

Compensatory Policies Attending Equality and Inequality in Mexico Educational Practice among Vulnerable Groups in Higher Education

René Pedroza Flores¹, Guadalupe Villalobos Monroy² & Ana María Reyes Fabela¹

¹ Instituto de Estudios Sobre la Universidad, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (UAEMéx), Estado de México, México

² Facultad de Ciencias de la Conducta, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (UAEMéx), Estado de México, México

Correspondance: René Pedroza Flores, Instituto de Estudios Sobre la Universidad, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (UAEMéx). Paseo Tollocan N° 1402 Poniente, Ciudad Universitaria Puertas “F1 y F2”, C.P 50110, Toluca, Estado de México, México. Tel: 52-722-214-5351. E-mail: renebufi@yahoo.com.mx

Received: August 10, 2015

Accepted: October 2, 2015

Online Published: October 28, 2015

doi:10.5539/jel.v4n4p53

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jel.v4n4p53>

Abstract

This paper presents an estimate of the prevalence of social inequality in accessing higher education among vulnerable groups in Mexico. Estimates were determined from statistical data provided by governmental agencies on the level of poverty among the Mexican population. In Mexico, the conditions of poverty and vulnerability while trying to access better standards of living as well as educational inequality continue to grow at an alarming rate. The number of poor (extreme and moderate) and vulnerable people (according to income and social need) increased from 2008 through 2010 dramatically. The number of people in this situation went from 89.9 million to 90.8 million, which represents 80.64% of the total Mexican population. Only 19.36% of the population is not considered poor or vulnerable.

The access to higher education is not distributed uniformly throughout the Mexican youth since they belong to different social and economic strata: the least developed regions carry the largest share. Consequently, educational opportunities are unequally distributed mainly across age and gender factors. A distribution imbalance is also found with regard to gender throughout the population observed and analyzed: indigenous females have a significantly higher risk of not having access to higher education than males.

Keywords: higher education, inequality in education, poverty, social inequality, social vulnerability

1. The Problem of Poverty and Social Vulnerability

There is a vicious circle between poverty and higher education because socioeconomic disadvantages generates educational disadvantages and vice versa. Unequal economic distribution makes educational opportunities more difficult to access, continue studying and graduate from higher education. The lack of higher education puts youth opportunities at risk and threatens their ability to achieve a higher life quality.

This opens a divide of inequality between young people because many do not live in the same conditions nor have the same opportunities to attend higher education. Also, not all of those who are accepted receive a high quality education because of the precarious situation in education. More so, many students who finished their studies do not study a postgraduate degree or enter the labor market because of a lack of professional development opportunities. Throughout their studies, from the possibility of entrance and up until the possibility of entering the work force, these young people play a game of chance with conditions of vulnerability.

These conditions of poverty and vulnerability while trying to access better standards of living as well as educational inequality continues to grow. The number of poor (extreme and moderate) and vulnerable (according to income and social need) increased from 2008 through 2010. The number of people in this situation went from 89.9 million to 90.8 million, which represents 80.64% of the Mexican population. Only 19.36% of the population is not considered poor or vulnerable.

In the data reported by the Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL) which translates to the National Council of Political and Social Development Evaluation, the number of poor and vulnerable due to income is growing.

This group includes those who do not have enough income to live a decent living and who do not have a stable income:

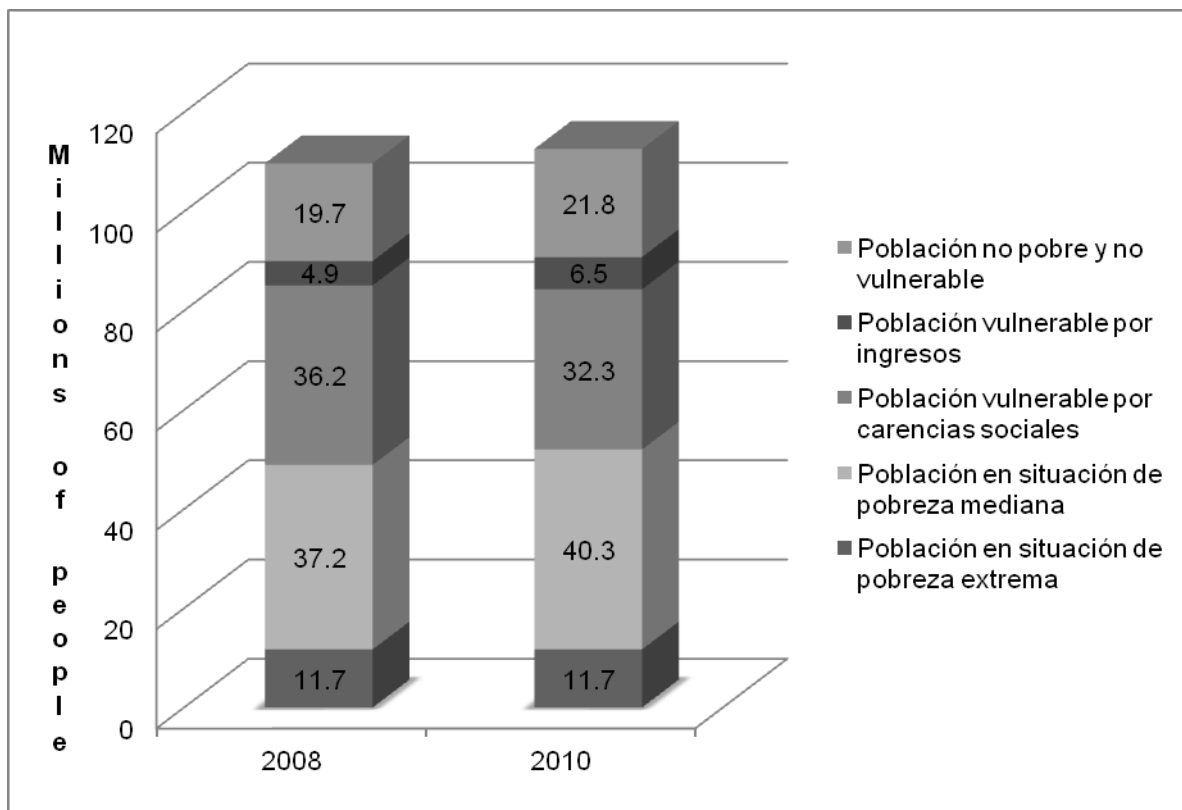


Figure 1. National poverty 2008-2010 (Distribution in number of persons)

Source: CONEVAL, 2011

We can see in the data that the vulnerable population, which goes back and forth between social inclusion and exclusion (Castel, 2000), has been more susceptible to going under the line of well being than going over it. This attributes to the number of people in moderate poverty. The area of integration (people who are not poor or vulnerable) may have grown, but the salary vulnerability of those who have unstable work situations and other adverse life conditions helped increase the population in the exclusion area.

The exclusion of millions of citizens from the minimum indicators of social well being creates distinct behavior in the media, between federal entities and between groups of the population. There is a huge contrast between rural and urban areas. In 2010, 23.9 million citizens lived in extreme poverty in rural areas while 6.3 million lived in the same extreme poverty but in urban areas (Note 1). The states of Mexico experienced different situations. The number of moderate poor grew in all states except for Michoacán, Morelos, Coahuila and Puebla. The number of extreme poor grew in 15 states and went down in 17. The states with the most growth in extreme poor were Veracruz and Mexico State (Note 2). With respect to population groups, the poverty of indigenous groups from 2008 to 2010 is notorious. There was no positive change in the situation. The number of poor went from 5.3 million to 5.4 million.

Poverty is defined by CONEVAL as *not having enough to obtain a decent standard of living*. This has to do with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. One supposes that with a higher ability to earn a decent living, poverty should diminish. Nevertheless, we do not always see this behavior because what each person receives from the GDP depends upon how income is distributed. It is possible to have an increase in the GDP, but for this to have no favorable impact on poverty because the distribution can be unequal, especially in the highest deciles (Note 3). Poverty can also decrease even if the GDP per capita has not increased because of better distribution among poorest deciles (Cortés, 2010).

The distribution of income was unequal in Mexico from 2008 through 2010. 30% of the homes are in the three highest deciles with 62.2% of the income. 70% of the remaining homes are within the first through seventh decile and take home 37.8%. There is a large gap between the first decile and the tenth decile which can be perceived in the following aspects:

- a) The tenth decile, the richest, has 33.9% of the income and the first decile, the poorest, has only 1.8%.
- b) The source of income in these two groups was different. In the tenth decile, 37.5% were government transfers, 67% from subordinate work, property income at 8.4%, 9.0% from independent work and 1.2% from property income. In the first decile, government transfers accounted for 40.3%, subordinate work at 35.7%, independent work at 16.5%, income for other work was 6.0% and property income was 1.2%.
- c) Expenditures were also different. The tenth decile spent 19.5% on education, while the first only allotted 5.4%. In the case of the richest, education is their second priority and in the case of the poorest, education is their sixth priority. We can see this in the following graphic:

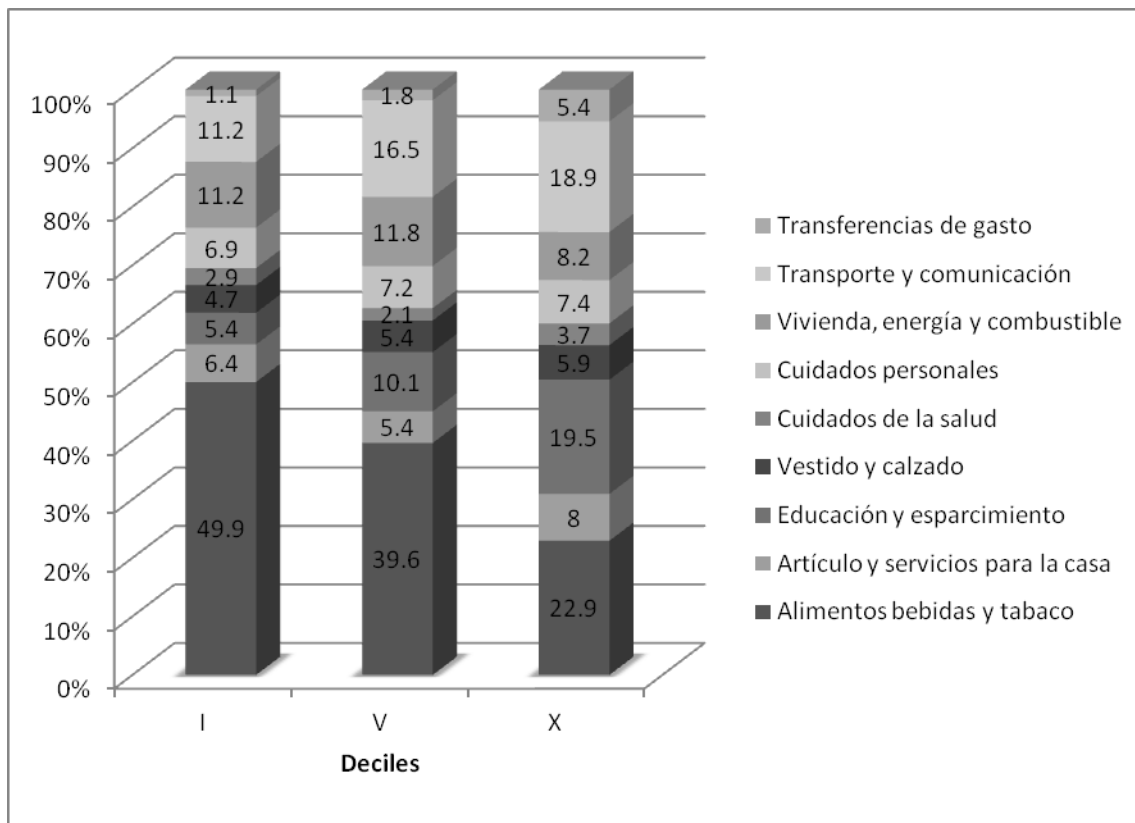


Figure 2. Structure of expense per decile of income 2010

Source: INEGI, 2011a

Two relevant aspects stand above for this study. The first is the inequality of income distribution because it is concentrated in the tenth decile corresponding to the richest.

The second is the inequality in education expenses because the smaller the income, the less the “investment” in education. 50% of the income of the poor is used for food. Education is not one of their main priorities. In contrast, education is a main priority for the richest decile. This confirms the vicious circle between poverty and education impacting all the way up to the third level.

2. Inequality of Higher Education among Vulnerable Groups

Young people and their families in a situation of poverty and vulnerability have had to “compete” for a place in higher education, in an effort to jump the gap of inequality in education. In recent years, statistical data has been presented dealing with the coverage of higher education. The data confirms that the problem of inequality in higher education continues.

Karina Avilés, in January, 2010, in the newspaper *La Jornada*, quoted data given to her by the Subsecretaría de Educación Superior (SES) or the Under-secretary of Higher Education, concerning the higher education access gap for young people between 19 and 23 years of age. Only 4.9% of the youth in the first decile attended an institution of higher education. While in the tenth decile relating to the richest sector, 58% had a place in higher education.

Tuirán, one year later, indicated in the newspaper supplement *Campus Milenio*, that the country was far from achieving equality in access to higher education. A young person in the tenth decile was four times more likely to enter higher education than a young person in the first decile.

Not only those with less resources, are excluded from higher education. The vulnerability is extended to other groups like women, indigenous people and those with disabilities.

In the case of women, the percentage of those attending higher education is lower than that of men, by almost one percentage point. In 2010, the information reported by INEGI was the following: 28.4% (men) and 27.3% (women). Women suffer double inequality, that of gender and that of poverty. Being a woman and being poor puts women in a more adverse situation than men.

Table 1. Percentage of the population between 18 and 29 that attend school according to the size of the community, as per age and sex (2010)

	Age			
	18-24		25-29	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Less than 2500 inhabitants	14.7	14.4	2.5	2.6
2500-14999	23.1	22.2	4.2	4.0
15000-99999	29.1	27.7	5.7	5.1
100000 or more inhabitants	36.2	34.9	9.2	7.5

Source: INEGI, 2010. Population and Housing Census Information from Basic Questionnaire

The lowest proportion of women studying in post-secondary institutions occurs at the lowest levels with only 14.4%, in other words, approximately 15 out of 100 women, between the ages of 18 and 24. As the number of inhabitants in a community rises, so does the participation of women, but not in the same proportion as men. Another aspect noted is that the older the woman, the lower the possibility of accessing education. In summary, women suffer inequality in education in three ways: gender, poverty and age.

With respect to indigenous communities, Mexico is a multicultural nation because there are approximately 62 indigenous groups. The indigenous population, according to official numbers, is over 10 million inhabitants, representing 9.8% of the total population. These indigenous communities are mostly located in the southern and south-eastern states of the country: Oaxaca (1.5 million inhabitants), Chiapas (1.2 million inhabitants), Veracruz (more than 900 thousand inhabitant), Yucatán (more than 900 thousand inhabitants) and Puebla (more than 900 thousand inhabitants). Another 4.2 million inhabitants are distributed throughout other states.

Indigenous communities suffer doubly from both social and educational exclusion. The poverty rates are high. Living conditions are lacking in many areas. When it comes to education, they have problems in two areas of the Human Development Index (HDI). There is a high rate of illiteracy which is three times higher than the national average. Only 64% of the indigenous population between 15 and 64 years old have a basic education. The rate of school attendance, the limited educational services in indigenous communities, the low quality of education and lack of basic services all influence the rate of school drop-outs. These problems create a breeding ground for inequality in education nourished by several different social, economic and cultural *roots*, which have been pointed out by the studies done at the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI) or National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples:

-Because of exclusion from or difficulty in accessing the system, which includes the type and sufficiency of

quality educational services, as well as the existence of accessible physical infrastructures adequate to the needs, circumstances and community interests as well as those of the population being served, and including the modification and flexibility of the schedules and school calendars.

-Because of the small amount of cultural indigenous content at the curricular level, educational materials and educational practice, which use very little of the diversity and the specificity of the indigenous cultures including: history, songs, dance, musical instruments as well as knowledge, among others.

-Because of the presence of bilingual education (Spanish-indigenous language) which has been seen much more like a problem than as a cultural necessity with enriching potential for the country as a whole.

-Because of the lack of educational materials in indigenous languages.

-Because in the majority of cases the bilingual teachers act as “Spanish translators”, they do not use the indigenous language for the transmission of the scientific and technological knowledge. This sometimes causes a devaluation of indigenous identity and culture (CNI, 2006, p. 93).

The problem with inequality in education for indigenous groups has to do with diversity, identity, language, values, educational practices, curriculum, pedagogical methods, educational materials and respect for other cultures. All of this has repercussions in all educational levels. This is particularly true in higher education, which impacts doubly: structurally because there is insufficient coverage, infrastructure and inadequate equipment, a lack of an inadequate distribution of economic resources; in academic results because of the teachers’ lack of education, traditional educational practices, high drop-out rates and academic failure in general.

In summary, the indigenous population suffers inequality in education at the post secondary level because of its ethnicity and poverty. Only 1% of youth between 19 and 23 years old access higher education (Castillo, 2002). Indigenous women have less opportunity than men to continue studying.

Another vulnerable group of people who encounter difficulties in higher education are those with disabilities. Using the data from the 12th General Census of Population and Housing 2000, there is a population of one million seven hundred fifteen thousand inhabitants with some disability. This represents 1.8% of the Mexican population. Some information related to education are: in the population between 15 and 29 years old, only 15% attend school, and 32.9% of the 15 years or older population do not know how to read or write (INEGI, 2011b).

The numbers in higher education are not at all comforting: there are approximately 41 thousand students in higher education with some disability (43% with blindness, 38% with some kind of motor impairment, 13% hearing impaired and the rest with some other disability). Only 2 of every 100 received higher education.

People with disabilities suffer inequality in education because of their disabilities and discrimination. Institutions of higher education do not have the proper facilities, professors who are prepared to attend to people with a disability, educational practices that are designed for people with a disability or appropriate educational material.

In this brief summary of the problem, we have seen that vulnerable groups must confront the problem of inequality in higher education from several different perspectives: socioeconomic, gender, ethnicity and disability. Giving proper attention to vulnerable groups requires a comprehensive and inclusive vision. It is necessary to focus on the origins of their exclusion from higher education in order to solve their problems. Not all young people in vulnerable groups have the same level of vulnerability. Some suffer more than others and some live their vulnerability one way and other another way. For example, women have a higher possibility of being vulnerable than men. Men with a disability have a higher possibility of being vulnerable than men without a disability. Levels of vulnerability vary. We can see this in the following table:

Table 2. Conditions of Inequality in Higher Education

	TYPE OF VULNERABILITY			
	Gender	Socioeconomic	Physical and Mental	Cultural
Woman				
Poor Woman				
Poor Woman with a Disability				
Poor Woman with a Disability and Indigenous				
Poor Man				
Poor Man with a Disability				
Poor Man with a Disability and Indigenous				

Source: Authors.

We can see a list of disadvantages in educational opportunities at the post secondary level, with their level of vulnerability. Not all people have the same level of vulnerability. Some have a higher or lower possibility of crossing the line of educational exclusion. Those who are farthest from the line are indigenous women with a disability and poor men are closer.

3. Compensatory Policies in Educational Politics and Educational Practice

The problem of inequality in higher education is observable in the socioeconomic field as well as in educational practice. There are disadvantages in the teaching-learning process, from the beginning of their studies and until the end, because of the conditions of educational practice. To socioeconomic vulnerability we can add vulnerability in the acquisition of knowledge, abilities, skills and values, because of the variety of abilities, motivations and emotional states.

Inequality in education is a political and economic problem, but it is also a problem of justice which impacts poverty and school failure. It turns out paradoxical that education is considered leverage for social development and that vulnerable groups do not have enough support to overcome their situation of inequality. The criteria of distribution and recognition is based upon merit, those who receive the highest grades get more financial support.

Educational policies and educational practice are important in the distribution of resources and the assessment of the subjects. With educational politics, a national project is designed and implemented. With educational practice, a project is designed and implemented for an educational institution. With respect to compensation and diversity of the parties involved in educational politics, compensatory policies are designed and implemented in an effort to provide equality in education. Educational practice attends to the question of diversity in order to attain quality in education.

Many studies have tackled the problem of compensatory policies within the framework of educational politics, mainly focusing on equality opportunities. We have the studies by Bolívar (2005), Roemer (2000), Reimers (2007) and Rivero (2005), who look at opportunity inequality in distributive social justice, from a political liberalism point of view and with the influence of Rawls. They coincide in their belief that in order to guarantee opportunity equality among the less fortunate groups, they have to be supported with more resources to compensate their situations, not only at the beginning but during the entire educational process.

These authors have emphasized the different moments of the educational process where we should diversify the compensation. They point out four moments specifically: opportunities for studying, accessing to education, continuity and results. With this we can attend to the conditions and obtain the support needed to participate in a more diverse offering. These groups can then comply with the requirements of acceptance, deal with the academic demands leading to continuity and achieve the final requirements for graduation.

Compensatory policies, also known as affirmative action, are those which support vulnerable groups in order to achieve the principles of equality, liberty and opportunity, basic human rights within the framework of distributive social justice. These policies also achieve a more cosmopolitan population within the framework of globalization. This objective has been to reduce the gap of social inequality, insuring quality in education.

The objective of compensatory policies has not passed unnoticed in Mexico. Since the modernization of education in the 90s, these policies have been incorporated into educational politics. In the last 24 years, which include two terms governed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Carlos Salinas and Ernesto Zedillo) and two terms governed by the National Action Party (Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón), the National Development Plans included the topic of equality in education.

Though ideologically the two parties are different, there was no variation in the problems of inequality in education within the framework of compensatory policies. Both political powers look at compensatory policies from a liberalism point of view, as a way to support less fortunate groups in their access to and conclusion of higher education. For comparison sake, we present two brief extracts corresponding to the National Development Plans (NDP) of Carlos Salinas (1989-1994) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), where we can see the insistence upon compensatory help in education with a liberalism concept. In the NDP of the first, we see: *in order to improve the rates of school attendance, it will be necessary to diversify and improve curricular options, improve the coverage of initial education, preschool, elementary and junior high as well as **promote opportunity equality for beginning and concluding studies at any level*** (Note 4); in the NDP of the second, objective number 10 corresponds to transformation in education and is titled: *reducing regional inequalities in educational opportunities, according to gender and social groups* (Note 5).

In both documents, though not written at the same time, the topic of equality in opportunities is constant. The

reason is that there has been no reduction of inequality in education and access to opportunities. Each 6 year term over the last 24 years has carried out different actions within their Educational Development Program, including legal changes and political strategies. Without going into too much detail, we will present some relevant aspects which show the tendencies and oversights in the persistent problem of equality in opportunity.

Mexico, unlike other countries in Latin America, has included the topic of compensatory policies in educational norms of the country. In the General Law of Education, published on July 13, 1993 and reformed on April 9, 2012, the title for the third part is *Equality in Education*. It includes several different articles which explain the help required by groups with disadvantages to achieving equality in education and equal opportunities of access and permanence during these studies. Two articles in particular are very important:

Article 32: the education authorities will take measure to establish conditions which will allow citizens to exercise their right to education, more equality in education as well as effective equal opportunities of access and permanence in educational services. These measures will be directed towards groups and regions with the most underdevelopment in education or those who are confronted with economic and social conditions of disadvantage as per articles 7 and 8 of the law (p. 12).

Article 34: ...the federal executive power will create compensatory programs which will provide economic support specifically to states with the most underdevelopment in education, with prior agreements specifying the amounts and the actions required by the local education authorities to promote development in these areas. The Secretariat will evaluate the results of these compensatory programs (p. 13).

These legal provisions are important for groups and regions with educational underdevelopment because they help to establish compensatory programs, helping them to overcome their situation of vulnerability. This means that groups in poverty can demand support programs from the government in order to achieve effective equality in educational opportunities.

Another good point in the General Law of Education, with respect to the topic of educational equality, is the content in article 41 which makes reference to the inclusion of diversity and attending to the conditions of social and gender inequality.

This legal tendency is accompanied with actions in educational politics. These actions are varied and are aimed at specific vulnerable groups: women, indigenous, people with disabilities and groups living in poverty.

3.1 *Compensatory Policies Attending Gender Vulnerability*

As pointed out by Palomar (2004), gender, meaning sexual difference, has been incorporated into higher education over the last few years. Many different organizations have worked to resolve the problem of gender inequality including: the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP in Spanish), the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES) and the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning (ANUIES). We would like to highlight some of the actions taken from the year 2000 to the present. Without a doubt, some of the actions taken in the last few years have helped make important strides:

a) The National Program for Equal Opportunity for Women (PROEquidad, 2000), among their objectives in education, they mention affirmative action agreements principally in indigenous areas (rural and urban), increase the female presence in higher education by 15% and that 20% of the commercials transmitted by the SEP on television and radio be about equality and gender.

b) INMUJERES (2003) and ANUIES propose incorporating perspectives about gender into institutions of higher learning, in order to deal with the inequality of opportunities and conditions of permanence and work within these institutions. The areas of attention to achieve the equality of women are divided four ways: policies, plans, programs and projects. The *National Network of Academic Gender Connections* was proposed as a strategy for achieving the agreement objectives.

c) The Federal Law for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination, published on July 11, 2003, in article 5, section I, mentions non-discriminatory actions to compensate for situations of inequality: education laws or positive public and compensatory policies which do not affect the rights of third parties establish different treatment and have the objective of promoting real equal opportunity (p. 2). Part III is dedicated to the positive and compensatory measures created to achieve equal opportunity.

d) The General Law for the Equality of Men and Women, published August 2, 2006, in article 5, defined affirmative action as temporary measures which accelerate the equality of women and men. Article 12, section V, deals with affirmative action within compensatory policies in order to insure equal opportunity.

e) The General Law of Access to a Life Free of Violence against Women, published February 1, 2007, in article

5, section IX, proposed eliminating the causes of oppression, inequality and gender injustice, promoting gender equality through the advancement and well being of women which will ensure a society where women are considered of equal value to men. And in article 45, sections I and III, it is mentioned that the Secretariat of Public Education should create policies aimed at gender equality and guarantee policies and actions which advance the situation of women.

3.2 Compensatory Policies Attending Indigenous Peoples Vulnerability

Schmelkes (2003) mentions three strategies that in the last few years have been applied to indigenous groups: affirmative action policies like the National Scholarship Program, PRONABES (Note 6), the creation of intercultural universities and a combination of affirmative actions through scholarships and the application of compensatory mechanisms by institutions of higher education to ensure consistency during the entire period of study.

Several different public and private institutions have participated in these strategies, most notably the Secretariat of Public Education by means of the General Office of Intercultural Education (CGEIB in Spanish), ANUIES and the Ford Foundation (with the program *Pathways*).

In order to attend to the problem of inequality in education, lack of coverage, insufficient infrastructure and the lack of financing for indigenous groups in higher education, as well as the academic problems of drop-outs, ANUIES and the Ford Foundation created the Support Program for Indigenous Students in Higher Education (PAEIIES in Spanish).

The PAEIIES includes several different indigenous groups including: Huastecos, Huicholes, Matlatzintecos, Mayas, Mazahuas, Mazatecos, Mixes, Mixtecos, Nahuas, Otomies, Populucas, Purépechas, Totonacas, Tzeltales, Tzotziles and Zapotecos. The program covers a large part of the country and includes the states of: Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Nayarit, Jalisco, Michoacán, Guerrero, Mexico State, Hidalgo, Puebla, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Yucatán, Campeche and Mexico City.

With this program, there are five areas of priority in intercultural education: graduation (thesis projects, final exams and paperwork), tutoring, oral and written expression, academic consistency and improving PAEIIES. These are all oriented towards the compliance of the PAEIIES objectives which are:

- Increase the number of indigenous students in higher education.
- Indigenous students achieve good academic standing in bachelor degree programs and earn access to graduate programs.
- Guarantee permanence and increase graduation efficiency.
- Contribute to changes in institutional and community policies.
- Reinforce the recognition and respect for cultural diversity in the university community.
- Connect indigenous students with their communities through practicums and cultural dissemination.
- Promote research projects dealing with indigenous difficulties (Castillo, 2002, p. 4).

The impact of PAEIIES has been favorable up to now. The most recent efficiency data reported highlights the fact that 2677 students have completed their course loads and 1004 have graduated. The PAEIIES is the most important affirmative action program within the multicultural framework of higher education.

3.3 Compensatory Policies That Attend to the Vulnerability of the Disabled

There has been significant progress in the laws of this country, especially at the beginning of this century. In 2003, the Federal Law for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination was published. Article 2, dealing with liberty and equality, is complemented by article 5, which mentions the positive and compensatory policies in the area of education. Chapter III, entitled *Positive and Compensatory Measures for Equal Opportunity*, includes article 13 referring to people with a disability.

In 2005, the General Law for People with Disabilities is published. In article 5, section V, refers to equal opportunity, where public affirmative action policies are mentioned.

In 2011, the General Law of Inclusion for People with Disabilities is published. In article 2, section XV, equal opportunity is mentioned with affirmative action. Articles 5 and 6 mention the beginning of public policies for equal opportunity and the guarantee of fairness. Chapter III is dedicated to education, mentioning scholarships in a compensatory sense in section VIII.

During the same period, ANUIES (2002) published a Manual for the Integration of People with Disabilities in

Institutions of Higher Learning (MIPDIES in Spanish). The purpose was to move towards an inclusive university using actions of equal opportunity and equal rights towards disabled persons in institutions of higher learning.

One point in the manual that stands out is the attention paid to the academic process more than policy. Accessibility is looked at in admission opportunities, academic consistency and graduation. Paying attention to teacher training, educational practice with pedagogical adaptations and changes to the curriculum are essential to becoming an inclusive university.

4. Conclusion

It was obvious that the economic model based on neoliberalism is not providing answers to the problems which occur from dividing up the gross domestic product per capita. This distribution is characterized by inequality. Even with compensatory programs, the number of poor rises.

This is proven by the following data: with respect to education expenditures, for inhabitants in the tenth decile, education is their second priority and they set aside 19.5% of the income for this expense. Those in the first decile (the poorest) only set aside 5.4% of their income. This is logical, since the priorities for the poor are food, travel expenses to work, clothing and rent. If there is enough money, the youngest in the family go to school and the older children must help out with expenses.

Many authors have said that schools create an elitist society and contribute to polarization. In other words, the only people who can go to school are those who have enough income to do so, making higher education a privilege rather than a right.

The lack of access to higher education intensifies if on top of being poor, the person belongs to a vulnerable group (women, indigenous or with a disability). This makes the situation worse, nevertheless, there are alternative for people in this situation of vulnerability. We are referring to affirmative action or compensatory politics.

The progress made in Mexico, when it comes to compensatory policies for equality in education, are notable. There have been enough laws passed to establish priorities in access, consistency and graduation from higher education for groups with a social disadvantage. Nevertheless, the reality tells us something different. The government is still designing policies and strategies meant to establish affirmative or compensatory actions from a liberalism point of view. For example, scholarships helping students access or remain in higher education still take into account the student's grade. Here we must ask how a poor, indigenous, disabled woman would be able to maintain a high grade point average. If a student is part of a vulnerable group, the criteria should be set up according to their situation. A young person with little economic resources, but young and living in a city with his/her family has a higher probability of obtaining a good grade point average than the woman describer earlier.

With respect to vulnerable groups, each person's situation is different. This is why compensatory programs must be specific and this means that resources are needed to attack this situation. The application must be reviewed with an ethics and humanity, considering personal growth and making the most of each person's abilities and opportunities.

When it comes to educational practice, teachers who teach this type of student should be sensitive to their abilities and limitations. These students require different attention even though they are inserted into groups and educational institutions created for all types of people. We need educational practice based upon respect for human rights, reflection and creativity to propose alternatives, as well as the design and application of teaching and learning strategies which facilitate particular learning styles.

In order to achieve all of this, the teacher must be willing to take into account the needs of these students, but above all discover which aspects of their educational practice can be modified in favor of better teaching. The teacher needs to maximize the resources he/she has already has and strive to implement new actions derived from intelligent and efficient management.

References

- Bolívar, A. (2005). Equidad educativa y teorías de la justicia social. *en Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio Educativo*, 3(2).
- Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión. (1993). *Ley General de Educación*. México: Diario Oficial de la Federación.
- Castel, R. (2000). "Encuadre de la exclusión" en Karsz, Saul (coord.): "La exclusión: Bordeando sus fronteras. Definiciones y Matices". España: Gedisa.
- Castillo, A. (2002). *El programa de apoyo a estudios indígenas en instituciones de educación superior: Una alternativa institucional para el acceso, equidad, cobertura y calidad*. México: ANUIES.
- CONEVAL (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social). (2011). *Porcentaje de la población en pobreza según entidad federativa, 2010 Estados Unidos Mexicanos*. México: CONEVAL.
- CNI (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas). (2006). *Informe sobre Desarrollo humano de los pueblos indígenas de México*. México: PNUD.
- CNI (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas). (2010). *Programa Nacional para Pueblos Indígenas 2009-2012: Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*. México: CNI.
- Cortés, F. (2010). "Pobreza, desigualdad en la distribución del ingreso y crecimiento económico 1992-2006", en Fernando Cortés y Orlandina de Oliveira. *Desigualdad*, 1a. ed. México: El Colegio de México.
- INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía). (2011a). *Resultados de la encuesta nacional de ingresos y gasto de los hogares (ENIGH) 2010*. Boletín de prensa, Núm. 270/11, Aguascalientes: INEGI.
- INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía). (2011b). *Estadísticas a propósito del Día Internacional de las personas con discapacidad*. Aguascalientes: INEGI.
- INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía). (2012). *Mujeres y hombres en México 2011*. México: INEGI e Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres.
- Reimers, F. (2007). *Políticas compensatorias de discriminación positiva y justicia social a fines del siglo XX en América Latina. Insuficientes, subfinanciadas y frágiles*. Consultado el 10/06/2012. Retrieved from <http://iacd.oas.org/LaEduca132/reimer123-133test.html>
- Rivero, J. (2005). *Políticas educativas de equidad e igualdad de oportunidades. III Seminario para Altos Directivos de las administraciones educativas de los países Iberoamericanos*. Habana: OEI.
- Roemer, J. (2000). Variantes de la igualdad de oportunidades. En *Fractal*. N. 16, enero-marzo, a. 4, v.V México.
- SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública). (2001). *Programa de Desarrollo Educativo*. México: SEP.
- Schmelkes, S. (2003). *Educación superior intercultural en México. Conferencia dictada en el Encuentro Internacional de Experiencias Educativas: "Vincular los caminos de la educación superior"*. México: ANUIES y Ford Foundation.

Notes

Note 1. Similarly, in rural areas, there were 40.9 million poor and 34.2 million in adverse conditions of social inequality during the same year.

Note 2. We can also add: Jalisco, Yucatán, Querétaro, Sonora, Tamaulipas, Guanajuato, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Zacatecas, Baja California Sur, Campeche, Tlaxcala, Chihuahua, Colima and Mexico City.

Note 3. Homes are divided into 10 strata each, each one represents one decile. The first decile represents the poorest 10% and so on until the tenth decile which represents the richest 10%.

Note 4. We have underlined.

Note 5. During Ernesto Zedillo's term (1995-2000) we can see something similar because his Educational Development Program (EDP) was based upon the axes of quality and pertinence in order to generate opportunities to education, especially for the poor. In the case of Vicente Fox (2001-2006), history repeats itself. In his EDP we find: the development of the county requires a system of higher education with more coverage and better quality. It must also insure equality of access and the territorial distribution of educational opportunities. In order to increment coverage with equity, it is not only necessary to increase and diversify the

curriculum, but also bring that education closer to social groups with less possibilities of access. The participation of these groups in higher education should correspond more and more to their presence in the population. We need to achieve good quality programs for all Mexicans, making it so that whichever institution they decide upon, they have real possibilities of obtaining adequate education (p. 183).

Note 6. This type of scholarship is not exclusive to indigenous groups and is applied in a general way. The objective is to contribute to achieving equality in education and the consistency of students in higher education.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).