

Argentina: Improving Student School Trajectories

Margarita Poggi

Abstract This chapter provides an analysis of the evolution of the Argentine education system from the late nineteenth century up to the present. It starts with a brief historical overview of state consolidation, early educational achievements and the expansion of a modern, open, and free system. It goes on to describe the main regulatory frameworks and most relevant policy guidelines developed in the last decade while analysing the relationship between federal and provincial levels of government. The chapter also examines social and educational gaps, repetition and dropout rates, quality of education and the status of the teaching profession. Finally, promoting diversity and prioritising knowledge are explored as some of the challenges that educational policies should address in the future.

Keywords Argentina • Education system • Federalism • Inequality • School trajectories • Quality of education • Teacher profession

Argentina is organised into a federal system comprising 23 provinces and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.¹ The population is estimated at about 40,120,000, according to the last 2010 National Population and Household Census. Among them, 49 % are men, 51 % are women, and approximately 90 % of the total population lives in urban areas.

According to the census, Argentina is the third most aged country in Latin America after Uruguay and Cuba (14 % represents the population of over 60-year-olds). Over the decades, the country has been characterised by a gradual decrease of the population between 0 and 14 years old, which represented 25.5 % in 2010. Argentina, together with Chile, Cuba and Uruguay, belongs to the group of

¹ Hereinafter called “jurisdictions”.

M. Poggi (✉)

International Institute for Educational Planning, IIEP/UNESCO Buenos Aires office,
Buenos Aires, Argentina

e-mail: mpoggi@iipe-buenosaires.org.ar

countries within the region with a progressive demographic transition, characterised by populations with a moderate or low birth and mortality rates, resulting in a low natural growth of about 1 %. For this reason, the population pyramid confirms the upward trend in the relative burden of the elderly population, showing in turn lower levels in the birth rate. This trend in the long term has had an impact on the expansion and development of the education system, among other things.

Argentina is a country with a high level of human development in Latin America and ranks among the countries with the highest levels, together with Chile, Cuba and Uruguay.²

It is noteworthy that throughout the twentieth century, the country had undergone long periods of military rule, especially during the second half of the century, until the end of 1983 when a period of democratic government began and continues up to today.

Here follows a series of the most relevant characteristics of the Argentine education system: first, a historical perspective that allows understanding early achievements and more structured characteristics; second, an in-depth analysis of the main policy guidelines during the last decade; finally, the article presents the still pending challenges that education policies should either address or delve into more vigorously in the future.

It should be noted that, due to the length allowed for this chapter, the analysis focuses on policies oriented to regular education, particularly those corresponding to the levels defined as compulsory by the *National Education Law*. However, this does not mean that other aspects not considered herein lack relevance.

1 Main Characteristics of the Argentine Education System

Understanding the achievements of the educational system and challenges for current policies requires a brief historical overview before a general description of the characteristics of this system (education types, processes and attainments).³ This overview takes into account the relationships between the federal and provincial levels of government that have been shaped through different regulatory frameworks (Bravo 1988). Regulations have also established the main topics addressed by educational policies as will be explained later.

²For further information, see SITEAL (2011).

³This section particularly picks up Chap. 4 of the *2010 Human Development National Report. Human development in Argentina: development and new challenges*. Buenos Aires. United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

1.1 *Brief Historical Overview*

The early expansion of the Argentine education system was grounded in the development and consolidation of a state that, since the end of the nineteenth century, took primary education as one of its main projects and that, in the second half of the twentieth century—in spite of interrupted democratic periods and repeated budgetary restrictions—achieved a significant expansion of education at the secondary and higher education levels. This commitment and dynamism resulted in, among other things, economic benefits deriving from participation in the world economy as a raw material producer throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the development of a dynamic industrial sector in light of import substitutions strengthened during the 1940 and 1960 decades, the construction of an active state in terms of the social and economic life organisation, the emergency of a pushing middle class and the early organisation of citizenship strongly demanding more and better state services.

In this context, the Argentine education system experienced an early expansion and consolidation—especially compared with other Latin American countries—between the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. This expansion was evidenced in the following: (i) the accelerated growth of primary education until reaching a stage of universalisation towards the decade of 1980; (ii) the creation of a diversified and strongly expanded level in secondary education as of the decade of 1950 (iii) the establishment, as of 1869, of a quite homogeneous and very dynamic system of teacher training institutions; and (iv) the expansion, during the twentieth century, of a modern university system with periods of strong open admission process and free education delivery.

The education system is based on a structure resulting from evolution over 100 years. The reform dates back to the end of the nineteenth century and has witnessed oscillation of the education structure towards a more consolidated regulatory framework (Albergucci 1996; Almandoz 2000). Two acts have mainly shaped its trajectory. The first one was *Law No 1420* in 1884 that was part of a wider set of rules that contributed to provide the creation and consolidation process of the Argentine state with a final institutional structure. This law, ruling over the Federal Capital and national territories, allowed Argentina to decide on a compulsory, free, universal and lay education system that delivers basic reading and writing skills, mathematics, world and Argentine history and geography, natural sciences, and access to knowledge of the National Constitution.

The difficulties experienced by several provinces in expanding their educational services caused the enactment of *Law No 4878* (known as *Láinez Law*) in 1905. It authorised the Nation to establish primary schools in the territory of those provinces requesting the action. This measure had a rapid impact (Braslavsky & Krawczyk 1988). Thus, in the decade of 1930, more than half of the primary school enrolment in the provinces corresponded to national schools. However, many of them offered four out of the seven grades expected and thus provided rural populations with a short-length primary education programme. As a result, a double education system

coexisted in each province (national and provincial) with strong differences between them, for example, bureaucratic and financial reporting relationship, teacher salaries or curriculum proposals. Also, several provinces closed down schools under their responsibility and transferred them into national schools.

Although there have been several attempts at reform over the 100 years, these acts have established a regulation framework that has served as the basis of expanding and consolidating primary education in Argentina all along the twentieth century.

On the contrary, secondary education was not ruled by a national law in Argentina until the enactment of the *Federal Education Law* in the 1990s. This lack of regulation was partly due to the initial subordination of secondary education to training courses for university admission exams. In fact, the Constitution of 1853 contains a vague reference to secondary education, therefore its expansion developed without a comprehensive legislation providing an organic structure to the array of offers, categories and specialisation courses.

Therefore, specialisation courses that shaped secondary education were the result of the creation of schools that was imposed as a model to pursue. The first secondary school, Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, was created in 1863 with a focus on elite education and training for university education. Afterwards, technical, productive and commercial specialisation courses were created following a two-stage process. At the first stage, intra-institutional diversification, “annexes” were created in national schools with special courses in response to the productive needs of the surrounding areas. The second, at the inter-institutional diversification stage from 1890 to 1910 approximately, several technical, commercial, agro-technical and art schools were established and taken as a model to pursue each specialisation. Since then, the Argentine secondary school was developed into such categories as general (*bachiller*), commercial, technical, art and agro-technical. These categories survived the different reform attempts throughout the century.

However, the true expansion of technical education was as of the end of the 1940s when a strong subsystem including arts and crafts schools was developed and further reconsidered by the end of the 1950s when the CONET (National Council for Technical Education) was created.

Teacher training underwent a similar process. The *Escuela Normal de Paraná* (a teacher training school in the province of Entre Ríos) was established in 1869. This was the first school oriented to training the necessary teachers to support the growing expansion of the primary education. Early in the twentieth century, other teacher training schools and institutions led to institutional models that would be replicated creating a teacher training system for secondary school level all along that century, thus shifting the central role of universities at the primary and secondary levels of the education system.

1.2 Recent Regulatory Frameworks

In 1968, a process was started to transfer schools created by the *Láinez Law* to the provinces. All primary schools managed by the central government was

transferred in 1978, except the schools for adults that were transferred in 1980. *Law No 24049*, passed in 1992, also transferred secondary schools and tertiary nonuniversity institutions including those belonging to the private sector.

As a result of the aforementioned trends, the Argentine education system was characterised by a sustained education coverage increase, particularly that of primary education, reflected in a sustained and sharp drop of the illiteracy rate until the 1960s. Although this rate was lower as of the 1970s, a remarkably low rate is attained by the end of the previous century. At a regional level, only Cuba and Uruguay show illiteracy percentages in the population over 25 years old lower than Argentina (UNESCO 2007; PRIE 2011).

As far as primary education is concerned, universalisation was attained in the 1980s. In connection with secondary education, a strong expansion process started in the 1950s and 1960s, only scaled down during the military governments. However, it was as of 1983 with the return of democracy that admission tests were eliminated, and secondary education turned into a more open and less selective system. This change resulted in a remarkable increase in the student enrollments.

The following changes were introduced by the *Federal Education Law No 24195* enacted in 1993: system forms of government changed, structure divided into levels and cycles, compulsory education extended to 10 years, curricular contents updated, and education quality evaluation system established. The central government was defined as being responsible for regulating, guiding and evaluating the education system and for the compensation of regional differences, while provinces remained responsible for the management of institutions. This law restructured the Federal Council of Culture and Education (CFE) established in 1970, to gather provincial ministers of education (Almandoz 2000).

The direct responsibility over the education management fell on provincial governments, which had to assume the costs and the transformation of the education. Also, policies that had to be agreed between the National Ministry of Education and provincial ministers within the Federal Council of Education (CFE) resulted in a large body of regulations that were unevenly applied and had a limited legal enforceability due to the ambiguities of the law and the resistance created.

Above and beyond the controversial nature of this reform, extending the compulsory education from 7 to 10 years contributed to expanding the education among the population, especially secondary education.

This regulation was replaced by *National Education Law No 26206*, enacted in 2006 (Filmus & Kaplan 2012). This law especially established a system containing a unified structure throughout the country in order to ensure a better regulatory framework and cohesion, as well as a better organisation and relationship among the different education levels and methods and the national accreditation of degrees and certificates issued by the education system. The law also established compulsory education from 5 years old until finishing upper secondary education and a four-level, eight-modality structure. Coming back to primary education of 6 or 7 years and secondary education of 5 or 6 years—provisional definition containing the real possibilities for adapting to each jurisdiction—entails recognising school traditions that the previous law was unable to change.

In connection with the government and the national education system management, the law maintains the structure of concurrent responsibilities agreed between the Ministry of Education and the jurisdictions. It also reorganises the Education Federal Council and adds a new responsibility that involves issuing compulsory and binding regulations whenever this agency decides.

The law also provides for the debates raised over the last two decades on education quality. Three elements are set forth on this issue, which are stated both in the law and policies implemented: (a) attempt to ensure the development of a set of core learning priorities as a strategy to avoid a perceived trend towards dispersion as a result of the decentralisation process and the regulatory challenges to the system at central level after the enactment of *Law No 24195*; (b) a new emphasis on the improvement of the education quality, focused on the system as a whole and not on schools and (c) the need to reinforce teacher and professor training and improve teacher working conditions.

It is necessary to point out that as of 2004 a set of new provisions was made to redefine the legal system in the context of a social, political and economic framework thoroughly transformed after one of the most serious crisis in the country in 2001. Apart from the *National Education Law*, there have been acts such as a law to guarantee the teacher salary and 180 class days during the school year (No 25.864),⁴ *Teacher Incentive Fund Law (No 25.919)*, *Technical and Vocational Education Law (No 26.058)*, *Education Financing Law (No 26.075)* and *Comprehensive Sex Education Law (No 26.150)*.

In connection with the *Education Financing Law*, for years Argentina could hardly exceed the 4 % limit to education investment vis-à-vis the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The availability of resources largely determined the capacity of the different governments to encourage the various actions over the last decade.

It was necessary to guarantee the increase in total resources allocated to education in order to prioritize this area as one of the core issues of the economic, social and citizen development. The new law established that the consolidated state budget would be progressively increased until reaching 6 % of GDP in 2010, significantly exceeding the allocation to this sector. Concrete actions in terms of resources for the sector were set, together with a division of commitments agreed between the national government and the jurisdictions, prioritised objectives and institutional devices to guarantee the final compliance. Thanks to these actions, consolidated education investment for the whole country had exceeded the barrier of 5 % of GDP by the end of 2006, further reaching 6.47 % in 2011. Also, the law created the Teacher Salary National Compensation Programme (FONID) with the purpose of contributing to compensate for inequalities in the initial teacher salary in the jurisdictions calling for this measure. This allowed setting a legal framework to the salary improvement policy started in 2003.

⁴Calendar later extended to 190 days in 2012.

2 Progress and Challenges of the Current Education System

The Argentine education system is made up of state, private, cooperative and social management education systems. Education is compulsory from 5 years of age until finishing high school. The structure of the education system contains four levels and eight modalities and is undergoing a transition and reorganisation process.

The levels are as follows: preprimary, primary, secondary and higher education, the latter including higher education institutes reporting to the jurisdictions, and autonomous universities.

The eight modalities are as follow: technical and vocational education,⁵ art education, special education, lifelong education for young people and adults, rural education, intercultural bilingual education, education in detention, and home and hospital education.

Approximately 12,000,000 students are enrolled in the system in all levels and modalities (Table 1).

2.1 Access to Preprimary, Primary and Secondary Education

The successive extension of the compulsory school attendance that occurred over the recent years had an impact on the enrolment and set new challenges in connection with the access, retention and graduation of children and adolescents in the Argentine education system.

As far as the primary education is concerned, the universalisation of this level is practically attained in the 1980s. This does not mean that the state should not have made the best efforts to increase the attendance of children from rural areas and from low-income sectors.

Censuses carried out in 2001 and 2010 show that the enrolment rate increased from 98.2 % to 99 % in the 6–11 age group (with a difference of almost 0.8 percentage point).

According to the census source mentioned, the highest enrolment increase is shown in ages corresponding to the preprimary level. Indeed, a 16.08 % increase is evidenced in the 3–4 year age group enrolment (from 39.13 % to 55.2 % for a stage that is not defined as compulsory) and another 12.56 % increase in the 5 year age group (from 78.8 % to 91.4 %) that is the age span corresponding to the education defined as compulsory.

⁵The Technical and Vocational Education Law No 26058, enacted in 2005, was the first one created to modify the regulatory structure set forth in 1990. The purpose of this law is to rule and set a legal framework for the vocational and training education at the secondary and nonuniversity higher levels and defines this modality as the one “promoting among people the ability, knowledge, capacity, skill, value and attitude learning related to performances and criteria typical of the social and productive contexts, allowing for a better knowledge of reality based on the systematic reflection on the practice and the application of the theory” (art. 4).

Table 1 Student enrollments according to the type/level of education and year

Type and level	Year					
	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	
Regular—preprimary						
Nursery school	22,525	25,390	39,318	60,986	74,642	
Pre-school	1,255,858	1,256,191	1,324,529	1,364,909	1,452,273	
Regular—primary						
Half-day schools	4,456,124	4,383,100	4,345,371	4,387,561	4,370,581	
Full-day schools	243,866	238,247	252,376	258,282	272,849	
Regular—secondary						
Basic cycle	1,846,136	1,838,779	1,913,868	1,920,661	1,844,898	
Oriented cycle	Technical	242,316	322,069	305,322	291,922	286,843
	Nontechnical	634,027	830,472	839,161	841,711	791,876
Basic and oriented cycles	Technical	221,171	134,229	105,438	118,928	174,173
	Nontechnical	545,913	363,572	302,018	298,516	521,441
Regular—nonuniversity higher education						
Teacher training only	277,546	313,085	277,808	282,514	337,903	
Technical only	180,071	213,472	233,029	249,654	302,712	
Both types of training	23,865	28,598	23,879	38,272	15,581	
Adults						
All levels	602,609	613,194	625,495	661,143	732,751	
Special						
All levels	73,508	74,294	78,797	79,872	100,439 (*)	

Source: Annual surveys 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009. National Bureau of Education Quality Information and Evaluation (DiNIECE). Ministry of Education of Argentina (MEN)

There is a percentage difference in the 15–17 age group that stands out: while the 12–14 age group shows a 1.4 point increase in the inter-census period, the 15–17 age group attendance grows by 2.15 % (from 79.4 % in 2001 to 81.6 % in 2011).

From a regional perspective, it may be said that enrolment rates corresponding to the primary and secondary levels in Argentina are the highest in Latin America. In the region where primary education is highly extended, Argentina, together with Cuba, Ecuador, Panama, Mexico and Uruguay, is part of a group of countries with rates far over 97 %. At this level, the graduation rate is high for countries in the region, even when there are some countries from Central America with the lowest rates (e.g., Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador) (SITEAL 2009, 2010; PRIE 2011).

At the secondary level, Argentina is part of a group of countries, together with Chile, Cuba and Peru, having high graduation rates. At the age of 17, eight out of ten adolescents are undergoing the final stage of secondary school, some of them have already finished and a small part has undertaken higher level studies. Seven out of ten young people between 20 and 22 years old have already finished secondary education (SITEAL 2010; Poggi 2010).



Fig. 1 Student school trajectories indicators. Regular education. Primary and secondary levels (Source: Annual surveys 2007, 2008 and 2009. National Bureau of Education Quality Information and Evaluation (DiNIECE). Ministry of Education of Argentina (MEN). Repetition, effective promotion, interannual drop out and overage rates: 2008–2009. Graduation rate: 2007–2008)

2.2 Overcoming Hindrances in Student School Trajectories

Regardless of the achievements already mentioned, there are still some hindrances in the education system in connection with the student school trajectories that should be stressed. To clarify this, five key indicators should be analysed: repetition, overage, dropout, effective promotion, and graduation, which refer to problems and effects that are mutually combined. Repetition leads to overage, and both are associated with dropout, which makes promotion, and graduation rates fall, although there might be other independent causes. This also calls for interpreting indicators carefully: for example, overage is also a result of the late enrolment in the education system. Consequently, there are times when the success of school inclusion programmes might increase this rate. The above figure shows each indicator (Fig. 1).

In the case of primary level, inter-annual dropout rate averages 1.16%. Dropout rates increase considerably at the 8th year of schooling (12.08%⁶). This may be due first to the fact that, at that moment, most of students accumulate years as grade repeaters and therefore turn overage. Second, this shows the difficulties faced by secondary schools to adapt to the inclusion of new groups of students. Finally,

⁶ Annual surveys 2008 and 2009. National Bureau of Education Quality Information and Evaluation (DiNIECE). Ministry of Education of Argentina (MEN).

adolescents young people living in less advantaged social contexts are seldom impelled to engage in the informal work force.

The cumulative effect of repetition is evidenced in the overage at the basic cycle of secondary education, which scales up to 38.2 %. High repetition rates imply that there is a growing overage increase every year; however, it is offset by the dropout increase (since most of those leaving school are those who repeated at least once in their career). This has an impact also on the overage rate at the second cycle of secondary education. Overage rate at the primary education level is over 22 % and grows as the students progress in their education as a result of the cumulative effect of repetition.

Another side of repetition and dropout is promotion. The effective promotion rate at the primary school level is over 93 %, at basic secondary school level is over 79 % and at the oriented secondary school level reaches almost 75 %.

There are many very complex causes for repetition. In a context of growing school inclusion, this discrepancy increases due to, among other factors, the access of boys, girls, adolescents, and young people from historically excluded social sectors, and challenges the system's traditions and practices. Schools have not been prepared to disclose inequality and diversity relationships entailed by their profiles.

It is worth mentioning a recent measure adopted by the Federal Education Council about repetition during the first year of primary school where the rate reaches 8.16, when it is 5.18 for the whole level.⁷ In the framework of other considerations about school trajectories,⁸ the agency has resolved that the two first years of this level are a pedagogical unit and therefore the promotion schemes leading to review repetition should be recast. It is also important to implement a promotion scheme for the second cycle accompanied by supporting measures and assistance through specific programmes to encourage continuing schooling, ensure learning achievements and respect the specific processes undergone by boys and girls.

2.3 Decreasing Social and Economic Inequalities

Argentina—after the 1990s and particularly after the 2001 crisis—recorded a strong increase of social and economic inequalities as evidenced also by the cultural level and the possibilities of civic integration and participation. Education has not escaped from this situation. While social gaps increased, the education system presented an extremely heterogeneous and fragmented scenario.

Over the past few decades, employment has been strong in the country, and the society was highly integrated. This situation has been gradually decreasing, social

⁷ Annual surveys 2008 and 2009. National Bureau of Education Quality Information and Evaluation (DiNIECE). Ministry of Education of Argentina (MEN).

⁸ See *Resolución CFE No174/12* approving the document “Federal guidelines to improve teaching and learning and school trajectories at the pre-primary and primary levels and modalities and their regulation”.

groups started to develop different integration strategies and schools played an important role to this end. School difficulties added to this situation, as mentioned above, turning more complex the design and development of educational policies that seek to recover social justice (Filmus & Kaplan 2012).

It was in this scenario that inclusion policies were promoted to provide for the essential material conditions to effectively exercise the right of children and young people to have access to education and remain in the education system. The provision of resources (school and inclusion scholarships, books and educational material, computer equipment), together with the building and refurbishment of physical spaces, has been conceived as a basic condition leading to a broader education proposal to make teaching and learning a feasible fact.

Scholarships granted through the different programmes totalled 690,785 students in 2009 (DiNIECE 2011); all along the 2000s, scholarships were extended from students attending secondary schools to those who did not attend any level at all (primary or secondary) to bring them back to school; the programme was gradually extended to reach also resident foreign students.

In 2009, an unprecedented comprehensive policy was established to replace and exceed both scholarship programmes and other social benefits delivered by several agencies until then. The purpose of the “Universal Child Allowance for the Social Protection” is to improve the situation of boys, girls and adolescents in a vulnerable social situation by granting a single benefit to their parents or tutors on the condition that sanitary controls and attendance at the public education system are complied with during the period established as compulsory.

In 2012, over 3,540,700 beneficiaries received the expected contribution, which allowed improving access and retention of children, adolescents and young people in the education system.

2.4 *Secondary Education as a Central State Policy*

Secondary education has been assumed as a central state policy (both at a national and provincial levels) to guarantee adolescents and young people the right to access, continue and finish this level of education.

The above-mentioned *National Education Law* has established the compulsory nature and therefore raised the challenge to overcome a selective tradition, typical at this level, in most of the modalities.

To progress in this aspect, a series of political and strategic guidelines has been agreed with the Federal Education Council, principally on the following subjects: jurisdictional plans and institutional improvement plans, guidance for pedagogical and institutional organisation, student mobility guidelines and proposals to include and/or rule students’ school trajectories at the secondary education level.

Indeed, the National Plan for Secondary Education is organised based on three strategies that have to do with major coverage of this education level and the improvement of student school trajectories, better quality of the educational offer in

connection with quality policies and the strengthening of the institutional management, both at a school level and technical team level within jurisdictions.

Defining a secondary school for all is a key issue (Tiramonti 2004). Some of the main characteristics set forth in the strategic documents are the following: quality standards, which entail more teaching in language, mathematics and foreign language; tutors spending more hours at the institution to ensure a better guidance to students at key stages throughout the school cycle and including subjects that contribute to the comprehensive training of students, such as sex education, education on and for human rights. Also, the purpose is to ensure a training environment inside and outside the school including community members and to promote and strengthen student participation.

2.5 Expanding Technical and Vocational Education

The technical and vocational education (ETP) is a modality within the education system coordinated by the National Institute for Technological Education (INET), reporting to the National Ministry of Education. This modality is ruled by the above-mentioned law. The function of this institute in the country is to coordinate and integrate different types of institutions and educational programmes for and into the labour activity. It includes ETP Institutions (both at secondary and higher education levels) and Teacher Training Institutes.

One of the main objectives is to strengthen the technical and vocational training, in terms of quality and appropriateness, to meet social inclusion processes, facilitate the integration of young people into the labour market and the continuous training of adults throughout their working lives, and meet the new demands of technological innovation, economic growth and reactivation of production systems.

It is worth mentioning that during the 1990s technical education was practically non-existent. Since 2003, a decision was taken to reactivate technical education and the *Technical and Vocational Education Law* was enacted, which allowed increasing resources invested in this area. This type of training is currently considered strategic and is recognised in terms of social and economic development.

Coordination actions between technological, technical and vocational training education on the one hand and labour and production sectors on the other are promoted at local, regional and interregional levels; also, international cooperation arrangements are carried out together with actions connected with the different integration processes, particularly, those of the MERCOSUR countries.

In recent years, efforts have been concentrating in strengthening technical and vocational education with the purpose of encouraging educational, social and labour inclusion. Actions taken include the following: national standardisation and validity of degrees, at both the secondary and higher levels; development of family vocational profiles and training programs, and strengthening ETP institutions management by financing improvement projects.

Concurrently, proposals have been developed for initial teacher training and improving science and technology teaching and learning processes by means of continuous teacher training actions in technological areas, production of teaching resources and publications on different contents and basic disciplines.

2.6 Improving the Status of the Teaching Profession

Improving the status of the teaching profession has been a strategic focus of the educational policies during the recent years. From a comprehensive point of view that includes not only the actions leading to improve material living conditions but also opportunities to access the cultural production. Improvement in salary and labour conditions has been accompanied by actions tending to reposition training as an inalienable right of teachers and, in turn, as an obligation of the central government.

In this context, the National Teacher Training Institute (INFOD) was created by the *National Education Law* as a new institutional framework to develop and strengthen teacher training policies.

The creation of this institute allowed defining three priority areas of activity:

- Institutional development: includes working strategies leading to reshape the identity of the teacher training system, facilitating consensus and conditions for its organisation, planning, strengthening, and improvement
- Curricular development: focused on integrating and improving curriculum and curriculum management and on updating teacher training, teaching and learning methods
- Professional development: includes the in-service training of teachers, articulated with their practices and updating contexts, taking into account the heterogeneity of their careers and the teaching and learning problems arising from the different labour contexts.

Also, the Teacher Training National Plan (2007–2010) was formulated in 2007 to develop a set of action guidelines leading to a continuous teacher training and professional development, considered as permanent activities articulated with the effective practices of trainers, oriented to teacher needs and their specific performance.

2.7 Learning Assessment and Improvement Policies

Argentina regularly evaluates learning achievements through a sampling or census process on specific curriculum areas (mathematics, language, natural and social sciences) and at certain key stages of the student school trajectories: 3 and 6 years of primary education and 2/3 and final years of secondary education.

Table 2 Results by level of performance in mathematics, end of secondary school 2007 and 2010. Country total

Performance levels	2007	2010
High	18.5 %	14.7 %
Medium	36.8 %	55.3 %
Low	44.7 %	30.0 %

Sources: Operativo Nacional de Evaluación (ONE, National Assessment of Student Achievement) 2007 and 2010. National Bureau of Education Quality Information and Evaluation (DiNIECE). Ministry of Education of Argentina (MEN)

Results from the evaluation of the Argentine education system are far from being desirable, in contrast with the high coverage rates achieved; therefore, it is important to delve into policies specifically oriented to quality so that this becomes a fundamental aspect to include children in schools. Therefore, learning achievements are a key issue where it is necessary to enhance improvement policies actions.

However, it is to be noted that the national education quality process to finish secondary school corresponding to the year 2010 reveals interesting results that are worth mentioning⁹ (DiNIECE s/f, p. 10):

- The percentage of students in the medium and high performance levels is 65.5 in natural sciences, 70 in social sciences and mathematics and 73.7 in Spanish.
- In mathematics, social and natural sciences, the amount of students with low performance level decreased between 12 % and 21 % points when compared with those of 2007.
- The highest percentage of students corresponds to the medium level of performance for all areas of study.
- In mathematics, the percentage of students in the medium level increases in 18.5 % points in comparison to the year 2007, while the percentage in the high level drops 3.8 %.
- In mathematics, considering high and medium levels of performance as a whole, students reaching satisfactory or outstanding performances account for 70 %, representing a 26 % points increase over those in the same level in the 2007 evaluation survey (44 %).
- In natural sciences, an 18 % increase is also observed in the medium level of performance, and in the highest level, there is a 3.3 % increase.
- In Spanish, there is an increase of 5 % points of students in the low performance level in comparison to the year 2007. Still this area has the lowest percentage of students in the low level.
- Spanish is the area with the highest percentage of students with a high performance level (20.4 %); this area also shows the highest percentage of students with high and medium performance levels (73.7 %).

⁹The principal results obtained in the 2010 ONE corresponding to the census conducted at the end of secondary education. Results of this survey for other years can be accessed through the DiNIECE website: <http://diniece.me.gov.ar>.

Table 3 Results by level of performance in Spanish, end of secondary school 2007 and 2010. Country total

Performance levels	2007		2010	
High	20.2 %	} 78.8 %	20.4 %	} 73.7 %
Medium	58.6 %		53.3 %	
Low	21.2 %		26.3 %	

Sources: ONE 2007 and 2010. National Bureau of Education Quality Information and Evaluation (DiNIECE). Ministry of Education of Argentina (MEN)

Table 4 Results by level of performance in social sciences, end of secondary school 2007 and 2010. Country total

Performance levels	2007		2010	
High	10.8 %	} 55.3 %	17.2 %	} 70.0 %
Medium	47.0 %		52.8 %	
Low	42.2 %		30.0 %	

Sources: ONE 2007 and 2010. National Bureau of Education Quality Information and Evaluation (DiNIECE). Ministry of Education of Argentina (MEN)

Table 5 Result by level of performance in natural sciences, end of secondary school 2007 and 2010. Country total

Performance levels	2007		2010	
High	10.1 %	} 44.3 %	13.4 %	} 65.6 %
Medium	34.2 %		52.2 %	
Low	55.7 %		34.3 %	

Sources: ONE 2007 and 2010. National Bureau of Education Quality Information and Evaluation (DiNIECE). Ministry of Education of Argentina (MEN)

- In social sciences, there is a 6.4 % increase of students in the high level for the whole country compared to the 2007 results (Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5).

Among the aspects of the educational policy promoted by the National Ministry of Education and the provincial ministries that allow establishing hypothesis about improving learning achievements, there are several questions worth mentioning.

First, efforts were undertaken during the last decade to extend the school year in order to guarantee 180 class days established by *Law No 25.864* at the end of 2003, later extended to 190 days, calling for a compensation of days lost to ensure the minimum number of days set forth by law.

Second, equal learning conditions as well as recognition of diversity must be guaranteed in an unequal education system. Working to narrow the gaps led to approving the core learning priorities (NAP) as a cluster of knowledge that should be part of the education of boys, girls and young people to create equal opportunities to access knowledge, which contribute to the full social integration and values in favour of the common good, social coexistence, job sharing and respect for the differences.

Third, school teaching policies and teacher training development policies, through the programmes implemented by the National Ministry of Education, aim at intensifying literacy and numeracy skills at the first cycle of the primary education level and teaching mathematics and sciences at the second cycle. Provincial initiatives developed on this subject should also be considered.

Also, several measures have been implemented in connection with reinforcing educational equipment and material to improve teaching conditions, for example, provision of school textbooks, science labs, working materials for teachers and students in different curriculum areas.

The *Conectar Igualdad* Programme¹⁰ (Equal Opportunity Connection Programme)—driven by different agencies of the national government together with other proposals to provide connectivity—merits a special mention. It seeks to promote social and digital inclusion by delivering netbooks and provide connectivity to every state-managed school and secondary and special school students together with those at Teacher Training Institutes throughout the country.

In 2005, over 75 % of urban schools and 40 % of rural schools at primary and secondary levels owned a computer, serving 81 % of urban enrolment and 54 % of rural enrolment. However, differences were still visible: 86 % of private schools were equipped with computers versus 70.5 % of state-owned schools. By 2005, only 37 % of educational institutions had connectivity, out of which 63.8 % had only a telephone connection and half of them was paying for it at that time. Institutions with broadband connections (ADSL, cable MODEM and satellite) were scarce and in general had to pay for it (DiNIECE 2006).

The *National Education Law* confirmed the importance of this issue by stressing the fact that the access and ICT literacy should be part of the essential curriculum contents to be included in the knowledge society.

The *Conectar Igualdad* Programme has already delivered more than 2,200,000 netbooks for the 2010–2012 period out of the expected 3,000,000 netbooks according to the reported information. This includes a series of pedagogical actions for professional development of supervisors, headteachers and teachers, promoted not only by the central government but also by the provinces, together with the preparation of supporting materials for teaching in the classroom and students' families (*Conectar Igualdad* 2011).

3 Future Challenges

To conclude, some thoughts on the approach of the pending challenges of the Argentine education system will be presented. It is worth noting that these are specifically addressed in the National Plan for Compulsory and Teacher Education, recently approved by the Federal Council of Education (December 2012).

¹⁰For further information please visit <http://www.conectarigualdad.gob.ar/>.

3.1 The Challenge to Narrow Social and Educational Gaps

The Argentine educational system shows profound regional and provincial gaps, some of which are related to social inequalities in terms of the capacity to enroll, retain and promote boys, girls, adolescents and young people throughout the country. A similar scenario that occurs relates to the capacity to provide quality education for all.

In this context, addressing the equity challenge means bearing in mind the need to coordinate government efforts, financing and supply strategies on the one hand and comprehensive and active social policies on the other hand. Equity is a problem directly related to the functioning of the education system, which also requires a steady effort from the nation, the provinces and the city of Buenos Aires to build a society with higher levels of social equality.

Social inequalities in the provinces are juxtaposed with profound school inequalities in terms of coverage, infrastructure, the quality of the equipment and the availability of resources at schools, altogether with teacher training and working conditions. All of the above has a bearing on the quality of teaching offered by schools and what students learn throughout their school trajectories.

Other differences deriving from enrolment segregation processes should be attributed to jurisdictional differences. The difference among schools—which reflects the social differences among the students—is the result of a complex process involving space and social circumstances as well as the scope of policies, the way they are implemented, and the effects produced to face these inequalities.

Overlapping social, regional and school inequalities contribute to a process of fragmentation and differentiation of schools that tends to become fixed. This fragmentation goes beyond the traditional forms of segmentation within the system.

The main issue here is that it is impossible to think of reversing the fragmentation effects on equity without the decisive action of the state in rebuilding the rules to curb them, ensure minimum common guidelines to operate the institutions within the education system and prioritise, in a clear and precise way, the support to schools serving lower income and less advantaged social sectors (Tedesco 2012; Filmus & Kaplan 2012).

Therefore, a further analysis is necessary for distributive educational policies to secure acceptable levels of social cohesion, ensuring common basic levels to guarantee quality education.

3.2 The Challenge to Promote Diversity

At the same time, it is essential to attach its own importance to diversity recognition policies that are increasingly included in the current educational agenda. The new educational laws have made their progress in the regulatory requirements of a broad set of rights for sectors of the society which were unattended by the old universal and homogeneous educational model. However, there appears

to be a considerable discrepancy between these regulatory prescriptions and the effective conditions that the education system seems to provide to ensure those rights. The most evident case is that of the intercultural bilingual education, which has been in the international and national agendas for over two decades, but every day runs up against the limits imposed by the feeble initiatives aimed at supporting this type of education.

It is not only about carrying out actions focused on a certain group of subjects recognised as holders of rights. The multiple articulations of social inequality and cultural diversity challenge the daily functioning of an education system that calls immediately for actions to deal with this context in a more sensitive way (Lopez 2010).

There are two tensions sprouting here: on the one hand, the difficulties to meet traditional socialising mandates that provided meaning to education in Argentina during the twentieth century in a context demanding recognition for diversity and, on the other hand, the difficulties derived from the importance of school tradition—important for the daily functioning of the education system—and the need to search for innovative and viable ways to understand the teaching and learning processes. In both cases, the traditional mandates provide a certain order to the actions taken by schools but limit their capacity to adapt to the ever-changing contexts and the diverse population enrolled. Over the past decades, the changing initiatives have been more prone to destabilise the smooth running of schools than to achieve new practices that are of relevance to school actors and meet the needs of their communities.

3.3 The Challenge to Prioritise Knowledge

The above-mentioned tension that seems to exist between the inclusiveness of the Argentine education system and the attainment of good education performance appears as one of the most difficult core issues to resolve. Deep inside, there is a tension in the relationship among cultural transmission, equity and diversity that calls for the need to think over about the system functioning guidelines.

On one hand, it is essential for equity policies to operate in such a way more access to knowledge is attained together with a meaningful and relevant learning for society and students (Tenti 2008). In this sense, policies should ensure equal learning achievements.

On the other, recognising diversity requires reviewing the curriculum and the daily organisation of teaching practices with the purpose of ensuring the right to education for all without entailing any imposition in this sense. Ensuring equal learning achievements would mean to carefully redefine the goals that everybody should attain. Diversity recognition policies must ensure respect for a cultural identity.

In this scenario, educational policies face the challenge to prioritise knowledge in complex societies where universal certainties keep changing.

Learning achievements are themselves a top priority issue. However, the response should not be to give everybody more of the same, least of all, a strategy that in the name of group identity will segregate and differentiate people.

It is necessary to view the experience of past decades in perspective to combine creative educational policies that focus on the strengthening of fundamental cognitive skills to understand, apply, develop and disseminate knowledge while, at the same time, organise a society that turns coexistence into an experience of tolerance and shared recognition.

References

- Albergucci, R. (1996). *Educación y estado. Organización del sistema educativo*. Buenos Aires: Docencia.
- Almadoz, M. R. (2000). *Sistema educativo argentino. Escenarios y políticas*. Buenos Aires: Santillana.
- Braslavsky, C., & Krawczyk, N. (1988). *La escuela pública*. Buenos Aires: Flacso–Miño y Dávila.
- Bravo, H. F. (1988). *Bases constitucionales de la educación argentina*. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina.
- Conectar Igualdad. (2011). *Nuevas voces, nuevos escenarios: estudios evaluativos sobre el Programa Conectar Igualdad*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Educación.
- DiNIECE. (2006). *Equipamiento informático, conectividad y sus usos en el sistema educativo argentino*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Educación. Disponible en: <http://diniece.me.gov.ar>
- DiNIECE. (2008). *PISA 2006. Informe nacional*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Educación. Disponible en: <http://diniece.me.gov.ar>
- DiNIECE. (2011). *La educación argentina en cifras 2010*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Educación. Disponible en: <http://diniece.me.gov.ar>
- DiNIECE s/f. *Operativo Nacional de Evaluación 2010. Censo de finalización de la Educación Secundaria. Informe de Resultados*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Educación. Disponible en: <http://diniece.me.gov.ar>
- Filmus, D., & Kaplan, C. (2012). *Educación para una sociedad más justa*. Buenos Aires: Aguilar.
- GIP (Grupo Iberoamericano de PISA). (2009). *Iberoamérica en PISA 2006. Informe regional*. Madrid: OCDE–Santillana.
- López, N. (2010). Entre el universalismo y la discriminación. Desafíos de la educación. *Aportes para el desarrollo humano en Argentina No 3*. Buenos Aires: Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo – PNUD/Argentina.
- Marchesi, A., & Poggi, M. (coord.). (2010). *Presente y futuro de la educación iberoamericana*. Madrid: AECID – Fundación Carolina. Número 7, 2º época. En: <http://www.pensamientoiberoamericano.org/sumarios/7/presente-y-futuro-de-la-educacion-iberoamericana/>
- Ministerio de Educación de Argentina. (2008). *El desarrollo de la educación. Informe Nacional de Argentina 2004–2008*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Educación.
- Ministerio de Educación de Argentina. (2011). *Análisis y evaluación de los aspectos educativos de la Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH)*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Educación.
- PNUD. (2010). *Informe Nacional sobre Desarrollo Humano 2010. Desarrollo humano en Argentina. Trayectos y nuevos desafíos*. Buenos Aires: Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo – PNUD/Argentina.
- Poggi, M. (2010). Una radiografía de los sistemas educativos de América Latina. Desafíos para las políticas educativas. En Marchesi y Poggi, op. cit.
- Proyecto Regional de Indicadores Educativos (PRIE). (2011). *Panorama educativo 2010. Desafíos pendientes*. UNESCO, Secretaría de Educación Pública de México y Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA).

- SITEAL. (2009). *Universalizar el acceso y completar la educación secundaria. Entre la meta social y la realidad latinoamericana*. Datos para el debate No 7, SITEAL. Buenos Aires: IIPE/UNESCO Buenos Aires- OEI. Disponible en: <http://www.siteal.iipe-oei.org>
- SITEAL. (2010). *Informe de tendencias sociales y educativas 2010. Metas educativas 2021. Desafíos y oportunidades*. Buenos Aires: IIPE/UNESCO Buenos Aires- OEI.
- SITEAL. (2011). *Argentina. Perfiles de países*. Buenos Aires: IIPE-UNESCO Buenos Aires – OEI. En <http://www.siteal.iipe-oei.org>
- Tedesco, J. C. (2012). *Educación y justicia social en América Latina*. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura – Universidad Nacional de San Martín.
- Tenti Fanfani, E. (comp.). (2008). *Nuevos temas en la agenda de política educativa*. Buenos Aires: IIPE-UNESCO Buenos Aires – Siglo XXI.
- Tiramonti, G. (comp.). (2004). *La trama de la desigualdad educativa. Mutaciones recientes en la escuela media*. Buenos Aires: Manantial.
- UNESCO. (2007). *Educación Para Todos en 2015, ¿alcanzaremos la meta?* París: UNESCO.