

**Facilitators and barriers to participation in
Lower Secondary Education in Mexico**

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the factors affecting students' educational participation in lower secondary education in Oaxaca, Mexico, for which the identification of factors leading to students' educational disengagement became fundamental. Given the stress commentators have given to the influence of socio-economic background on students' academic achievement, it became necessary for this study to explore whether students' performance would vary if coming from advantaged or disadvantaged backgrounds.

Through the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews, 81 participants (students, parents and teachers), selected through specific criteria, were interviewed in 9 schools from both advantaged and disadvantaged areas. The elements investigated included family, school and community aspects, as well as students' attitudinal characteristics, all of which the literatures have identified as influential on educational performance.

Socio-economic background proved to be one of the strongest influential factors, in so far as the educational provision and educational support that coming from a socio-economically advantaged family may offer. Additionally, other aspects of family values influence students' individual preferences and aspirations, for example, the environmental stability at home, regardless of family background. School presents two strong determinants that, if adjusted, could ameliorate students' educational disengagement; homework and school policies. Positive and negative practices carried out by teachers which influence students' educational participation are also outlined.

These findings provide the basis for the development of a strategy to improve the public educational system and to enhance students' academic achievement so that they are able to finalise their compulsory education.

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Author's declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

1 Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 stated that basic education should be free and mandatory, at least at the elementary and fundamental stages. Therefore, achieving universal provision of compulsory education is a top priority for most developing countries. Over the past two decades, the length of basic education has been extended and lower secondary education has been increasingly positioned as the immediate prolongation of primary education (UNESCO-UIS, 2004 in UNESCO, 2005), as in the case of Mexico since 1993.

Educational statistics in Mexico reveal that children in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas struggle to conclude lower secondary education. Although the country has moved forward with figures of enrolment in primary and secondary education increasing over past decades, overall national averages may not reflect regional variations. By 2005, for example, 82 percent of children of eligible age (3-15) to attend lower secondary school were enrolled at this level, however, disadvantaged states such as Oaxaca and Chiapas showed attendances of 81 and 76 percent respectively. These outcomes seem to reflect international patterns where transition rates into secondary education are usually always above 95% in industrialised and developing economies, and almost always above 50% in other regions (UNESCO, 2003:66). Additionally, national statistics show that this level of education is the stage at which different determinants appear to hinder educational performance.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the reasons behind the non completion of lower secondary education in Mexico when both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 3 of The Political Constitution of the United Mexican States declare that basic education is compulsory.

This research is particularly important in the context of the situation in Mexico, for three main reasons. Firstly, because its focus was on lower secondary education, a level which not only international literature reports as one in which problems of school participation become apparent, but a level that the Mexican education system recognises as one of its current challenges. Secondly, because this level of education has not been studied by educational researchers in Mexico to the extent other levels of education have (Sandoval, 2002). Finally, the findings suggest that not only do essential adjustments need to be made in the systems in which children perform (in terms of family, school and community), but they also flag the urgency of redefining

educational concepts such as homework, teaching practices and school policies since their current conception hinder children's school performance.

1.1 The scope of this study

Because the literature on school failure is very broad and because educational failure at the basic levels has not been studied in depth in Mexico, it was necessary to evaluate different sources to decide which aspects were the most relevant to set out the grounds of this research. Thus, researching the reasons why children struggle to conclude their basic education meant starting a study with limited advantage. One of this study's main attributes therefore is its scoping nature, which at the same time entails that the findings not only establish the foundation for further research but it also represents a breakthrough in research on factors affecting educational failure at the basic levels of education in Mexico.

The literature on school failure is very broad and it can be said that the three main aspects that have been investigated throughout the years are associated with low academic achievement, dropping out, and more recently, school exclusion. The first two have mainly been approached by both so-called quantitative and qualitative approaches, while the last one, mainly through the latter approach.

The literature commonly suggested that the problem of school failure derives from more than one source. Although the initial idea entailed investigating factors that hinder lower secondary school students' completion of this level of education, the literature shed light on the act of "dropping out" as being the culmination of a cumulative process of disengagement from school. Therefore, it became impractical to look only at "dropping out" whilst disregarding the disengagement processes involved. Moreover, it also represented an opportunity to explore the positive factors influencing educational performance.

Authors such as Gillborn and Mirza (2000); Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980); Epstein, Elwood, Hey, and Maw (1998), through more preordinate methodologies, have studied the influence of demographic characteristics such as socio-economic background, ethnicity and gender and have identified them as being significant in explaining differences between educational outcomes. On the other hand, authors such as Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock (1986); Finn (1993); Orfield (2004); Rumberger (1983, 1987, 2004); Osler and Vincent (2003); Osler (2006), through more contextual and comprehensive approaches, have analysed the influences of family, school, geographical and behavioural factors to explain educational failure.

Thus, the two main spheres that the literature pins as being influential on school accomplishment, irrespective of the methodological approaches undertaken, are demographical characteristics, and contextual characteristics, including how individuals function in such contexts.

Different elements of family, school, individual and geographical characteristics, suggested by international literature, were to be explored in Mexican secondary schools. Given the important effect that socio-economic conditions have on students' educational participation, it was considered pertinent to control for disparities in both advantaged and disadvantaged contexts.

1.2 Objectives of the study

This study was conducted in the State of Oaxaca, where statistics for academic reprobation and dropping out at all levels of education are amongst the highest in Mexico, figures that become increasingly apparent at the lower secondary education level. Thus, through semi-structured interviews with students, parents, teachers and social workers, elements of demographic (socio-economic status, gender, age, etc.) and contextual characteristics (including school and family dynamics) were explored in advantaged and disadvantaged locations of the State. Given the scoping nature of the study, the objectives were also of a broad nature and are listed below:

Identifying the factors leading to students' disengagement from lower secondary schools;

Identifying the factors facilitating students' educational performance in lower secondary schools; and

Examining the extent to which such factors varied depending of socio-economic background

1.3 Contribution to knowledge

As envisaged, this study disclosed that educational failure can have diverse lines of reasoning. It also unveiled which of the factors signalled by the literature, influence educational failure in the context of Mexico and how. Also, these factors were linked to the three main areas explored (schools, family and geographical location). Nevertheless, this study offers two main contributions to knowledge. The first sheds light on key concepts identified in each of the areas explored and that need urgent revision and redefinition; the conception of 'homework', 'family' 'school support' in

the collective conscious of teachers, parents and students proved to represent a patent limitation to the learning processes of children. The second contribution provides insights into the power that school practices and policies have on children's educational outcomes.

It is important to mention that, although major aspects influencing educational failure in the Mexican context were disclosed in this study, its broad scope and consequently the extensive nature of its findings require future work to explore such influential factors in greater depth.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters, with the first chapter being the introduction. Chapter two describes what the literature review has said in relation to educational performance and its relevance to human capital, and to the legal texts describing 'compulsory education' as being mandatory. The definition of educational participation for the study is presented, as well as the trends for participation in developed and developing nations at basic educational levels. The section also presents the definition of educational failure for this study, and the main theories through which other authors have strived to explain it.

Chapter three focuses on educational provision in Mexico, illustrating the organisation of its education system, followed by describing of important constitutional reforms that the system has undergone following the National Agreement for the Modernisation of Basic Education in 1992. The education system's challenges and aspirations relating to international commitments regarding basic education are also outlined. The final part of this chapter provides an overview of the educational challenges faced by children attending basic education in developed and disadvantaged regions of the country.

Chapter four outlines the research strategy and methods used to explore the factors affecting students' performance at lower secondary level in Mexico, describing the purpose of the study and the rationale behind the research design. A further section gives account of the conduct of the pilot study and fieldwork, followed by the tools employed for analysing the collected data. The final section discusses the main challenges and strengths of the research design.

Chapter five presents the family factors identified as being influential on students' school performance, outlining those factors that either facilitate or hinder participation and achievement in school, along with the definition of 'family' used in

the study. Subsequently, the role that homework plays in the lives of lower secondary students is analysed, and the influence cultural capital has at home, and how it impacts students' school work. Also described are the relationships found between parental involvement in schools, their views on education, and their children's educational attainments. Aspects of household dynamics are also examined, as well as the influence of the communities' socio-economic and cultural traditions. The final section presents a summary and discussion of findings and implications for policy and practice.

Chapter six covers school factors found as being influential on students' educational outcomes. Firstly, it accounts for the ways in which school infrastructures affect students' achievement and attendance. Subsequently, the characteristics of teachers in the study are presented along with the teaching practices that have positive and negative effects on students' performance. This chapter also presents the way in which school policies affect students' permanency in school. The last section of this chapter summarises and discusses the findings as well as potential practice and policy implications.

Chapter seven classifies students' personal attributes; the demographic characteristics and personality traits shared by "successful" and "less successful" students. The following section describes students' level of academic attainment over the years, and their short and long-term aspirations. Students' after-school activities, their involvement in employment, anti-social behaviour and dating, are also accounted for. The final section provides a summary and analysis of students' academic and behavioural traits identified as influential in the way they approach education and implications for families and schools.

Chapter eight concludes the study by reviewing the initial objective and research questions, followed by an analysis of the main findings and the extent of the grounds for generalisation and transferability. This chapter also presents a discussion of the contributions and implications drawn from the study to the area of participation in lower secondary education in Mexico, as well as an outline of advice suggested to policy makers. The final aspects comprise a consideration of advantages and limitations of the study, and an illustration of important avenues for future exploration.

2 Facilitators and barriers in secondary education

The purpose of this chapter is to describe what the literature review has said regarding educational performance, namely what facilitates it and what diminishes it. The chapter starts by explaining the relationship between education and human capital; the benefits that human capital brings to nations; how it is normally measured and how it is being measured at the international level. The second part recounts the historic and legal platform of the rights to free and compulsory education for all, on which this research is founded, and how the provision and enjoyment of such rights nowadays are chief commitments of national governments. The third part of this chapter defines compulsory education; the way it has historically and legally become a fundamental responsibility of all nations; the way it has evolved in other nations' educational systems, illustrating trends of compulsory education participation in different countries. The fourth part defines educational participation as comprising enrolment and academic achievement and it also illustrates general trends in developed and developing nations from pre-school education throughout secondary education. Patterns of gender parity are also considered. The section concludes with the description of the more prevalent types of educational inequalities: gender disparities, poverty and disabilities. Furthermore, education quality is presented as the way of measuring equality or inequality in education. The fifth part describes the aspects comprising educational failure: low achievement, school exclusion, and the issue of 'dropping out', and how such aspects are measured in education. The final part of the chapter presents an analysis of the different approaches that aim to explain the factors responsible for educational failure. Two main approaches are put forward; firstly, the frequent approach used in quantitative educational methodologies: by associating (1) ethnicity; (2) social class; and (3) gender, with aspects of student achievement. For this, different studies are described and the associations identified will be outlined. The second approach covers four main spheres; (1) the family; (2) the school; (3) the community; and (4) the individual, as well as sub-aspects of these elements. At the same time, the family and school are argued to be part of a larger (a) 'institutional' dimension which includes the geographical location of the community; and (b) an 'individual' dimension comprising the behaviours and attitudes of students. Such factors and sub-factors (i.e., family composition, school resources, student ambition, etc.) are believed to influence students' academic performance. This approach also considers ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES) and gender elements; however, given the

complex number of factors involved, it applies more with qualitative studies. The end of the chapter summarises and reflects on the main facilitators and barriers identified as being influential in students' educational outcomes.

2.1 Education and human capital

It has been demonstrated that access to education prepares individuals with substantial knowledge and abilities to perform rationally and function judiciously in any social nucleus, and so contributing to the development of the wider society. Education per se entails meaning and worth to every person, without exceptions according to UNESCO (2002). It also recognises education as the necessary tool that helps to unravel and secure other human rights such as “the rights to good health, liberty, security, economic wellbeing and participation in social and political activity.” (p.30). Becker (1993) and Keeley (2007) provide important examples: educated people smoke less and exercise more; also, they become more involved in community projects. It is without doubt a tool which certainly decreases mortality and crime rates, pollution, to mention a few; one which increases political involvement and consequently, one which promotes a more democratic state.

It is well known that Adam Smith defined three factors of production: land, labour and capital goods (Smith, 1999). Later, and based on Smith's approach, a fourth factor was added: entrepreneurship, which is the motivational aspect that enables projects to become a reality. Over fifty years ago, based on Theodore Schultz's approach regarding the value of people, human capital was also considered a crucial factor of production (Keeley, 2007).

The OECD (2001) defines human capital as “the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being” (p. 18). Education (knowledge and skills) is therefore a crucial part of human capital; human capital brings economic growth which is one of the ultimate goals that nations aspire to. In a nutshell, “education is investment in human capital” (Halsey et al., 1980:2). In addition, it could be argued that the accumulation of knowledge and skills commences at birth and ends at death (OECD, 2001). Consequently, nations aim to ensure that children and adults can access a wide variety of educational opportunities (OECD, 2009a); representative developed governments such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom for instance, regulate their educational policies based on the criterion that national growth relies

on high levels of knowledge and skills (Mahony P. in Epstein et al. 1998; Rumberger (2001).

2.1.1 Individual and national advantages

It has been said that human capital provides economic and social benefits; at the individual level it is expected that those more educated, or with at least, basic education, will not only have greater opportunities to find better paid jobs but will also have the opportunity to increment their levels of human capital through further formal or informal ‘on-the-job’ training. In comparison, those with low academic proficiencies, especially adults, will be at greater risks of facing unemployment and social exclusion (Steedman, 1996 in OECD, 2001; Orfield, 2004).

Not only does formal education, such as completing compulsory schooling or attending university, bring immediate economic benefits such as higher salaries, it also brings cultural capital (family habits and cultural assets) to their homes; and thus, habits and cultural practices are reproduced within the family and in the society, even practices such as “the appreciation of classical music, literature and even tennis” (Becker, 1993: 21).

Another reason why education is a concern for governments is that people who do not have adequate skills to find employment result in greater national expenses; as pointed out in the previous paragraph, they become less likely to be part of a qualified work force and therefore, less likely to hold well paid jobs, more prone to unemployment, and consequently, costing the government money such as benefits and unemployment allowances (Rumberger, 2001; Rumberger, 2004). Therefore, free and compulsory education can decrease the levels of child labour and consequently improve school attendance rates (UNESCO, 2007). It can also help people benefit from considerable earning gains the higher the educational levels they attain (OECD, 2009b) and therefore decrease youth unemployment rates, one of the most common problems that governments face worldwide (UNESCO, 2010).

2.1.2 Measurement of human capital

Knowledge, skills, and competencies of individuals are usually measured by educational attainment, such as diplomas or certificates. These three attributes could also be built through experience or informal training, which also represent human capital. A difficulty emerges when, as OECD (2001) observed, educational credentials vary from country to country, thus leaving little proxies for comparison.

The most common methods used are international evaluations such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). Although they merely measure a number of skills and competences, OECD (2001) indicates aspects of their limitations: the sample sizes, the variables inspected and the number of countries participating (OECD, 2001). Despite these limitations, it should be noted that through these methods of measuring attainment, the improvement of human capital and the economic growth rates can therefore be estimated (UNESCO, 2004; OECD, 2009b).

An example of this can be given by OECD (2009a) with regards to global upper secondary education rates; the proportion of the adult population below that level of education went from 37 percent in 1997 to 30 percent in 2009. On the other hand, the figures for the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary and Poland demonstrated that the levels of their population that were below upper secondary education decreased by around 5 percent over the last decade. Generally, populations who have not completed upper secondary education have decreased by an average of 2 percent per year between 1998 and 2006, and nations whose labour markets contained populations below the level of secondary education decreased considerably over the same period, except for countries including Germany, the United States, Japan, Mexico, Poland and Turkey (OECD, 2009a). Another example is Mexico's human capital by 2007, which was the lowest in the OECD and which has had, according to OECD (2007), a slow improvement over the recent decades, if compared to nations such as Korea, Spain and Greece.

Another problem with this approach addressed by UNESCO (2004) is that measuring knowledge and skills through the number of years in school is a very harsh measure principally in a global context, given the significant differences in the resources allocated to the educational systems and the different levels of poverty.

Finally, it is reasonable to say that despite human capital being a crucial factor of economic growth, there are other factors that nations depend on for this, factors including demography, technological modernisation, market-trade policies, and crucially, political and legal systems (Keeley, 2007). However, it is undeniable that a highly educated society can bring innovation for industry, boost productivity and a rapid introduction of state of the art technologies (UNESCO, 2004). Given that nations' most essential assets are not their natural resources or geographical location, but people's human capital, creating the means to battle the inequalities of access to

schooling can help to create the means to economic and social progress (UNESCO, 2010). Moreover, the empowering of disadvantaged groups such as women, the disabled, indigenous peoples and the poor also comes along with the augmentation of human capital.

2.2 The rights to education for all

As mentioned previously, education has been declared a universal right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), a document through which respective national representatives established that elementary stages of education should be free and compulsory. Both international treaties such as the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), or the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and international agreements such as the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993) or the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) are instruments that encourage access and equality in education.

More recently, the 'World Declaration on Education for All' and a 'Framework for Action' was adopted in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and thereby the target of attaining universal primary education (UPE) by 2000 was agreed on. Later, in 2000, representatives of 164 countries, including heads of state, teachers, non-governmental and international organisations, congregated in Dakar, Senegal, for the World Education Forum, where the Education for All (EFA) goals were set. These goals focused on access to education, literacy, gender equality in the search of development of capabilities for young and adults. The same year, at the United Nations' headquarters, New York, world leaders, through the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), asserted the efforts to eradicate extreme poverty, to alleviate health and educational deficiencies, to mention some, by 2015.

Based on the existence of these international instruments, the second and fifth EFA Dakar goals, but mainly on Article 26, section 1 of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights are taken as a departure point for this study:

EFA Goal 2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

EFA Goal 5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

Universal Declaration for Human Rights, article 26, section 1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. [...]

Given that providing access to education to all is a commitment of national governments, such governments therefore become accountable to the objectives of national and international human rights agreements by translating them into national legislations in favour of their citizens (UNESCO, 2002)

The Education for All (EFA) global initiative has boosted national efforts significantly. However, the fact that more than 60 years later these goals have not yet been achieved are a clear indicator that extraordinary efforts need to be made, especially in the less developed nations. Therefore, it is imperative that the instruments and policies implemented to achieve these goals are constantly observed and evaluated against the Dakar objectives and other international treaties and agreements.

2.3 Defining compulsory education

Compulsory education refers to the number of years that the population of a given country are legally required to attend school. Ideally, all people in the world would be able to exercise their right to complete at least pre-school, primary and secondary education. Justifying a given number of years in education dates back to 1962; international treaties re-asserted article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with regards to the right to free and compulsory education; the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education that year, is recorded as one of the earliest international treaties guaranteeing free and compulsory education. In 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) introduced the concept of “progressive introduction of free education” in secondary and higher education. Other treaties followed in Europe, North America and Africa, enabling their economic, social, civic, and cultural rights to be included in their legislations. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 incorporated such rights, including political rights, and this special convention emerged because of

the extra care and special protection that children, as a vulnerable group, require. This convention was ratified by the highest number of nations (191) in 1999. These official treaties establish the international legal framework of the fundamental requirements and obligations to guarantee free and compulsory education for all children (Tomaševski, 2001).

By 2001, 15 countries including Finland, France, Norway, Sweden, Australia, Chile, Ecuador, and Algeria, had set up new regulations to comply with international procedures to promote economic, social and cultural rights, particularly the guarantee of free and compulsory education. Although the majority of nations (106) such as Austria, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, Barbados, Egypt, the United Kingdom, had complied with “some” international procedures and allowed citizens with full access to the aforementioned rights. In contrast, 52 countries including Bangladesh, Belize, China, Cuba, Japan, the United States, etc. were not implementing specific courses of action to alleviate such human rights violations (Tomaševski, 2001).

Since the right to free and compulsory education has been legislated by a large number of countries, it is generally expected that the obligations stay counterbalanced between parents and schools. From the Report on the Regional Conference on Free and Compulsory Education in Latin, in (Tomaševski, 2001:13) it is established that:

“Just as school legislation imposes upon the parent the duty of sending his children to school, States should accept the obligation of providing enough schools to educate all children.”

Tomaševski (2001) also acknowledges that no one can be obliged to do “the impossible” (p.13); and thus, if parents are not able to afford the economic expenses derived from sending their children to school, they cannot be coerced to accomplish such legal entitlements. Stromquist (2001), in her discussion of poverty and girls’ education in Latin America, points out that although slow educational progress has been made, education cannot be portrayed as universally free and compulsory worldwide. She argues that the latter statement is rather chimerical, given that parents are expected to supply their children with uniforms, books and school materials, which represent considerable costs for the economically disadvantaged. Another important point that Stromquist (2001) makes is that school attendance is not actually obligatory in developing countries.

2.3.1 Number of years for compulsory education

Compulsory education differs in terms of ages in different countries; it ends at age 14 in South Korea, Portugal, Turkey and Brazil, for example, yet it ends at age 18 in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands and even Chile (OECD, 2009a). Given that education shall be free and compulsory and provided by governments, one main limitation is that not all governments have implemented formal procedures to eliminate basic human rights violations like non-access to education. Some nations have modified their legislations to implement solutions within the framework of the international agreements to promote access and permanency in education. Tomaševski (2001) provides details of the countries' constitutional agreements and which are organised in Table 1, which shows that a significant number of countries have committed, at least on paper, to the provision of free and compulsory education. However, a significant number of countries are either in the process of complying with such guarantees or have such guarantees limited to their citizens or residents only. Such situations increase inequality of access given that immigration and giving refuge to asylum seekers are phenomena that happen in virtually every nation.

Table 1. Countries constitutional guarantees of free and compulsory education for all children, 2001.

	Yes	Partial	Restricted to citizens	None
Number	142	29	37	44
Examples	Austria, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Egypt, Finland, Mexico, Sweden, United Kingdom, etc.	Bangladesh, Burma, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Maldivies, Nepal, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, etc.	Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Greece, Guatemala, South Korea , Turkey, Vietnam, etc.	Angola, The Bahamas, Botswana, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, USA, Zambia, etc.

Extending compulsory education

The majority of international agreements on free and compulsory education, starting from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, specified primary education as basic and therefore, as the compulsory phase of education. However, in

countries such as the United States and France, secondary education has been part of compulsory education since the 1600s and the beginning of the 1900s respectively. In the United States, however, Massachusetts was the first state to legally implement school attendance laws, which included secondary school, in 1853. The International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Internet Archive's (INCA) database provides a few examples of the dates when countries extended the years of compulsory education; France, for example, lengthened it from age 14 to 16 in 1967; Germany, to 9th grade (ages 6 to 12) in 1970, yet students attending the Gymnasium school are expected to finish at age 18, since 1982; Italy extended it to age 16 in 2009; the Netherlands to age 17 in 2007; the United States varies between its 50 States, from age 16 in Kansas (since 1852) or age 18 in Connecticut (in 1872). Examples from Latin America include Mexico and Chile extending compulsory education to lower secondary school (from ages 11 to 14) in 1993 and 2003 respectively.

More recently, the Council of Europe, through the European Social Charter of 1966 (Revised) instituted primary and secondary education as free of charge and compulsory, calling for the reduction of non-attendance in school and dropout rates in the same levels of education. Gradually, the length of basic education has been extended to lower or upper secondary school. Secondary education is increasingly being positioned as the immediate prolongation of primary education. Due to the different categorisation of compulsory education as in "basic" or "fundamental", countries are currently grouped as those with primary school as compulsory education, and those with compulsory education further than primary school, i.e., lower or upper secondary school (Tomaševski, 2001). As expected, compulsory education in countries from the developing world have an equal length of primary schooling. Examples of a small number of OECD countries and their official durations of compulsory education are presented in Table 2.

Generally, participation rates have a propensity to be high at the latter stages of compulsory education in the majority of OECD countries. However, participation rates reach below 90 percent towards the end of compulsory education in countries like Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Turkey, the United States, Mexico and Chile (OECD, 2009a). One of the possible explanations for why, in such nations, more than 20 percent of the population aged 15 to 19 is out of school (OECD, 2009a) could be explained by the age at which they end their fundamental education. Nevertheless, from a similar standpoint, such as that of Stromquist (2001), it could

be argued that poverty and educational policies (i.e., not enforcing compulsory education lawfully), may be decisive factors in determining school participation.

Table 2. Official duration of full-time compulsory education of some OECD countries.

Country	Starting age	Leaving age	Duration (in years)
Belgium	4	18	14
Chile	6	14	8
USA	6	16/18	10/12
UK (ENG/WLS)	5	16	11
UK (NIR)	5	16	11
France	6	16	10
Mexico	5	15	10
Bulgaria	7	16	9
Greece	6	15	9
Sweden	7	16	9
Brazil	6	14	8
Turkey	6	14	8

Compulsory school stages

A brief description of the importance of the stages of education largely considered as compulsory education was considered supplementary in this section. Pre-school education is considered a critical stage to prepare children physically and mentally, and one which provides children with the prospects to improve and develop their learning experiences at home, and at the same time, to help decrease illiteracy and poverty (OECD, 2009b).

Primary and secondary education, on the other hand, comprises the grounds of the development of innumerable competencies and skills that prepare children to lifelong learning and to be highly productive citizens (OECD, 2009b). Needless to say that these levels of education also prepare students to acquire further advanced knowledge and skills in tertiary education. For this study, the objective is to report on lower secondary education, as the majority of nations still consider it as being legally compulsory (UNESCO, 2004) and, in the majority of nations worldwide, which account for almost 80 percent of children of secondary school age, lower secondary education is the last stage of compulsory education (UNESCO-UNEVOC/UIS, 2006 in UNESCO, 2007).

2.4 Participation trends in compulsory education

The goal of making educational opportunities accessible to all can become tangible when youths and adults have free and full access to education. Based on the EFA goals, participation comprises enrolment, academic attainment and completion in all educational levels: pre-school education, primary school, secondary and tertiary education.

The first Dakar goal includes the expansion and improvement of comprehensive early child care and education with special attention given to the more vulnerable and disadvantaged children. An important relationship exists between children's early years and their physical and psychological development (UNESCO, 2008). The second Dakar goal focuses mainly on girls' access and permanency to a free and compulsory education of good quality, by 2015. Universal Primary Education (UPE) is expected to be achieved when all children of eligible age enrol and complete six years of this level of education (UNESCO, 2004). As for the third goal, it focused on eliminating gender disparities in both primary and secondary education by 2005, a goal that the majority on countries are still counting on to achieve. This goal also aspires to achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with particular attention on favouring girls' access to and achievement in basic education. In this sense, gender parity promotes that the same number of girls and boys, relative to their respective age groups, participate in the education system. Gender equality, on the other hand, means that girls as much as boys, will have equal opportunities to access education and for achievement, and to experience equal treatment (UNESCO, 2003).

2.4.1 Enrolment and educational achievement

In response to the international commitments to boost educational participation, nations have increased efforts to gather enrolment and achievement data and to make them more accessible to the domestic and global community. Both enrolment and achievement are clear indicators of the status of educational participation, as well as dropping out rates. However, as not all governments are able to provide accurate data on the number of children who leave school before completion, this section of the literature review will contain data on enrolment and academic achievement, and dropping out rates will be described in the section of educational failure.

Enrolment rates

Enrolment, according to UNESCO (2004), is the most critical aspect of school participation and “the most easily measurable indicator of progress towards UPE” (p.90). To measure enrolment in the education sector, two statistical measures are used: the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER). Their definitions, according to UNESCO EFA reports are:

GER: Total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the official age group corresponding to this level of education. The GER can exceed 100% due to late entry or/and repetition.

NER: Enrolment of the official age group for a given level of education, expressed as a percentage of the population in that age group.

Academic achievement

The most available resource to measure achievement are international surveys such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2000, 2003, 2006), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007) by the International Association of the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). PISA evaluates reading, mathematical and scientific literacy of 15-year-old students and TIMSS evaluates performance in mathematics and science of 13-year-old students. Given that this study focuses on Mexico, and despite Mexico’s initial participation in TIMSS, the nation decided to withdraw before the publication of results. For this reason, attention will be concentrated on PISA results. Despite the fact that TIMSS includes a significant mixture of participating nations (around 28 percent of industrialised countries, the remainder being transitional and developing nations), an accurate comparison between outcomes of these two tests would not be practical. Equally important, PISA has, by 2006, achieved an integral assessment of literacy, numerical and scientific aspects, which allow estimating students’ knowledge and skills towards the end of their compulsory education. OECD (2006) mentions that the requirements for this test to allow students to perform consistently are that: students are aged between 15 years 3 months and 16 years 2 months; they must have had completed at least 6 years in school; they can

either be attending publicly or privately funded schools, and in either a full-time or part-time curriculum.

2.4.2 Pre-school education

The definition of pre-primary education by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is one of level zero; for children aged at least 3 years, offering planned learning activities away from the home environment (UNESCO, 1997 in UNESCO, 2004).

Previous studies show that when children who have received pre-school formation and those who have not, are compared, the cognitive and participative outcomes have been better for the former, even if the programmes functioned with limited resources (UNESCO, 2004). Other studies have also reported that when children attend pre-school, they develop not only their logical responses but they acquire better social skills (Raine et al., 2003 in UNESCO, 2004), and this level of education also helps to reduce levels of hunger and malnutrition, given that close to 10 million children aged under 5 die yearly, mostly in developing countries (UNESCO, 2006).

Early child care has been included in the basic educational set and participation is higher in developed and transitional nations (UNESCO, 2006); however, several countries do not yet count on an established system of measurement. Formal examinations, assessments or completion certificates are, for the most part, not customary at this level and therefore, comparison between countries would not show accurate outcomes (UNESCO, 2004).

Pre-primary education programmes and entrance age

To date, all nations have implemented pre-primary level programs, normally called pre-school education (93); kindergarten (66); pre-primary education (50); early childhood education (34); and finally, nursery education and a variety of combinations of the aforementioned mentioned designations (28) (UNESCO, 2006). The duration of these programmes vary between countries; in almost half of the world's nations pre-primary lasts around three years, yet in most of the OECD nations, children attend pre-primary programmes that last between one to four years and which comprises ages 4 to 6 (UNESCO, 2010). The majority of European Union nations make available two years of free early childhood programmes. In places such as Central and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, pre-primary school programmes last four years, and in places such as Latin America and the Caribbean, the Arab

States, East Asia and the Pacific, pre-primary school programmes last one or two years (UNESCO, 2006).

Although age three has been considered as the customary entrance age since 1998, a unified agreement has not been established between nations to define the entrance age for pre-primary education, being, for example, ages 3 to 5 in eighty six countries; 4 to 5 years in thirty one countries; and 3 to 4 in twenty four countries (UNESCO, 2006). Clear differences can be noticed between regions in which an official entry age to attend pre-primary education has been instituted; to illustrate some examples, all countries from Central Asia have age 3 as the official entry age; in North America and Western Europe, the majority (85 percent) of countries have this stipulation, followed by a significant number of countries from Latin America and the Caribbean and in sub-Saharan Africa (with 68 and 64 percents respectively) (UNESCO, 2008).

With regards to its obligatory nature, pre-primary education is not obligatory per se in about 85 percent countries (UNESCO, 2006) and therefore it can be assumed that children could either enter this level of education when they turn 3, 4, or 5, or not enrol at all. Most noteworthy, thirty nations have amended their constitutions to make pre-primary education, compulsory, with pioneer nations being Israel (1949) and Luxembourg (1963), and with some of the most recent ones being FYR Macedonia (2005), followed by the Iran, Peru, and Poland (2004). Other countries such as Denmark, Latvia, Burma, the Netherlands, Moldova and ten nations from Latin America and the Caribbean, one year of pre-primary education is compulsory (Umayahara, 2005, and UNESCO-OREALC, 2004 in UNESCO, 2006).

Participation in pre-school education

A steady increase of pre-primary participation has been registered worldwide in the last three decades; from 43.7 million children enrolled in 1975 to 139 million by 2006 (UNESCO, 2006). In a period of 31 years this represents:

- a) an increase of 95.3 million more children enrolled;
- b) an increase in enrolment of 218 percent, and
- c) a threefold increase in pre-primary enrolment.

Worldwide pre-primary education total enrolments increased about 183 percent from 1975 to 2004, but by only 24 percent from 1999 to 2006. From the former period of time, developed and transition countries had a 9 percent increase, and

developing countries presented a 565 percent increase (UNESCO, 2006). Regionally, South and West Asia had shown the largest increase of 3,800 percent, followed by sub-Saharan Africa with 3,600 percent increase. Although the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean had had more stable increases in pre-primary enrolment between 1975 and 2004, at the end of this period, total enrolments mainly increased in South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa by 22 and 15 times. Latin America and the Caribbean followed by a sevenfold increase in total enrolments.

The largest increases of pre-primary enrolment have therefore occurred in developing regions, particularly in East Asia and the Pacific and South and West Asia. From 1999 to 2006, a similar pattern followed, developed countries' enrolments went up 3 percent whereas developing countries achieved an increase of 32 percent. One of the reasons why enrolment rates in developed countries has become more steady in the last end of the last decade is because of the low birth rates at the end of the 1990s (UNESCO, 2006). Furthermore, the population of children aged 0 to 5 has stabilised in Latin America and the Caribbean and, relatively, in South and West Asia. On the other hand, in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States, the number of young children has not reached a stable point. With regards to Latin America, Torres and Puiggros' (1997) study of public education in Latin America claimed that pre-schooling was generally out of the reach of the impoverished. UNESCO (2008) provides substantial data confirming this statement, reporting that attendance rates for children from poor homes is significantly lower than that of children from wealthy homes and that the reasons vary from the lack of local facilities, cost or parents' distrust towards the facilities and authorities. Latin America, however, has had a significant improvement in pre-school education; in terms of gross enrolment ratios (GER) it increased from 55 percent in 1999 to 64 percent in 2006. In particular, Mexico, as a country in Latin America, had a GER of 80 percent, and a net enrolment ratio (NER) of less than 70 percent (UNESCO, 2005).

A curious case is that of the United States; despite early childhood programmes not being lawfully enforced for children of ages below 5, at least 60 percent of children of such ages attended a pre-primary educational programme in 2007 (UNESCO, 2010). Such development has significant relation with the fact that women, to whom the rearing of children is traditionally assigned to, have increased participation in the formal economy since the 1950s, and equally important, the number of mono-parental families (particularly with women being in charge) have

increased over the last decade in both developed and developing countries (UNESCO, 2006).

In relation to gender differences, in the majority of nations with available data, enrolment favours boys overall by less than 10 percent. Examples of this include Bahrain, Colombia, Equatorial Guinea and Suriname. On the other hand, examples of nations with enrolment rates favouring girls include Bolivia, the Philippines, and Trinidad and Tobago (UNESCO, 2006). The same report also observed that participation also favours, for the most part, children from urban areas.

Little has been demonstrated regarding the quality of early childhood programmes, however, UNICEF (2008b) states, as cited by UNESCO (2008) that for a programme to be considered of good quality, four elements must be present: firstly, that children enrol early, secondly, that courses take place in suitable facilities, thirdly, that parents participate in the process and, finally, a substantial factor, not only that the number of teachers is sufficient but that they possess relevant qualifications. Unfortunately, the international community has not uniformly defined the educational contents that this educational level shall comprise, or an age of entry, nor the programme duration in terms of hours and years. As a consequence, the estimation of the real progress of this educational level is notably difficult.

2.4.3 Primary Education

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, both primary and secondary education provide children with ground knowledge and skills that will prepare them for the future. Since the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, it is undeniable that figures for primary education enrolment have risen. World figures of primary school total enrolments rose from 646 to 694 million between 1999 and 2007. Even net enrolment ratios (NER) went up from 82 to 87 percents for the same period. Although a 7 percent increase in 8 years might not seem dramatic, these figures confirm that the world is progressing towards the reach of universal primary education.

Developed and developing countries have clearly denoted different patterns; developed countries had a decrease in their total enrolments of 6 percent, whereas developing countries increased their total enrolments by 10 percent within the same period. Developed countries have decreased the number of enrolments for this level of education, in great part because their birth rates have been decreasing due to a greater birth control. Developing countries, on the other hand, have increased the

number of enrolments partly because of the lack of an appropriate birth control system and also because governments have implemented policies that have promoted that more children access education. Table 3 gathers main figures for primary total enrolments by region between 1990 and 2007:

Table 3. Total primary school enrolments (millions) by region, for school years ending in 1990, 1999, 2000 and 2007.

	1990	1999	Change between 1990 and 1999 (%)	2000	2007	Change between 2000 and 2007 (%)	Change between 1990 and 2007 (%)
World	595	647	9	647	694	7	17
Developed countries	61	70	15	62	66	6	8
Developing countries	505	560	11	562	615	9	22
Transitional countries	29	16	-45	23	13	-43	-55
Sub-Saharan Africa	62	81	31	86	124	44	100
Arab States	30	35	17	36	41	14	37
Central Asia	5	7	40	7	6	-14	20
East Asia and the Pacific	207	218	5	211	191	-9	-8
South and West Asia	135	157	16	160	192	20	42
Latin America and the Caribbean	75	70	-7	70	68	-3	-9
North America and Western Europe	50	53	6	53	51	-4	2
Central/Eastern Europe	31	25	-19	24	21	-12	-32

Source: UNESCO (2004, 2006, 2007, 2010)

From the period 1990 to 1999, developed countries had larger increases in the number of enrolments for primary school; almost 7 times higher than the increase registered in developing countries. The pace at which developed countries registered enrolments between the periods 1990 and 1999, decreased by 60 percent during the period 2000 and 2007. This might be related to the fact that fertility rates have extremely decreased in the majority of developed countries, and the raise in the rate of women's participation in paid employment (Adsera, 2004), among other

geographical changes. Similarly, the pace at which developing countries registered enrolments between the periods 1990 and 1999, decreased by 18 percent during the period 2000 and 2007, however the number of intakes clearly increased. Overall, the increase in enrolments from 1990 to 2007 increased 17 percent with outstanding increases in developing nations (22 percent, compared with an 8 percent in developed countries). Increases were especially notable in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, followed by the Arab States, with 100, 42, and 37 percent increase respectively. The GER and NER figures are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Primary gross and net enrolment ratios by region, for school years ending in 2000 and 2007.

	GER 2000 (%)	GER 2007 (%)	Change between 2000 and 2007 (%)	NER 2000 (%)	NER 2007 (%)	Change between 2000 and 2007 (%)
World	101	-	-	84	87	3
Developed countries	102	-	-	97	96	-1
Developing countries	101	-	-	82	86	5
Countries in transition	100	-	-	90	91	1
Sub-Saharan Africa	82	99	21	58	73	26
Arab States	92	95	3	81	84	4
Central Asia	100	100	0	91	92	1
East Asia and the Pacific	110	110	0	93	94	1
South and West Asia	96	108	12	81	86	6
Latin America and the Caribbean	123	117	-5	97	93	-4
North America and Western Europe	102	101	-1	96	95	-1
Central/Eastern Europe	100	98	-2	92	92	0

Source: UNESCO (2004), and UIE-UNESCO (2010)

The three regions mentioned earlier which presented a substantial increase in the number of enrolments have, as a result, shown a steady increase in their GERs: in this case, with South and West Asia leading this group reaching a GER of 108 percent, followed by sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States with GERs of 99 and 95 percents respectively. On the other hand, there is still a way to go with regards to the

NERs; except for sub-Saharan Africa, whose NER increased 26 percent between 2000 and 2007, South and West Asia and the Arab States did not show impressive increases with 6 and 4 percent respectively within the same period. Yet, South and West Asia, with an 86 percent of NER by 2007, was in the position in which Latin America and the Caribbean were in 1990 (UNESCO, 2003). By 2007, the regions whose countries are closer to accomplish the goal of universal primary education, are North America and Western, Central and Eastern Europe, East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, with NERs above 90 percent.

It is important to point out that GERS include children of late entry or who are repeating a school year and therefore such numbers can overestimate a country's commitment to allow all children, access in school (UNESCO, 2006). In nations whose children do not enrol at the official age include Chad, Madagascar, Mozambique, and less frequently, Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO, 2006). NERs, in contrast, could be a more accurate indicator of school coverage by countries; when all children at the official prescribed age are registered in primary school within one nation, that nation would have reached universal primary education (UNESCO, 2010).

Gender parity in primary education

Gender parity in primary education has followed different patterns by region; sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and in Afghanistan, in South Asia (63:100), for example, reported the greatest gender disparities in primary school intakes (UNESCO, 2010). Given that NERs represent the percentage of population of a certain age group for a given level of education, Table 5 presents the GPIs in relation to NERs. Table 5 also shows that developing countries have had a steady improvement and that developed countries have GPIs that favour girls; in general, the global GPI is improving. Regions that have reached gender parity are East Asia and the Pacific (1.00), Latin America and the Caribbean (1.00), and North America and Western Europe (1.01). Improvements ranged from being impressive such as those of South and West Asia; having had a 0.67 GPI in 1990, reached 0.85 in 2000 and 0.96 in 2007, to those that were not so noteworthy, like that of sub-Saharan Africa whose GPI went from 0.92 in 2000 to 0.93 in 2007. Furthermore, the regions that are closer to reaching gender parity in enrolments are Central Asia, South and West Asia and Central and Western Europe.

Although primary education is the stage at which more disparities have been overcome in terms of access and participation, most important of all is to ensure that children complete a good quality programme in due course (UNESCO, 2007, 2010).

Table 5. Primary gender parity index (GPIs) of net enrolment ratios (NERs)

	GPI F/M 1990	GPI F/M 2000	GPI F/M 2007
World	0.88	0.94	0.97
Developed countries	1.01	1.01	1.01
Developing countries	0.86	0.93	0.97
Transitional countries	1.00	1.02	0.99
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.86	0.92	0.93`
Arab States	0.82	0.90	0.92
Central Asia	0.99	0.99	0.98
East Asia and the Pacific	0.96	1.00	1.00
South and West Asia	0.67	0.85	0.96
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.99	0.99	1.00
North America and Western Europe	1.01	1.01	1.01
Central/Eastern Europe	0.99	1.00	0.99

Source: UNESCO (2004, 2010)

2.4.4 Secondary Education

Secondary education generally comprises two stages; based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), lower secondary (ISCED level 2), and upper secondary (ISCED level 3) (UNESCO, 2007). The former stage is, to date, mostly compulsory and aims to continue with the educational objectives of primary education; the latter stage is normally the final stage of compulsory education, by and large, in industrialised nations (UNESCO, 2007). Moreover, lower secondary education is definitely compulsory in all developed countries, transitional nations, the majority of Latin American countries, the Caribbean, and East Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO, 2007). Generally, in about three quarters of nations for which UIS-UNESCO has data on, lower secondary is included as part of compulsory education (UNESCO, 2006). Participation is therefore higher and almost universal in these nations, as the GERs and NERs in table 3.8 demonstrate.

Unlike figures for primary education, secondary and higher education figures are less available (UNESCO, 2004) and thus, these two levels of education are, for practical purposes, combined to provide a unique “secondary education” data. However, given that nations are currently focusing on getting all children to complete basic or compulsory educational levels (which can go from 9 to 12 years), the provision of independent data for each level, especially for preliminary level, became necessary and such data is now more readily available (UNESCO, 2006).

Transition rates from primary to secondary education

UNESCO (2003) describes a rate of transition from primary school to secondary school, which is calculated by obtaining the percentage of enrolment of new entrants in secondary school in relation to those students who enrolled in the last year of primary school the previous year. By estimating such rates by the number of enrolments minus the number of repeaters, this rate focuses on children who were enrolled and might seem too positive when there are out there children who dropped out from primary school after the third or fourth year, or children who never made it to primary school. In the end, this rate is the closest indicator of transition of school levels. Developed and transitional countries have transition rates to secondary school normally above 95 percent, and the majority of developing countries, normally above 50 percent, with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa with lower rates (UNESCO, 2003). Additionally, Table 7 illustrates the changes in total secondary enrolments in 8 years by regions, with the earliest and latest data available.

Table 6. Transition rates from primary to secondary education 2000 and 2006.

	2000 (%)			2006 (%)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
World	91	90	92	93	93	94
Developed countries	99	99	99	99	-	-
Developing countries	84	86	82	88	89	86
Transitional countries	98	98	98	99	99	100
Sub-Saharan Africa	64	63	65	64	64	65
Arab States	88	84	95	88	86	90
Central Asia	98	98	98	99	99	100
East Asia and the Pacific	88	92	90	-	-	-
South and West Asia	84	79	89	84	87	84
Latin America and the Caribbean	91	90	92	95	-	-
North America and Western Europe	99	100	98	99	99	99
Central and Eastern Europe	98	98	98	98	99	98

Source: UNESCO (2004, 2010)

Table 7. Total secondary school enrolments (millions) by region, 1999 and 2007.

	1999	2007	Change between 1999 and 2007 (%)
	(Thousands)	(Thousands)	
World	436,797	518,721	19
Developed countries	84,564	83,335	-1
Developing countries	320,514	409,125	28
Transitional countries	31,719	26,261	-17
Sub-Saharan Africa	20,578	35,580	42
Arab States	22,682	27,453	17
Central Asia	9,356	10,891	14
East Asia and the Pacific	133,579	165,769	19
South and West Asia	97,783	125,705	22
Latin America and the Caribbean	52,575	58,547	10
North America and Western Europe	60,661	62,401	3
Central/Eastern Europe	39,582	32,375	-18

Source: UNESCO (2010)

Clear increases in enrolments took place worldwide and especially within developing countries; with the highest increases taking place in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia. Figures specifically pertaining to lower secondary education have become more accessible since 2004, and therefore, an objective comparison between then and recent years would not show key changes since 2000 (or before), to the most recent data. For that reason, figures of GERs and NERs for secondary education (including the lower and upper level) are presented in Table 8. Also, because only two regions presented data for NERs for 2000, NERs will be compared between 2001 and 2007. Table 8 shows that, in concordance with total enrolments, substantial increases were observed in sub-Saharan Africa (31 percent), however this region, followed by South and West Asia, still stands far behind universal enrolments with 34 and 52 GERs by 2007. Central Asia (14 percent), and Latin America and the Caribbean (9 percent) showed preeminent increases as they are getting close to universal enrolments with 95 and 89 GERs by 2007.

Table 8. Secondary education gross and net enrolment ratios by region, for school years ending in 2004 and 2007.

	GER 2000 (%)	GER 2007 (%)	Change between 2000 and 2007 (%)	NER 2001 (%)	NER 2007 (%)	Change between 2000 and 2007 (%)
World	77	66	-14	55	59	7
Developed countries	107	100	-6	90	90	0
Developing countries	60	61	2	48	54	12
Transitional countries	85	90	5	85	84	-1
Sub-Saharan Africa	26	34	31	21	27	28
Arab States	69	65	-6	55	57	3
Central Asia	82	95	14	84	88	5
East Asia and the Pacific	77	78	1	-	71	-
South and West Asia	50	52	4	-	46	-
Latin America and the Caribbean	81	89	9	64	71	11
North America and Western Europe	106	100	-6	89	90	1
Central/Eastern Europe	86	88	2	83	80	-4

Source: UNESCO (2003, 2010)

It needs to be added that countries within those regions reach GERs of 60 percent or below (UNESCO, 2003). On the other hand, the Arab States showed a decrease of 6 percent, as well as North America and Western Europe, as had the whole of the developed countries. However, the latter region has reached GERs of 100 percent, while the former reached only 65 percent.

As for children enrolled in their official age groups, an increase in NERs was registered worldwide (7 percent), notably in developing countries (12 percent) by 2007, with positive increases in North America and Western Europe and Central Asia, with 90 and 88 NERs respectively. Central and Eastern Europe perceived a 4 percent decrease in NERs. As for Latin America and the Caribbean, although an 11 percent increase was registered, there was, by 2007, still a 29 percent margin to overcome in achieving universal NERs. Sub-Saharan Africa had a 73 percent margin to surmount.

Although secondary education has maintained similar participation patterns with those of primary education, it is well illustrated that participation is generally lower in secondary education, and also, its regional disparities are even more pronounced (UNESCO, 2010). Equally important, limitations of these figures include the different patterns of enrolments for lower secondary and upper secondary education by regions; worldwide, the former level presented a superior GER of 78 percent whereas the latter presented GERs of 54 percent in 2007 (UNESCO, 2010). Another limitation is that, as with the transition rates, in some countries the rates of reprobation in primary school are high, especially in grades one and four (UNESCO, 2010), leaving fewer children at the official age.

Gender parity in lower secondary education

Similar to patterns in enrolment rates for primary and secondary education are the patterns for gender disparities which widen even more at the latter level. At the same time, more data disaggregated by gender is becoming available nowadays. Table 9 presents GPIs of NERs for 2000 and 2007. Although the figures for 2000 may indicate that girls are participating more than boys, this decline was associated with a higher overall number of enrolments (UNESCO, 2004) and also because of the data collection reference date, which was modified to gather more accurate data (UNESCO, 2010). Overall, by 2007 most regions were closer to achieve gender parity.

Regions such as Central and Eastern Europe, North America and Western Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean presented more stable GPIs which did not go below 90 percent, and regions such as Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific did not present GPIs below 80 percent. These regions have, by and large, countries that have achieved GPI of 1. On the other hand, the Arab States, South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, included countries with extremely low GPIs, where the lowest percentages appeared as 0.72 in Djibouti, 0.38 in Afghanistan, and 0.60 in Guinea, respectively in each region. A downside with the secondary education GPI is that it includes figures for both, lower and secondary, and as UNESCO (2006) mentions, significant disparities are hidden between both levels. Lower secondary education faces larger gaps when present: “the higher the level of education, the greater the gender disparities” (p.44).

Table 9. Gender parity index (GPIs) of net enrolment ratios (NERs).

	GPI (F/M) 2000	GPI (F/M) 2007
World	1.11	0.96
Developed countries	1.03	1.01
Developing countries	1.18	0.95
Transitional countries	1.02	0.98
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.97	0.82
Arab States	1.03	0.95
Central Asia	1.02	0.97
East Asia and the Pacific	1.08	1.02
South and West Asia	-	0.86
Latin America and the Caribbean	1.12	1.07
North America and Western Europe	1.02	1.02
Central/Eastern Europe	1.00	0.97

Source: UNESCO (2003, 2010)

Despite such optimistic data, lower secondary education represents for many, a key withdrawal point (UNESCO, 2008). Participation begins to decrease due to different factors such as enforcement laws, places in schools (UNESCO, 2005), and also, at this stage, children start to experience situations that may jeopardise their permanency and performance in school. Aspects cited by (UNESCO, 2003) include

economic factors for boys, including paid employment, and family reasons for girls, including looking after others, pregnancy or marriages in places like Latin America. Upper secondary education, which will not be given account for in this study, as previously explained, for the minority of countries do not include or enforce this stage as part of compulsory education, discloses the lowest enrolment rates in all OECD and partner nations (OECD, 2009a). Without doubt, the vast effects that secondary education as a whole, contributes to personal development of individuals, social integration and development of economies (UNESCO, 2008).

2.4.5 Inequalities in education

Inequality is the opposite of equality; the Oxford English Dictionary (Online) defines equality of persons as “fairness, impartiality, equity” and “the condition of having equal dignity, rank, or privileges with others”. Longman (1999) gives the following description: equality of opportunity. Inequality, on the other hand, is defined by the latter author as “a lack of fairness or equality”, and the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “disparity in respect of magnitude, quantity, number, intensity, or other physical quality” and as “of persons: unequal treatment of others; unfair dealing, unfairness, partiality.

Equality in education then suggests equal opportunities for all (males, females, rich, poor, old, young, etc.) to access all educational levels and to succeed in school. It also suggests a fair number of enrolments, a fair school curriculum, fair treatment in the classrooms, and the opportunity to have good quality of teaching and facilities. Equality of opportunities is one of the main prevailing educational matters and one which facilitates a society to be more meritocratic (Stromquist, as cited in Piper, Dryden-Peterson and Kim, 2006). Stromquist also pointed to some of Coleman’s (1968) criticisms about educational equality seeing as the author asserted that what made an impact on students’ achievement were mainly personal characteristics, such as ethnic composition, and the family’s socio-economic background, while schools’ characteristic effects were minimal. Coleman (1968) also pointed out an important drawback of one of the commonly considered essential elements promoting equality of educational opportunity; the availability of free schools, which do not eradicate monetary basis of inequality of opportunity. He claimed that: “free schools, however, do not mean that the costs of a child’s education become reduced to zero for families at all economic levels. When free education was introduced, many families could not afford to allow the child to attend school beyond an early age. His

labour was necessary to the family...” (p. 11). From a gender perspective, Claire (2005) emphasised the distinction between equality of access and equality of outcome. The first, she stated, could merely represent providing educational means theoretically accessible to everybody, but whose use is ultimately biased by discriminative stereotypes, sometimes perpetuated by teachers. Equality of outcome, moreover, consists of teachers’ monitoring of students given gender differences in performances (for instance, girls’ advantage in Literacy and boys’ advantage in Science) to become aware of “what is at issue in ensuring equal opportunities” (p.7), so adequate initiatives can be designed and implemented to guarantee equal opportunity of outcome.

One thing is to state what the inequalities in education are and the other is what causes these inequalities. The following chapter will focus on the explored causes of inequalities, while this section will describe inequalities in education. If the aforementioned inequalities had to be grouped, based on the international educational targets, those associated with gender, SES, religion, ethnicity, language, location and health impairments could be included. As well as inequality in opportunities to accessing schools, the number of educational years attained, in academic achievement, in availability of schools, etc. (UNESCO, 2010). UNESCO (2008) points to a straightforward example of inequality: SES affects the educational pathways of the rich and the poor and it is more likely that children in Britain or France will enter tertiary education than children in the Niger or Senegal are to complete primary school.

Education quality

The most commonly used indicator to measure whether the previous educational aspects mentioned are equal or unequal is through education quality (UNESCO, 2005), and education quality has been normally measured through achievement of students on specific areas of the national curriculum (Chapman & Adams, 2002). Quality in education, however, is difficult to measure with precision because direct indicators have not yet been established (UNESCO, 2003, 2008), though such a conception is important for the benefits it brings to people and economic development (UNESCO, 2008).

UNESCO (2003) acknowledged two agents which are decisive to educational contributions and which help to estimate quality in education: teachers (number of teachers against the number of students, and qualifications held); and financial

resources assigned to education (public allocation of resources). How well prepared teachers are is important to facilitate students' knowledge and skills that will increase their chances to have a better future (Reimers, as cited in Piper, Dryden-Peterson & Kim, 2006). Reimers also mentions other studies which have considered other aspects that intervene to assess quality, such as student background and school facilities. Such evidence suggests that education of good quality represents a great aid to achieving equality in education in favour of those who were born within economic and social disadvantages (UNESCO, 2003).

Gender disparities in participation and achievement

Gender disparities imply the understanding of three important concepts: gender parity, gender equality and gender equity. The first concept relates to numbers and can be measured, for example, it could be said that when the same number of boys and girls, at the official prescribed age, enrol in the education system and attend the available levels, gender parity in education will have been reached (UNESCO, 2003, 2006). Gender equality, implies that the same advantages or restraints are to be experienced by both boys and girls with regards to equal opportunity of access; equal treatment and academic attainment, as well as equal future employment opportunities (UNESCO, 2003). Gender equality is not an easy variable to measure (UNESCO, 2003), and to date, it is a matter of concern given the persisting stereotypes used in learning materials and teachers' gender-biased practices and expectations of girls and boys (UNESCO, 2006), to mention a few. Furthermore, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2000) states that gender equality require that men and women exert their free will to expand their individual capacities, and not by gender stereotypes. As with regards to gender equity, the report points out that it involves a fair treatment for men and women, in proportion to their respective gender requirements, which may consist of treatments that may be different but indispensable to establish equality in correspondence to rights and obligations, benefits and opportunities (i.e., positive discrimination, which establishes actions that give preferential treatment to females (as part of a minority group) over males (as part of a majority group has been a common practice in educational policies).

It is important to take into account a predominant fact that has been present on the international political agenda over recent decades: girls are attaining higher levels of academic achievement compared to those of boys. It has been demonstrated that in developed countries, where opportunities for school participation tend to be more

equal, girls outperform boys (UNESCO, 2003). The learning process is an area where differences can be tangible; results from PISA 2000 showed that, in most participating countries, the tendencies significantly favour girls in literacy over boys. The balance was reversed in PISA 2003, where boys considerably outperformed girls in mathematics.

OECD (2004) described clear differences between students' areas of interest and students' characteristics as learners that were observed in most PISA 2003 participating nations. With regards to areas of interest, girls showed more awareness in reading whereas boys showed more interest in mathematics, as a result of gender motivations. On the other hand, their approaches to learning varied as well; it was indicated that generally boys have a greater confidence in their abilities as effective learners and to overcome problems, whereas girls tend to have greater persistence and effort (OECD, 2004). Other trait differences are pointed out, such as their employed learning strategies, which varied from the tendency of girls to memorise materials and having a more systematic approach to learning, to boys' tendency to learn by constructing new knowledge and relating it to previous knowledge. Moreover, results from PISA 2006 showed that scientific competency amongst boys and girls were relatively the same, yet males performed better than females "in explaining phenomena scientifically" whilst females performed better than males in "identifying scientific issues" (OECD, 2009b: 22). However, in six countries males achieved considerably higher science scores than girls.

Although the gender gap has gradually diminished and more girls are retaking their access and permanency in school (UNESCO, 2010), the fifth Dakar goal, that aimed to eliminate gender disparities in the primary and secondary levels by 2005, is still an ongoing target, along with the aim to achieve gender equality in education by 2015. It is clear that gender disparities in education cannot be ignored when discussing access to and permanency in school; the gender perspective was therefore to be considered a constant category of analysis in the study, and which will be described in more depth in the demographic aspects of students.

Poverty

As the figures of primary and secondary education enrolment have shown, there still are regions where none of the EFA goals seem a realistic option and the reasons mostly relate to poverty. Regions subject to possible failing in achieving such goals, at least in the medium term, include the Arab States, South and West Asia and

principally, sub-Saharan Africa. By 2005, the majority of people in sub-Saharan Africa, together with 40 percent of people in South Asia were living below the poverty threshold of US\$1.25 a day, where a disadvantaged person had an average daily consumption of US\$0.73 for almost 25 years, as Chen and Ravallion (2008) comment in UNESCO (2010).

Domestic poverty constitutes one of the most constant factors limiting educational access and performance and one which reproduces over generations (UNESCO, 2010). As the same source describes; poor people can normally take care of their basic expenses, and when emergencies appear (i.e. household cash urgent situations), to the cost of their children's education, as Stromquist (2001) indicated. Furthermore, not only do children have their chances to attend school reduced, but children are driven into employment, child labour being one of the distressing consequences of poverty. By 2008, there still were approximately 218 million child labourers, from whom the greater majority were under 15 years, and from developing countries (UNESCO, 2008), despite the minimum age for child labour being at the age of completing compulsory education, and no under 14 years of age (UNESCO, 2006). What is more, many children get involved in hazardous working conditions, for example, dealing with dangerous machinery (Blanco Allais and Quinn, 2009 as cited in UNESCO, 2010), collecting salvageable materials from rubbish, selling newspapers to motorists at traffic lights, to sex work (UNESCO, 2010). Moreover, it should be noted that both boys and girls also spend time performing domestic chores. Girls, being the majority, carry out longer hours of work, especially domestic work, and therefore are the most affected with school dropout (UNESCO, 2010). Low achievement is also strongly associated with child labour, as stressed by Stromquist (2001) and Gunnarsson et al. (2006) as cited in UNESCO (2010).

On top of that, poverty also increases the likelihood of over age enrolment in primary education (i.e., in Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, Nigeria, Mozambique, Tanzania) (UNESCO, 2006, 2008). Other aspects with which poverty is linked include geography; rural localities frequently increase children's risk of not having access to schooling (UNESCO, 2007, 2010). Another factor strongly linked to poverty is migration; despite migration provoking economic benefits for both the migrant and their employer, migrant children tend to experience higher levels of poverty (UNDP, 2009a).

Finally, poverty, as one of the main disadvantages for people, is normally linked with indigenous people, who are more prone to illiteracy and indigenous language

(UNESCO, 2007). These matters, associated with socio-economic status standards will also be discussed as part of the demographic characteristics of students.

Disability

Disability and marginalisation are words that are normally encountered together; stigmas associated to physical and mental impairment often form a basis for exclusion from society and school (UNESCO, 2010:181). According to Disability Awareness in Action, 2004 as cited in UNESCO (2004), disabilities include cerebral, physical, sensory and psychiatric disorders. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, approved by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2006, and in force since May 2008, defines persons with disabilities as “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. That is by far the closest definition that can be considered globally. However, to date, not all governments monitor participation of disabled children in school, and therefore, fair international comparisons cannot be accurate (UNESCO, 2008). It is only important to mention that in 2006, The Committee on the Rights of the Child issued its general comments on the rights of children with disabilities, an action that aimed to accelerate the achievement of the EFA goals, which apply to all children ‘with or without disabilities’ (UNESCO, 2008). Globally, there are approximately 150 million children with disabilities, mainly in developing countries, and worse: fewer than 2 percent of them attend school (Child Right Information Network, 2010; UNESCO, 2010).

Children with disabilities face different forms of barriers, from geographical distance to school and lack of transport, inappropriate accommodation of school facilities, lack of teacher training regarding approaches on inclusion, to discrimination and exploitation against them by peers and school staff alike, all of which shadows their self-confidence and educational participation (UNESCO, 2008; UNICEF, 2009). Such barriers are also enhanced by poverty as, in several nations, the probability of households being headed by disabled people being in poverty raises. (McClain-Nhlapo, 2007 as cited in UNESCO, 2010). Moreover, they face greater difficulties to set out money for health and food (Bird and Pratt, 2004 as cited in UNESCO, 2010).

Thus, the majority of barriers that children face in accessing education are closely related to poverty and the more of them are present in combination, the more

children's vulnerability increases and the greater chance that their access to educational and social equality of opportunities are restrained.

2.5 Defining educational failure

This section aims to define the three concepts that are frequently related to educational failure: insufficient academic performance in school, known as underachievement or low achievement, school exclusion, and the phenomenon of "dropping out." In the light of this study, these three concepts are strongly interrelated, and as it will be described in the following section, dropping out is almost always a consequence of the previous two factors.

The revision of literature focused on studies that looked at the issues of 'underachievement', 'dropping out', and 'school exclusion' although the latter was looked at to a lesser extent, given the vast literature available on the former factors and which aims to explain the factors that cause children to both perform poorly academically or quit school. Although there are different interpretations of the definitions of these concepts, they are related to low school marks, grade repetition, and non-completion of an educational level, or leaving school.

2.5.1 Underachievement and low achievement

In education, the term "underachievement" is one of those that is most widely used and a concept over which there is little agreement on, whether it is its definition or its measurement (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Smith, 2005). Smith's (2003, 2005) analysis of the concept 'underachievement' separates this term from that of 'low achievement' and associates the former to students performance in relation to what is expected of them while the latter, she indicates, "applies to a large and distinct section of the school population" (p.7) (i.e., children from disadvantaged homes). Smith's (2005) conceptualisation adds that underachievement is normally defined by a prediction of a student's achievement given his or her gender, family background and their general attitude towards school. An example of this, Smith suggests, is the inaccurate generalisation that all boys are underachieving (or as Gillborn and Mirza, (2000) put it: the concept 'underachievement' can disguise real attainment of ethnic minorities). Additionally, the author indicated that underachievement manifests at three specific levels; on a national scale, between schools and amongst students (2005).

Although the literature review section of this study focuses on research that looks at the causes of ‘underachievement’ as a phenomenon where students do not perform well academically, the methodology considered students low achievers in the sense of those whose marks were low compared to that of their peers.

Grade repetition

As a rule, low achievement is related to examination and module failure, and to grade repetition. The prevalence of these conditions within a nation may indicate that its education system has deficiencies directly connected to a lack of understanding of the curriculum by students and to the low quality of instruction that they are given (UNESCO, 2006). UNESCO’s (2010) definition of repeaters was the most suitable for this study. A repeater is a pupil who has enrolled in the same grade or level as the prior year.

As mentioned earlier, repetition rates are higher on the first and fourth year of primary school. Figures for secondary school repeaters rates are, by and large, not available. At least for primary education, repetition rates have dropped considerably since 1999 (UNESCO, 2006). The repetition of a year is a more common phenomenon in developing countries, especially in regions such as the sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, where there is a significant lack of children attending the appropriate classes for their respective age groups (UNESCO, 2008)

The problem with grade repetition is that it symbolises a foundation of inequality in schools, it implies high costs for governments and families, and it impedes nations’ goals of having full cycles of basic education for all children (UNESCO, 2008). It also diminishes children’s chances of advancing to further levels of education and, at the same time, the problem of older children experiencing unsuitable curricula is perpetuated (UNESCO, 2006). Finally, previous research has shown that repeaters learn less or do not learn fully by repeating an academic year and the chances are they will either continue the cycle of repetition or even dropout (UNESCO, 2002).

Students at risk of educational failure

Educational failure cannot be mentioned without raising the concept of ‘at-risk’ students being in danger of school failure including dropping out altogether. The definition of a student being ‘at risk’ is “one who is likely to fail at school” (U.S. Department of Education (1992) as cited in Archambault, Diamond, Coffey,

Richardson and Brown, 2010:3), a definition that best illustrates what an ‘at-risk’ student is, for the purposes of this study.

Richardson, Casanova, Placier and Guilfoyle (1989) described what an ‘at risk’ student is by analysing two models, firstly, through the Epidemiological Model, which is based on an analogy between school failure and risk factors in epidemiology (biological, socio-economic, activities, etc.). This model suggests that there are certain groupings of students that can be identified as being the most susceptible to specific health conditions; for example, being part of a minority group, poverty and language diversity are also associated with students that are at risk of educational failure. The second is the Social Constructivist Model which, from an interactive perspective, believes that the students deemed to be ‘at risk’ are considered so because of the characteristics of their personal lives and their backgrounds: family, past experiences, and social interrelations with pupils and teachers in school. Ultimately, this approach sees being ‘at risk’ as the consequence of various factors which interrelate in the life of an individual.

Another model, similar to the first approach, is based on medical health risk factors and contrasting “school failure” against “death” or “disease”, and “risk factors’ against ‘health risk indicators’, but by taking into account the influence of home and school factors over children. Such a model is described by Finn (1993), who indicated that a student is ‘at risk’ if he or she “does not remain an active participant in class and in school” (p. V) regardless of their personal characteristics such as SES, ethnicity, home language. Finn also asserted that participation in school, unlike personal characteristics, are able to be influenced through school and courses of action taken in the home.

2.5.2 Dropping out

Dropping out could be considered as being the final stage of educational failure. Similar to underachievement, it is almost impossible to raise the subject of educational failure without mentioning the act of dropping out. Longman (1999) defines a ‘drop out’ as “being someone who leaves a school or college without completing the course.” This straightforward definition was decided to be used in this study, disregarding a second existing definition of dropping out with derogative implications: “that an individual leaves common society due to a disagreement of the standard practices”.

The reason why studying this phenomenon is important is, according to Rumberger (2001, 2004) who studied dropouts in the USA, because dropping out frequently provokes financial and social disaster for governments. He also claimed that evidence suggests that “high school dropouts are far more likely than graduates to be unemployed, in prison, unmarried or divorced, and living in poverty” (2004:1). Additionally, UNESCO (2008) highlighted that rural children in most developing countries are less expected to enrol in school and highly expected to drop out.

As it has been mentioned before, the transition from primary to secondary school is a high risk stage where many children fall away from their educational path (UNESCO, 2009). Examples include regions such as South and West Asia, with 79 percent of boys and 53 percent of girls being out of school. Furthermore, UNESCO (2009) points out that in regions such as East Asia and Latin America, male dropouts (88 and 76 percent in respective areas) would go back to school, compared to girl dropouts (67 and 71 percent in respective areas).

Dropping out rates

A standardised definition of dropout rates has as yet not been established. To date, numerous governments still struggle to produce accurate data, or even any data at all (UNESCO, 2003, 2010). It becomes difficult to reach certainty in estimating data on completion and dropping out rates if different methods are being used globally. Rumberger (1987) indicated that, within the USA high school context: “there is no consensus definition of a high school dropout, nor is there a standard method for computing the dropout rate” (p.103). Rumberger (2004) also indicated that national statistics tend to be deceptive, especially if based on surveys, and suggested an ‘ideal’ method to keep up real data on graduation rates:

To know exact graduation rates, we would have to give each student a single lifetime education ID number and follow them individually through all the grades, wherever they moved [...] (p.4)

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UNESCO-UIS) stresses the importance of constantly evaluating the relevant requirements regarding the definition of indicators and the collection of data on this matter, and therefore, together with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the World Bank and UNICEF, constantly seek to develop new educational indicators. Such figures are expected to be of high quality; that is, consistent and absolute (UNESCO-UIS, 2008), and for that reason,

UNESCO-UIS operates regional workshops, along with statisticians and policymakers, in order to work closely with Member States to improve data quality at both national and international levels (UNESCO-UIS, 2009:4) with the hope of improving the production and correlation of data through standardised criteria. Such standards would not only help to assess the educational statuses of nations, comparing them with the goals of Education for All, as well as the Millennium Development Goals, but also to learn from other nations' experiences on how to be in control of data. For the purpose of this study, and retaking Longman's definition above, a dropout will be someone who has left lower secondary school without completing it.

2.5.3 School exclusion

School exclusion is another aspect strongly related to educational failure. To 'exclude' involves "to keep or shut out; to leave out from among the rest", which can also be adapted to what happens with students when, for various reasons, they are prevented from participating in, or from being taken into account within school. Social exclusion is grouped together with school exclusion: "being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems" (Walker and Walker, 1997:8 as cited in Macrae, Maguire and Milbourne, 2003). The reason for presenting both definitions together is that it is generally that one depends on the other and vice versa; there exists a major relation between school exclusion and then subsequently committing criminal offences. The great majority of the prison population in the United Kingdom has had a recurrence of exclusion from school at some point in their lives, for which a significant relation between school exclusion and the subsequent criminal activity can be established, as affirmed by Vulliamy and Webb (2001).

School exclusion has become a widely researched phenomenon in the United Kingdom and the European Union, and one whose measurement has not yet been standardised. In the United Kingdom, figures have been usually provided by Local Education Authorities (LEAs), by schools or by the Department for Education and Employment or DfEE (now Department for Education and Skills or DfES). The latter especially in the case of national evaluation projects (Vulliamy and Webb, 2001). Such figures, according to the same authors, are broadly known to underestimate by far the actual number of students who are excluded from school.

In a compilation of studies that aimed to define school exclusion in the context of the United Kingdom, Macrae et al. (2003) highlighted two of the phenomenon's important characteristics: firstly, that head teachers of schools are the ones who decide whether a student is to be excluded, and secondly, that exclusion can be either on a temporary or permanent basis. The same authors indicated two forms of intangible school exclusion which seem to 'massage' school exclusion figures: 'informal' or 'unofficial' exclusion practices (which intend to keep the problem out of sight) and internal exclusions. The former refers to situations where parents of children who are to be excluded transfer their children to another school at the suggestion of head teachers, and the latter refers to exclusion within the school whereby children miss out attending their classes as well as other recreational and social activities because they have been reprimanded.

Osler et al. (2002) put forward the common idea that school exclusion encompasses "the process of official and recorded exclusion from school, in response to a breach of the school's behavioural policy or disciplinary code" (p.21). She also introduces a broader concept of school exclusion and one which officially or unofficially focuses on girls' experiences in school. This perspective also includes girls who opt to disengage from their studies themselves, those who fall pregnant and withdraw from school, or those with caring responsibilities, amongst other reasons. Her study included other established factors that indicate, as a result, that girls' problems in school are apparently overlooked. Mentioning the ones that are more relevant to this study, firstly, the fact that boys' underachievement in recent years has been attracting the attention of the media, policy makers and researchers, for which girls' underachievement, as well as other problems, are left unperceived. Secondly, because violence in school (which can lead to formal exclusion) is strongly related to boys, other forms of violence, such as ethnic and verbal abuse, and both psychological bullying and violence, have been ignored when analysing the problem (Osler, 2006). Finally, girls are more prone to permanent exclusion: one in four permanently excluded pupils is female (DfES, 2001, as cited in Osler, 2006).

This more inclusive approach was used to illuminate this research especially because it does not only look at schooling practices or classroom management (which are the funnels to 'disciplinary exclusions' in school) but it also looks at girls' behaviours or actions that did not necessarily lead to disciplinary exclusion.

2.6 Approaches to understanding educational failure

This section aims to describe different approaches that attempt to explain the factors responsible for educational failure. Various reasons are widely known for explaining underachievement and high dropout rates, which appear to be more prevalent in developing countries. They include gender, ethnicity, economic factors, geographical location, school costs, the need to look for employment, and pregnancy. For example, according to UNESCO's (2003) studies, girls in Latin America have mentioned family-related issues amongst the reasons for leaving school, followed by pregnancy and motherhood, in rural areas. Girls have also reported struggling to attend school when they are geographically located at a long distance from school. Furthermore, UNESCO (2006) stressed poverty and poor parental educational background, especially of mothers, as the main contributors to children dropping out.

Ethnicity, social class and gender are elements that have been analysed to understand educational failure, particularly boys' underachievement in literacy, in the United States and the United Kingdom (see, for example, Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Halsey, Heath & Ridge, 1980; Epstein, Elwood, Hey, & Maw, 1998). On the other hand, various authors (for example, Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Finn, 1993; Orfield, 2004; Rumberger 1983, 2001, 2004) have examined the problems of educational failure, attempting to understand the factors that influence academic performance. By and large, these trends have predominantly focused on the negative factors (either in isolation or collectively) affecting students' lives by categorising them as "influential factors" or "barriers". The first section presents studies where ethnicity, social class and gender for the greatest part, account for educational performance, particularly for underachievement; the second is based on various factors, associated to family, school and community, that strive to explain 'underachievement', 'dropping out' or 'school exclusion'; and the third section explores the potential that non-monetary resources (cultural capital) are believed to help build up academic opportunities for children.

2.6.1 Ethnicity, class and gender

The terms 'race' and 'ethnicity' are somewhat interchangeable in this study. Many of the studies that have explored the factors that influence learning have explored race as ranked categories classifying populations (Gregory and Sanjek, 1996:1) based on biology. However, this study considers 'ethnicity' as a concept that covers both biological and social constructions. The word 'race' will be used only when referring

to other authors' work. A few definitions have not adopted ethnicity as a concept that includes biological traits. Claire's (2005) concept of ethnicity says that 'ethnicity' refers to group identity derived from cultural aspects including origin, ancestry, language, customs, beliefs and religion.

Mapping race, class and gender

Gillborn and Mirza's (2000) study of 'racial' inequalities in education within the United Kingdom explored additional aspects such as class and gender. Based on data submitted by Local Education Authorities (LEAs), the former Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Youth Cohort Study of England and Wales (YCS), attainment of children from different ethnic groups was measured from 1988 to 1999. Findings of students' attainment of least five higher grades (A*-Cs)¹ in their GCSE examinations at the end of their compulsory schooling showed the prominence of race relating to students' achievements. Overall, White students attained the highest number of higher grade GCSEs in 5 percent of the 81 LEAs that categorise ethnicity within their reporting of results. White students also attained second place in reaching those grades in 32 percent of the LEAs, yet attained last place with 7 percent of students attaining such grades amongst the remaining LEAs. In 11 percent of LEAs, Black pupils² were more likely to attain five higher grade GCSEs than their White peers, highlighting that, firstly, White students did not always dominate the highest attainments; secondly, for every one of the principal ethnic groups considered, there was at least one LEA where each respective group was the highest achieving, and finally, that students from minority ethnicities are able to achieve high attainment. This serves as a critical sign that attainment is variable irrespective of ethnicity. Another significant conclusion from the ethnicity analysis was that, although students of every major ethnic group have been attaining more higher-grade GCSEs than in the past, minority ethnic groups are the ones mostly exposed to continual inequality of achievement.

Additionally, the authors presented data of a study by Race on the Agenda (RACE), considered relevant to this study; the examination of African-Caribbean students' performance in 13 LEAs in the Greater London area. A contrast was obtained with the national averages as opposed to the following two indicators: the

¹ Candidates receive a grade for each two-year GCSE course that they have. Pass grades, from highest to lowest, are: A* ('A-star'), down to G with U as Unclassified (Failed)."

² Various LEAs merged all Black groupings into only one category.

quantity of Black students with average ability in Key Stage 2³ English “tests” and the quantity of students who achieved a minimum of five higher-grade GCSEs at the end of Key Stage 4⁴. From the constituencies with applicable records (72 percent) it was evident that a gap existed between African-Caribbean students’ averages between Key Stages 2 and 4. Though the sample was modest, attention was drawn to African-Caribbean students’ progressive decline as they progressed through the educational system.

Social class aspects were also studied to analyse its influence in students’ educational attainment, based on the YCS data, during nine years starting from 1988. By looking at the five higher-grade criterion during this period, inequalities became apparent between pupils from ‘professional’⁵ households and ‘unskilled’ households, where the former attained significantly greater higher grade GCSEs. Although ‘unskilled’ students increased their performance significantly (67 percent) during that period, the gap of attainment also increased by 22 percent.

The authors signalled that when social class and ethnic origin were controlled, class seemed to have a more powerful influence on students’ school performance. Students from middle-class homes achieved notably higher achievements than peers of the same ethnic background but from working class homes, thereby proving the strong influence class has on every ethnic group.

It was also demonstrated that, despite class exerting a positive influence on students, it does not reverse the fact that the levels of attainment are different among ethnic groups; for example, White students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds seemed to improve their attainments during those 9 years. In contrast, there was a decline in attainment for African-Caribbean and Pakistani/Bangladeshi students from both class categories. The data showed that Indian and Pakistani/Bangladeshi students from working class homes attained results that equalled Black peers from middle-class homes, placing Black students as the most disadvantaged, regardless of social class.

Gender was examined under the same standard, and it was encountered that gender inequalities of school achievement were less pronounced than those of ethnicity and social class. Gender inequalities between ethnic groups were constant,

³ Key Stage 2 in England and Wales officially includes Years 3, 4, 5 and 6, for pupils aged between 7 and 11.

⁴ Key Stage 4 includes two years of schooling which integrate GCSEs, and further examinations, in state schools in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, for pupils aged between 14 and 16.

⁵ At the time, the YCS followed the methodology of the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC90).

and relatively broad, yet with variability in the size of the inequality gap, with narrower disparities between Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Black girls and boys.

It was discovered that when comparing groups of pupils of the same sex, but differing ethnic background, ethnic inequalities still persisted. For instance, girls attained higher-grade GCSEs more often than boys in all ethnic groups. But, when taking into consideration the three factors, inequalities were evident between ethnic groups no matter the gender or class, with the high achievers in the following order: Indian, White, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, and Black. Indian females from middle-class backgrounds accomplished higher attainments than males of the same ethnic group and class, a pattern replicated in the other ethnic groups. Females from working-class backgrounds attained five higher grade GCSEs more often than males of the same class. Thus, students from minority groups are more prone to poorer educational attainment, regardless of whether they are females or from a middle-class background.

Limitations to the study were pinpointed; LEAs were likely to be undervaluing the accurate level of White students' attainment. It was likely that LEAs that did not apply for such assistance were likely to have less minority settlement. Some of the data for Pakistani/Bangladeshi students was modest, so generalisations were cautiously made. However, it was indicated that the patterns were relevant in so far as the trends gathered: pupils belonging either to a minority group or a disadvantaged home can attain high grades though their chances for learning are more at risk of being diminished.

A further study, by Gillborn (2010), in which race and class inequalities and their effects on the White working class, were looked at through the Critical Race Theory (CRT), and focused on White working class boys, their statuses as working were determined by their eligibility to free school meals, an indicator of disadvantage. The author discussed that while such an indicator does not necessarily equate to most people's definition of working class, it was the most available data from the schools. Affluent White male pupils were 32 percent more likely to attain at least five higher-grade GCSEs than underprivileged White male pupils. Also, the latter group was 10 percent less likely to attain five or more higher-grade GCSEs than their Black African male peers with free school meals. Affluent White males stood at an advantaged position in comparison to their peers from minority groups of the same gender and class; thereby corroborating the dominant influence of economic condition and ethnicity in educational attainment.

Social class origins and educational fortunes

Gorard, in Claire (2005), based on PISA 2000 results, drew attention to boys' underachievement in literacy, stated that using only gender as an account for differences on pupils' achievement was not enough. For instance, he sustained the fact that of the males studied, approximately half only read when necessary, rather than for leisure and that females were more likely to read novels than boys, who tended to read more web-pages, comics and newspapers. This may only indicate that boys and girls have differing yet equivalent literacy. The fact was that these differences were constant, in the United Kingdom as well as in most regions worldwide, after controlling for household background, school composition and social ability. Thus, a reasonable alternative, the commentator suggested, would be to, firstly, stop concentrating on gender, which cannot be altered, and secondly, to analyse other sources as causes such as other aspects of the educational systems, including programmes of study and examinations.

Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980) conducted a study, between 1932 and 1972, on social class origins and their impact on students' different educational pathways in England and Wales. Overall, it was demonstrated that family social class was far more influential on the types of schools children attended. Based on strict selection criterion, the educational pathways of a sample of 8,529 men born between 1913 and 1952 were scrutinised from primary school through to university in 1972. The sample was divided into three social classes: service; intermediate and working class, from which they surveyed educational and familial biographies.

The findings regarding primary school level will be discussed here due to the importance of the decision parents make in sending their children to either a private or state primary school. Also, it was proved that at secondary school level, between the state and private systems, a degree of interchange was recorded based on, for example, changes from public primary schools to private, or from private to the state schools. It was determined that the higher the educational level, the more likely entry to schools was based on merit. Given the year that the study was published, some of the types of schools described in their investigation are now defunct.

The relations found between social classes and access to schools was patent among those parents who chose to send their children to either a state or private primary school. Parents who decided on enrolling their children in the private system predominantly belonged to the 'Service' class. Parents from the 'Intermediate' classes were highly likely to choose the private system of education for their

children. From the 'Service' class, 24 percent of students went to private school, compared to 6 percent from the 'Intermediate' class, and 0.95 percent from the 'Working' class students. The percentage of participants who went to a private primary school was 5.8 per cent, regardless of class, the majority (56 per cent) coming from the 'Service' class, followed by the 'Intermediate' class (34 per cent), and the 'Working' class (9 percent). Of relevance are the reasons why these parents made such decisions. Further comparison within the context of Mexico would not be practical given the substantial discrepancy in defining the diverse social classes and ethnic groups in Mexico.

Interestingly, the study reported the likelihood that children will follow their parents' educational path. Parents who attended advantaged types of education were more prone to ensuring their children took advantage of such an education. Some of the rationale affecting this pattern of 'educational inheritance', the authors signalled, was economic; even if parents, who attended private schools, wanted to enrol their children into the private system, they must be able to pay the corresponding fees, which are normally beyond the possibilities of the lower classes. Another major factor is that of 'cultural inheritance'; parents who have socialised through private schooling may have developed a predilection towards such a system by having acquired the belief in the superiority of that system. If these parents were not able to pass on such privileged conditions to their children, they showed more willingness to benefit their children's education by making financial sacrifices; seeming to confirm the strong influence of parental education on that of their children's.

A fascinating finding was that participants whose fathers experienced private schooling were more likely to have attended private primary school than those whose mothers attended private schools. The authors indicated that, at the time that the respondents were children, male-female relations were somewhat patriarch-dominated, a probable reason for this trend. Consequently, both class background and parental experiences provide evidence to predict who is more likely to 'go private' in their educational path.

It is important to point out that this research was founded on the Education Act of 1944 and its effect on inequalities in the school system. The Act aimed at eradicating from state schools any unfairness of opportunity due to economic disparities, and achieving free secondary education for all. The chances of securing grammar-school education would become more equal between the social classes. It was found that boys from a higher social standing were more likely to attend university. The

majority of 'Service' class boys who remained in education until age 18 progressed on to university. Furthermore, it seemed that the likelihood of working class students better approximating their more privileged contemporaries, was higher the longer they lasted in the educational system and, by the time they reached Sixth Form, the differences were small.

The authors described the limitations of this longitudinal study; for example, that results on males' experiences are only showed and that a number of participants had to be purged for reasons irrelevant to the study. Nevertheless, results showed evidence regarding the influence of parental educational background and financial capabilities on their children's educational fate.

'Failing boys'

Approaches to gender and education have evolved along the years; equal opportunities and highlighting of the disadvantage of females was given emphasis to between the 1960s and 1970s, followed by prominence on 'Identity politics and feminism' before moving attention to performance and attainment, with a particular emphasis on the disadvantage of males in the Mid-1990s (Raphael Reed, 1998). Cohen (1998) summarised effectively how boys' underachievement overtook the media and the educational system since boys appeared to be 'left behind'. Discourses continued to evolve to explain why boys were underachieving when, in the past, it was assumed they were not. Cohen described the arguments given, at the time, to explain this phenomenon, for example, schools not living up to their obligations, hindering boys' progress; the lack of positive male role-models at school; financial fluctuations influencing boys more markedly than girls; and, finally, the so-called 'crisis of masculinity'. The author also described studies in France and the United Kingdom dating from the seventeenth century to the late 1980s where evidence pointed towards boys' underperformance in language learning. The issue is that, if from the seventeenth century, boys' English composition was poor and girls were performing better in languages and literacy, data resembles current trends from international reports such as PISA. As Cohen (1998) and Gorard (2005) agree, attention should be focused on teaching methods or curriculum so that boys and girls can have their capacities addressed, allowing them to make the most of their potential and stop, as Mahony (1998) stated, obsessing with academic achievement. Whitelaw, Milosevic and Daniels (2000) brought up the notion of not focusing on the

implementation of drastic curricular alterations driven by possible oversimplified assumptions from unpolished statistics.

Studies on gender, class and ethnicity

At the same time of the 'Mapping Race, Class and Gender' study, Linnehan (2001), in the United States, conducted a study exploring characteristics based on socioeconomic and demographic class and educational performance. The study aimed to identify and determine students' ideas and approaches in relating to high school marks, and assessing the association between such ideas and approaches to intellectual performance. The identification and measurement of students' attitudes in relation to marks were estimated via the Fishbein and Ajzen (F&A), by estimating the beliefs of students that going on to further education and employment are direct results of their grades. These outcomes were measured against students' indications of the importance of these outcomes. It was expected that the students' judgements, views and dispositions were largely determined by their social milieu.

Racial and social class, determined by the authors as parental educational background, were critical elements observed in the study, and based on contemporaneously reported discrepancies in academic attainment, these were examined. These spanned cultural values, socioeconomic backgrounds and the racial boundaries normally attributed to social class. The author considered the prevalent racial trends in the United States at the time. For example, it was believed that Asian students might have been striving to live up to the stereotype of a 'model minority' by making every effort to achieving high grades. It was also believed that African-American students had consistently achieved the lowest grades compared to other ethnic groups and that they were subjected to more experiences of discrimination. Thus, through an open-ended questionnaire for urban and suburban students in the 9th to 12th grades, relationships between academic performance and further education and employment outcomes were found.

Urban students' average age was slightly older (16.2) than suburban students (16.0), which might be an indication of less year repetition and correct age enrolment in the latter area. Regarding ethnicity, the urban group included 28, 53, 10 and 9 per cent of White, Black, Asian and Other students respectively whilst the suburban group was composed of 62, 10, 15 and 5 percent White, Black, Asian and Other students. Black students were more concentrated in urban areas and White students were more concentrated in suburban areas.

A minority of students from the latter area (4 per cent) had intended to enter full-time employment rather than continue their education against a relatively higher number of students from urban areas (18 percent) who planned to seek employment after high school. The same pattern was found regarding parental socioeconomic status; the majority of parents with high school and college degrees were concentrated in the suburban areas. Ethnicity differences were distinct regarding Asian students whose interests were biased more towards college than employment, particularly in suburban groups. Parental educational background did affect students' beliefs and attitudes toward college or employment; those whose parents had gone to college associated grades with the likelihood of going to college more than those whose parents did not. Moreover, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds saw employment as valuable, particularly in urban areas. It can be argued that the majority of students with parents with college degrees will see college outcomes as more valuable. Finally, the higher the association students from both types of areas made between grades and the conviction that grades are essential to go on to college, the higher the students' grades, a pattern was not evident with reference to grades and future employment.

Lindsay and Muijs (2006) followed up the documented trend of boys' underachievement since the 1990s, especially on literacy standards, which, they reported, had been ongoing up to the beginning of the twenty-first century. Their investigation, based on the intention of a disadvantaged LEA, in the East End of London, to challenge boys' underachievement, aimed to find out which schools' attributes were tied to students' academic success. For this, the focus of attention were the students identified as being the least achieving in that particular LEA (chiefly UK-born White, Black African and Black Caribbean boys).

Based on a model that included variables generally regarded as influential on academic achievement (previous attainment, school meal eligibility as a measure of disadvantage, schools' situation on Special Education Needs (SEN), literacy and date of birth), semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and students of 3 primary and 3 secondary schools. These schools were chosen given their higher than expected performance for at least one of the three ethnic groups amongst boys. Findings showed that schools were tackling boys' underachievement through different approaches; from not directly targeting any particular group, instead insisting on equally high standards regardless of ethnicity, to others targeting particular underachieving groups. For the first, students declared that discrimination

did not exist in school whereas for the second, particular support for ‘at risk’ boys was provided and by placing them in a same-sex class. Other factors found to be helping overcome underachievement, included diversifying the curriculum, still operating the National Curriculum but through a more inclusive and open perspective, avoiding the so-called ‘chalk and talk’ lecture style of allowing the various requirements needs of students to be met; monitoring students’ performance, not only academically but also at a more personal level, allowing schools to detect an ‘at risk’ student and provide them with immediate, supplementary assistance; having high yet pragmatic expectations also helped, for example, by using disciplinary policies enabling the creation of more work-oriented atmospheres in class, which particularly worked better with younger children; having a higher proportion of teachers and staff from other ethnic groups and promoting inclusivity in schools, encouraging participation in activities of interest to ethnic minorities; and finally, having good communication with parents who, in these schools, showed a high level of involvement. Despite the geographical location of the LEA not allowing a wide social class variation; and it not being possible to identify social class elements as isolated or interdependent; schools had changed their demographic makeup from being mostly White to being more multiethnic. Nevertheless, these eight factors could be generally applied by almost any school, yet what seemed to have made the difference to students was the comprehensive approach and dedication with which teachers and other members of staff put these methods into practice.

2.6.2 The interrelation of family, school and geographical factors

Literature on educational failure in Mexico is mostly based on educational statistics to report the interpreted results via publications mainly produced by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) and the National Institute for Educational Assessment and Evaluation (INEE). The most current literature on achievement is associated with PISA results. Books studying the dropping out phenomenon at the lower or upper secondary school level in the country are, to date, non-existent, especially for the former and even less so regarding school exclusion. For this reason, most of the literature regarding underachievement, dropouts and school exclusion reviewed, was international and focused on the high school or upper secondary school level, which in most developed countries, constitutes the last stage of compulsory education.

The problems of underachievement and dropping out have been most commonly researched in comparison to school exclusion. These problems, and in particular

dropping out, at the fundamental educational levels have been scrutinised by countless numbers of authors whose contributions have helped to identify ‘the whole ball of wax’ involved in it. The main framework of the literature review will be based on studies carried out by Rumberger (1983, 1987, 2001, 2004); Ekstrom et al. (1986); and Finn (1993). The first author proposed a division of institutional (family and school) and individual (values, attitudes, behaviours) factors believed to influence either educational performance or the dropping out phenomenon. The latter authors threw light on the cognitive and behavioural components of students’ lives. These studies, which will be outlined below, considered ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES) and gender elements, plus a range of other factors to explain educational failure.

a) The institutional and individual perspective

Rumberger’s contributions on this topic were based on evolving systematic reviews of the dropping out problem which focused on longitudinal studies in the United States, given the steady increase of the problem from the early 1980s and which later on, in 2004, the author reported as ongoing. Such contributions evolved while coinciding with other researchers on the aspects related to the problem. A major study from which Rumberger (1983, 1987) drew significant conclusions took place in 1979 in the United States. This research included 12,700 females and males aged between 14 to 21 years old, where analysis of data from a national longitudinal survey took place to review the dropout patterns through the conduction of interviews confined to those aged between 18 to 21 years of age. Participants included both high school graduates and high school dropouts who were classified by ethnicity, gender, and SES status. The dependent variable to this study was the act of dropping out while two sets of independent variables included firstly, family dynamics and geographical characteristics and secondly, psychological and behavioural factors such as preferences and activities. The same aspects of the independent variables were examined in each group of participants, therefore allowing a comparison of the likelihood of dropping out amongst individuals with analogous traits. Results supported that demographic characteristics, including cultural possessions, accounted for dropout tendency and that variations existed between ethnic groups. Family characteristics, at the same time, appeared to account for ability at school or future aspirations, facts also associated to dropout behaviour. Associations to this analysis and of other systematic reviews carried out by

Rumberger (1987, 2001) will be made in the subsequent sections, as well as considerations of other commentators on the problem.

Despite that the general findings the above depicted study signalled, that males dropped out more than females, and that this pattern accentuated the older their age – except for Hispanic females, Rumberger (1983, 1987) identified the influence of family background to be one of the most powerful indicators of dropout behaviour, especially socioeconomic status. Rumberger (1983) separated the influential factors as endogenous and exogenous. The former comprising individual traits such as ethnicity, sex and socioeconomic status of the family, which, therefore were not possible to modify, or at least not suddenly while the latter, included employment and educational involvement as well as personal outlooks and ambitions. Rumberger (1987) proposed to group such influential factors into a number of groupings such as economic, peer, individual, demographic family-related and school-related factors; adding that a number of these factors were modifiable through, for example, statutory and regulatory changes. Rumberger (2001, 2004) assigned these influential elements to institutional and individual frames of reference. Thus, the institutional factors comprised the family and the school aspects while the individual factors comprised the students' academic and social engagement in the school.

b) Path analysis of demographics, school participation and out-of-school behaviour

Ekstrom et al. (1986) along with the National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) and Educational Testing Service (ETS) conducted a longitudinal analysis in relation to the experiences of 1980 high school sophomores throughout their senior year in 1982 in the United States. The objective was to find out who made it to graduation and who dropped out, and the reasons why. By making use of NCES' High School & Beyond (HS&B) database, base-year survey and achievement exams (covering civics, reading, writing, science, mathematics and vocabulary) were given to students. Of these students, twenty-two thousand were seniors in 1982 and about two thousand who had dropped out of school the same year completed a follow-up questionnaire. One of the main aspects explored was the differences in intellectual achievement and behaviours between students who graduated and those who dropped out. For this, a path model was designed including family background, learning support at home, attitudes, cognitive achievement and school dispositions.

White and Hispanic males were more prone to drop out than girls, except for Black males who were less likely to drop out than black females. Dropouts constituted 15 percent of the sophomores who started school in 1980 from which Hispanics constituted the majority with almost 30 percent; followed by Blacks with almost 20 percent and whites with less than 15 percent. The majority dropped out from the 11th (Junior) year, were males, and older in age in comparison to those who graduated from high school. In addition, these students were attending urban public schools in the South or West.

c) Participation and identification in school model

Finn (1993) put forward a model of school engagement where both student participation and student identification in school constituted elements present in the lives of students since their primary years. According to the author, these respective behavioural and psychological components were expected to evolve as children grew up. Participation involved aspects such as going to school, paying attention in class, completing homework, etc., which, under beneficial conditions, would develop a level of identification with the school (sense of belonging) by seeing school-related achievements as important. On the other hand, if unfavourable circumstances were experienced in school, i.e. if the student participation in class appeared passive or if their grades were persistently low, this student would gradually disengage and be at risk of academic failure. Regarding students' demographic characteristics, the author pointed out that students could automatically be considered to be at risk of school failure if their background included belonging to a minority ethnic group; if a second language was spoken at home; if the income level of the family was low and if they attended urban schools. Thus, the author suggested, both demographic and school risk status could make a student likely drop out of school. However, the latter risk status had the possibility to be manipulated through school and home interventions.

The methodology involved two studies using sample of eight-grade students on a national scale from the U.S. National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). Both studies focused on measures of participation constructed from students, parent and teacher questionnaires. These included engagement and achievement indicators of youngsters, i.e., attendance, participation in the classroom, as well as participation in school-relevant activities outside the regular program. The first study explored the association of students' participation in school with their academic achievement; data of 15,737 eighth-grade students in public schools was

analysed. The second study aimed to distinguish whether a difference existed between the level of engagement of students at risk but with acceptable grades and those not at risk and with low grades. The behaviour of 6 thousand of demographically at-risk students was examined. Both studies drew their data from instruments such as ability tests, questionnaires, etc. administered to students, parents, and school staff in the NELS:88 study.

One of the main findings was that students considered at risk of educational failure, due to ethnicity, SES or home language, seemed not to keep uniform patterns of participation or behaviours at school. The high achievers were separated from the lower achievers by various forms of active participation or involvement in school. Patterns of dispositions at home were different as well: low achievers watched more television or read less for pleasure.

More specific elements of the previously discussed studies will be described further in the sections below where factors influencing educational performance will be allocated to broader sections such as family, school or individual.

Parental education and occupations

Main family background aspects drawn attention to with regards to academic failure or in particular, dropping out, included parental education and socioeconomic status (SES) of the household (Rumberger, 1983, 2001, 2004). The intensity of influence of these factors was believed to be dependent on the family's ethnicity and, at the same time, dependent on the gender of the offspring. Similar to the findings of Halsey et al. (1980), described earlier, Rumberger (1983) found that paternal educational levels were more likely to influence young men, though he also found that mothers' educational level reduced young women's likelihood of dropping out more often than their fathers' education. For example, Black and White females of the above longitudinal study were less prone to dropping out the higher the maternal educational progress. It was only in the case of Black males where their mother's education did affect their educational performance. Overall, the influence of parental education levels, further than simply indicating a probable economic status, according to the author, proved to exert a strong influence on children, with aspirations for educational attainment seeming to be determined by parental role-models on a like-sex basis.

Consequently, the unfavourable effects of family characteristics are more marked for adolescents from more impoverished homes. For instance, White females from a

lower SES family were significantly less likely to drop-out if maternal educational levels increased by a year than those females of a higher SES family. Such impact on Hispanic students as the most disadvantaged portrayed, were even stronger. In addition, not only were Black females from disadvantaged backgrounds more likely to be involved in pregnancies than their counterparts from higher SES backgrounds, but also they were more likely to marry and have children at a younger age, thereby being more likely to leave school. Similarly, Ekstrom et al. (1986) found that family background proved to exert a powerful influence since high school dropouts studied were excessively from disadvantaged households and from minority groups. This evidence substantially replicated what Gillborn and Mirza (2000); Halsey et al. (1980), stated on the impact of class as being greater than that of ethnicity and gender.

From a human capital perspective, Hampden-Thompson (2008) suggested that it was believed that parents with higher levels of education were more likely to be more proactive with their time with their offspring and, by doing so, improve their children's academic skills. In addition, due to living in more affluent neighbourhoods with better resourced schools, their children were exposed to more advantageous and prolific schooling experiences and to access paid recreational activities in the school or community. In comparison, children from disadvantaged households may experience the need to seek employment to help supplement their family's financial requirements, as evidence indicated for Hispanic dropouts in the USA (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom, 1986). Furthermore, Rumberger (2001, 2004) put forward Coleman's (1998) view that the quality of relationships children have with their parents, neighbours and the schools ('social capital'), played a significant role to explain educational achievement.

Similarly, the cultural indicator proved influential on the chances of students to stay in school; the probability of students dropping out was lower if their homes had more reading materials. This factor was constant across ethnicity, gender and SES (Rumberger, 1983). Other cultural aspects comprised fashions amongst ethnic groups, Hispanic students, for example, were found to easily drop out due to a need to supplement familial income by seeking employment.

The structure of the family

Not less important, Rumberger (2001, 2004) also highlighted the structure of families as noteworthy; single-parent and step families were more likely than traditional two-

parent families to have children who drop out. Similarly, Ekstrom (1986) found that having a so called 'intact' or two-parent family predisposed particularly Whites and Hispanics to stay in school. A more recent study by Hampden-Thompson (2009) found that there were significant associations between single-mother families and children's educational disadvantages. The study was based on evidence covering the United Kingdom and the United States, and which revealed that positive correlations between single-parent homes and low grades and test scores exist, and that receiving less parental encouragement and attention concerning education, increases the propensity to drop out and a lower likelihood of attaining higher education entry qualifications. By using data from PISA, comparisons of 15 year old students from both single-mother and two-parent families were made across 18 industrialised nations and covering the sizes of their relative literacy achievement gaps. The findings highlighted that children living in a mother-only home displayed a tendency for achievement below expectations in reading literacy. It was more customary for children from two-parent homes to have access to books at home and these children were less at risk academically when compared to children from single-mother families. Regarding social involvement, in the majority of nations, students from two-parent households had higher levels of social and community involvement when compared to children derived from single-mother households.

There are variations in the academic performance gap that exist across nations with the greatest gap existing within the USA followed by Great Britain. A lesser gap was noted in Scandinavian nations such as Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. These findings could be argued to possibly have a relation with the advanced public policies established in these countries in support of women, for instance in the early 20th Century women won their right to vote as early as 1906 in Finland, 1913 in Norway, etc. Also, their governments have been proactive in ensuring gender equality issues are incorporated into all policy areas, i.e., in March 1995, its adoption of the Programme for Nordic Co-operation on Gender Equality 1995-2000, which covered educational opportunities, possibilities of men and women combining family care and paid work, decision making and economic activities.

Although one of the limitations with these explanations was, as indicated by the author, the design of the PISA data results and their cross-sectional nature, the findings regarding southern European countries were of special interest to this thesis given the relative contextual similarity with the economic and cultural systems in Mexico. For Greece, Portugal and Italy, there was no distinction between the two

family structures. Additionally, in Spain there was no discernable difference in parental occupational status. Three of the possible explanations the author indicated for this was the ‘breadwinner’ model in which the mother is encouraged to stay at home and the father goes to work, thus, whether a child comes from a two-parent home, where the father is the main provider, or if the father is absent, with the mother being the main provider, then the relative number of breadwinners per family structure will be consistently the same. Furthermore, another explanation includes southern European nations, regarding the role of the extended family, where Mediterranean families are generally known for their solidarity and take responsibility for the welfare of their members, something that could mitigate any possible economic or educational disadvantage. A further cultural account was related to the existence, in these nations, of fewer single-mother families. It appeared those children, rather than being born outside of marriage, come from single mothers who are divorcees and therefore are potentially better off financially than their unmarried counterparts, and again tend to have better protection from both the State and family. Although the author stressed the need for further nation-specific variables for a clearer understanding of the tendencies of underachievement, the study highlighted major tendencies related to single-motherhood and regional disclosures.

Homework support at home

A crucial element found by Ekstrom et al. (1986) was related to educational support in the household, which patterns turned out to be clearly different between those who left and those who stayed in school. In summary, dropouts in her study had less access to study aids at home; had fewer chances for learning activities after school; and the likelihood that their parents were able to supervise school and after-school activities was deficient or even absent. Along with this, the fact that their natural parents were less likely to be residing at home, that their mothers had limited formal educational attainment and lower educational expectations for them, could have contributed to the limited school-related support at home. Educational assistance at home came as the strongest in relation to students dropping out; and particularly for Whites and females; the likelihood of students leaving school was decreased if there was greater access to study aids. Generally, the following seemed to apply: a family providing strong educational support seems to produce a typical high-achieving student.

Other studies have made further contributions regarding homework, for example, Corno (1996) in a systematic review including studies from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s. The effects of homework was presented from the perspectives of the four entities involved; students, parents, schools and policy makers; Corno (2000) on the other hand, proposed an integral perspective on homework, where more than merely being seen as an academic task, it is also seen as an instrument for developing social skills through interaction with family and peers and through community participation. Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, and Greathouse (1998) demonstrated the association between the amount of homework a student has and its long-term stimulating effect. Trautwein (2007) pointed out a positive association between homework and achievement ('class-level effect') as well as the association between homework and the improvement in attainment ('student-level effect'), yet a positive association between low achievement and longer homework completion time.

Family monitoring

The time dedicated to homework and after school activities, monitored by the parents, was also found to be influential on students' educational performance. Finn (1993) found that 8th grade students, at risk due to their demographic characteristics but more successful academically, watched less television on all days of the week than their less successful at risk counterparts. Also, the latter students devoted less time to leisure reading. This was found to be directly related to better achievers at-risk having parents who were more proactive regarding involvement in school work, supervised their homework more frequently, and not only did provision them with considerable learning materials at home but also talked about school activities on a regular basis.

Epstein (1995) drew attention to the importance of developing school, family, and community affiliations on the basis of the benefits they could provide to the schools' atmospheres and programs. Further benefits included the provision of additional support to families and the fostering, expansion and strengthening of parents' abilities and leadership, as well as improved interrelations between families within school and the greater community; all with the ultimate goal of facilitating both students' academic and life success (see Epstein, et al., 1997, for detailed information on collaboration programs and their suitability). Casanova (1996) listed the six forms in which parents are able to establish partnership programs with the schools identified by Epstein (1995). Such forms of parental involvement were indicated to start from

the very basic level, where parents provide their children with the necessary food, clothing, sanitation needs, etc., followed by gradual and higher levels of involvement with the school. Parents were also able to participate in schools by providing additional support for sport or exhibition events, etc., even actively getting involved in the learning activities of their children with the assistance of teachers, or be more participative in school decision-making. The highest level was for parents' involvement with the circulation of family, school and community resources. Casanova (1996) pointed out a serious weakness with this optimistic proposition; she warned that, apart from those helpful forms of involvement, other contravening implications deriving from involvement of parents could emerge. These could range from demanding which grades or homework their children should be administered with, assuming immediate responsibility to monitor teachers and even further, to being able to decide whether a school head teacher could remain in their position. Anti-democratic repercussions as well as antagonism are other weaknesses that the author warned about.

Cultural capital in the home

Family-based factors, such as parental educational and occupational levels, customary family norms and practices, which influence the educational performance of students is on the whole called 'cultural capital' by many authors, a term originated by Bourdieu (1986). As it has been presented at the beginning of this chapter, several studies have revealed that education is investment in human capital; knowledge, abilities and capacities are more often than not, measured by educational credentials. Capital can be applied to three broad categories: economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital pertains to money and can be in the form of property, finances, trading stocks and shares etc. On the other hand, cultural capital can be in the form of educational accreditations and, under certain conditions, can be convertible into economic capital.

According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital can be present in three conventions. Firstly, the 'embodied' state in which external wealth becomes an integral part of an individual's identity. Secondly, the 'objectified' state, through assets such as encyclopaedias, book collections, paintings, etc., whose legal possession is capable of being transmitted, and the 'institutionalised' state, translated in academic qualifications, which grants the veracity that the autodidact may lack.

In the field of education, research has suggested that the more cultural capital there is in the home, the likelihood that other informative assets such as book collections, computers, or other types of digital learning facilities will be present increases. Moreover, the likelihood that children will be highly inspired and supported by their parents or siblings academically will also increase (see Hadfield, Edwards & Mauthner, (2006) for more on siblings as a basis of scholarly support). Previous studies have reported important associations between cultural capital and educational achievement, for example, Li (2007) found a strong association between family capital and educational support at home for children's second-language learning. The author highlighted that, rather than the possession of 'material resources' in the home, it was actually the use of existing familial capital that was integral to creating a positive learning environment and the way in which it was used to invest in the education of their children. Attention was also drawn to children's learning habits outside of school and how it was a responsibility of legal and educational institutions to be involved in framing such activities. Another study carried out by Hampden-Thompson, Guzman, and Lippman (2008), which was based on data from PISA and TIMSS, examined student's academic achievement across nine Western industrialised nations, and their relationships to student's access to cultural resources and participation in culturally enriching activities. Although their study framed European and North American nations only given their commonality of Western cultural history, their findings, among other considerations, indicated a positive correlation between student literacy and participation in cultural activities, however this was not so in mathematics and science achievement. Also, students from less advantaged backgrounds seemed to benefit less than their more well-off counterparts in the majority of countries. The authors warned about the variations of such associations between countries yet stressed the especially positive relationship between student literacy and access to reading materials.

Other authors have talked about contributions that social capital has on educational performance, for example, OECD (2001) reported a positive relationship between education and social capital, mainly measured in social interactions and between education and well-being, democracy, etc.; Marjoribanks' (2004) research focused on the effect of family and school capital as well as individual characteristics on the educational achievement of adolescents; and Ream and Rumberger (2008) on schooling and its effects on social and behavioural aspects such as engagement activities friendship networks nucleated around schools as being dynamically

influential on dropping out and educational completion. Emotional capital has been another area explored in relation to school performance, for example see Gillies' (2006) exploration of emotional capital as a parental investment in their children's education; Reay's (2000) view of emotional capital, with parental engagement in the education of children being influenced by gender and social class; and Zembylas' (2007) criticism of the use of such a concept in the field of education.

Family stability

In relation to family structures, Bradshaw, Keung, Goswami and Rees (2008) on behalf of the Children's Society in the United Kingdom put forward the notion that 20 percent of the variation in overall happiness could be explained by a child's family ability to "get along" with each other, whereas family structure could only account for 2 percent. This study was the second phase of a previous study conducted by The Children's Society (2006). A survey including around 7,000 participants aged between 10 and 15 in England in 2008 was carried out to explore their perspectives regarding the aspects they considered had an effect on their well-being. Strong evidence was found in relation to the quality of family relationships as being crucial to a young-person's well-being. Attention was also drawn to the fact that children who experience parental divorce or separation tend to have considerable differences in educational outcomes as opposed to children in traditional two-parent families. The so-called "crisis period" immediately following such separations can lead to primarily evident differences, some of which appear to diminish with the passage of time, however some remain. Furthermore, such children were already more likely to experience academic and behavioural problems some years before their parents actually separated. This leads to the opinion that parental separation is a symptom of ongoing problems, rather than a stand-alone event. Linked to the above, variations in outcomes are influenced by the quality of general family relationships. Such relationships can include possible parental conflicts and interactions before, during and after a separation or divorce.

Children tended to fare better in families that have separated, as opposed to when living with both parents but in a "high conflict" environment. This suggests that school outcomes are more determined by the functionality and cohesion of a family rather than the physical structure of the family. Equally important, socio-demographic factors seemed to have a limited effect in explaining the variations in overall well-being.

The geographical location

Rumberger (1983, 2004) suggested that community characteristics exerted a strong influence on students as well. For example, and similar to Gillborn and Mirza's (2000) results in the United Kingdom; when students' families resided in rural or suburban areas, the likelihood of dropping out especially for Blacks, was lesser than those living in central cities. In addition, the author highlighted findings where, at a given area, minority males had higher probabilities of dropping out given the high employment prospects of the area. Furthermore, he characterised aspects such as crime and drug use, pregnancy and early marriage, which sometimes prevail in certain areas, as symptoms rather than causes of dropout behaviour. Furthermore, region made a difference too; Blacks in the South were less likely to drop out than Blacks in other regions, whereas Whites in the South more predisposed to dropping out than Whites in other regions. Ekstrom (1986) also found regional variations; with other variables being same, schools in rural areas and the South tended to be higher.

The school factors

Based on Jessor's (1993) paradigm called 'developmental behavioural science', Rumberger (2001, 2004) considered that not only do family and community settings contribute to moulding the nature of students' progress but also that schools have their influence. Rumberger (2004) summarised the school related factors that account for students' academic performance in four qualities that schools possess. Firstly, the student composition, that is to say the social distribution of the schools affects student achievement at a group or social level as well as at an individual level, irrespective of student background. Secondly, the school resources, such as the teacher/student ratio or teaching quality may influence the number of dropouts. Thirdly, the structural characteristics, such as size and location as well as the means by which the school is controlled, be it public or private, have also proved significant to school performance, with greatest direct effects in low-SES schools. These first three factors, the author suggested, accounted for school effectiveness. Finally, the fourth factor relates to policies and practices that form the social climate of the schools were found significantly influential as well, even when the students' background characteristics and the schools' structural and resource characteristics are controlled for. Rumberger's (2001, 2004) reviews point out two main ways in which schools have an effect on student dropout; the first being in an indirect way, through schools' general policies and practices aimed at improving overall effectiveness, and

which might inadvertently provoke students' gradual disengagement and their voluntary decision to withdraw. The second way is in a direct way, where students voluntarily withdraw due to express or conscious policies or decisions. Such decisions generally concern troubled students and often cover poor attendance, low grades, or poor behaviour, leading to suspensions or exclusions. The term 'discharge' has been used to describe this process. Tests to attain a certificate of the educational level could also be connected to dropping out.

Given that this fourth factor is by and large related to students who misbehave and the disciplinary actions administered by the schools, occasionally to the point of forcing students to leave school, some authors have called these students 'push-outs' rather than 'dropouts'. See, for example, Cassidy and Bates (2005); Stearns and Glennie (2006); with a focus on school organisations and the promotion of social and peer support to 'push-out' prevention. 'Excluded' has been another term given to students in relation to a voluntary or involuntary disengagement from school. Osler and Vincent (2003) examined the manners by which girls are excluded by schools and attempted to explain the long-term negative effects that 'school exclusion', as a formal disciplinary measure, brings to secondary school girls under 16 years old. The authors also examined various types of exclusion, for example, temporary, fixed term, informal, unofficial and permanent forms. They argued that self-exclusion, used by some girls as a strategy to avoid 'bullying', either by peers or teachers, or problems with the curriculum also led to girls' permanent exclusion from school. Under this perspective, the lack of appropriate assistance and support provided by the schools might worsen factors such as pregnancy, drug and alcohol use, ineffective social interactions in schools, to mention some, which might put girls at risk of permanent exclusion. The present study, however, employs the term 'dropout' to include any student who did not conclude lower secondary school, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Self-exclusion will be used as well given its inter-linking with bullying and truancy (Osler & Vincent, 2003).

School resources

Both school facilities and teachers' abilities form part of the effectiveness of the school and have been studied in relation to student school performance. Rumberger (1987) drew attention to the effects that schools' management, structure, teacher composition, have on students. He pointed out the effects of poor conditions for teaching staff and inadequate facilities that unfavourably affect students'

performance in school, influencing their ultimate decision to leave. Hampden-Thompson (2009) argued that the locations of schools determined the cultural capital available and that schools often lack key resources and were of poor quality if they were situated in deprived areas.

UNESCO (2006) considers that the recruitment of adequate numbers of teachers, their training and appropriate pupil/teacher ratio is fundamental to provide education quality. Maintenance of adequate quality standards is made difficult if classroom ratios exceed 40 students per teacher (40:1). In relation to teachers' abilities, Tatto and Velez (1997) studied the professional aptitude of teachers in Mexico and pointed out a lack of preparation on subject matter, something that seems to be an endemic weakness of teacher training programs worldwide, not just Mexico. The authors also argued that a key weakness of the Mexican educational system that needs to be recognised is teachers' poor knowledge of their required subject matters.

Several studies have reported the effect of school facilities on student performance, notwithstanding borders and cultures. Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda's (1987) study of 51 primary schools and 2, 559 pupils in Botswana measured pupil performance against schools' availability of classrooms, desks, seats and books. Results showed that pupils from schools with adequate classrooms, furniture and sufficient availability of books, performed better, in their overall performance in their Standard 7 examinations, than students from schools with insufficient school equipment. On the other hand, Branham (2004) studied the association between the quality of school infrastructure and student attendance and drop-out rates. Schools that use temporary buildings that are in disrepair or have under-resourced janitorial provisions had an adverse effect on students' daily attendance and permanency in school. The author suggested that investment in infrastructure could negate such critical effects by benefiting not only students but also teachers' disposition and turnover rates, as well as the schools' scholastic atmosphere. Similarly, Durán-Narucki (2008) found that, with all other things being equal, the quality of school infrastructure was directly associated with students' achievement in English Language, Arts and Mathematics examinations and school attendance. There were three important dimensions of academic facilities which were believed to influence students' performance; the 'material' dimension (roofs, toilets, etc.) which directly affect learning practices within the school; the 'social interaction' dimension (or everyday socialisation) which limits the learning environment if the classrooms and playgrounds represent a hostile setting; and the

‘environmental meaning’ dimension, where if a damaged panel, door or lavatory, for instance, is not taken care of, it highlights the level of regard those in authority have for the school, affecting students’ sense of well-being and worthiness. Moreover, not only do poor resources of the school interfere with students’ performance; they also negatively affect both students’ and staff’s stability and sense of belonging. Finally, Uline, Tschannen-Moran and Wolsey (2009) identified what they claimed to be essential to define the quality of school buildings; security, classroom ergonomics and available space, lighting and aesthetics. Such aspects were found to either facilitate or diminish student behaviour and learning as well as the everyday activities and relationships among its members. They added that a sense of collective identity or commitment can be positively affected by a school’s good design and condition.

Academic participation

Rumberger (2004), retaking Finn’s (1993) model of school engagement, described how two levels of student engagement (academic and social engagement), as well as their sense of belonging in school (identification), affect their educational outcomes. The behavioural components are reflected through participation in the classroom, other school activities, homework completion, and in achieving good grades etc., while the psychological components are reflected through good level of sociability with teachers, peers, etc. This approach also considered that educational performance is composed of three interconnected dimensions, one of which dropping out depends on. Firstly, ‘academic achievement’ measured by exam scores and grades, secondly, ‘educational stability, measured by student permanency or enrolment stability at the same institution and, thirdly, ‘educational attainment’ as reflected by completion of school years and achievement of degrees or diplomas. Thus, it is considered that a student’s educational attainment will be dependent on measured abilities and constant attendance. In other words, students are less likely to complete a particular portion of schooling if their education is interrupted by changing schools or dropping out. Moreover, Finn (1993) separated two sets of ‘at-risk’ factors in the lives of students; ‘status risk factors’ (demographic characteristics) and ‘behavioural risk factors’. While the first set of factors were established and therefore unchangeable, the second, manifested when active participation or socialisation in the school, diminished. Given that dropping out is the last stage of a cumulative process of disengagement (Rumberger, 2004), if the latter factors are detected in time, this

would allow the opportunity to prevent such factors from aggravating to the point of students dropping out.

Research on student achievement has thrown light on explaining its effect on educational failure. Finn's (1993) sample of demographically 'at-risk' and not 'at-risk' students showed that grades obtained by the former group of students were noticeably lower than those obtained by those not considered 'at-risk' because of their demographic characteristics. On the other hand, Ekstrom et al.'s (1986) longitudinal study found that, Hispanic and White students with low achievement had a higher likelihood to drop out, especially a large number of White students with lesser mathematical abilities in their sophomore year achievement test. Dropouts normally held poorer grades and were more prone to regularly failing exams. Moreover, the time these students dedicated to homework completion was, on average, 2.2 hours per week as compared to so-called 'stayers' who dedicated an average of 3.4 hours per week.

On the other hand, Rumberger's (2001) findings corroborated that academic failure did not, by itself, lead to dropping out; after student background and academic achievement was controlled for, absenteeism, a typical indicator of student disengagement and student misconduct, was found to be related to dropout behaviour. Likewise, Ekstrom (1986) reported that dropouts were more involved with disciplinary conduct in school and unconstructive activities such as cutting classes, suspensions, or even having experienced incidents with the police, tardiness in school and unexcused absences. As for Finn (1993), being absent denies students' exposure to learning activities, therefore expected attendance was a particularly important participatory behaviour throughout the school years. Osler and Vincent (2003) found that the intangible and overlooked emotional effects of bullying for girls drew attention to absenteeism from school as being a strategy used to avoid bullies.

Regarding school participation, Finn (1993) found that students at-risk due to their demographic and historical background, yet academically successful, differed from their less-successful peers with regards to a range of behaviours, both in class and outside, even when ethnic differences were controlled. Successful students not only kept a habitual attendance in school but were punctual, came to class prepared, were less disruptive and more participative, both in class and in extra-curricular activities, and did more homework. Rumberger (2001), in reference to his NELS:88-based study, discussed school retention (repeating an academic year of school) as being

interconnected with dropout rates, especially when this experience become apparent during the primary years (ages 5 - 12) and junior high school (around ages 11 – 14); students might become 400 percent more likely to drop out between grades 8 (ages 13 to 14) and 10 (ages 15 to 16) than students who did not repeat years, even when variables such as schooling and background factors, socioeconomic status and 8th grade performance were controlled for. These findings complement Finn's (1993) study, where 28 percent of the 'at-risk' sample had repeated years at least once prior to 8th grade, compared with 17 percent of not 'at-risk' students who had repeated grades.

Social identification in the school

Relative to student identification with the school, Finn's (1993) findings suggested that for more successful students, the learning-related experiences were notably appreciated. He argued that if less successful students were, as well as experiencing low grades, or exam results, simultaneously experiencing conflictive interactions with staff, their disposition to participate in learning activities could be expected to decrease. Accordingly, the incidents Ekstrom et al. (1986) mentioned of students who may have had experienced incidents with the police fit into this school-related category since such activities could only set them apart from participating in school activities. These students, before dropping out, according to the authors, decreased their participation in extra-curricular activities as well and they themselves reported feeling that they lacked popularity and socialised with other students of similar scholarly and behavioural characteristics. Additionally, 'peer pressure' was identified as well by Rumberger (1987); the majority of dropouts from his study, had friends who were, or who later became, dropouts. Additionally, educational ambitions and future expectations were generally shared by friends who eventually dropped out.

An individual approach outside the school

Ekstrom's et al. (1986) findings of students' behaviours outside the school showed evidence that sophomores (10th grade of high school) who later dropped out, used to carry out activities such as 'riding around' and dating. These students were also less inclined to discuss their social experiences with their parents, and likewise, parents of sophomores who later dropped out, were less inclined to monitor the activities of their children, both in and out of school.

With regards to future plans, as in opposition with high school graduates, sophomores who eventually dropped out did not have a definite idea as to whether they wanted to go on to further education. Yet, those who did said they would prefer to take the next academic level, for example junior college. Furthermore, almost half of those sophomores who later dropped out were working, outnumbering not only the number of those sophomores who were working and graduated but also the number of hours they worked per week. ‘Stayers’ enjoyed school better than working and thought their jobs were less important than the school. Dropouts-to-be, on the other hand, felt the opposite. Almost expectedly, dropouts were more inclined to earning money. Likewise, Finn (1993) found that fewer at-risk students intended to further their education.

In the same way, dropouts in Ekstrom et al.’s (1986) longitudinal study listed their reasons for having left school. These included, in order of occurrence, disliking of school, poor grades, employment, marriage, poor relationship with teachers, supporting the family, pregnancy and suspension or expulsion from school. Except for the marriage and pregnancy motives, males experienced all reasons listed with significantly more acuteness. Similarly, Rumberger (2001) argued that students’ higher educational ambitions or those of friends’ proved to lower the probability of dropping out across all ethnic groups. Notably, the author emphasised that such exogenous factors could only be associative in nature, not causal given that low future aspirations or even low grades could be more than the cause of dropping out but an effect of other factors. With regards to interests and activities after school, Finn (1993) suggested a relationship between students’ activities after school and school failure; students who were more successful tended to read more for pleasure and watched less television than who were not as academically successful.

Attitudes to society and self

Regarding self-esteem, Ekstrom et al. (1986) found that dropouts and ‘stayers’ had obviously diverse views; dropouts were notably less satisfied with themselves in relation to general achievements that could make them feel proud than ‘stayers’ were. Along with that, students’ opinions regarding the sense of control they had over their lives showed that dropouts were more likely, than ‘stayers’ to believe that their destiny was out of their control. Gender stereotypes were also marked among dropouts; females’ priorities were inclined towards homemaking and males’ priorities inclined, towards being ‘breadwinners’.

Such ranges of domains, enclosing educational, behavioural, monetary and personal elements, undoubtedly summarise what the majority of authors' concurrent idea and which Ekstrom et al. (1986) put in a nutshell: the problem is not created by just one particular factor. The following section summarises the main aspects gathered from the literature reviewed regarding perspectives to explain educational performance.

2.7 Concluding remarks

Essentially, every person is entitled to equal opportunities to accessing and completing at least the elementary stages of schooling. Nevertheless, participation trends in compulsory education are still unequal in terms of access and outcomes. Inequalities in education are a reality and a great number of people do not benefit from the same privileges due to their gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and so on. For example, these inequalities are present in the form of unequal opportunities to accessing schools, to exercise their rights to a fair school curriculum, to enjoy their rights to fair treatment in the classrooms, to good quality teaching and school facilities that secure their well-being. Both gross and net enrolment rates for primary education have risen since the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. Yet, at present, of children eligible for lower secondary school, around 71 million do not have access (UNESCO, 2010); By 2015, of the nations that currently do not have universal primary enrolment, 67 percent will not achieve it (UNESCO, 2007); and “many of the world’s poorest countries are not on track to meet the 2015 targets” (UNESCO, 2010:1).

Thus, disparities in educational participation manifest differently at different educational levels. Secondary education, sometimes divided into lower and upper levels, generally constitutes the last stage of mandatory education worldwide and participation at this level is commonly lower than for primary education. Regional disparities also become more pronounced (UNESCO, 2010). Although gender disparities in enrolment at this level have been changing in favour of girls, it does not necessarily mean parity or equality of access, but a possible overall increase of enrolments (UNESCO, 2004). Yet, as for gender parity, it should be acknowledged that, as of 2010, more regions are gradually getting closer to achieving it (UNESCO, 2010). However, the reality is that gender disparities become more pronounced the higher the educational level (UNESCO, 2006: 44); and from primary school onwards, lower secondary school therefore represents, for many, the turning point for

dropping out of school (UNESCO, 2008). A few isolated 'causes' that can jeopardise children's learning experiences in school include economic circumstances, household chores, or lack of spaces in schools, to mention some.

Educational failure, especially at the basic levels, reflects a nation's drawback of human capital and of potential benefits for development. Studies such as PISA, TIMSS or IALS are, by and large, tools currently employed to measure knowledge, skills and competencies of adolescents at an international level. Dropout rates and school exclusion are more difficult to 'measure', because it can manifest in either a fixed-term or permanent disciplinary measure which, if temporary, it will affect the student's ability to participate successfully in school to different degrees; and if permanent, what will happen with the student in question could be uncertain. The estimation of dropout rates, on the other hand, represents an even more difficult task given the various methods of data collection for both graduation and completion (Kaufman, 2004). Diverse approaches have consequently attempted to explain educational failure and, to date, the greatest coincidence amongst theoretical perspectives is that there is no single cause for the problem nor a simple solution (for example, Ekstrom et al., 1986; Finn, 1993; Rumberger, 2004).

Ethnicity, social class and gender have been defined as indispensable criteria to cross-cut research design and analyses. While these three factors have proved to influence academic achievement, Gillborn and Mirza (2000), in their study of 'racial' inequalities in education, within the context of the United Kingdom, stressed the powerful influence of social class over that of ethnicity or gender. Black students have proven to be capable of high achievement, and therefore ethnicity on its own cannot explain patterns of attainment. In fact, each main group studied had been capable of attaining at least five higher-grades (A*-Cs) in their GCSE examinations in given districts. Although girls attained more of these grades than males regardless of ethnicity, Indian girls were the highest attaining group, followed by White girls. From then onwards, White boys performed in general, better than their male counterparts from other ethnicities. However, despite class being the strongest factor, with socially advantaged Indian students were more likely to attain higher grades than their disadvantaged White peers, it does not override the influence of ethnicity; White students attained higher than their Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Black counterparts, regardless of social class. Thus, the second strong influential factor suggested was ethnicity, followed by gender. In summary, with gender and ethnicity equal, social class will consistently exert a strong influence on academic outcomes;

however, with gender and social class being the same, ethnicity will, most times, still permeate students' outcomes.

The effect of social class, as measured by parental educational and occupational background, was constant in most studies; Halsey, Heat and Ridge (1980) argued that the family social class is tremendously influential in children's educational fate, whether it is because it influences the way parents choose a type of school or because they transmit their values towards education. The argument that parents who enjoyed private education would prefer their children to benefit from the same type of education was a desire dependent on the availability of financial resources. Children, however, are very likely to follow the educational path of their parents, perhaps, at least in part, because these parents are even more willing to make financial sacrifices to benefit their children's education. Linneham (2001) also claimed there was an important relationship between parental educational background and students' value of education and future aspirations. The author also highlighted that while more parents with high school and college degrees tended to concentrate in suburban areas, more high school students from these areas not only valued outcomes related to college as more important but also achieved better grades in comparison to their urban peers. This also indicates the possible reproduction of values and priorities regarding education as determined by geographical locations and prevailing economic patterns.

Apart from gender, ethnicity and social class, other authors drew attention to the interrelation of various factors encompassing 'institutional' factors such as those of family and community characteristics, as well as school dynamics and 'individual' factors, comprising students' attitudes and behaviours.

The influence of parental educational and occupational background were found by most authors to be crucial; Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Gillborn and Mirza (2000); Halsey et al. (1980) highlighted the impact of class being the strongest amongst other demographic characteristics. Furthermore, children's aspirations for educational attainment seemed to be determined by parental role-models on a like-sex basis. Economic disadvantages were also more marked among students from minority groups (i.e., for Hispanic and Black in the United States) (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al., 1986). These students are also more likely to be involved in employment, marriage or teenage pregnancy than their counterparts from higher SES backgrounds and therefore more likely to leave school.

Another way in which the family socioeconomic status favoured students was through the possession of human capital. Parting from Bourdieu's (1986) perspective of the types of cultural capital present in the home, and how they benefit children's academic performance, research has suggested that the availability of reading material is especially associated with higher student achievements in literacy (Hampden-Thompson et al., 2008). Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom, 1986) considered that parents with higher levels of education are more likely to be proactive with their time with their offspring and improving their children's academic skills. In comparison, children from disadvantaged households may experience the need to seek employment to help their families' financial requirements. Li (2007) highlighted that rather than the possession of 'material resources' in the home, it was actually the use of existing familial capital that was integral to creating a positive learning environment and the way in which it was used to invest in the education of their children. The locality's cultural capital, social capital and economic characteristics also proved to contribute to students' scholarly performance. Exploration of the effects of emotional capital in student learning is becoming more widespread (see, for example, Gillies, 2006; and Reay, 2000).

Academic support at home for homework was found, by Ekstrom et al. (1986), to be a crucial predictor of school performance and one which was associated with mothers' levels of formal education which, at the same time, was likely to determine not only the level of educational support provided to their children but also to shape their children's educational expectations. Corno (1996, 2000); Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, and Greathouse; (1998); and Trautwein (2007) also acknowledge the positive relationship between homework completion and achievement gains, and the development of social skills. Academic support and family monitoring go along with the monitoring of after-school activities; children who watched more television or dedicated less time to leisure reading were likely to be less successful in school (Finn, 1993). Moreover, although parental involvement with the school was suggested by Epstein (1995) to strengthen the benefits offered to students, Casanova (1996) warned cautiousness about the level and types of involvement.

The structure of the family was also put forward as influential for children's performance in school; students from two-parent families were more predisposed to stay in school and to score higher test grades and marks (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Rumberger, 2001, 2004; Hampden-Thompson, 2009). However, generalisations with this argument should be cautious, Hampden-Thompson, 2009); Bradshaw, Keung,

Goswami and Rees (2008) found that family structure did not account for children's overall happiness or sensation of well-being as much as how members of the family interacted with each other, simply put: children tend to fare better in families that have separated, as opposed to living with both parents in a confrontational environment. Not many studies in the field have focused on the exploration of home-stability, which seems worthy for further exploration.

Finally, the place where the family lived was found to be influential on student achievement Ekstrom (1986); Gillborn and Mirza's (2000); and Rumberger (1983, 2004). Generally, more affluent families were concentrated in rural and suburban areas; parents held higher levels of educational and occupational qualifications and such areas had less concentration of minority populations. It is important to draw attention to the fact that urban and rural patterns are not the same in developed and developing countries; for example, in Latin American countries, the poor, indigenous populations are more concentrated in rural areas, where there is less potable water and sanitation (UNESCO, 2007). Furthermore, children from rural areas tend to be socially marginalised and having poorer opportunities for good-quality basic education.

School factors, such as resources, teacher quality, structural characteristics, and their policies and practices, were found to exert an effect on student performance if their provision was not of optimum quality. Insufficient teaching staff and inadequacy of teacher training (Rumberger, 1987; UNESCO, 2006) as well as sub-standard subject matter preparation (Tatto & Velez, 1997) proved to have a negative effect on students' learning.

Poor school facilities, such as lack of availability of classrooms, desks, seating and books are believed to affect pupil performance negatively (Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda, 1987; Durán-Narucki, 2008). The state of school infrastructure is also related to student daily attendance and dropout rates (Branham, 2004; Durán-Narucki, 2008). Students' sense of safety and identity in the school was also affected by the building conditions (Uline et al., 2009). The location of the school also determined the services available for students; key resources are lacking and of poor quality in deprived communities according to Hampden-Thompson (2009).

Student academic participation was another aspect highlighted by the literature. The model of school engagement put forward by Finn (1993), and retaken by Rumberger (2004), separate students' participation into a behavioural and a psychological component. Forms of participation signalled to start during the

primary years. The first component, or student academic participation, is measured by attendance, homework completion, involvement in extra-curricular activities, etc., whereas the second component, or identification with school, is measured by the level of socialisation with peers and teachers. The model signals that a student will be at-risk of educational failure if he or she fails to reach an acceptable level of socialisation or active participation. Ekstrom et al. (1986) also found an association between detrimental academic participation (low scores, exam failure etc.) and dropout behaviour and that students with unacceptable social behaviour in the school such as missing classes, suspensions and reprimands, were also more likely to drop out. In relation to inadequate levels of socialisation, Osler and Vincent (2003) drew attention to self-exclusion as a strategy used by girls to avoid bullying in school. A relationship also existed between a gradual decrease of student participation from both academic and extra-curricular activities (1993) Ekstrom et al. (1986); they also spent more time with friends with similar disengagement attitudes and who later became dropouts (Rumberger, 1987). The responsibility of students' misconduct, however, seems to be put on the backs of students' or their families, with little research being conducted on how teachers and schools deal with a violent or misbehaving student; and the effect of such support or, lack of, has on students' academic performance.

Students' after-school behaviours, according to Ekstrom et al. (1986), can also predict dropout behaviour; students who later became dropouts seemed to have spent a considerable amount of time loitering with friends, which had a direct association with minimal or non-existent parental monitoring. Also, their priorities and plans for the future were modest with regards to educational pursuits (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Finn, 1993; Rumberger, 2001).

The constant element identified as influencing student performance was that of family background, and in particular, the family's socioeconomic status. Aspects related to the family as an institution comprise; parental educational and occupational background, parental provision of cultural capital, parental supervision of school work, parental supervision of out-of-school activities, and family stability. The gender of parents is also considered to affect students' role models and educational aspirations. Assuming the family to be a system on which the child's educational survival is dependent upon, it could be argued that if one of the processes deteriorates or is missing, the child's academic performance can be compromised (school disengagement) or even collapse (dropping out).

3 Situation of educational provision in Mexico

Compulsory education is one of the current challenges of the education system in Mexico. Although Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs) for primary and secondary education respectively reached 98 and 72 percent by 2007, the survival rate in the former level of education only reaches 94 percent (UNESCO, 2009, 2010). Despite more children completing a cycle of compulsory education than 20 years ago, by 2006 there were 73,000 out-of-primary school children in Mexico, of which 84 percent were girls. There are factors still hindering full participation in compulsory education. A third of the population in Mexico has never had access to, nor has ever concluded, a cycle of either primary or lower secondary education (SEP, 2007). Mexico's education system has a long way to go and, although educational figures may seem optimistic, socio-economic and political conditions may be restricting the expected progress.

This chapter focuses on the situation of educational provision in Mexico. It starts with the illustration of the organization of the education system, giving some background on constitutional reforms that the system has undergone since the National Agreement for the Modernisation of Basic Education in 1992. This section ends with a discussion on the ways these reforms have transformed the delivery of education, including the roles teachers have played in these reforms. The second part of this chapter describes the education system's current challenges and aspirations in relation to international commitments, especially those aspiring to universality of basic education. The final part of this chapter provides an overview of the problems people face in concluding compulsory education in the country. Data on educational failure in advantaged and disadvantaged areas are presented.

3.1 Compulsory education in Mexico

Compulsory education in Mexico lasts 10 years and consists of pre-school, primary and lower secondary education. According to the General Law of Education, the Government is obliged to provide free education for all the population who are eligible to attend. The National Agreement for the Modernisation of Basic Education in 1993 designated that secondary education would be the final stage of compulsory education and therefore everybody should, theoretically, have completed all educational levels up to and including this stage.

However, full compulsory education in Mexico is still not a reality. Since the National Agreement for the Modernisation of Basic Education, which will be

discussed in more detail below, average duration of schooling has increased from 6.3 years in 1990 to 8.3 years in 2006. However, if compulsory education consists of 10 years and not even urban areas fully achieve it, there is a disparity that requires attention. The General Law of Education declares that the Government is obliged to offer educational services for everybody to attend compulsory schooling; at the same time, this law states that parents are obliged to make their children attend basic years of schooling. In other words, it could be said that the onus falls mainly on parents to ensure their children attend school.

Moreover, if the average years of schooling are disaggregated by both region and gender, it can be seen that the population in more developed regions, and the male population in particular, have historically presented higher average years of schooling. In order to emphasise these differences, data on 4 regions, based on their Human Development Index (HDI) will be portrayed in Table 11. The HDI, established by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), is a means of measuring a country or region's average attainment in three indispensable aspects of human development: health, knowledge, and respectable standard of living (UNDP, 2009). The Federal District and Nuevo León are portrayed as the most-developed areas, and Oaxaca and Chiapas as two of the least developed areas in Mexico.

3.2 Organisation of the Mexican Education System

The Mexican education system is regulated by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP). The Secretariat administers all public and private schools in Mexico. Most people attend public education (Federal, State or Municipal schools), and private schools' programs are accredited by SEP. The system is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Illustration of the Mexican School System by educational levels.

The Mexican School System		
Educational Level	School Stage	Type of School modality
Basic Education	Pre-school (4-5 years old)	General
		Indigenous
		Community
	Primary School (6-12 years old)	General
		Indigenous
		Community
	Lower secondary school (13-15 years old)	General
		<i>Telesecundaria</i> (Educational Television System)
		Technical
		Night school (for workers)
		Community
	Upper Secondary Education	Technical professional
Upper secondary school		General
		Technological
Higher Education	Skilled technician	
	Bachelor's degree	Teaching School
		University/Technological degree
	Postgraduate degree	Diploma course
		Masters degree
Doctoral studies		

Source: INEE (2008b)

Note: The preschool system may vary in the number of years for completion, depending on the type of schooling provided.

3.2.1 Brief introduction to Levels of Education

As a result of a reform of the General Law of Education, one year of pre-school education must be completed before Primary education starts. It has been compulsory since the academic year 2004-2005. Primary education lasts for 6 years.

As for lower secondary school, the General Secondary modality can be located in urban and rural areas. It provides workshops and laboratories and each module is taught by a specialist teacher. The Technical lower secondary school offers general subjects to students aged 13 to 15, and each module is taught by a specialist teacher. In this modality, technological education is emphasised in areas such as farming, fishing and forestry, or in services specific to either rural or urban areas, depending on their relevant economic characteristics. The *Telesecundaria* (satellite-based) school was initially created to serve rural communities with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants, and where it was impossible to locate general or technical secondary schools due to the limited number of students who finished primary education. However, this service has expanded into disadvantaged urban areas. This educational service combines taught modalities with specific aspects of distance-learning and is taught by a specialist teacher. Lower secondary school for workers has a duration of three years of schooling for those aged 15 or older who have finished their primary education. Classes are generally held during the evening in general secondary schools. The curriculum does not contain technological activities or workshops.

3.2.2 National Agreement for the Modernisation of Basic Education

The National Agreement for the Modernisation of Basic Education in 1992 was a controversial process in Mexico due to the major reforms it entailed. These ranged from the decentralisation of the education system, the implementation of compensatory programs, an increase of school days and also the extension of compulsory education to nine years at the time. One of the major reasons for this decentralisation process in Mexico was geared towards improving the quality and equity in education. Its aim was to assure “Federalism” in the system through reducing intervention by the Federal government and decentralising educational resources.

This agreement was signed by the Federal government, State governments and the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE). To date, the Federal government is in overall control of the design of the national curriculum, teacher training, the national school calendar, and provision of academic materials such as free text books. State

governments are in charge of administering curricular content according to regional needs, managing schools and other local programs. Other functions are jointly administered by both State and Federal governments such as the promotion of educational research. These changes have resulted in difficulties for the educational system, due to rejections of the agreement by teachers, differing expectations and uncertainties and because of entrenched bureaucratic practices (Zorrilla, 2002) that have collided with the “new” regulations.

3.2.3 The National Union of Education Workers (SNTE)

The National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) is considered to be the largest teachers’ union in Latin America. It is powerful for two main reasons, firstly, it is the only education union in Mexico, all basic education teachers in Mexico must be a member of the SNTE. Membership is not restricted to just teachers, but is also open to all staff within the public education system. Secondly, all of its members contribute a membership fee that approximates 1 percent of their basic salary, giving it a large financial base. The Union does not seem to have financial accountability to its members or the general public (Santibáñez & Jarillo, 2007), thus, due to the size of membership and for financial reasons, SNTE is a complex yet very powerful factor in the Mexican education system.

The Union system is based on a structure of incentives that must be earned through political participation. This may involve the Union’s internal affairs, years of service and punctuality, amongst others. Teachers are obliged to follow SNTE policies and what the leadership dictates. If teachers do not follow such policies, they become subject to the Union’s system of sanctions that could include teachers being moved to other locations, or limiting their progress in the career advancement points-system, to name a couple (Santibáñez & Jarillo, 2007). Historically, this Union has been powerful and has exerted a very strong influence both on Federal and local governments by influencing SEP’s policies or by the controlling teachers’ vacancies and their creation or removal. On several occasions, the SNTE’s intense political activities have led to long periods of strikes as a means of using its dissatisfaction and as a ‘bargaining chip’ when negotiating its demands, normally relating to salaries, working conditions, pensions and teacher training (Vaillant, 2005).

Vaillant (2005) lists the number of teachers’ protests from 18 countries in Latin America; it was estimated that between 1998 and 2003, teachers’ protests in Mexico occurred 103 times. If the number of strikes in other countries were looked at within

the same period of time, teacher protests in Uruguay, Chile and Venezuela occurred 3, 7 and 45 times respectively, with Venezuela having the second highest number of protests overall. This not only gives an idea of the scale of the teachers' political involvement, but also to the degree of their absences in schools, a fact that puts students at risk of not achieving their learning needs or not having a good quality of teaching. Many sources in the nation, such as the media and especially the public, have suggested the SNTE might be the major contributor to the deficient educational situation in Mexico. It is important to mention that major political involvement by the SNTE is especially observed in disadvantaged states such as Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero (Santibañez & Jarillo, 2007).

3.2.4 *Oportunidades* anti-poverty program

The *Oportunidades* program has represented a breakthrough for Mexico's education system. The program grants financial assistance to families in extreme poverty in exchange for regular school attendance of children in basic and upper secondary education (ages 6 to 17). As one of the foremost social policy instruments in Mexico, *Oportunidades* has generated an increase of primary and secondary school enrolments (UNESCO 2008), permanence in school and regular attendance (SEDESOL, 2008; The World Bank, 2009). This program started as *Progresá* in 1997 assisting approximately 300,000 recipient households (World Bank, 2009) but by 2010, *Oportunidades* helps 5.8 million families in Mexico (SEDESOL, 2010). The World Bank (2009) acknowledges the program as an iconic case given its steady and successful evolution.

3.3 Educational trends in Mexico

Currently, compulsory education is a central topic on the international agenda, not only because it represents the opportunity for individuals to be provided with the basic learning needs to develop their own capacities and potential, but also because it stimulates progress in life and social development (UNESCO, 2000). Furthermore, most world governments are committed towards the achievement of universal primary schooling as one of the goals from the Dakar Framework for Action, namely that all children should have access to, and be able to complete, free and compulsory education of a good quality, at whatever level of education is considered 'basic' (UNESCO, 2002:15).

The six Dakar Goals are the result of other documents such as the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), where governmental representatives acknowledged education as a fundamental right for all and committed to ensuring primary schooling for all children in the world, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), where making primary education compulsory and free for all was considered as an imperative requirement, as well as development of access to secondary education, all based on equal opportunity. These and other documents have served as guides for designing strategies and policies by governments, international organisations and educational authorities.

To what extent has Mexico achieved its part of the mission? By 2005 Mexico had not achieved full, compulsory education enrolments, or addressed problems such as year reprobation (retention) and the issue of "dropping out" which, to date, represents serious concerns that prevent children from completing their years of compulsory education.

3.3.1 Low performance in PISA

Results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 regarding Mexico, which focused on reading abilities, showed that the Country was positioned ahead of the other Latin American nations, but lay in penultimate place amongst the 32 participating countries. PISA 2000's average mean score was 500 and Mexico reached a mean score of 422.

However, Mexico's mean results from PISA 2003, which focused on mathematical abilities, lowered to 385 (400 in reading and 385 in mathematical literacy). This positioned Mexico 35th out of 41 participating nations, but in last place out of the members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) who participated. Finally, results from PISA 2006, for Mexico, which focused on scientific abilities, did improve to an extent. From the expected mean score of 500; Mexico attained a score of 410, positioning it at number 49 of 57 participants. However, this mean score positioned Mexico at the bottom of the list amongst the participating OECD nations.

Although Mexico's performance in PISA, together with those of Chile and Brazil, leads the results from Latin American nations, the reality is that Mexican students' performances in reading, mathematics and science are below the OECD countries' average. PISA 2009 was applied in March 2009 in Mexico; however, results were available from December 2010 for which results will not be included in this study.

Table 10 illustrates Mexican students' performance for the three assessed areas in the PISA between 2000 and 2006.

Table 10. Mexico's mean scores of student performance in PISA 2000, 2003 and 2006.

		Reading performance	Mathematical literacy	Scientific proficiency
OECD (2000-2006)	500	500	500	500
Mexico (2000)	422	422	387	422
Mexico (2003)	385	400	385	405
Mexico (2006)	410	410	406	410

Sources: OECD, 2004; OECD, 2009

In summary, a small reversal was observed in the results obtained over the three assessed areas between 2000 and 2003 for Mexico, followed by a similar recovery for results obtained between 2003 and 2006. Thus it could be argued that Mexico's position has stagnated.

3.3.2 The problems of year repetition and dropping out

The fact that the goal of universal primary education has been achieved by Mexico (UNESCO, 2006) may be a positive indicator towards a substantial progress in the country over the past decade. It seems that a position has been reached in which all children of required age to attend this level of education complete six years of quality schooling, especially at the primary education level. However, Mexico faces two main problems at the lower secondary education level: the high levels of grade repeaters and the high levels of dropouts, especially amongst males.

Statistical data from 2002/2003 reveals that Mexico presented a Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in lower secondary education of 63 percent, meaning that just over half of the students, relative to the age group to attend lower secondary school, enrolled in that level of education (UNESCO-UIS, 2005). Data disaggregated by gender shows an NER of 61 percent for males and 64 percent for females.

The percentages of grade repeaters in secondary education during the 2002/2003 academic year, represented 2 percent of those students, 3 percent for males and 1 percent for females, who were enrolled in the same grade for a second or further year, irrespective of age (UNESCO 2005). A small reduction of these figures was observed from 2006 data, where 1 percent of students, 2 percent for males and 1 percent for females, repeated grades (UNESCO-UIS, 2008). However, the pattern

remained the same: more boys repeat grades than girls. Accordingly, dropout rates for lower secondary education in 2004 was 7.4 percent, 9.1 percent for males and 7.7 percent for females (expressed as percentages of the total population for that age group) (INEE, 2006a), and for the 2006/2007 academic year this rate remained at 7.4 percent, 9 percent for males and 5.8 percent for females.

These figures do not seem ideal with respect to Mexico's attainment of their Dakar commitment to increasing participation in secondary education; rather they show the limitations that Mexico faces towards its goal of acquiring skills that are fundamental for its social and economic development. These figures also highlight that Mexico faces notable challenges within its educational system that generate significant rates of children who struggle to advance to their subsequent school years and high rates of dropouts at the last stage of basic education.

3.3.3 Advantaged areas versus disadvantaged areas

In Mexico, like most Latin American countries, educational achievement manifests differently in urban and rural areas. Rural areas generally have lower availability of educational resources such as physical infrastructure, teaching materials and a lack of teachers (UNESCO, 1997). Also, rural areas more often have higher proportions of indigenous populations which are, at the same time, very likely to live in conditions of acute poverty, resulting in marked educational and social inequalities of opportunities for them.

The indigenous population who, in 2005, spoke an indigenous language represented more than 7 percent of the total population in Mexico (INEGI, 2010a). This population is considered as a vulnerable group as they generally live in conditions of extreme poverty. Their traditions and customs are not fully recognised and access to good quality of education or health services is limited or even non-existent, reinforcing their own exclusion and marginalisation (OACNUDHM, 2003).

When looking at PISA results, and general educational patterns of all administrative divisions in Mexico, it is evident that they correspond to those of international patterns; educational results tend to be better in more developed states. Mexico comprises thirty one states and one Federal District, Mexico City, and the Human Development Index (HDI), described earlier, was used to identify the most advantaged and disadvantaged states in the country. States with the highest HDIs include the Federal District, Baja California, Nuevo León, Coahuila and Chihuahua; and states with the poorest HDIs include states such as Michoacán, Guerrero,

Chiapas and Oaxaca. PISA 2006 results for these divisions were as described in Table 11.

Table 11. PISA 2006, Science mean scores in most advantaged and least advantaged entities in Mexico.

HDI	PISA 2006 Mean scores
Most advantaged States	
Federal District (.88)	445
Baja California (.87)	437
Nuevo León (.85)	435
Chihuahua (.83)	421
Coahuila (.83)	410
Most disadvantaged States	
Michoacán (.75)	398
Guerrero (.73)	379
Oaxaca (.73)	368
Chiapas (.71)	374

Source: PNUD (2007)

This data shows that advantaged areas in Mexico had mean scores for Science abilities above the national average (410), similar to nations such as Chile, Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey. Disadvantaged areas, on the other hand, had mean scores below the national average, similar to countries such as Indonesia, Argentina, Brazil and much lower than that of Azerbaijan. As a result, the areas' respective HDI and their index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status (ESCS) coincide; the estimated national mean score for ESCS was -0.99, Oaxaca and Chiapas again being the farthest from the national ESCS mean score with -1.60 and -1.45 respectively.

3.3.4 Oaxaca: one of the states left behind in Mexico

It has been determined that Oaxaca State, southern Mexico, with a HDI of 0.73 (PNUD, 2007), is at the tail end of the list of states, being second lowest in the country. Its HDI, if compared to other territories in the world, would put them at a similar level to El Salvador, Palestine and The Maldives (PNUD, 2007). Oaxaca also has one of the lowest levels of Education Index in the country (0.77), similar to El Salvador, Belize, Cape Verde and Botswana.

It is worth mentioning that Oaxaca has the highest concentration of Mexico's indigenous population, with 18 percent of indigenous communities (INEGI, 2009b) residing there. Indigenous populations are found throughout Mexico; however they are mostly concentrated in the southern States, where agricultural and subsistence farming is important regarding their way of living. Historically, indigenous peoples have faced human rights violations due to historic conflicts that have been taking place over many years, relating to assurances over land rights. On the other hand, in some parts of Mexico, their customary laws are not fully recognised and their access to education or health services is limited or non-existent, reinforcing their own exclusion and marginalisation (OACNUDHM, 2003). Finally, Oaxaca not only holds the greatest educational failure rates associated to its low socio-economic conditions, but it's regional education system also faces significant political challenges deriving from the aforementioned SNTE. Led by this Union, teachers frequently go on strike to express their demands.

The Teachers' Union Strike in Oaxaca in 2006

On the 22nd of May 2006, teachers of the SNTE, Section 22⁶ started a strike, camping in the centre of Oaxaca City, the state capital of Oaxaca State. Their demands included improvement of salaries and training conditions for its members. The strike continued until June 14th when government security forces attempted to evict striking teachers from the city centre with the use of tear gas and other riot-control techniques. Three days later, as a result of the Union and other organisations' discontent with the State government, the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) emerged on the 17th of June of 2006, installing barricades at key points in the city and demanded the State Governor's (Ulises Ruiz Ortiz) resignation. Consequently, children of all publicly funded schools were not in school and were not able to start the new academic year, in August, until negotiations took place and teachers decided to go back to schools at the end of October of 2006.

This represented an important event in terms of the content and form for this study as the strike had just ended by the time the pilot had started. The Strike left serious consequences for schools; the late start of the 2006 academic year, in October, was

⁶ The SNTE was comprised of 55 Sections that were distributed throughout Mexico. Section 22 covered Oaxaca. A new Section was created in December 2006, following the teachers' strike that year with the intention to mitigate Section 22's hegemonic position. These sections would then compete for the membership of about 55 thousand education workers in Oaxaca.

expected to delay coverage of the curriculum. Also, the teacher-students and teacher-parents' relationships had shown signs of damage. There was a constant tension noticed amongst teachers in relation to the reforms of educational policies by the Federal government.

3.3.5 Lower secondary school dropout rates are higher in disadvantaged regions

National statistics in Mexico show that full enrolment in basic education has been achieved in most administrative divisions in Mexico, especially at primary level where homogeneity of access has been achieved for girls and boys. However, a significant gap in enrolment has been observed during the transition from primary school to lower secondary school.

Enrolment patterns

Figures for the Federal District do not seem as alarming as those for states such as Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero, as can be observed in Table 12. As these three disadvantaged states present similar educational figures, data for only Oaxaca will be portrayed.

Table 12. Net Enrolment Rates (NER) for primary and lower secondary education disaggregated by gender for three academic cycles.

Location	Primary			Secondary		
	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008
National	105.1	101.2 M (100.7) F (101.8)	101.4 M (100.8) F (100.2)	77.6	80.0 M (77.9) F (82.1)	81.5 M (79.4) F (83.7)
Federal District	112.9	106.0 M (105.3) F (106.8)	107.8 M (106.9) F (108.7)	102.6	99.9 M (97.9) F (102.0)	100.9 M (98.6) F (103.2)
Oaxaca	105.5	103.6 M (103.0) F (104.3)	101.5 M (101.3) F (101.7)	66.7	70.2 M (68.4) F (72.0)	73.2 M (71.2) F (75.3)

Source: INEE (2006a, 2007, 2008a) / Note: There was no data disaggregated by sex available from 2005/2006

Net Enrolment Rates (NER) for basic education provides evidence of the situation of school participation in Mexico by focusing on students eligible to enrol at a given educational level. Figures from primary school net enrolment are normally above

100 percent, suggesting possible overestimation of enrolment data obtained from the SEP's Statistics 911⁷. This overestimation could overtake the population mean estimation carried out by the National Council of Population in Mexico (CONAPO) (INEE, 2008b). It could also represent inconsistencies between sources of information, given that the theoretical maximum value is 100 percent (INEE, 2007). It could be argued that an education system is ideally efficient when the number of students of eligible age (to attend each level of education) coincides with the number of students who enrol such levels of education. Parting from this principle we can conclude that the Mexican education system still has its challenges in improving efficacy at the lower secondary level.

Generally, statistics show parity of enrolment between genders has been achieved in basic education. Girls, however, are more likely to complete their academic cycles, as reported in figures of primary education completion by UNESCO (2003), and this internationally known pattern persists at higher levels of education (UNESCO, 2003; INEGI, 2007). Lower secondary school NERs for Mexico is 81 percent, as can be observed on the above table, suggesting that the country still struggles to achieve the goal of universal lower secondary school. It is important to point out that enrolment rates for states such as Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero mean that they are much farther away from achieving this goal.

Dropout rates

Not all students enrolled in primary or secondary school conclude their educational levels in a timely manner, or conclude them at all. Global educational targets not only cover enrolment but also ensuring that students stay in school. It is important to observe dropout rates in lower secondary education since as this is the educational level at which students seem to struggle in remaining in school.

The National Institute for Educational Assessment and Evaluation (INEE) (2006a, 2007, and 2008a) in Mexico works with two types of dropout rate. The first, named dropout rate (a), refers to the estimated number of students who leave school, before concluding a given school year, per hundred enrollees at the beginning of a school year for a given educational level. This data includes repeaters or some under or over-age students. The second type, dropout rate (b), refers to the estimated number

⁷ Statistics are taken via 'Questionnaires 911' that obtain statistical information from schools at the beginning and end of each school cycle. The information relates to students, teachers, schools and classes of the national education system at all educational levels and services.

of students who do not conclude an educational level, per hundred that initially enrolled 5 years before primary school and 2 years before lower secondary school.

In summary, rate (a) looks at the number of students who did not conclude any given school cycle that they enrolled for, regardless of whether they are enrolled according to their age group. Rate (b) refers to those students who do not conclude a given educational level. Data from three academic cycles show that, males in disadvantaged regions tend to drop out more than females in all levels of basic education. The following table shows dropout rate (a) and it is possible to observe the almost steady educational patterns over the years. Again, for brevity, Oaxaca will represent other disadvantaged states in Mexico.

Table 13. Trends in dropout rate (a) in Mexico for 2004/2005, 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 disaggregated by gender.

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
National	7.4 Males (9.1) Females (5.7)	7.7 Males (9.6) Females (5.9)	7.4 Males (9.0) Females (5.8)
Federal District	5.1 Males (6.7) Females (3.4)	10.0 Males (12.5) Females (7.3)	7.4 Males (9.5) Females (5.2)
Oaxaca	8.1 Males (9.7) Females (6.5)	11.3 Males (12.3) Females (10.4)	8.2 Males (10.2) Females (6.2)

Source: INEE (2006a, 2007, 2008a)

Dropout rates have varied significantly over the years, INEE (2007, 2008a) registered Colima and Nuevo León as the states with the lowest dropout rates (a) for 2005/2006 at 4.4 percent. On the other hand, Oaxaca registered one of the highest dropout rates (a) for 2005/2006 with 11.3 percent, similar to Coahuila for 2006/2007 with 11.6 percent. Regardless of ranking in the list, it is crucial to focus on the figures. The highest dropout rates exceed 11 percent of the student population, meaning that out of every 100 enrolled students approximately 11 do not enrol for the following academic year.

A clear gender difference is observed in Oaxaca. If data is taken from the 2006/2007 educational cycle, it can be concluded that 10 percent of males dropout from a school year. In contrast, only 6 percent of females leave a given school cycle.

The proportion of male dropouts from lower secondary school is higher than at primary school level. The following table shows dropout rate (b) from two academic cycles.

Table 14. Trends in dropout rate (b) in Mexico for 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 disaggregated by gender.

	2005/2006	2006/2007
National	21.8 Males (26.4) Females (17.0)	21.8 Males (26.5) Females (17.1)
Federal District	23.8 Males (29.9) Females (17.3)	24.1 Males (30.1) Females (17.7)
Oaxaca	26.0 Males (29.3) Females (22.6)	24.2 Males (28.3) Females (19.8)

Note: Data for dropout rate (b) was included by INEE *Panorama Educativo de México* from 2007.

Theoretically, the values of this indicator should range between zero and one hundred. The table above shows that, on average, more than 21 percent of children do not conclude lower secondary school in a timely fashion in Mexico. An alarming 28 percent of males fall behind their studies or leave education before concluding it in Oaxaca. National trends show that males generally dropout of school more than females at all levels of education, and the gender gap gets wider the higher the educational level gets.

Dropout rates (b) are an indication of the level of the education system's success or failure in retaining students in school and for them to conclude an educational level in a more age-standardised way (INEE 2007, 2008a). Consequently, the more students who do not conclude an educational level in a reasonable time (six and three years for primary and lower secondary school respectively), the more inefficient the education system can be considered to be. Grade repeaters and dropouts exist because they are, to an extent, the product of the system's failures. The identification of the factors that are causing such inefficiencies, in order to suggest possible adjustments for the education system, is partly the aim of this study.

3.4 Concluding remarks

Compulsory education is one of the current challenges of the education system in Mexico. Despite the introduction of the National Agreement for the Modernisation of Basic Education in 1992, devolving the education system to the states and making lower secondary education mandatory, access and enjoyment of full compulsory education in Mexico still has shortcomings to tackle. If compulsory education comprises a year of pre-primary school through to lower secondary school (ages 5 to 14 or 15), and the average years of schooling are still 8 years of education, and with great gender and regional variations, whose obligation is it to enforce compulsory education? Is it the schools' or parents'? Many factors, which will be described in the following chapter, intervene. Mexico's main educational challenges, stopping children from completing their years of compulsory education, include the low levels of Net Enrolment Rates (NER), the high percentage of year retention and "dropping out" in lower secondary education. Mexico's low performance for PISA when compared to other OECD countries' mean scores has also been a matter of concern.

However, more than gender inequalities, regional inequalities are huge, especially as the majority of Mexico's indigenous population are concentrated in rural areas where poverty amplifies the inequality of economic, social, and educational opportunities available. Oaxaca, as the second poorest state in Mexico, experiences deeper educational drawbacks regarding enrolment, transition and completion rates especially for compulsory education levels. Finally, two important factors influence the education system in Mexico, especially in Oaxaca; firstly, the SNTE with its massive membership and strong political influence; secondly, the *Oportunidades* anti-poverty programme which has stimulated educational participation especially for school attendance up to upper secondary school level.

4 Exploring the determinants that influence students' decision to drop out from secondary school in Oaxaca, Mexico

This chapter presents the research strategy used to investigate the factors affecting lower secondary school students' educational performance and the dependency of such factors over the prosperity or disadvantage of the area. It consists of six sections. The first section describes the purpose of the study and the elements subjected to exploration. The second comprises the projects' overall research design, starting with the description of research methods and rationale for their selection, as well as the ethical considerations that such methods entail. The sample is subsequently discussed, followed by the site's relevant demographic background. The last part of the research design includes a discussion of the categories for exploration. The third and fourth sections give account of conduct of the pilot study and fieldwork, the processes and challenges of accessing the settings, participants, and instrumentation of research tools. The fifth section of the chapter explains the tools employed to analyse the information collected. The final section of this chapter, discusses both the focal challenges and strengths of the research design.

4.1 Purpose of the study and research questions

If, as indicated on Chapter 2, participation entails enrolment, academic achievement and completion of educational levels; lower secondary school children in Mexico face a type of 'under-participation' or 'educational failure'. Following the trends of educational participation in Mexico through the analysis of secondary data, in the form of statistical figures at all educational levels, lower secondary education, the last stage of compulsory education, was identified as the stage where problems of educational failure became more apparent. The patterns indicated that girls and boys experience educational failure differently; girls face greater obstacles regarding enrolments, and boys experience higher dropout rates the higher the educational ladder they go. Moreover, regional variations were evident with less developed States showing lower levels of educational participation or higher levels of failure.

Although the original idea was to explore the reasons for which students did not complete their last level of compulsory education, the literature shed light on the fact that dropping out is the culmination of a cumulative process of disengagement from school. It therefore became impractical to look at "dropping out" without looking at

the disengagement processes involved. Thus, aspects regarding academic achievement; school exclusion; and dropping out were explored at the lower secondary education level in Mexico. Furthermore, if the restraining aspects influencing educational failure were to be investigated, it seemed worthy to identify facilitators to educational participation.

The main objective of this thesis was to identify the facilitators and barriers to participation in lower secondary schools in Mexico by exploring aspects of family and school environments along with attitudinal dispositions. Thus, the research questions that guided this investigation were as follows:

What are the factors that affect students' educational performance in lower secondary school?

What are the factors that lead to students' disengagement from this level of education?

To what extent do these factors vary depending on socio-economic background?

4.2 The research design

The use of social survey research was decided as the strategy to address the above questions. It is important to clarify that, although a particular theory was not being tested, though a generation of a theory intended, one of the main decisions was not to be sheltered by the cultural cliché (Gorard, 2004) of a methodological paradigm (i.e. quantitative or qualitative). At most, it could be argued that the study would possess certain qualitative attributes.

Among the options of survey types, the 'interview survey' seemed ideal; it presents fewer complications than, for example, postal or telephone surveys (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007), and the process of obtaining survey information becomes easier when participants interact with an on-the-scene interviewer (Cohen et al., 2007). That is to say, the process runs more smoothly if the interviewer can assist in clarifying queries from participants and encourage participants to give full answers. Another element of importance is the potential of improving the participants' "response rates" (Cohen et al., 2007). With regards to the sample size, the small-scale survey was selected, given the limitation of only counting on the 'lone researcher' (Cohen et al. 2007) to carry it out. Borg and Gall, (1983) draw attention to the use of small samples as a weakness for research in that small survey

samples increase the dangers of biased results. However, it was aimed to target enough participants for the knowledge provided to be representative of the population being studied, for example, lower secondary school students. Additionally, it was expected that the pilot study was to test the reliability and validity of the proposed design.

Ideally, a large longitudinal survey would have helped to gather more specific information about students' experiences during their 3 year transition through lower secondary school. In particular the 'follow up' or 'cohort' studies to, over time, concentrate on the same individuals and for the effects of this study on their families and schools. However, the idea seemed inconceivable due to the researcher having limited time to conduct the study and restrictions regarding the high costs involved, for example travel, interviewing time, etc. Another strategy initially considered was the use of case studies, which seem ideal for the lone researcher (Bell, 1993) and because it provides the convenience of concentrating on either a situation or an aspect of a problem to investigate in depth the different elements interconnected (Bell, 1993; Borg & Gall, 1983). Although both 'interview surveys' and case studies had the strength of being able to gather rich data giving in-depth understanding to the topic being studied, case studies render the risk of producing "shallow" outcomes given the difficulty in cross-checking information, making it almost impossible to define the representativeness of the case or cases studied (Borg and Gall, 1983). The opportunity for generalisation or transferability of findings would have been minimal with case studies. Furthermore, these normally precede surveys (Bell, 1993) and, rather than identifying key influential aspects to educational participation 'from scratch', a set of integral-based factors had already been gathered from the literature. That is not to say that the survey was not to be exploratory, however, access to a relatively wider range of participants than it would have been for the case studies, was intended, and therefore the design fell into the interview survey category. This strategy was to be supported by non-participant observation and record keeping for support of which particulars are given in the section below.

4.2.1 Research methods

Data was collected via guided semi-structured in-depth interviews and, to a lesser extent, 'unconcealed' participant observation and note taking. Additionally, data owned by the schools (i.e., student numbers, teachers, classrooms, timetables, etc.) was welcomed; in essence, any potentially informative source of information.

(Gorard with Taylor, 2004:5). The use of guided semi-structured interviews (GSI) or 'semistandardised' interviews (for example, Berg, 2007) was decided to be the primary method of data collection. Two aspects of the theoretical background were decisive for this selection. Firstly, it was necessary to corroborate the numeric interpretation of secondary data regarding educational failure in Mexico corresponded to what happens in reality (Gorard & Taylor 2004); secondly, it was necessary to check whether the range of factors identified as affecting educational participation operated in the Mexican context. Although the majority of these factors were gathered from Westernised settings, it would have been extreme to presuppose that the influential factors would be completely different or alike in such a context.

Regarding the research tool itself, GSI would allow the researcher to implement a given number of pre-established questions and selected themes uniformly and systematically (Berg, 2007). Information is obtained face-to-face and therefore more naturally and flexibility (Borg & Gall, 1983). An invaluable advantage of GSI is the opportunity for the researcher to diverge from the order of the interview for further clarification, allowing respondents' opinions, and underlying reasons, to be better understood (Borg & Gall, 1983:442) without compromising objectivity and allowing multi-sensory channels to be used (Cohen et al., 2007: 349).

A crucial point is raised by Berg (2007) regarding the way questions are to be formulated, despite the standardisation of this type of interviews; questions must be conveyed in a way that those surveyed will understand. In fact, during the fieldwork, expressions such as "No way!" or "Come on!" were used with the students instead of words, like "Really?" that were normally used with teachers or parents. On the other hand, questions had to be tailored to students, for example: "Who helps you at home with your homework" or to teachers; "Who do you think help children with their homework?" Other questions were not asked to sub-groups of participants, for instance, it was not for the purpose of this study to ask teachers what they thought about the standard of their own teaching.

Methods not used included standardised or structured interviews or unstructured or un-standardised interviews; the former for its lack of opportunity for flexibility or adjustment, etc. and the latter, for their lack or order to the questions. On the other hand, questionnaires limit the exchange of ideas and overall communication between the interviewer and the respondent (Cannell & Kahn, 1968 in Berg, 2007). Focus groups, though seeming accurate to investigate aspects of the schools and communities, would have been tactless when asking students, for example, about

private and perhaps sensitive aspects regarding their families. However, despite the chance that they would give an on-off chance of information gathering, thus saving time for the researcher, the price of affecting a child with such public questions would be too high to pay. The risk also existed that the information gathered would probably be incomplete or inaccurate. In reality, however, a couple of family group interviews were carried out as home visits took place with the school social worker.

The gender perspective

The category of gender was decided to be a constant category throughout the study; not only to disaggregate figures and study equal number of participants of each 'gender' but to explore, throughout the course of the interviews, whether experiences or views were permeated or biased by gendered beliefs. The researchers' perspective of gender is based on it being a socially constructed behaviour and that "gendered traits are not tied to biological sex" (Butler, 1990; MacInnes, 1998 in Francis, 2006:14). It has been indicated earlier in this thesis that its objective is not the exploration of 'femininities' or 'masculinities' "in plural [...] in order to reflect the different ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed or performed by different individuals" (Francis, 2006:12). However, the words 'gender' and 'sex' will be used indistinctively to refer to males, females, boys and girls in the sense just described, but none of them will imply that a biological attribute entails behavioural attributes specifically. For example, girls or boys are perceived as individuals with different characteristics or preferences, that girls can have stereotypically masculine or feminine qualities as can boys.

It is, nevertheless, one of the sub-objectives of this thesis to find out to what extent girls' disadvantages in education in Mexico affects their educational participation, as pointed out by UNESCO (2004, 2010). Furthermore, the idea of whether 'doing gender' of some sort would be an influential factor in students' educational participation, was as well considered, based on the possibility that classroom behaviour that is not gender-traditional could marginalise or torment children (Davies, 1989) (Reay, 2002) (Francis, 2006).

4.2.2 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were considered throughout data collection, analysis and the reporting of results. When schools were approached, they were given an original letter explaining the nature of the project, signed by the then academic supervisor of

the University of York guaranteeing the formality of the project. In accordance with legal requirements regarding storage and use of personal data, set out by the Data Protection Act (1998), the rights, privacies and welfare of the children, young adults and adults interviewed were ensured. At all times, the purpose of the study was explained to students before the interviews took place, as well as the topics to be covered during the interview. Anonymity to all participants and confidentiality of participants' contributions was assured and the right to withdraw from the interview, for any reason and at any time, was explained and participants were asked whether they understood the information and whether or not they wished to participate. Finally, participants were also encouraged, at any point, to stop the interviewer for further clarifications or to ask any questions.

It could be added that a way of 'formal consent' was assumed by heads of the schools allowing the researcher to conduct fieldwork in 'their' schools. Moreover, no evidence pointed towards the possibility of participants being at risk of any kind that required formal consent for interviews, nor was such consent requested by the schools. On the other hand, consent was implied by the act of conducting the interview (Berg, 2007). It must be highlighted that covering the necessary ethical considerations took between 5 to 10 minutes before starting each interview. Although seeming to be a dry, formal process, it served as an ice-breaker in the sense that, after having been explained the aforementioned, participants felt safe and more open to participate.

Regarding the administration of data, a table contained their pseudonyms, their 'profile' (i.e. female high achiever), school year, age, school (i.e. technical), and in a final column, a particular characteristic that resonated with the researcher (i.e. the fighter-mum, the boy with hair highlights, etc.).

4.2.3 The sample

Eighty participants conformed the final sample of this study. Given that the types of participants involved ensure the representativeness of a specific population (Krathwohl, 1998), it was necessary to hear not only from lower secondary students, but also from parents and school staff. These participants were found in three types of secondary schools: general, technical and *Telesecundarias* in both advantaged and disadvantaged areas. Because both, the barriers as well as the facilitators affecting the lives of students were to be investigated, both successful and less successful

students (including dropouts) had to form part of the sample, in order to add balance to the findings:

- a) High achievers (HA): Students with high marks, excellent behaviour; first-class/with having a spotless record.
- b) Students 'at risk' of dropping out (AR): the definition was not based on the Epidemiological Model used by Finn (1993) where education equates to medicine and dropping out is analogous to disease. Under this model, students at risk of educational failure are identified by 'risk factors' such as characteristics like having a disadvantaged background. For this study however, 'at risk' students were those whom the school could identify as having low marks and bad behaviour, therefore being at risk of leaving school. Socioeconomic characteristics were not included in the criteria, precisely in order to identify whether being a high achiever, 'at risk' or a dropout was associated with socio-economic status.
- c) Dropouts (DO) or 'school deserters', as defined in Mexico, were adolescents who did not complete lower secondary school.

Parents of the same 'types' of students were included in the sample: parents of high achievers; parents of 'at risk' students; and parents of dropouts. Aiming for representativeness, it was the intention that the parents in the sample were not the parents of the students in the sample. Additionally, it was essential to hear the views of one or two of the teachers in each school as well as those of the school social worker, for their first-hand contributions on school factors. Finally, to control for gender bias, one of the objectives was to interview a similar number of female and male participants. It must be pointed out that the original sample included the possibility of also interviewing public servants working for the *Oportunidades* program and a member of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) involved with educational matters. In reality, it was not possible to carry out these interviews, given the lack of time and difficulty in arranging meetings with them. Table 15 shows the original sample design.

Initial sample

The initial target was to work in 6 schools (3 in advantaged areas and 3 in disadvantaged areas) and if 9 participants were targeted per school, that gave an

estimate of 54 participants altogether. See Table 16 and 17 for a detailed account of pilot study and fieldwork participants.

Table 15. Initial sample design of schools and participants to be targeted per school.

General secondary school	Technical secondary school	Telesecundaria
2 high achievers (HA) (male and female)	2 high achievers (HA) (male and female)	2 high achievers (HA) (male and female)
2 ‘at risk’ students (AR) (male and female)	2 at risk students (AR) (male and female)	2 at risk students (AR) (male and female)
2 Dropouts (DO) (male and female)	2 Dropouts (DO) (male and female)	2 Dropouts (DO) (male and female)
1 parent of HA	1 parent of HA	1 parent of HA
1 parent of AR	1 parent of AR	1 parent of AR
1 parent of DO	1 parent of DO	1 parent of DO
1 teacher	1 teacher	1 teacher
1 social worker or school psychologist	1 social worker or school psychologist	1 social worker or school psychologist
Total: 9 participants	Total: 9 participants	Total: 9 participants

4.2.4 Ethnicity and socio-economic status

Ethnicity was originally included as a characteristic to control in relation to students; for example, indigenous students versus *mestizo* students, since these two groups constitute the majority of the population in Mexico. In Mexico, the word *mestizo* is used to describe a person with one parent of indigenous ancestry and one parent of European ancestry, a result of past colonisation of Mexico by Spain. ‘Other’ sole races only, for example, Caucasian, is very rare to find so this was discarded from the beginning. However, due to the situation explained above about reaching indigenous communities, and, as established when conducting both the pilot and fieldwork, it was realised that the great majority of students were *mestizos* or indigenous. In relation to socioeconomic characteristics, it was important to find out whether being a high achiever or ‘at risk’ or dropout would be linked to socio-economic status, however, due to the type of methods used, it was considered that asking a parent about their income could be too sensitive an issue. As parental cooperation was needed within a relaxed environment during the interview, an

alternative method of ‘asking’ that question was to enquire whether household incomes were sufficient to cover basic needs.

4.2.5 The site: Oaxaca State

This section aims to describe demographical aspects of Oaxaca State as well as the general characteristics of the localities where the schools were located.

Oaxaca’s demographical background

Mexico comprises 31 States and one Federal District (D.F.), containing the Federal capital, Mexico City. Mexico’s Human Development Index (HDI) is .85 (UNDP, 2009a) and Oaxaca State is placed 30th on the list with a HDI of .74. By 2005, in Mexico there were 2,454 municipalities and D.F.’s delegations (PNUD, 2009) of which 570 are in Oaxaca, representing 23% of the total municipalities in the country. According to the Oaxaca State Constitution, the State is divided into 30 districts for administrative, judicial and revenue purposes. Municipalities are represented by a by an elected Council, through a based election system or through the Law of Usages and Customs, the latter especially in rural areas (OACNUDHM, 2003). A municipal mayor heads the Council, along with 1 or 2 lawyers, for legal advice and representation, and a given number of councilors, according to the size of the population. Municipalities in Oaxaca comprise Cities, Villas, Towns, Ranches, or Congregations, depending on economic importance, number of citizens and public services available. ‘Urban’ and ‘rural’ localities are defined by their population size where the former has a population of 15,000 or more and the latter, less than 2,500; those with a population of between 2,500 and 15,000 inhabitants are defined as being in-transition or rural-urban (CONAPO,2005).

The two main reasons for choosing Oaxaca State to conduct the study were its high concentration of municipalities with the lowest HDI and education indexes in the country, as well as its high contrast of development between its own municipalities (PNUD, 2008), facilitating the exploration of both advantaged and disadvantaged areas. Given that the researcher is a native of the region, this could facilitate mobility within the region and mitigate the possible hindrances encountered to accessing schools.

Indigenous population in Oaxaca

It is important to restate that in Oaxaca, rural areas have higher concentrations of indigenous people who speak native languages and that 35% of the population of Oaxaca is classified as indigenous (INEGI, 2005). They also generally live in extreme poverty and are therefore considered as a vulnerable group within Mexico. In areas where the population is mostly indigenous, municipalities or villages, where traditional practices continue, choose their political leaders and resolve relevant disputes through Usages and Customs during communal assemblies. This has its legal foundation in Article 25 of the Political Constitution of the Free and Sovereign Oaxaca State. Nevertheless, their usages and customs are not fully recognised and access to good quality education or health services is limited or non-existent, reinforcing their own exclusion and marginalisation (OACNUDHM, 2003).

4.2.6 Criteria for the selection of advantaged and disadvantaged areas

Given the previously underlined association between socio-economic conditions and educational performance, it was decided to target schools in both advantaged and disadvantaged localities in Oaxaca. In order to achieve this, HDI by locality was considered, the original idea being to target one of the poorest localities in the State, such as, Coicoyán de las Flores or San Martín Peras with HDIs of 0.47 and 0.52 respectively (PNUD, 2009) as well as one of the more affluent areas, such as San Sebastián Tutla or Santa María del Tule with 0.92 and 0.89 respectively. Various localities were appealing, as Oaxaca has 8 regions, with the customs and traditions varying between regions and even between localities. The final decision of which disadvantaged localities to visit was influenced by knowledge of the suspicions indigenous or rural people have regarding their territories, sometimes becoming unwelcoming or aggressive to strangers. It is documented that some indigenous communities maintain long-lasting feuds with neighbouring communities or even with the State Government in relation to land ownership, natural resources, religion, or political and cultural aspects (CDI-PNUD, 2006). In other words, access to schools in rural areas had serious limitations; firstly, because endeavouring to reach these communities without having contacts there entailed risking personal security and secondly, travelling 3, 5 or even 8 hours to visit one locality for only one day would limit the number of participants needed per school.

Thus, it was decided that Oaxaca City would be the best locality, being the State Capital and having a HDI of 0.88, making it the sixth most developed municipality

amongst the 570 in the state. The disadvantaged localities would be located in the Isthmus Region. Apart from using the HDI to indicate a locality's level of development, the number of students with *Oportunidades* scholarships was another indicator of disadvantages in a locality. The concept of free school meals has recently been introduced in Mexico, however, the only existing programme to date is by the National System for Integral Family Development (DIF), providing breakfasts to children at risk of malnutrition and who attend public schools from pre-primary to primary education (DIF Nacional, 2010).

4.2.7 The selection of schools

State or publicly funded schools were the target for the study given that the majority of children in Mexico attend this type of schools; for example, in the 2003-04 academic year, of the 5,736,494 children enrolled at lower secondary schools, 93 percent attended State schools and 7 percent attended private schools (INEE, 2004a).

Aiming for representativeness, the original plan included surveying 6 schools; one General school, one Technical school and one *Telesecundaria* from both advantaged and disadvantaged areas. The three types of secondary schools are likely to be found in the City of Oaxaca. However, not all disadvantaged localities have all three types of secondary schools, so two or three different localities were targeted in order to cover the school type sampling criterion.

4.2.8 Categories explored

Four areas were to be explored; family aspects; school aspects; individual aspects and geographical aspects. The category with the most elements for exploration was school (18), followed by family (10), individual (8) and geographical (2). Participants were also asked about personal details such as age, school year if students, languages spoken, etc. Although all participants were interviewed regarding the aforementioned categories, there were variations depending on whether it was a student, dropout, parent or teacher (See Appendixes 1 and 2 for detailed interview guides).

4.3 Pilot Study

'Testing' the research strategy and methods was intended to anticipate three main potential difficulties: accessing schools, finding participants and building an appropriate rapport during interviews. One aim of the pilot study was to figure out

the level of ease in gaining access to schools; was approaching the head of schools in the first instance was the right move? Or, would a letter from an academic supervisor backing up the project be enough for an outside researcher to gain credibility to conduct research in the school? Would the number and profile of participants be easy to reach and, importantly, would they be willing to provide relevant data for the study? The defined variables needed to be tested as being relevant in the context of Mexico.

Piloting took place between the 11th December 2006 and the 26th January 2007 in two Technical schools, each one located at an advantaged and at a disadvantaged area respectively. Data collection was carried out during school hours and took place during 21 working days overall. The advantaged area was the City of Oaxaca, with a HDI of 0.84, and Locality “DA” (for anonymity reasons) in the Isthmus region as the disadvantaged area, with a HDI of 0.74 at the time of the pilot study (PNUD) (2009).

4.3.1 Accessing schools

With knowledge of bureaucratic processes when dealing with governmental agencies, institutions or organisations in Mexico, schools were visited and, as a first step, a request for a meeting with the head of the school was made. The physical visit to the school was thought to be more effective than trying to arrange a meeting over the phone. Time keeping in Mexico is not always precise and trying to arrange a meeting over the phone would have seemed like an act of self-importance whereas asking to have a chat with the head of the school whenever they had a spare twenty minutes seemed a more humble approach in the context of Oaxaca State. The procedures were slightly different in each school as described below.

The Technical lower secondary school in the advantaged area

This school in the City of Oaxaca has “mixed” schedule patterns, with some classes lasting from 7:00 a.m. until 11.50 a.m. and other classes lasting from 11:50 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. On the first day, a talk with the Sub-director of the school was granted, after waiting for about an hour. He showed interest in the study and expressed that researchers were welcomed in the school; however, it was added that it was a requirement to provide a letter describing the research methods intended to be applied, as well as the number and characteristic of participants. The letter was to be directed to the head of the School. Also a back up letter by the institution the researcher was “working for” was necessary. Both requirements were presented the

next day and the head of the school gave instructions for the researcher to work in the Academic Coordinators Department and, later that day, an introduction to the school's psychologist was made.

The Technical lower secondary school in the disadvantaged area

This school has a "single" schedule pattern, with all classes starting at 7:00 a.m. and finishing at 2:00 p.m. Upon arrival at the school, the researcher was received by the head of the school. It was explained what the study was about and he showed an enthusiastic interest and called the social worker into his office for the aims and methods of the study to be described to her. Subsequently, she endeavoured to help contact all participants and provide all information that was needed. Though no formal letters were requested at the time, it was nevertheless considered appropriate to provide the school with such a letter.

4.3.2 Selecting and interviewing participants

Choosing participants was a task facilitated by the schools. Once the head of school was provided with the document describing the project and the sample needed, they would normally provide the list to the social worker for her (all were female) to select participants, from students to teachers and dropouts. For the latter, they would take the researcher to their homes. Once a private space was provided in the school, and having the participant there, a digital recorder turned on and, once the participant's consent was obtained as well as their rights, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, the interview was started. All participants were given reasons for their participation and it was explained about the importance of their particular contribution. Additionally, participants, especially youngsters, were reassured that there were no 'right or wrong' answers, their views or perspectives could help to understand their realities and design strategies to help more members of society in the future. This took about 10 minutes including comments or questions raised by the participants.

Interviewing participants

Interviews with students took place in the schools; in a separate classroom in the advantaged area and in the school's sickbay in the disadvantaged. Interviews with parents were arranged by the school social worker/psychologist and parents either came to the school or the social worker/psychologist took the researcher to their

homes. Generally, contacting the participants was a straightforward task, however, dropouts turned out to be the most difficult type of participants to find. Although the initial plan was to find them through the 'snowball' strategy in case the schools had lost track of them, approaching them without the social worker as a school representative seemed a near-impossible task.

Finding a dropout in the advantaged was very difficult as no dropout could be contacted initially, so the psychologist advised the researcher to ask a woman, who sold food in the school, to ask to interview her daughter, who had stopped coming to school. During three consecutive days it was intended to arrange an interview with her daughter, and different reasons were given for not arranging an interview. Such an interview did not take place, however it was eventually possible to interview a three-day dropout who turned up at the school to request a formal one-year withdrawal.

With regards to parents' interviews were the second hardest group of participants to find. Originally it was planned not to interview parents of already interviewed students and vice versa, so as to aim for representativeness; that is, it would have not been possible to count both child and parent as two separate participants, but rather as one if both came from the same household. It was also considered that gathering information from one family member would provide enough information about household practices and dynamics. However, two relevant aspects made it necessary to desist from the initial plan. Firstly, finding dropouts or parents in general who were free to cooperate was found to be particularly complicated. Secondly, interviewing a father of a high achiever that had already been interviewed revealed that each appeared to have their own interpretations of the same reality. In fact, locating parents in the City of Oaxaca, the advantaged area, was more complicated, as students not only came from the city (with 256,130 inhabitants) but from the whole metropolitan area. The best option seemed to be to aim at interviewing those who lived nearer to the school. On the other hand, finding participants in the disadvantaged area was not problematic in so far as most of the students attending the school lived in the same locality. When visiting parents, the social worker and researcher would arrive at the participants' houses and, after the appropriate introductions, the social worker would leave and the interviews would take place, either straight away or if the parents were out, the interview would commence upon their return.

From teachers' interviews, it was obvious, from informal chats, and from talks overheard in both schools, that they were going through difficult times following the 5 month teachers' strike in protest against the State Government (see 'Oaxaca: one of the States left behind in Mexico' in Chapter 3). Teachers and State Government were still in the process of negotiating petitions and proposals at the time. At the same time, perhaps as a result of historical practises, each school seemed to have its own internal 'political' dynamics; teachers almost always become informal members of internal groups. Table 16 presents the number of participants in advantaged and disadvantaged areas. Attention was given to the roles that teachers and school staff play in the lives of students. Some staff occasionally become confidants and mentors to students. For this reason, the porter of the Technical school in the advantaged area was interviewed.

Table 16. Pilot study participants.

Participants	Advantaged area	Gender		Disadvantaged area	Gender	
		M	F		M	F
	Total			Total		
High achiever (3)	1	-	1	2	-	2
'At-risk' (4)	2	1	1	2	2	-
Dropout (4)	1	-	1	3	2	1
Teacher (4)	1	-	1	3	2	1
Social worker (2)	1	-	1	1	-	1
Academic coordinator (1)	1	1	-	-	-	-
Porter (1)	1	1	-	-	-	-
Parents (10)	4	1	3	6	3	3
Sibling (1)	-	-	-	1	-	1
Mother-in-law (1)	-	-	-	1	-	1
Total interviews: 31	12	4	8	19	9	10

Observation in two classes

Observation in two classes took part during the pilot study in the advantaged area. As a non-participant observer, the researcher attended a Mathematics class taught by a female teacher and a Civics class delivered by the school's psychologist. There was a clear difference, the Mathematics teacher arrived 10 minutes late for class. Therefore, teaching sessions officially lasting 50 minutes, only had 40 minutes left for teaching. Although students seemed relaxed, some were throwing paper balls at

each other or talked and not paying attention to the teacher. The students in the Civics class were all well behaved and participative and the class started and finished punctually. Despite class observations indicating rich data, as far as teaching techniques and attitudes and on students' participation and behaviour, such data did not seem enough to be valid since a specific model had not been designed to follow-up on such observations. Furthermore, although group dynamics are expected to vary between classes, the likelihood existed that both students and teachers were behaving "differently from usual" (Krathwohl, 1998:249) and thus the decision was made to concentrate the focus on the data collection through interviews. Note-taking was kept throughout the pilot study. See a summary of main points observed on the fieldwork section.

4.3.3 Lessons of the pilot study

Conducting the pilot study made two things visible: that some procedures regarding the interviews and some aspects of the content needed adjustment.

Technical areas for improvement

In order to save digital space, the recorder was only switched on as the interview started as explaining the purpose of the study, assuring confidentiality and anonymity and asking for consent normally took between 5 and 10 minutes.

When listening to recorded interviews it was realised that, on a couple of occasions, when emotional issues were described, the interviewer changed topics and unwillingly limited the conveyance of what later could have been revealing information. Listening to apparently "irrelevant" information can lead to critical discoveries for the study. The strategy changed to allow participants to express themselves freely and re-direct the conversation to relevant topics if such 'deviation' occurred without being helpful to the research objectives.

A couple of interviews conducted were not private per se, with numerous people in the same room or nearby, sometimes offering their opinions, whether solicited or not. Thus, opportunities for candour and honesty were limited. Therefore, for the fieldwork, it was judged that privacy was a priority.

The question "What do you think of the importance of education?" needed clarification when translated. The word *educación* (education) in Mexico not only implies formal schooling but it also means having good manners. After a couple of students elaborated their opinions about the importance of good manners, it was

realised that the translation had not been faithful to its meaning and therefore the option changed to specifying education as “going to school”.

Adaptation of elements for exploration

After listening to the interviews and having made a manual analysis of their content with tables in a Word document, the decision was made that a few of the elements explored had to be removed and others needed to be added. Within the family factors, for example, when dropouts described what made them quit, it caught the interviewer’s attention that their parents’ appeared to take this decision ‘lightly’, so parental attitude towards their children’s school attendance needed exploration as an influential variable. Thus, for the fieldwork, the question “What would you do if your son/daughter told you, ‘I’m quitting school?’ ” was added.

As for the school factors that required further exploration, factors included the *Oportunidades* scholarship, which brought up rich contributions from students, apparently being of great influence on school attendance. Also, religion of students and families deserved more in-depth investigation given that both female high achievers from the disadvantaged area were involved with a church in the community along with the male high achiever in the advantaged area. English as a second language also came up constantly from the interviews, with teaching-learning processes and English teachers’ attitudes in the classrooms being prominent. School practices and policies also drew attention as being near-decisive for students’ disengagement from school. Aspects removed from the school factors included whether their modules included human rights and gender-sensitivity topics since these modules were already part of the lower secondary school curriculum, and the outputs of such questions did not seem relevant to students’ academic performance or behaviour, or pertinent to the research questions.

After manual analysis, with the use of tables in Word or Excel documents, and with the consultation of academic supervisors, it was decided that the data obtained from the two Technical schools was going to be part of the findings of the study. However, to test the new interview questions, the aim was to stick to the plan and find three types of schools (General, Technical and *Telesecundaria*) in both advantaged (AA) and disadvantaged (DA) areas.

4.4 The fieldwork

Given the success encountered in being welcomed in the two schools visited for the pilot Study, it could be said that the research design was tested and the fieldwork ready to commence. It was necessary to replicate such endeavours in 3 schools in the City of Oaxaca (1 General, 1 Technical and 1 *Telesecundaria*), and the same was needed in three disadvantaged localities within the Isthmus Region of Oaxaca to cover the research design conditions. The interview guides had been updated (see Appendix 3) and the method of accessing the schools was defined. More original back up letters were prepared along with the academic supervisors' business cards. Fieldwork was conducted during regular school hours in intact classes from the 30th April through to the 18th May 2007. Work in the schools varied between 2 days and 10 days, depending on the dynamics of the school and the level of difficulty to cover the participants needed. Minimal disruption to teachers and students was paramount.

Schools' profile

In addition, the methodology included a 'School profile' format which was designed for schools to fill in details regarding their number of teachers, classes, students, students with the *Oportunidades* scholarship, or with the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) scholarships (See Appendix 4). This form also requested the numbers of dropouts registered the previous academic year and the reasons on record (See Appendix 5). The two Technical schools from the pilot study were visited again for them to fill in the 'School profile' format.

4.4.1 Accessing the schools

The first step was to select the schools from the official directory of schools from SEP. Three schools which were renowned for their teaching quality were selected in the City of Oaxaca (AA), and three other schools in smaller towns in the Isthmus region (DA). However, near the end of the fieldwork, the researcher was introduced to a teacher and, after discussing the work being conducted, the researcher was officially invited to visit the Technical school where the teacher in question worked. It seemed reasonable to attend in order to gather "extra" data, resulting in 4 schools being visited in disadvantaged localities for the fieldwork.

The process of approaching schools was similar to that of the pilot study. Access to schools in disadvantaged localities was generally easier; heads of schools were not as stringent about formalities (personalised access letter, back up letters, etc.), whilst

in the schools in Oaxaca City, formalities were regarded as imperative. Nevertheless, formalities were observed in all schools and letters were always given along with verbal descriptions of the study.

4.4.2 Selecting and interviewing participants

Interviews took place in empty classrooms or at the students' parents' houses. For dropouts or parents of dropouts, the school social worker would normally take the interviewer to their home, make introductions and in the majority of cases, interviews would take place immediately.

As experienced during the pilot study, dropouts were very difficult to locate in the City of Oaxaca, either they did not register a telephone number with the school or their addresses were too far away to attempt to locate them and, to this task, there was no offer from the schools to accompany the researcher to their homes. Therefore, the sample had to be rearranged, aiming to find at least one student who had dropped out from each school visited, instead of two. Conversely, and due to the smaller sizes of the localities, social workers in the disadvantaged localities were always happy to accompany the researcher to the homes of the participants. The option for interviewing additional participants such as siblings, academic coordinators or porters was excluded for the fieldwork given the limited timeframe available and the size of the sample to cover. The high-achieving student, who had recently graduated from lower secondary school, was interviewed at the suggestion of that student's head of the school. Table 17 contains a summary of the participants from both the pilot study and the fieldwork.

Table 17. Summary of pilot and fieldwork participants.

Participants	Disadvantaged region	Gender		Advantaged region	Gender	
		M	F		M	F
High achiever student (11)	7	2	5	4	2	2
At risk student (13)	8	7	1	5	3	2
Dropouts (12)	10	6	4	2	1	1
Teachers (11)	7	5	2	4	1	3
Social worker/Psychologist (8)	5	0	5	3	0	3
Other school staff	-	-	-	2	2	-
Parents (20)	14	4	10	6	1	5
Other relatives (3)	3	1	2	-	-	-
Total interviews: 80	54	25	29	26	10	16

4.4.3 Challenges to the interviews

One group interview took place despite the intention to ensure the conduct of individual interviews for the fieldwork. However, if the opportunity of having the participants available to interview arose, the opportunity had to be taken. A male dropout and his parents were home, it would have been impolite to ask his parents to leave. The social worker was also present. In that instance, the format of the interview had to be re-arranged in order to ensure the dropout and parents had their say and that relevant topics were all covered.

As for the schools, tension was still palpable following the political conflict the previous year. Moreover, at the time of the fieldwork, the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) was negotiating the Retirement and Pensions System recently proposed by the State Government; no teacher seemed happy with such reforms. Around 40,000 staff (73 percent of education workers in the State) affiliated to the SNTE in Oaxaca (El Universal, 2006) attended meetings every Friday to discuss the political situations and so classes were suspended. On top of that, schools were also suspended on Tuesday 1st of May; Thursday 10th of May; and Tuesday 15th of May due to public holidays (Labour Day, Mothers' Day and Teachers' day respectively).

Content went on straight forwards

The adapted interview guides worked smoothly and adults, and the majority of participants interviewed, except for one social worker in an urban school who showed reluctance to open up, were ready to share. Furthermore, it was also found that during the interviews, participants would tell anecdotes of people they know, therefore enriching the data 'with a personal touch'.

Particularities observed in the schools

This section summarises the important aspects gathered as a non-participant observer in the schools during both the Pilot study and the Fieldwork.

Parents come and go to the school all the time, especially mothers. Also, the open-door policy social workers kept seemed to be the norm in the majority of schools and, furthermore, students either seemed to like to come in and out of their offices or they were curious because of the presence of 'a researcher' in the school. Also, in almost every school visited, (except for the General school in the centre of the City of Oaxaca) there were feral dogs roaming around the sports courts, patios and

courtyards. It was then explained that the schools adopt these dogs who guard the schools at night from attempted burglaries. Finally, the use of mobile phones is very popular amongst students.

4.5 Data analysis procedures

After gathering the data from the fieldwork and after finding that the majority of the process and information gathered resembled that of the pilot study, with the exception of the interview adjustments, it was decided to join the data as part of the findings for which there were 80 interviews to transcribe.

Analysis started with the transcription of the interviews. Each transcription was dated and included the participant pseudonym and their codes (i.e. PM_HA_M_A_T1 for a parent male of high achiever male from advantaged area in Technical school). Approximately 75-80 percent of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The process of transcription took 8 months, and was challenging owing to differing regional dialects and idiomatic expressions used by participants. Many times people from the Isthmus region would mix Zapoteco words or phrases to the Spanish language used in the interviews, making the transcription very challenging. It was necessary to find other ways of transcribing accurately the content but not necessarily word-for-word, allowing a reduction in the time used for the task.

Mid-way through translating the interviews, it was decided to attempt to store the data on Microsoft Access and create a database of all the participants. However, assigning various characteristics to the tables, assigning attributes to the entities and creating the queries to link the data seemed over-complicated. What was discouraging was that, when printing reports summarising participants' specific characteristics, the result was 5 to 10 pages depending on the queries requested and such reports were not easy on the eye.

Towards the end of the transcription process, the decision was made to use Atlas.ti; software that seemed perfect for the analysis of such large amounts of data. The first step was to create codes for elements explored during the fieldwork based on the interview guides; new codes were also subsequently created when new elements arose. All transcriptions were assigned to the project and re-read with codes tagged to particular quotations. The software allowed the creation of various groups, for example 'all students', 'all parents', 'all teachers', 'female high achievers', 'female high achievers from disadvantaged areas', etc. The relationship between codes (e.g. 'father's education', 'homework support at home', etc.) and quotations assigned with

a code also facilitated the analysis; it could now be possible to retrieve all quotations assigned with the code “The value of going to school” for all students or merely for ‘Males at-risk from disadvantaged areas’. Codes were at the same time grouped within 4 general categories: family, school, community, and individual. Once all transcriptions were coded, the manipulation of data allowed a straightforward identification of patterns.

4.6 Concluding remarks

Though the literature review was mostly based on studies in Western cultures, the use of semi-structured interviews facilitated the identifications of aspects that applied to a Mexican context and those that did not.

The elaboration of a basic questionnaire for participants to fill in their personal data such as age, gender, number of people in the household, number of siblings, parental background, etc., would have been a time-saver for the researcher, not only by saving time and digital memory and decreasing the duration of the interviews, but mostly the time taken for transcription. Other specific aspects could have been gathered via the questionnaire, for example, “I have had a paid job” (“Yes”/ “No”). However, these other specific aspects could have resulted in both incorrect or missing data and a potential limitation for the analysis process. Social workers themselves face these situations with students with the way they respond schools surveys, i.e. “Do you work?” -“Yes”; “Where?” - “With my dad”. Although time consuming, the data obtained was generally rich, detailed, comprehensive, sufficient to depict a full and revealing picture of the problems studied. Furthermore, despite the sample being of a small-scale data, the large number of respondents in the sample allowed contrasts and associations amongst areas and between groups of participants.

Finally, disadvantaged areas were not absolutely representative of the most disadvantaged areas of Oaxaca, nor Mexico. However, the objective was to control for this factor as much as possible by the number of students with *Oportunidades* scholarships, something that is normally linked to smaller localities with less economically active populations, and with greater illiteracy. Although it could be argued that the conduction of the study in a locality with a HDI of 0.39 (PNUD, 2009), such as Coicoyán de las Flores, at the time of the study, instead of a HDI of 0.64 (PNUD, 2009) belonging to Santa María Xadani, could have thrown data that would indeed be representative of what is going on in disadvantaged localities. Nonetheless HDIs were, at the time of the fieldwork, estimated for the year 2000 and

have since increased, like most municipalities in Mexico have. The fact that the State of Oaxaca, to date, lies in penultimate place within Mexico, according to its HDI, enhances this study's level of reliability and representativeness.

The following three chapters describe the findings divided in three main categories; family, school and individual factors. The geographical characteristics are embedded within the family category.

5 The influence of home-related factors on school participation and achievement

Family aspects that were found influential for students' educational performances are described in this chapter. The findings focus on the factors that may enhance or hinder students' participation and achievement in school. Such factors were defined based on the contributions of all the participants in the study; high achievers, 'at risk' students, dropouts, parents, teachers and social workers. Subsequently, the presentation of results is outlined by 'type' of student and by area, where appropriate. This chapter is divided into seven sections. The first sets out the definition of "family" used in this study, describing the educational and occupational backgrounds of participating parents, disaggregated by area. It also discusses the influence parental background has on students' educational performance. The second section describes the role homework plays in lower secondary schools in Mexico, the addition cultural capital makes for students to complete their school work, the different ways students approach homework, and the relationship between parental disposition or ability to help and students accomplishment of such tasks. Other aspects of the household, related to the general atmosphere at home were also looked at, for example the dynamics regarding domestic activities, communication issues, parental supervision, aspirations for their children and religion, amongst others. The third and fourth sections describe the associations between parental involvement in school and parental views on education and also their children's educational attainments respectively. The fifth section provides more detailed information about household dynamics such as domestic work, parental supervision, relationships between family members, and religion and their effect on students' performance. The sixth section presents some of the communities' socio-economic and cultural patterns that proved influential for students' educational fates, and the final section provides both a summary and analysis of the family and community factors that were found as being influential on students' educational participation.

5.1 Home socio-economic status

Parental socio-economic status has been strongly associated with students' performance in school (OECD, 2004; Ekstrom, 1986; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Linnehan, 2001). Results in this study confirm that there is an association between these factors. However, the findings also show that parental educational background,

as along with occupational status, is not necessarily proportional to students' academic performance as will be described in this section.

The home, household and family are terms used indistinctively in this thesis and refer to the definition of "household" used by Longman (1999): "all the people living together in a house" and all actions "concerned with the management of a house". This definition of *household* was chosen, rather than that of *family*, because the latter concept may convey the idea of the traditional "nuclear" family, namely a mother, father and their children. Given that there are increasingly more single-parent families, and because more women tend to have children without getting married (Longman, 1999), the term household seemed more appropriate and less out of date than that of *family*.

5.1.1 Parental educational backgrounds

Parental educational levels were generally low; the majority of parents had not completed primary education and mainly came from disadvantaged localities. The second largest group of parents finished their upper secondary school (USS), whilst a minority of parents held a professional degree. Table 18 shows the list of categories used to classify parents' educational background. It also shows that 17 parents (22 percent) did not finish primary education; an unsurprising fact, given that Oaxaca is considered to be a State with a very high marginalisation index, where 45.5 percent of the population aged over 15 have not finished primary education (INEE, 2006a). The minimum level of primary education achieved by one parent in a disadvantaged area (DA) was two years; this suggests that she might be able to read and write. On the other hand, those parents who did not have the opportunity to access any level of education at all, constituted 14 percent of all the parents in the study.

Table 18. Educational levels of parents in the study.

ID	<i>Educational level</i>	<i>Total parents</i>
a)	Did not attend school	11
b)	Did not finish primary	17
c)	Finished primary	13
d)	Finished lower secondary school (LSS)	13
e)	Finished upper secondary school (USS)	15
f)	Degree	10
	Total	79

Note. Six male parents were reported as being "absent" and their academic details were unknown. Their details were not considered in order to facilitate the illustration of data.

On average, most parents either finished primary education or their lower secondary education. It is important to highlight that, generally, parents from advantaged areas (AA) were more likely to hold higher levels of education than parents in disadvantaged areas. Table 19 disaggregates these data by advantaged and disadvantaged areas. Percentages are given to show the variation of the number of parents within each area and to better illustrate educational patterns.

Table 19. Parental educational background by area.

ID	Educational level	Parents in AA N (%)	Parents in DA N (%)	Total
a)	Did not attend school	0 (0)	11 (20)	11
b)	Did not finish primary	1 (4)	16 (30)	17
c)	Finished primary	8 (32)	5 (9)	13
d)	Finished LSS	2 (8)	11 (20)	13
e)	Finished USS	10 (40)	5 (9)	15
f)	Degree	4 (16)	6 (11)	10
	Totals	25 (100)	54 (100)	79

Of the parents from disadvantaged areas, 20 percent (11 of 54) did not attend school, whereas all parents from advantaged areas had at least started basic primary education.

A correlation between areas can be noted; parents from disadvantaged areas had higher percentages at only the lower stages of education whereas parents in the advantaged areas had higher percentages at progressing to higher educational stages. Referring to the highest level of education attained by parents, a majority of parents in advantaged areas (40 percent) managed to complete upper secondary school, whereas in disadvantaged areas, most parents (20 percent) only completed lower secondary school. These findings agree with those of Shiefelbein, (1997) on education in Latin America, where people from a middle or upper-class background tend to finish primary education whereas those from poorer backgrounds finish an average of only four years of primary schooling.

5.1.2 Parental occupational status

Following the tendency from the previous section, more parents in advantaged areas held better or more professional occupations compared to parents from

disadvantaged locations, where the majority were involved in the informal economy or in low-paid employment.

Table 20 lists the categories of occupation held by parents in the study. It was intended to classify jobs into broad categories to better illustrate occupational trends. These categories were based on two aspects; firstly, occupations held by parents from the study, and secondly, on the 2000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system.

Table 20. Parental occupations.

ID	Occupation	total parents
I	Domestic and informal work	58
II	Skilled and administrative	13
III	Professional	8
	Total	79

Note 1. Six parents were “absent”, thus, their occupations were not considered for the total numbers of occupations.

Note 2. Skilled and administrative include construction, extraction and administrative support occupations; Professional includes jobs in education and training as well as legal professions. Source: The 2000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC).

It can be seen that the majority of parents were involved in domestic or informal work; only eight parents were involved in professional employment. Table 21 shows the differences in occupations by area. It also illustrates how the majority of parents in disadvantaged areas (80 percent) are more involved in domestic activities or piecework, farm work and manual labour. It is also observed that there is a similarity between parents who have skilled jobs in both advantaged and disadvantaged areas (20 and 15 percent respectively). A clear difference is noted where 20 percentage of parents from advantaged areas held professional employment, as opposed to only 5 percent in disadvantaged areas.

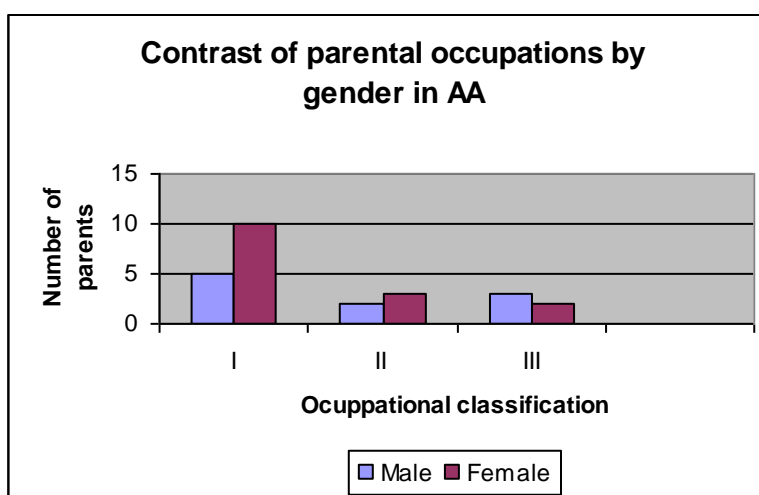
It is worth mentioning that most parents in disadvantaged areas who held a professional degree were males in the teaching profession. Those in the advantaged areas who had this level of degree were mostly male lawyers, architects and other similar professionals. This gives a clearer picture of the employment opportunities in each type of area, and possibly about prevalent gender paradigms. Furthermore, the gender gap between parental occupations is greater in comparison to that of educational levels. This can be observed in more detail, as shown by Figure 2.

Table 21. Occupations by area

ID	Occupation	Parents in AA N (%)	Parents in DA N (%)	Total
I	Domestic and informal work	15 (60)	43 (80)	58
II	Skilled and administrative	5 (20)	8 (15)	13
III	Professional	5 (20)	3 (5)	8
	Total	25 (100)	54 (100)	79

Note. Skilled and administrative works in this table include construction, extraction and administrative support occupations; Professional includes jobs in education, training and Legal professions. Source: The 2000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC).

Figure 2. Parental occupations by gender in advantaged areas (AA)



Occupation classification

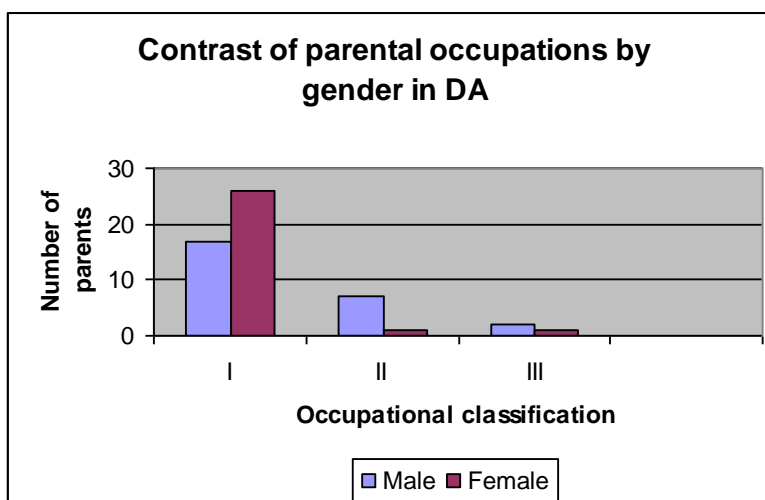
I - Domestic and informal work

II - skilled and administrative

III - Professional

Pa - Parent absent

Figure 3. Parental occupations by gender in disadvantaged areas (DA)



Occupation classification

I - Domestic and informal work

II - skilled and administrative

III - Professional

Pa - Parent absent

The graphs show that most female parents from both area types performed the majority of the domestic and informal work. Generally, and in concordance with gender inequality of opportunities prevailing over past decades, male parents not only had higher educational qualifications but also higher occupational statuses compared to female parents, regardless of location.

5.1.3 Cultural capital in the home

There appears to be other factors that are stronger determinants, which will be analysed in the following section, regarding homework support in the home. The findings confirm Richardson's (1986) view that parents of a higher socio-economic position were more likely to add additional educational and other resources to their home. The more cultural capital there is in the home, the higher the likelihood that there will be other informative assets, such as computers or other types of digital learning facilities. This might put students at a greater academic advantage compared to those students with little or no cultural capital at home.

Furthermore, there is a marked relationship between geographical location and socio-economic status; children from advantaged households tend to be in advantaged positions academically as access to information might be accessible in the form of a knowledgeable person or other assets. Parents from low income households are less able to acquire such resources or to afford after-school activities for their children, all of which may benefit their children in general (Hampden-Thompson, 2009). Therefore, children from these types of homes have to find their own way of accessing these sources of information from elsewhere.

Sources of knowledge at home: dictionaries and encyclopaedias

With reference to dictionaries and encyclopaedias as the first resource a student might resort to, not all students in the study had dictionaries at home, especially those in disadvantaged areas. All male high achievers interviewed reported having dictionaries at home; most female high achievers reported having dictionaries at home. Some at-risk students, including girls and boys, reported having a dictionary and the minority of male and female dropouts had no dictionary. Generally, not all students attending lower secondary school possessed a dictionary at home, a fair relationship between having these resources and students' performance in school was apparent.

Encyclopaedias, on the other hand, were less common resources in homes of students overall. What is more, some students were even unaware of what an encyclopaedia was. However, this item was more likely to be found in the homes of high and under-achievers, regardless of gender, in advantaged locations. One aspect to be noted was that more male students, regardless of academic performance, seem to own such resources at home.

Other educational assets: books and computers

Most high achievers tend to have other books at home, apart from those provided at school, such as novels. This was especially observed in advantaged areas, where parents are more likely to have completed a higher educational qualification. Amongst all students, the only one who had a computer and Internet access at home was a male high achiever from an advantaged area. His mother held a managerial position and his sister was studying for a university degree. Having older siblings seems both inspirational and academically resourceful (Hadfield, Edwards & Mauthner, 2006), for example, with providing books bought in the past or by possessing a computer; the case of having an older sibling in a more advanced educational level or more specifically, doing a degree in computing may make a household more likely to possess a personal computer (PC) at home. Thus, the younger the student is in relation to their siblings, the more likely it is for them to 'inherit' more informative resources at home.

It is important to remark that the lack of these resources at home does not necessarily restrict students from accomplishing their homework. There seems to be particular personality traits that high achievers, regardless of their gender, develop towards being self-sufficient or proactive when it comes to homework completion; they normally go to a public library, turn to a relative or resort to the use of public Internet cafés in order to accomplish work themselves.

In summary, these findings indicate that families living in advantaged areas are more likely to have educational resources at home, and that they can also count on more domestic assets. Nevertheless, because not all students who came from advantaged families performed well in school, it is important to consider that having informative or material resources in the house does not necessarily determine students' academic achievement; merely that they signify extra help for them.

5.2 Homework completion and family support

The General Law of Education in Mexico and the State Law of Education in Oaxaca establish the assessment of students' academic achievement as an individual measurement of students' knowledge, abilities and skills. Additionally, they conceive the assessment as a process of measuring the achievement of the established objectives of educational programs (IEEPO, 2009). Furthermore, the Mexican educational system requires that, for lower secondary students, marks are given for homework, notebook appearance, attendance and behaviour, not just examinations (Sandoval, 2002).

Homework is normally defined as "schoolwork brought home" (Corno, 1996:27) and has been regarded as extra work that goes over the topics that students have studied in school. It has been proved that achievement is associated with homework (Trautwein, 2007:372). Homework, therefore, may count significantly towards the final marks, for which, having effective homework assistance seems to be a key element that impacts students' performance in school.

5.2.1 Disposition of students towards the completion of homework

This section provides information on dispositions that students developed regarding the completion of their homework assignments.

Proactive traits developed by high achievers for homework completion

As mentioned before, having somebody at home, such as a parent or a sibling that is able to assist with school work seems to be of great benefit. However, if human or cultural capital is unavailable at home, this does not seem to prevent them from carrying out their homework, nor does it restrict parents from providing effective support by encouraging students to obtain support elsewhere. Importantly, there seems to be particular dispositions that high achievers develop within the family environment that orientate them towards being proactive regarding homework completion; normally they attempt to solve it themselves.

High achievers usually turn to someone else for help only when they were not able to do it by themselves. It seems that parents of high achievers provide general support to their children and encourage them to try hard in school. These parents might help them directly or, if unable, they would direct their children to public libraries; they would even go with them or would call on somebody who would be able to help, such as a relative or neighbour. Despite having economic struggles at

home, these parents also do their best to ensure their children can count on having educational materials required by schools.

The following example is typical of a high achieving student with limited resources at home. Alina, 14-years-old, is the oldest of two siblings, with no dictionary, television or telephone at home. Her family speaks both the native Zapoteco and Spanish. Her mother did not attend school and her father, a carpenter of 4 years primary education, is her main source of support for homework.

Q: When you have homework... who helps you at home?

Alina: ...my dad is the one who studied more, I ask my dad and he gives me answers, but if I'm in doubt and none of them know ... I have to go to another... I ask for permission to download it from another place [sic], so someone explains it to me with more clarity so I can do it myself.

Q: So, if you ask someone to explain it to you ...who do you go to?

Alina: I have some relatives who are teachers and I go there, and if I can't, I then go to the Internet café, it's easier for me to download the information.

Responsibility towards school chores is another trait that high achievers in general possess as indicated by Finn (1993) and Ekstrom (1986); they seem more inclined to put social or recreational activities aside in order for them to complete their homework. Others organise their time so they do not miss other essential activities that are part of their routines, such as language lessons, sports, or religious services. Generally, there is a shared outlook about putting school chores first.

Underachievers and dropouts' passive attitudes towards homework

Underachievers and dropouts share certain attitudinal traits; either they show passivity towards homework, or a disinterest in completing it. If underachievers were willing to accomplish their homework but were unable to work it out from their books or other home resources they tended to give up, delay it or find something else to do, such as watching television or socialising with their friends.

Such attitudes prevail for underachievers and dropouts who were once underachievers, from homes where human and cultural capital is available, and where parents were able to help due to their academic or employment backgrounds. This type of attitudinal disinterest seems to override all types of potential help

available at home. Reasons are related to not understanding subjects, unsatisfactory teaching of classes or lack of assistance at home.

Without exception, there exists a general disinterest from students with problems completing their homework. For reasons such as lack of understanding of the subject well as lack of motivation or parental supervision, these students, on the whole, “cannot be bothered” to go through school work at home.

The following refers to Emilio, an ‘at risk’ student living and attending school in an advantaged area. He showed disinterest towards homework, and his parents lived in different cities. He was living with his nineteen year old aunt who was his de facto guardian. Emilio made clear, that he was financially well off due to his mother, father and grandmother, all sending him money on a regular basis. He mentioned that he only had to say what he needed for school for him to have prompt provision of all materials needed. His behaviour was poor and, as well as his marks being low, he regularly skipped classes.

Q: What do you think of those students who are not performing well and that are about to leave the school because... because their absenteeism is too high and their marks very low?

Emilio: Well, it’s because I sometimes tell them to come along with me [...] [laughs] no, I tell them to stay... that they should hang out with the smart ones so they can see how they work and all that, isn’t it? Because I have realised that school is super easy... laziness is what beats me, because, look, I’m the highest in the classroom. When it comes to exam results, I’m the best, but I always fail in the end.

Q: Why do you say you’re the highest and you fail?

Emilio: Because I never hand in anything!

Emilio’s apathy at school might be influenced by other factors, possibly related to his parents living away from home. There were, however, other cases where both parents lived at home and where students presented similar attitudes towards school. Such cases provide evidence that a favourable socio-economic status is not necessarily a factor that makes a student be responsible with homework.

The following case depicts a similar situation, yet in this case Javier attends school in a disadvantaged area. His parents finished upper secondary school; his

father is a taxi driver and his mother as a housewife. He has two younger sisters in primary school.

Q: If you are in doubt, for example, with homework... who do you ask for help?

Javier: No one.

Q: No one? How do you solve it then?

Javier: I don't solve it, I feel embarrassed to ask the 'teach', people might think I am a 'thickhead'... I feel they will say things to me.

Q: And why do you feel they will say that? Is that the way they normally react or...?

Javier: No, I... it's just me... that's why I sometimes end up not bringing my homework...

Q: And your dad and mum, if you asked them for help, would they be able to help you?

Javier: ... my dad.

Q: He could help you?

Javier: Yes.

Q: And why don't you ask him to help you?

Javier: Because my dad is... very strict... If there's one thing he doesn't like, there he goes to tells us off, that's why I never ask him.

Tendency to put their friends and other activities first

Another reaction of students who are not able to cope with homework is by engaging in outdoor activities, often hanging out with friends. Alex, a 13-year-old female who is 'at risk', lives in a disadvantaged locality. Her father did not finish primary school and her mother did not attend school. Her parents were separating at the time, and although her uncle was the Head of the *Secundaria* she attended, she did not seem to have family supervision for her homework.

Q: Do you like going to school?

Alex: Yes, but when I'm out of the house [Snaps hands] I get so bored, so I hang out with my friends to... we go out, we are hanging

around... and at night I don't feel like doing my homework then I'm tired and I go to bed... and when I arrive [*to the school*] "I've not done my homework!" so I start doing my homework.

Q: And where do you go when you guys go out?

Alex: Sometimes they come to my house... then we ride the motorcycles that run around here... the little ones [*moto-taxis*] we play football or whatever, we're there then at night we go back to my house and the guys come as well and we're talking, talking and... at night I'm worn out and it's time to sleep!

Tendency to plagiarise homework

Another pattern that underachievers follow is the tendency of not seeing homework as requiring dedication. An option for some is to complete homework at school, either by plagiarising or "borrowing" from their peers or by completing as best they can on the same day the assignment is due.

The following example is of a student, expelled from school for vandalism and did not continue with his studies after that. Damian, 17-years-old, had been out of school for two years. He lived with his mother, sold fish informally at the local market and did not go to school.

Q: With homework, who did you ask for help?

Damian: I didn't use to ask for help.

Q: You used to do it on your own?

Damian: No.

Q: Or you didn't do it at all...?

Damian: I didn't used to do homework... I'd get to school early, so my classmates' backpacks were there already, I'd get their notebooks out and copy it... and I would hand it in.

This shows a marked difference between students' tendencies towards homework. Parents, alongside them, seemed to have different ways of assisting their children with homework. What turned out to be most relevant was the type of help that was provided in order to help their children achieve.

5.2.2 The value of a knowledgeable person at home

This is the first category and one associated with students who academically do well: their parents can help either because they possess the appropriate knowledge, have more educational assets or they ensure their children receive the help they need, even if they do not possess such assets themselves. Generally, having a person at home who was able to help with school work proved beneficial for children's learning.

Results showed that parents are the first port of call that students turn to for help if in difficulty completing homework. The following typifies an ideal way in which a parent might be able to help their children. Sonia, a single mother of a high achiever (and a primary teacher), said she always made sure her daughter accomplished her homework:

Q: When your daughter, Marta, is unsure... who helps her?

Sonia: In case I can't and after... looking on... the Internet, we have encyclopedias, if we can't find it, we seek help from my brother, my brother is an architect, my cousins are... I have quite a few cousins that have a degree and all that, they also have books, or... in fact, they have studied more [...]

Q: Uh-huh

Sonia: So they help us.

Q: So she asks you first...

Sonia: Yes, me, we... Well, she, she herself... I mean, she tries to find it, she is not the kind that comes to you: "Mum, I'm stuck", no, she tries. It's only when she's really stuck when she comes and tells me: "Hey, mummy, such and such thing". "There you go" if I have it, and because I tend to keep all my notes since... since [laughs] there's the bunch of books and things [...] and I go "Come on, let's try to find it here, I think there's this and this" and that's it, we search, we investigate or we go out and turn to [another source] until we find it.

This example can be taken as a summary of many others from the fieldwork and which deconstructed the spread idea of students performing better when they come from so called 'nuclear' families. As a rule, students reported that they turned to their parents as a first instance for guidance. However, older siblings were also reported to

be a major source of support for them; if parents were not able to help, students turned to an older sibling who had been in school before. Having a knowledgeable person at home adds human capital to the home benefitting children's learning.

5.2.3 Parents' inability to help

Several parents reported their inability to help their children because they did not finish primary education, or because they never attended school. This 'type' of parent was mostly found in disadvantaged localities, where parents were less likely to have finished primary or lower secondary education.

The following quotation summarises what some parents shared about their academic limitations. Soledad is Damian's mother:

Q: Your son Damian, when he did his homework, who did he turn to for help?

Soledad: No one because I... I didn't go to school; I only got to second year

Q: Second year in primary?

Soledad: Uh-huh, primary... That's why Damian... when he was in school he normally didn't like to do his homework, that's why... what teachers said; he just didn't like it.

Have you done your homework?

Parents sometimes believed that asking their children "Have you done your homework?" Or telling them "Do your homework" is a way of supervising or guiding their children. This was a frequent complaint not only from some underachievers but almost all teachers, who commonly believed that there is a lack of adequate support at home.

Ignacio, a 14-year-old, is the eldest of two children and had been reporting continuous achievement and behavioural problems at school, thus was at risk of dropping out. His mother, a housewife, worked informally as a seamstress and his stepfather also did informal work. Both of them finished basic education.

Q: What do they [parents] tell you at home about the importance of education, about studying, about you coming to school?

Ignacio: Nothing, they're telling me "try hard", "you'll be a thick head", like that, but it's just words, I would... I would like to count on my mum... I'd like her to sit with me, that she'd tell me "let's do your homework" or that she helped me but, ... even though they tell me "sit down..." and they sit next to me to watch, there's no point that she's just sitting there... what's the point? It would be ideal that someone came, someone with a profession who could be able to help... if you have a question, if you didn't understand your teacher, they could assist you. How then? They won't help me.

This suggests that not only do students not give homework the importance that it has as regards to their overall learning process and final marks, but some parents seem not to acknowledge this either. Likewise, most teachers think that parents do not spend enough time with their children to help them with school work as perhaps they should. The majority of these complaints came from teachers of schools with children from families of a low socio-economic status. The quotation below depicts this view. Elena, a History teacher from an advantaged area, has been in the profession for twenty eight years.

Q: How do you see the general support that students receive at home?

Elena: ... in practice, the help consists of "Have you got homework to do?", -"Yes", -"Then do your homework", that's the way support is given, right? Or "I need this material" -"Alright, here you go and get your material", that's their... in their view, their support, but there isn't a real support such as "Let's see son, sit down; tell me what you learnt today... Did you understand it?" [...] No, no, there's no such support [...], so it's basically by word the way they check: "Have you got homework?, Yes?, Do it", and "Have you done it?" But they don't corroborate "Let me see your back-pack, let me see what your homework is about", they don't do it, parents don't do it.

The majority of teachers commented that parents seem to believe that their responsibility with their children is limited to merely sending them to school, and that they would prefer parents to be more proactive with their children's education.

5.3 Parental involvement in the school

It was observed that when parents get involved, not only with their children's academic duties but also with other school activities, children tended to perform positively in school. This type of involvement might include being part of support committees or by attending parent-teacher meetings. Incidentally, it was noted that it was generally mothers who attended these meetings.

Additionally, parents of high achievers seemed more inclined to show initiative in visiting the school on a regular basis in order for them to follow up on their children's learning, an action that seemed to be much appreciated by teachers. Parents of underachievers, on the other hand, are more known in schools because of their constant calls by teachers or social workers, yet reasons are related to the students' bad marks or unconstructive attitudes. The quotation below illustrates most social workers' complaints about parents' disinterest. Reina, a social worker of eighteen years, in a disadvantaged locality that has significant political conflicts, and where drug dealing occurs, represents a major social problem.

Q: How much do parents get involved in their children's education?

Reina: Very little because, I mean, they never come of their own free will, that they'd say: "Well, I have a free space today and I am visiting the school and I will ask teachers about my child's performance" No, no, no, no, no. In fact, they come obliged by the circumstances, that's why my desk is full of papers and things, because I'm writing report after report [...] I keep a logbook so I remember when Pedro called in, or Juan, Maria and I can locate their details, right? But as the matter of fact, parents come obliged by the circumstances; I have to send appointment notices... Mmm, that's why I sometimes joke about my work place and say: It actually looks like a Court, not a Social Work area, doesn't it?"
[Laughs] Conflicts and more conflicts...

The belief that a closer relationship with parents could increase students' performance, as indicated by Lindsay and Muijs (2006), was also noted; teachers shared their views about their desire to encourage parents to be more involved with the students' learning processes. Most teachers also thought that parents seemed to "wash their hands" of any school-related responsibilities after they had enrolled their children in school.

5.4 Parents and the value of education

The majority of parents seemed to view education as a privilege, a valuable opportunity that should never be wasted. This may be related to the fact that education was not universally accessible a few decades ago, and also due to costs of attending school in Mexico. Such costs include small fees or charges, uniforms, school materials, money for breaks at school, and other expenses. Despite this view of education being a privilege, financial difficulties sometimes mean parents would remove their children from school in order for them to find a job to supplement household incomes. Consequently, although access to school is theoretically offered to all children, not all have the means or opportunity to attend or remain enrolled.

5.4.1 Parents want their children to have better opportunities

Those parents who value education highly seem more willing to make everything possible for their children to remain in school, and most of them shared the same aspiration: that their children should have better life opportunities than themselves. The following is what Alina, a female high achiever from a disadvantaged location said about her father's views on her education. As previously indicated, Alina's father completed four years of primary school and worked as a carpenter.

Alina: He tells us to give our best so when we grow up we have... Mmm... a good economy, that he doesn't... he doesn't want us to live like they are living now. [...] I tell him "I will, dad" I tell him "I will continue studying", "alright, my love" he says "You will have my support" he tells me, "if you need anything, I don't care where I get the money from but I will give you my support" he tells me, umm...: "You simply focus on your studies", and yes, I will continue studying.

Alex, the female at risk, portrayed previously, also shared what both her parents tell her about the importance of education.

Alex: They tell me to study, that it is going to be useful when I grow older, because in this day and age finding a job is very difficult, you have to study and... and then when you've found it, you can get married. When you have your family, then you will already have what's needed to support them, you'll then have a profession because if... like the girls in here... in this community, when the buses set off to go to [*a northern*

city] they go and work as maids. My mum tells me “Well, you won’t; you got to study”, they’re telling me that I must study to have a degree.

The following extracts depict both a male and a female parent of dropout students, both said they valued education. The first example is Mr Juan, from a disadvantaged area, his daughter decided to stop attending lower secondary because she was going to get married. His son had very low marks and been disruptive at school. It is worth mentioning that Mr Juan and his wife, Benita, were facing a separation at the time of the interview. In the extract below, Mr Juan makes a comment regarding his daughter’s unwillingness to continue studying.

Q: Is education important to you?

Juan: Of course [...] it’s like a patrimony for them, the fact that she could have a degree, I tell her since I did not have the opportunity because when I studied I told my dad “look, I have presented the exam at the Technical upper secondary school, I now need the money to pay” –“No” he said: “I have found you a job”, he found me a job as a labourer and builder over there, and I had already passed the exam over there at the school, I had already passed [...]; my dad did not give me his support and that hurt me [...].

The second example refers to Dora, the mother of a male dropout in a disadvantaged location. Dora makes *tortillas* to sell in the neighbourhood and her husband, Bruno, works in agriculture, a job that he perceived as volatile in terms of incomes. Both had insisted on Jacinto, their youngest son, to return to school. This interview was challenging in terms of understanding them as their first language was Zapoteco and their knowledge of Spanish was limited. The interview threw a significant number of enriching elements to the research.

Q: Did you go to primary school?

Dora: Nothing, me? Nothing, my father told me...

Q: And what about you, *señor*? [I interrupt]

Bruno: Me neither.

Dora: Before it was like that, I tell my mother “I’m going to study” – “Ah, go on, what for, to write letters to the boyfriend?” Because... I did

not study, bless me, God only gave me clothes and that's how I tell [my son]: "I did not take my mother's example, I am giving you... I'm telling you, I don't know how; I haven't got any money! But you're going there today, to school." And he's going to use his notebook, what an amount of money I owed to the shop over there when my other sons were in school! But thank God, now they have their jobs.

5.4.2 Parental reactions at children's willingness to stop school

The Mexican education system is obliged, constitutionally, to provide universal, free and secular basic education. However, the system does not enforce compulsory school attendance and therefore it could be inferred that it grants parents the right to decide whether their children should attend school or not.

Additionally, the findings suggest that the decision to stop attending school can be taken by parents or students themselves. When parents were asked what they would say if their children informed them that they wanted to stop going to school, the responses were mixed; for parents of high achievers the notion that their children must stay in school was non-negotiable. Parents of underachievers, resigned to the likelihood of it happening, or in the case of parents of dropouts, when it happened. Social workers said that normally when students were absent for more than two or three days they would call students' homes or visit them, depending on the school procedures. If it was ascertained that the decision had been made by the student that would not return to school, social workers would be to try to convince them otherwise. However, if the answer is a definite "no" the case is normally closed.

Parents as educational enforcers

Reactions, of parents of high achievers, to this notion were that they would be resolute about their children continuing their education. Almost all parents from this group said they would force their children to remain in school, as we can note from the following example. Valeria, the divorced mother of a high achiever in an advantaged area, finished upper secondary education and informally sold bags. Her two daughters have always been on the honour roll in school.

Q: I have a question... which one would be... the answer that you would give to Carolina if she told you that she does not want to come to school anymore?

Valeria: That she doesn't want to come to school anymore?

Q: Um-hm.

Valeria: First, she would have to explain to me why and... if it's because the academic matters that they [*teachers*] will not work, well she has to finish whatever she has to finish, but Carolina must finish school.

Q: She must finish school?

Valeria: She must finish school.

Amadeus, a male high achiever in the advantaged area shared what he thought it would be his parents' views on this notion. Both his parents finished upper secondary school. His father is a sales promoter at a bank and his mother owns a book shop.

Q: If I asked you... if you told your parents tomorrow: "Do you know what? I don't want to finish lower secondary school", what would they say?

Amadeus: Well... first, they would be surprised.

Q: Uh-huh.

Amadeus: Because... it's just that they... worked very hard to go to school... they did it on their own, their parents were not there for them and that's why they, like... because it is already a different generation, I have more opportunities, well, they would say "Listen, son, you'd be throwing away such a good opportunity that we didn't have... it is not that we want to force you to do something, but... you've got to be... I mean, you are... you are kidding, aren't you son?"

Q: Um-hm.

Amadeus: I believe that they would force me to stay in school, they would make me [...], it is a good opportunity because... not just anyone can come to school.

Generally, parents of high achieving students tended to be more in control of their children's lives and education and seemed to assume more responsibility in their roles as guardians. It is important to acknowledge that most parents from very disadvantaged households, and whose children were doing well in school, were

aware that their children's educational future could be at risk. Although they wanted their children to have the opportunity to go to higher education, they said their economic limitations could make them unable to provide further financial support.

“Get a job”

Parents of students facing difficulties at school, whether low for marks or behaviour, and of students who dropped out of school, seem to face or have dealt with this scenario differently; their common first reaction is to demand that their children return to school. Yet, if the student insisted that they were not going back, parents seemed to relent and reluctantly accept their child's decision. All of these parents shared something in common: they came from low income households and therefore the majority of them were from disadvantaged localities.

Elba, the mother of an 'at risk' male student in a disadvantaged community, where a large proportion of the population migrates in search of better employment opportunities, is a housewife and is involved in informal commerce. Her husband is a primary school teacher. Her son, Adam, had been attaining low marks, bad behaviour and high levels of absenteeism in school.

Q: His marks are very low... And what do you think this is due to?

Elba: He hasn't been paying attention in school, he's telling me he's not going regularly, that he is not making an effort.

Q: He doesn't want to go anymore?

Elba: Yes, he doesn't want to go [*to school*] anymore.

Q: And why is that?

Elba: Well, he wants to work, he says.

Q: Where's that?

Elba: Well, these days everybody is leaving to go to work somewhere else.

[..]

Q: And what do you tell him?

Elba: Well, I'm telling him to study, why to... go to work... he should study I tell him. We'll still see what he says, whether he'll go back [*to school*] but he wants to leave to find a job [...]. Like, his dad is a teacher,

he tells him to study but if [Adam]'s saying he will do that, what else can we do?

Jacinta, a widow, is the mother of a student who dropped out of school in an advantaged area. She finished primary school and sells *tortillas* to a prestigious restaurant in the city of Oaxaca. Gabriel, her son, started working part-time at a vehicle repair shop with his uncle, a mechanic. He had also shown an intense interest in illegally crossing the United States border for work. However, his uncle insisted that if Gabriel worked full time at the repair shop, he could earn the same money as if he had emigrated. Gabriel seemed to have enjoyed working to the extent that he decided to trade attending school for full-time work.

Q: What do you think about the fact that he wants to leave school?

Jacinta: Um, I... I now don't tell him anything. I did pressurise him before when... when he told me he didn't want to go anymore, I pressurise him and I pressurise him to the point of threatening him. Well, I tell him that... "We're alone" I told him, he is... he is the only one, and like they say, the only thing I can give him is... his education, that's why he didn't go to the school in [community], there's a lower secondary school in there where he could walk to. [...]No, I told him "Ok, look" I told him "It's that... Gabriel..." I tell him "No, it can't be" I tell him "that you leave it just like that... all thrown to waste, but my effort... because it's my effort" I tell him "It's not possible" I tell him, so he says "No" he says "It's better that... I thought about it well" he says, "that the repair shop is better" [...]

Q: And... and you, Gabriel, what...? Are you thinking about quitting school for a while... and then coming back? Or you're definite...

Gabriel: I'm definite.

Q: Aren't you interested in coming to school?

Gabriel: [Shakes his head negatively]

Felipa, mother of a male dropout from an advantaged area, though from a low income household, finished primary school and is involved in the informal market by selling plants, cereal grains and flowers in the city of Oaxaca. Her husband moved to

the north of Mexico to work as a labourer. Her son had been out of school for a month at the time of the interview.

Q: What would you think if your son stops going to school, if he leaves school, what would you think?

Felipa: Well, I would send him to work, that's the only thing, I've told him, I've told him "If you don't... If you don't want to study you have to go to work... doing I don't know what" because you see the boys don't have a job, there aren't enough jobs because they're young, and that's what I've told him.

It is observed that for parents of students at risk of dropping out, the most logical option if the child quits going to school is to get a job, especially in disadvantaged households. Contrary to the reaction of parents of high achieving students, this group of parents do not exert total authority upon their children, nor do they compel them to attend school.

The "wasted money" mentality

As previously mentioned, sending children to school costs money and so education is generally perceived as an investment. Therefore, education may seem as a risky expense for some parents or students when there appears to be no immediate, tangible benefit. The following quotation, from Soledad, mother of Damian, the dropout mentioned previously, illustrates the view some parents and students, from disadvantaged households, shared regarding the cost that going to school might represent.

Q: Did you use to talk to Damian about the importance of studying?

Soledad: [*Interrupts*] Yes, yes! I used to talk to him about it and I used to hit him and he entered the school again, I got him in again, I said to him "Look, how nice it would be that you finish your lower secondary" I told him, I got him in again but then, complaints and more complaints about him in school. I told him "You don't want to study" I told him "It's better that... I haven't got money to spend just like that and you're not working" Teachers said that he's always hitting the boys that are actually studying, they said "It's better if he doesn't come anymore" they said

“because he doesn’t either want to study nor he let others study” they said, that’s why he stopped going.

What Alina, the high achiever from a disadvantaged area, portrayed previously, said about the cost of education, represents a crucial view that is distinctive in disadvantaged areas.

Q: Why do you think there are students who don’t do well or who are about to quit coming to school or who actually quit? What do you think about it? Why do you think this happens?

Alina: Well, in my class I see that there are some who have already decided to quit coming to school [...], I tell them that it’s not good, that if they are coming to school, it should be to study, “no” one says “I only come to spend my money and I do nothing in class, I just mess about so I don’t do anything at home” that’s what they tell me

Q: Uh-huh...

Alina: And there is one of my classmates who did not continue with her studies because she decided it so, her parents wanted to send her back but “no” she says... she knew... she was straightforward because... she chose well because she told her dad: “Why am I going to school, dad, if I am not going to learn anything” she says “I pay attention but I can’t learn anything, why am I going to be spending your money; it’s best that I start working than wasting your money”. [...]

Q: Mmm... and this girl who told her parents... is she already working?

Alina: Yes, she is working.

Q: And where is she working?

Alina: At the market.

Q: Oh, is she selling something?

Alina: Yes, she sells clothes I think.

A social worker for 5 years from a *Secundaria Técnica* in a very disadvantaged community shares Alina’s point of view from a gender perspective:

Q: What do you think about school enrolment in this community and their students, do you think that all students from eligible age enrol to lower secondary school?

Dulce: No. From all children of eligible age to enrol, not all of them attend lower secondary school, especially girls because... here the culture follows that... what's the use of lower secondary school for women if they'll marry as soon as they can. Because here they marry at a very early age, parents do not want to waste –that's how they call it, to waste their money in them, so, they normally don't send their daughters and... From those who send their sons, well, those are the ones that want to study the least, and why? Well, because they start working with the motorcycles [*taxi motorcycles*], there are a lot of motorcycles here.

As other teachers from disadvantaged communities said, parents may give a preference to their sons going to school as a daughter could represent a high cost that will not pay off economically in the future.

As Stromquist (2001) said “In principle, all families recognise the importance of education”. In practice, however, the reality is that the cost that education represents for parents means they may seek other alternatives, such as marriage, emigration or withdrawing their children from school to help contribute to the family's income. Children's contribution might seem more valuable if they contribute to the family's work. In most disadvantaged communities where agricultural work is more common, gender takes part; boys help with agricultural work and girls with domestic work. Additionally, both boys and girls seem to accompany their parents if the family chooses to emigrate.

As discussed in the background section of this thesis, schools in disadvantaged areas tend to have lower enrolment rates than urban schools and students from such areas have easier ways of quitting school.

5.5 Social environment in the home

This section focuses on the social environment of the home, that is, the conditions in which family members live and interact. For example, the norms established and followed at home, routines and curfews, etc. and how these conditions affect them.

5.5.1 Involvement in housework

Parents of female high achievers tend to engage with their children more with regarding household organisation and domestic work; they are encouraged to participate more actively in domestic chores, especially females. Male high achievers participate as well but mostly with more male gender-based activities such as looking after the dog, cleaning the garden, or farm work if in a disadvantaged community. Preferably, parents would wish that their children avoided participating in such activities so they could focus more on academic work. However, such chores at home did not seem to affect students' school performance⁸, as has been demonstrated when dispositions of high achievers were described.

Students who failed to contribute with housework did so because of two main reasons: either they were not expected to do anything or because they did not obey their parents. It could be argued, for the latter statement, that it was actually parents who may have failed to exert control over their children, as the below extract illustrates. Soledad, the mother of a dropout from a disadvantaged area, complains as to how Damian does not help her with domestic duties yet seemed helpless with this situation, similar to how she felt helpless when her son decided to stop attending school.

Q: After school, did he do any type of work? Did he use to help you or what were his activities?

Soledad: None.

Q: None?

Soledad: None, nothing... he'd get home and see my dishes all dirty, a lot of things to do and he would just go; he leaves everything and goes out. So when I come back I do the dishes, I clean, I brush [the floor]. He comes home late, the food is ready; "Mum, is food ready?" he just comes back to eat, he eats and leaves again! [snaps hands].

5.5.2 Discipline and parental supervision

A particular aspect shared by high achieving students is that their parents set up strict rules for homework; for example, it must be completed after dinner, television must

⁸ Other factors that affect students' school achievement, such as working for the family business or contributing with agricultural work, are covered in 'The home influenced by its community' section'.

be switched off or opportunities to go out might be restricted. These parents also keep track of their children's whereabouts. Moos (1976) summarises the types of disciplinary actions that parents take, stating that if parents tend to be dominant, children turn out to be obedient, neat, courteous and better socialised. Furthermore, Rumberger (2001) stated that "students whose parents monitor and regulate their activities, provide emotional support, encourage independent decision-making [...] and are generally more involved in their schooling are less likely to drop out from school" (p.12-13). Nevertheless, there is more than mere discipline and curfews, there are the ways they are implemented and how they are integrated as part of the home social dynamics.

High achievers' after school activities included language classes, sports and other education-related classes. If these extra activities involve recreations, parental follow-up normally takes place. Eva, a female social worker from an advantaged area, who has been working with adolescents for twenty six years, summarises the general view of other social workers as well as teachers.

Q: And given that you... are constantly dealing with the students, what is the constant characteristic when a student is doing well in school? I mean, what is the constant attribute, their characteristics?

Eva: Of a student?

Q: Uh-huh [...] that is doing well in school.

Eva: Well, they are students that have the support of their parents; they are regularly students from integrated families.

Q: Um-hm.

Eva: [...] they are well fed, their parents look after their health... students are inculcated with good habits from an early age, regarding both their studies as well as well as their hygiene. They are students that come to school with their... clean, well presented, mmm... well, well presented and they normally have breakfast before school and... these are students that have extra school activities such as English or Mathematics classes, they do... they go to cultural centres, mmm, they do sports, they swim.

The previous excerpt also covered an aspect that was pointed out mainly by teachers and other school staff; the importance for students to have breakfast before school, as shown below.

Breakfast before school

Breakfast is proven to be the most important meal of the day, and eating a balanced diet is known to help the body and mind perform well. Nutritional habits of students are demonstrated to have an impact on their mood and performance in their everyday lives.

Most high achievers had regular breakfast and meal routines, whereas underachievers, especially males, seemed more predisposed not to having regular meal routines.

The following extract refers to Conrado, a *prefecto*⁹ from a *Secundaria Técnica* in an advantaged area who depicts most teachers' perspectives on students' diets and the impact of this on their school performance.

Conrado: Like I was telling you, right? The fact that they come with an empty stomach, well, whether you like it or not, you wont... you wont... you will not perform, even you wanted to very much, the stomach discomfort will win over you, wont it? We see it here with... I'm telling you that girl from yesterday, she didn't even have... I asked her "And did you have breakfast?" and she smiles and says "Mmm... no" and they tell me "Well, and how do you know?" Come on! Isn't it? There are boys that have rounded spots all over their little faces and just the doctor would know, wouldn't he? The doctor will tell you that it is really an anaemic manifestation, and why? Because he's not eating well, why? Because there's nothing left at home the next morning, not even bread for their stomachs, nothing to eat, so you can imagine [...], for example when we pay tribute to the flag or during any civic event, they can't be standing for more than twenty minutes and when you realise, they have fainted. Why do they faint? Because they haven't eaten anything and the sun is burning, that's what is indicating to us what the problem is.

⁹ A "prefecto" is a member of staff who enforces discipline within the school. They may also act as door keepers.

5.5.3 Communication at home: the value of family cohesiveness

It was observed that high achieving students, regardless of home socio-economic status or family composition, tended to have good relationships with other family members and generally thought their home environments were stable. Moreover, communication with parents appeared to be positive. All of which form family cohesiveness, which can be defined as “the extent to which the family calls forth strong emotional ties among its members, joint interests, pride in the home” (Davies, 1973:4)

Having good communication and a stable home environment proved to be positive for children. Having said this, it is not intended to say that these households did not face difficult times at home. The most common factor, related to arguments in most families, was money. Yet, the most common factor that would affect children’s emotional stability was going through family separation or divorce, along with episodes of domestic violence.

The following example depicts a regular way of how positive communication is kept between family members. Felicita is a high achiever from a *Secundaria Técnica* from a disadvantaged area.

Q: And how do you get along with your siblings and parents at home?

Felicita: Pretty well although there are times when there are problems but we do... we communicate with each other. If something is happening, we speak it out; we do not hide anything from each other.

Q: You mean you tell your parents or you mean you communicate it among each other [with siblings]?

Felicita: Yes, there are times when it is done among us [siblings] and when it is big [the situation]... we don’t know what to do, then we do tell our parents

Q: What would something big be, for example?

Felicita: For example when we have problems at school, right? And we don’t want to tell my mum, we go and share it with a sister, but then this sister does not know how to give us an advice... then that’s when she tells us “better tell mum... tell dad and see what they say” and then we tell our parents.

When parents are courageous

The fact that some families of this group of high achieving students had been, or were going through, difficult situations did not necessarily mean instability in school for them. Both male and female high achievers said that their parents were open and discussed the facts with them and asked them to try not to allow family matters affect their performance at school. The following is what Larisa, a female high achiever from a disadvantaged area said regarding her positive communication with her parents; it summarises what other parents and other students in similar situations said.

Q: You were telling me that... you just now mentioned something that called my attention; you said that despite the problems at home eh... you can go on... like... what sort of problems?

Larisa: Well... there have been problems between my parents... that they have... well, family problems that... there was a time in which... I was going to suffer their separation... because... For problems they had, for example, it's what people say and all that, it's what they tell my dad... because my dad is rarely with us, well, you can't say he is with us all day and well, the family problems they had, that my mum had... another man with whom she was living... and that was going to be the cause of their separation, and because of that, well, yes, sometimes we... those problems make us... make us don't want to think about the school because you're thinking about the problems at home and all that, but [...] now the problems have been solved [...] and despite all that, they do ask us that... that if one day they end up separating, that... we shouldn't quit our studies and that we should go on and well, we have overcome that and thank God we are doing well at school.

It is worth mentioning the single parent case as well; Valeria, the mother of two female high achievers from an advantaged area, talks about how she did not allow her divorce affect their children. Valeria completed upper secondary school and was involved in informal work.

A lot of personal matters made us... separate and to find another... another way of... life, but that didn't... didn't diminish... in relation to my responsibility as a woman and as a mother with respect to my

daughters; there was a priority. At this moment, I am a mother, I know that I have to be there one hundred percent, I. [...] You have to get active so your daughters see you... that you are... foreseeing a future where you get involved and where you get them involved as well, don't you? We were basically left out three of us at home; obviously, I need to sell things, I need to leave the house, I... So I spoke to them often when we were at home and... I explained to them that everything was fine; if we didn't have a car at that moment, it was all fine: buses were there and we could get to our destination, it was a matter of getting up earlier, that was it, and that there was no excuse not to accomplish with the rest of the activities that we had, I used to tell them "So do you see that I sit down and start going: 'You know what? [changes voice to whiny mode] Umm... I'm so sad I haven't got money to feed you. No, my love, the world goes on and no one has died of hunger; only those with no interest at all. Do you love yourself? Yes? Alright, well, I also love you and adore you, so let's get going'".

High-conflict environments at home and "It's in my head all day" 'effect'

Most underachievers and dropouts said that their home environment was unstable. The most common reason that would affect stability was going through parental separation or divorce, along with domestic violence, which seemed to create a feeling of fear with the children. Consequentially, these problems appear to distract them from paying attention in class or they experience what, in this study, will be called the "it's in my head all day" 'effect', given that this phrase was heard several times by students whose parents' problems overtook their minds.

Cinthya, a 16-year-old dropout from a disadvantaged area, diabetic, who had left year 3 of lower secondary school, had been held back two years in primary school. Her parents were going through a divorce, a fact that seemed to affect her, and at the same time, she reported being regularly physically abused by her oldest brother. She decided to run away with her boyfriend in order to get married. At the time of the interview, she was living in her future mother-in-law's house waiting for the marriage to take place. In the following quotation, she describes an episode of abuse from her oldest brother and how the family conflicts at home affected her decision not to go back to school.

I wash his clothes, I washed his clothes, I tell him “can I borrow 50 pesos?” –“what the f... I’m going to lend you money”, this and that, he started to say, “alright, thank you then” I tell him “I wash your clothes all the time and this is it, not any more, not even one item of yours I will touch, and you all don’t help me, and I would hurt myself like an idiot, I am now –I tell him- sick, and doctors have told me that I shouldn’t wash, that I wash maybe some... my own things... and theirs: like this [“a lot” gesture with hands], the pile of clothes and I tell them “it’s not only the washing machine [an agitator-type washing machine] that will do it”, it’s tiring for me to fill it with water, take the clothes out, drain the water, rinse them, hang them out to dry –“ha!, you don’t say” he tells me “the washing machine does it all” – “you are wrong” I tell him.

[...]

I went to my house earlier and my mum said, my sister said “Come tomorrow to do our laundry” –“Alright, that’s what I came for?, to be forced to do laundry?, I don’t think so” I tell them[...]. And my mum asked me if I still want to go to school and I tell her “With the way you all treat me?” And my dad already had problems with my mum, he used to tell me “I have spoken to your mum” he starts... all that, one day I told them “Look, your problem is something apart, and all that you have told me, I take it with me, I am thinking about it, I don’t even feel like studying, I am in the classroom, all the time... “Your mum this”, “This and that” because they’re always fighting; they say they are going to divorce.

Similarly Alex, a 13 year-old female underachiever from a disadvantaged area, illustrates how experiencing conflicts at home can create aggressive behaviour in children. Her mother did not attend school and her father did not finish primary school, they were separating and she was presenting behavioural problems as well as very low marks that were putting her at a serious risk of dropping out from school.

Alex: I wasn’t like I am now... In primary school I was always... can you believe it? I was... I used to hold first place on the honour rolls, I mean, I... I was the clever girl... but I don’t know, how with the problems... “You’ve got traumatised” she tells me.

Q: Who tells you?

Alex: Umm... the other day I went to see this psychologist, she tells me: "I believe you're traumatised".

Q: Uh-huh.

Alex: [...] I have a cousin who sits on the front rows and she goes "hu, hu, hu" she's making faces at me [snaps lips] and I get pissed off and I go "Pah!" I punch her! [we laugh] then the teachers grab me and I go "Well, tell her not to make faces at me!, what does she think?" and they tell me off [...]

Q: Where did you punch her?

Alex: On her back [...] or I grab her... grab her head and shake it like this, and that's it because I don't like it that... don't like it that people shout at me, I don't like noises anymore [...]

Q: And you weren't like that... in primary...?

Alex: No, I wasn't like that because everything was normal at home [...] Like my dad, now... has a problem with my mum... he rarely is in the house [and] all of the guys [classmates] sitting outside, all of them knew it, and they are telling me and... like that woman wears glasses and this ones are coloured [sunglasses] they tell me "Oh, what, are they your stepmother's? They tell me, "no, what the hell a stepmother" I told them... we're there saying things [...], "your stepmother" this and that, oh, gosh, I don't know, I don't know... Because of [parents] I am in school like this... I am just thinking about problems from home with my dad or my mum, I don't feel like listening to the teachers any more, this problem is already in my head, I cannot take it off my mind...

To a great extent, these students felt abandoned, not looked after and experienced apathy from their parents and their homes in general, situations which are likely to lead to delinquent behaviour in children, as put forward by Moss (1976).

5.5.4 The effect of religion on school involvement

Religion turned out to be a revealing issue. Initially, it appeared that most high achievers came from families with a religion other than Catholicism, for instance, Jehovah's Witnesses, and evangelical denominations of Christianity. However,

further cases revealed a relationship between one of these religions and stability of home and family. The majority of Mexicans are Catholics. The Census of 2000 in Mexico estimated that 82 percent of people in the country were Catholics, 8 percent non-Catholics and 4 percent had no religion and the remaining 6 percent were unspecified (INEGI, 2009a).

The trend for the participants was similar, although the number of people who professed a religion other than Catholicism was larger in proportion than the data from the Census. That may be related to the fact that, in Mexico today, more people are opting for different religions than in the past. Of a total of 82 people interviewed, only 59 participants were asked which religion they professed¹⁰. A majority of which (61%) stated they were Catholics. A significant number of people said they belonged to other religions (36%) and only two (3%) said they had no religion (see Table 22).

Table 22. Percentages of interviewees' professed religions.

Catholics N (%)	"Other religion" N (%)	None N (%)	Total N (%)
36 (61%)	21 (36)	2 (3)	59 (100)

Note: Other religions include Jehovah's Witnesses, evangelical Christianity, Mormonism and Judaism.

Since revealing information was associated with the home dynamics, if only parents and students are taken into consideration, the total of participants who responded to this question was 51. The results can be seen on Table 23:

Table 23. Percentage of religions professed by students and parents.

Catholics N (%)	"Other religion" N (%)	None N (%)	Total N (%)
30 (59%)	19 (37)	2 (4)	51 (100)

High achievers and "other religions"

Of the students and parents who replied to the question about which religion they belonged to, religions professed by each family are taken into consideration, rather than considering them individually by interviewee. As such, the following can be seen:

¹⁰ Given the nature of the interviews, this question was sometimes left aside, mainly with school personnel.

Table 24. Religion per family of interviewees.

	Catholics N (%)	“Other religions” N (%)	None N (%)	Total N (%)
Families of high achievers	8 (50)	8 (50)	0 (0%)	16 (100)
Families of at risk students	11 (79)	3 (21)	0	14 (100)
Families of dropouts	11 (65)	6 (35)	0	17 (100)
	30 (64)	17 (36)	0	47 (100)

Note: 7 people were not asked this question and therefore their data was not taken into consideration.

Generally, most participants professed a religion, apart from three students, two dropouts and one at risk. It must be clarified that these students specified that it was their families who practiced a religion (from the “other religions”) and that they had no religion.

The initial findings suggested a relationship between being a high achiever and belonging to a non-Catholic religion. Further findings supported this: the ratio between high achievement in school and belonging to families who profess “other religion” is found to be 50:50. In contrast, most families of those students at risk and those of dropouts (79 and 65 percent respectively) interviewed, were Catholics. Some of these families were Catholics by tradition: they were baptised Catholics though did not attend church regularly, as opposed to people from “other religions”, who attend religious services daily or weekly. Practicing a religion does not a guarantee high performance; these students were more likely to suffer discrimination in school due to belonging to a religious minority¹¹. However, teachers and social workers acknowledged that generally these children not only have an outstanding achievement but are also well behaved.

Abel, a high achiever from a *Secundaria General* in the City of Oaxaca, describes how he and his family attend religious services near-daily. This is also an illustration of how these students tend to be responsible even if they have commitments that may include daily services in church.

¹¹ Religious discrimination will be described in Chapter 6.

Q: And what is your religion?

Abel: Umm... well, we are Christians.

Q: Christians, and how often do you go to church?

Abel: Umm... well, you might find this strange, but... almost every day [...].

Q: And when you come to school, what is a normal day for you, tell me. For example: “I finish school...” I mean, tell me what you do, like “such and such”, I go to church or help my mum, I mean, describe it.

Abel: Well, a normal day... I am not attending any [after school class] at the moment, so, because of the exams I had to take in order for me to enter upper secondary school and another exam I had, err... well, I've been studying. But on a normal day, well, from here I go home, I eat, I do a bit of... I do my homework, all of it, if I can, or if I can't, I do it here in order to... leave quickly to a class [he doesn't specify which], Umm... I normally choose schedules from 5.30 to 7.00 p.m.

Q: Uh-huh.

Abel: And from 7.00 p.m. I would go to... well, to the meeting... to the church, and from there, I leave at 9.00 p.m. From there I go home, I eat, I have supper with my parents and we talk, we dine and we go to sleep.

The following chapter will include a section on discrimination at school and religious affairs in more depth. In the meantime, a teacher's opinion on how students who profess “other religions” perform well will be presented. This example also illustrates what most teachers and other members of staff thought about the subject. Cecilia is a History teacher of 32 years in a *Secundaria Técnica* from an advantaged area:

Q: And have there been problems here because some students belong to a religion different to that of Catholicism?

Cecilia: Well, there's a religion, Jehovah Witnesses, their moral principles... [...] because they don't pledge allegiance to the flag as a higher symbol.

Q: Has [the school] expelled or suspended... a student for this reason?

Cecilia: Not that I know of.

Q: So they don't pledge allegiance to the flag and they are respected? I mean, they are not obliged to do it?

Cecilia: It's because there isn't... Well, there are norms, but I myself have begun to think: wait a minute, to which extent are we making mistakes? We are... On one side, we say "The freedom of religion", but on the other side, we say "Well, but why don't they want to pledge allegiance to the flag?" But, OK, it's part of their religion not to pledge allegiance to the flag, isn't it? Isn't it true? As a result, I have come to think that it isn't correct. Yes, it's true, it is not correct. But, to which extent am I also doing my part to say "I have to respect them"? I myself do not understand the disciplinary circumstances. [...]

Q: Is there a difference between those students who belong to... for example, to the conventional religion and those who belong to another religion?

Cecilia: It's visible, noticeable.

Q: What are the differences?

Cecilia: The discipline and their responsibility; these are students that don't cause... They are responsible students and well behaved, they are participative and conscientious; that's the way they express themselves and they believe that their only sin is not being able to pledge allegiance to the flag because it's part of their principles.

Religion 'does its bit'

If the majority of students who came from families of a non-conventional religion reported excellent reviews at school, it can be argued that there are positive aspects from "other religions" that can be beneficial for the students.

As a brief illustration, three fathers of high achievers accounted that religion helped them quit their alcohol addictions and that it changed their lives inasmuch as they were on better terms with their families than before. An equally important example is Rodolfo, a student at risk of leaving school due to very low marks. His family could be considered as dysfunctional insofar as his older brother was in jail,

and his two older sisters dropped out of basic education to get married. His father passed away in a car accident.

He was attending a Secundaria General at a disadvantaged locality and claimed that his Pentecostal religion “got him out” of anti-social behaviour and drugs:

Q: And why do you like going to church? To that particular church.

Rodolfo: Because it got me out of certain problems, because sometimes I was... I was going around in bad company. They used to tell me “C’mon, try this and you’ll feel good”, they would say [unintelligible] and I used to say “No, I don’t want to try it” I used to tell them because I knew what that was.

Q: What was it? Was it marihuana or drugs? [sic]

Rodolfo: Well, drugs.

Q: You mean cocaine?

Rodolfo: Yes, cocaine

Q: Oh, right

Rodolfo: “No” I used to tell them, and fortunately I left them. [...] One day I was coming from [a neighbourhood] and I met a good friend. She told me “What are you up to? Why don’t you come to church with me, I invite you”, “I don’t know” I told her, “No” I used to tell her until she convinced me and I stayed. Fortunately, I have been with the church for a year now.

Unlike the previous examples, Rodolfo was facing difficulties with his academic performance. However, the effort to stay in school may be considered as an achievement in itself as his parents had not finished primary school and the only person who could “sometimes” assist him with homework was his step-father.

As previously noted, “other religions” encourage people to secure family cohesiveness and to avoid anti-social behaviour. It can be deduced that those are positive contributions that prove to be advantageous to students and their attainment in school.

5.6 Home influenced by community

As mentioned in the introduction section of this thesis, international patterns in education are repeated when contrasting developed with less developed countries. Mexico's more advantaged administrative divisions generally present more favourable participation rates in education. When it comes to the State of Oaxaca, municipalities or communities that are more affluent offer better services to their citizens in most ways; ranging from public services such as transportation, drinking water, paved streets, land line services to libraries or Internet Cafés (the latter was a valuable resource for students in homework completion). Community characteristics in this study reflected marked cultural practices which crucially shape students' motivations and 'decisions'.

5.6.1 Public services

Public services in disadvantaged areas are more basic. Most houses had access to a running water supply; however, not all houses were connected to the sewerage system, or had paved roads or sidewalks in their neighbourhood. Although most homes from disadvantaged localities reported not having access to basic services this did not seem to directly impact students' performance at school. With regards to public transport, most students lived near their schools and so they usually walked or rode their bikes to school. Taking a bus or being driven by their parents was the most common means of transportation for students in advantaged areas.

The lack of public libraries proved to hinder students' academic performances. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, parents with little or no basic schooling are less able to help their children with homework or revision for exams. Thus, public libraries in disadvantaged localities may certainly aid students carrying out their school work. Some public libraries allow the students to use the internet (where available) for free for up to one hour. However, some localities lack libraries and if there are libraries, they sometimes follow irregular service hours and are unlikely to have a computer, or enough study material.

Seemingly, as a result of these limitations, internet cafés proved to be a very popular resource for students from homes where educational resources were limited or non-existent, or for students with such resources but with no Internet connection at home. The following, from a female high achiever in a disadvantaged locality, describes this information in a nutshell. Raquel's mother completed three years of primary school and her father is the Head of a primary school.

Q: But do you know how to use the Internet?

Raquel: Yes.

Q: And where do you use it?

Raquel: Over there... there's a place over there... they rent computers, that's where we go to do our homework.

Q: I see... and about how many places like that are there here in M... where they rent computers?

Raquel: Mmm... just one.

Q: Just one? Mmm, and how many computers are in there?

Raquel: Mmm... five computers.

Q: It gets full I guess.

Raquel: Yes, there are *s'm* days that it's full... they are always doing homework and that's the only place here.

[...]

Q: Is there a library here ?

Raquel: Mmm, yes but... sometimes... you go to... to the library... there's no one [staff] yet... Or when you get bored of waiting, that's when they arrive. Sometimes they don't even open in the afternoon and the books are somehow battered. They still lack of things there, *den* the library is not well equipped.

5.6.2 The culture as a determinant

Community characteristics in this study reflect marked cultural practices which shape students' motivations and 'decisions', choices that permeate the dynamics of a society or centre of population.

Article 25 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services [...]" For this, it can be deduced that students living in poorer communities are less likely to have parents or mentors who have completed at least

basic education and more likely to lack the fundamental services that would allow them to have a decent life and to advance along their educational path.

Results showed that students in urban areas have access, as the majority of participants claimed, to most basic public services, benefitting their lives in most aspects. Students in advantaged communities have better public services or resources such as libraries, internet cafés, shops, etc. near to their homes. It is important to clarify that not all students living in the City of Oaxaca, the advantaged location in this study, had access to full basic services, especially those who lived on the city's outskirts, which are usually in newly built, developing neighbourhoods. It could be argued, however, that most students living in the City of Oaxaca have more access to better public and social services and centres of recreation in general. The following example depicts how a single mother, who did not finish primary education, and whose work consisted of making *tortillas* and sell them to a popular restaurant in the City, did her best to provide her son with a private computer course. The following quotation was extracted from a joint interview with Jacinta, a mother of three, and Gabriel, her eldest son who had stopped going to school for two weeks and had decided not to go back to school any more. Although they lived in the city's outskirts, they carried out their daily activities in the City of Oaxaca. The school that Gabriel had been enrolled in held a reputation of being very good in terms of teaching quality.

Q: Do you know how to use the Internet?

Gabriel: [Nods]

Q: Do you? Where did you learn?

Gabriel: Over there... in my... neighbourhood.

Jacinta: I sent him to a... a short course, when they were in 6th grade, yeah, in 6th grade of primary school that was... when computers were introduced in the school, so I told him "you don't know anything, you better go and learn something at least... at least something... I sent him and his brother

Q: Um-hm.

This example shows that not only different types of facilities are better available in larger, more developed areas but also that this influences people's views and

choices. This represents an aggregated value; parents in a disadvantaged location would be less likely to facilitate an extra school course or private recreational activity to their children if these facilities are not available in their community.

Gender fates

Students from disadvantaged areas tend to face, along with poverty, or as a result of poverty, more difficulties associated with their gender and cultural beliefs than their counterparts in advantaged areas. People of both types of areas are not excluded from experiencing these difficulties; however, the aim of this section will put an emphasis on disadvantaged locations where the problem of school failure is more visible, especially the problem of high dropout rates, and where the decision to stop school attendance seems to be an easier one to make. In terms of gender, girls were, in most cases, morally obliged to stay at home and take responsibility of domestic activities if needed. The following example is shared by Pilar, a social worker of twenty nine years from an advantaged area.

Q: And for example, those boys who stop coming to school, what is it most related to when it comes to boys?

Pilar: Umm... eh... economic matters, yes, because it's normally the case that boys are put in the position where "You gotta find a job" isn't it? The girl will still probably be sustained but the boy must work, doesn't he?

Q: And... if it's the girl who stops coming to school, what is it most related to?

Pilar: Alright, to family problems, isn't it? To family disintegration, mmm... the case of one or two, three girls that have to look after their younger siblings so mum can go to work, see? Mum is alone, there is no partner, something like that, and so she [girl] brings and takes her brothers and she cannot study until mum comes back from work, doesn't it?

A similar example was shared by Felicita, a high achiever from a disadvantaged location:

Q: And who asks you about your homework? Or are you the only one responsible for your homework?

Felicita: Yes, I am. In fact, I always am on the Honour Roll because I am responsible, because, well, I have that aspiration to better myself, because my parents are giving us what their parents were not able to. They are giving us this opportunity and no one else... not just anyone has that opportunity; a lot of people have told me “Well, make the most of it; look at me, I want to study but I don’t have this opportunity, you have it; make the most of it”.

Q: Do you know someone who does not come to school?

Felicita: Yes, and who would long to come.

Q: And why do you think they can’t come?

Felicita: Well, because the... because of the lack of money, sometimes it’s because their mother or father has already passed away... and they can’t continue anymore; they have to be in charge of their younger siblings, they have to work...

In remote, less developed localities, being the youngest female sibling may bring more long-term implications; such as having to compromise their education in order to care for their parents for their rest of their lives, as can be observed from the following excerpt from a 15-year-old female dropout from a disadvantaged area. Jocelyn lives with both parents and an older sister in a town with high rates of national emigration. Three of her older siblings are working in the north of Mexico.

Q: So, how did it happen? One day... How did it happen when you left the school? I mean, you suddenly stopped going?

Jocelyn: Yes, I... I explained things to my mum, right? That I don’t want to go to... the school.

Q: And what did she say?

Jocelyn: That I should decide whether I was going or not.

Q: You just didn’t want to go to school anymore [...]. And what are your plans now, what are you going to do?

Jocelyn: Well, I sometimes would like to get a job like... in the bigger places like... there’s this [Supermarket] where I’d like to work if my mum gave me permission to go, but if I stay here looking after her, if

anything happens, at least I'm here [...] that is my... it's the promise to my mum, that's why she is not going to let me go anywhere else.

Q: What promise?

Jocelyn: That I will look after her because... I am the youngest of... My brother also says that I shall do.

Q: And to whom was that promise made? Tell me more about it.

Jocelyn: Well, that I am going to stay here to look after my mum.

Q: And did you accept it? Are you alright with it?

Jocelyn: Yes

Q: Well, if you have accepted it and you're alright with it... are you happy about it?

Jocelyn: Yes.

Q: Are you sure?

Jocelyn: Yes, I am sure... I like looking after her because she is my mother.

While some girls may choose to care for their parents, if they happen to be the youngest female, others have the option of starting a family at an early age; most lower secondary school girls who dropped out for marriage or pregnancy reasons, were in their 3rd year (approximately age 14). After this, it was almost impossible for them to return to school. Alex, an 'at risk' female student, previously mentioned, illustrated the experience of a former girl friend.

Q: So tell, me... and when you go to these *discos*¹², do you drink alcohol?

Alex: No.

Q: You don't drink alcohol?

Alex: I was given some one day... a chap gave it to me and he said "Do you wanna be my girlfriend?" No, I told him, "I mean, I don't know", he

¹² It is common for small communities or towns to organise disco nights with a DJ for young people to dance and drink in exchange of an entrance fee. These are normally referred as "discos". Activities preferred by students are discussed in more detail in the Individual Factors section.

wasn't even a student, you see and... he sent these guys who were at the bar to give me a six... a six-pack of [beer] "Alright" I said, [unintelligible] and we were there... "But we are going to drink, ha?" he said and everyone was drinking "I will drink, but just one" I said, I didn't even finish it and gave it to a boy who was there, I didn't like the taste [...] I'm not into alcohol. You see, we have this neighbour; she used to come to this school as well, she was about to finish school, she went to a disco and started drinking and kept on drinking and drinking until she got drunk. I was with her, I didn't realise she went somewhere else, I got... I started looking for her but couldn't find her so I went home. It turned out she had taken the boyfriend with her, I don't know where and it turned out that she got pregnant. My... I got scared! "I am not going to drink" I tell her [laughter] "what if these chaps do the same thing to me?" [laughter] I think I got scared that time and now, she's with a child!

Q: Oh, and did she continue studying?

Alex: She finished school here! But she was pregnant; no one knew she was pregnant! [lowers her voice] No one knew.

Adolescent pregnancy and marriage are factors that may derive from the lack of information and are sometimes seen as a means of escaping homes where domestic violence or conflict prevails. Furthermore it could be a symptom of the lack of employment in disadvantaged areas. With such limited opportunities, cultural practices act not only as a barrier against opportunities but also narrow available opportunities. The following depicts how marriage is viewed by girls as one of the ultimate goals in life. Marcela, a maths teacher of 37 years from a disadvantaged area gave her point of view on the youth marriage dynamics in her school's community and how this influence females' dropping out rates:

Q: And for example, the problems with boys who drop out, you say that gangs would be the key factor, wouldn't it?

Marcela: Um-hm.

Q: And what would the problem be for girls who leave?

Marcela: Well, I feel that here in the X community it is very common that girls marry at a very young age, yes, at 13 or 15 years of age they

feel they've been left behind, don't they? So, at the first opportunity... I'm now seeing it with those on their 1st year; they already have boyfriends, girlfriends. Thus, this is very common in the X community; they marry, and that's it and... last year... two years ago I had a student in 3rd year, she ran away with the boyfriend and before that, she said "But he already asked me to marry him, I need to take this chance" because the idea is that, if she doesn't take the chance that time, you've lost the opportunity to marry [bursts out laughing]. [...]

Q: And say, how many girls run away per month?

Marcela: No, no, it's not so...

Q: Not so frequent?

Marcela: No, not so... one student from Year 2 ran away [...] and this year it has happened for students in Year 3 [...]. Yesterday... last year another student was 'kidnapped', she held the record that girl was on her 2nd year.

Certainly, locality X is only one of many with similar practices. Federico, a male teacher of twelve years and who has been teaching at a *Telesecundaria* for three years in a different disadvantaged area, shared what he tells parents during meetings in the school with regards to youth marriages.

Federico: Eh... In one of the meeting with parents I told them "For the love of God" I told them parents: "I might be poking my nose in, and maybe it's none of my business, but don't let your daughters marry at that age, they're just children for heaven's sake".

Q: Um-hm.

Federico: You are destroying a life, you're letting them become mothers at... eleven, twelve... to me, that is a criminal act, I tell them "let them develop", alright? And it's people that will reproduce the same family patterns of their mothers... to make *totopo*, to be at their husbands' 'beck' and that's it, I mean, I told them "For the love of God, don't let their daughters..." at least my students, my students, "Let them have a university degree, I don't know, let them finish their upper secondary school, why do you let them marry at eleven, twelve...?" Students on

their 1st year come and tell me “Girl so and so is not going to come to school anymore” –“Why?” –“She’s been kidnapped, she’ll marry” –And I am “What...?” [...]: Here, girl students leave every year.

Q: About how many on average, say, per year, related to that reason?

Federico: Umm... Let’s say five or six girl students per year... But I’m talking about 12, 13 year olds.

The fates of boys are also influenced by gender expectations; contrary to girls, males are expected to be economic providers or be financially self-sufficient, either by pursuing higher school degrees or by emigrating for better job opportunities. Generally, regardless of school performance, males are more expected to pursue a career in order to ensure a patrimony for when they have a family. The following is what Laurencio, a 14-year-old high achiever from a *Telesecundaria* from a single parent advantaged household in an advantaged location said regarding to what his single mother expects from him in the future.

Q: What does your mum tell you about school, does she... motivate you? I mean, does she mention the importance of going to school or... you come to school because you have to... what do you think?

Laurencio: Definitely, when... well, she encourages me to go to school so that I can develop a career or... in order for me to have a stable job and be able to sustain a family in a decent way.

This also shows that boys are also expected to perform the role of carers as well, however, these expectations are economically-oriented; in advantaged localities, most parents would encourage their children to pursue a university degree whereas in disadvantaged localities boys are encouraged to find employment as soon as possible. Both types of expectations go towards the same goal: that male students can help their families financially in the future.

The following extract typifies how, in more disadvantaged areas, boys are expected to be economic providers for their parents when they are older, a fact related to the lack of a systematic governmental assistance for the elderly in the country. Nelson is a 14-year-old high achieving student who lives with his parents and his four siblings. His father has an administrative job and his mother is engaged in informal commerce.

Q: Do your parents tell you that you continue with your studies? Or do they tell you that you become, for example, an architect, a doctor? Do they tell you things like that?

Nelson: Yes.

Q: How do they tell you this? What do they tell you to be?

Nelson: Um... my mum tells me that I become a medical doctor.

Q: Um-hm.

Nelson: But I don't like it... um... they tell me that I try hard to become a professional so that when they are old, I can look after them, support them economically.

As the matter of fact, males and females face different fates; most expectations from boys point towards financial aspects, whereas females are more restricted to access waged work.

In less advantaged communities, children are forced to leave the school in order to work and contribute towards household incomes. Many times, however, this work is unpaid and is normally done within the house or for the family's informal business or farm. This coincides with data from UNESCO (2003) when describing parents as children's main employers: "The vast majority of working children – i.e. those helping to produce marketable output – in developing countries are engaged in agricultural work, typically on family-run farms [...]. Accordingly, the work participation rates of children tend to be higher in rural than in urban areas" (p. 121).

Children's emigration

Oaxaca faces problems with poverty that cause high rates of national emigration from small communities in disadvantaged areas, a phenomenon that affects mainly males in both types of area. According to the UNESCO (2003) households' surveys, boys generally drop out for economic reasons, either due to trouble affording school costs or needing employment.

Regarding international emigration, almost every participant interviewed had a relative who was, or had been abroad for work. It was observed that national emigration may be a fundamental practice by communities as a way of surviving. In all the disadvantaged localities where this study was carried out, masses of people

emigrate to the north of Mexico in the search of better job opportunities. Federico, a teacher from a poor locality, adds that emigration might be the only choice left, sacrificing students' participation in that locality:

Federico: One of these problems is the economic conditions of the community [...] For example, typical; there are kids... well, buses come on a regular basis to pick up children to take them to Monterrey, Nayarit, I don't know exactly where... but children in their 1st year... His [sic] father tells him "Quit school and go to work" and they go... it's the economic situation. [...] Fathers work as peasants, builders; and mothers make *totopo*... I mean, there are no financial resources and they almost force their children to work as a result of the same economic difficulties.

On one hand, it could be argued that emigration might not represent a problem but benefits the economy given that inequality of opportunities is the major reason for such practices. Moreover, the UNDP (2009a) agrees that this mobility may be beneficial in improving human conditions (labour, education, health, etc.) not only for those who emigrate but also for their families. However, emigration might become problematic when hundreds of students have to leave their communities in search of jobs, and so cutting short their studies.

5.7 Concluding remarks

As the literature indicated, the findings revealed that "family" plays a major role in children's educational performance. In the context of Mexico, the factors that are influential for children in lower secondary education can be grouped into four main aspects: 1) Parental socio-economic and educational background; 2) The lack of educational support; 3) Coming from a single-parent family; and 4) Coming from a high-conflict environment. Additionally, the influence of the household's geographical location was considered to be part of this section given its impact on students' school outcomes and life prospects.

There was a clear association between the socio-economic statuses of families and the localities in which they lived; parents from advantaged areas were more likely to have higher levels of education and work in more professional occupations. The relationship that Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1986); Finn (1993); and Rumberger (1987, 2004) found between family SES and home cultural capital also came out in this study; students from homes of a higher socio-economic position

were more likely to have additional study aids such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias and computers at home than students from less advantaged backgrounds. This represented a patent association between parental background and parental provision of cultural capital for their children. However, this association did not necessarily indicate that all less advantaged parents in the study failed to appreciate the importance of such extra resources as some of these parents tried to make sure that their children accessed such resources by encouraging them to go to libraries or to borrow them from elsewhere, from example, from relatives or neighbours, or in the form of a computer course. It is worth mentioning that although almost all students from advantaged homes had direct access to different modes of cultural capital, not all of them were doing well in school, confirming Li's (2007) argument that having educational and other resources at home does not necessarily make a difference, rather it was more important how such resources were used. If students with these resources at home did not perform well, and others who lacked basic resources, such as a dictionary, were able to obtain high marks, the strong influence of class that Gillborn and Mirza (2000) highlighted could not be generalised in the context of Mexico. One explanation for this lies in the fact that, as students and parents reported, education, though compulsory up to lower secondary school, is not accessible to everybody and therefore, rather than being taken for granted, it symbolises gaining access to a privilege. "Not accessible" in this case meaning that the costs involved for uniforms, school materials, lunches, etc, may hinder parents affording this privilege for their children.

Although the findings revealed that most parents with higher levels of education valued education as being important, it was also revealed that most parents with little or no levels of education, did not value education as important. The majority of high achievers' parents claimed to do so, regardless of background, and were willing to make all necessary financial sacrifices for their children to go to school and have better opportunities in life than they had, as opposed to parents of low achievers or dropouts, who thought that securing employment for their children was more important. Furthermore, for parents who valued education as important, the notion that their children could one day drop out of lower secondary school was not an option, while for parents of low achievers or dropouts, despite some claiming to value education, they were more inclined to accept that their children could stop attending school with a degree of resignation or, as some expressed, forced upon by their precarious economic conditions. What is more, dropouts who were once low

achievers were able to make their decisions as to whether to remain in school or to leave; the process was completed if the parents “accepted” that decision. These parents and children were also more likely to have the idea that attending school and attaining low marks or having behavioural problems at the same time represented a waste of money, again, given the costs of sending children to school. The *Oportunidades* scholarship, with its monetary assistance to poor households, does play an important role to keep children in school.

Given that there is no single cause to explain school performance, neither parental economic or cultural provision can solely account for it; the geographical factors, including cultural values and job opportunities also appear to influence both children’s and parents’ decisions for children staying in school or leaving. In localities where national and international emigration was the norm, people saw this practice as “the most logical thing to do”. Buses routinely transport people to the north of the country to work in factories or, in girls’ cases, for domestic work. These buses represent, for a lot of people, a “good opportunity” or even, the only opportunity they are left with. When families live in extreme poverty and in localities lacking employment, going to school may represent a luxury, whilst securing money for essential living expenses may represent a necessity. The advantages that education embodies, as seen by people, are therefore another important determinant for decisions that parents and students make with regards to lower secondary school attendance.

The second family aspect that proved influential and which is very much linked to parental background and cultural capital in the home was the lack of educational support. The help that parents or older siblings can provide to students regarding homework seems to be of great benefit given the weight that homework has on final marks in lower secondary schools in Mexico (Sandoval, 2002). The findings disclosed that homework, rather than being just “schoolwork brought home” (Corno, 1996:27), represents a barrier to students’ educational attainments. Since homework is marked, if students: a) failed to understand the subject well in school; and b) do not count upon a person at home to assist them nor with study aids at home, the likelihood that a student will not comply with homework increases greatly. This brings, as a consequence, deterioration in marks, exam failure and the likelihood of grade repetition and dropping out. On the other hand, if students were not fully prepared in school, or did not understand the subjects well, but counted on a person at home who could help, the balance between success and failure could be narrowed

to a greater extent. However, a new question arises as to what extent this balance could be restored by parents like the 22 percent (17) of parents who did not finish primary school? Nevertheless, not only knowledgeable people are of great help; as it has been pointed out, some parents who did not finish their primary education encouraged their children to be resourceful and their children were capable of high achievement. This finding certainly has important implications for the redefinition of the roles homework and examinations play within the lower secondary educational programs in Mexico. Though the goal of making basic education compulsory is being achieved, educational legislation, as well as the objectives of the educational programs continue requiring homework and examinations to be marked in order to measure students' abilities (IEEPO, 2009). This means that it is not only the schools who can be held accountable for students' academic achievements, but also parents, who need to play their part in counteracting any potential gaps of knowledge that their children may experience.

In addition, another unanticipated finding refers to the misconception about how academic support is given to children at home. It was interesting to discover that what some parents consider as "helping" with homework might not necessarily signify that for students; some parents believed that by asking or ordering the child to complete their homework they fulfilled their parental obligations regarding their children's schooling. As previously mentioned, others wanted to help but were unable to, given their limited educational background, and others did not get involved with schoolwork at all, with the latter instance possibly being a result of having to work longer hours to help supplement their household financial requirements, as some authors (Rumberger, 1983, Ekstrom 1986, Hampden-Thompson et al. 2008) have speculated. Nevertheless, it has been discussed that some parents found ways to provide their children with the educational materials needed or encouraged them to find them elsewhere despite their low educational attainments. This indicated differing types of disposition that parents may have when offering help, or comprehension of how to help, irrespective of their educational or occupational backgrounds. What is more, important differences were found regarding students' or dropouts' attitudes to homework. Homework, for high achievers, was a priority, whereas for less successful students it represented a secondary activity, irrespective of gender. This finding corroborates the ideas of Ekstrom (1986); Finn (1993); and Rumberger (1987) who suggested that more successful students receive more parental monitoring for school and after-school

activities. It can therefore be assumed that a strong relationship exists between the level of parental monitoring and students' attitudes towards schoolwork. One important implication of this aspect is the need to promote parental and teachers' awareness that when students do not comply adequately with school responsibilities, it may well be a consequence of a lack of knowledge, lack of parental supervision, or both. Furthermore, the major demand from teachers was the need to call upon parents to get involved with their children's schooling, which accords with the positive association between the level of parental involvement with the school and students' performance suggested by (Epstein, 1995, 1997).

The third and fourth family elements found as influential are interconnected and refer to family composition and family relationships respectively. On one hand, the majority of low achievers and dropouts from the study came from single-parent homes, corroborating, to an extent, the association between low achievement and single-parent and step families suggested by Ekstrom (1986) and Rumberger (2001, 2004). On the other hand, one unanticipated finding was that the quality of family relationships, rather than mere family structure, proved to be crucial to children's performance in school. One reason why previous research has associated school failure to family structure is related to socio-economic status; it may be more likely that students from a two-parent home benefit from more access to books and other study materials at home, as in Hampden-Thompson's (2009) study of reading literacy and family structure. However, parting from the fact that socio-economic status does not limit students from performing well, the findings of this study confirm the ideas of Bradshaw, Keung, Goswami and Rees (2008), who suggested an important connection between students' educational outcomes and the stability of their home environment. Moreover, as these authors indicated, the "crisis period" of a parental separation may happen before, during or after parents factually separate, what can affect children's outcomes in school, an effect that may diminish with the passage of time. As a matter of fact, high achievers of the present study generally described having good communication with their family members, regardless of family structure while the majority of 'at risk' students and dropouts described experiencing domestic violence or going through a disturbing parental separation. Such distressing situations at home seemed to affect girls and boys differently; the former seemed to experience more distraction during classes and the latter showed a tendency to manifest more disruptive behaviours both in the school and outside the school. It can therefore be assumed that the "it's in my head all day" 'effect' that low

achievers and dropouts of this study experienced and which affected both their marks and behaviour negatively, was indeed a direct consequence of high-conflict environments at home.

Another unanticipated finding related to family dynamics is associated to religious practices. Initially, it turned out remarkable that the majority of high achievers professed a religion other than Catholicism, which is the main religion in Mexico (92 percent of people in the country profess it according to the last Census in the country (INEGI, 2009c). If data is looked at by families, out of 17 families with high achievers interviewed, 50 percent professed one of the “other religions” as they are called in Mexico, irrespective of gender and area, as opposed to 21 and 35 percent of ‘at risk’ students and dropouts respectively. Moreover, teachers and social workers acknowledged that generally these children not only have outstanding achievements but they are also very well behaved. There are two possible explanations for the positive relationship between religion and constructive school outcomes; firstly, that students of “other religions” reported (as well as teachers) to have a limited or no participation at all in social activities in the school such as festivals, parties, and sometimes even in sports, due to their religious beliefs. It is therefore probable that such times are likely spent doing academic work, reading or, like some students reported, making progress with homework in the school. Although at first glance these tendencies could seem as social withdrawal or self-discrimination from getting involved with other students, it may be very likely that, academically, it represents benefits for them. Despite religious activities taking great part of students’ afternoons (some reported attending services every day for two hours), this did not seem to affect their capability to accomplish their school responsibilities. The second explanation relates to religion as a way of improving or adding to home stability; three fathers of high achievers reported that “the religion” (non-Catholic) helped them overcome their alcohol addiction and a few students reported that religion helped them get out of anti-social behaviour and drugs. It is possible then to hypothesise that because religion seems to improve relations amongst family members, and because a stable home environment promotes children’s school performance, a strong connection between religion and academic success can be established. One important implication of the findings regarding the home ‘atmosphere’ is to raise teachers’ awareness of the role the home dynamics play in students’ academic attainments and behaviour. Ideally, programs should be

implemented in schools to detect when students are going through difficult situations in order to give them the appropriate academic and psychological support.

The family factors found as being influential represent a breakthrough for the Mexican context and for academic achievement related research; firstly, there is substantial evidence that disadvantaged children are capable of high achievement, as well as children from single-parent families, however, one of the strongest determinants for this happening is the functionality and cohesion of their home environment. Furthermore, geographical location plays a key influence on the lives of students, especially an area's socio-economic conditions. This determines the availability of educational resources, such as public libraries and Internet cafes, for homework completion, as well as employment opportunities. In the poorest localities, where public services were less or even not available at all, parents and students were left with almost no choice but to emigrate for employment opportunities. Additionally, local cultural practices determined the incidences of early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and traditions based on gender stereotypes, which mostly biased against girls, given that once married or with children, girls are not permitted in the schools. Whether married or single, once a girl drops out, her future seems to be reduced to becoming a carer.

Thus, family factors represent a system of interwoven elements; although coming from a socio-economically advantaged home, and having access to the various forms of cultural capital proved to boost school attainment, the findings of this study suggest that the lack of these elements can be overcome through parental encouragement and by being resourceful. While effective academic support and encouragement at home, as well as a stable home environment, seem to be the family factors that account the greatest for students' educational outcomes, further work is still required to establish this.

6 School factors

The aim of this chapter is to describe the factors which were found to affect students' participation. Forty-six codes were created from the interview transcriptions and were subsequently grouped into seven main sections. The first section of this chapter describes the aspects related to school infrastructure and the way it exerts influences on students' educational performance. The second section provides general characteristics of teachers who participated in the study (qualifications, seniority, etc.). The third section presents the teaching practices identified by students and parents as being unhelpful. The fourth section describes the teaching practices that garnered praise. The fifth section gives an account of students' school experiences; the extent to which their socialisations with teachers and peers affects their performance in school. The sixth part refers to school policies and the way they influence students' dropping out of school. The seventh section describes the level to which the anti-poverty program *Oportunidades* promotes school participation. The last section constitutes both a summary and analysis of the school-related elements identified as being influential to academic outcomes.

6.1 Preamble: timetables and school characteristics

The school represents the other home of the students given that it is the place where they spend a long number of hours. Therefore, school is the second important place that exerts an influence on students' development (Durán-Narucki, 2008). Schedules in *Secundarias* in Mexico range between six to seven hours of classes per day. Table 25 illustrates regular timetables for the three most common types of lower secondary schools (See also Appendix 3 for schedules of schools studied).

Table 25. Schedules by type of lower secondary schools.

General	Technical	Telesecundaria
7.00 to 13.10 hours (morning schedule)	7.00 am a 14.00 hours (morning schedule)	8.00 to 14.00 hours
13.20 to 19.30 (evening schedule)	13.10 a 20.10 hours (evening schedule)	Average: 6 hours per schedule
Average: 6 hours per schedule	Average: 7 hours per schedule	

Note: The school calendar for the academic year 2009-2010 ran from the 24th of August 2009 to the 9th of July 2010. There are two vacation periods, the Christmas and Easter break consisting of 16 and 15 days respectively.

It is relevant to this chapter to mention that the schools operate a cooperative with parents normally called *cooperativa* that is an organised business, managed by students and supervised by teachers and which provides catering services. Though it is part of the school, parents get involved in the operations of the business. Usually, the profits that the cooperative obtains contribute towards school maintenance.

6.2 School infrastructure

The school infrastructure, including having sufficient classrooms, equipment, desks or cabinets apparatus, and textbooks are believed to be factors that have a positive effect in students' performance. Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda (1987) conducted a study in 51 schools in Botswana, from which results showed that students from schools with adequate classrooms, furniture and sufficient availability of books, did better in their overall scholarly performance, than students from schools with insufficient school equipment. Furthermore, Uline, Tschannen-Moran and Wolsey (2009) discuss the significant influence of schools cleanliness and maintenance on students' education.

School infrastructure in Mexico is normally less homogeneous than in developed countries; to date, urban schools are more likely to be better provisioned with facilities and services than those in less advantaged localities. The condition of schools' infrastructure is considered by the National Institute for Educational Assessment and Evaluation (INEE, Spanish acronym) when evaluating education quality. The two main reasons for INEE for doing so are because, firstly, it helps to estimate the effects of such conditions on academic achievement, and secondly, because it helps assessing the quality of the current educational offer and supplies (INEE, 2006b). For the conduction of this evaluation, INEE takes into account the availability of three physical spaces in schools: computer rooms, libraries and multiple-Laboratories (for the areas of Physics, Chemistry or Biology). The latest INEE results for 2006(a) showed that, on a scale from 0 to 100, privately funded schools showed the highest average score (84.25) in such evaluation. While these types of schools are not included in the study, nonetheless they can illustrate that schools with sufficient resources are able to provide with sufficient facilities. General and Technical schools get a similar average of 72.3 and 79.27 respectively, and *Telesecundarias*, one of 24.82. Table 26 shows the disaggregated percentages for these physical spaces by the type of secondary school.

Table 26. Percentage of lower secondary schools (by type) that have a Computer Room, Library and Physics/Chemistry/Biology Laboratory.

Type of school	Computer Room (%)	Library (%)	Multi-laboratory (%)
General	*79	*77	*82
Technical	83	84	90
Telesecundaria	39	36	28
National	60	57	55

Source: INEE (2006b)

Notes: Figures were rounded and those with an asterisk (*) have a standard error greater to 3 percent.

The data above indicates that, on average, 80 percent of General schools count on the aforementioned physical spaces. Similarly, but more favourably, approximately 80 percent of Technical schools have a computer room and a library, and 90 percent of this type of school, have a multi-laboratory. Finally, it can be observed that less than 40 percent of *Telesecundarias* have computer rooms, computer rooms and libraries, and that less than 30 percent of these schools, count on multi-laboratories. Although it seemed predictable that Technical schools, whose curriculum puts greater emphasis on technical abilities, had better scores in terms of infrastructure, *Telesecundarias* had limited facilities that may constitute the essential architectural design of a school in present times.

Public resources for basic education

Historically, investment in education in Mexico is composed of contributions from the State (Federation, 80 percent; administrative divisions, 19 percent; and municipalities, 1 percent) (80, 19 and 1 percent from the federation, administrative divisions, and municipalities, respectively), plus the investment that comes privately or from society. It is important to point out that in recent years families have contributed about a fifth of the national expenditure on education (INEE, 2008a). The national expenditure on education is, on the whole, expressed as part of the Gross National Product (GNP). As for educational levels, the Federal expenditures on education is distributed as follows: 60 percent for basic education, 10 percent to upper secondary education, 20 percent to higher education, and the rest is designated to other educational services such as teacher training, primary and lower secondary education for adults, and cultural and sports development (INEE, 2008a).

According to the INEE (2004a), Mexico spends 20 percent of its GNP per capita per student whereas OECD countries spend in average, 26 percent. By 2007, the public educational expenditure per student, as part of the per capita GNP was 12.89, 11.70 and 17.99 for pre-school, primary and lower secondary education respectively (INEE, 2008a). Also, expenditure by educational level shows that Mexico spends less money per student than the OECD average; 15 versus 17 percent of its per capita GNP for pre-school; 15 versus 20 for Primary; and 15 versus 23 for lower secondary INEE (2004a). Nevertheless, Mexico's expenditure in upper secondary and higher education is actually higher than the OECD average; 34 versus 28; and 39 versus 34 percent respectively (INEE, 2004a). Thus, it can be assumed that basic education needs greater projection in order to provide better educational services.

6.2.1 Poor infrastructure in schools

In relation to school facilities, the general view from students, teachers and parents was that they were in "bad condition" and that the school facilities were not enough. General concerns were pointed towards the lack of facilities, especially the lack of classrooms and laboratories. The second main concern was the condition of toilets. This information is summarised in table 27.

Table 27. School facilities reported as in lacking, bad condition and lack of maintenance.

Lacking	Bad condition	Lack of maintenance
Classrooms	Toilets (no paper, no water)	Toilets
Laboratories	Classrooms	Computers
Chairs	Laboratories	Painting
Libraries	Lack of equipment, tools and material in laboratories	Telephone bills
Books	School building	
Computer room	Television remote control	
Computers		
Access to the Internet		
Teachers for the workshop modules		
Sports pitches/Space for Physical Education		
Nurse's office		
Space for counseling		
Cafeteria		

6.2.2 Lack of classrooms

Most students said that their schools did not have enough classrooms, meaning that they had to improvise by taking some classes outdoors or in the cafeteria. Sometimes they would have to check if a teacher was absent to make use of the classroom. Larissa, a female high achiever from a disadvantaged area summarises these views on the following quotation:

Q: What do you think of this school, do you think it has all necessary facilities to the standard of a Lower Secondary School or...?

Larissa: No, it lacks of a lot of facilities because, in our case, as I am telling you, for our English module, there's only one teacher who teaches my group and we are the sort of people [sic] that when [the teacher] arrives, we have to start looking for a free classroom because... we either end up without a classroom and we go to the cafeteria... anywhere, really, but we don't have a classroom for... well, not even for our technology workshop; we have to check whether one of the teachers did not show up; that their classroom is free...

[...]

Q: You don't have a fixed classroom all day?

Larissa: No, no, some schools are like that, they have fixed classrooms, no, here, teachers have their own classroom, we are the ones who must move for each class, that's the way it is, but those two teachers [...] don't have classrooms... and it has been requested because we have council meetings, well, student council meetings and we have requested to have more classrooms, they tell you "yes, yes", they only tell you "yes" and at the end of the day they never build them.

The lack of classrooms was a typical complaint and also the fact that classrooms were used for various purposes. For example, computer rooms were sometimes used as seminar rooms, or vice versa. The second most common complaint in relation to the lack of classrooms was related to spaces for workshops that were part of the compulsory school curriculum. Oliver, a high achiever and a student 'at risk' from a disadvantaged area, shared what they were going through regarding this matter:

Q: What do you think about your school? Do you have everything you need regarding the facilities and all that? Or are there things needed? What do you think?

Oliver: Umm... yes.

Q: Yes... what?

Oliver: We need things.

Q: Like what sort of things?

Oliver: Like with the classroom for the electricity Workshop; we don't have one. We are basically based outside. There is... If you would like to check it out later on, we have two hours of it, the last hours, oh, but we're going to finish at 12 p.m. today [...] I was glad to hear that. Yes, we're leaving... but yes, we're always there on the stone picnic tables over there.

It is worth mentioning that in some schools, generally new schools (i.e., of five or six years), it was reported that new classrooms were being built. It was also reported that parents' committees in the schools were involved in such developments.

Other educational spaces needed

Apart from classrooms, other spaces, such as libraries, computer classrooms, laboratories and cafeterias, were mentioned as spaces needed in the schools. This meant that students not only lacked spaces to learn, but they also lacked spaces where they could access learning materials to reinforce their learning process. As for cafeterias, most schools from disadvantaged localities did not have a space where students could buy food or drinks or to eat within the school.

6.2.3 Lack of equipment or material

That schools provide sufficient furniture and reading materials has proved to improve students' performance (see for example, Mwamwendam, 1987). The lack of equipment, on the other hand, seems to represent a limitation for the teaching-learning process. Equipment reported as missing in the schools included chairs, desks, books for libraries, computers and material for multi-laboratory classes. Students emphasised the lack of chairs, which meant they had to borrow chairs from the cafeterias. Other times, as students reported, the technological workshop

teachers¹³ ('shop teachers') would help by fixing equipment such as chairs and school desks. This coincides with Sandoval's (2002) ethnographic work with general lower secondary schools in Mexico City, where she describes how 'shop teachers' play an important role in giving maintenance to school furniture, normally at the request of the heads of schools. Felicia, a high achiever from a disadvantaged area summarises such situations as follows:

Q: Do you think that your school has all the necessary facilities or are there things needed?

Felicia: We are now lacking of... the chairs situation; there are times when there are no chairs left. We used to be fewer students but the number of students is increasing and therefore chairs are not enough anymore. In fact, we went... the Student Council asked the President of the Municipality for help, that's when the bigger classrooms were divided into two, in order to 'fit' more classrooms.

Q: Oh right, but then, are there students that stay standing or how do they manage with the chairs situation?

Felicia: Well, they go to the food stalls, they ask to borrow chairs, or when chairs get damaged, they send them to the mechanic shop... electricity shop to get them fixed. And that's what they do.

Also, students are expected to bring their own materials for the technological workshops. The provision of materials in school was a major concern, especially for students. Moreover, there were cases reported in which students were not allowed in class if they failed to bring the requested materials. Although this topic will be explored more in-depth in the School Policies section, it will be mentioned here briefly given its relevance to the current section. Rodolfo, a student 'at-risk' from a General school in a disadvantaged area puts forward an example of how students had to improvise, together with their classmates and teachers, in order to be able to take their technological workshop.

Q: Do you think that the school provides you with everything that you need? Do you count on all the conditions... classrooms, everything that you need or do you think you need things?

¹³ Workshops can be for type-writing, sewing, electronics and metalwork.

Rodolfo: Well, I believe that things are needed, for example, like me; I take the Electricity Shop class. We don't have a classroom; we don't have all the necessary resources.

Q: And where do you take that class then?

Rodolfo: Well, a classroom are [sic] being built, they say, and we are using a classroom of students in their 3rd year.

Q: Aha, and do you lack things for you to do your practices?

Rodolfo: Sure, tools, there's nothing.

Q: So what do you do in there then?

Rodolfo: Well, the teacher just asks us for materials that we'll use and then we just bring our own screwdrivers and stuff; ours

These views are without doubt, evidence that demonstrates the lack of equipment or material available in schools. This is another aspect that coincided with Sandoval's (2002) findings about the constant worry from technological workshop teachers about the lack of material and deterioration of the facilities, a characteristic prevailing even in schools with the best conditions.

Materials might be expensive

As mentioned earlier, these situations are more prevalent in schools from disadvantaged localities. In such areas, households are also more likely to go through economic difficulties, what exerts an impact on students' capability of accomplishing with bringing the materials and tools needed to be allowed in class. Ignacio, a student 'at risk' illustrates two aspects: firstly, the fact that students with lower marks or those who dropped out, were less able to identify whether their schools lacked facilities; and secondly, the impact of the costs that materials needed for their workshop classes have on their marks:

Q: How do you see this school, like it has everything you need, or does it need things?

Ignacio: The school is very cool.

Q: Is it very cool?

Ignacio: It's nice, it has everything; it doesn't need anything.

Q: Nothing at all?

Ignacio: It doesn't need anything, according to me, it doesn't need anything. Well, yes, in the electricity... in the 'shop' classes only. In [the technical drawing 'shop']; there, you're on your own. You... each one has to buy their own materials so you can make your sketches. [...] I mean, to me, the school should have the materials. To tell you the truth, what you buy for the Drawing Shop... To me, the Government should give us that; we shouldn't be buying all that [...], a drawing block costs 70 pesos [£3.50], you buy it all the time and then, if your T-square ruler breaks, that's 80 pesos [£4.00]; 80 plus 70... Then the set square, then the compass, then the HB pencil, then the masking tape, all of the things they ask for. In Electricity: wire, magneto, copper, the needle-nose pliers, screwdriver, coil, all of the things that we need to buy; they are all expenses.

Although the situations where students fail to bring their material due to economic problems happens in both advantaged and disadvantaged areas, they prevail mostly in schools from disadvantaged localities. Eva, a social worker from a General school at an advantaged area, points out that despite the odd case of students failing to bring their material, students from her school normally comply with all of the requirements.

Q: Now that you have mentioned the school materials, when material and things like that need to be bought for their class activities, or their Technological activities, for anything, eh... are students asked to bring their own materials or does the school provide them with the materials?

Eva: No, students bring their own material.

Q: And has there been a case in which a student is not able to bring their material because of an economic matter?

Eva: Yes, um... say, one?

Q: Aha...

Eva: One of... just to say something, for their technological 'shop'; there's one student that... due to economic struggles at times, they can't afford to buy some... ummm... material that the teacher requested. But

he eventually complies with the requirements, because students in this school comply with the requirements.

6.2.4 Resources not used and lack of maintenance

It is a fact that the Secretariat of Public Education in Mexico (SEP) has set out objectives to improve the quality of education. To achieve this, programs such as '*Programa Escuelas de Calidad*' (Quality Schools Program), '*Programa Nacional de Lectura*' (National Literacy Program), '*Bibliotecas de Aula*' (Classroom Libraries), etc., have been implemented. The main aims of these programs are to improve the quality of schools and teaching through the implementation of technological and communication resources (multimedia technology and Internet), as well as to provide general support for all modules taught in basic education. As a result, reinforcing long-distance educational services, in order to reach schools in remote localities has been a priority (SEP, 2007).

Another aspect that the SEP has focused on, to improve the quality of schools, is on producing and distributing new multi-format educational material, along with the enrichment of the Educational television network in Mexico (Edusat) (SEP, 2007). Therefore, some schools have acquired sophisticated equipment such as televisions and computers, and replaced chalk boards with electronic boards.

Equipment not used

The majority of participants showed concern not only about the lack of resources or the poor condition of existing resources, but about the lack of use of such resources. Participants, especially teachers, reported counting on having sophisticated equipment in the schools; however, due to poor security in some localities, the equipments had either not been installed, or not used at all. Another reason reported why equipment was not used was because of the lack of knowledge on how to use it. The following example depicts a case in which students from a *Telesecundaria* were not using their communication equipment effectively. If in these types of schools, classes are transmitted via satellite, through television programs, what represents a clear sign that students were not meeting the learning objectives laid out by SEP. Laurencio, a 12 year-old high achiever from a *Telesecundaria* in an advantaged location, had his say on the use of equipment in his school:

Q: What do you think of the facilities of this school?, the classrooms, the library, all facilities, the toilets... how...? If you had to evaluate it in a critical way, what would you say?

Laurencio: Well, I'd say that the school is in a bad state [...] because there isn't like... enough space, and the facilities, well, we have them, but we don't use them, say, constantly...

Q: Like which ones, for example?

Laurencio: Umm... for example, the computers, we haven't used use them; the 'telly', well, the remote control isn't... there isn't one and therefore teachers can't swap channels.

Q: Which 'telly', the one in your classroom?

Laurencio: Aha.

Q: So are you guys watching the same thing or what's going on?

Laurencio: Well... we are not watching the 'telly' now; we are just... umm... just like... answering the questions [from the books]

Q: Oh, I see. But do you know if the remote control will be fixed?

Laurencio: Well, now... this has been the... it's been like this for a while, actually and the 'teach' keeps on saying that some of us should buy the remote control or that... someone needs to buy it and you see, no one does.

Lack of training to use equipment

The lack of knowledge on how to use equipment was a concern expressed by students, parents and teachers, without exception. Although it was true that schools from advantaged areas reported counting on more facilities, it was also true that the resources that they had were not fully utilised, a reality present in schools from both types of area. As INEE (2004b) reported, bigger schools tend to have more and better resources, whereas smaller schools usually are in less favourable conditions. Therefore, it can be assumed that the quality of school conditions are directly related to school sizes. In order to highlight the fact that this situation takes place in schools from both types of areas, this subsection, as well as the following one, will contain examples from both areas. The first example is of a parent from a female high

achiever from a well regarded Technical *Secundaria* in the City of Oaxaca. This example illustrates that, although the school's facilities are in good condition, full advantage is not always taken of what is available.

Q: What do you think about the facilities of this school where your daughter goes? Do you feel that it counts with all the infrastructure needed, say the library, all of the facilities, do you think they are OK or have you noticed or heard if things are needed?

Valeria: Everything is fine.

Q: Um-hm

Valeria: Everything is fine for my taste. Perhaps what the school needs are the personnel to instruct students and tell them "This is for this and you can use it like this and that" but if adults or the school personnel are not trained, it's obvious that they [students] will not care. The school has all type of services. It has everything.

This, and the subsequent example, summarises what the majority of participants agreed with; that although the equipment was available in the school, other needs meant that these resources were not being taken advantage of by all students. The most common reasons mentioned were related to the limited number of resources and for which they had to be shared by students. Some students from certain specialisation areas would also have priority to use them, as it was the case for students from Technical schools who opted for computing as their optional module. The second common reason was related to the lack of formal instruction on how to use such equipment, meaning that these resources were not used at all. The second example is of a female teacher of thirty seven years, from a Technical *Secundaria* in a disadvantaged area.

Q: How do you see the school's facilities? For example, the books, the computers, the school desks, even this nurse's office, does it have all it needs? Or what things would be missing?

Marcela: Well, we need more things. I think that here we need a school doctor, don't we? And starting with... in this laboratory [she laughs] and in social work, where my colleague is, I feel that we need a psychologist to help guide students. [...] In terms of material assets, here, the school

has a seminar room, the library is in bad condition; it does not count on suitable facilities due to the fact that the number of students increased, and the board members overlooked that aspect. They divided the library to add a classroom there and logically the library does not have furniture to go there and study.

Q: There are not enough tables?

Marcela: There isn't anything! Because all tables were moved to the new classroom and therefore, there are shortages. The furnishings... and because it's more than 25 years since this school was founded, well, the furnishing is already deteriorated in that respect. Now, I observe that there has been a disorganisation; I would say that all classrooms should at least have a television, don't they? so that... We are connected to the Edusat network [...] but it doesn't work. It does not work because no classroom has a television for the students to watch it.

It was common for participants to report that schools were undertaking construction work or extending their spaces, especially classrooms due to the increase in the number of students. This also accounts for the limitations that students and teachers faced regarding the use of resources. On one hand, improving the schools' building design (i.e., location of corridors, appropriate signage, ample meeting rooms and classrooms adaptable to teaching needs) has proved to influence students' achievement positively (Uline, Tschannen-Moran and Wolsey, 2009); yet on the other hand, sometimes schools have to sacrifice access to resources (for example, spaces in the libraries or seminar rooms) in order to accommodate more students in the schools.

Lack of maintenance of equipment

Related to the previous section, is the maintenance of school equipment. Most participants mentioned that there was equipment or furniture that needed to be repaired, from chairs, desks, appliances to offices and gardens. According to the majority of teachers, resources for maintenance must be searched for by the school and parents. Parents, through school cooperatives manage to obtain funds themselves via different fundraising activities. The quotation below will focus on an inclusive quotation from a social worker and teacher of Civics and Ethics from a Technical

School from the City of Oaxaca. The quotation also summarises most aspects reported regarding the lack of maintenance of equipment and facilities from schools of both areas.

Q: And what do you think of the facilities of this school?

Pilar: We lack a lot of things, a lot. We had a very good period here, a very good one, but technology advanced, right? [...] but there is always an activity or a situation that makes us feel that we don't have this, that we don't have that. Suddenly one day, all classrooms were provisioned with a television and a video recorder; the beta format disappeared, so, we only had VHS... Umm... how many videos actually work to date and how many televisions? And did we give them a good use? And before, we even had cabinets in each classroom where we had the EDUSAT material (education via satellite); the antenna and the programs were installed and that was it. Like a 'flash in the pan' and none of it was taken advantage of. Not properly. What's happening now? [...] the seminar room is working but not properly; there is equipment that is out of date. Umm... there's too much material lacking in this school [...] the famous projector, well, it's been years since I've been fighting for some speakers, to have a proper sound in the seminar room. We have a television and a video recorder whose sound is lost; they're badly located and well. And then, the overhead projectors; each one of us were given one and screens were fixed in all classrooms, but how many teachers use them? [...] I remember parents used to be more supportive, they'd organise the money collection, but suddenly parents' committees did not want to give us any more support so all of this has created situations such as "there's no paper" or "there are no markers", this and that, or "the toner is finished", "the machines are infected", and "there's no one who can come and fix them" that "it costs money" [...].

It is relevant to mention that participants from all schools referred to the outdoor spaces as being neglected and inappropriate for students' interaction. Even the General school in the City of Oaxaca, which could be classified as one of the best equipped and safe schools, was considered as needing improvement to the building fabric and an adequate space for sports. This subsection, however, illustrates such

scarcities in disadvantaged localities, because the amounts of their requirements are notably greater. What Federico, a teacher of 12 years from a *Telesecundaria*, adds to this section is the extent to which the lack of maintenance to the spaces impacts on students' learning.

It is not only about offering the student the teaching but to tell them that education also includes urban development, the visual health that we could have; that our school could look pretty, but we see it all bushy, all scratched, I mean, it's depressing. I also believe that it's not this school only but the majority, hu? [...] so, to me, the environment... or a Head of the School's office like the one we have. Honestly, if you saw it, that's not a Head's office [...] I've even said, as a joke, "we just need to close it here [shapes a square with his hands] and put a pig, for heaven's sake!" [...] The famous multimedia equipment was installed. There it is. They send us computers that are indeed very hard to get but there isn't a process of maintenance, there isn't a follow up, there's nothing. It's just "I give you this" and if it breaks down, may God help you. That's the SEP like.

As mentioned in the previous section, whether the school is in an advantaged or disadvantaged area matters because that determines the quantity and frequency of provision of resources. Furthermore, INEE (2006b) highlights the fact that teachers from public urban schools count on more teaching support, compared to those in rural and indigenous schools. But it also stresses that the support that teachers can get from the schools affects their performance directly, as well as their own conditions of work satisfaction. Finally, it acknowledges that maintenance and preservation of school infrastructure represents an important action to secure the availability of secure and comfortable spaces to facilitate the teaching-learning process.

Toilets are normally dirty: "they're scary"

To close this section, an aspect of schools that was mentioned by all participants was that sanitary facilities were reported as being in bad condition. Students, however, were the most concerned because they were the most affected. The general problem in schools, from both advantaged and disadvantaged areas is that there is scarcity of running water, and the water to fill cisterns having to be bought privately. For schools, this represents an extra financial burden that their capital assets might not be

able to afford. But, as it has been presented, these expenses, and the cost of electricity, telephone bills, as well as stationery, need to be funded mostly by students' parents via the parents' committee. The extent of such contributions is indirectly proportional to the level of urbanisation of the locality: the less urban the more contributions parents were required to make.

The general observation regarding toilets was the lack of running water and therefore, the lack of hygiene. In most schools there are toilets for teachers and administrative staff and toilets for students and other members of staff (i.e. janitors). Due to the larger number of users, students' toilets are in the poorest conditions. In addition to the lack of water, toilets were also reported as being in poor physical repair: some with cisterns missing and so not in use. Finally, almost no school provides sanitary paper. From phrases such as "in very bad condition", "they are very dirty", "they rarely clean them", "they don't clean them", "they don't give them maintenance at all", "I never go [...] I hold it" participants described the conditions of toilets, Pilar, the social worker of twenty nine years from an advantaged area, adds on this respect:

And so, the area where the students' toilets are does not have water at the moment. It is a constant expense to pay tank trucks to fill the cistern, and if there is no money, simply, there's no water, isn't there? And the water finishes very quickly! [...] Yes, they try to sweep them, to pick up the paper that's left on the floor, to wash them a bit but it doesn't last long as there is no water to flush it. I mean, they can appear to be clean but what the children discard does not run away and that gives a bad, very bad aspect, doesn't it? And it's terrible because we have had cases in which dads, mums complain and have even said that children don't want to come to school because they can't do toilet in school. Mind the classic aspect they have: the doors and walls all covered with graffiti and well...
[...]

Jocelyn, the 15 year-old 'dropout' who left school in order to look after her mum due to the promise of her being the youngest female, initially mentioned toilets as the reason for her not wanting to come to school anymore:

Q: Was there something in school that you didn't like?

Jocelyin: Oh! The toilets, they don't clean them every day, they stink and I don't like it and that's why I told my mum that I don't like going to school. Because the toilets are dirty and the male's toilets, the smell... they stink and the girls' toilets as well, no one cleans them.

Finally, another reason mainly given by parents and teachers themselves for the school facilities to be in poor conditions was the school staff's constant involvement in political activities to the point of putting the preservation of facilities, aside. Reina, whom has been mentioned earlier, is a social worker of eighteen years in a disadvantaged locality and whose answer regarding the school facilities' conditions, summarises the political element commonly mentioned:

Q: And school facilities, do you think they are enough? Computers, books, school desks, what do you think?

Reina: Umm, there are two points. First, not only that it's not sufficient but on the other hand, the school infrastructure is good but there isn't a constant maintenance [...]. What the school needs is that the management staff assumes their role to supervising the facilities and the work done in the classrooms. And to ensure that the safeguarding of that infrastructure is maintained so that the service provided is better, instead of getting involved in other kind of rackets [laugh].

Generally, a large number of school facilities were reported as being in bad condition. Whether this was due to an absence of resources, lack of a maintenance-oriented culture, political reasons, or a combination of them, it was nevertheless the norm in all the schools of the study. Most participants' views make it evident that students do not get everything they need for their learning process, nor do they take full advantage of what is available in the school, and that what is available to schools tends to deteriorate due to poor maintenance. This pattern was visible in the majority of schools, regardless of their location. With regards to toilets and sanitary facilities, students not only avoided using them, a fact that may affect their physical well-being, but also the unhygienic condition of toilets affects students' attendance, representing clear evidence of the gravity of this situation. Such evidence has been put forward by Durán-Narucki (2008) when they stated that students' attendance can be influenced by the quality of the school's infrastructure. Branham (2004) studied

the effects of schools that need structural repair, use temporary structures, and have understaffed janitorial services and found that students are “more likely to miss days in those schools” (p. 280). Additionally, if students miss school, this leads to them missing lessons, and very likely, leading to further school disengagement if other barrier-factors are present in their lives at the same time. It can be concluded that as in Durán-Narucki (2008)’s findings, students who attend a school with low quality of maintenance, have a lower attendance and an inferior school performance.

6.3 Contextual background: teachers of the study

In order to provide a clearer picture of the teachers in lower secondary schools in Mexico, a general background on teachers’ characteristics will be provided. The numbers of years in the profession and their qualifications, as well as the level of training they receive are briefly described below.

6.3.1 Teachers and school sizes

A total of 23 members of staff were interviewed (see ‘The research design’ in chapter 4); 15 females and 8 males of which 12 were in-classroom teachers. It was noted that more female teachers participated in the advantaged locations (80 percent) than in the disadvantaged locations (54 percent). Based on a form that every school filled in, it was possible to know the number of teachers per school. Table 28 presents a summary of teachers per schools. This table shows that the schools in less developed areas tend to be smaller in sizes and therefore, the numbers of teachers are fewer. It is also observed that more female teachers seem to be concentrated in urban schools whereas more male teachers are congregated in schools of less affluent areas. This data can be matched with national data on basic education where it is pointed out that six out of ten teachers are females, mostly concentrated in urban areas (INEE, 2006b). Likewise, it is acknowledged that female teachers comprise the majority of teachers at this educational level.

Table 28. Number of teachers working in each participating school.

School	Total	M	F
AA			
General	31	11	20
Technical A	39	17	22
Technical B	71	33	38
Telesecundaria	6	2	4
Total	147	63	84
DA			
General	19	14	5
Technical A	33	15	18
Technical B	27	14	13
Technical C	11	7	4
Telesecundaria	10	8	2
Total	100	58	42

6.3.2 Teachers' qualifications

In order to practice teaching in Mexico, a certificate of the *Escuela Normal Superior* (Normal Superior School) or a pedagogical bachelor degree is necessary. Teaching qualifications have evolved as follows: a three year degree up to 1969; a four year degree up to 1984; a pedagogical bachelor degree from 1984 to the present. INEE (2006b) also reports that most basic education teachers within the Mexican Education System (including private and public schools) have the necessary qualifications to practice the teaching profession. From this majority, 32.6 percent of teachers have completed the *Escuela Normal Superior* and 60 percent have obtained a bachelor degree respectively (pedagogical or not).

6.3.3 Teachers' years of work experience

Similar to INEE's (2006b) report of urban schools having a higher concentration of older teachers, the majority of teachers from advantaged areas interviewed had more work experience than their counterparts in disadvantaged areas (see Table 29). This pattern was described by INEE (2006b) as a direct consequence of the education system's characteristics; to advance along the teaching career path ("*trayectoria laboral docente*"), teachers must earn points through time and political involvement. This structure of incentives must be followed for belonging to the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE), as mentioned in Chapter three. Teachers in this study

indeed reported that recent graduates are almost always initially located in remote communities but that, through their ‘system of points’, they are able to negotiate better opportunities, such as moving closer to urban areas.

Table 29. Years of experience of teachers interviewed.

Schools in AA	Total	M	F
Years in the profession (Average)	26	25	27
Yeas in school (Average)	17	17	16
Schools in DA			
Years in the profession (Average)	21	19	22
Yeas in school (Average)	12	11	12
Total	247	121	126

Consequently, public urban schools have a higher concentration of older teachers. As INEE (2006b) reported, 19 percent of basic education teachers had at least five years in the profession whereas the remaining 81 percent were equally integrated by two ranks: those teachers with 6 to 20 years of experience and those of 21 or more years of experience. Furthermore, teachers in advantaged areas count on more favourable conditions (INEE, 2006b).

6.3.4 Teacher training

When the National Agreement for the Modernisation of Basic Education (ANME) was put into operation in 1993, curricular changes were required and therefore new books and materials were generated for teachers; the aim was to introduce them to the new approach and to the use of the new didactic methods. Also, SEP created the National Program for the Permanent Updating of In-Service Teachers of Basic Education (PRONAP), whose function was “to facilitate awareness of the new plan of studies’ contents and approach, as well as to promote the use of the new methods, procedures and didactic resources, coherent with the educational aims of basic education” (Sandoval, 2002:101). Undoubtedly, at least on paper, professional training is offered to teachers by the Mexican education system. However, the question remains: are teachers delivering effectively?” The extent to which participants believe teachers are accomplishing their educational objectives is described further in this chapter.

6.3.5 Teachers' salaries

Last but not least, although this study did not explore teachers' salaries through the interviews, it is essential to point out that teachers' salaries in Mexico are very low, when compared to other OECD countries. The starting annual salary for teachers at the lower secondary education level (in US dollars purchasing power parities) is \$17,736. The salary after 15 years of experience is \$23,161, and their salary at top of scale is \$38,325 UNESCO-UIS (2008). Given that most teachers interviewed were in that range of 15 years of experience or more, their salary is significantly low; it represents almost half the salary of teachers in the US and in the Netherlands, or almost a fifth of that of teachers in Luxembourg. Finally, in Mexico it is widely known that demands of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) focus on better salaries and more training opportunities.

6.4 Teaching: the negative practices

One of the ways to address the level of proficiency of teachers was to explore the participants' perceptions regarding the levels of knowledge of teachers in the schools. This was done by asking whether they believed teachers were experts in their respective subject areas.

6.4.1 Students and parents' perceptions of teachers' knowledge

From those students who responded (13), it was interesting to note that the minority who agreed with teachers being experts in their areas, were high achievers (23 percent) whereas the majority who agreed with teachers being experts were students 'at risk' and dropouts (46 and 31 percent respectively). Table 30 presents a summary of the responses grouped into three categories: those who thought their teachers were experts in their subject (Yes), those who thought their teachers lacked of expertise (No) and those who thought that some were experts and some were not (Yes and No).

Table 30. Students' perceptions on teachers' knowledge.

Students	Yes N(%)	No N(%)	Yes and No N(%)
HA	3 (23%)	3 (60%)	4 (40%)
AR	6 (46%)	2 (40%)	4 (40%)
DO	4 (31%)	0 (0%)	2 (20%)
<i>Totals</i>	13 (100%)	5 (100%)	10 (100%)

High achievers were more inclined to judge their teachers' mastery more critically; the majority of them thought that their teachers lacked expertise. Also, they were more likely to have divided opinions; some believed a number of teachers mastered their modules more than others but also stressed that some teachers lacked the knowledge to deliver their classes. What was interesting was the fact that the majority of 'at risk' students and dropouts believed that their teachers were experts. The leniency that students, with less commitment to academic work, showed towards the 'evaluation' of their teachers may be evidence of their lack of understanding of what constitutes good teaching. What is more, it was noted that most students believe theirs or others' academic failure was due to their own fault. Three quotations will be presented below to illustrate the patterns in which students 'evaluated' their teachers; the first two are from high achievers from different schools' systems, and the last one is from a 'lenient' dropout. Abel, aged 15 from a General school in an advantaged area encapsulates the general view of high achievers:

Q: What do you think about your teachers? Are the majority of them experts in their subject area?

Abel: Um... I think some of them aren't... some of them are.

Q: And how do you know when they aren't?

Abel: I think they don't when... well... they don't... they can't answer to your questions often. Or for example, sometimes I think that the one who is not a great expert in her module is the Physics teacher, because she teaches History, Geography, Civics, and therefore Physics is a module that's doesn't really sit well with her; it's a social sciences' module.

Q: Um-hm

Abel: And well, it's confidential, isn't it?

Q: Yes, totally

Abel: I sort of feel that if I asked her something, umm, no, no; she wouldn't be able to give me a proper answer [...] I don't remember what I asked her the other day but no, she couldn't answer it. Or there are teachers that... I mean, yes, I mean, I think highly of them; the Maths teacher, no way, I've sometimes even wondered what he is doing here when he could be teaching in another school where he could get a better salary.

Not only schools where each module was taught by a different subject specialist had this problem reported; students from *Telesecundarias*, where all modules are taught by a single teacher, were more likely to report their teachers' lack of expertise. Lau, a 14 year-old male high achiever summarises these observations as follows:

Q: And what do you think about your teachers, well, your teacher, because there's one person in charge of each class isn't there?

Lau: Um-hm.

Q: Do you think she is an expert in the subject areas?

Lau: Well, I think she is in some of them.

Q: Um-hm.

Lau: Because... there are some where she makes mistakes, a lot of mistakes, but we correct her between all of us.

Q: You, the students?

Lau: Um-hm [smiles].

Q: You all correct her? Like in which subject or area for example?

Lau: Umm... Well, like, sometimes in Mathematics, she gives us incorrect results, or she solves the operations the wrong way and so we help her through.

Irene, a twelve year-old female dropout from a Technical school in a disadvantaged area and who had been out of school for over two months at the time of the interview, may be a good example to illustrate the possible leniency of less successful students to critic their teachers. First, she said her teachers were experts, yet further on in the interview when discussing favourite and less favourite modules she revealed something distinct:

Q: Did you feel your teachers knew their subjects well? Were they experts in their subject areas?

Irene: Yes.

[...]

Irene: I get very bored during Maths... because the teacher sometimes never [sic] explains how to solve the operations.

6.4.2 English as a second language: the ‘hardest’ module

Upon exploring teachers’ expertise, enlightening information was revealed by students – almost without them realising; the fact that most of them struggled with the English module as a second language. The pattern prevailed in advantaged and disadvantaged areas. The question of favourite module was included to find out the circumstances under which students learnt and enjoyed their classes. English and Maths were respectively the least popular modules, especially the former. What is more, students attributed their bad marks in that module to their own inability to learning rather than something to do with the teachers’ techniques. Another way in which the English module came up was when the question of languages spoken was asked, like in the case of Larissa, a 14 year-old high achiever from a disadvantaged area:

Q: What languages do you speak?

Larissa: The common one, Spanish and... because to tell you the truth, what my parents want now is that I learn English, but you know, I’m finding it very difficult because... I don’t think that module goes with me, because to tell you the truth I’m finding it very difficult, but I’m taking a course after school. That’s how I’m improving my English a bit more. So, for now, I just speak Spanish, the common one.

Q: Oh, I see. And why are you finding it difficult to learn English in school? For example, in your class, do you get bored or do you feel your teacher does not teach you well?

Larissa: It’s not that I get bored but... Umm... I don’t understand it [...], honestly, I have no idea why I don’t... I can’t perform well in that module.

In order to highlight the general concerns regarding the English module, a selection of brief quotations are presented to illustrate the situation with this module in all types of schools:

“The teacher delivers well all the subjects, except for English.” (Male, high achiever)

“She gives us the text; ‘translate it’ and she seats at her desk; she’s there reading, she doesn’t explain the words or their meanings to us” (Male, high achiever)

“I don’t know any English; with this I tell you it all!” (Male ‘at risk’)

“To be honest, I haven’t learned much in his class” (Male, ‘at risk’)

“Sometimes he doesn’t teach us; he goes for the basic concept: ‘you’ll copy and translate this” (Male, ‘at risk’)

“That’s the one I have flunked!” (Male, ‘at risk’)

“My classmate says ‘Oh, I get a headache with that teacher’. He was reported because he never pays attention to the students if they ask him questions” (Female, dropout)

“It’s the only module I didn’t like” (Female, dropout)

While most students declared having struggled in that class, it is also a fact that not all students received extra support after school. A vital point therefore is that ‘at risk’ students were the most affected because they were less likely to report having additional support at home or to be attending after school English courses.

6.4.3 An overloaded lower secondary school curriculum

Given that lower secondary school became compulsory and part of basic education in 1993, this educational level has gone through a series of changes in terms of form and content. Since its establishment in 1925, it had only been reserved to those who aspired to enter higher education until the 1970’s when its demand had significantly increased throughout the country. Lower secondary school had to be redesigned to fit the new demands aimed at developing students’ abilities and competencies (SEP, 2006). The changes included acknowledging the importance of students’ previous knowledge and experiences, as well as the need to strengthen their understanding of topics and their reflecting abilities, and team work, among others. These changes have been happening within the context of the new international educational policies, which at the same time demand the adaptation of new pedagogical approaches and strategies to reaching all sections of society. Equally important has been to reach all

remote areas of the country and certainly, to achieve a better quality of education as a whole (Sandoval, 2002).

Over the past decade there has been constant discussion as to whether the curricular content of lower secondary education is excessive in its content and also on the distribution of such content (Sandoval, 2002; SEP, 2006). Given that with the new curriculum students are expected to acquire both general knowledge and “training for life”, the number of workshops and teaching hours have increased, making the curriculum, overloaded (Sandoval, 2002:55). Thus, the excess of curricular content or rather atomisation of it, has limited teachers from applying the proposed changes to the foot of the letter (SEP, 2006). Additionally, students’ poor performance in international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) may be an indicator that this educational system has not yet overcome this period of transition.

The Education Sector Development Program

The objectives of the Education Sector Development Program (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo) 2007-2012 comprises six main objectives, the first one being “To elevate the quality of education in order for students to be able to improve their educational achievement standards; to count on means to access a greater welfare and to contribute to national development” (SEP, 2007). This includes strategies such as making sure the study plans and programs aim to revise and adapt the basic education graduate’s profile, to stimulate new pedagogical practices in the classroom to address text books contents, and to adapt the teachers’ training system in order to match it to the curricular objectives’ needs, among others. As a result, teachers have the compromise not only of completing an overloaded educational program but they are also expected to cope with limited academic resources and facilities in the schools, as described earlier. In addition, teachers’ involvement in their Union’s political activities, inside and outside the school reduces the number of hours spent in their classrooms.

6.4.4 School and homework overload

The majority of students, especially high achievers believed that their curricular program was overloaded, not to mention teachers, whose general opinion was that covering the program contents in one academic year was an almost impossible task.

A 15 year-old 'at risk' male from a Technical school in an advantaged area depicts the typical complaint regarding homework overload:

Q: And do you always accomplish your homework?

Max: More or less.

Q: More or less...?

Max: Um-hm.

Q: When you don't complete it, why is that? What might be the cause?

Max: Sometimes because I forget, or sometimes because I don't have the time.

Q: Why don't you have the time?

Max: Because sometimes I have to be in... Umm... I have to do homework for other modules and leave others, I mean; a 'teach' doesn't care if we have other homework; he will give you the homework for his module and that's it.

A teacher, of 27 years, in a disadvantaged area depicts the general view of teachers:

Q: And what do you think about the curricular design, do you think the program is balanced, or very heavy for them, what do you think?

Roberto: It's very heavy, very heavy, for example, say, if we talk about History, umm... the contents are too much, too much, and [the program] does not cover the expectation of covering it all during the academic year. But here there's something important, the teacher must play an important role; we need to 'dose' our module contents... our subject contents. Teachers have to re-design their work program and choose the most ideal... the most ideal information that must be offered to the students instead of covering the program from a to z.

6.4.5 Workload after the SNTE's strike in 2006

In order to catch up with three months of not having classes during the strike action, schools implemented strategies to catch up with their teaching and either adapted their schedules to teach on Saturdays or altered the schedules to finish school one or

two hours later than usual, for example, from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Students reported that teachers were covering two or three topics per module, per day. Thus, if in a normal day students spend up to seven hours in school, having between 4 or 7 modules, depending on their timetable, that meant students were being taught between 12 to 21 topics per day. Moreover, not only did the students complain about the workload in school but also about the amounts of homework they were given; leaving them little or no time to carry out their usual home duties and to prepare their uniforms for the week ahead. Students' religious activities were at the same time at stake because some churches run sabbatical activities. As a result, parents protested and asked the schools to reduce the number of hours students spent in school because they felt their children were being pushed too far. On the whole, in a month and a half students were required to cover a curricular plan that was designed to be covered in four months.

As for teachers, although the majority of them defended their involvement in the political conflict, they also recognised that the short period of time left to cover the school year's program was not going to be enough. Furthermore, they also regretted the fact that students struggled with the pace at which the process of catching up was carried out. From phrases such as "It was too heavy for them... many of them couldn't accomplish their homework", "Parents also need their children to do farm work, or for selling, etc.", "They came back more aggressive toward us", "What was lagged behind, is lagged behind; it will never be recovered 100 percent" or "It's a fact, we damaged our education... we did", teachers expressed their feelings at the situation. The following quotation by Amadeo, a male teacher from a General school in the City of Oaxaca, puts forward teachers' views on the situation:

Q: Have you caught up with all subjects so far?

Amadeus: Class... class times can be made up but you cannot make up knowledge. I mean, all the effort is indeed, done by us, to make up all subjects, but it is not possible to cover everything as when you have a complete academic year. So, children... we understand... well, at least I understand that they leave with less knowledge, or they have left with less knowledge.

Despite the fact that teachers expressed their commitment to compensate for the lost time, teachers continued taking the Fridays off for Union-related meetings, as

noted during the fieldwork, between May and June of 2007. On top of that, May the 1st, 5th and 15th are normally bank holidays on the academic calendar for being Labour Day, Battle of Puebla Day and Teachers' Day respectively. Mother's day on the 10th of May, despite not being marked on the academic calendar as an official holiday, was a day off and festivities were held in the schools.

Students' marks dropped

As a result of being under this intense pressure, high achievers experienced having their marks decreased and therefore students 'at risk' were more likely to have dropped away from school. Nelson, a 14 year-old high achiever from a *Telesecundaria* in a disadvantaged area summarises students' general feeling about the process of catching up with the subjects:

At the beginning I got mad because people were saying that the academic year would be lost [...] and then when [teachers] came back, the subjects, we did them two per day. Quickly, to catch up! But like this, nothing sticks to my head... Because, for example, when I was in my 2nd year, I passed with 9.9, but now my marks dropped, that's why I'm mad... because a lot of things were done too quickly.

Moreover, teachers noted that students had come back less motivated. In brief, the following quotation by Elena, a teacher of 28 years from a Technical School in an advantaged area, summarises these views:

Q: And for example, the recent problem with the Union and APPO, do you think this will have a repercussion on students' learning?

Elena: Well, I believe that any situation that comes to... not to unbalance but to disrupt the steady pace of work, affects them. Why? Because for quite a while they didn't work and so they lost rhythm; they lost the habit of studying, umm... it's like they entered into a phase of laziness, laziness and slackness.

Parents' reactions at the strike

On the whole, this period of stress not only affected the relationship between students and teachers but also the relationship parents had with the schools. According to the majority of the participants, parents initially supported the strike,

however, when this was prolonged, parents, especially in the advantaged areas, protested and some of them formed groups to take over the schools:

When we came back we found out that a lot of children had been transferred to other private schools [...] based on that, a lot of schools are facing problems because parents were determined not to let teachers back in the schools and have assigned other people who are teaching. (Amadeo, AA)

Teachers' views on the strike

Teachers' responses to the question if they agreed and were committed to the Teachers' Strike were generally dominated by negative responses. Fewer teachers actually defended the Union's cause. The views of the majority can be summed up by the way a female psychologist from a Technical school in a disadvantaged area put it:

Whether you agree with it or not, you have to participate because here they control you through a chart of participations [...]. If you participate... in our case, for example, for those who are not from [this community] and don't intend to stay here; well, you have to participate to get closer to your own community or to the place you're aiming for. So in a way we feel somehow obliged to participate, to be present. Especially now with the way things have developed, it's like this: "those who do not participate; well, they don't get a promotion" [...] or "those who do not participate, we will move them to a different school" or "we can decrease your hours of teaching", I mean, in a way, there's some pressure, isn't there?

6.4.6 Teachers' pets

The question "Do you think teachers give girls and boys the same treatment?" was normally followed by "Do you think teachers' treatment is equal to everybody or do they have preference for some students?" These questions intended to explore whether teachers would give students a special treatment on the basis of their gender. Students reported that teachers show preferences towards high achievers and so called 'brown-nosers'. A 12 year-old high achiever, from a Technical school in an

advantaged area, illustrates the general views of students and dropouts about students with good marks:

Q: And for example, your teachers... the way they treat students, are they fair or do they show any preferences at all?

Salma: Umm... some show preferences over some students.

Q: What sort of preferences?

Salma: Like... well, if they do their homework, "Oh, I like this one" or "I like that one because it's a diligent student".

Q: Uh-hu, that type of preference... but in a way in which they would prefer boys or girls, does it happen like that?

Salma: Umm, no, no, because they do not choose them like that.

On the other hand, Alina, a 14 year-old high achiever from a Technical school in a disadvantaged area illustrates the general views about 'brown-nosers':

Q: And do you believe teachers treat boys and girls equally? Or are there any preferences?

Alina: Well, like some teachers say "I'm not indifferent to no one [sic]" but there are cases where... I notice in some classes, some [students] get more verbal warnings than others, say, teachers are explaining and then "Sit down" and the student goes "But 'teach', I'm not doing anything" – "Sit down!" and if another student is standing as well, she won't get a verbal warning and then "But 'teach' why don't you tell her off too?" and the teacher acts like he doesn't know, like he doesn't hear anything [...] It's that some students are cheeky "Alright, I'm going to get this 'teach' to get fond of me so he doesn't..." and they win the 'teach' over and so when they [students] are messing about, the 'teach' doesn't tell them anything because they're friends.

Joel, a so called 'brown noser' shared how he gets teachers to like him and give him special treatment. He was a 14 year-old student 'at risk' from a Technical school in a disadvantaged area. Although the original question aimed to target possible differences in treatment due to gender issues, he reassured what the majority of students said about teachers' preferences towards certain students:

Q: So in general terms, all students are treated the same way?

Joel: No.

Q: And why not?

Joel: Because they are more considerate to some; like in my case.

[...]

Q: They give you a lot of consideration? And why is that? Why to you?

Joel: You have no idea the things I do to teachers, I have no mercy! [...]

They put up with me a lot.

Q: And why is that?

Joel: I don't know, it might be that I'm charming, that's why.

Q: Oh! [laughter] Because they put up with you a lot and not with others then?

Joel: [...] Sometimes I'm messing about, or I get mad, I just leave my things on my desk and leave the classroom, bah! I don't care what they say and I go to have something for breakfast, I take my time and everything; I even take my time [emphasises]. The bell ring, I'm eating, I take my time to go into the classroom and they never tell me anything, whereas other students would not be allowed in after the bell has rung [...] I know my moves [he laughs] [...] I know how to be a 'brown-noser', that's why!

A significant number of teachers admitted having shown, or to know of other teachers who showed disposition to indulge more well behaved and hard-working students or the youngest in class. Roberto, a teacher of 27 years from a Technical School in a disadvantaged area said:

Q: And as teachers... Well, you can't talk for others, can you? But have you seen... You, as a teacher, do you show preference to some students?

Roberto: Well, in a lot of cases, we teachers prefer the student who is quiet, the one who accomplishes his [sic] work, and does not bother others.

While teachers' treatment towards students was found equal in terms of gender, the fact that some teachers behave differently with certain students may, in itself, prove to be a discriminatory act. If teachers dedicate more time to the students who work hard or are more tolerant to their student friends, this without doubt diminishes academic opportunities to students who are 'at risk'. Conversely, some teachers were appreciated as being caring towards their students and to be prepared to look after their welfare as in the previous example (See 'Positive teaching practices for quotations illustrating teachers' commitment to students).

6.4.7 The practice of removing a child from class

This section will focus on teachers' policies in the classrooms. Teachers are, to an extent, free to decide who gets into the classroom and who does not, or whom to dismiss, based on disciplinary criteria that teachers establish themselves; for example, if a student is being disruptive or if the student did not bring his or her homework, it was the teacher's discretion whether or not to exclude them. Such findings coincide with the OECD (2007) report on PISA 2003 and where one of the factors mentioned as being likely to contribute to students' underperformance in Mexico is that teachers make their own decisions "within the realm of their own classrooms" (p. 32). The report also stresses the practice that teachers have of not sticking to curricular and pedagogical procedures. The practice of not allowing students in the class or removing them from the classroom is quite common in public lower secondary schools in Mexico. The inclusion of this theme was decided after carrying out the pilot study. 'At risk' students and dropouts' school experiences revealed key issues; students not only miss classes intentionally but also due to a number of classrooms or school policies. When students and teachers were asked their views about this practice, the word "technique" was used to avoid biased answers.

From 13 of the participants (students, teachers and social workers) to whom this question was addressed, 12 said that this practice was carried out in their school. Only one male high achiever from a *Telesecundaria* in an advantaged location said that this practice was not customary in his school. Presumably the fewer number of students in the class (23 compared to 35 in traditional schools) as it is customary in these types of schools, could result in teachers being more able to do without this practice and offer a more personalised learning environment. Despite this practice being acknowledged as a common in the schools, some teachers and social workers

thought that students with negative behavioural attitudes actually deserved more attention from them. As an illustration, Dulce, a social worker of five years in a Technical school from an advantaged area said:

Here, when the teacher can't stand them anymore, that's when he [sic] gets them out of the classroom [...] and that's not the right thing to do, to get them out. That means that, as a teacher, you don't have control over that boy.

Another factor reported by teachers and students was that students may deliberately misbehave in order to be dismissed from class by being exceedingly disruptive. Some schools send students to social work and some leave them free to do as they wish. In the latter scenario, most students spend their time hanging around in the school or they can even leave the premises of the school. The main concern with this practice is what Amador, a male teacher in the City of Oaxaca, said referring to those students who “defeat” teachers by being extremely disruptive and who are dismissed from the class: “What they want is to be outside, but outside the student doesn't learn.” While most participants said this practice is carried out in their schools, many teachers acknowledged their disagreement with such practice. Some even suggested that a better approach would be to draw more attention towards disruptive students and to try to know these students better to have a better understanding of what may be causing such behaviour.

6.4.8 School corporal punishment and verbal violence from teachers

Practices such as inflicting physical or verbal aggression towards students, which has been more customary in the past, and which is prohibited in most developed countries, are still carried out in some schools in Mexico. Sonora is, to date, the only State in the country where the State Education Act (amended in 1998) forbids staff violating students' physical, psychological or moral integrity. Participants from both advantaged and disadvantaged areas said teachers exert physical and verbal violence towards students, yet the practice seems to be more prevalent in disadvantaged areas. Another pattern reported was that male teachers are more likely to use their hands or physical strength whereas female teachers are more likely to use a wooden stick. A 12 year-old male student at risk from a disadvantaged area shared on this respect:

Oscar: Teacher Valentino, he just speaks bad words, he gets the book and hits him on his head.

Q: At the students?

Oscar: To a little boy.

Q: And why does he hit him?

Oscar: Because instead of paying attention he is talking to this other kid

Q: Does he hit anyone or just him?

Oscar: Well... to those who do not understand the subject.

Q: With the book?

Oscar: With the book or with whatever he has at hand... with his fingers like this [he snaps his fingers] on the head, like this [snaps his fingers against the table to exemplify].

Different patterns on how this practice is handled emerged; parents from disadvantaged areas tended to be more permissive about corporal punishment being carried out in school, and in some cases these parents even encouraged teachers to sanction students this way. Conversely, it was not reported that parents in advantaged areas would encourage this type of discipline. However, parents from both areas who dissented from this practice handled the situation in a similar manner; they would come to the school and create a riot by trying to punch the teacher who committed the aggression, or they would wait outside the school to attack the teacher at the end of the school day. The following example given by a social worker, of 20 years, from an advantaged area depicts most cases shared by teachers and social workers:

Alright, an example happened this year; this girl came to my office, she was in tears; she said that a teacher... had assaulted her. So the first thing I did was to check her to see if she had a scratch, umm... a bruise on her arm because she said that he tugged her, but no, she didn't have anything [...]. The next day I found out the father was waiting outside for the teacher to come out because he was going to beat him up.

In the previous example, the teacher exerted violence or brutality towards the student, rather than corporal punishment. It should be noted that only teachers from

advantaged areas reported that some parents would undertake legal action, i.e. taking the case to the State Human Rights Commission. Also, parents in advantaged areas appear to be more aware about their children's rights. Finally, personnel from both areas expressed that corporal punishment is a practice that is in the process of being eradicated, like this male teacher, of 25 years, from an advantaged area:

“The famous piece of chalk that flies across the classroom is not used anymore, nor the wooden stick” (Male teacher of 25 years, AA)

If the impact of corporal punishment both in the home and in the school could distress victims physically, mentally and emotionally (Humphreys, 2008), it is relevant to reconsider the value of this practice in terms of the schools' educational goals. Cases were reported where children with aggressive behaviour and who were hit by teachers, sought revenge outside their school. In cases like these, students themselves, parents or even students' friends attacked teachers or their properties, i.e., throwing stones at their bikes or scratching their cars.

Finally, although the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children was launched in 2007, corporal punishment of children has not yet been prohibited in the home or in all schools in Mexico. On the other hand, article 423 of the Civil Code in Mexico indicates that parents are allowed to “correct” children (by not including actions that attempt against their physical or psychological integrity), yet a specific prohibition on corporal punishment in schools is not stated. Furthermore, articles 13 and 32 of the Law for the Protection for the Rights of Children and Adolescents prohibit any type of mistreatment, damage, aggression, abuse or exploitation against children or adolescents in educational institutions. Laws that prevent corporal punishment exist on paper; however, these statutes and regulations can be open to interpretation given that hitting somebody with a stick might not necessarily represent an attempt against their life. Additionally, the definition of “corporal punishment” as such, is not explicitly mentioned within these official documents.

6.4.9 Sexual harassment from male teachers

The question of whether male teachers sexually harassed female students was addressed, not only to find out whether this type of misconduct happened but also to look at whether the effect of such conduct would affect students' participation in school. Based on the fact that little research has been carried out on sexual hostility

against male students (Dunne, Humphreys and Leach, 2006) it was decided to focus on harassment towards students of both genders. However, findings turned out to be in concordance with UNESCO (2003)'s report on gender violence in schools, which recognised that although girls as well as boys could suffer sexual harassment, girls are the main objects of this type of maltreatment.

Male teachers harass female students

Most participants knew of, or had heard of, a case of existing unsolicited behaviour of a sexual nature by male teachers towards female students in each school visited, especially students; (males and females) as well as all members of staff. They all had a story to share. Different types of actions from male teachers that would cause discomfort on female students were portrayed: from sexually-oriented innuendos, to the use of sexual vocabulary, getting too close, fondling and touching. The following quotation from a female high achiever from an advantaged area illustrates a classic type of comment from students:

Q: And for example... I'm going to speak softer [I lower my voice] for example, are there any teachers who try to harass girls?

Alina: Yes

Q: Really?

Alina: Yes, there this one teacher, well, taught us on our 1st year, we didn't know, he would approach us... but just girls.

Q: Umm

Alina: Just girls [with emphasis], he would approach them, he would hold their hands, this and that and obviously we didn't know him [she softens her voice] we didn't know what he was like and it wasn't until our second year when we came to realise what he's like and we began to keep our distance from him a bit more.

Furthermore, cases were mentioned where teachers would refuse to mark the female students' work or give them a bad mark in order to get the students attention; that is, so students had to 'beg' the teacher to re-check or mark their work, thus having the power to establish a relationship of control over the students, where they had something that the students needed.

Generally, female high achievers were more likely to report such abuse either to their mothers, other teachers, or were more likely to put teachers on the spot in the classroom by asking them to restrain themselves. It is worthy to stress that although cases of sexual harassment were reported both in advantaged and disadvantaged areas, more participants from the latter areas shared cases, which suggests that the issue might be more prevalent in such areas.

Girls' flirtation in exchange for better marks

Numerous students (females and males) and female teachers also said that some girls "like to flirt" with teachers. The quotation below from a male 'at risk' aged 12 from a disadvantaged area illustrates a case in which a student might be willing to exchange intimate gestures with the teacher to attain a better mark.

Q: Are there teachers who might want to go over the line with girls or with boys?

Oliver: Yes [responds promptly]

Q: Do they? What do they do?

Oliver: Umm, there's a teacher named Aaron who wants to go further with a girl called Dora [...] "come here" he tells her, he grabs her from her waist, I mean... and he starts telling her things like that and the girl, well... she allows it, and last time, teacher Aaron told her... because I was behind his desk, picking up my pencil, because mine is a propelling pencil, it'd fallen and everything spread on the floor when I heard him saying, he said "I'll pass you with a 10 but if... if you give me a kiss" he said to her, umm... the girl was like... and she said "Alright then, at what time?" –"Wait for me when the school finishes" he told her, "Are you staying?" he said, –"Yes" she said [...]. And then the girl stayed, I saw she was still [in the classroom] when school finished and I told her "Dora, c'mon, let's go!" –"No" she told me, I have dance practice" and she stayed, so I went, I didn't want to spy on them, I didn't want to because what if they caught me? I could get myself into a mess [he laughs] and because teacher Aaron... he hits us.

Female teachers were ‘on the defensive’

Although the majority of teachers, especially females reported having seen or known of a case where a male teacher would flirt with a female student, as well as students, female teachers in particular would assert comments that implied female students were responsible for such actions. According to some female teachers, female students can be flirtatious with male teachers, i.e., they would hug the teacher, wear shorter skirts or talk to them with softer, higher pitched voices. Also, male teachers were believed to hug girls driven by their paternal instincts and that some students misinterpreted this by thinking that male teachers went over the limit. At the same time, most female teachers who held girls responsible for having teachers flirting with them also admitted that some teachers indeed go over the limit and that they do get reprimanded. In conclusion, like a social worker from a disadvantaged area put it: “It’s like liquorice: allsorts”.

Harassment is seldom reported to the Head of the School

Teachers said that when parents reported inappropriate conduct from male teachers, the latter acted defensively, claiming that students misinterpreted their actions, or claiming that students were lying. The most common way these complaints were brought forward was with the parent, normally the mother, speaking to the teacher about the situation. According to stories shared, parents seldom took the case to the Head of the School’s office; however, when the case escalated to having the Head of the School involved, teachers in fact apologised and actually modified their behaviour and stopped molesting students. A few cases were cited when the teacher had to be transferred to a different school but none in which a teacher was suspended. Similar to how parents in disadvantaged areas tackled problems of physical aggression towards their children in school, parents in such areas were as less likely to push teachers or Head Teachers for a sanction to be applied to the molesting teacher. Parents in advantaged areas, however, were more likely to demand to have the teacher removed from the school.

One reason why this type of inappropriate behaviour from male teachers is under-reported may be related to the fact that students have the general belief that teachers are protected by their Head of the School, and in general, that they will not have the support of other teachers, whether they would be females or males, as it can be illustrated with the following input from a porter from a Technical School in an advantaged area:

Q: So, tell me about the case you were mentioning

Conrado: [This girl] suffered sexual harassment by one of my colleagues, she approached me and told me “You know, this and that” and I told her “maybe the teacher is only being affectionate?” – “No, no, no” she says, “one thing is...”

Q: Wait, wait, “a colleague” meaning a teacher?

Conrado: Yes, a teacher.

Q: But what do you mean she told you “this and that”, tell me what she said

Conrado: I mean, the girl said “Well, he comes, he asks for my homework and goes ‘Oh, yes, it’s... well done’ and he doesn’t even check it and then he gives me a 10... and then ‘Oh, how pretty hands you have, what a pretty nails’ and I don’t feel comfortable” she said. [...] It’s pretty common, especially girls, female students but they don’t dare to report it for whatever reason you may like, to the social work department but they just wouldn’t go to anyone, I sometimes suggest “why don’t you see such and such colleague?” [...] - No”, they say, - “But give me a reason” I tell them “It’s because they can’t keep things to themselves, you trust them and the minute later everyone knows it, everyone is talking about it”.

This also illustrates how female students who were suffering a type of harassment from a teacher, would normally come to another male teacher whom they trust to accuse this situation, yet not as a formal report but to an extent looking for some protection. There were cases where these ‘protectors’ would speak with the ‘molesters’ to ‘warn’ them, as a female teacher from a disadvantaged area said: “as teachers and man to man” they ask misbehaving teachers to respect the girl in question.

These findings without doubt show that quite a few male teachers do go over the limit with female students, and that the fact is rarely pursued formally in the school. This piece of anecdotal evidence coincides with other studies that suggest that violence against girls in schools are hardly ever reported “because it is embarrassing or difficult to engage with (Dunne et al., 2006: 86) and more significantly, “because

students fear victimisation, punishment or ridicule (Leach et al., 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2001a)” (UNESCO, 2003:144).

Although cases of sexual harassment from teachers appear not be a direct factor for a student to actually drop out, it certainly showed that it leaves female ‘at risk’ students in an even more vulnerable position. Furthermore, if appropriate support is not given to these girls at home, and their marks are at stake, some of the ways they may find to deal with this could include to hiding the experience of teacher molesting them to themselves, or to concede to such ‘exchanges’ taking place. Apart from the fact that previous studies reveal a relationship exists between gender-based violence, poor school performance and dropout rates (UNESCO, 2003), these findings have also shown that students’ rights to their physical and emotional wellbeing are still being transgressed.

6.4.10 Lack of opportunities for teacher’s training

The previously mentioned ‘Agreement for the Modernisation of Basic Education’, which included a reform of the basic education curriculum, also promoted the advancement of teachers and therefore a comprehensive reorganisation of the prevailing teacher training system (Torres and Puiggrós, 1997). *Carrera magisterial* (Teaching Career), a “horizontal promotion mechanism for teachers based on performance evaluation” (Torres and Puiggrós, 1997: 156) emerged as a result of the agreement and the National Program for the Permanent Updating of In-Service Teachers of Basic Education (PRONAP).

PRONAP’s main objective is to create the conditions for the training and career advancement of teachers, for these conditions to become regulated and part of a systematic process, and which together with the help of the public, social and private sectors, can contribute to the improvement of learning levels of students (INEE, 2008a). By 2008, PRONAP was intended to have trained 1,250,000 teachers and management staff members within the educational service, as well as over 40,000 technical-pedagogical assessors, almost 4,000 members of technical teams that operate the continuous training program and 25,000 collectives of teachers in the country (INEE, 2008a). Interestingly, if the number of teachers reported as existing in 2008 by INEGI (2010b) were 1,158,281 for teachers of basic education (pre-school, primary and lower secondary school), the figure does not match with the number of teachers trained by the PRONAP that same year.

Teachers are out of date

Teachers' general concerns were that the majority of basic education teachers are out of date with regards to pedagogical techniques and in the use of technological resources. Their complaints included not knowing, following or even understanding the basic education general program; not being experts in the subjects they conveyed or that they were not being willing to use the new technology. Furthermore, social workers and school psychologists stressed that teachers lacked appropriate pedagogical and psychological techniques to deal with their students. The following quotation by a male History, Geography and Civics and Ethics teacher from a disadvantaged area also illustrates how teachers were humble when recognising the lack of understanding of their subjects:

Roberto: [...] We have some cases of teachers who umm... including myself, why not, who do not understand our subjects with clarity.

Additionally, the following quotation from a social worker, of 5 years, from a disadvantaged area illustrates teachers' resistance to the use of up to date technological resources:

Q: You were telling me that you have a seminar room?

Dulce: Yes [...] but it doesn't work as a seminar room, right? It functions as a computer room because a seminar room is actually meant to be for all teachers to bring their students to use the computers for Edusat, to study other topics, films that are available in there but no; they haven't been willing to learn to use the technology, they don't know how to use the computers... I think they are afraid of... I don't know whether it's fear or resistance, isn't it? To get up to date.

Inequality of opportunities for training

Most teachers showed enthusiasm about training aimed at developing their pedagogical skills. Despite the fact that teachers acknowledged that some courses were available to them, some of these courses were deemed to be very poor in content, others as costly and others taking place in the City of Oaxaca, therefore not being as easily accessible to those living in further, more remote locations. With regards to their lack of pedagogical skills, some teachers thought that some of them

assume the persona of an authoritarian figure in the classroom; by building a barrier between them and the students, the latter feel less comfortable to ask questions.

Furthermore, a significant number of teachers mentioned ENLACE (National Evaluation of Academic Performance at School Centers) and ENAMS (National Certification Exams) as some of the updating strategies taken by their schools. ENLACE is a standardised test that students in basic education take in order to assess that the knowledge and abilities targets laid out in the basic education official plans and programs are being met. Students take Maths, Spanish and a third module (Science in 2008 and Civics and Ethics in 2009) On the other hand, ENAMS aims to measure teachers' knowledge and they must pass national courses to be up to date and to obtain the Diploma SEP on Academic Merit Recognition. The latter exams are not compulsory but it was mentioned that more schools are encouraging teachers to apply, and that, at the same time, more teachers are willing to take them because it may add additional points for their *carrera magisterial* (Teaching career).

When these exams were mentioned, most teachers showed concerns and antipathy; most of them declared not to feel prepared enough to take these tests, and some even questioned the validity of these tests. The quotation from a male teacher from a disadvantaged area shows the views of teachers on these exams:

I think the teacher has been given a lot of freedom; there isn't a constant evaluation of teachers; they more or less evaluate us, like with that famous exam ENLACE, to see how teachers are doing, right? Umm... to see how the country is doing [...] They bring the exam, a lady comes to apply the exam, I think someone external and the lady who came says: "How many groups are there? –Three groups –"Alright put them all together in one classroom" and we're there, crowded, next to each other; we're there, chatting, I mean, no, that is not an evaluation, that's wrong to start with [...] what kind of results can that type of exam throw?

A substantial number of teachers expressed that they were keen to attend training courses. Most teachers in disadvantaged areas said they had fewer opportunities to attend these courses and the reasons revolved around two main aspects: firstly, that the management staff members (Head of schools, deputy heads and academic coordinators) or teachers with more points on their *carrera magisterial* (Teaching career) or those with more seniority in their job had greater priority to attend; and secondly, that they had to pay for such courses themselves. Nonetheless, dynamics of

schools varied. In a few schools, teachers complained that the management staff was indifferent to participation in training programs, hindering other teachers' involvement. Another aspect raised was that sometimes teachers were unwilling to share their training experiences with others, as female teacher of 27 years from a disadvantaged area expressed:

It's like every one works in isolation; they don't want to... I mean, to share their experiences and ethically, students are the ones who get affected.

While the majority of teachers in disadvantaged areas complained about not having sufficient opportunities to attend training courses in the City of Oaxaca, or even to be, teachers concerns in advantaged localities focused on the lack of opportunities for postgraduate courses instead. Teachers in better well-off localities were certainly more likely to have attended training courses or completed a diploma course. Complaints arose regarding the lack of a masters funded by either the Secretariat of Public Education or the *Escuela Normal Superior* (Superior Normal School).

6.4.11 Lack of teaching qualifications

Subsequent to teachers acknowledging their lack of opportunities to updating their training, another chief concern was the inequality in relation to teachers' proficiencies. Several teachers stressed that Technical schools can count on greater budgets, with a greater number of personnel, along with more specialised personnel than General schools and especially more than *Telesecundarias* or schools in smaller communities. Likewise, teachers from *Telesecundarias* thought they bore heavier workloads and responsibilities as they are required to be knowledgeable in all modules. This came as no surprise when it is known that a great number of current lower secondary school teachers were transferred to this level of education from primary schools. Some, with an upper secondary school degree, were in the past called *Centros de bachillerato Pedagógico* (Levinson, 2001).

Another typical testimony was that a significant number of teachers do not have proper teaching qualifications, as required by SEP. Some teachers were reported as holding a technical degree, engineering or a bachelor degree in subjects other than teaching. The most reported cause for an unqualified teacher entering the education system was the inability to find suitable employment elsewhere or even chronic

unemployment in the economy as a whole. As Levinson (2001) stated, it is presumable that these teachers entered the teaching careers as a result of nepotism within the teachers' union SNTE and, as a consequence, their pedagogical preparation was limited. Furthermore, students themselves resented this situation as it is illustrated by the following female high achiever, from a disadvantaged area and attending a General school, when asked whether she thought teachers were experts in their subjects:

Well, I have observed that the majority are not even teachers, they're not teachers, they don't have the umm... the preparation to teach us [...] for example, the computing teacher, he is an engineer but he doesn't have... umm... a degree in pedagogy and therefore he gets exasperated very quickly, for the same reason that he doesn't know how to deal with... with the students.

6.4.12 Low salaries and lack of dedication

Research has suggested that in numerous countries in the developing world, teachers receive exceptionally low incomes and Mexico is no exception; one of teachers' chief complaints was that their salaries were very poor and even "miserable" as some put it. As a result of their low salaries which do not allow them to afford the minimum living expenses (UNESCO, 2008), it appears that teachers search for secondary employment or get involved in the informal economy to supplement their income. Various teachers described that they, or their colleagues, also taught a second shift in an evening primary school or run *taquerías* (taco stands) or sell cosmetics, amongst other activities.

Federico: The economic situation also drives teachers to look for some more, doesn't it?

Q: Um-hm.

Federico: Then, the low salaries... It is said that teachers earn well; that's not true, I mean, I am telling you, a salary of [...] 8 thousand pesos monthly [£418] [...] but that salary is covering a rent, telephone bills, electricity, feeding your family and it doesn't... I mean, half-feeding them, [...], travelling expenses, if you have a child or two studying in higher levels, I mean; I see it, teachers don't have the time in the evening to say "Alright, I'm going to prepare my classes", "I'm going to search

for material”, no. Because the teacher has to leave the house and drive a taxi, they are taxi drivers in the evening; they even sell purified bottled water, anyway; they get involved in other activities [...] I mean, that also limits the professional development of a teacher.

Several teachers expressed that many of them come to work “just for the salary” and also that the majority are not fully committed with their jobs. The following conversation with Abril, a female teacher of 32 years, depicts teachers’s acknowledgement of their lack of commitment. This piece of dialogue came forth from the question of what she thought of the school’s prestige.

Abril: Yes, the school has not been able to have a good prestige, doesn’t it? I think that it’s because those who work here have not... tried harder, don’t we? That the school reaches a good reputation [...] we haven’t allowed it and we barely give anything to get to that level [...] I believe that we lack... I don’t know, love for our profession, don’t we? Loving what we do.

Q: And why do you think this is missing?

Abril: Well [raises voice] I think that it’s because... very few of us are qualified teachers [...] and many of us are not interested in getting better at what we do, or to get up to date.

It was also accounted that some teachers get paid for five extracurricular hours but that they do not, in reality, spend extra time planning their lessons. This could be seen as unequal and likely to generate a feeling of resentment among other teachers. What is more, such dissatisfaction causes high levels of teachers’ absenteeism as well, as it was reported by teachers themselves. Social workers in particular expressed that teachers’ additional occupations generate a lack of compromise from them to get to know the students and their personal or family problems better.

If teachers work in schools with poor facilities, have limited opportunities for training and have low wages, in fact wages below the poverty threshold according to UNESCO (2008), it is not surprising that they may lack motivation to do their jobs. Furthermore, if effective teacher training and motivation are essential for students to improve their educational results (UNESCO, 2008), these findings are a clear indication that the achievement of good quality of education is on standby.

6.5 The positive teaching practices

This section highlights the positive practices praised by students, parents and teachers themselves. The question asked to students for them to mention their most and least favourite module proved useful in finding out the aspects that students valued from their teachers. Students' answers threw significant results; it became evident that preference to a module was related to two main characteristics: the level of learning they accomplished in such a module and the level of emotional support the teacher provided. It is worth mentioning that most students (high achievers, 'at risk') and dropouts straightforwardly mentioned one or two less favourite modules, however, when the favourite module was mentioned, students 'at risk' and dropouts took their time to highlight positive traits from their teachers. This could be associated with the degree of value that, to these students, teachers who are committed and dedicated to their subject areas represent. The following quotation illustrates various other analogous quotations. Alejandra, a 13 year-old student 'at risk', said that although her favourite module was Art Education, it was the Mathematics module where she paid most attention to.

Q: Which one is your favourite module?

Alejandra: Art Education [sighs] [...] but in maths class, I don't know why but I pay a lot of attention to that 'teach' Ramon.

Q: You do?

Alejandra: Um-hm. I take my notes, and because he takes the time to explain how things are done, I complete my math exercises, I do like to do the maths exercises, but when it comes to other modules... mmm [sluggishly].

6.5.1 Committed teachers and strategies to tackle students in academic need

Teachers who were praised as being "good" or "committed" were also characterised as being proactive in the sense of the extra time they dedicated in school and providing help for students to improve their academic grades. Various cases were mentioned in both advantaged and disadvantaged areas; for example, some teachers would be available at school on Saturdays or an additional hour after school in order to help those students who needed more support. Other teachers would gather students at the end of each four-month term so they could focus on the topics where most students struggled.

It is important to mention that such strategies were described as regular activities that teachers had been carrying out for years, regardless of the teachers' strike in 2006 that put some students behind. On the other hand, more cases of male teachers implementing these strategies were mentioned, and from that it can be assumed that probably less involvement in domestic activities allowed them to carry forward with such remedial activities. Finally, by the way in which these cases were portrayed by teachers, it was clearly inferred that these practices were not part of school policies but that they took place by teachers' initiatives, and most significantly, such measures were also accredited as having a positive effect in reducing students' failure rates.

The 'human quality' factor

Students and teachers predominantly praised teachers' "human quality". The former acknowledged those teachers who, besides their teaching activities, demonstrated care and concern for students. Teachers, on their part, highlighted that this factor positively affects students' general wellbeing and achievement. The following quotation from a 13 year-old high achiever, in a disadvantaged area, typifies students' appreciation of teachers' human quality.

[...] there is a teacher that... ummm, well, I have noticed that... he is new but he does care a lot about... how we feel; he even... he notices when some of his students is sad or ill. Yes, he talks to you, he asks you what's wrong with you, he approaches you, he tells you... he's been a good friend, and I also find his module [computing class] enjoyable.

The positive effect that the 'human quality' factor can have on students' learning experiences was not only praised by students but also by some teachers. It is worth mentioning how Levinson's (2001) anthropological study in a lower secondary school in Mexico illustrated teachers' pride of their formation at the *Escuela Normal* (Normal School) and how they "were also taught to make students their 'friends' and to 'pay attention to matters of emotion'" (p. 80). Sandoval (2002) also refers to how career teachers would show special pride in having a better didactic formation than professionals who had recently joined the educational profession. These teachers, according to Sandoval, also gave special value to their cordial relationships with the students. Thus, it was considered worthy to include a quotation of Celina, a psychologist at a General school in a disadvantaged area, which expresses concisely

the opinion of those teachers and social workers who brought the topic of involving affectivity up.

I have known cases of great teachers, great teachers who assume great compromises, teachers that commit to the profession, teachers who don't mind losing three hours, five hours, alright? And they get involved, right?, in the emotional wellbeing of the [students], and for their social wellbeing, alright? And not they only get involved with scholarly matters as in "I teach you mathematics and that's what I'm supposed to do and I don't care about the rest", I have seen great teachers, I have, who have formed great boys [sic], great persons, right? And students feel enormously thankful towards those teachers.

These findings coincide with Sandoval's (2002) findings of her ethnographic work in three lower secondary schools where the author expressed: "I could perceive that among teachers who considered themselves as 'good teachers', apart from the value they gave to their intrinsic professional knowledge, they showed interest in their students and expressed their concerns for their rearing as the second important incentive of their jobs" (p. 171-172). These data, and the pieces of evidence here presented, certainly prove that when teachers' practices are complemented with quality human interaction, they can enhance students' interest in their subject modules.

6.6 Exclusionary school policies

When the questions of whether and when suspensions or expulsions occurred in school, and also the circumstances in which they would take place, were prompted, teachers, social workers and students illustrated similar cases. School policies tended to be strict with regards to students' appearances, but more inflexible in relation to permanent anti-social behaviour, pregnancy or marriage. According to teachers and social workers, the majority of their conduct codes are "policies" or measures adopted by the Porters or the Schools' Advisory Councils (SAC) which are, by and large, integrated by the Head of the School, teachers and a representative of the school's Parents' Committee. If according to Longman (1999), a 'policy' is "a course of action for dealing with a particular matter or situation, especially as chosen by a political party, government, business company, etc." and 'regulation' is defined as

“an especially official rule or order”, school policies seem to be followed as regulations.

6.6.1 Suspensions for incorrect dress codes

Students may be dismissed from school if their manner of dress is “inappropriate”, for example, in most schools, boys are not allowed inside if their hair is too long or if they are wearing an inappropriate hair style; if their face appears unshaven or if they are wearing the “wrong” colour of belt or if worn “incorrectly”. Girls, on the other hand, may not be allowed inside if they are wearing makeup or extravagant accessories. Furthermore, boys and girls can be sent home if they miss out wearing items that are part of their school uniform or the “appropriate” footwear. Such procedures are carried out by the prefect or designated school commissions (the latter commonly on Mondays). Abril, a female teacher of 32 years, at a General school in a disadvantaged area, illustrates how teachers can, as well, enforce such policies in their classrooms:

And I don't know to which extent this works, there's a teacher here that... I don't agree with him but everyone has their own techniques, of course, and their own way of seeing things. He... he checks his students, that they wear their uniforms... the right way. I tell him that's unnecessary since students are checked at the entrance; but he sends back those who are not wearing the complete uniform or are not wearing it correctly. They are sent back or are left outside so they fix it themselves and then they can come in. [...] I don't pay attention to those matters that much but him, the boy [sic] comes to the teachers' class and the teacher gets them out, gets them out and sometimes students can go away for a whole week, or if this class is due three times in the week, they miss these three classes.

Teachers and students mentioned that, as a result of such disciplinary actions, students may sometimes decide not to show up in school. A 15 year-old student who was ‘at risk’, from a *Telesecundaria* in a disadvantaged area is an example of how students could skip school if they knew they might not be allowed in for not conforming to the correct dressing standards.

Q: And do you work after school?

Rodrigo: Well, no, I don't have like a formal job but sometimes we have to... there are some neighbours who we have to help sometimes [...] Like for example, yesterday... yesterday I did not come to school because... my hair was too long and I had to get a hair cut... so I stayed and... there's a man near here who sells shoes and he's building a house and needed the use of a compressor and because his was broken, we took it to a mechanic.

Students may return to school as soon as they “fix” what is wrong; that is, if they go to the barber's shop to make their hair more agreeable, go home and put on the correct clothing or remove any unapproved accessories, and then they could come back to school. Nonetheless, those hours away from the school represent time in which they were missing out on their education.

6.6.2 Expulsion for anti-social behaviour, marriage and pregnancies

The concept of ‘anti-social behaviour’ in Mexico has not been approached in the rigorous way as in the United Kingdom (See, for example, The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003). In Spanish, the word ‘*vandalismo*’ includes acts including intimidation and harassment, aggressive language and/or behaviour, illegal narcotic trafficking, and trespassing private property, and other such acts which are more related to felonies and crimes. For that reason, the concept of anti-social behaviour referred to in this thesis was based on the United Kingdom's Home Office (2010) definition of it as “any aggressive, intimidating or destructive activity that damages or destroys another person's quality of life”.

Regarding expulsions for this type of behaviour, the majority of schools had similar criteria in which such expulsions were decided. For anti-social behaviour, students' actions had to be “grave”, such as those involving violence, drug dealing or use, robberies, and any other vandalic acts. As previously described, in the past boys used to be more involved in fights than girls but nowadays the latter increasingly participating in these types of behaviour. Expulsions involve three initial written warnings and, if the misconduct persisted, then parents would be informed. If after this, students did not alter their conduct, he or she would be asked to sign a commitment letter and, finally, if a reoccurrence in behaviour takes place, the School Advisory Council would make the final decision (usually through a voting system) and expulsion may take place. Only one Technical school in a disadvantaged area

accounted that their constant dealing with problematic students made them generate an agreement with the DIF (The National System for Integral Family Development) to provide students with welfare support. Their ultimate condition therefore becomes that, while the student attends therapy with the parent(s), he or she will not be expelled.

In a similar manner, marriages and pregnancies are a sufficient motive for the expulsion of female students, however this happens more subtly; teachers, social workers or the advisory council ask the student and her parents that she be transferred to a night school (secondary school for workers). Even though these situations were reported as facts in both advantaged and disadvantaged areas, it was in the latter areas where schools dealt with these situations more frequently. As a preventative strategy, school policies promote that students, especially females, do not get involved in dating, and also prohibit acts of affection such as kissing. Despite some schools claiming that they wanted to avoid having pregnant or married girls expelled, most teachers found it justifiable that these girls should stop coming to the school. Reasons to validate this policy included that other girls could follow the same example; that the community could ‘point their fingers’ at the school and criticise them for allowing such activities to happen; and finally, that pregnant girls could be at risk of getting hurt during their lunch breaks or during sports activities, which are part of the curriculum. On the whole, they would not be completing their educational programme fully. Certainly, if the pregnancy or marriage is obvious, the female student is normally asked to change her academic system to night school. The following conversation with a female teacher, of 31 years, from a *Telesecundaria* in the City of Oaxaca, summarises this policy:

Q: And if the case of a girl being pregnant comes up, would she be allowed to continue attending classes?

Esmeralda: Ooh! [surprised]

Q: What are the school policies on this respect?

Esmeralda: Well, if it’s evident, she can’t come. [...] Here, we have had a variety of cases, this other girl got pregnant and she denied it, then she gave birth during the vacation period [...], she knew how to hide it, she was already in her second year [...] the baby was born just in July, then August we were still on holidays; in September she comes and wants to enrol back, and we were like “Let’s see...” Everyone opposed “Is that

she already has a baby” and she kept on saying “No, it’s my mum’s”, “It’s my mum’s” and OK, it’s her mum’s. And because of her age and because... how would we verify that medically? That’d be getting involved in more problems, won’t it?

Similarly, teachers mentioned cases where girls had been pregnant without informing the school. What is more, male teachers are reported to be less likely to identify whether a girl was pregnant. On the other hand, teachers mentioned that some pregnant girls stopped attending school by their own will, either because they were aware of the policies or because they had no intention of continuing with their studies. Moreover, teachers also said that these girls often felt embarrassed that their classmates would see them in their condition.

In relation to marriages, because girls and boys under 18 can marry with the authorisation of the parents, it was reported that, once married, girls are not particularly welcomed in the schools because of similar reasons to those of pregnancies. Teachers feared that other female students could follow the “bad” example. However, these policies apply differently with regards to male students; various cases were reported of boys who married and whose parents pleaded for them to continue attending school and having the SAC to allow it. This excerpt of a conversation with teacher of 37 years, Marcela, from a disadvantaged area illustrates this:

Marcela: A couple of years ago there were some boys who married but they were allowed in the school, I found that out and I thought, “Well, why the girl is denied entrance but is allowed to the boy? And he [sic] used to deny that he was already married.

Q: But the Head of the School knew about this?

Marcela: Yes, they certainly knew, I assume the parents came to ask the Head of the School and he was admitted.

These punitive, exclusionary school policies seem to affect girls’ permanency in school more negatively than for boys. It is also worth mentioning that the previously mentioned cases of “agreed” kidnappings (see 5.6.2 Culture as a determinant factor), aggravate the situation of girls having to drop out of school, especially in disadvantaged localities.

6.7 *Oportunidades* enhances participation

Oportunidades grants monetary assistance to families in extreme poverty in exchange for regular school attendance of their children in basic and upper secondary education (ages 6 to 17). As one of the foremost social policy instruments in Mexico, it has in fact generated an increase of primary and secondary school enrolments (UNESCO 2008), permanence in school and regular attendance (SEDESOL, 2008). As anticipated, more students from disadvantaged areas had assistance from *Oportunidades*, according to data provided by the schools. When participants were asked whether they thought this program helped students within the program, the overall response was positive; nonetheless students in particular expressed their disagreement at the fact that, according to them, most outstanding students with economic struggles did not have the scholarship but that those with low grades did. In concordance with this, and contrary to what was reasonably expected, none of the high achievers from disadvantaged areas interviewed were benefitting from this grant. Substantially, from the total 37 participating girls and boys, only two girls had assistance from *Oportunidades*; one student ‘at risk’ and one dropout; both from disadvantaged locations. None of the male students interviewed had this scholarship.

Perceptions of misuse of the scholarship

A surprising finding was that there was a general perception that the monetary assistance was being misused by numerous parents, namely mothers, who are the ones who personally receive the aid. The majority of responses by students and teachers to this matter indicated that numerous mothers keep their children enrolled in school only to assure their receipt of this financial assistance. Teachers and social workers asserted that children, with help from *Oportunidades*, would come to the classroom without the basic stationary such as pens, pencils or notebooks. Equally serious was that both teachers and students illustrated cases where these mothers would cash the scholarship and not provide the students with school materials or school uniforms, and instead, spend the money on other things such as food, personal items or, as most commonly mentioned in disadvantaged areas, on alcohol. The following two quotations highlight teachers’ and students’ views on this matter:

Q: And in the case of students with the *Oportunidades* scholarship, mothers and fathers who manage this resource, do they make good use of it for the children?

Nidia: Ah! That, I don't know, because there are actually a lot of students here eh? [...] but I see that mums cash it, don't they? [...] honestly, there are colleagues of mine who complain that "the student didn't bring a pen"... and they get them out of the classroom; that "the student didn't bring their notebook, again: "out of the classroom!", no book... out of the classroom... that's where incongruences come up, don't they? If the mum... if the student has the *Oportunidades* scholarship, why does he [sic] fail to bring his drawing material or why doesn't he [sic] have a notebook? Or why don't they have trainers or their Physical Education uniform? Whatever, why does he not wear a belt? [...] because these resources are for them and there are mums who are abusive on that respect.

(Female social worker of 16 years, General School, DA)

Q: Do you think [*Oportunidades*] helps?

Felicia: Yes, to continue studying, but there are occasions in which parents spend the money and they forget it's for their children, that is, to buy their children's school materials and all that.

Q: Have there been cases like that where parents just spend the money?

Felicia: Yes, my neighbour, it happened a lot with her, her daughter had the scholarship and every time she got paid, she wouldn't buy anything for her daughter; she'd rather drink... get drunk.

(Female High Achiever, 14 years old, Technical School, DA)

Furthermore, another significant aspect came up; a few students admitted receiving this scholarship in return for political support given by their families to the ruling party in their localities. This factor, however, was decided not to be explored further due to not being directly related to students' attendance. This type of problem was described by UNESCO (2007) when citing that these types of assistances designed to enhance school attendances, are difficult to administer effectively, and the chances are that corruption and misappropriation will take place. On the other hand, these findings certainly show that these financial transfers to poor households which are conditional on students' school attendance seem to be doing their share in keeping more students in school. Whilst parents' main objectives may not seem to be

particularly focused on their children's education, results nonetheless show that parents encourage their children to attend school more than if they did not receive this assistance.

6.8 A note on school experiences

In light of previous research (Finn, 1993; Ekstrom, 1986; Rumberger, 2001, and OECD, 2004) which has explored the influence of peers and teachers' relationship on students' academic performance and dropout rates, this study did so as well. While the use of questions such as "How do you get along with your peers/teachers" were raised, results did not throw light on any crucial relationship between good or bad peer/teacher socialisation and students' academic outcomes. Most studies on understanding under-performance in school or the dropout phenomenon have focused on people aged 16 and over. Lower secondary school students' standard ages ranged between ages 11 and 15 and therefore differences in the ways they experience socialisation were expected. Students indeed reported experiencing good and bad times at school, to suffer socially and, to a degree, institutional violence or discrimination. These experiences, however, seem to be seen by students as a common part of their everyday lives at school.

6.8.1 Relationship with peers and teachers

Although male high achievers admitted to being, to an extent, reserved when socialising with peers and teachers, both female and male high achievers said they had good relationships with their teachers and peers. This factor is very likely to be related to the fact that five of the 12 high achievers interviewed (three males and two females) belonged to a religion other than Catholicism, which is the main religion in Mexico. Despite the fact that teachers were keen to highlight that students of "other religions" were well behaved, responsible and were not generally disruptive, high achievers tended to keep stable social relations, regardless of their creed.

Although all students and dropouts were asked the same questions mentioned above, students 'at risk' and dropouts usually mentioned somebody that they did not get along with, either fellow students or teachers. In some instances they mentioned both peers and teachers. The range of reasons given varied from their peers being "annoying"; for getting more attention from the opposite sex (in the case of boys); for being criticised for believing to be more "upper class" than the rest (in the case of girls); or general gossip. Despite these troublesome interactions, only one female

dropout (out of a total of 13 students ‘at risk’ and 12 dropouts) from an advantaged location gave the reason for her not wanting to go back to school as being because her girl friends had stopped talking to her and she “didn’t like being alone”. As much as this case is certainly a piece of evidence, it can hardly be taken as representative because none of the other 24 students ‘at risk’ or dropouts together said that their average or poor socialisation with peers or teachers affected their will to stay in or out of school. In brief, students’ poor capacities for socialisation with others did not seem to represent distinctive barriers to their advancement in school.

6.8.2 Students’ “best” and “worst” moments in school

Best moments

A clear distinction between high achievers and less successful students was found regarding their views of the best and worst moments in school. Two straightforward questions were asked: what their best moments in school were and what their worst moments in school were. High achievers’ best days or experiences in school were, on the whole, related to academic achievements such as being named as a ‘flag bearer’ or having won a school contest. Only a few boys mentioned social events that took place in the school. Students ‘at risk’ and dropouts, on the other hand, associated their best days in school with school festivals, birthday events, sports activities, school trips and some even mentioned days out with friends and family holidays. A few of these students were not able to remember such a day and a male dropout said “none”. The positive experiences they had in school, however, were not found to impact students’ marks or their decision to remain in school; they seemed to make students’ experiences in school more enjoyable.

Worst moments

When asked what their worst moments in school were, as well as their best moments, there was, as well, a clear difference between high achievers and less successful children. High achievers, irrespective of gender, mentioned academic-related situations such as a teacher forgetting to print an award for them; failing an assessment; the memory of a teacher leaving the school; and the odd case of the male Christian students whose worst moment was related to not having enough or good friends. Students ‘at risk’ and dropouts on the other hand, regardless of gender, associated worst moments with fights inside and outside the school; when their

mothers were called to the school as a result of their bad behaviour; when teachers ‘ridiculed’ them; or when they were removed from class or had suspensions and similar occurrences. Overall, students’ experiences of bad moments in school appeared to only represent heart-aching moments, and like in the previous section, none of the situations mentioned seemed to have emitted red flags warning of significant barriers to their performance in school.

Discrimination and verbal bullying for religion, skin colour and not conforming to the ‘normative’ gender stereotypes

When students were asked whether they had experienced or witnessed a case of discrimination or violence in school, by either their teachers or peers, more substantial cases emerged. The words “discrimination” or “violence” encouraged the students into giving account of cases of bullying by other students or by teachers. Bullying that was reported included scornful remarks, mocking someone for having a peculiar voice or for their physical characteristics, such as being too short or tall, too fat or skinny. The three main reasons why students were bullied were related to religion, skin colour and not conforming to conventional gender stereotypes. It is important to remark that most teachers and students mentioned that students with disabilities normally have full support from students. With regards to religion, despite most schools from both types of areas promoting respect towards children of “other religions”, students from these religions reported that more often than not, they were the target of discriminatory comments such as the cases of the following students from disadvantaged areas:

They are always asking me why I don’t dance; they’re always telling me that it’s because my religion forbids me to, and no; it’s just that I don’t like it. (Nelson, 14, male high achiever)

They start telling me “You’re a Christian”, that Christians this and that. In fact, it happens a lot in the classroom when we start talking, because there are about five girls who are Christians [...] we start talking and they start making fun, that Christian are useless, [...], that we don’t know how to dance, this and that but in the end everyone should mind their own religion. (Felicita, 14, female high achiever)

Furthermore, other ways of indirect violence from teachers was reported from students who complained that some teachers were unfair when marking their work, or for giving them low marks for not participating in Physical Education or Arts classes (which also includes dancing). Thus, their marks were affected negatively or their conduct was only assessed as “average” despite their claims that they deserved better marks. On the other hand, teachers said that, with time, more schools are opting for alternative measures to compensate for students’ lack of participation in some school activities due to religious beliefs, without having their marks negatively affected. With regards to honouring the national flag on Mondays, several schools have opted for either allowing the students to be present without them having to salute the flag, or for allowing them to arrive to school after the service has finished. Likewise, they are allowed to miss artistic activities Saturdays, along with other festivals. Instead, teachers would set them alternative homework or academic activities. Some schools, however, opt for warning parents before enrolling their children that the school rules include saluting the national flag, and that children who enrol, regardless of religion, must salute the flag.

Finally, skin complexion and gender stereotypes that were “non-conformist” were also a motive for students, and even teachers, to deride or look down upon other students, as teacher and social worker Pilar, from a Technical school in an advantaged area, put it:

[...] but They normally point their fingers to classmates with darker skin, or to those who behave in a particular way... do you know what I mean? Say, he gets pointed at a lot if some of them are effeminate, let’s say, like very fine in his manners, um... they start pointing their fingers, but we work with them all the time not to allow... but children are terrible, aren’t they?.

Oliver, a 12 year-old high achiever, and an ‘at risk’ student from a General school in a disadvantaged area, presented a case which summarised these facts; when he was asked about cases of discrimination or violence between students:

Er... there’s a girl whose name is Rachel [...] um... what happens is that there’s this boy that yells at her “*negrocha*”, the girl is dark [laughs] the girls is dark but completely... she’s not brown, like normal brown, it’s black this girl, black, black, black, no... you can only see her eyes; the

white of her eyes because her eyes are also black, she's black completely, from feet to head, her hand, everything, all of her is black and [laughs] "F**** negrocha!" he tells her and she goes like "Shut up, you, Winnie the Pooh!" because he's fat [...] and they start fighting and she feels bad sometimes and he also feels bad sometimes... There is also one that is sort of... [laughs] sort of... you know... [...] I mean... "half man and half woman" like they call him, you understand, don't you? [...] and everyone tells him things, they tell him "F**** *puto!*", "F**** Armando gay!" "What are you looking at me, f**** gay!" they tell him.

Equally important is to illustrate a case of discrimination for not conforming to the traditional gender stereotypes, exerted by the school staff. Leticia, a 15 year-old female and a 4 month-dropout from a General school in a disadvantaged, shared the following:

Q: Did sometime at school you see, witnessed or were the victim of any type of scorn, discrimination?

Leticia: Umm... Yes.

Q: Of what type?

Leticia: They used to tell me I-lesbian, that I was the lesbian of the whole school they used to tell me, the teachers and the students [...] that if I was really a lesbian... and the Head of the School [female] also used to tell me "Well, you are a damn lesbian, why don't you just get out of this school" she used to say.

Discrimination and bullying are unconstructive situations experienced by students, a fact that may destabilise their commitment in school, and therefore ones that affect students' permanency in school over time (Richardson, Casanova, Placier & Guilfoyle 1989).

6.9 Concluding remarks

The school factors found as influential on students' academic outcomes were described in this chapter in the following order: the school infrastructure; the teachers' attributes (including their historical and current political participation with the SNTE); teachers' positive and negative classroom practices; school policies, including the anti-poverty program *Oportunidades*; and students' socialisation with peers and teachers. Among these, three were shown to have a crucial effect in disengaging students from school: teachers' background, teachers' practices and school policies.

With regards to school facilities, all schools from the study reported lacking adequate infrastructure, equipment and maintenance. As expected, urban schools were in better conditions than those in disadvantaged localities, however, the constant complaints in all schools were over the lack of classrooms, laboratories, computer rooms, cafeterias, and the lack of maintenance to existing facilities and, in particular, of students' toilets. The National Institute for Educational Assessment and Evaluation's (INEE, 2006b) evaluation of public school infrastructure showed that Technical schools are better off than General and *Telesecundaria* schools, with results of 79, 72 and 25 respectively on a scale from 0 to 100. The results of such evaluations are consistent with the findings of this study, showing that students lack spaces for learning and materials that reinforce such learning. One of the most shocking findings was that *Telesecundarias* may have faulty or non-working televisions – their primary means of facilitating learning. As for Technical and General schools, the time it takes for students to find chairs, look for an empty classroom or to improvise a classroom outdoors is time that is not being utilised effectively for learning. These findings are in agreement with Mwamwenda & Mwamwenda (1987) who showed that the lack of adequate furniture and equipment is very likely to diminish students' performance. With regards to the maintenance of facilities, this is normally financed by schools themselves and parents; however, most schools claimed that their funds were rarely enough to keep the facilities up and running, causing them to deteriorate over time until they break down. Therefore, a strategy that schools implement is to get 'workshop' teachers to carry out repairs of furniture and facilities as a means of alleviating their bad state. The lack of maintenance represents another cause for concern, given the association that poor maintenance in schools has with lower school attendance and achievement, as observed by Durán-Narucki (2008).

Both lack of infrastructure and maintenance may lower students' attendance, mainly because teachers usually ask students to bring tools, materials and other stationery, for example, for their workshop or laboratory classes. The fact that students are required to bring their own school materials to schools was an issue that came up as a stressor given that many families with financial struggles are not able to afford such expenses. This becomes an issue given that sometimes teachers' principles include not allowing the students in the classroom if they fail to bring such materials. Some teachers reported financing school materials for their students, however not all teachers do so, nor are they expected to do so. While schools are not able to provide adequate infrastructure, equipment, and even less, materials, it is also a reality that parents may not be able to afford buying such materials, nor teachers. One implication of this is the need for schools to find a way in which no student is excluded from the learning process, be it by the schools finding a way to provide more materials or by redesigning the curriculum to make the most of the learning experience with what is available. All in all, the poor condition of the facilities and the lack of equipment and services in the schools represent limitations in various ways for the students to make the most of their curriculum.

The second set of elements that plays a crucial role in students' academic outcomes revolves around teachers and involves: teachers' lack of knowledge; obsolete practices in the classrooms; lack of adequate teaching qualifications; poor training opportunities; lack of dedication; low salaries; and excessive involvement with political activities. These elements are here grouped as "teachers' attributes" and include characteristics inherent to teachers' present opportunities as well as their historical political involvement and evolution.

With regards to lack of knowledge, students, parents and teachers themselves were very critical of teachers. It is relevant to note that similarly to how high achieving students were able to signal the bad state of infrastructures, these students were also keen to give testimonies concerning teachers who did not master their subjects; English as a second language and mathematics in particular were reported as the modules where teachers lacked expertise. Moreover, these students also complained that many lacked the appropriate teaching credentials. The reason for high achievers being more critical is not clear, however it may have something to do with their better preparation and, probably, because such preparation strengthens their abilities to identify what may be inefficient in their educational system and to demand better conditions for their learning experience.

In relation to classroom practices, the practices including violence in various forms, and teacher-based classroom policies stood out as negative while the human quality of teachers was a trait highly appreciated. With regards to violence, the use of wooden sticks or hitting were practices still carried out by teachers to exert discipline, and harassment of female students by some male teachers is sometimes used as a way of negotiating marks. Most of these cases were reported in disadvantaged areas. A possible reason why such practices prevail in such areas might be associated to the poorer educational backgrounds of parents from these areas; they may be less aware of the existing children's rights, or of more modern approaches to education. On the other hand, the classroom policies freely operated by teachers "within the realm of their own classrooms" (OECD, 2007: 32) give them the power to determine who gets into the classroom and who does not, based on disciplinary criteria that teachers establish themselves. For example, students can be dismissed if they fail to bring their homework or stationery; if their uniforms are not being worn correctly; or if being disruptive. Two effects were drawn from such inflexible measures; firstly, that students may fear teachers and would not feel at ease to ask questions if something was not understood, and secondly, that they can "use" these rules at their convenience if they want to 'hang out' outside the classrooms. These findings corroborate OECD's (2007) observation in relation to Mexico's PISA 2003 results; where the lack of standardisation of discipline in the classroom was highlighted as one of the factors contributing to students' underperformance. It is worth mentioning that despite participants' criticisms over certain teachers; others were acknowledged as being very dedicated and excellent in their subject areas. The human quality of teachers in the classrooms was a trait highly appreciated by all students, especially by those 'at risk' of dropping out, perhaps because of the value that such academic and caring support might represent for them.

The lack of teachers' training that students reported was a subject also brought up fervently by the majority of teachers, a topic which appears to be intrinsically related to their association to the National Union of Education Workers (*SNTE*). Teachers, in fact, seem to face contradictory situations; on the one hand, the Minister of Education of Mexico (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) has set up important objectives to improve the quality of education in Mexico since the National Agreement for the Modernisation of Basic Education in 1992. This has been intended through the use of schemes such as the Quality Schools Program (*Escuelas de Calidad*); the National Literacy Program (*Programa Nacional de Lectura*); and the

enrichment of the Educational television network in Mexico (*Edusat*) (SEP, 2007), among others. Naturally, along with these changes came the implementation of technology and communication resources. On the other hand, at least on paper, training opportunities are on offer for all teachers, yet, the findings revealed that such opportunities are in practice, not equal for everyone but that it depends on the privileges teachers earn through a system of points controlled by the *SNTE*. Given that almost by default all teachers working for the education system in Mexico form part of this Union, they are compelled to follow what is called the teachers' career path (*trayectoria laboral docente*). Their time in the profession and their level of political involvement give teachers more privileges over time such as attending training courses or choosing a school of their preference, with urban areas being the most popular. This evidently represents not only limitations to newly graduates and to those teachers who abstain from attending given political demonstrations, but it also paralyses their opportunities for career development. Overall, one of the most interesting findings was that the majority of teachers would prefer not to get involved in political movements; firstly, because they may not agree with the Union's political tactics and, secondly, because most of the time, the "causes" they are battling for are not fully understood – for example, changes in pension schemes or in salaries. Nevertheless, teachers' hands are tied and many opt to get involved in political movements to avoid penalties, but this, as a consequence, leads them to be absent from their classrooms for hours whilst attending meetings; for days when attending demonstrations; and for months when they go on strikes. Thus, teachers' lack of training and their 'enslavement' to the *SNTE* are elements that, in combination, represent major barriers to students' learning.

In addition to the aforementioned elements, there are other aspects that teachers from public schools bear with: large class groups, an overloaded school curriculum, and low salaries. Classes sizes ranged from 35 to 46 students in the schools visited for this study when the average class size for public schools would ideally be no more than 30 students per group according to UNESCO-UIS (2008). If students in small classes have better opportunities to interact with teachers and accessing educational resources (UNESCO, 2008), only *Telesecundarias*, which have smaller groups, cover this requirement for good quality of teaching. In relation to the contents of the lower secondary school curriculum, the majority of participants agreed that the curriculum was overloaded. A heavy curriculum combined with the number of hours that teachers do not spend in the classroom (due to their political

involvement) and the hours students do not spend in the classroom (due to their dismissals), account greatly for students' disengagement from learning and mark-dropping. Particularly after the prolonged teachers' strike in 2006, students seemed to struggle to catch up with their classes and their marks dropped. Furthermore, teachers reported having to choose which aspects of the curriculum to cover, a fact that is very likely to increase the gaps in students' learning. These findings confirm that teachers' excessive workload represents a limitation to the teaching quality in Mexico as reported by OECD (2007). Likewise, teachers' salaries in Mexico are known to be significantly lower than in other OECD countries (UNESCO-UIS, 2008), this often forces them to find alternative jobs to generate extra income, as reported by teachers from this study. Thus, attending other jobs may be associated to the lack of teachers' preparation that students complained about and their lack of motivation described by teachers themselves. The association that Sandoval (2002) made between teachers' low salaries and a negative impact on their motivations and teaching skills is confirmed here. For example, the time that teachers dedicate to other jobs might 'take out' time that they could spend preparing their classes or developing their teaching skills and work overload is likely to create a sense of frustration and a lack of motivation.

The role school policies play in the lives of students was an unanticipated finding and one of the strongest factors affecting students' permanency in school. School policies were defined by teachers as guidelines, supposedly allowing flexibility and not written on a specific regulatory document, yet the findings suggested that they are rather applied as rigid rules and regulations. Two types of policies were identified to affect students negatively; the policies regarding the marking system of the lower secondary school curriculum, and the policies regarding pregnancies and marriages, which affect mainly girls. With regards to the former, the Mexican educational system requires that marks are given for homework, notebook appearance, attendance and behaviour, not just examinations (Sandoval, 2002). Students who fail to bring their homework, either because they did not know how to complete it or due to negligence, accumulate bad marks that may lead to examination and module failure. As mentioned above, teachers may also determine to "mark" students' appearance based on haircuts, cleanliness, etc. All of these factors are nothing but elements that put students at risk of being disengaged from school. When students 'break' these 'regulations', i.e., not wearing the right trainers, wearing the wrong shoe or belt colour, wearing the hair too long for boys or make up for girls, these

students may be dismissed until they conform to the school dress code. Moreover, depending on the gravity of the ‘breach’ (for example if they do not comply with their homework or get involved in fights), students may not be allowed back in the school until they bring their parents. In many cases, however, parents are not able to come soon, for example, if they are away or busy with work or simply because children do not tell them promptly. In either case, whether it is hours or days of school that children miss, home and class work accumulates and students spend valuable time catching up with classes they have missed. The second type of policy relates to permanent school expulsions, which occur if a girl falls pregnant or marries, or if students get involved with serious anti-social behaviour. This way of extreme sanctioning provokes what Osler and Vincent (2003) described as “involuntary disengagement” from school. Furthermore, school measures taken with respect to girls who fall pregnant or marry concur to what these authors describe as an “unofficial” type of exclusion because they are not “formally” expelled but asked to switch to the *night school* system, normally school for people in employment. As many teachers described, if they let these girls stay in school, the school staff would face both the risk of setting a bad example with other students and the risk of dealing with distressed parents for “allowing” these situations to happen in the schools. The chances for these girls to finishing their lower secondary education are thus diminished because very few, or none, see the night school system as a viable option, generally two reasons: firstly, because they consider it a danger to their safety to attend night schools and, secondly, because they may need to do housework. As for boys, especially those in disadvantaged areas, when they are expelled from schools, their tendency is to find employment. These very strict, rather exclusionary policies appear to suggest that the schools lack effective prevention programs regarding sex education and psychological support targeted to students with behaviour problems. More details regarding possible revision of school policies are outlined in the Conclusion chapter.

Oportunidades, the national anti-poverty strategy designed to raise educational attendance and achievement, is included as an educational policy but, in this case, coming from the federal government. The program certainly proved to boost school attendance; however, the findings suggested that parents’ main motivation to do so was the monetary assistance received in exchange. Furthermore, cases of corruption and misuse of the program were reported. Despite these findings not being very reassuring, the silver lining could be that by attending school, students continue

benefiting from whichever advantages the school experience offers. The extent to which *Oportunidades* helps to increase school achievement is something that the education sector in Mexico might need to re-evaluate.

Finally, students' school experiences appear to exert an important yet, contrary to expectations, not so determinant influence in students' academic outcomes. One of the worthy aspects identified was the difference in the way in which high achievers and students 'at risk' 'live' school; for the former, their priorities, motivations and future plans revolved around academic accomplishments whereas for students with low marks and those with behavioural problems, priorities, motivations and future plans revolved around school festivals, riding around and getting jobs in the near future. Two implications can be inferred from this pattern; firstly, there is a possibility that students' attitudes towards school and life in general is greatly permeated at home and, secondly, that previous and present experiences both in the school and the household determine students' motivation towards future academic attainments. Also, high achievers appeared to create positive socialisation bonds with peers and teachers while less successful students are more prone to get involved in problematic social interactions with peers and teachers. The aspects identified as influential factors are related to discrimination and bullying because of belonging to a religion other than Catholicism, skin colour and for not conforming to 'normative' gender stereotypes. These types of aggression, however, did not seem to operate in isolation to "push" students out of school. This finding, however, cannot be generalised because, while general aspects of students' interaction with peers and teachers were explored, other aspects such as self-esteem, personality, identity, etc, were not explored in-depth. Thus, further work may be required to establish the influence of psychological aspects of the individuals on school outcomes.

7 Individual factors

This chapter focuses on students' personal attributes by describing the different personality traits held by "successful" and "less successful" students. These sets of "profiles" could help to identify students in one of the following two categories: high achievers or 'at risk', and, more importantly, to recognise when a student is disengaging from school, or at risk of dropping out. The first section of this chapter presents the demographic characteristics of students from the study, disaggregated by gender, age and languages spoken. The second section presents eight attitudinal characteristics of successful and less successful students. Given that students' level of involvement in the school has been incorporated within the school factors (See '6.8, A note school experiences'), this section only considers students' patterns of academic participation throughout the years. Other attitudinal factors include the extent of academic motivation between groups of students, aspirations for their future; the influence of role-models; their priorities in life; their activities after school, paid work; involvement with anti-social behaviour and dating. The final section of this chapter summarises students' academic and behavioural traits identified as relevant as to how they participate educationally.

7.1 Students' demographic characteristics

Students' personal characteristics were classified as physical and attitudinal. In order to find out whether differences existed between high achievers and less successful students, their gender, age and language were considered in order to observe whether such categories were significant in their school performance.

7.1.1 Tendencies by age

A clear difference was noted between successful and less successful students; from the 36 students (including dropouts) interviewed, female and male high achievers, without exception, were attending the appropriate school year for their age in both advantaged (AA) and disadvantaged areas (DA), as shown on Table 31 and 32. Dropouts provided information of the year they were enrolled in at the time they left school. Three important patterns were found when comparisons were made by area: firstly, the majority of the students interviewed in disadvantaged areas were over-age; secondly, not only more male high achievers but also 'at risk' and dropout males were over-age in disadvantaged areas, compared to females; and thirdly, almost all male and female dropouts were not in their age group, regardless of area.

Table 31. Students' ages in relation to their school year.

Participants	Eligible age	Over-age
High achiever (M)	4 (20%)	0 (0%)
High achiever (F)	7 (35%)	0 (0%)
At risk (M)	4 (20%)	6 (37.5%)
At risk (F)	2 (10%)	1 (6%)
Non-attender (M)	1 (5%)	6 (37.5%)
Non-attender (F)	2 (10%)	3 (19%)
36 students	20 (100%)	16 (100%)

Table 32. Students' ages in relation to their school year by area.

Participants	AA			DA		
	Eligible age	Over-age	Sub-total	Eligible age	Over-age	Sub-total
High achiever (M)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2
High achiever (F)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	5
At risk males (M)	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	3	2 (29%)	5 (71%)	7
At risk (F)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1
Dropout (M)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1	1 (17%)	5 (83%)	6
Dropout (F)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	4
36 students	9	2	11	11	14	25

The fact that more students from disadvantaged areas were over-age carries two important implications: first, that they may have been held back at some point in their basic education, and second, that these areas enclose factors that hinder students' capability to succeed in school.

7.1.2 Tendencies by languages spoken

The decision to include the category of language in the study derives from the fact that Mexico has been acknowledged as a "multicultural and plurilingual" (INEE, 2006a:32) by having more than sixty different ethnic groups in the whole country, which are generally located in States such as Oaxaca, Chiapas, Veracruz or Yucatán (INEE, 2006a). On the whole, 7 percent of the national population speak an indigenous language and 88% of those who speak an indigenous language, also speak Spanish (bilingual) (INEGI, 2010a).

Thus, students were asked whether they spoke “Spanish and Zapoteco” or “Spanish only” given that Zapoteco is the indigenous language¹⁴ spoken in the areas of the State of Oaxaca in which the study was conducted. As shown in table 33, all students in advantaged areas reported speaking “Spanish only”. On the other hand, in the disadvantaged localities, four high achievers (2 males and 2 females) out of seven said they spoke “Spanish and Zapoteco”. As for males ‘at risk’ in disadvantaged areas, the majority of them, spoke “Spanish and Zapoteco” (71%). Only one female of this category was interviewed in such areas, and she spoke “Spanish and Zapoteco”. A similar tendency was observed with dropouts, the majority of them (83% and 75% of males and females respectively) spoke “Spanish and Zapoteco”. Thus, the overall number of students who spoke two languages (native Zapoteco and Spanish) in advantaged areas was 0% as opposed to 72% in disadvantaged areas. These results are significant given that ‘at risk’ students and dropouts in disadvantaged areas were more likely to be bilingual; it can therefore be assumed that there is a key relationship between bilingualism, poverty, and poor academic performance.

Table 33. Languages spoken by students.

Participants	AA			DA		
	Spanish only	Spanish and Zapoteco	Sub-total	Spanish only	Spanish and Zapoteco	Sub-total
High achiever (M)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2
High achiever (F)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	5
At risk (M)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	3	2 (29%)	5 (71%)	7
At risk (F)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1
Dropout (M)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1	1 (17%)	5 (83%)	6
Dropouts (F)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	4
Subtotals	11 (100%)	0 (0%)	11	7 (28%)	18 (72%)	25

7.2 Students’ attitudinal characteristics

Attitudinal traits were explored based on Rumberger’s (2001) “individual” approach to find out the extent to which students’ values, inclinations and conducts influenced their performance in school.

¹⁴ Indigenous language is the numerous idioms that historically are inheritance of the diverse ethnic groups of the American continent (INEGI, 2010a).

7.2.1 Patterns of school engagement over the years

The educational engagement of the student, as described by Rumberger (2001) involves “students’ attitudes and behaviours with respect to both the formal aspects of school (i.e., classroom and school activities) and the informal ones (e.g., peer and adult relationships)” (p. 6). Fundamentally, this formal approach is based on Finn’s (1993) perspective of the accumulation of threat factors in the lives of students over the years, where students’ early school achievements play an important role in future achievements.

Module failure and year repetition

Students and parents of students were asked whether they (or their children in the case of parents¹⁵) had failed a module or been held back one year in school at some point of their academic trajectory. With the exception of one female high achiever who reported having failed a module in 5th grade of Primary School (“due to family problems”), none of the other high achievers of both genders reported having failed a module or being held back a year in school. All respondents to these questions are grouped in Table 34.

Table 34. Participants who responded the question of module failure and year repetition.

Participants in AA and DA	Total (%)
High achievers (11) Parents of high achievers (4)	15 (36%)
‘At risk’ students (13) Parents of ‘at risk’ students (2)	15 (36%)
Dropouts (11) Parents of dropouts (1)	12(28%)
Total	42 (100%)

Note: 10 respondents were from AA, and 32, from DA.

Generally, of the 42 respondents (35 students and 7 parents), 45 percent (19) mentioned that neither they, nor or their children, had failed a module, and almost 55 percent (23) of them mentioned that they, or their children, had either failed a module and/or had been held back one or two years in school. Interestingly, 7 percent of high achievers reported having failed a module or been held back in

¹⁵ Of the study population, the children of these parents were not interviewed; their parents rather provided the family, school and individual related information.

school; and 87 and 75 percent of ‘at risk’ students and dropouts respectively had gone through such an experience.

Patterns by areas

If data is disaggregated by area, 100 percent of the high achievers from advantaged areas, had never failed a module or been held back in school in the past, compared to 90 percent of high achievers from disadvantaged areas. When the focus is turned the other way and percentages of students who had failed a module or who had been held back in school were disaggregated, 100 percent of the ‘at risk’ students in advantaged areas had experienced either or both conditions, compared to 83 percent of ‘at risk’ students in disadvantaged areas. However, this latter statement must be interpreted with caution because there were only 3 ‘at risk’ respondents from the former area. Similar trends were observed for dropouts (see Table 35); only one of the 2 interviewed in advantaged areas, had gone through a module failure experience, compared to 8 (out of 10) who reported either or both conditions in disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, the ratios between ‘at risk’ students who “have” and “have not” experienced deplorable academic failure vary greatly: in advantaged areas, the ratio is 3 to 0 whereas in disadvantaged areas, the ratio is 10 to 2. All in all, students in such areas appear to be at a greater academic disadvantage.

Table 35. Students who “have” or “have not” failed a module or who have been held back a year in school at some point in their lives, disaggregated by area.

Participants	Advantaged Areas (AA)		Disadvantaged Areas (DA)	
	“Have”	“Have not”	“Have”	“Have not”
High achievers	0	5	1	9
Students ‘at risk’	3	0	10	2
Dropouts	1	1	8	2
Totals	4	6	19	13

Note: Parents reported the academic background of their children.

Gender patterns

As anticipated, the findings indicated that girls were at an academic advantage regarding their academic trajectory, compared to boys; in general, fewer females than males “had” failed a module or had been held back a year in school in both areas. Nevertheless, the biggest ratios were observed in disadvantaged areas between ‘at

risk' males and females, where the ratios were 10 to 0, followed by male and female dropouts with a ratio of 5 to 3 (See Table 36).

Table 36. Students who “have” or “have not” failed a module or who have been held back a year in school at some point in their lives, disaggregated by gender.

Participants	Advantaged Areas (AA)		Disadvantaged Areas (DA)	
	“Have”	“Have not”	“Have”	“Have not”
High achievers	0	5	1	9
(Male)	0	3	0	1
(Female)	0	2	1	8
Students ‘at risk’	3	0	10	2
(Male)	2	0	10	0
(Female)	1	0	0	2
Dropouts	1	1	8	2
(Male)	1	0	5	0
(Female)	0	1	3	2
<i>Totals</i>	4	6	19	13

As expected, 100 percent of students who had repeated a year in school in the past, had failed modules as well, yet not all students who had gone through either of these experiences had dropped out. Interestingly, of the 15 students who had been held back a year (2 in advantaged areas and 13 in disadvantaged areas), 93 percent repeated a year or two in primary school and 7 percent (one student ‘at risk’ from an advantaged areas) repeated a year in secondary school. Also, the greater majority of students who were ‘at risk’, or were dropouts, from both areas had reported having “bad conduct” reports or having missed school on unauthorised absences, or having been suspended for misbehaviour.

Other trends

The rewarding aspect of learning proved to be another way in which performance in school can be predicted in future years. Although some of the students who were ‘at risk’, from both genders, mentioned having good grades whilst in primary school, all high achievers from both genders reported having received diplomas of acknowledgement at primary and in secondary schools. This expected result was found to be strongly linked to academic motivation, which, unlike achievement only, illustrates the extent to which students become prone to attain further future goals

(Coleman, 1966; Finn, 1993) an aspect that will be described in more detail in the following section.

7.2.2 Academic motivation and future aspirations

This section presents students' motivations; aspirations for the future and their priorities in life. In relation to academic motivation, as described by Rumberger (2001), educational success, as well as commitment, are determined not only by students' educational background and earlier achievements but also by students' present educational ambitions. Motivation is also described by Coleman (1966) as being an outcome of schooling, and one that is strongly influenced by the family and school environments. This interlinked relationship will be discussed further in the 'concluding remarks' of this section. It is worth indicating that students' participation in class and homework completion are topics that have been covered in section 5.2.1 (Disposition of students towards the completion of homework), and the social involvement in the school has been covered section 6.8.2 (Students' "best" and "worst" moments in school). Students, thus, were asked five basic questions regarding their future aspirations and present priorities: a) What are your plans in two years time or in the future?; b) What is your dream job?; c) What are your friends' future plans?; d) Is there a person that you admire or that inspires you?; e) What is your priority in life? (For this question, it was generally suggested that they mentioned the first thing that came to their minds).

Aspirations for their future and dream jobs

A clear distinction existed between categories of students regarding their personal academic motivation and general enthusiasm about the future. The number of respondents to these questions was 31 of out 37 (11 high achievers, 12 'at risk' and 10 dropouts). Without exception, and regardless of area and gender, all 11 high achievers mentioned that in two years time they would be in upper secondary school, and the majority mentioned that their plans involved going to university. Furthermore, most of them were certain about the university degrees they wanted to pursue (i.e., being a pathologist, an accountant, architects, marine biologist, etc.). The following quotation from a female high achiever from a disadvantaged area, aged 14, illustrates the common way in which students responded these questions:

Q: And your short term plans, what about them? What do you see yourself doing in two years?

Larisa: Yes, well, what I want is to continue studying and finish a university degree and to be someone in life.

‘At risk’ students, to an extent, similarly visualised themselves studying in the future; 7 of them said they would go to upper secondary school, with only one male student from a disadvantaged area mentioning wanting to go to university. No significant differences between areas or gender were found. From the other 4, two males said they would be working in two years, and two said they did not know.

Finally, of the 10 dropouts who responded, 30 percent (1 male, 2 females) mentioned they would re-enrol at a different lower secondary school at some point; 40 percent (1 male, 3 females) mentioned they would be working, and 2 percent (1 male, 2 females) said that they did not know. It is important to add that the types of jobs these students mentioned were biased by gender stereotypes; agriculture, carpentry for males, and working as a shop assistant, helping with the domestic work, or as a housewife, for females. Note the uncertainty depicted in the following quotation from a male dropout, aged 14, from a disadvantaged area:

Q: And what do you want to do in the future?

Benito: [laughter]

Q: For example, when you are 20, what would you like to be doing?

Benito: [laughter]

Q: Working or in school?

Benito: [laughter] in school, but... umm... I didn't really like school.

A note on friends' future plans

The extent to which friends' futures affect students' decisions about their academic future in this study was found only relatively significant. In both types of area most students claimed that their friends had similar plans to their own, however, a considerable number of high achievers in disadvantaged areas reported cases of friends who were willing to continue with their studies, but who were unable to because of the lack of economic resources of their families.

7.2.3 The influence of positive role models

The overall response to this question showed a positive correlation between successful students and having a role model; the more successful the student, the more likely that he or she was to have a person they admired and, the less successful the student was, the lower the likelihood that they did. Those high achievers with a role model said they admired a relative (i.e. uncles, aunts, siblings) or teachers. The reasons given for such admiration were, firstly, “for being knowledgeable” (63 percent); and secondly, for having “worked hard in life” and having “moved up” (37 percent). The responses from ‘at risk’ students with role models were, on the other hand, difficult to group due to the varied and interesting nature of their answers, yet the only aspect in common was that almost none of them mentioned relatives. Their answers varied from admiring a football player, a church pastor, a human rights activist, a disabled carpenter, and their boss, to mention some. The two dropouts, who happened to be females, said they admired a teacher and a cousin who was an economic migrant, respectively. It is important to mention that the category of gender did not appear as significant, and as for areas, the only aspect gathered was that more high achievers from advantaged areas (3 of 4) said they did not have a role model. Table 37 shows this relationship by students’ academic status.

Table 37. Students with role models and students without role models.

Participants	Had role model	Did not have role model	Total
High achievers	8	4	12
Students ‘at risk’	8	3	11
Dropouts	2	5	7

7.2.4 Priorities in life

Students were asked what their current priority was or what the most important thing for them was; all (3) high achievers who were asked this question stated that what was most important to them was studying. ‘at risk’ students (6) gave varied answers such as “being cool”, “living well”, etc. Only two students (male and female) said their priority was “going to school”. Dropouts (3) followed the same pattern by giving diverse answers such as “going back to school”, “my family”, and “get away from my home”.

7.2.5 Activities outside school

Given that the social experiences of students play their part in influencing their disengagement from school (Ekstrom 1986; Rumberger, 2001), students' activities after school, such as attending formal courses, playing sports, socialising with friends, etc., were also explored in this study. Students were asked about their activities after school, whether they worked, and whether they had a boyfriend or girlfriend. The aim was to find out whether such "activities" influenced their performance in school or, more importantly, whether they could be associated to the academic status of students. It is worth noting that patterns of homework completion, as well as participation in domestic activities, have been explored in the family factors section.

After school activities

Normal activities for students included domestic work, art courses, religious activities or hanging out in the house. The majority of high achievers (8 out of 10 respondents) said they performed domestic chores after school. All respondents to the question of domestic chores were from disadvantaged areas, the majority (70 percent) of which were females. Also, four high achievers (1 male and 3 females) said they participated in the family's informal work; this implicated that they carried out unpaid jobs such as getting involved with food preparation and/or selling, or in a mechanic's workshop. With regards to art classes, three students (2 from an advantaged area and 1 from a disadvantaged area) said they attended language (English) courses or music classes after school; three also mentioned attending religious services after school, and finally, three indicated watching television, playing with computers, or reading. As for the 9 'at risk' students (6 males and 3 females), 3 said they undertook domestic chores, regardless of gender, 2 male mentioned sports, other 2 males said going to disco nights; a female said going on rides with friends, and another girl said she did nothing. For dropouts, football was a preferred activity after school; 27 percent (2 males, 1 female); 18 percent did domestic chores, 18 percent went on rides or to discos and 18 percent said they did nothing.

7.2.6 Paid work

One anticipated finding was that the more successful the student, the less likely it was for them to be involved in paid work. From 16 respondents (4 high achievers, 5

students ‘at risk’, and 7 dropouts), no high achievers reported having a paid job. However, the ratio between ‘at risk’ students who had a paid job and those who did not was 2 to 3, and according to expectations, all dropouts had a paid job. Disaggregations by gender and area are shown in Table 38. Furthermore, teachers and social workers agreed that most students in disadvantaged areas work, either formally or informally in order to contribute to the family income. Note the quotation from a male teacher of 27 years:

The majority of them work, yes, the majority work, umm... the precarious situation and the economic situation of these families in the area... force students into the need to work, doesn't it? They go and sell things; any activity that allows them to get some cents that can help them with the school, for their own things and also for the home, doesn't it?

Table 38. Students with a paid job and without paid jobs disaggregated by gender (Male (M), Female (F)) and area (Advantaged Areas (AA), Disadvantaged Areas (DA)).

High achievers	Students ‘at risk’	Dropouts
No (F, DA)	Yes (M, AA), mechanic	Yes (M, DA), builder
No (F, AA)	Yes (M, DD), shop assistant	Yes (M, DA), farmer
No (F, AA)	No (M, AA)	Yes (M, DA), factory assistant
No (F, AA)	No (M, AA)	Yes (M, DA), couturier
Total students: 4	No (M, DA)	Yes (M, DA), moto-taxi driver
	Total students: 5	Yes (F, DA), moto-taxi driver
		Yes (F, DA), waitress
		Total students: 7

7.2.7 Involvement with anti-social behaviour

According to expectations, ‘at risk’ students and dropouts were more likely to exhibit anti-social behaviour than their more successful peers. From the 27 students (8 high achievers, 11 ‘at risk’ students and 7 dropouts) who were asked whether they drank alcohol, smoked or used drugs, no high achievers reported using such substances. However, 1 male ‘at risk’ student and 3 dropouts (2 males and 1 female) said they drank alcohol and had used drugs such as marijuana or cocaine, and these four

students were from disadvantaged areas. From these results, a clear association can be established between poor school performance and involvement with illicit substances. A possible explanation for this might be that disadvantaged localities are more likely to lack resources such as play areas and after-school activities, a fact that jeopardises students' opportunities to develop healthy habits (Rumberger, 2001). Nevertheless, this association must be interpreted with caution because high achievers in disadvantaged areas, who also lack such recreational resources, managed to avoid such temptations.

Another important finding was that a significant number of students and school staff from both area types, said drugs were trafficked within the schools, and introduced indirectly by criminal gangs. Teachers, on their part either had reserved comments or admitted they prefer to look the other way on this respect, for the matter being a double-edged sword given the legal implications and the criminal and other anti-social purposes that gangs are involved with. The quotation below from a male teacher of 16 years from a disadvantaged area illustrates this:

Q: And do you get prohibited substances distributed within the school?

Mariano: We have had cases but... to tell you the truth we have also... we are afraid, I mean to get involved with problems because of drugaddictions. Pointing fingers? Because sometimes [mumbles] this is linked to organised crime and who knows...

The fact that teachers prefer "to look the other way" is not encouraging for the safety and well-being of students and because students' risk of being involved with anti-social behaviour increases. One encouraging strategy taken by schools that a few teachers mentioned was the "backpack operations" where children's backpacks are searched for prohibited substances.

7.2.8 Dating

Students' involvement with "romantic" relationships was, to a great extent, directly proportional to achieving low marks. From the 26 students (73 percent) out of 37 interviewed were asked whether they had a boyfriend or a girlfriend; 54 percent indicated they had a significant other at the time, and 46 percent said they did not. Almost all high achievers, regardless of gender and area, were not involved in romantic relationships; 80 percent of the 'at risk' students had boyfriends or

girlfriends at the time of the interview, and the 20 percent who said “no” also said that they had been involved in such a relationship in the past. For dropouts, it was somehow surprising that three (2 females and 1 male) of the four with a negative answer, said they had never had romantic relationships in the past. Gender may be an important aspect to explore further since males were more likely to be involved in dates, in both areas, than females. Table 39 disaggregates this information by gender and area.

Table 39. Students who were involved in romantic relationships.

High achievers	Students ‘at risk’	Dropouts
Yes (F, DA)	Yes (M, DA)	Yes (M, DA)
No (F, DA)	Yes (M, DA)	Yes (M, DA)
No (F, DA)	Yes (M, AA)	Yes (M, DA)
No (F, DA)	Yes (M, DA)	Yes (F, DA)
No (F, DA)	Yes (M, DA)	No (M, DA)
No (M, AA)	Yes (M, AA)	No (M, DA)
No (M, AA)	Yes (F, DA)	No (F, DA)
No (M, DA)	Yes (F, AA)	No (F, DA)
	No (M, DA)	
	No (M, DA)	
Total students: 8	Total students: 10	Total students: 8

7.3 Concluding remarks

The analysis of demographic and attitudinal characteristics of students (including dropouts) revealed clear differences between successful and less successful students. With regards to age and gender, overall, more females were enrolled in school according to their age group compared to males. An important finding was that the majority of high achievers were enrolled in school according at eligible age, irrespective of gender and area, a fact that can be explained by their smooth academic trajectory, as it will be discussed in more detail below. With regards to age and area, in general, students from disadvantaged areas were more likely to be over-age with the exception of high achievers. With regards to language, it was, to an extent, expected that none of the students interviewed in advantaged areas were bilingual, and also expected that a great number of students in disadvantaged areas spoke both native Zapoteco and Spanish, in particular ‘at risk’ students and dropouts.

The situation with indigenous languages must be flagged as relevant given that it has been acknowledged (see for example, Stromquist, 2001; UNESCO, 2010) that students whose home language differs from the one used in schools (Spanish in the case of Mexico), tend to be at a greater academic disadvantage. Although some of the high achievers were bilingual, the efforts that these students have to go through cannot be taken for granted because they are at greater risk of educational failure if other factors coincide, for example, lack of books, lack of understanding of a module, conflicts at home, etc.

These demographic findings are significant in at least four major respects: firstly, that high achievers are more likely to have had an intact academic trajectory since primary school, irrespective of area; secondly, that 'at risk' students and dropouts are very likely to be over-age; thirdly, year repetition is significantly more common in disadvantaged areas; and finally, that students from disadvantaged areas are considerably more likely to be bilingual. In summary, a strong relationship between poverty, bilingualism, over-age enrolment and poor school performance can be confirmed, at least in the context of Mexico.

Switching to students' attitudinal characteristics, their academic engagement over the years indeed proved to be associated to their present academic conditions. The majority of high achievers, for example, reported never having failed a module or being held back a year in school, irrespective of gender. Two important patterns were identified with 'at risk' students and dropouts: not only had all gone through either or both experiences but more males from disadvantaged areas did. These findings are consistent with those of Ekstrom (1986) and Rumberger (2001) who suggested that prior achievements play an important role in predicting academic engagement. To this it can be added that poorer students are more likely to have had a record of poor academic performance over the years.

The patterns identified regarding their ambitions and social life were marked between groups of students. With regards to priorities in life and future aspirations, high achievers associated their priorities with their studies and less successful students with finding a job, being cool or some were unsure. Moreover, high achievers, without exception and regardless of gender and area, intended to complete a university degree and 'at risk' students and dropouts, on the other hand, were unsure or their aspirations turned around getting a job in the short term. The influence of friends on academic attainment that Ekstrom (1986) and Finn (1993) suggested was confirmed in this study given that most students claimed that their

friends had similar ambitions to them. Similarly, the majority of high achievers from advantaged areas claimed to have a role model but only a minority of less successful students said they had one. The findings on paid work was noteworthy; most students in disadvantaged areas and fewer in advantaged areas worked after school, be it a paid job or involvement with the informal economy. None of the high achievers had a paid job; however, the majority of those who came from disadvantaged areas participated in the informal economy, normally assisting their parents. This finding is highly related to the fact that poverty affecting disadvantaged households require that children contribute to household income (for those with paid jobs) or help to reduce labour costs (for those helping with the family business). What was admirable was the tenacity observed from high achievers; they were able to combine homework and after-school jobs. This implies that working, which takes up time from students, does not necessarily represent a barrier for high accomplishments in school, and also, that having a job in isolation could not be associated with school failure. At the same time these findings support the idea that students in poorer localities are, as UNESCO (2010) already signalled it, at a more vulnerable position and therefore, enlarging their chances of marginalisation from education.

Dating was another element that emerged as significant and which corroborated Ekstrom's (1986) and Finn's (1993) findings of US high school students, where those who dropped out used to hang out with friends or go out on dates more than 'stayers'. The present study unveiled important patterns; firstly, that male students were more likely to be involved in dating, regardless of academic performance and area. Moreover, amongst 'at risk' students and dropouts, more females were involved in dating than their high achiever counterparts, irrespective of area. Two situations of concern arise from these findings; firstly, that students who go on dates dedicate less time to homework completion, and so will be reflected negatively on their marks; and secondly, that they are at greater risk of unwanted pregnancies, and therefore, of dropping out from school.

The situation with anti-social behaviour was similar; some 'at risk' students and dropouts had been involved or were involved with gangs, not so high achievers. Unfortunately, teachers said that given the seriousness that dealing with drug dealing or gangs involves, they are left with no realistic choice but to look the other way. Two main implications derive from these dynamics in schools; again, that students involved with anti-social behaviour are going to be less likely to dedicate time to their academic responsibilities and more likely to jeopardise their motivations and

very likely, their ambitions. The second implication is that schools may need to adjust the strategies to tackle anti-social behaviour, for example, by raising awareness at what it involves and its serious consequences.

This chapter has outlined the marked demographic and attitudinal tendencies from successful and less successful students and the constant factors identified as putting student at high risk of educational failure were: living in a disadvantaged locality, speaking a native language, having a paid job, hanging out with low achievers, going on dates, and being involved with anti-social behaviour. Whether some of these elements are a result of the combination of one or more individual factors is possible and therefore caution must be applied for associations. More importantly, these elements can be useful for teachers and schools to identify when students might need extra support or attention (for example, those bilingual students, those with jobs after school, those presenting bad conducts, etc.) to prevent their total disengagement from school.

8 Conclusions

This concluding chapter comprises four main sections. The first section reviews the objective of this thesis, along with the three research questions which guided the research. The second section summarises the main findings, discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 by a) considering the way in which they relate to the research questions; b) highlighting the key factors that were found to be influential on educational outcomes; and c) by presenting a table summarising the positive and negative influential factors from the three spheres explored, family, school and geographical location. The end of this section, which focuses on findings, includes the estimated degree of generalisation and transferability of such findings within the study itself and across other potential settings. The second section of the chapter accounts for the contribution to knowledge, as well as the implications of practice and the entities involved. This section also draws out advice to education policy makers. The third section summarises the limitations and advantages of the study. The fourth section of this chapter considers directions for future research in the field of educational failure in publicly funded lower secondary schools in Mexico.

8.1 Research questions and main findings

The objective of this study was to find out which factors affect students' participation in lower secondary education in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. Three main research questions were addressed by this study: 1) What are the factors that affect students' educational performance in lower secondary school?; 2) What are the factors that lead to students' disengagement from this level of education?; and 3) To what extent do these factors vary depending on socio-economic background?

In relation to these questions, this study has found that 1) the factors affecting the academic performance of lower secondary students in Mexico come from three main spheres: family, school and geographic location. Each sphere contains different factors that can affect the performance of students in positive or negative ways. In turn, these factors rarely exist in isolation and therefore it is the combination of such factors which may influence the lives of students; 2) the most relevant factors that lead to student disengagement can be summarised as follows: parental educational and occupational background, the stability of the home environment, teaching and classroom practices, the teachers' dependence on the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE), the exclusionary school policies and the constraining cultural practices of the community; 3) although socio-economic status is directly related to

students' school performance, it is not a single factor neither is it absolute, since the intervention of other factors can reduce or reverse this relationship.

8.1.1 The interrelation of family, school and geographic factors

The results of this investigation showed that students' educational performance is influenced both directly and indirectly by the family, school and geographical settings in which they interact. The attitudinal inclinations of the students may also facilitate or limit their academic performance. Considering those students who fail educationally, that is, those who are underachieving, being excluded from school (officially or unofficially) or those who dropped out, it can be said that their educational failure began when certain signs became manifested, such as low school grades or failing an examination or module. At such a point a student would show signs that something was wrong. Also at this point, it meant that something in the life of this student was not in an "ideal" state, that some aspect of his or her family life, school or community was directly or indirectly influencing them negatively. This study found that for example, if one aspect of one area fails, the other areas could help counter such a failure. It would therefore be necessary that at least one of these three spheres be in good condition.

The most influential family factors

Parental educational and occupational background, as well as the stability of the home environment, proved to be the strongest family determinants. When the parents' background is prosperous, it is very likely that they will provide educational support at home and also the cultural capital that can potentially help students with homework and further revisions. "Potentially" is used in the sense as argued by Li (2007), that it was not being in possession of educational resources at home which is directly associated to students' obtaining good grades, but rather the use that was given to such resources. Indeed, this study showed that poorer children are capable of high achievements, despite not having cultural capital in the form of resources or a person who could help them, and the association between family socio-economic status and educational achievement pointed out by Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1986); Finn (1993); and Rumberger (1987, 2004), could not be established as absolute in this study. Generally, regardless of family background, high achieving children came from households with more stable home environments; they also tended to be supervised by their parents regarding homework and after-school

activities, irrespective of the existence of cultural capital in the home and were also more motivated by their parents to have higher aspirations in life. Another important finding was that children from single-parent homes may be at greater risk of failing academically, mainly because such households often have fewer economic resources than those of a two-parent home (Hampden-Thompson, 2009) or as a result of the single parent working longer hours to increase their income (Rumberger, 1983, Ekstrom 1986, Hampden-Thompson et al., 2008) leaving them with little or no time to supervise or help their children with schoolwork. However, these children are also capable of excelling in school. Furthermore, this finding is similar to the way in which children from poorer homes excel, in that they normally come from stable households, thus establishing the importance that home environments play in the lives of students (Bradshaw, Keung, Goswami and Rees, 2008).

School risk factors

Certain teaching and classroom practices, along with exclusionary school policies and teachers' associations with the SNTE, emerged as reliable factors that put students at risk of educational failure. It is a fact that teachers need training; teachers' lack of relevant knowledge was a factor recognised not only by students and parents but also by teachers themselves. However, many who want to prepare claim not to have the opportunities, as training is usually reserved for those teachers with higher seniority or greater participation with the SNTE. Therefore, those with lesser seniority, or those who disagree with the political interests of the SNTE leadership, have their opportunities for advancement curtailed, consequently the quality of their teaching is negatively affected. As to whether this lack of training and preparation for teaching could be due to their associations with the SNTE in preference to their career advancement (*carrera magisterial*) could only be established as partly true.

Other important aspects that teachers deal with include an overloaded school curriculum and low wages, with the latter forcing them to seek alternative sources of employment which in turn reduces their class preparation time. Again, this is reflected in the quality of their teaching. Moreover, the high demand on their time that their union requires leaves teachers with even less time to teach. Therefore, not only would the teaching on the curriculum be incomplete, but the curriculum is also likely to be taught incorrectly. It is very likely that students who receive poor quality teaching will not learn properly, especially if the student is bilingual (having a native language as their first language). More so, if homework has to be submitted, and

therefore marked, such students may not know how to complete this work or have anyone at home to help or guide them in finding support elsewhere.

As well as marking examinations, classwork and homework, in concordance with Sandoval (2002), basic education teachers in Mexico also “mark” students’ appearance, notebook appearance and behaviour, along with other criteria that they are “free” to designate at their discretion. Undoubtedly, students with no support are at a higher risk than students who, at very least, have someone at home to help them academically, because their homework represents a mark that will be their “ticket” to pass a module and the academic year.

On the other hand, "strict" teachers, as students called them, will most likely verbally assault or dismiss students who do not conform to the rules they have imposed within their classroom. For example, if students fail to bring their notebook, their uniforms are not worn correctly or if a student misbehaves, teachers can expel them from the class. Such practices, whether based on aggression or denial, will only provoke a student’s disengagement from the learning processes. Firstly, dealing with an unapproachable teacher will intimidate them and communication with the teacher (fundamental to the learning process) is likely to be degraded and secondly, from the moment students leave the classroom, they “disconnect” from the learning process. Additionally, there is no guarantee that they would attempt to catch up with their class notes, as a dedicated student might do. However, it can also be said that a dedicated student would not be likely to cause disruption in the classroom. These “solutions”, instigated by teachers, highlight two important points related to the school: firstly, teachers’ lack of training in handling disruptive students, given that as many social workers pointed out, disruption caused by students is a sign that the student is dealing with problems, most likely at home; and secondly, that school operating procedures allow teachers to take such measures.

School policies, described by teachers as “policies”, not regulations established in a formal document, hide huge risks to the retention of students in schools and can ultimately push students out of school. For example, the “solution” of expelling students who are disruptive, involved in vandalism or with unwanted pregnancies could be avoided, through preventative strategies based on psychological support for students or sexual health information.

Risks within the geographical location

Geographical location also entails intrinsic risks for adolescent students, such as economic, social, and cultural expectations. The meaning of “moving forward” may differ between advantaged and disadvantaged communities. In the former, studying normally represents the students’ future and motivation whereas for the latter, moving forward may imply, for boys, to leave school and find work (usually by emigrating to the north of Mexico); and for girls, to leave school to marry, thus ensuring social status or to look after their parents at home because that is their “duty” as good children. Geographic location therefore indirectly determines the futures of adolescents. However, geographic location is not an absolute determiner.

Behavioural risks

Students showed different attitudinal preferences, from their attitudes toward school, their motivations and ambitions for the future; this was very likely as a result of the family, school and geographic factors. For example, ‘at risk’ students and dropouts were less likely to have received educational support or parental encouragement at home, irrespective of socio-economic status or cultural capital. Thus, it can be argued that students’ values, priorities and future aspirations tend to be ‘acquired’ from the spheres in which they interact.

8.1.2 Summary of positive and risk factors

Table 40 shows a summary of the positive and negative factors highlighted both in the concluding remarks sections of the findings chapters and in the current chapter. It can be said that the factors that positively influence students can counteract the factors that put students’ educational performance at risk and vice versa. Finally, it is important to note that it cannot be established that individual facilitators or constraints affect students’ school performance but they act collectively; for instance, if more negative factors are present in the lives of students, their performance is more likely to deteriorate, yet if more positive factors are present, their performance is more likely to improve.

Table 40. Facilitators and risk factors to educational performance in lower secondary schools in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Family	
Facilitators	Risk factors
<p>Stable home environment</p> <p>High value given to education by parents, irrespective of socio-economic background</p> <p>Access to educational resources in the home or in the community</p>	<p>Low parental educational/occupational background</p> <p>Limited or non-existent cultural capital in the home</p> <p>Single-parent home</p> <p>High-conflict home environment</p> <p>Bilingualism (native language)</p> <p>Parental misconception of academic “support”</p>
School	
Facilitators	Risk factors
<p>Appropriate facilities</p> <p>Dedicated and caring teachers</p>	<p>Overloaded school curriculum</p> <p>Low teachers’ salaries</p> <p>Teachers’ almost necessary association to the SNTE</p> <p>Teachers’ reluctance to update to new technology</p> <p>Exclusionary teaching and classroom practices (verbal aggression/corporal punishment/removing students from the classroom)</p> <p>Exclusionary policies (marking homework/notebook appearance/personal appearance/bringing school materials, etc., and expelling students permanently because of anti-social behaviour, pregnancy or marriage)</p> <p>Lack of teacher training</p> <p>Poor facilities and infrastructure</p> <p>Students having to buy school materials</p>

Geographical location	
Facilitators	Risk factors
Availability of public services such as libraries, internet cafes, recreational centres <i>Oportunidades</i> scholarship	Living in disadvantaged areas Lack of public services Limited economic opportunities Gendered-based economic, social and cultural expectations
Attitudinal factors	
Facilitators	Risk factors
High educational ambitions Having high achieving friends	Dating Riding around Paid work Care work Domestic work

8.1.3 Generalisability of findings

This study focused on publicly funded lower secondary schools in Oaxaca, Mexico. Although the study was not based on large-scale surveys, the ‘interview survey’ method used ensured that the number of participants was not as low as it would have been, for example, with a case study. In terms of the number of participants, with 37 students, 18 parents (only 2 being parents of interviewed students), and 23 teachers, it can be surmised that what Maxwell (2005) called “internal generalisability” of findings was achieved. Not only were the number of participants plentiful, but there were sufficient numbers of participants in each targeted group (high achievers, ‘at risk’ students, dropouts, parents, teachers and social workers), for example, 11 high achievers and 7 parents of high achievers (17 families in this case because one parent and daughter from the same family were interviewed). In terms of the students’ gender, 7 were female and 4 were male; of the parents, 4 were female and 3 were male; regarding location, 7 were from advantaged areas and 11 from areas of greatest disadvantage. Thus, a generalisation of the conclusions achieved from “within the setting or group studied” (Maxwell, 2005:115) can be established.

In this study, three important school-related elements contribute to the transferability of the results, that is, it is possible to infer that the findings could emerge as being the same or similar to other situations with enough contextual similarities. Firstly, the publicly funded education system in Mexico, although administered locally, is regulated by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP). This

means that limitations such as the overloaded school curriculum, the poor teaching standards for mathematics and English reported by participants, as well as the freedom granted to teachers to establish their own classroom disciplinary measures and the schools' disciplinary policies, may also occur in other publicly funded schools. It is also worth mentioning the way in which schools must seek additional resources to improve and maintain their facilities. Thus, it is very likely that the school effects encountered in the state schools studied in Oaxaca may be reproduced in other state schools across Mexico. Secondly, the vast majority of teachers are affiliated to the SNTE. As a result, the limited training of teachers, the almost forced political participation in return for points earned for career advancement (and the time spent outside the classrooms for attending the Union meetings or demonstrations) are detrimental circumstances which may also occur in other States in Mexico. It is worth highlighting that both the functioning aspects of the schools and the teachers' affiliation to the SNTE were recognised as key influential factors affecting students' performance and thus adding significance to the impact that such factors could have in other similar settings. Thirdly, the sample design is easy to reproduce given that it is likely that schools will have successful and less successful students, as well as parents and teachers willing to participate.

On the other hand, the extent to which these conclusions can be generalised further, for example as being characteristic of the lower secondary education population in Mexico as a whole, cannot be claimed categorically, given that economic and cultural differences between, for example, southern and northern areas in Mexico, vary markedly. However, the findings of this study potentially have "transferability", an alternative criterion to determine external validity in research with qualitative attributes. In relation to the term "transferability" originally put forward by Bryman (2008) (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1994); one of the responsibilities of the researcher involves providing a detailed explanation of the social world that was studied, thereby constituting a type of "database" to allow objective estimation "about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux" (p. 378).

Nonetheless, it is true that the setting in which this study took place might represent a limitation on the full "transferability" of findings, given that regions and localities in Mexico may have different economic and demographic characteristics. For example, employment opportunities, public services, the number of indigenous population and social and cultural expectations in southern areas of Mexico might be

different to those closer to the US-Mexico border. In this regard, it can be argued that the findings are partially transferable to lower secondary schools in other areas with similar Human Development Indices (HDIs) as well as economic and cultural dynamics to the ones studied.

Additionally, this study provides an informative contribution by presenting the key factors involved in students' academic performance and provides a basis for developing strategies to help diagnose students at risk of educational failure.

8.2 Contributions to knowledge

This study has contributed to knowledge in three ways. Firstly, it has revealed key facilitators and barriers from the three main spheres in which the student develops (family, school and community) which influence their academic performance in the context of Mexico. The detection of such factors comprises a legacy that will not only allow educators and policy makers to further understand the problem of educational failure, but also represents a breakthrough, with the potential to improve the education system in Mexico; secondly, by identifying the urgent need to re-examine a number of school and family-related concepts; and thirdly, from the implications of practices deriving from these findings which fall on the schools and community. Given that the first contribution has been presented in Section 8.1, this section will provide details of the latter two aspects, which are aimed at educators and policy makers.

8.2.1 Revision of concepts

“Integrated” families

A distinction needs to be drawn between the terms “family composition” and “family integration”. They are both different aspects of family and neither is a direct cause or consequence of the other, as their relationships depend on each individual situation. As described in Chapter 5, family composition refers to the number of members residing in the home who are related by blood, marriage or adoption. The majority of the teachers' discourse encapsulated the perception that ‘at risk’ students come from “disintegrated families”, referring to the fact that these children came from homes with divorced or separated parents or who were “only living with mum, grandma”. While it is true that children living in a two-parent home may have greater opportunities to access educational resources and greater cultural capital (Hampden-

Thompson, 2009), which may enhance students' performance, having two parents at home does not guarantee academic success. It was the stability of the home environment, including what Rumberger (2001, 2004) put forward as emotional support, encouragement and parental supervision, that proved to be a key factor, able to reverse or mitigate the risk of educational failure. Furthermore, it was revealed that such stability is irrespective of family structure. Another aspect to bear in mind is that structures of families have been changing significantly in recent times, for example, more women are having children out of wedlock and divorces are more common than in past decades, to mention a few scenarios. Consequently, there seems to be an urgent need to transform teachers' collective notions of a) associating family structure with integration or disintegration of the home, and b) taking for granted that children who come from homes with a structure that do not conform to the traditional two-parent home are deemed to fail academically, as both beliefs have been disproven. Thus, "family composition" should refer to the structure of the home or number of family members, and "family integration" to the stability of the home, associated with the level of communication, supervision and encouragement given by members of the family. This would not only help teachers to be more perceptive of the realities that students experience at home, which are inevitably reflected in the classroom, but it would also help to avoid assigning a stigma to students from single-parent homes.

Homework

The suggested revision of the concept of "homework" is based on three precepts: firstly, that the findings showed that many 'at risk' students have a tendency not to comply with homework; secondly, that not all parents are able to provide adequate educational support to their children (whether because of their limited educational background or due to their lack of understanding that "helping" their children with homework implies further academic support than just telling them "do your homework"); and thirdly, that homework is marked and counts towards final grades, thereby affecting students' opportunities to complete lower secondary education.

It is a fact that the quality of academic support that parents are able to offer is subjective and perhaps preconceived. Neither parental educational background nor their perception of how to give suitable academic support to their children can be changed overnight. Therefore, the responsibility falls on the educational system, which has the capacity to make changes in favour of student performance. Thus, the

role of “homework” needs to be re-evaluated; it is suggested that student achievement be assessed through homework that is formative rather than summative and also by lessening the amount of homework. Furthermore, the marking of homework “appearance” is a practice that should be eradicated.

School policies

The evidence presented in Chapter 5 proved that school policies, whose original aim was to improve school effectiveness, inadvertently provokes both voluntarily and involuntarily student disengagement from school. Both teacher-based classroom policies and general disciplinary procedures need re-evaluation. Regarding classroom policies, the extent to which teachers can dictate classroom policies needs to be re-evaluated. Dismissing students from the classroom for the following reasons should be eradicated: not bringing homework or school material, being disruptive, appearance and similar cases. Also, practices of corporal punishment and verbal abuse should be eradicated. Finally, the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) needs to re-design the lower secondary education curriculum to enhance the conveyance of health education in order to reduce the number of pregnancies and marriages (especially amongst girls). They should also give psychological support to students, particularly those with behavioural problems or involvement with anti-social behaviour.

8.3 Implications for practice

The implications for practice deriving from the findings of this study involve adjustments of practices mainly in schools and, to a lesser extent, the wider community. Schools and teachers follow quality standards; therefore, schools owe the greatest responsibilities to students. Parents certainly need sensitivity regarding the factors that contribute to student disengagement from school; however it would be nearly impossible to impact directly on household dynamics. To what extent can parents be told that the level of communication given at home will affect their children and that they may need to learn to communicate more effectively?; To what extent can parents be told that things they say may resonate in their children’s minds and be carried by them all day? How can a parent’s educational background be modified? Unfortunately, achieving changes in students’ homes would not be possible in the short term, though teachers can be encouraged to modify their teaching practices and be provided with further training. Furthermore, communities

can also improve their public services to a degree, especially if collaborating with schools and local government to provide better services that could benefit students.

8.3.1 Implications for practice for the schools

As previously described, three aspects of the school environment (teaching and classroom practices, teachers' association with the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE), and exclusionary school policies) were found to be crucially affecting students' performance. This implies the modification of teachers' roles and the support given to them, as well as a change in school practices and policies which could prevent student disengagement from the school environment.

Altering the teachers' roles

Firstly, teachers need an urgent increase in their training in three areas: knowledge refresher courses, pedagogic methods and the use of new technologies. It is imperative that teachers update and reinforce their knowledge in all subjects, especially English and mathematics, which were the subjects reported by the students as their least favourite or the ones where they had the lowest marks. Also, as reported by students and teachers themselves, a number of teachers do not have a "proper" teaching qualification, for which training in teaching methods is imperative.

Secondly, schools need to design strategies for teachers to be able to identify students with symptoms of school disengagement (for example low marks, behaviour problems, 'in-person absenteeism', absenteeism, etc.). Classroom management needs to be improved and teachers need to be able to understand why a student is disengaging from school by talking to or observing the student, talking to peers, parents, etc. Teachers need to be able to provide assistance to students in conjunction with specialists, such as a social worker, school psychologist or public institutions of social assistance.

Thirdly, teachers might collaborate in groups with other teachers to design a support system for 'at risk' students, for example, by teaching extra hours or by peer-tutoring. Finally, teachers need to eradicate the following practices from the classroom environment: corporal punishment, verbal abuse and any other type of abuse, as well as the practice of expelling students from the classroom. It is a virtuous circle; more training for teachers about teaching methods will help them to better understand and offer support to their students.

The adjustment of school practices and policies

Firstly, the value given to homework, which counts towards students' final marks, needs to be reduced. The fact that students struggle to complete their homework, as explained above, may be related to their lack of sufficient knowledge to complete it effectively, lack of a person to help them at home or lack of interest. The latter reason is probably because if a student does not understand a topic in class, his or her interest in the subject will also decrease. In fact, all the reasons are interrelated. Given that updating teachers' knowledge and a positive change in teaching will not happen immediately, measures such as reducing or even eliminating the value given to homework need to be taken, in order to prevent students' disengagement from learning.

Secondly, the following policies need to be eradicated: a) punitive school policies such as dismissing students from the school due to not complying with appearance standards (wrong shoe colour, not bringing their sports kit, etc.); b) expulsion for anti-social behaviour. Rather, students need to be funnelled into the appropriate channels of welfare support; c) "voluntary withdrawal" of girls due to pregnancy and marriage. Support should be offered to these girls so that they can finish their lower secondary education. Specific strategies need to be defined by educators.

Thirdly, students' well-being and sex education must be enhanced by the establishment of a system of welfare support with public institutions of social assistance. Finally, schools need to strengthen their communication with parents, so that teachers can understand a bit more of the students' family environment, and also pass on information to parents about positive ways to encourage their children's educational performance. It is also important that parents get involved if a student has been channelled to a source of welfare support.

8.3.2 Implications for practice in the communities

This requires that local governments improve the equipment in public libraries, not only by widening the availability of books but also of computers, which were the resources most needed by students and the ones lacking in most households. Opening times should also be adjusted accordingly. Furthermore, the creation, or strengthening (depending on local needs) of partnerships between public health institutions and other civil institutions for social assistance and the schools are needed, in order to provide welfare assistance to students, parents and the whole school community.

8.4 Implications for policy makers

Structural changes through policies are needed to alleviate, and subsequently eradicate, the barriers that students face in concluding compulsory education. For reasons similar to those of practical implications, in that it may be more viable to make an impact across schools and communities than in households, most of these are targeted at schools and teachers. These changes in policy, oriented to the role of teachers, the school system and the community require formal ratification from within the Secretariat of Education (SEP) in Mexico.

Firstly, the training opportunities offered to teachers need to be strengthened country-wide, as well as the provision of continuous technological training. The role of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) in teachers' performance needs to be revisited.

Secondly, in relation to the school system, the lower secondary school curriculum needs to be revised so that it fits the school year programme more realistically. Additionally, there needs to be a revision of the role and value given to homework in the academic programme; strategies need to be established for schools to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to complete it. Strategies are also needed to strengthen reproductive health information through either integrating the subject into the curriculum or through more health campaigns. Regarding operational issues, it is imperative that the eradication of school policies such as removing children from classrooms, dismissing children from school, expulsions, verbal abuse and corporal punishment are made official.

Thirdly, and similarly to the implications of practice, the establishment of cooperative work between schools and welfare support agencies is needed to support students with emotional or behavioural problems. Finally, although not crucial to the disengagement of students from schools, the improvement of school infrastructure must be sought; it is unacceptable that all schools reported a lack of facilities, from classrooms, chairs and laboratories to working materials, all necessary for student learning. Schools need more funding in this respect.

8.5 Critique of the study

The three main limitations of this study are related to the research methods employed. The first limitation, as discussed in Chapter 4, contends that semi-structured interviews may not have obtained the amount of data that questionnaire-based surveys could have provided, and from which exact numerical analysis could

have been made. Nevertheless, given the exploratory nature of this research, it can be said that ‘interview surveys’ accomplished their purpose for in-depth exploration and key findings on the area of educational failure in basic education in Mexico were unveiled.

The second limitation relates to the sample size; overall the number of participants was sufficient, for example, 37 students, 18 parents and 23 teachers. However, when participants are grouped into more specific categories, for example, “high achievers”, there were only 11 participants, whilst “female high achievers” only comprised 7 informants. The sample size could be considered small, which limited the opportunity for wider generalisations. However, given the standardisation of the publicly funded educational system in Mexico, it can be argued that the findings provide an important platform for transferability at a national level. As previously indicated, one of the spheres studied was geographical location of schools and households. Thus, it should be expected that the economic, social and cultural dynamics of a given locations may alter the results. For example, in parts of northern Mexico, the emigration of girls going to work in assembly plants, for international export, may be higher than that of boys.

The third limitation was linked to the sites; it was not possible for a lone researcher to control for severely disadvantaged areas, especially, as described in Chapter 4, for reasons of distances and personal safety. However, having seen that the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of the disadvantaged areas which were visited permeated students educational outcomes, it could be expected that within the Mexican context, the more disadvantaged the area, the stronger such economic and cultural influences will be.

Given that the present study explored an educational level that has not attracted much attention before, the findings remain preliminary. Further investigation is needed, perhaps via questionnaires that cover each of the factors identified, in order to ascertain the extent to which they influence students’ educational outcomes. It is also necessary to know the degree of variation of the influence of family, school and geographical factors between different areas of Mexico. Thus, whether such findings can also be reproduced in other settings, remains to be seen.

8.6 Avenues for further research

This study has illuminated key areas that are influential to students’ outcomes, including both facilitators and barriers. Its explorative nature requires more in-depth

investigation with regard to factors related to the family and the school. Firstly, the association between family atmosphere and students' academic outcomes observed by Bradshaw, Keung, Goswami and Rees (2008), which emerged as significant in this study, in particular the exploration of the extent to which experiencing parental separation or conflict, affects students' performances. Furthermore, the extent to which going through such experiences may affect students differently: girls with the "in-person absenteeism" derived from the "it's in my head all day" effect, and boys, with misbehaviour or delinquency, both afflictions described in Chapter 5.

Secondly, the role that homework plays in disengaging socio-economically disadvantaged students from school, as they are more likely to lack cultural capital at home, and thirdly, the role of disciplinary codes of conduct ("policies") in schools in pushing students out of school, the type of school exclusion that Osler and Vincent (2003) have characterised as "involuntary withdrawal" from school.

Finally, based on these findings, a call is made to educators and policy makers, particularly the Mexican Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), to fund more in-depth investigations into the factors contributing to educational failure in lower secondary schools. Furthermore, a call is also made for them to delineate an intervention model for preventing any form of educational failure, but mainly, of "dropping out", perhaps through decision-making methods such as 'SWOT' analysis or the Delphi method or through action research. The latter methodology is recommended, because people who are part of a community of practice (in particular teachers and social workers) are able to better appreciate the problems and recommend solutions.

List of abbreviations and definitions

a) Abbreviations

AA	Advantaged areas.
DA	Disadvantaged areas.
GSI	Guided semi-structured interviews.
PPP	Purchasing power parities.

b) Acronyms

CONAPO	Consejo Nacional de Población de México (National Council of Population in Mexico).
DIF	Sistema nacional de Desarrollo integral de la familia (The National System for Integral Family Development).
Edusat	Red Satelital de Televisión Educativa (Educational television network in Mexico).
ENAMS	Exámenes nacionales para la actualización de los maestros en servicio (National Certification Exams).
ENLACE	Evaluación Nacional del Logro Académico en Centros Escolares (National Evaluation of Academic Performance at School Centers).
GPI	Gender Parity Index.
HDI	Human Development Index.
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute of Statistics and Geography).
OACNUDHM	Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en México (Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights).
PRONAP	Programa Nacional de Actualización Permanente para Maestros de Educación Básica en servicio (National Program for the Permanent Updating of In-Service Teachers of Basic Education).
PPP	Purchasing power parities.
SAC	School Advisory Council.

c) Definitions

GDI	"Human Development Index (HDI) A composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living." (UNDP 2009:15).
GPI	Gender Parity Index: "Ratio of female-to-male value of a given indicator. A GPI of 1 indicates parity between sexes; a GPI that varies between 0 and 1 means a disparity in favour of boys; a GPI greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favour of girls." (UNESCO, 2004:384).
HDI	Human Development Index.
PNUD	Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo.
PPP	"Purchasing power parities (PPPs) are the currency exchange rates that equalise the purchasing power of different currencies. This means that a given sum of money, when converted into US dollars at the PPP rate (PPP dollars), will buy the same basket of goods and services in all countries. In other words, PPPs are the rates of currency conversion which eliminate the differences in price levels among countries. Thus, comparisons between countries reflect only differences in the volume of goods and services purchased." UNESCO-UIS (2008:285).

Glossary of Spanish words

Escuela Normal Superior	(Superior Normal School) Founded in 1924 to train teachers of lower and upper secondary school, as well as of Normal School.
Homenaje a la bandera	Civic act to pledge allegiance to the flag.
Prefecto	Teachers who enforce discipline within the school. Porters may also act as door keepers.
'Profe'	Short for teacher.
Señor	Mister.
Señora	Madam.
Telesecundaria	Satellite-based lower secondary school.
Tortilla	Tortilla.
Tortillería	Tortilla factory.
Totopo	A type of tortilla baked in a clay oven.

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Appendix 1. Interview guides for the pilot study

a) Guide for semi-structured interviews with students and dropouts

Personal details	Gender
	Age
	School year
	Language(s) spoken
	Address, contact telephone, email (if possible)
Family determinants	Number and gender of family members
	Home environment description
	Parental educational background
	Parental occupation
	Person “in charge” of the house
	Support for school at home
	Informative resources at home (books, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, newspapers, computers, Internet)
	Sibling relationships (‘get along?’)
	Most common reason for arguments at home
	Ways of resolving arguments at home
Geographical determinants	Local public services
	Relatives and national/international migration
School determinants	Perception of school
	School facilities and conditions (classrooms, computer facilities, bathrooms)
	Coping with school curriculum (modules, subjects of study, hours of schooling)
	Learning experience in the classroom
	Perception of teachers’ competence
	Teachers’ preferences among students (treatment, marking, gender)
	Academic achievement (coursework and exam marks, diplomas of acknowledgement)
	Educational stability (constancy/years held back)
	Socialisation (with peers, teachers, other school staff)
	Involvement in school activities
	Friends in school
	Views about high achievers
	Views about those who left school

	Views on the importance of education
	Feeling of safety in school/bullying
	Best and worst moment experienced in school
	Getting to school
	<i>Oportunidades</i> scholarship
Individual determinants	Activities/responsibilities after school
	Friends outside the school
	Dating
	Role models
	Short-term plans
	Long-term plans and dream job
	Present priorities
	Best friend's educational aspirations
b) Guide for semi-structured interviews with parents	
Personal details	Gender
	Age
	Language(s) spoken
Family determinants	Number and gender of family members
	Home environment description
	Educational background
	Occupation
	Person "in charge" of the house
	Informative resources at home (books, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, newspapers, computers, Internet)
	Support for school at home
	Child preference/treatment to children
	Educational aspirations for their children
	Views on importance of education
	Sufficient income to support family?
	Most common reason for arguments at home
	Ways of resolving arguments at home
Geographical determinants	Local public services
	Relatives and national/international migration
School determinants	Perception on school-entry requirements
	Are their children coping with school curriculum? (modules, subjects of study, hours of schooling)
	School facilities and conditions (classrooms, computer

	facilities, bathrooms)
	Coping with school curriculum (modules, subjects of study, hours of schooling)
	Learning experience in the classroom
	Perception of teachers' competence
	Involvement with the school
	Child's academic achievement (school year, coursework and exam marks, diplomas of acknowledgement)
	Child's educational stability (constancy/years held back)
	Child's socialisation in school (with peers, teachers, other school staff)
	Perception on how his/her child copes with homework
	Child's extra-curricular activities
	Child's activities/other responsibilities after school
	Views about high achievers
	Views about those who left school
	Views on the importance of education
	Child's feeling of safety in school/bullying
	How child gets to school
	<i>Oportunidades</i> scholarship
Individual determinants	Leisure activities

c) Guide for semi-structured interviews with teachers and other school staff

Personal details	Gender
	Language(s) spoken
	Years in the profession
	Seniority in the school
	Module taught and school year
Family, school and individual determinants	Availability of school facilities and conditions (classrooms, computer rooms, library, laboratories, medical care, facilities for disabled students, bathrooms)
	School entry requirements
	Awards received by the school (prestige)
	High achievers' academic performance, socialisation and involvement in school (gender, SES and ethnic background influences)
	Low achievers' academic performance, socialisation and involvement in school (gender, SES and ethnic background influences)
	Dropouts and their previous academic performance socialisation and involvement in school (gender, SES and ethnic background influences)
	Causes of students' unauthorised absences
	Preferences for particular students
	Parental involvement in school
	Students and after-school responsibilities
	School management and organisation in relation to students' academic achievement
	School curriculum (quality of design, inclusion of gender and human right issues)
	For Telesecundarias: system effectiveness (does it work?)
	Ways of disciplining students
	Friendship among students
	School bullying
	<i>Oportunidades</i> scholarship
Geographical determinants	Local public services
	Political/social/religious influences
	National/international migration patterns

Appendix 2. Interview guides for the fieldwork

a) Guide for semi-structured interviews with students and dropouts

Personal details	Gender
	Age
	School year
	Language(s) spoken
	Address, contact telephone, email (if possible)
Family determinants	Number and gender of family members
	Home environment description
	Parental disciplining style
	Parental educational background
	Parental occupation
	Person “in charge” of the house
	Support for school at home
	Informative resources at home (books, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, newspapers, computers, Internet)
	Sibling relationships (‘get along?’)
	Most common reason for arguments at home
	Ways of resolving arguments at home
Breakfast before school?	
Geographical determinants	Local public services
	Relatives and national/international migration
	Drug activities/gangs
School determinants	Perception of school
	School facilities and conditions (classrooms, computer facilities, bathrooms)
	Coping with school curriculum (modules, subjects of study, hours of schooling)
	Learning experience in the classroom
	Perception of teachers’ competence
	Ways of disciplining students
	Teachers’ preferences among students (treatment, marking, gender)
	Academic achievement (coursework and exam marks, diplomas of acknowledgement)
	Educational stability (constancy/years held back)
	Favourite and less favourite module

	Perception on the English module as a second language module
	Coverage of school curriculum/ school workload (after teachers' recent strike)
	Reaction to the teachers' recent strike
	Parental involvement with teachers' strike
	Socialisation (with peers, teachers, other school staff)
	Involvement in school activities
	Friends in school
	Accidents at school
	Views about high achievers
	Views about those who left school
	Views on the importance of education
	Feeling of safety in school/bullying
	Best and worst moment experienced in school
	Getting to school
	<i>Oportunidades</i> scholarship
Individual determinants	Activities/responsibilities after school
	Activities during the teachers' strike
	Friends outside the school
	Dating
	Role models
	Short-term plans
	Long-term plans and dream job
	Present priorities
	Best friend's educational aspirations
	Addictions (alcohol, drugs)

b) Guide for semi-structured interviews with parents

Personal details	Gender
	Age
	Language(s) spoken
Family determinants	Number and gender of family members
	Home environment description
	Educational background
	Occupation
	Person "in charge" of the house
	Ways of disciplining children

	Informative resources at home (books, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, newspapers, computers, Internet)
	Support for school at home
	Child preference/treatment of children
	Educational aspirations for their children
	Views on importance of education
	Sufficient income to support family?
	Most common reason for arguments at home
	Ways of resolving arguments at home
	Children and breakfast before school
Geographical determinants	Local public services
	Relatives and national/international migration
	Drug activities/gangs
School determinants	Perception on school-entry requirements
	Coping with school curriculum (modules, subjects of study, hours of schooling) (child)
	School facilities and conditions (classrooms, computer facilities, bathrooms)
	Learning experience in the classroom
	Perception of teachers' competence
	Involvement with the school
	Child's academic achievement (school year, coursework and exam marks, diplomas of acknowledgement)
	Perception on the English module as a second language module
	Child's educational stability (constancy/years held back)
	Child's socialisation in school (with peers, teachers, other school staff)
	Perception on how his/her child copes with homework
	Child's extra-curricular activities
	Child's activities/other responsibilities after school
	Coverage of school curriculum/ school workload (after teachers' recent strike)
	Involvement with teachers' strike
	Reaction upon the teachers' recent strike
	Children's activities during the teachers' strike
	Views about high achievers
	Views about those who left school

	Views on the importance of education
	Child's feeling of safety in school/bullying
	Drug activities/gangs in the locality
	How child gets to school
	<i>Oportunidades</i> scholarship
Individual determinants	Leisure activities

c) Guide for semi-structured interviews with teachers and other school staff

Personal details	Gender
	Language(s) spoken
	Years in the profession
	Seniority in the school
	Module taught and school year
Family, school and individual determinants	Availability of school facilities and conditions (classrooms, computer rooms, library, laboratories, medical care, facilities for disabled students, bathrooms)
	School entry requirements
	Awards received by the school (prestige)
	High achievers' academic performance, socialisation and involvement in school (gender, SES and ethnic background influences)
	Low achievers' academic performance, socialisation and involvement in school (gender, SES and ethnic background influences)
	Dropouts and their previous academic performance socialisation and involvement in school (gender, SES and ethnic background influences)
	Causes of students' unauthorised absences
	Preferences for particular students
	Parental involvement in school
	Strategies to tackle students' low achievement
	Students and after-school responsibilities
	Children and breakfast before school
	School management and organisation in relation to students' academic achievement
	School curriculum (quality of design, inclusion of gender and human right issues)
	Coverage of school curriculum/ school workload (after the

strike)

Reaction upon the recent strike

Students' activities during the teachers' strike

Involvement with teachers' strike

Perception on the English as a second language module

For Telesecundarias: system effectiveness (does it work?)

Ways of disciplining students

Friendship among students

School bullying

Oportunidades scholarship

Addictions alcohol/drug activities in school

School policies on expulsions and pregnancies

Geographical determinants

Local public services

Political/social/religious influences

National/international migration patterns

Appendix 3. Schools' profile

a) Schools in advantaged areas

School ID	School type	HDI of locality 2000	Age of school	Number of teachers	Year groups			Average students per year group	Average students per school	Schedule type**	Students with <i>Oportunidades</i> Scholarship			Students with IEEPO Scholarship		
					1st	2nd	3rd				M	F	T	M	F	T
School "AA"	Technical	0.84	31	39	8	8	8	32	768	Mixed	24	29	53	3	7	10
School "AB"	Technical	0.84	35	71	12	12	12	45	1,600	Mixed	0	2	2	6	13	19
School "AC"	General	0.84	17	31	6	6	6	35	630	Single	4	3	7	10	5	15
School "AD"	Telesec.	0.84	19	6	2	2	2	25	150	Single	10	12	22	0	0	0

* Data given during the academic year 2006-2007. ** For this study, the term "Single" schedule means that all classes for all students take place during the same time of day, usually from the morning until early afternoon. The term "mixed" schedule means some students study from morning until early afternoon and some study from early afternoon until early evening.

b) Schools in less advantaged areas*

School ID	School type	HDI of locality 2000	Age of school	Number of teachers	Year groups			Average students per year group	Average students per school	Schedule type	Students with <i>Oportunidades</i> Scholarship			Students with IEEPO Scholarship		
					1st	2nd	3rd				M	F	T	M	F	T
School "DA"	Technical	0.74	27	33	4	4	4	35	420	Single	59	48	107	0	3	3
School "DB"	Technical	0.64	19	11	2	2	1	20	100	Single	51	34	55	2	1	3
School "DC"	Technical	0.67	72	27	5	5	5	20	300	Single	12 3	14 3	266	2	2	4
School "DD"	General	0.74	14	19	5	4	4	38	494	Single	26	26	52	1	0	1
School "DE"	Telesec.	0.64	27	10	3	3	3	25	225	Single	81	72	153	1	0	1

*Data given during the academic year 2006-2007. ** For this study, the term "Single" schedule means that all classes for all students take place during the same time of day, usually from the morning until early afternoon. The term "mixed" schedule means some students study from morning until early afternoon and some study from early afternoon until early evening

Appendix 4. Reasons registered by schools why students left school by May/June of the academic year 2006-2007

a) Schools in advantaged areas

Reasons	School "AA"			School "AB"			School "AC"			School "AD"		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Low achievement	2	4	6	6	7	13	0	1	1	-	-	-
School transfer	2	10	12	3	1	4	-	-	-	0	1	1
Poor attendance	3	6	9	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	-	-
Behaviour problems	2	0	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Economic reasons*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	1	5
Marriage	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Family problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Overall total		29	Overall total		17	Overall total		2	Overall total		6

*This includes students who looked for work within the area, as well as students who looked for work elsewhere in Mexico and in the United States.

Note: Referring to the data above, School "DA" returned an incomplete questionnaire and so getting a true picture about the reasons for dropping out according to gender was not accurate as first hoped. However, total numbers of students who left the school was obtained. The school reported 4 reasons why students left; behaviour problems, marriage, economic reasons and low achievement but they were not disaggregated by gender.

b) Schools in less advantaged areas

Reasons	"School DA"			"School DB"			"School DC"			"School DD"			"School DE"		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Low achievement	2	2	4	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
School transfer	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	7	1	8	0	0	0
Poor attendance	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	2	9	0	0	0
Behaviour problems	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Economic reasons*	5	1	6	6	8	14	1	2	3	0	0	0	14	27	41
Marriage	2	3	5	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
Family problems	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Overall total		22	Overall total		17	Overall total		6	Overall total		18	Overall total		41

*This includes students who looked for work within the area, as well as students who looked for work elsewhere in Mexico and in the United States.