



Teacher Recruitment in Latin America.

Global Trends. Regional Challenges.

Education
& Development

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Summary

Latin America has made huge progress in guaranteeing universal access to primary school education over the past decade. As more students enroll in primary and secondary education, the need to recruit additional teachers has also increased. Moreover, changing demands in the global labor market and minority children participating and persisting in formal schooling have increased the need for a highly-qualified and specialized teacher labor force. The existing teacher labor force in Latin America is inadequate to meet these growing demands. Many teachers, particularly those working in public schools, come from impoverished backgrounds and have low levels of education. Teaching is by and large considered a low-status career and teacher education institutions provide insufficient preparation for the challenges teachers face in their classrooms.

This brief outlines some of the main challenges to teacher recruitment in Latin America today, focusing on teacher salaries and working conditions. In addition, the brief considers the qualities and characteristics of work in disadvantaged schools and how they might dissuade prospective teachers. The brief is fully based on reports prepared in the framework of PREAL's Working Group on the Teaching Profession, UNESCO's Strategic Project on the Teaching Profession and OAS Inter American Teacher Education Network.

Teacher Salaries.

International research on teacher pay suggests that it may influence whether an individual chooses to enter the teaching profession, where he or she chooses to work (Murnane et al., 1991) and the quality of teaching (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007). Popular perception in Latin America is that teacher salaries are low and that dissuades individuals from entering the profession. Some researchers suggest that increasing salaries in Latin America could draw higher-quality candidates into the profession and reduce the need for teachers to work double shifts or multiple jobs (Bennell, 2004; Villegas-Reimers, 1998).

A recent study of teacher pay in Latin America concludes that most teachers in the region earn an hourly salary on par or higher than non-teachers (Castro & Ioschpe, 2008). The study examines teachers' salaries in 17 Latin American nations. The authors come to this conclusion after comparing factors such as total hours worked, vacation time and benefits such as tenure, while maintaining that teachers and non-teachers alike spend additional time outside of their regularly scheduled work times on unremunerated job-related activities.

Working Conditions.

In addition to the perception that teachers receive low salaries, the working conditions in many Latin American public schools are challenging.

In his report on the importance of working conditions in Canadian schools, ***Teacher Working Conditions That Matter: Evidence for Change, Leithwood (2006)*** identified three categories of working conditions that tend to influence teachers' thoughts and feelings, which in turn influence their actions in the classroom.

These categories include: a) school working conditions; b) classroom working conditions; and c) external government policies and social trends. Classroom working conditions may range from teacher-student ratio to discipline to resources available for instruction. School working conditions include qualities such as principal leadership or autonomy. External factors, such as federal testing or accountability policies, may also influence teacher working conditions (Leithwood, 2008).

In an OECD review of the literature on teacher demand and supply, several salient working conditions that might influence teacher satisfaction included:

a) **Class size, number of classes taught, teaching load;** b) **Percentage of class time spent in areas outside of a teacher’s certification area;** c) **Flexibility to take temporary leaves;** d) **Composition of the student body, composition of the faculty;** e) **Percentage of time spent in out-of-classroom activities;** d) **Safety;** e) **Quality of facilities;** f) **Quality of instructional materials;** g) **Opportunities for participation in professional development activities;** and h) **Opportunities for collaboration and decision-making.** Unfortunately, many of these characteristics—such as the influence of materials on teacher satisfaction—have not been investigated by the empirical literature (OECD, 2002).

Class Size.

In many Latin American countries, classroom working conditions vary considerably. Although research on the influence of class size on student achievement in Latin America is inconclusive (Vegas & Petrow, 2008), some incipient international literature on the influence of class size on teachers suggests a link that may negatively impact teacher recruitment or retention (Bohnstedt & Stecher, 2002; Pas, Stinebricker, 1999). In their longitudinal study of public school teachers in Texas, Kirby, Berends and Naftel (1999) found that large class sizes were related to higher teacher attrition. Likewise, Mont and Rees (1996) found that class size was related to teacher turnover.

In Latin America, average primary school teachers do not face especially large class sizes; in fact, the pupil-teacher ratio in 2007 was approximately 24 to 1 (UNESCO, 2010). However, teachers in some countries face larger class sizes: Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua all have pupil-teacher ratios around 30 to 1 or more. Moreover, class size is not static across all types of schools and geographic regions; urban schools are likely to have larger class sizes than rural schools.

In those countries and environments, class size may be viewed as a negative working condition that can dissuade prospective teachers from entering the profession.

Autonomy.

Research suggests that teachers are most satisfied when given autonomy to do their work (Guarino et al., 2004). Perception of autonomy is one factor that is likely to influence teacher recruitment and retention.

In 2001, with higher levels of autonomy reported had higher levels of autonomy also had lower levels of teacher attrition. In her study of first-year teachers, Weiss (1999) also found that perceived teacher autonomy was one of the main factors predicting whether teachers believed it was worthwhile to give their best effort. Similarly, Ingersoll and Alsalam (1997) found that teacher autonomy was related with teachers’ reports of commitment to the profession. In schools with greater autonomy, superintendents reported lower levels of teacher turnover (Seyfarth & Bost, 1986). Finally, Shen (1997) found that teachers who remained in the same school over the course of two academic years were also more likely to perceive they had influence over the school.

By some measures, many Latin American teachers likely possess considerable autonomy. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) administers a principal survey that examines multiple indicators of school and teacher autonomy. For example, when asked whether principals or teachers have considerable responsibility to choose course content, more than half of respondents in Colombia, Chile, Brazil and Argentina responded yes (See below). In Brazil and Argentina, the percentage of respondents answering in the affirmative was higher than the OECD average. In contrast, a small percentage of respondents in Uruguay and Mexico reported that principals or teachers possessed this type of autonomy.

Principal and Teacher Autonomy in Latin America

Country	Autonomy (%)
OECD Average	65.93
Uruguay	11.9
Mexico	13.7
Colombia	54.31
Chile	59.47
Brazil	74.33

Standardized Assessments.

In an effort to improve educational achievement, Latin American governments are increasingly employing educational accountability policies. One of the main strategies for promoting accountability has been to implement or participate in standardized assessments of educational achievement. Over the past 20 years, most education systems in Latin America have established national and/or state-level educational assessment systems to gauge system performance and monitor change over time (Ferrer, 2006; Vegas & Petrow, 2007). Also, more and more Latin American countries are participating in regional and international assessments such as SIMCE, PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS (Ravela et al., 2008).

While there are numerous benefits to the increasing focus on accountability and standardized assessments in Latin American educational systems, a potential negative outcome of these movements is to make the teaching profession less attractive. Prospective teachers value teaching in part due to the intrinsic reasons, such as a desire to be creative or deeply explore a subject matter through teaching. An increasing emphasis on standardized assessments, some might argue, limits opportunities for creativity in content and instructional practices.

Student Discipline.

Problems with student discipline also appear to influence teacher retention. In a study of 82 teachers who had left a single U.S. school district, Berry, Noblitt and Hare found that one of the primary explanations given for teachers' exits included disciplinary problems in the classroom. Problems with student discipline were also cited as a main factor for teacher dissatisfaction in Hounshell and Griffin's survey of 37 teachers in North Carolina (1989). Also, when teachers felt they had more control over disciplinary policies in their schools, they were more likely to report they intended to remain in teaching (Weiss, 1999).

Working conditions in Latin American schools are not limited to issues of class size, autonomy, standardized assessment policies or student discipline. The region has a tremendous amount of ethnic, racial, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity among its schools and student populations. This diversity also contributes to radically different working environments and is likely to influence individuals' decisions about whether to become teachers and where to work.

Indigenous or Bilingual Schools.

Indigenous peoples make up a large proportion of the population in Latin America. Many of them speak an indigenous language and also make up a large proportion of school-age children. **In all, approximately 550 different languages are spoken across 21 countries in the region, making bilingual and bicultural education, and the recruitment of bilingual teachers, a pressing issue.**

The challenge of recruiting bilingual or indigenous teachers in Latin America is similar in many ways to the challenges of recruiting teachers of diverse ethnic or linguistic backgrounds in high-income nations with increasing immigrant and minority populations, such as the United States. U.S. research emphasizes the importance of recruiting a diverse teacher population so that teachers can "communicate with students within the context of their cultures and/or native language" and "bring positive images and varied perspectives to their students" (Talbert-Johnson, 2001; SREB, 2003 as cited in Branch & Kritsonis, 2006)

Educational indicators conclude that indigenous schoolchildren post lower enrollment rates, higher dropout rates and lower completion and performance rates than their non-indigenous counterparts. While there are numerous factors that contribute to these data, a lack of bilingual/bicultural teachers is considered a major obstacle to the education of indigenous children.

Rural Schools.

Recruiting teachers, especially high-quality teachers to teach in rural schools is an enormous challenge for Latin America. Although the exact number of rural teachers and schools across the region is unknown, some countries—even those that are increasingly urban—continue to have significant numbers of rural schools. For example, approximately half of all public schools in Brazil are rural and 59 percent of those are made up of multi-grade classrooms, where students of varying ages and abilities are taught together in the same class (INEP, 2007).

Teaching in rural areas presents unique challenges and working conditions for teachers. First, students residing in rural areas tend to come from households with lower socioeconomic levels than those residing in urban areas. **In urban areas, the percentage of those living in poverty is much lower; approximately 40 percent live in poverty and 10 percent live in extreme poverty (FAO, 2004). Thus, living and teaching in rural areas in likely means**

working in under resourced schools (Little, 2006).

The working conditions in multi grade schools are also challenging. Teachers must plan and deliver instruction to students of varying ages and abilities, increasing their workload. Differentiating instruction to students of different ability levels requires creative and sophisticated instructional practices, meaning that teachers must be prepared to instruct students of both varying and low abilities. For these reasons, it is common for teachers working in rural areas to transfer to urban schools as soon as possible (Montero et al., 2000).

Urban Schools.

Latin America has become increasingly urban. More than 75 percent of the region's population. Proportionally, more students in many Latin American countries are enrolled in urban schools than in rural schools. Thus, the demand for teachers in urban areas is high.

At first glance, it would appear that teacher recruitment in urban areas is a less pressing issue than recruitment in rural areas. However, despite the appeal of living and working in urban areas, the quality of teachers working in most urban, public schools in the region remains inadequate. For example, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, which includes the nation's second most populous city, 30 percent of teachers do not possess higher education (INEP, 2009).

Moreover, teachers in urban schools face numerous obstacles that are less likely in rural schools. Violence, drug use, and prostitution—all more common in urban areas—are cited as the source of student absence and other challenges in urban schools (Educar Para Crescer, 2008). The prevalence of these challenges in urban, Latin American schools may also be likely to dissuade new teacher candidates from entering the profession.

Science and Math Teachers.

Improving student achievement in the disciplines of science and math is a growing concern for Latin American schools, particularly at the secondary level. **Secondary students from Brazil, Mexico and Uruguay who participated on the 2003 Programme in International Student Assessment (PISA) of math, science and literacy performed considerably lower in these areas than the OECD average (OECD, 2003).** Although there are numerous explanations for the differences found in student achievement, a shortage of qualified teachers in math and science is an important one. On average, a higher percentage of principals Latin American countries participating in the PISA assessment believed that their schools' capacity for instruction was limited because of a shortage of math and science teachers than among OECD nations overall.

Impact of Shortage of Math and Science Teachers on Instruction in Select Latin American Countries (%)

Country	Shortage of Math Teachers	Shortage of Science Teachers
Mexico	35.03	35.36
Brazil	32.88	29.11
Uruguay	55.5	42.96
OECD Average	22.07	21.08

Source: PISA Data, OECD, 2010.

FINAL REMARKS

Latin America is facing numerous challenges to teacher recruitment. Projections indicate that the region needs to slightly increase its primary school teacher supply; in addition, the quality of the teacher supply needs to increase. Latin American schools will likely need teachers who have special skills in the areas of science, math and indigenous languages. At the same time, perceived low salaries and working conditions in many of the region's schools present challenges to teacher recruitment.

Although research on teacher pay in the region is inconclusive in determining whether teachers in fact earn less than individuals in other professions, the general perception is that they do. This likely dissuades new entrants into the profession.

Information on working conditions in Latin American schools is more conclusive; teachers may face environments where there is little autonomy, problems with student discipline, students who do not speak the language of instruction and increasing pressures on teachers to meet standards of accountability. These factors may also complicate teacher recruitment.

This brief is available on line in www.preal.org/Library/Publications and OAS Collaboratory for the Teaching Profession www.oas.org/iten. Facts, figures and trends are based on a draft policy paper prepared by Carol DeShano da Silva for PREAL's Working Group on the Teaching Profession. Published as a PREAL Paper in Spanish only, 2011. Marcela Gajardo, Sociologist and Educator, is Cofounder of PREAL and Co Director until January 2013.