Educational policies and academic performance in Latin America*

Políticas educativas y el desempeño académico en América Latina

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Abstract

The study arose from the need to understand the influence of educational policies on the academic performance of high school students in Latin America. Its main objective was to determine the relationship between these policies and academic performance, adopting a quantitative and correlational approach within the positivist paradigm. The methodology included surveying 100 teachers from five countries: Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. Validated by 5 experts in the educational field, the reliability was 0.988 (highly reliable) applied virtually. The results revealed a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.619 between educational policies and academic performance, indicating a moderate correlation. The statistical significance of the p-value, which was 0.000, confirms that this correlation is significant at the 0.05 level, ruling out the possibility that it is a result of chance. The findings suggest that there is a relevant connection between educational policies and students' academic performance in the region.

Keywords: educational policies, academic performance, Latin American context.

Resumen

El estudio surgió de la necesidad de comprender la influencia de las políticas educativas en el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes de bachillerato en América Latina. Su objetivo principal fue determinar la relación entre estas políticas y el desempeño académico, adoptando un enfoque cuantitativo y correlacional dentro del paradigma positivista. La metodología incluyó la aplicación de una encuesta a 100 docentes de cinco países: Chile, Perú, Ecuador, Colombia y Venezuela. Validado por 5 expertos en área educativa, la confiabilidad fue de ,988 (altamente confiable), aplicado de manera virtual. Los resultados revelaron un coeficiente de correlación de Spearman de 0,619 entre las políticas educativas y el desempeño académico, indicando una correlación moderada. La significación estadística del valor de p, que fue de 0,000, confirma que esta correlación es significativa al nivel de 0,05, descartando la posibilidad de que sea resultado del azar. Los hallazgos sugieren que existe una conexión relevante entre las políticas educativas y el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes en la región.

Palabras clave: políticas educativas, desempeño académico, contexto latinoamericano. .

Introduction

Educational policies are directly related to students' academic performance. This is how policies that ensure access to education improve the quality of education and reduce educational inequalities, having the potential to enhance students' academic performance, achieve optimal results, and academic persistence until the end of the school century.



In this regard, Garzón-Baquero (2023) argues that, in any educational system, educational policies are responsible for ensuring equitable access to education, ensuring that all boys and girls have the opportunity to access quality education, regardless of their social, economic, or cultural

background. This aspect is fundamental for both individual and social development. Additionally, they have the potential to improve educational quality. Likewise, this improvement is achieved through investments in education, curriculum reforms, strengthening teacher training, and continuous student assessment. In this way, the aim is to raise educational standards overall.

Thus, Atencia (2023) believes that the importance of these policies lies in their ability to reduce educational inequalities, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to achieve educational success, regardless of their social background. This indicates that they are relevant for the sustainable development of countries and the realization of the fundamental right to education for all individuals, allowing them to reach their full potential and contribute to the progress of their communities.

In this sense, it is important to highlight specific examples of how these policies can positively impact society, i.e., those that ensure access to education contribute to the reduction of poverty and inequality. For Fuentes-Salazar (2023), those that improve educational quality drive economic growth and social development, while those that reduce educational inequalities promote peace and social cohesion. However, it is essential that educational policies are carefully designed and implemented to achieve effectiveness and avoid negative impacts.

Hence, Mora-Rosales et al. (2023) point out that, in various regions of the world, there are countries whose educational policies have left a positive mark on students' academic performance. One of the most notable examples is Finland, which boasts one of the most successful educational systems globally. This achievement is attributed to policies such as free and compulsory education, the outstanding qualification of teachers, and the implementation of continuous assessments for students, which have contributed to achieving high levels of educational equity.

Similarly, according to Byun et al. (2023), another emblematic case is that of South Korea, whose rapid economic growth in recent decades has had education as a decisive factor. Through deliberate educational policies, such as significant investment in the education sector, curriculum reform, and improvement of teacher training, the country has managed to raise the quality of education and improve students' academic performance.

According to Gopinathan & Lee (2018), stands out as another example of success in educational policies, as this country has achieved outstanding levels of academic performance through the implementation of policies that include compulsory and free education, demanding academic standards, and standardized assessments. The combination of these elements has contributed to the sustained success of its educational system.

According to De Sousa & Nunes (2023), educational policies in Latin America have had a complex and uneven development in recent decades. Overall, these policies have focused on ensuring access to education, improving the quality of education, and reducing educational inequalities. According to Barria-Herrera & Zurita-Garrido (2023), access to education has improved significantly in recent decades. Currently, most boys and girls in the region have access



to primary and secondary education. However, there are still challenges regarding access to education in rural areas, for students with disabilities, and for boys and girls from minority groups.

According to Gavaldón & Ambrosy (2023), the quality of education in Latin America has been a constant concern. The results of international assessments show that students in Latin America have lower academic performance than students in other developed countries. In recent years, governments in the region have implemented a series of policies to improve the quality of education. These policies include curriculum reform, improving teacher training, and continuous student assessment.

Within this context, Lule-Uriarte *et al.* (2023) point out that educational inequalities in the region are significant, as students from poor families are less likely to access education, complete secondary education, and achieve high academic performance.

Based on all of the above, the present study aimed to determine the relationship between educational policies and the academic performance of high school students in Latin America. It is worth noting that, in this study, no attempt was made to make a comparison or a detailed analysis by country, but rather to consider a sample of five countries in Latin America to establish the relationship between the variables studied and provide a reference for the region.

Methodology

The study was grounded within the procedures inherent to the positivist paradigm, adopting a quantitative approach. Methodologically, this paradigm, according to Hernández et al. (2014), is characterized by its orientation towards the collection and analysis of quantifiable data, with the aim of explaining phenomena through the application of statistical methods and the identification of numerical patterns. This approach, as defined by Acosta (2023), is distinguished by its commitment to exploring and understanding phenomena through the measurement and quantification of variables, focusing on obtaining objective and verifiable data.

In this context, the choice of the positivist paradigm implies a rigorous and structured perspective, where research is conducted based on the search for regularities and causal relationships that can be expressed quantitatively. Statistical tools thus become fundamental elements for analyzing and generalizing the results obtained, allowing for a more precise and objective approach to understanding the phenomenon under study.



The grounding in this paradigm reflects the intention to address the research object from an objective and empirical perspective, aiming to identify patterns and regularities through statistical analysis of frequencies. Hence, the quantitative approach of the positivist paradigm provides a methodological framework that allows for a more precise and structured evaluation of phenomena, contributing to the generation of scientific knowledge based on measurable and observable data.

Additionally, it was typified as correlational because it seeks to measure the relationship between educational policies and the academic performance of high school students. As Hernández et al. (2014) point out, it is a type of research design that focuses on the relationship between two or more variables without intervening or manipulating any of them. The main objective is to determine if there is an association or correlation between the variables and, if so, the nature and strength of that relationship.

The sample used in the study consisted of a group of 100 teachers from various countries, including Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela, evenly distributed with 20 participants from each country. Participant selection was carried out through the LinkedIn social media platform, where teachers were contacted and invited to participate in the study. To collect the necessary information, an online form, also known as a questionnaire, consisting of 36 items designed according to the dimensions and indicators established in the study framework, was used.

The questionnaire addressed various areas relevant to the research objectives, covering specific dimensions considered essential for understanding the topic under study. The included items provided detailed information about the experiences, perceptions, and practices of teachers regarding the variables of interest. In addition to using SPSS software, Version 21, for data processing, a detailed analysis of measures of central tendency and dispersion was conducted to better understand the distribution of the data. This analysis included relative and percentage frequencies, as well as inferential statistics to establish the level of correlation between the variables.

Results

Below are the tables detailing the frequency and correlational results of the educational policy and academic performance variables.

Table 1
Teachers' Perception of Educational Policies in Latin America

Levels	Ensuring access to education		Improving the quality of education		Reducing educational inequalities	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Poor	4	4,0	86	86,0	85	85,0
Fair	84	84,0	4	4,0	5	5,0
Effective	2	2,0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Authors' own elaboration (2024).

The Table 1 provides a detailed overview of teachers' perceptions regarding educational policies in Latin America. In terms of *Ensuring Access to Education*, the results reveal a level of effectiveness that falls within a range considered fair. 84% of the respondents indicate that these policies



have had a moderate impact, while 4% believe their effectiveness has been poor, and only 2% consider it to be effective.

When addressing the topic of *Improving the Quality of Education*, the outlook is challenging, as a significant 86% of teachers expressed that the implemented improvements have been poor, highlighting a widespread concern in this aspect. On the other hand, 4% consider these improvements to be fair.

Regarding the task of *Reducing Educational Inequalities*, the results reflect a prevailing perception of deficiency among teachers, as 85% believe that the implemented policies have been poor in effectively addressing this challenge, while only 5% think they have been fair in this regard.

These findings underscore the need for critical analysis and possible reformulation of educational policies in the region. Concern for educational quality and the reduction of inequalities stands out as decisive areas that require immediate attention and effective strategies to achieve substantial improvements in the Latin American educational system.

Table 2
Academic Performance Indicators

Levels	School Attendance		Participation in Activities		Retention Rate	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Poor	70	70	30	30	90	90
Fair	20	20	60	60	10	10
Effective	10	10	10	10	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Authors' own elaboration (2024).

Table 2 presents in detail the indicators of academic performance, offering an insightful view on school attendance and student participation in activities, as perceived by teachers in Latin American countries. The results highlight notable patterns that deserve analysis and reflection.

Regarding school attendance, it is observed that 70% of the surveyed teachers consider this indicator to be crucial and rate it as poor. Only 20% classify it as fair, and just 10% perceive it as efficient. This trend raises questions about potential underlying factors that may be affecting students' regular attendance, which could have significant implications for their academic performance.



As for student participation in activities, 60% of the teachers rate it as fair, indicating room for improvement in this aspect. Thirty percent of the respondents perceive it as poor, suggesting significant concern regarding students' involvement in activities beyond the core curriculum. Only 10% consider participation to be efficient, highlighting the need for strategies to encourage

greater student engagement in these activities.

Finally, concerning the retention rate, 90% of the teachers evaluate it as poor, while only 10% consider it fair. These results raise questions about the educational policies and practices that may be contributing to low student retention, which could have long-term implications for access to and success in education.

All this indicates that the indicators of academic performance highlight areas of critical attention that could benefit from specific interventions and strategies to improve school attendance, participation in extracurricular activities, and retention rate, aiming to promote a more effective and enriching educational environment.

Table 3
Correlation Coefficient of Variables

			Educational Policies	Academic Performance
Spearman's Rho	Educational Policies	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,619
		Sig. (bilateral)		,000
		N	100	100
	Academic Performance	Correlation Coefficient	,619	1,000
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.000	
		N	100	100

Note: Author's own elaboration (2024).

Table 3 shows that there is a positive and significant correlation between educational policies and academic performance. This means that countries with stronger educational policies also have students with better academic performance. Hence, the Spearman's correlation coefficient for educational policies and academic performance is 0.619**. This coefficient is considered a moderate correlation.

Furthermore, the statistical significance of the p-value for the correlation between educational policies and academic performance is 0.000. This value indicates that the correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that the correlation is not likely to be due to chance. This evidence indicates that there is a positive and significant correlation between educational policies and academic performance. This means that educational policies have a significant impact on students' academic performance.

Discussion

When contrasting the results of the study with some theories on educational policies, Arco et



al. (2023) point out that when educational policies are designed to ensure access to education, they are often implemented through a set of measures that address various barriers that could hinder individuals' participation in the educational system.

It is thus that Irrazabal-Bohórquez et al. (2023) highlight that the adoption of free and compulsory education is established as a fundamental pillar, eliminating economic barriers that could prevent access to education, especially for children and families with low income. This measure aims to ensure that all members of society have the opportunity to access basic education.

Additionally, Pastore (2023) asserts that scholarship programs and financial aid constitute a strategy to reduce economic disparities and facilitate the participation of those students who may face financial challenges to continue their education. These programs seek to alleviate the costs associated with tuition, educational materials, and other related expenses, enabling more individuals to access educational opportunities.

According to Dussel & Williams (2023), accessible school infrastructure also plays a relevant role. The construction and maintenance of schools located in easily accessible areas, as well as the provision of school transportation in remote regions, contribute to ensuring that education is physically accessible to the population. Moreover, adapting facilities for students with disabilities promotes inclusion and equal opportunities.

Therefore, Ornelas (2020) emphasizes that promoting inclusive and diverse policies constitutes another key measure since addressing the needs of specific groups, such as people with disabilities, indigenous communities, or ethnic minorities, involves adapting educational programs to address diverse realities and ensure that education is truly accessible to all.

Finally, according to Bey et al. (2023), flexibility in schedules and study modalities emerges as a key strategy to address logistical challenges, as providing flexible options benefits working adults, single mothers, and those with particular responsibilities, allowing greater participation in educational programs. Hence, Escudero (2023) believes that these measures work in harmony to create an inclusive and accessible educational environment, ensuring that education is an achievable right for the entire population.

Continuing with the analysis of the study's indicators, Mansutti *et al.* (2023) state that educational policies aimed at improving the quality of education implement various strategies with the aim of raising academic standards and providing more effective learning experiences. According to Dorado & Benavides (2023), one of the fundamental measures is investing in the training and professional development of teachers since providing continuous training opportunities enables educators to stay updated with the most effective educational methodologies, incorporating new pedagogical strategies and innovative approaches into their practices.

According to Durán et al. (2015), the periodic review and updating of school curricula constitute another essential strategy for improving educational quality. Ensuring that the contents are alig-

ned with current needs and demands of the labor market guarantees that students acquire relevant skills and are prepared for the challenges of the 21st century. Additionally, the introduction of educational technologies and digital resources can enrich the learning process, providing students with more interactive and personalized experiences.

According to Gavaldón & Ambrosy (2023), continuous assessment of student performance and constructive feedback are fundamental elements for improving the quality of education. In this regard, Irrazabal-Bohórquez et al. (2023) highlight that the implementation of formative assessment systems allows teachers to adapt their teaching methods according to the individual needs of students, identifying areas for improvement, and strengthening acquired skills and knowledge.

Likewise, according to Palencia & Verdugo (2023), fostering the participation of the educational community also contributes significantly to improving educational quality. Involving parents, guardians, and the community at large in the educational process creates a supportive environment that positively impacts students' academic performance. Moreover, establishing effective feedback and communication mechanisms between the school and the community can strengthen collaboration and commitment.

In this line of thought, Reiban & Jiménez (2023) consider that improving the quality of education involves a combination of factors, from teacher training to curriculum updates, the integration of educational technologies, continuous assessment, and community participation. Therefore, these collaborative measures seek to create a dynamic and ever-evolving educational environment, preparing students to face emerging challenges and opportunities in their educational journey and beyond.

According to Rivera (2023), educational policies aimed at reducing educational inequalities adopt a comprehensive approach to ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, gender, ethnicity, or geographical location, have equal opportunities and access to quality education. In this regard, Pérez (2023) points out that one of the fundamental strategies is the implementation of inclusion and equity programs that address existing disparities. This implies identifying and eliminating systemic barriers that may disproportionately affect certain groups, ensuring that all students have access to appropriate resources and support.

Taking into account this discursive analysis, Vázquez (2023) argues that the equitable allocation of educational resources is essential to address economic disparities among educational institutions, as this ensures that schools located in disadvantaged areas receive additional funding and resources to counteract inherent inequalities in the educational system. Additionally, the implementation of school feeding and transportation programs can address logistical barriers that may affect students in disadvantaged situations.

According to Edwards et al. (2023), attention to cultural and linguistic diversity is key to reducing educational inequalities. Thus, developing inclusive curricula and providing specific support for



students whose mother tongue is not the predominant one in the school environment ensures that all students have access to quality education, regardless of their cultural background.

For Barria & Zurita (2023), the implementation of measures to ensure accessibility to education for people with disabilities is also fundamental. Adapting facilities, providing accessible educational materials, and offering specific support ensure that students with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate and learn effectively.

Meanwhile, Fuentes (2023) considers that promoting gender equity in education is another fundamental component because adopting policies that foster equal opportunities for girls and boys, and implementing strategies to address gender discrimination, contribute to reducing gender-based educational disparities.

Therefore, according to Gopinathan & Lee (2018), reducing educational inequalities involves an integrated approach that addresses various dimensions, from resource allocation to addressing cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity. These policies seek to create an equitable educational environment that ensures that every student, regardless of their context, can reach their full potential and contribute fully to society.

Within this context, Mora et al. (2023) assert that educational policies play an important role in promoting school attendance, as they establish regulations and conditions that directly and indirectly shape students' participation in the educational system, ensuring universal access and free education by eliminating economic barriers, thus ensuring that all children have the opportunity to access education, regardless of their financial resources. Additionally, Rosas (2023) highlights that the implementation of financial support programs, such as scholarships and economic aid, acts as a highly relevant incentive for low-income families, facilitating regular attendance by reducing economic inequalities.

According to Garzón (2023), school infrastructure and accessibility are also crucial areas in educational policies that affect attendance. This is because ensuring that schools are located in accessible areas and providing school transportation in remote regions helps overcome logistical and geographical obstacles that could hinder regular attendance.

Simultaneously, Atencia (2023) points out that awareness campaigns and community engagement supported by specific policies positively influence attendance by fostering a shared understanding of the importance of education and creating an environment that values and supports students' regular attendance.



Taking into account Atencia's ideas (2023), school feeding programs, supported by specific policies, also play a vital role in school attendance by providing nutritious meals that can act as an additional incentive for regular participation, especially in communities where nutrition is a determining factor.

Furthermore, Fuentes (2023) emphasizes the idea that inclusive policies that address the needs of students with disabilities and promote equal opportunities contribute significantly to attendance by ensuring that schools are equipped to meet diverse needs and facilitate the participation of all students in the educational process. All of this indicates that these educational policies form a comprehensive framework that seeks not only to facilitate access but also to promote continuous and meaningful participation in education.

From Atencia's perspective (2023), participation in activities is closely related to educational policies, being a basic component to enrich students' educational experience. Because educational policies that promote participation in extracurricular activities are often oriented towards ensuring inclusion and equity. That is, these policies aim to ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background or abilities, have access to a variety of activities that complement their holistic development.

Continuing along this line of thought, De Sousa & Nunes (2023) believe that participation in academic activities aligns with the vision of educational policies that seek to foster students' social and emotional development. This is because interaction in activities such as clubs, sports, or artistic activities is considered fundamental for cultivating social skills, teamwork, and leadership, key aspects of student development that go beyond academic boundaries.

Additionally, Barria-Herrera & Zurita-Garrido (2023) argue that educational policies can be geared towards identifying and supporting specific talents and skills of students. This highlights that participation in academic and extracurricular activities offers opportunities for students to explore and develop their individual interests, whether in sports, cultural, scientific, or artistic areas. Therefore, policies that encourage this diversity of options contribute to strengthening the connection between students and their individual passions.

Similarly, Joiko (2023) posits that participation in school activities is also integrated into the framework of educational policies that promote holistic education because these policies recognize the importance of going beyond basic academic teaching, and extracurricular activities provide opportunities for personal growth, vocational exploration, and the development of multifaceted skills.

Finally, Chen-Quesada *et al.* (2023) suggest that some policies may incorporate incentives for participation in extracurricular activities as part of broader strategies to improve attendance and academic performance. Additionally, Atencia (2023) believes that recognitions, scholarships, or additional academic credits can be offered as incentives, thus encouraging student participation in these activities.

In this vein, Martínez (2023) highlights that participation in extracurricular or academic activities not only benefits from educational policies but also contributes to the fulfillment of the broader objectives of an educational system that seeks to holistically nurture students and prepare them for life's challenges and opportunities.



Chaves et al. (2023) assert that educational policies play a fundamental role in influencing student retention rates by establishing guidelines and strategies that address key factors affecting educational continuity. Firstly, some policies incorporate early intervention programs that seek to identify and address potential academic, emotional, or social challenges that could be precursors to dropout. These strategies aim to prevent obstacles before they become significant barriers to retention.

Similarly, Atencia (2023) points out that policies ensuring equitable access to educational resources and additional support significantly contribute to retention. This may include allocating additional funds for schools in disadvantaged areas, as well as implementing mentoring programs and counseling services that strengthen individualized support for students.

For Lagos (2023), flexibility in educational pathways is another dimension addressed by educational policies, allowing educational programs to be adapted to the individual needs of students. The introduction of flexible education options, distance learning, and credit recovery programs provide students with the opportunity to adjust their educational trajectory, thereby reducing the likelihood of dropout.

Similarly, García (2023) emphasizes the idea that policies promoting inclusion and addressing student diversity also play a significant role in retention. Adapting educational programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities and addressing cultural and linguistic barriers contributes to creating a more inclusive and welcoming educational environment.

Furthermore, for Vázquez (2023), socio-emotional support programs supported by specific policies positively impact retention by prioritizing the well-being of students. Providing psychological support services and promoting a safe and positive school environment are elements that can influence students' decisions to stay in school.

It is thus that Chen et al. (2023) consider educational policies to play an integral role in addressing various dimensions affecting student retention, from early detection of challenges to the creation of inclusive educational environments and the provision of necessary supports. Meanwhile & Atencia (2023) believes that these policies ultimately seek to create conducive conditions for students to continue their education effectively and reduce dropout rates.

Conclusions



Based on the results presented, it is concluded that educational policies play an important role in students' academic performance, demonstrating that countries with stronger educational policies also exhibit more prominent academic performance. The Spearman correlation coefficient, which stands at 0.619, indicates a moderate correlation between educational policies and academic performance, suggesting that changes in educational policies are associated with variations in academic performance.

The statistical significance of the p-value, which is recorded as 0.000, confirms that the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, ruling out the possibility that the observed relationship is due to chance. These conclusions have far-reaching implications for the formulation of public policies and educational strategies, as they provide governments with a basis for designing policies that positively impact students' academic performance.

All of this indicates that investment in education is required, ensuring equity in access to education, improving the quality of teaching, and conducting regular assessments of academic performance. The implementation of these recommendations could significantly contribute to the creation of a more effective educational system, providing all students with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Additionally, it is important to note that, although the correlation between educational policies and academic performance is significant, it is not perfect. Additional factors such as socioeconomic backgrounds, family support, and the country's economic conditions may also influence academic performance. Nevertheless, the findings underscore the importance of educational policies as a significant factor that can contribute to the improvement of students' academic performance.

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