

# The Peruvian educational system and social challenge of the high

What is the problem with segregation? asks Sandra Carrillo, while pointing out that the educational emergency did not originate in the pandemic, since “Peru is one of the Latin American countries with the greatest separation of students in different schools according to the socioeconomic level of the families”. In the following article she reflects on what it means to have access to quality education in the country.

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## Peru’s education system in emergency: the political and social challenge of the high level of school segregation

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# em in emergency: the political h level of school segregation

The educational emergency did not born as a result of the pandemic, it is rather the pandemic that evidenced the state of emergency in which the Peruvian educational system finds itself. During the pandemic, Peruvian schools did not have in-person classes for more than 600 days. This situation has enormously increased the gaps in learning, in socio-emotional well-being and in access to the right to education for more than eight million students, among girls, boys and adolescents, putting the groups with the most serious conditions of health at greater risk of vulnerability.

Quality education is a right for all people and it is the duty of the State to guarantee that right. In this logic, access to education, permanence in the educational system, receiving quality education and guaranteeing the best development of each student must be constituted as the ultimate obligation of the State and the greatest commitment of civil society. Quality education must come regardless of the personal, family or sociocultural characteristics of the girls, boys and adolescents: it does not matter where they were born or the wealth of their families, or their abilities, or their mother tongue or membership in a cultural group or religion. There are no exceptions to access quality education.

The existence of very differentiated schools for different groups of students does not comply with the basic principle of quality with equality. The equality of opportunities is called into question if the system divides based on the wealth or poverty of their families, or their educational level, or based on their origin or their abilities.

This phenomenon of unequal distribution in different schools according to personal or social characteristics, or by condition, is what we technically call *school segregation*. Thus, school segregation by socioeconomic level is the different distribution, in schools, of students from families with more economic resources and those

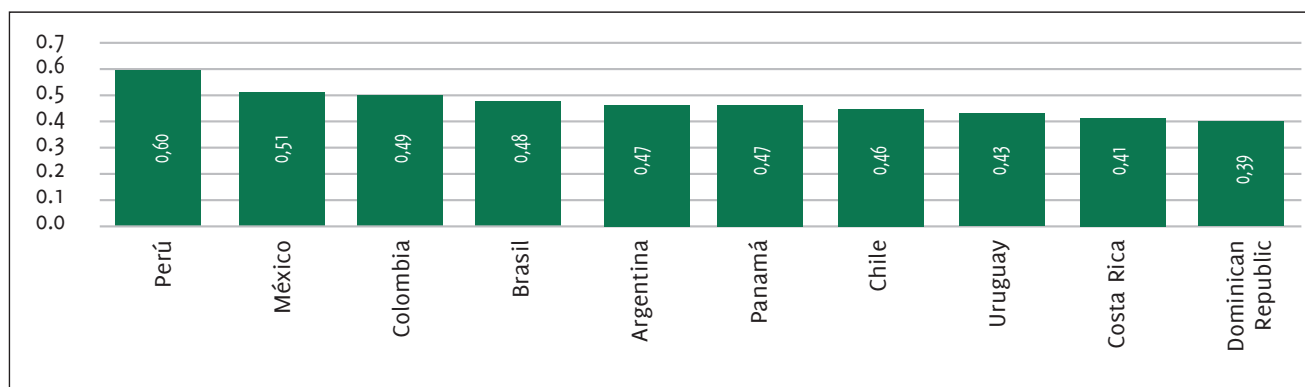
with less (schools for the rich and for the poor). Segregation by national origin occurs if the unequal distribution is between foreign and native students (schools for foreigners or schools for indigenous people). School segregation by ability occurs if there are schools for the brightest students and schools for students with more difficulties.

Peru is one of the Latin American countries with the greatest separation of students in different schools based on the socioeconomic level of the families. The latest data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), as seen in graph 1 (see next page), show that Peru is, above Mexico or Colombia, the country with the highest segregation index of the Latin American countries that participated in this international evaluation.

And we are not only at the forefront of segregation in the region; furthermore, the rates increase year after year. Peru's participation in the different editions of PISA provides us with clear, as well as alarming, data. The index was at 0,44 in 2000, at 0,54 in 2009, at 0,55 in 2012 and at 0,59 in 2015, until reaching 0,60 in the 2018 edition. That 0,60 means that 60% of students from lower-income families (6 out of 10) should change schools so that there would be no segregation. 60%, the highest figure of the countries for which information is available. A figure as large as it is worrying.

## BUT WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH SEGREGATION?

1. This very high school segregation has disastrous consequences for the quality of the educational system because it directly attacks equality. It is contrary to the very approach to rights enshrined in our constitutional regulatory framework and in international treaties.

**Graph 1. School segregation by socioeconomic level in Latin American countries. PISA 2018**

**2.** It is pedagogically inconvenient because daughters and sons of families enrolled in schools with a high concentration of low-income students have fewer opportunities to learn. There the classes become more complex; the *peer effect* – the relationship between students – does not offer major advantages in these groups; their teachers are less experienced, have very little training, are probably less motivated and face numerous limitations in carrying out their work. All of this is combined with certain characteristics of infrastructure and services, as well as situations of abuse and violence that are generated in spaces where there is less agency and possibility of choice. Those who are behind continue to be left behind. The trajectory is upwards and for this group the slope is increasingly steeper, which makes it much more difficult to climb in these conditions.

**3.** Politically it does not help build a better democracy, because schools are one of the most important spaces for the formation of citizenship. Civic education and citizenship courses are not enough to build democracy, but day-to-day coexistence is also important to learn to recognize, accept and value *others*, those who are different from *oneself*. Thus, for example, the concentration of sons and daughters of wealthy families in a few schools makes it impossible for them to share experiences with a more diverse student body.

**4** It is strategically a problem because inequalities are generated that will impact future social inequalities. Society becomes weaker and more fragmented. Diversity is part of the enrichment of the citizen educative experience that is lost in these highly differentiated spaces, even more so when it is a country with elites

who exercise social power, with high discrimination and marked social fragmentation.

**5.** It is a problem for the management of social policies, since having such differentiated groups makes intervention programs and projects more expensive and complex, in addition to adding vulnerabilities, so the situation worsens in these groups.


We insist that the educational emergency does not originate in the pandemic. We cannot talk about a quality educational system if we cannot guarantee the same conditions and opportunities for all of its students. An educational system that segregates and excludes is not a quality educational system. In this sense, our educational system is in emergency. The evidence of the last two decades tells us that segregation has increased and that we are not doing anything about it to stop or reduce it.

Although the Ministry of Education has proposed an enabling regulatory framework (Ministerial Resolution 531-2021-Minedu) in which specific actions are indicated in schools for the return to classes, this is insufficient in the face of the challenge of achieving reintegration. and permanence of students, in the current year, based on a focus on the right to education.

The return to presentiality has to be without leaving anyone behind or outside the system, and the school cannot continue offering the same thing it offered before 2020. Education needs to be given from a territorial perspective, that is decentralized, adapted to the contexts and their particular conditions, allowing intersectoral articulation, the incorporation of sociocultural elements, and the participation of families and

communities. With a segregated education system, this is much more difficult to achieve.

It is important to recognize that the Peruvian educational system is highly segregated and that something must be done about. We must continue to deepen our knowledge of school segregation in the country, look at other segregations, analyze its evolution, investigate its causes and consequences, and address paths to change the situation.

The return to presentiality becomes an opportunity to remove the Peruvian educational system from its state of emergency, lay the foundations and project the path towards an education that contributes to building a more just society, which will have an impact on the construction of a country with greater cohesion and better development. Without a doubt, with school segregation the path will be impossible. 

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