Evaluation and educational improvement policies in Latin America

Blog

Cross-national studies

Educational plans, policies and reforms

Educational evaluation

In recent decades, and particularly since the eighties and nineties, ministries of education in practically every country in Latin America have promoted the creation, development and strengthening of information systems.

These generally have the following functions:

- To detect and visualize key trends and achievements in education systems.
- To contribute to the objectivity of discussions regarding certain topics and place specific issues on the public agenda.
- To enhance understanding of problems within systems, subsystems and institutions, and guide the selection of priorities in the design of educational policies.
- To clearly communicate aspects of this complex system to different audiences.

The participation of Latin-American countries in the main international and regional evaluations is shown in Table 1. It can be seen that involvement in educational evaluation studies has expanded over time. While the scope and depth of the above studies vary, all have helped institutionalize the use of information systems within the region and support the functions for which they were created.

These initiatives, and others, have been successfully consolidated over time because of the information provided by government agencies from each of the countries involved. This allows not only for national analysis but also for the detection of regional and international trends over the longer term.

However, it is important also to consider how the information produced by these studies is used. To avoid drawing incorrect conclusions, information must be handled with strong methodological care to ensure proper interpretation and the contextualization of the analysis, based on an in-depth knowledge of national education systems. As long as the appropriate pains are taken during the collection process, and in the interpretation of the information, its contribution can be of the utmost importance.
With different levels of institutionalization, national evaluation systems have consolidated around the following aspects:

- Data collection on a regular basis, which allows information to be continually updated.
- Application of evaluations in different grades.
- Use of various instruments (tests, socio-educational surveys on family environment, school variables, etc.).
- The proper implementation of methodologies that allow comparison over time, and between the countries, in the case of regional and international studies (a more recent development).
- Public access to the information by different actors, and dissemination strategies, though these vary considerably between countries.

In this regard, the region has made much progress. Although challenges remain, particularly concerning the second generation of information systems, and the analysis and interpretation of the extensive amount of information collected, indicator systems and evaluative studies are being merged to produce a greater understanding of the trends in education systems and their schools. Finally, an important challenge lies in improving the which such analysis is communicated to different audiences.

Click here to read the full article

View PDF

- Log in or register to post comments