

History of educational management in Mexico

Education in Mexico is regulated by the Secretariat of Public Education. Education standards are set by this Ministry at all levels except in "autonomous" universities chartered by the government (e.g., UNAM). Accreditation of private schools is accomplished by a mandatory approval and registration with this institution.

The 1917 Constitution provides that education should avoid privileges of religion, and that one religion or its members may not be given preference in education over another. Religious instruction is prohibited in public schools; however, religious associations are free to maintain private schools, which receive no public funds. Proof of Mexican citizenship is required to attend public schools for free.

Mexican education is linked to its turbulent history and its ethnic and class divisions: Indians, Spanish aristocrats, criollos, and peons/mestizos (those of mixed blood). Clearly, the Catholic Church played a significant role in Mexican education during the Colonial era, which extended from first European contact in the early sixteenth century until the Mexican revolution. The Spanish governor of Cuba, Diego de Velázquez, sent expeditions to the Mexican mainland via the Yucatán Peninsula. The first Spaniards arrived in 1517 and a year later reached the Gulf coast along what is now Veracruz. Hernán Cortez then landed in 1519 with eleven ships and 550 men and succeeded in conquering the Aztecs in three years. Once Montezuma II was captured, Cortez named this land "New Spain."

Spain, like the other major colonial powers in what is now North America, provided education mainly for the ruling Aristocracy. The indigenous peoples had their traditional ways of education destroyed by the Spanish, but elements of these beliefs and methods survived through the new Mexican culture that emerged. In the Spanish colonies, including Mexico, educational services were provided by the Catholic Church. Here, the upper class and clergy were educated in the classics, while the peons and mestizos remained ignorant. The Mayan and Aztec had their own traditional ways of education, an ethnomethodological process that was primarily oral.

The population of American Indians in what is now central Mexico at the time of European contact was estimated to be 25 million. Physical genocide, wars, slavery, and disease reduced these numbers to a mere 1 million by the seventeenth century. Most Indians continued their informal verbal educational heritage and lived on pueblos, while their mestizo and lower-class counterpart campesinos resided on

ejidos (communal land holdings). Others were forced to work for the Spanish on farms and in mines. Even then, the Spanish attempted to change the communal lands into taxable ventures called encomiendas. Despite these challenges to their aboriginal culture, many of the Indian languages and traditional ways remained intact with many attributes incorporated into the large mestizo population.

Wary of the influence of Rome, the Crown, and the Holy Roman Empire, the local Spanish attempted to establish their own plantation form of government in Mexico, one that exploited the both the Indians and peasants. The Roman Catholic Church and Spanish crown, on the other hand, wanted to establish a colonial form of feudal privilege and religious dissent. Clearly, the Catholic Church was intent on cultural genocide, often building their churches on sacred sites of the aboriginal idols. The Indians revolted unsuccessfully in 1541 in the Mixton War but did manage to draw attention to their plight under the encomienda feudal system. Missions and monasteries came to replace the encomiendas as the form of local control over the indigenous population. Rural estates called haciendas surrounded these missions, and monasteries becoming self-sufficient centers of political and economic power.

Within this system, Franciscans provided the early education of the Indians and mestizo peasants, which consisted mainly of instruction in Catholicism. The Jesuits and Augustinians, on the other hand, provided the more classical education for Spanish emigrants and the criollos. Vasco de Quiroga, a liberal Catholic judge and Bishop, is credited with starting the first school for the natives, the hospital-school of Santa Fe established on the outskirts of Mexico City in 1531. Viceroy Mendoza and Bishop Zumárraga established another Indian school, the School of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, in 1536. However, with its focus on Latin, rhetoric, logic, philosophy, music, and native medicine, the school's student body changed to comprise mainly the Spanish privileged class. Nonetheless, during colonial Mexico, the small group of well-educated Indians was still held to an inferior status even by the illiterate Spaniards.

Today the Mexican educational system consists of three levels: primary, secondary, and higher education. Formal basic education encompasses preschool, elementary, and lower secondary. Basic education accounts for approximately 81 percent of the total number of students receiving school services. Federal, state, and local governments provide 93 percent of basic education, while private schools provide about 7 percent.

In 2000 there were 29,700,000 students enrolled in all levels of education. Of these, 23,612,000 were enrolled in basic education grades. According to estimates from the SEP (Public Education Secretariat), school enrollment for children aged 6 to 14 years stands at about 92.08 percent. However, only 46.68 percent of those between the ages of 15 to 19 years attend school.

The new legal framework adopted in 1993 under a new federalism continued to charge the Federal Government with the task of determining the study plans and programs for elementary, lower secondary, and teacher education for the entire country. Additional constitutional amendments made it a legal obligation for parents to send their children to elementary and lower secondary schools. Under the provisions of the 1993 General Education Law, the Federal Government, through SEP, continues to oversee the general implementation of education, but the states are given complete responsibility for administering basic education, including indigenous and special education and teacher education. Preschool education is not mandatory but is available to children between the ages of three to five. It is not necessary to attend (kindergarten) to enroll in elementary school. However, preschool education is highly recommended.

Mandatory school age is 6 to 14 years, which covers primary and lower secondary school. Elementary school is from grades one through six; lower secondary education is taught in three levels, from first to third grade. Although elementary school enrollment improved for children in the compulsory ages from 86 percent in 1990 to 92 percent in 2000, completion of elementary school for those 15 years of age and older remained low. About 70 percent of those people beyond the compulsory school age were able to complete elementary school. This percentage, however, represented an increase in graduation rates for this age group from 62 in 1990. Mexicans 15 years and older who completed secundaria (lower secondary school or middle school) or its equivalent reached 46 percent in 2000 from 36 percent in 1990.

The academic year is set by the SEP for all public and private-incorporated schools offering preschool, elementary, secondary, and teacher education. The year consists of 200 working days of classes usually beginning in the last week of August and ending in the first week of July. Preschoolers attend school for three hours every day from Monday to Friday. Primary school children spend between four and four and a half hours in class instruction every day. Students in secundaria

(middle school) spend at least seven hours per day in school. There are morning, afternoon, night, and combined class shifts.

In general, in the compulsory school grades, boys and girls are almost equally represented: males, 92 percent; females, 91 percent. However, this balance is upset in the upper grades. Even though the gap is closing, males tend to be represented in greater numbers than females, particularly in higher education. With the exception of vocational, technical, and teacher education, representation of men at all levels of education (including university undergraduate and graduate levels) is higher than women's. The official language of instruction is Spanish.

However, increasing attention is being paid to Indigenous education. Mexico recognizes 62 indigenous ethnic groups that speak more than 80 languages. These groups are found in 24 of the 31 Mexican states. More than 1 million indigenous children receive bilingual instruction at the preschool and elementary school levels; this education is offered in 72 dialects from 49 parent languages. The grading system is based on a 1 to 10 scale, with 10 being the highest and 6 the minimum passing grade.

PRIMARY EDUCATION: Nearly 7 out of 10 children receive kindergarten education. Although preschool education is not mandatory, it is an important part of basic education in Mexico. Most five-year-olds, 83 percent, attend preschool. Aside from preschool education, many government agencies offer nursery or day care services for children younger than three years of age. Here parents and infants receive educational, health, and welfare services. While 30 years ago nearly 75 percent of all students in Mexico were enrolled in elementary school, in the year 2000 there were 14,808,000 (50 percent of those eligible) students attending primary school. The expansion of basic education to include lower secondary and an increase in educational opportunities at higher levels, as well as a decrease in demographic growth in the country (from 3.4 percent in 1964 to 1.4 percent in 2000), have spread the total number of students throughout the whole educational system. Also, as a consequence of the new federalism, school administration is no longer shared by the federal and state governments. State governments manage all schools providing education.

The median age for students in elementary school is between 6 and 11 years, but more than 1.2 million children, or 7.5 percent, enrolled in primary school are older than the age of 12. About 70 percent of the population 15 years and older has

completed elementary school; however, there are 16 out of 31 states with graduation rates below the national average. For example, in the state of Chiapas, only 43.5 percent of the population 15 years of age and older has completed primary school. Although there is little variation between men and women for completion of elementary school education at the national level (72 to 69 percent, respectively), women in this age bracket in Chiapas account for only 44 percent of those who have completed the 6 years of elementary school—9.5 percentage points below men. Preschool education is offered in three modalities: general, indigenous, and community education. State governments and private institutions offer general education. Indigenous community education is provided by the SEP, and classes are taught in the children's respective languages.

Primary school is also offered in several modalities: general, bilingual-bicultural, community education, and adult education. During the 20 hours of classes per week, first and second grade pupils take Spanish; mathematics; environmental knowledge, which includes natural sciences, history, geography, and civic education; artistic education; and physical education. From the third to the sixth grade, students continue taking these courses, with the exception of environmental knowledge, in addition to natural sciences, history, geography, and civic education. The curriculum places great emphasis in reading, writing, and oral expression. In the first two grades, children spend 45 percent of class time studying Spanish. From the third to the sixth grade, they spend 30 percent of class time on this subject. For more than 40 years, students in elementary school have been receiving free texts from the national government. Also, the minimum grade for promotion is 6 based on a scale of 1 to 10.

Indigenous and community primary school attendance grew by one-third from 1990 to 2000; this type of education is offered in the poorest and most isolated regions of the country. Community education services are delivered in 95 percent of the 50,636 rural schools spread throughout Mexico. All indigenous schools receive community education services.

In Mexico there are 72,650 preschools and 99,176 primary schools. There are 155,777 teachers engaged in preschool education, while 545,717 work in primary schools. In general the rural sector tends to be less favored than urban centers when it comes to educational opportunities. An analysis of school attendance by age groups in the year 2000 illustrates this phenomenon. School attendance for children aged 6 to 14 years (the compulsory ages) in communities of fewer than

15,000 people was 89 percent, while in localities of more than 15,000 inhabitants attendance was 95 percent. For those in the 15 to 19 age bracket, attendance greatly diminished. Small communities averaged 34 percent, while larger communities registered 55 percent. For those in the 20 to 24 age bracket, school attendance was 7 percent for those in communities of fewer than 15,000 inhabitants, while 23 percent went to school in communities of more than 15,000 people.

Secondary education is divided in two levels: lower secondary, or and upper secondary education. Since 1993 secundaria has become part of compulsory basic education. Lower secondary is structured into three grades and is offered in several modalities, including general, telesecondary, and technical. This type of education is offered to children between the ages of 12 and 16 years who have completed elementary school. People older than 16 years of age can obtain secundaria education by attending secondary school for workers or for adults, two other available modalities. There are 29,007 lower secondary schools with 2,462,000 females and 2,608,000 males attending them. The teaching staff consists of 307,763 people. In 1997, the government began the distribution of free texts for this educational level in the most marginal areas of the country.

The curriculum at this level stresses the need for students to sharpen their Spanish language oral and written abilities. At the same time, mathematics is also given great attention. Secundaria students spend an average of five hours per week in language-related instruction and the same number of hours in math. First graders in lower secondary are also required to take a course entitled physics and chemistry. In the second and third grades, physics, chemistry, and biology are taught as separate courses. A further emphasis in lower secondary education is the learning of a foreign language, usually English or French. Other courses include artistic expression and appreciation, physical education, and technological education.

Distance education is offered through telesecondary. This service is offered to children in rural areas in communities of fewer than 2,500 people or where lower secondary enrollment is too low to build a school. The system began in 1968, and it has been expanded to serve communities in several Central American countries and in U.S. border communities. During the 1998-1999 school cycle, this modality of education was serving 900,000 youths. In 1998 nearly 90 percent of the children in the lower secondary age group were enrolled in these schools. The dropout rate was 9.2 percent, while the graduation rate in that year reached 76.1 percent.

The second level of secondary education is upper secondary education; this level of education involves several options and is available to those who have completed compulsory education. There are three subsystems in this category: general upper secondary, which includes open and distance upper secondary education; technical professional education, which trains qualified professional in different fields; and technological upper secondary, which offers the opportunity to obtain professional technician degrees and prepares the students to continue on to higher education. General upper secondary education is offered through bachiller colleges (CB), preparatoria schools, science and humanities colleges (CCH), and incorporated bachilleratos (incorporated to a state or federal university).

Higher education: There are six subsystems of higher education institutions in Mexico: public universities, technological institutes, technological universities, private institutions, teacher training colleges, and other public institutions. When all of them are counted, Mexico has 1,250 institutions of higher education. Traditionally, universities operated under their own organic laws and enjoyed considerable legal autonomy; however, in 1973 they were integrated into the national education system. In 1997, SEP revitalized the State Commissions for Higher Education Planning to coordinate more effectively higher education in the different regions of the country.

A pattern of an increasing number of universities and enrollment began in 1940. The country had only 8 universities in that year, increasing its number to 124 in 1980. During the 1998-1999 academic year, ANUIES (National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education) listed 213 universities. Of these, 45 are public universities, where 50 percent of the academic research in Mexico takes place. These universities enroll 52 percent of students pursuing undergraduate education and 48 percent of those pursuing a graduate degree.

There are 147 technological institutes offering higher education. The Ministry of Education (SEP) coordinates 102, while state governments coordinate the other 45. In the latter, students can choose between regular and three-year programs: two years of general education requirements and one year of specialization. There is also another group of institutions of higher education that is not part of the previous two subsystems; some of these are under the SEP and other government ministries. One percent of those pursuing bachelor's degrees and 7.5 percent of those pursuing graduate degrees attend them. Technological universities are institutions coordinated by state governments but created by federal, state and, in some instances, municipal governments. This educational modality was created in 1991 for students who want to obtain associate degrees. The length of studies is

two years. As of 1999 there were 36 technological universities in 19 states. In the subsystem of private institutions, there were 598 schools, not including teacher colleges. Private institutions are grouped into universities (168), institutes (171), and centers, schools, and other institutions (259). Accreditation for these academic institutions is issued by SEP, state governments, or other public academic institutions authorized to accredit them. Private institutions of higher education have 27.6 percent of the undergraduate enrollment and 36.5 of the graduate enrollment in Mexico.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION:

Throughout the twentieth century, literacy was of great concern to Mexican authorities. At the outset of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, only 15 percent of the population was literate. After the revolution, literacy campaigns made it possible to increase literacy rates to 37 percent in 1940. Census figures for the year 2000 indicated that more than 90 percent of the population was literate. Men and women seem to have similar rates of literacy. Literacy campaigns have continued in different parts of the country. In some instances, like in the 1960s, the most outstanding elementary school students from rural schools were trained by their own teachers to teach adults to read and write. At the end of the campaigns, many of these elementary school students were given a trip to Mexico City, where they toured the capital city and had meetings with high-level officials, including the secretary of education. At the close of the twentieth century, literacy campaigns were still implemented in parts of the country. Students from the *bachilleres* were teaching literacy courses. Although literacy rates have decreased, the absolute number of illiterate people has remained constant since 1970, at around 6,000,000 people. But one must take into consideration that population growth has increased from 35,000,000 in 1960 to nearly 100,000,000 in 2000. Illiteracy is concentrated in groups of elderly people and in isolated and dispersed communities. Indigenous groups are disproportionately affected and, within these groups, it is women who show greater rates of illiteracy than men.

In 1995 the national government released information indicating that in 1995 nearly 80 percent of indigenous women were illiterate; males between the ages of 15 and 24 years had an illiteracy rate of 3.8 percent. In 1998 the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) offered literacy, as well elementary and secondary education, to 2.6 million adults in 1998. Of these adults, 21 percent participated in literacy courses. Since 1996 a new curriculum has focused on providing adults with literacy education and their first elementary school examination.

