the management process. This model allows for the evaluation of teachers based on learning and the effectiveness of education. This model would be very innovative in Colombia to create schools in areas where there are no schools, where education is underperforming or to create bilingual programs and other innovative models that focus on specific areas such as science and technology, arts and multiple intelligences, among others.

The OECD PISA study, a standardized test for high school students in which Colombia has participated since 2006, reflects relatively poor learning results compared to other nations. In the latest study in 2018, Colombia ranked second to last among 37 OECD countries behind Mexico and Chile.

The technological factor has an important impact on the development of the test. According to the report, students who invested one hour in digital learning improved their

performance by 14 points. It is also worth mentioning the measurement that was carried out regarding the time spent on digital devices for leisure, which showed that students who spent only one hour on this activity were 49 points above students who spent 5 to 7 hours on these devices.

According to this panorama, it can be said that Colombian students are performing well below the OECD average, reaching 383 points in mathematics, 409 in reading and 411 in science. The average is approximately 470 and 480. In relation to the most advantaged countries such as Singapore, Japan, Korea and Canada, the gap is even greater, whose averages are above 500 points.

It is important to highlight the relationship between economic development and educational development. The constant, as mentioned, shows a positive correlation between strong economies and optimal educational performance. Likewise, with economies that are not so robust, where their educational performance suffers and is verified through these evaluation instruments.

1.3. Challenges of the education system in Colombia

Education in Colombia, especially in rural areas, faces challenges that are rooted in various historical, social and structural issues. In other words, to understand these problems and find effective solutions, it is necessary to analyze the factors that negatively influence rural education, as discussed in specialized literature on the subject. It is important to note that there is a disconnect between the “curriculum” and rural reality. Gaviria, for example, points out that rural education in Colombia is often treated as a mechanism for insertion into a literate and technological society, at the expense of local practices and knowledge. The standardized national curriculum does not consider the cultural and territorial particularities of rural communities, which leads to a significant disconnect between what is taught in schools and the daily reality of rural students. This disconnect translates into a lack of relevance and applicability of the knowledge imparted, which demotivates students and contributes to high school dropout rates.

On the other hand, the physical conditions of rural schools also represent a major problem. According to Gaviria, rural schools often lack adequate infrastructure, teaching materials, laboratories and sports equipment. In addition, violence and mining operations in these areas aggravate the situation, creating an educational environment that is not conducive

to learning. These material and contextual deficiencies make it difficult to implement quality education and limit educational opportunities for rural students.

Gaviria mentions that until the 1990s, rural schools showed significant progress thanks to educational models specifically designed for these areas, such as the Escuela Nueva and the Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT). However, the persistence of an urban and cosmopolitan educational model in rural areas has contributed to the ineffectiveness of education in these contexts. Current educational policy is not relevant to the needs and realities of rural communities, which perpetuates a cycle of low school retention and limited academic progression.

According to Perfetti (2003), cited by Gaviria, he argues that rural areas face a series of difficulties, such as lack of jobs, forming families at an early age, extreme poverty and illiteracy, among other problems. These circumstances contribute to a pattern of low school retention among children. Of every 100 students who begin primary school in these regions, only 35 manage to finish it. Of these, less than half (16 students) continue on to secondary school; and of the latter, only 8 complete the ninth grade and only 7 finish all of basic education.

Thus, it can be seen that the roots of the problems of education in Colombia are deep and varied. The disconnection between the curriculum and rural reality, the lack of infrastructure and adequate resources, the ineffectiveness of urban educational models in rural contexts, the need for greater community participation in the design of the curriculum and the responsibility of the State to guarantee quality education are interrelated factors that must be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Only through a holistic understanding of these problems and the implementation of pertinent and contextually adapted educational policies will it be possible to improve education in rural areas of Colombia and guarantee the right to quality education for all citizens.

The abandonment of sovereignty and territorial control promotes the increase of endemic problems in the country, such as drug trafficking and the existence of insurgent and criminal groups. This situation, which in many regions of the country translates into total abandonment, generates an environment of lack of hope and confidence among all its inhabitants. Consequently, this causes problems such as the recruitment of minors, illegal crops, criminality and chaotic conditions that make all its inhabitants victims, especially children, who should be in school learning the basic skills to have access to a better quality of life.

In Colombia, however, school dropout persists as a serious and complex problem that undermines the future of thousands of young people and, therefore, of the country as a whole.

Between the end of 2022 and May 2023, approximately 473,786 students dropped out of the education system, a significant increase compared to the 330,000 students who dropped out in the same period between 2021 and 2022. This growing trend is worrying and reflects the need for urgent and multifaceted intervention to address the roots of this problem.

According to the study by the Comptroller's Office delegated for the Education, Science and Technology, Culture, Recreation and Sports Sector of the Colombian Economy magazine of 2024, the need to work in different sectors that make up the Colombian territory is one of the predominant factors in the decision to drop out of school, particularly affecting families living in conditions of multidimensional poverty. Poverty is a phenomenon that is exacerbated when it is combined with the phenomenon of violence and armed conflict in Colombia. In regions affected by armed conflict, such as Putumayo, Arauca and Caquetá, insecurity and fear of violence prevent parents from sending their children to school. Meanwhile, forced displacement also interrupts children's education, since when moving to new areas, many students take a long time to join the educational system, if they do at all.

The reasons, for example, behind the recruitment of minors are varied and complex. Montoya Ruiz points out that the participation of minors in war depends largely on the context in which they grow up and on personal factors. Poverty, the attraction to weapons and the lack of opportunities are some of the reasons that lead children to join armed groups. This context of vulnerability and abandonment makes minors easily manipulated by the actors in the conflict.

According to calculations by the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO, current learning problems can translate into a decrease of about 12% in a student's lifetime earnings. At the social level, school dropouts contribute to the perpetuation of inequality and social exclusion. A less educated population has less capacity to actively participate in society and contribute to the country's economic and social development.

1.4 Analysis of public spending on education in Colombia

The reality is that Colombia does not invest enough in education. Colombia ranks 87th in investment in education. This lack of investment creates the conditions for providing low-quality education and at the same time has led to the development of private education as a strong alternative in the country. Consequently, people struggle more to have access to private education and not to develop a public education that is of high quality and competitive at a global level.

Since 2020, a discouraging scenario has been presented in Colombia in terms of public spending on education. There was a decrease of 1,325.5 million euros, representing a fall of

8.45%, reaching 11,677 million euros. Although this expenditure still represented 14.75% of total public expenditure, there was a drop in the global table of countries by the amount allocated to education, falling from 35th to 37th place.

It is important to note the variation in public spending per capita on education, which fell from 263 euros in 2019 to 232 euros in 2020. This data reflects the need to evaluate not only the total amount invested, but also its efficient distribution to benefit the entire population, regardless of their academic status.

It is crucial to note that, despite the relatively high investment in primary and secondary education in Colombia (around 5% of GDP), spending per student is at worrying levels. The country ranks second with the lowest investment per student, only behind Mexico. This raises questions about the efficiency and equity in the distribution of resources, as well as the need to review policies to maximize the impact of investment at each educational level.

Now, during the year 2023, Colombia reached a historic budget of \$54.8 billion allocated to the education sector, marking a notable growth of 10% compared to the immediately preceding year. This increase is presented as a response to the growing demands of the educational community and as a strategy to strengthen the coverage and sustainability of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country.

The presentation of the latest advances of the Coverage Expansion program and the current government financing plan reflects a commitment to strengthening public HEIs. Nearly \$9.5 billion were allocated, of which \$6.3 billion are intended to finance the operating and investment budgets of these institutions. In addition, additional resources were allocated to strengthen the budget base, investment projects and infrastructure improvements.

In Colombia, public education covers around 81.1% of the student population, in contrast to the 18.9% represented by private education. According to the Entrepreneurs for Education Foundation, the proportion of students per teacher differs between the two systems, being 16 students per teacher in the private sector and 25 students per teacher in the public sector. These figures underline the significant prevalence of public education, where 81.1% of students, equivalent to 8,018,501 enrolled in 2020, contrast with the 1,864,342 schoolchildren enrolled in the private sector, which represents 18.9% of the total.

Based on several regions of Colombia, the level of literacy in the country varies according to sociodemographic characteristics. The figures presented in the 2018 National Population and Housing Census (CNPV) inquire about the literacy level of people in Colombia in terms of whether they knew how to read and write, whether they attended an educational institution, what was the highest educational level achieved, and what was the last grade passed at that level. Bogotá is the area of Colombia according to the census, with the lowest illiteracy rate with 2% of the entire population. On the other hand, La Guajira is the department where

reading and writing skills are the lowest. In this department, 14.2% of people cannot read or write. Some studies based on the 2018 census showed that there are five departments in which more than 10% of the population reported not knowing how to read or write: Guajira 14.2%, Chocó 13.14%, Vichada 11.78%, Sucre 10.90% and Córdoba 10.26%.

Despite the above, Colombia has seen a reduction in illiteracy rates in recent decades, according to data from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE). However, the most recent report notes that around 6% of the population still lacks basic reading and writing skills. Although this figure is encouraging compared to previous years, there are notable disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as between different regions of the country.

The 2020-2021 ECV Quality of Life Survey reveals that the Caribbean and Pacific regions still face double-digit illiteracy rates, at 15.4% and 13.4%, respectively. In addition, municipalities with Territorially Focused Development Programs (PDET) and dispersed rural areas present significantly higher rates than municipal capitals. These differences highlight the need to specifically address conditions in the most marginalized and disadvantaged areas.

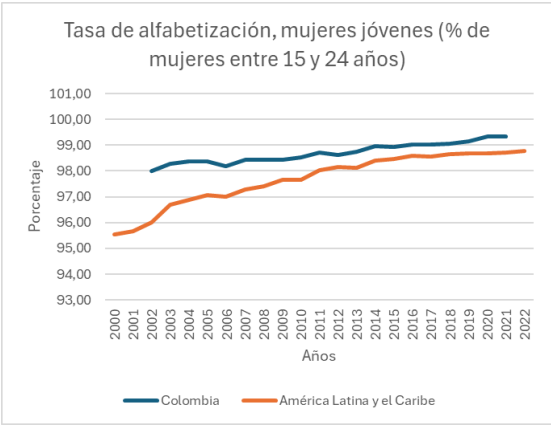
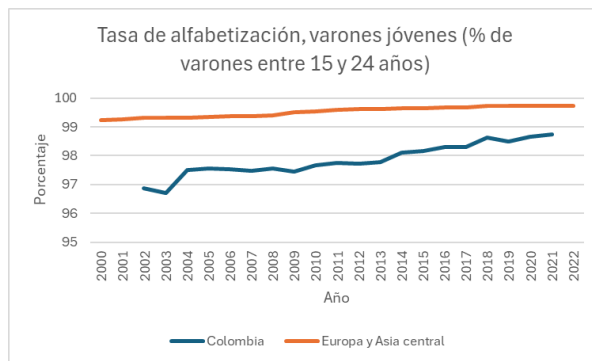


Chart I. Prepared by the authors, 2024, “Young women literacy rate (% of women between 15 and 24 years old)

DANE data suggests that, in general terms, women have slightly higher literacy rates than men in Colombia. However, it is essential to address existing gaps, especially in older age groups, where the illiteracy rate can reach 28.4%. Strategies such as the School Feeding Program (PAE) and online platforms are helping to combat this problem, but continued attention is required.



Gráfica II. Elaboración propia, 2024, “Tasa de alfabetización varones jóvenes (% de varones entre 15 y 24 años) Colombia-Europa y Asia central”

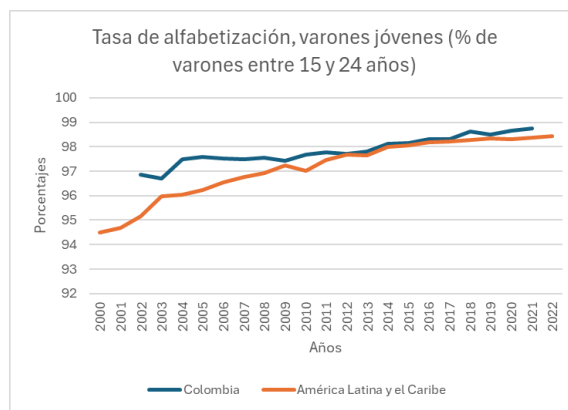


Chart III. Prepared by the authors, 2024, “Young male literacy rate (% of males aged 15-24) Colombia-Latin America and the Caribbean”.

The two graphs present a comparative analysis of the literacy rate of young men (between 15 and 24 years old) in Colombia in contrast to two regions of the world: Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, in the period from 2000 to 2022.

In the first graph, which compares Colombia with Europe and Central Asia, it can be seen that the literacy rate in Europe and Central Asia has remained close to 100% throughout the period. This region has achieved almost complete stability in male youth literacy levels, reflecting a robust and accessible education system. On the other hand, Colombia shows a gradual growth trend. At the beginning of the period, in 2000, the literacy rate in Colombia was visibly lower, but over the years it has seen steady progress, approaching 98% in 2022. Although there have been significant improvements, a slight gap remains between Colombia and Europe and Central Asia, indicating that there is still some way to go to match these literacy levels.

The second graph, which compares Colombia with Latin America and the Caribbean, presents a different dynamic. In this case, Latin America and the Caribbean starts with a lower

literacy rate than Colombia in 2000, but quickly shows a considerable increase, reaching and slightly surpassing Colombia's rate around 2011. From that point on, both lines show stable and sustained growth, with both rates remaining close to 98% in recent years. At some points, Colombia presents a slight margin higher than Latin America and the Caribbean, although this difference is minimal.

Together, these graphs illustrate the progress that Colombia has made in male youth literacy over the last two decades, reaching regional levels in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, when compared to Europe and Central Asia, a gap still persists, highlighting the need to continue strengthening the education system to achieve higher standards and close the gap with regions that have achieved almost universal literacy.

1.5 Literacy and regional disparities

Early childhood education in Colombia is an issue that has raised opinions and attention in recent decades. Initially, the 1991 Political Constitution recognized education as a fundamental right and established the obligation of the State to provide it from early childhood. Likewise, the General Education Law (Law 115 of 1994) establishes the legal framework for the Colombian education system, including early childhood education. It defines preschool education as the first stage of formal education, aimed at boys and girls under six years of age. Decree 2253 of 1995 regulates preschool education in the country, defining its objectives, curriculum and organization. Finally, the Comprehensive Early Childhood Care Policy (2011), for example with the program “From Zero to Always” is a comprehensive policy that focuses on ensuring the development of children under six years of age, promoting comprehensive care that includes health, nutrition, education and protection. Despite these laws, hundreds of thousands of children do not have access to early education or education at any time in their lives. This is a violation of the human rights of a population that lives in total abandonment.

The implications of early education on human beings are related to the cognitive, social and emotional development of children. Specialized literature has shown that early stimulation improves academic performance and social skills throughout life. It has also been shown that early education has a significant impact on reducing social and economic inequalities. It is known that high-quality early education programs can compensate for the disadvantages of children from vulnerable backgrounds. However, in Colombia, early childhood education continues to present problems in access to education, as well as other factors that affect the environment of children.

Early education refers to educational programs and activities aimed at children, usually spanning from birth to age eight. Its focus is on creating a nurturing and stimulating environment for young children to develop their cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills. Early instruction is essential as it lays the foundation for a child's future learning and growth. It facilitates the development of skills such as language, problem solving, creativity and social interaction, and encourages progress in fine and gross motor skills.

Rural areas bear the brunt of the difficulties, for example, research says that the distance between homes and educational facilities is considerable. Therefore, this makes regular access to early education difficult, especially for younger children. Add to this the difficulties in areas that have been affected by armed conflict, which have generated forced displacement and a lack of security that prevents access to education, taking into account that insecurity considerably affects children's regular attendance at educational programs. There are also studies showing that regions affected by conflict also tend to receive fewer resources for education, which limits the ability to offer quality services.

However, urban areas with outbreaks of marginalization, poverty and socioeconomic inequality prevent access to early education. Low-income families, for example, cannot afford private early education programs and public services are insufficient. Early education emphasizes the importance of establishing positive relationships and promoting a sense of belonging and well-being in young children. Its main objective is to establish a solid foundation for future academic success and the general well-being of children. It recognizes the unique needs and characteristics of young children, and strives to support their comprehensive development during the critical first years of their lives. Early education is essential and represents a significant approach to having access and success during the educational path. Unfortunately, lack of access is a fundamental problem, very few regions have managed to create far-reaching initiatives and worse still, thousands of students do not have access to primary education.

School dropouts have consequences both at the level of the individual and in society as a whole. The phenomenon of school dropouts is triggered by several different factors. It is established that a person without education will have limited job opportunities. Meanwhile, with lower earning potential, school dropout is associated with low income levels. It is known that people without a high school diploma generally earn less than their peers with higher levels of education. Lack of educational qualifications can hinder career advancement and limit opportunities for better-paying jobs.

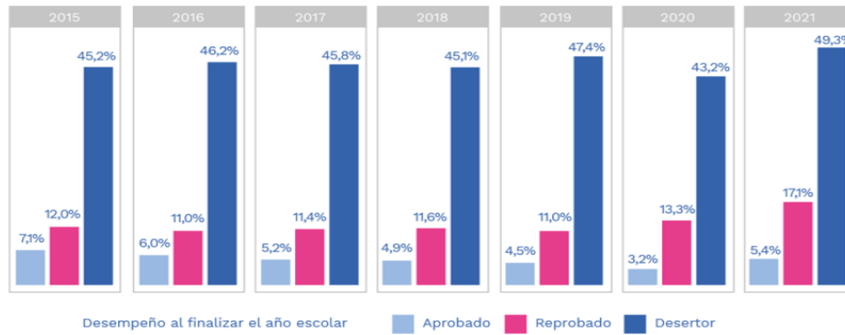


Chart IV. Taken from the Ministry of National Education 2022, “Percentage of students who did not enroll the following year”. Source: MEN, based on Simat information. 2021 figures as of November – preliminary cut-off at the end of the year.

The analysis of school dropouts in Colombia reveals an interconnection of individual, family and institutional factors. The following figure shows that academic performance is an important predictor of dropouts. Students who fail the school year are more likely to not enroll the following year. In addition, it is observed that 54% of students who drop out within the year enroll again the following year, suggesting a temporary withdrawal. Likewise, dropout is more pronounced in rural areas compared to urban areas. Although the gap has narrowed, an increase is observed between 2019 and 2020. This shows the importance of addressing regional differences and considering the specific conditions of rural areas when designing educational policies.

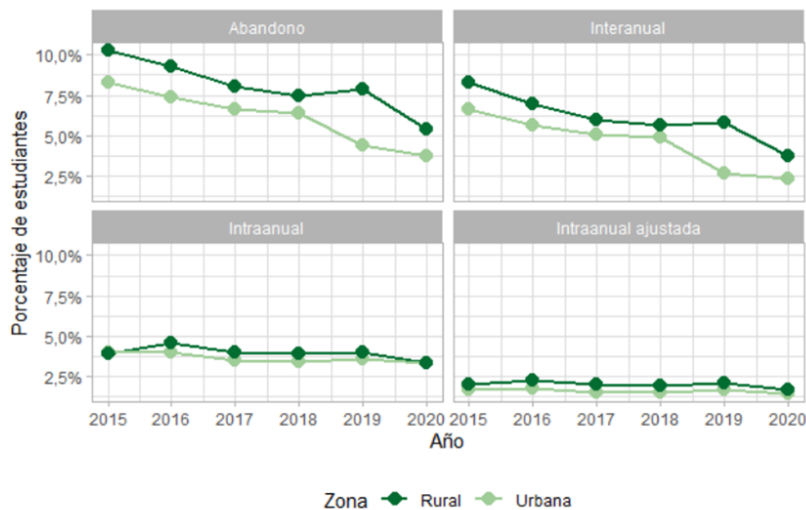


Chart V. Ministry of Education 2022, Technical Note, “Dropout indicators by area Source: Own calculations based on Simat.”

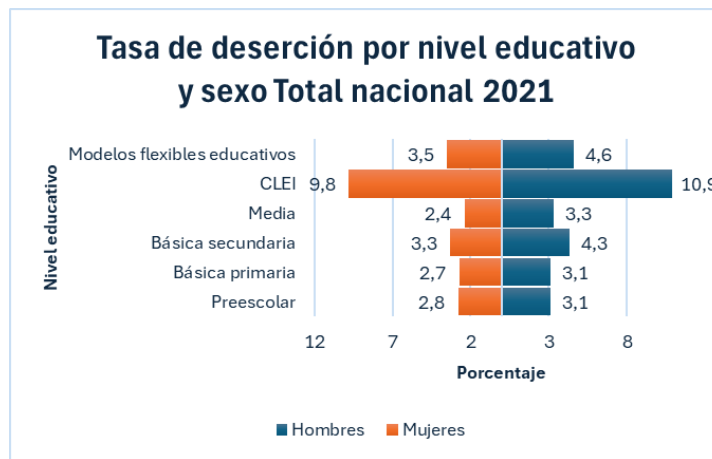


Chart VI. DANE, Formal Education - EDUC. “Dropout rate by educational level and sex, national total, 2021, men-women”.

According to the graph above, we can indicate that, for example, in the “flexible educational models” the dropout rate is 3.4% for men and 4.6% for women. As for the integrated special school cycles, the dropout rate is 9.8% for men and 10.9% for women. In the “average” the dropout rate is 2.4% for men and 3.3% for women. As for basic secondary education, the dropout rate is 3.1% for men and 3.1% for women. Finally, in preschool, the dropout rate is 2.8% for men and 3.1% for women. It can be observed that the dropout rates are higher for women at most educational levels, except in basic primary education, where the rates are equal for both sexes.

Conclusions:

The current situation of education in Colombia reflects a series of critical challenges that threaten to perpetuate inequalities and limit the development of large regions of the country. The lack of access to quality basic education in many areas, together with low academic results, the polarization between public and private education, and the high rate of school dropouts, reveal a system that requires profound and urgent reforms. In addition, the low preparation of students to face the challenges of the 21st century, such as bilingualism and digital skills, points to the need for a comprehensive change that strengthens the foundations of the educational system.

This panorama is particularly discouraging in the departments of La Guajira, Chocó, Vichada, Sucre and Córdoba, where high rates of illiteracy and multidimensional poverty limit the opportunities of thousands of children and young people. The lack of adequate infrastructure and the dispersion of rural areas create adverse conditions that make it difficult to access and remain in the educational system. This situation, combined with state neglect in disadvantaged regions, fosters an environment where phenomena such as the forced recruitment of minors

profoundly violate the rights of children, affecting their development and perpetuating cycles of violence and poverty.

To address these problems, it is essential that Colombia promote an inclusive national dialogue that involves all sectors of society. Education, understood as a tool for equity and sustainable development, requires decisive intervention by the State, supported by the international community, educational organizations and local communities. Only through constant collaboration will it be possible to close educational gaps and ensure that all children and young people, regardless of their origin or socioeconomic status, have access to quality education and development opportunities that prepare them for the future.

Likewise, addressing school dropout in Colombia demands a deep understanding of the individual, family, institutional and contextual factors that influence this phenomenon. The implementation of public policies that promote equity and inclusion, strengthening socio-emotional and academic support, is crucial for students to be able to complete their education. In this sense, regional strategies are required that respond to the specific contexts of each area, with a focus on reducing dropout rates and promoting equal opportunities.

Finally, if we aspire to a more just and prosperous country, it is imperative that education be a pillar of transformation. Investing in improving the quality of education, guaranteeing equitable access and building a safe environment for minors are essential steps to break the cycles of vulnerability and violence that affect the most disadvantaged regions. This effort must be comprehensive, continuous and committed, because only in this way can future Colombian generations be offered a horizon of hope and real opportunities.

Referencias bibliográficas

Astorga, Alfredo, et al. (2007). “Educación de calidad para todos: un asunto de derechos humanos”, UNESCO, Buenos Aires.

Ayala Santos, Rutsara, Coronel, Luz Karime, y Ayala Garcia, Erika Tatiana. “Costos, daños y consecuencias del conflicto armado en Colombia desde una mirada territorial y comunitaria.” (2023), Módulo Arquitectura CUC, vol. 31, pp.93-110.

Banco Mundial. (2019). “La crisis del aprendizaje: Estar en la escuela no es lo mismo que aprender”. Bogotá, Colombia. <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/news/immersive-story/2019/01/22/pass-or-fail-how-can-the-world-do-its-homework>

Bustelo, Mabel González. (2016). “El verdadero fin del conflicto armado: Jóvenes vulnerables, educación rural y construcción de la paz en Colombia”. Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution, Norwegian Refugee Council.

Cambio. (2022). “Así está la pirámide de la educación”, Sección educación. Bogotá, Colombia. <https://cambiocolombia.com/articulo/peso-peso-paso-paso/asi-esta-la-piramide-de-la-educacion>.

Castillo, Ángeles Gervilla. (2006). “Didáctica básica de la educación infantil: conocer y comprender a los más pequeños”. Narcea Ediciones.

Castillo-Briceño, Cristina. (2015). “Posicionando la educación inclusiva: Una forma diferente de mirar el horizonte educativo.” *Revista Educación* 39.(2).

Cobo Gómez, Juan Carlos; Andrey Geovanny Rodríguez León, y Claudia Stella Ruiz. (2023). “Análisis de los factores sociales y las razones de deserción escolar: Desafíos de la educación preescolar, básica y media en Colombia.” *Revista Economía Colombiana*. Contraloría General de la República.

De Avella, M. V. (2007). “Educación de Calidad para todos, un asunto de Derechos humanos. Una Propuesta para la Discusión sobre Políticas Educativas”. REICE: Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación, 5(3).

Defensoría del pueblo Colombia. (2022). “La alfabetización nos permite avanzar en la construcción de una sociedad igualitaria”. Bogotá, Colombia. <https://www.defensoria.gov.co/-/la-alfabetizaci%C3%B3n-nos-permite-avanzar-en-la-construcci%C3%B3n-de-una-sociedad-igualitaria>

Díaz Domínguez, Teresa, y Pedro Alfonso Alemán. (2008). “La educación como factor de desarrollo”. *Revista Virtual Universidad Católica del Norte*, no. 23, 1(15). Fundación Universitaria Católica del Norte. Medellín, Colombia.

El Espectador. (2023). “Colombia es el segundo país donde hay menos gasto público en la educación secundaria”. Sección educación. Bogotá, Colombia. <https://www.elespectador.com/educacion/colombia-es-el-segundo-pais-donde-el-gobierno-gasta-menos-en-la-educacion-secundaria/>

El Tiempo. (2021). “¿Cuántos colombianos sabemos leer y escribir?”. Bogotá, Colombia. <https://www.eltiempo.com/datos/cifras-de-analfabetismo-en-colombia-564784>

Expansión. (2024). “Colombia - Gasto público en educación.” Datosmacro. <https://datosmacro.expansion.com/estado/gasto/educacion/colombia>

Flórez López, J. R. (2022). “*Reformas educativas neogerenciales en América Latina: Las escuelas chárter frente al modelo público de educación, con especial atención a los casos de Chile y Colombia*”. [Tesis doctoral, Universidad de Salamanca].

García Mejías, Ainhoa. (2024). “Los techos de cristal en el ámbito laboral”, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. <https://burjcdigital.urjc.es/handle/10115/31455>

Garrido, Juan Fernando. (2001). “Guerra y pobreza en Colombia.” *Estudios Gerenciales* 17(81).http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0123-59232001000400006&lng=en&nrm=iso. ISSN 0123-5923.

Gass, Jamie y Chieppo, Charles. (2019). “How Massachusetts Showed the Way on Education Reform”. *Public Policy Research*. Pioneer Institute.

Gaviria, J. A. (2017). Problemas y retos de la educación rural colombiana. *Educación y ciudad*, (33).

Gutiérrez Fonseca, María Paula. (2015). “La erradicación del analfabetismo en Colombia con enfoque de género”. Repositorio Universidad del Rosario.

Lerma, Carlos Alberto. (2007). “*El derecho a la educación en Colombia.*” Buenos Aires: Flape

Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2023). “*Ante el aumento de la deserción escolar en los últimos años en Colombia, el Ministerio de Educación ha implementado estrategias para prevenir que los estudiantes abandonen las aulas*”. Bogotá, Colombia. <https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/salaprensa/Comunicados/415819:Ante-el-aumento-de-la-desercion-escolar-en-los-ultimos-anos-en-Colombia-el-Ministerio-de-Educacion-ha-implementado-estrategias-para-prevenir-que-los-estudiantes-abandonen-las-aulas>.

Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2023). “*Ante el aumento de la deserción escolar en los últimos años en Colombia, el Ministerio de Educación ha implementado estrategias para prevenir que los estudiantes abandonen las aulas*”. Bogotá, Colombia. <https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/salaprensa/Comunicados/415819:Ante-el-aumento-de-la-desercion-escolar-en-los-ultimos-anos-en-Colombia-el-Ministerio-de-Educacion-ha-implementado-estrategias-para-prevenir-que-los-estudiantes-abandonen-las-aulas>.

Montoya Ruiz, Ana Milena. (2008). “Niños y jóvenes en la guerra en Colombia: Aproximación a su reclutamiento y vinculación.” *Opinión Jurídica* 7(13).

Radio Nacional de Colombia RTVC. (2021). “Así está el panorama del analfabetismo en Colombia”. Bogotá, Colombia. <https://www.radionacional.co/actualidad/analfabetismo-en-colombia-cifras-panorama>

Restrepo, Juan Cristóbal de J. (2006). "Estándares básicos en competencias ciudadanas: una aproximación al problema de la formación ciudadana en Colombia." *Papel político* 11.(1).

Ruiz-Ramírez, Rosalva, García-Cué, José Luis, y Pérez-Olvera, María Antonia. (2014). “Causas y consecuencias de la deserción escolar en el bachillerato: Caso Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa.”. *Ra Ximhai* 10(5). 51-74.

Sanabria Vacca, Elizabeth. (2014). “La deserción escolar en el contexto rural colombiano. Caso Guateque-Boyacá”, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.

Torres, Rosa María. (1994). “Qué y cómo aprender: necesidades básicas de aprendizaje y contenidos curriculares”, Repositorio Bibliográfico Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe Etnoeducación e Interculturalidad.
<http://8.242.217.84:8080/jspui/handle/123456789/36952>

UNESCO. (Consultado el 12 de abril de 2024) “*El derecho a la educación.*” Sitio web de la UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/es/right-education>.