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**Abstract**

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**Keywords**

South Americans, Global Education, Educational Policy, Access to Education, Equal Education, Educational Quality

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*Education in South America* is one installment of the nineteen-volume *Education Around the World* series curated by editor Colin Brock. The series aims to draw attention to under-represented regions in education literature. The book's editor, Simon Schwartzman, an expert in Brazilian education and former president of Brazil's national statistical office, IBGE, has compiled literature from local experts in ten countries of South America, excluding Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana, which are included in the volume on the Caribbean region for their cultural and historical links to that region. The book begins with Schwartzman's regional overview that provides a brief summary of the historical background of the colonization of South America by the Spanish and Portuguese. The editor references the roles that slavery, religion, and immigration from Japan, Italy, Germany, and other parts of Europe have played on the cultural and economic development of the region.

Schwartzman asserts that since World War II, the region, which is composed of mainly middle-income countries, has faced political instability and has depended largely on the extraction and export of its resources. South America has also experienced an expansion in private schooling in light of the post-World War II trend of increased urbanization. The editor provides this historical background to contextualize and unite the country-specific chapters that follow in a common narrative of growth and strife.

For instance, Schwartzman maintains that South America was successful in reaching the United Nations Millennium Development Goals as demonstrated by increased access to education in the region. However, low rankings on the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) reveal that many South American countries still lag behind other nations in their ability to offer quality education to their citizens. Schwartzman argues that, although South America has shown improvement in increasing student access to education, in order for education to begin to eradicate social inequalities, access alone is not sufficient. Quality of education is crucial. The national chapters aim to position ten countries in South America in this

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battle for improved education quality in the region. When considered alone, each chapter provides a snapshot of a country's progress. When combined, these chapters offer a comparative perspective on the state of education in South America.

The chapters are organized by country and listed in alphabetical order. The editor highlights six key themes in the regional overview that can be found in the national chapters: (1) access, equity, and quality of education, (2) education policy, (3) governance and the role of the State, (4) teachers, (5) curriculum, teaching methods, and information and communication technologies (ICT), and (6) multicultural and bilingual education. Many of the chapters follow the model of the regional overview and provide the historical context for the country of focus prior to analyzing the state of education in that country. In some chapters, the authors opt for providing a comparative perspective by positioning student achievement in that country among the achievement of students in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries using Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and PISA scores.

The book begins with two chapters addressing the state of education in Argentina. In the first chapter, Juan Carlos Tedesco provides historical background to show that, in the context of poverty in Argentina, schooling's function was to provide social support rather than serve as a place for learning. He chronicles the policy changes that occurred leading to a new national education law, which "considers education and knowledge as public assets, and assumes that education is a key strategy in the process of the construction of a fairer society" (p. 25). He establishes that the challenge of funding education has turned the attention to a focus on privatization. The second chapter gives an overview of the Argentine education system as well as its areas for improvement. The authors, Silvina Gvirtz, Angela Inés Oría, and Esteban Torre, offer a comparative perspective of the performance of students in Argentina to that of students in other countries and argue that structural changes at the State level are necessary for improvement in the quality of education in Argentina. They emphasize that, if the State is to be responsible for education, the State must be held accountable for enhancing the quality of education that the students receive. According to the authors, this involves including stakeholders in micro- and macro-level decisions regarding the approach to privatization and "publification" of the education system.

The third chapter focuses on Bolivian education. It is unique in its approach to assessing the quality of education in this South American country as it illustrates the need for multiculturalism in Bolivia. Unlike the authors of other chapters who provide an historical background and policy analysis related to equity and access, the authors of Chapter 3, Fabricia de Andrade Ramos and Mauricio Blanco Cossío argue that there is a need for policies aimed at pluralism to allow for higher-quality education. They present a dichotomy between policies that engender autonomy and those that foster diversity, and the authors contend that a change in policies became necessary when the monolingual Spanish system was no longer adequate.

Chapters 4 through 7 focus on Brazil and cover topics that range from governance to curriculum to the rate of return on education in the country. The author of Chapter 4, Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro, outlines the role of the government in education by explaining that, historically, education has been decentralized in Brazil. This allows the State and municipalities to have key roles in the financing and implementation of education programs. However, the author argues that the State and municipalities rarely collaborate beyond their financial agreements. She contends that, "To a large extent, the problems of education are political" (p. 113). João Batista Araujo e Oliveira (Chapter 6) agrees that political instability has contributed

to poor student achievement. He argues that it is not a lack of policymaking but rather poor implementation of policies that has contributed to poor skill development for Brazilian students. Fernando de Holanda Barbosa Filho and Fernando Veloso (Chapter 7) echo these sentiments by stating, “Brazilian students have not acquired essential skills for full participation in modern societies” (p. 155).

Chapters 8 through 10 provide an overview of Chilean education, which, similar to other countries in the region, is a story of growing pains. In Chapter 8, Cristián Bellei and Xavier Vanni provide a summary of the evolution of educational policy in Chile. They argue that educational policy has attempted to define a more relevant role for the State by following market logic. Similarly, Beatrice Ávalos (Chapter 9) provides an overview of the evolution of teacher education policies from support and deregulation to market-led improvement policies. The themes of privatization and decentralization are present in Chile and are the cause for much dissatisfaction among students. In this section, Bellei and Vanni (Chapter 8) and Gregory Elacqua (Chapter 10) detail the student movement that demanded the government cease to fund for-profit schooling.

The following three chapters address the state of education in Colombia. In Chapter 11, Martha Laverde Toscano calls for social change through education reform and social development that would allow for sustainable economic growth. She highlights this need by presenting the education gap that exists in upper secondary education in Colombia. In Chapter 15, Pablo Cevallos Estarellas and Daniela Bramwell examine educational policies in Ecuador that focus on universalizing educational services and compare them to policies aimed at improving the quality of those services. In the case of Ecuador, as presented by Orazio Bellettini, Adriana Arellano, and Wendy Espín (Chapter 14), the challenge in implementing such policies is partially the result of the geographic fragmentation of the country.

The final four chapters of *Education in South America* highlight the state of education in Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela respectively. In the case of Paraguay, Cynthia Brizuela offers an analysis of the barriers that hinder the achievement of education quality and equity. She argues that children and adolescents in Paraguay receive weak civic education and that “many children and adolescents do not have access to school or do not stay in school long enough, the lifelong skills achieved are scarce, and ... many students do not achieve the minimum academic skills expected in terms of school performance” (p. 381). When compared to other national chapters, it becomes evident that access to quality education is a significant challenge for the region of South America.

In Chapter 17, Santiago Cueto, Juan León, and Alejandra Miranda use public data and data from the Young Lives longitudinal study to show that both socioeconomic status and educational opportunities are linked to children’s outcomes in Peru. The authors present a UNESCO comparative analysis, which divulges, “the gap between urban and rural students in Peru is the widest in all tests among participating countries” (p. 393). This chapter offers additional evidence that there is a need for equitable education in Peru as well as in the region at large. The final two chapters of *Education in South America* address agents of change in Uruguay and Venezuela. In Chapter 18, Denise Vaillant praises teachers as change agents in light of Uruguay’s need to increase access and retention in secondary education. In Chapter 19, Mabel Mundó complements Vaillant’s perspective with the argument that not only teachers, but also schools in Venezuela, should be positioned as change agents. Mundó argues that increased enrollment needs to be accompanied by an increase in education quality as well.

*Education in South America* offers an historical perspective on the state of education in ten South American countries. The book critically examines relevant policies aimed at improving education in this region. The nineteen national chapters of the book reveal that, despite the implementation of recent educational policies intended to increase access and education quality in many South American countries, there is still a need for improved education quality in the region. A common thread between the assessments of the state of education in these countries is that, while there have been improvements in some aspects of educational access, they have not come in tandem with improved quality due to political instability and incongruence between policy implementation and practice. The authors agree that education has the potential to be a powerful tool for change, yet there are many challenges that South American nation-states are facing in developing and offering higher-quality education to their students.

The chapters in this book add to the body of research on education in South America by providing country-level analyses, written by local experts, of the current educational climate in this region. The individual chapters accomplish the editor's goal of highlighting both the improvements that have been made and those that are yet to be realized through a combination of policy analysis and cross-national comparison. While the book does shed light on some underrepresented countries in education literature, it is limited in its representation of the countries of Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela as it only offers one perspective of the state of education in those countries compared to the four diverse chapters dedicated to Brazil or the three dedicated to Chile and Colombia each. Overall, the book provides a vision for social development in South America by calling for improved policy implementation and the allocation of resources to the priority area of providing high-quality education across the region.

### **About the Author**

*Janna Goebel* is a doctoral student in the Educational Policy and Evaluation Program in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University, USA. Her doctoral specialization is Comparative, International, and Global Education. Her research interests include comparative education and international student mobility.