

High School Completion in Argentina: A Balance of Recent Strategies

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Abstract

In 2008 the Federal Council of Education dependent on the Ministry of Education of Argentina ordered the creation of the Completion of Primary and Secondary Education for Youth and Adults Plan (locally known as Fines). The purpose of the program is to offer young people and adults a plan aimed at basic education completion. This paper analyzes the design and implementation of the plan considering pedagogical aspects, working conditions of teachers and resources provided by the national government and the provinces to meet the goals. A review of the norms and acts that regulate Fines and the interviews with participating actors suggest that the initiative lays the foundation for gradual underfunding of the previous adult education system and strengthens a new system sustained with precarious learning and teachers.

Keywords: high school completion - adult education - youth employment - training for job - flexible learning supply

1. Introduction

In mid-2008 the Argentinean Federal Council of Education established the creation of *Primary and Secondary Education Completion for Youth and Adults Initiative* (hereinafter *Fines*). This plan's purpose is to offer young people and adults a program for school completion. The rationale for this action is the need to observe and implement the necessary means and resources to comply with compulsory primary and secondary education, as provided by the National Education Act 26206. According to the Permanent Household Survey, by 2008 nearly 42% of the population between 18yo and 60yo (5.5 million people) had not completed basic education. Of these, 1.6 million were younger than 30yo.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the design and implementation of the plan considering its pedagogical aspects, the working conditions of teaching staff and the resources provided by the national government and the provinces to meet the goals.

The first part of the article reviews the evolution of the educational offer aimed at young people and adults in Argentina. The second part is devoted to describing the guidelines and implementation of *Fines* Plan. The third one gathers schooling indicators in order to present some results of the initiative.

2. Origin and Recent Evolution of youth and Adult Education in Argentina

In Argentina, as well as in the wider Latin American context, there is growing agreement on the need for new generations to complete secondary education. This is reflected not only in the laws and regulations governing the education system (Law 26206; Resolutions 118, 188/2010) but also in the vast array of specific intervention programs. This goal is based on the idea that the completion of basic education is vital for gaining access to a set of critical knowledge for living in society.

The 1990s were characterized by institutional reforms (decentralization of schools from the national government to the provinces, curriculum changes, etc.) and the implementation of targeted programs that sought to improve educational equity primarily through grants (still in force) that promote school retention. However, the results of such reforms were disappointing: curriculum changes and the reassignment of responsibilities between the different government levels failed to improve the system's efficacy (TEDESCO, 2005); and targeted programs only provided partial and temporary compensation for inequalities (CAILLODS & JACINTO, 2006).

In the next decade, public policies focused on promoting basic universalism. These actions fall within the scope of regular education, through the grant of scholarships that condition cash transfers on school attendance and periodic health checks, and through the introduction of tutors whose role is to guide and support (individually or in groups) students to prevent absenteeism, moderate dropout and grade repetition. A detailed and comprehensive review of these initiatives is provided in JACINTO & TERIGI (2007).

Faced with difficulties to include or retain students in high school, governments have developed alternative schooling services (distance or blended learning, evening classes). In particular, Argentina has offered a systematic institutional response to adult education since the early twentieth century, with the gradual introduction of Sunday schools and evening classes for adults, followed by the opening of additional schools dependent on primary schools and finally, in 1973, the creation of a regime with its own facilities and staff (WALLS POCHULU, 2005; IOVANOVICH, 2004). It originally covered the primary level of education until 1993, when the secondary level was incorporated. In essence, it is a compensation scheme for those who failed to finish their studies through a shorter and more flexible curricular offering. In 2008, 6546 educational establishments operated in Argentina under this system, with more than 35 thousand permanent teaching positions and more than 450 thousand lecture hours (Ministry of Education, CONAPLU 95/07).

With the promulgation of National Law 26206, this modality was renamed as *Continuing Education for Youth and Adults*, whose specific purpose is to ensure literacy and compulsory education and to link the curriculum with the "world of work". The "continuing" character is attributed to an educational approach with the following desirable attributes (HISSE, 2009):

- ✓ education must take place over the entire human life cycle, including adult life,
- ✓ education must consider social changes, population preferences and demands, and
- ✓ education should be adapted to technological changes that modify the workplace.

This led to the recommendation to diversify educational organizations as a tool to promote equity (BRASLAVSKY, 2001) in the belief that inequalities in educational access and achievement stem from the homogeneity of structures, neglecting other elements that may cause and reproduce social inequalities.

In line with institutional flexibility and curricular diversification, there is a need for change in learning times and spaces, considering that young people nowadays do not always have the opportunity to devote a period of their youth exclusively to schooling (JACINTO, 2009). This would justify the introduction of distance and blended learning programs. Furthermore, according to the Lisbon Declaration, issued in 2009 by the governments of Latin American countries, the use of information and communication technologies in teaching and learning initiatives would be recommended in situations like the present, marked by financial crises¹

These considerations served as the main arguments to support the design of alternative educational formats for vulnerable youth. In general, initiatives favor a more personal relationship between teachers and students, a different organization of learning spaces and timing (workshops, mentoring, tutoring, videos, etc.) and coordination with other institutions of civil society which collaborate with strategies for educational and social inclusion. This would generate a more controlled environment to more effectively operate as a framework of containment (TIRAMONTI, 2007). The *Fines* Plan is inspired in these new guidelines.

3. The *Fines* Plan: Start up and Implementation

The Plan was implemented through agreements with the provinces conducted between May and December 2008. It was structured in 2 stages to achieve the goal of completion. The first would be aimed at young people and adults who, having attended the final year of secondary school, had failed various courses. In the second stage, initiated in 2009, recipients of the plan would be young adults who had not completed primary and/or secondary school.

While jurisdictions would be responsible for arranging facilities for the operation of the plan, calling and appointing teachers and issuing diplomas, the Ministry of Education would fund the salaries of participating teachers, cover the additional operating costs of the establishments involved, and pay for training of provincial technical teams, learning materials and, in general, the dissemination of the Plan.

¹ Available at: http://www.oei.es/Declaracion_Lisboa.pdf. Accessed on July 7, 2014.

3.1) First Stage

Starting up takes shape with the enrollment of applicants (in the educational establishments where they attended the secondary level, in offices designated by the province or in other places prepared for that purpose). After that, the provincial education authorities summon the tutors who will be responsible for helping students access the material and complete unfinished courses.

3.1.1) Academic Organization

Local resolutions show a marked disparity in the pedagogical conditions between provinces. For example, in some provinces the number of hours per course or curricular area is set in lecture hours while others are set in clock hours². In most cases, the equivalence between these systems of time measurement is omitted.

Moreover, in the first stage of the plan all provinces assigned a uniform workload without distinguishing between curricular areas. For example, Mathematics had the same weekly load as Natural Sciences while the traditional system curriculum assigns a different load per course. Though the workload for each curriculum area is equal within each jurisdiction, across provinces there is a remarkable dispersion of the weekly hours devoted to each course; from 3 lecture hours to 8 clock hours per week.

For example, 10 provinces explicitly set a maximum classroom size for each tutor (usually around 20 students), while in the rest no reference is made about the number of students per tutor.

Regardless of the number of weekly hours scheduled for face-to-face meetings between tutors and students, the provincial resolutions almost unanimously agree that the modality should not last more than 2 months. This is perhaps one of the most significant differences between the Plan and the so-called Adults branch, historically aimed at adult education where the lectures extend throughout the school year (nearly 8 months without considering exam period).

The fewer number of face-to-face meetings between students and tutors is grounded on the need to match the courses with the students' possibilities (work, family, etc.) and needs. Hence, face-to-face meetings are complemented with "TV-classes" broadcasted by the official TV channel or with virtual tutorials available on the website Educ.ar. The problem with this blended learning option is that in order to learn the students must rely on having enough time and an appropriate space to examine the material and on their autonomous capacity to synthesize and assimilate knowledge, while the program itself recognizes that recipients lack such conditions and abilities. Weekly meetings with the tutor for 8 weeks may not be productive if the student is unable to devote enough time to review and study or come up with questions.

If the student was not able to complete secondary studies under normal conditions (i.e., attending classes regularly, with the guidance of a teacher and the support of peers and family), it is not clear what could be done under less favorable conditions (with less weekly lectures, more autonomous activities, possibly leaving less time to study, etc.). Interviews with tutors participating in the Plan support this hypothesis: students attend classes almost without having explored the material; meetings usually take place in late afternoon, during their out-of-work hours, thus taking hours from their rest time and hindering full exploitation of the time spent with the tutor. In short, contents delivered in face-to-face meetings are far from the level required in the regular curriculum.

3.1.2) Teaching Positions and Resources

Coverage of teaching positions for the Plan is under the responsibility of the provinces. In most cases, special enrollment is carried out without taking into account existing ratings on the boards of each jurisdiction to cover vacancy positions in the Adults branch (La Pampa). The criteria for mentor selection vary from province to province. In some cases, applicants are subject to the commonly used criteria for selecting teachers, and positions are covered in the order of merit that emerges from there; in other cases a special evaluation grid is applied (Mendoza, Corrientes, Salta).

Some provinces do not allow applicants without a teaching degree or minimum teaching experience in the Adults branch (Córdoba, Jujuy³, La Rioja) while in other provinces candidates without a qualification are accepted (Formosa) and/or working experiences with youth and adults are favored. In other jurisdictions (Chaco, San Juan,

² Tucumán, for example, takes the unusual equivalence of 1,2 lecture hours per clock hour (that is, 5 lecture hours = 4 clock hours).

³ Moreover, in this jurisdiction, candidates who already have more than 15 lecture hours in other schools are not admitted.

Misiones, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CABA) or Tierra del Fuego) published resolutions do not include an annex with the conditions to access tutoring positions or do not expressly mention the selection criteria. An assessment of this aspect indicates that the Plan is far from having a uniform and relatively specific tutor training program.

Regarding monetary resources for the Plan, although a statement made by the Ministry of Education in 2008⁴ indicates that the Plan had a budget of U\$ 11.98 million, resolution 66/08 of the Federal Council of Education ordered the transference of U\$ 11.26 million (94% of budgeted funds) to the provinces for Plan implementation⁵. One of the most striking features of the Plan is the low remuneration of tutors. The above mentioned provision states that the central government will finance 5 lecture hours weekly per tutor during a period of 5 months. A careful analysis of the fund allocation chart shows that, during the first phase of the Plan, tutors earned U\$ 145 per month and/or U\$ 290 for each curriculum area. For comparison purposes, this represented 37% of net salary of a secondary level position in 2008 in the province of Buenos Aires⁶. Moreover, as several provincial resolutions explicitly recognize (including CABA, La Pampa, Santa Fe, San Juan, Tucumán), the set amount does not contribute to social security and does not include the extra payment for employment tenure, so it does not imply an increase in pension funds and/or medical coverage, nor is it considered in extra annual salary calculation but adds to the taxable income that employees must pay (known as "4th category" in the rent tax structure).

3.2) Second Stage

Although resolution 66/08 of the Federal Council of Education announces the second stage of the *Fines* Plan (i.e., the extension to youth and adults who had not completed primary and/or secondary school), at present the second stage has not yet started in most provinces. There are also indications that in most provinces enrollment for the first stage is still in force. However, as there is not enough information made available by the different levels of government concerning their actions, it is difficult to make a more categorical assessment of the situation.

Buenos Aires is perhaps the only province that published the norms to be applied in the second stage of the Plan; though it did not begin in 2009 as planned, but in late 2010. In turn, in Buenos Aires, the Plan was also gradually extended. At the start of the second phase, admission was restricted to adults who had not completed secondary level and also participated in worker cooperatives (e.g. Argentina Trabaja Plan, Social Income with Work Plan, etc.) or were members of trade unions that had signed agreements with the national or provincial Ministry of Education. In 2012, the Plan finally included adults who had not completed primary school.

3.2.1) Academic Organization

In the province of Buenos Aires, the beginning of *Fines 2* increased the duration of each course (from 2 to 4 months) and admitted some differentiation in teaching hours between courses, with a maximum of 4 clock hours per course. Furthermore, the Plan adopted the 3 year-long curriculum of educational establishments under the Adults branch.

However, in April 2012, the Ministry of Education of Buenos Aires issued Resolution 444/12 with some modifications to the previous regime. Mentoring will again have a duration of 2 months with a uniform load of 3 weekly hours for all courses.

The same resolution of 2012 enables young people and adults who did not complete primary school to enroll in the Plan.

Once more, interviews with tutors who participated in *Fines 2* reveal that pedagogical conditions and performance of the Plan's students are significantly far from those recorded in the branch of common education.

First, teachers' attendance and compliance with the schedule are not controlled; and some establishments operate in areas specifically granted by trade unions which do not necessarily possess proper facilities for educational purposes⁷.

⁴ (http://www.infoleg.gov.ar/basehome/actos_gobierno/actosdegobierno12-1-2009-1.htm)

⁵ It follows that the remaining 6% was devoted to material edition funding and technical staff training.

⁶ The estimation was based on the teacher salaries simulator available at www.salariodocente.com.ar

⁷ An interviewed tutor relates that face-to face meetings were held in facilities of the local offices of retail employees union. Three curricular meetings (math, psychology and philosophy) were held simultaneously in the same room. Each group had 15 to 20 members and tutors should be careful not to speak too loud and control conversations between students to avoid disturbing the other groups.

Moreover, accreditation of courses is solely the responsibility of the tutor and takes place at the premises without appointing an examination board and without sufficient controls to ensure that contents satisfactorily cover the course syllabus. In any case, the guarantor of quality is the tutor's own conscience⁸.

3.2.2) Teaching Positions and Resources

In Buenos Aires province, candidates were selected using the same procedure followed in the first stage. This implies a special enrollment system, distinct from the general enrollment lists. The order of merit is established by the regional headquarters based on its pedagogical approach and on the candidates' background applying a different (less detailed) grid from the one generally used by common education boards⁹.

While in the first version of *Fines 2* (September 2010-March 2012) mentors were appointed for 4 months for 4 clock hours and the salary was equivalent to that of a secondary level teacher, in April 2012 the appointment was reduced to 3 weekly clock hours during 2 months. In the case of tutors for the completion of primary education, the appointment is for 4 months and money compensation is equivalent to the wage rate of a teacher with a load of 15 hours per week.

In any case, the budget savings emerging from the Plan are not based on differential average pay (as stated on *Fines 1*) between teachers and tutors, but on a working contract that represents between 30% (4 months versus 12 months) and 17% (2 months versus 12 months) of the equivalent position in the Adults branch.

Furthermore, in various news media and blogs, a significant number of tutors who participated in *Fines* (either in the first or second stage) reported the delay of several months in salary payment both at beginning (which could be attributed to the absence of standardized proceedings given the recent launch of the Plan) and after 5 years of operation¹⁰.

Under the slogan of flexibility and adaptability to adverse social environments, a parallel system of education for youth and adults emerges, allowing an adjustment of 70% of the investment in education.

Table 1: Adult Education Subsystems in Argentina 2010

	Adults branch	<i>Fines</i> Plan
Student access		dependent upon sufficient enrollment rate in each course
Teaching approach	face-to-face	virtual, assisted by mentors
Lecture hours	vary with each course	homogeneous
Course duration	annual	4 months for primary courses 2 months for secondary courses
Facilities	schools	schools or other convened spaces (union offices, local government offices, etc.)
Teachers selection	general call best rated by Evaluation Boards	discretionary
Teachers wage	determined by wage agreements contributes to social security special pay for experience	not including extra pay for experience

Source: own elaboration based on norms

Neither the national Ministry of Education nor its provincial counterpart has published in an accessible way data on the budget allocated to the Plan from its creation. As clarified above, resolution 66/08 of the Federal Council of Education established transfers to the provinces of nearly 11 million dollars to afford tutors remunerations in 2008-2009. Since then, that organization ceased to publish the budget amount allocated to the Plan. For example, the Administrative Decision 988/12 made by the Ministry of Economy and the Chief Office of the Cabinet of

⁸ One of the interviewed tutors reports that, upon agreement of the regional headquarters, she evaluated a student who had not attended the 16 planned face-to-face meetings because in order to apply for a job he urgently needed to have his secondary education diploma. Thus, he credited the course being evaluated only on the contents presented in the meetings, instead of sitting for an exam comprising all the contents of the program.

⁹ Students of related careers with 50% of the courses passed are also admitted.

¹⁰ See <http://corrientes.in/?p=26106> in Corrientes (22/Oct/2012; accessed 29/may/2013)

<http://www.elpatagonico.net/nota/165867/> in Chubut (19/Aug/2012; accessed 29/may/2013)

<http://www.eldiariodelarioja.com.ar/noticia.asp?id=92017> in La Rioja (27/Dec/2012; accessed 29/may/2013)

<http://www.ushuaianoticias.com/noticias/leer/5262-estamos-muy-atrasados-y-esperamos-que-no-se-haya-caido-el-plan.html> en Tierra del Fuego (28/6/2010; accessed 29/May/2013)

Ministers stated that in October 2012 the *Fines* Plan received additional funds from a budget reallocation. However, the annex where the received amount is stated is not available on the website of the Official Gazette, but by personal request. News media that could access such information indicate that the Plan received U\$ 18.14 million at the end of 2012 (Infobae, 19/Oct/2012). However, it is not clear whether such amount is the total budget available for the Plan after restructuring or if it corresponds to the increase.

Also, data published by the Ministry of Economy of the Province of Formosa¹¹ indicate that the central government transferred nearly U\$ 662 thousand for the implementation of the Plan. This amount is 4.6 times greater than the one initially received. But this cannot be taken as a test case of increase in the overall budget that the National Ministry of Education assigned to support this policy. This follows from comparing the case of San Luis with that of Formosa; according to the data published by the Office of Public Budget of the Ministry of Finance of San Luis province (www.hacienda.sanluis.gov.ar), between 2008 and 2013 the funds transferred by the national government to San Luis increased 75% (from 638,000 to 1.12 million pesos), at a rate well below the inflation rate and even lower than the teachers' wage increases in the same period (between October 2008 and March 2013 the salary of a high school teacher with same work load increased 2.7 times). So while it is valid to conclude that the national budget for *Fines* Plan has increased since its beginning to the present, the rate of increase varies considerably from one jurisdiction to another. There is no documentation to indicate whether this disparity arises from a different provincial performance compared with the physical goals of the plan (shortage of facilities, insufficient enrollment, lack of suitable or available staff, etc.) or from *ad hoc* and hidden criteria impeding access to information and independent evaluation.

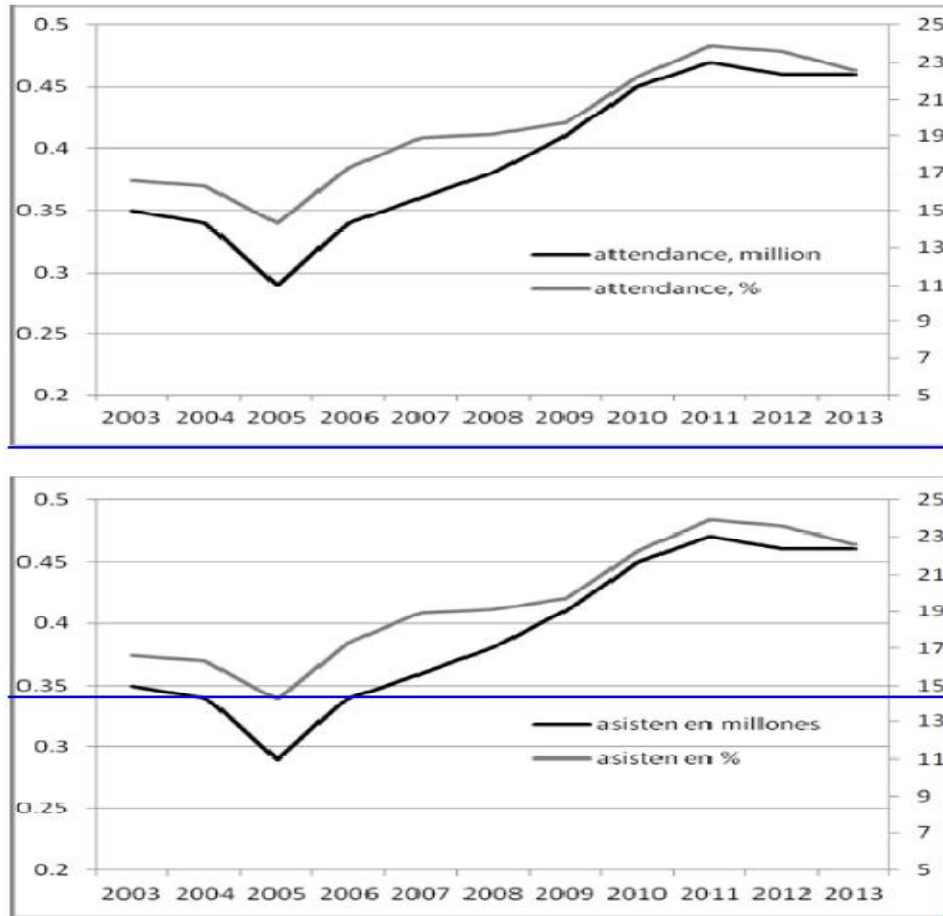
Furthermore, information about students' enrollment and graduation rates is not systematized in sufficient detail in the statistical figures published by the National Directorate of Information and Evaluation of Educational Quality (DINIECE). Figures are verbally stated by government officials and occasionally published by the media. After 5 years of operation, there are no elements allowing some systematic and rigorous assessment of the financial, human and infrastructure resources assigned to the Plan or of the results achieved in terms of enrollment and graduation rates.

4. Compulsory Schooling Indicators

Between 2008 and 2013, according to data from the Permanent Household Survey, the number of adults aged 18 to 60 who had not completed the secondary level of education or were not attending educational institutions decreased by 150 thousand (5.58 million to 5.43 million), representing 3.5 percentage points (from 46.3% to 42.8%). During the same period, the proportion of young people (18-30 years) with incomplete secondary studies decreased less (2.6 percentage points). Anyway, although the prevalence decreased, the amount remained almost at the same level (about 1.6 million). This implies that despite the large enrollment in the *Fines* Plan reported by the media, millions of adolescents end each school year without completing secondary education. In the 2008-2013 period, only 2.2 out of 10 people aged 18 to 30 who had not completed their formal studies attended any educational establishment.

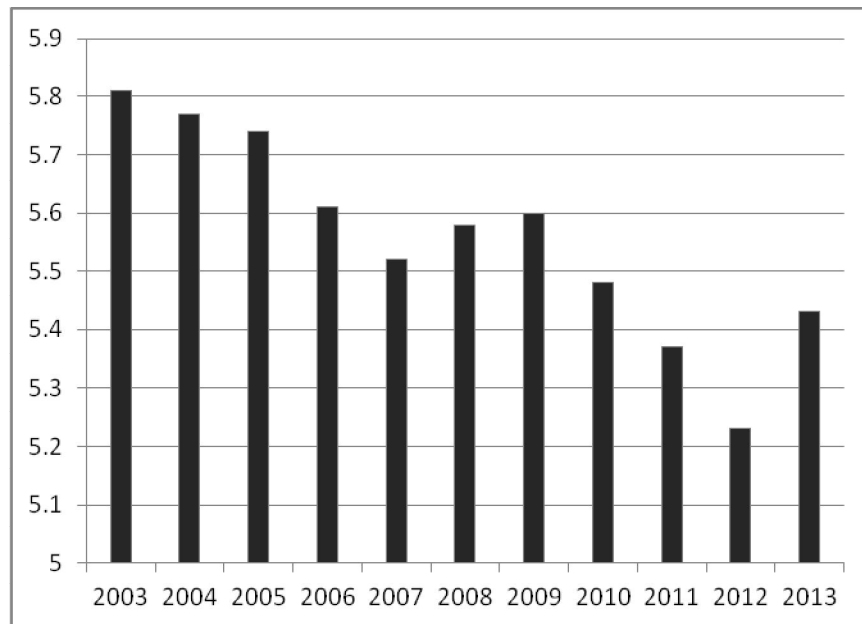
¹¹ (http://200.45.175.38/media/documentos/documento_356.pdf; accessed 28/May/2013)

Figure 1: Population aged 18-30 with Incomplete Education, Attending school, 2003-2013



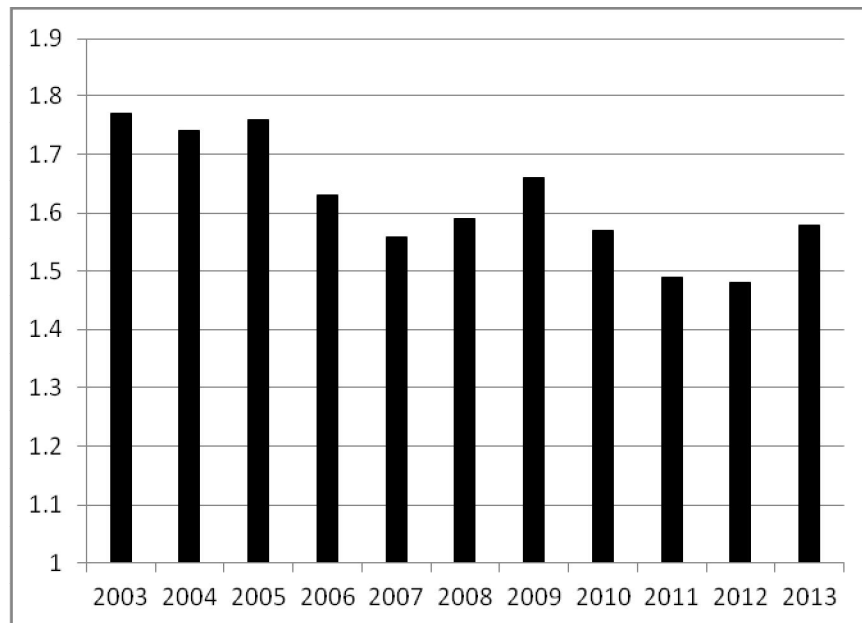
Source: own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey, 4th quarter

Figure 2: Population aged 18-60 with Incomplete Basic Education, not Attending School 2003-2013 (in Millions)



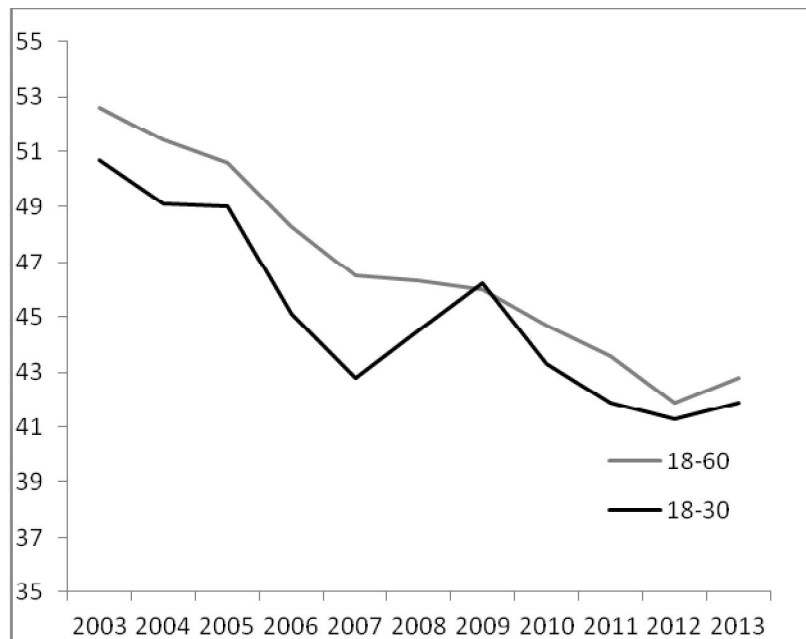
Source: own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey, 4th quarter

Figure 3: Population Aged 18-30 with Incomplete Basic Education, not Attending School. 2003-2013 (in Millions)



Source: own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey, 4th quarter

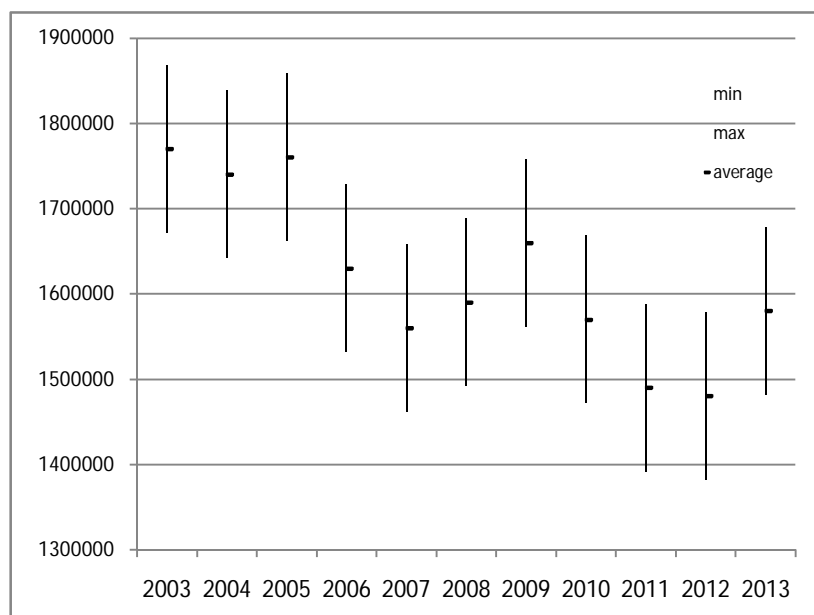
Figure 4: Adult Population with Incomplete Education, not attending School. 2003-2013. (in Percentage Values)



Source: own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey, 4th quarter

Point estimates must be considered carefully as they correspond to forecasts based on samples. Thus, instead of analyzing point estimates, it is better to focus on confidence intervals. The Plan does not compensate for poor education access.

Figure 5: Population aged 18-30 with Incomplete Education, not attending school. 2003-2013. Confidence Intervals



Source: own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey, 4th quarter

Figures indicate that i) the decreasing tendency of population with incomplete education began before the *Fines* Plan was started up, ii) the Plan could not improve this tendency, iii) the goal of universal school access has a limit.

The latter is consistent with several reports published by SITEAL which stress that Argentina, like the rest of Latin American countries, by 2006-2007, before the implementation of *Fines*, had reached its peak in educational expansion considering the trends in the last 2 decades. These reports explicitly recognize that the goal of universal access to knowledge by means of quality secondary school completion is extremely difficult to achieve.

5. Discussion: School Completion, Flexibility and Quality of Learning

The new policy directions aimed at educating adults and young people seems to rest on the need to adapt educational structures to new socioeconomic realities that require a flexible educational offer, in tune with the "world of work". This implicitly involves some insufficiently checked assumptions which turn policies ineffective. Those unchecked assumptions can be summarized as follows:

5.1) Labor Access Obstacles Emerging from Education Deficits

Based on the observation that the occupational status (quality, duration and salary levels) in young people is more advantageous in strata with higher levels of education, public interventions that aim to offset the difficulties of new workers focus almost exclusively on schooling completion and training, linking the problems of labor market with supply. Thus, educational deficits would represent an obstacle to labor market access. However, later and more rigorous reading of the evidence (education & work relationship) showed that educational credentials are subject to an increasing devaluation process (JACINTO, 2011) so education degree is less significant in the occupational status of the working-age population. It is noteworthy that despite some consensus among the literature, educational policies are still supported in terms of their (limited) ability to mobilize resources, especially when occupational problems seem to be caused by structural and cyclical weaknesses of productive activity rather than by the workforce qualifications¹².

¹² This is based on the fact that, despite the gap in employment and wages between different educational levels, the qualifications of the labor force have tended to increase and the level of employment has not grown at the same rate (MAURIZIO, 2001; WAISGRAIS, 2008). This phenomenon, known as over-education, is not only limited to Argentina or Latin America but is part of a generalized process showing an upward trend in developed countries for at least the last 30 years (RUMBERGER, 1981; CHEVALIER 2003; DOCKERY; MILLER, 2012).

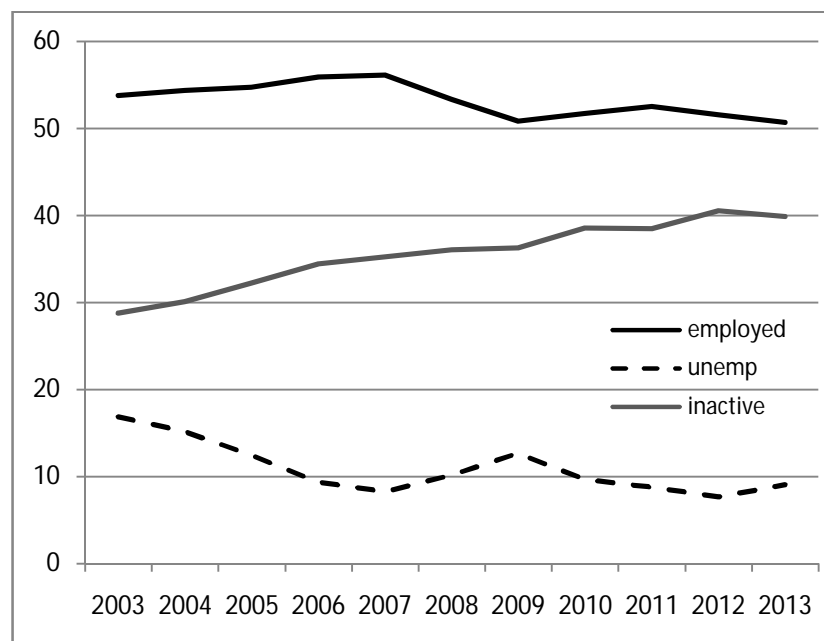
5.2) Learning Deficits Emerging from an Educational offer Delinked from real Problems

Persisting inequalities in educational achievements were attributed to the existence of a uniform educational structure (in terms of curriculum content and its duration) within which the social and labor realities of youth and adults are not considered. This hypothesis gave reason for the emergence of alternative schooling spaces, such as *Fines* Plan, which supposedly adapt curricula and learning modalities to occupational contexts where traditional teaching strategies proved inadequate.

The use of ICTs (Information & Communication Technologies) as a learning tool may prove to be effective for people who have dropped out of school for working reasons. In such cases, the working experience has enabled them to grasp knowledge outside school, which can be complemented with virtual lectures that successfully retrieve and resignify such knowledge. In Argentina, nevertheless, most high school dropouts occur in a context of inactivity or unemployment and are heavily concentrated in low-income sectors. School desertion is not motivated by working concerns; young people who abandon school perceive that education does not report necessarily better prospects than being outside the school. Furthermore, as school performance is strongly affected by SES (BELLEY & LOCHNER, 2007; REARDON, 2011), schooling only strengthens the capacities of students who are already encouraged at home but it cannot be of much help to students with a major shortage of stimuli.

Figures of young population by occupational status show that the adaptation of the educational offer to target young people has not provided them with employment, but has consolidated a sustained increase in inactivity (Figure 6). Therefore, there is an artificial decrease in unemployment, without modifying its actual incidence¹³. Furthermore, "inclusive" educational programs such as the *Fines*, by not dealing with the causes of school dropout (emotional, family or income instability, etc.), merely mask the problem. Indicators may improve in the short term, but as no permanent solutions are proposed to ensure access to quality education, they may show a decrease when the social and economic context is less auspicious. This confirms the circularity involving education and poverty and shows the effect of schooling on poverty; getting knowledge also requires migrating definitely from situations of deprivation.

Figure 6: Population aged 18-30 with Incomplete Education, by Occupational Situation (in Percentage Values)



Source: own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey, 4th quarter

¹³ As unemployment rate is calculated in terms of active population, an increase in inactivity diminishes the population universe over which the incidence of unemployment is calculated.

Adaptation of educational offer involved the deterioration of teachers' employment conditions and did not generate a concern for quality. This is manifested in the fact that tutors are not selected following objective and transparent criteria and the decision to accredit students' knowledge virtually depends on each mentor's will. Therefore, flexibility of the educational offer of *Fines* Plan strengthens educational inequality, instead of compensating knowledge deficits among vulnerable young people.

6. Final Remarks

Several elements of *Fines* Plan implementation indicate that the quality of the offer received is poor not only in absolute terms, but relative to what is currently offered on average (specially, with marked signs of deterioration) by Common Education branch.

The quality shortcoming of *Fines* Plan is shared in some way by the rest of the educational system. There is consensus in the literature that improvements in education access figures tend to occur simultaneously with reversals in educational quality indicators (KESSLER, 2002; RIVAS, 2010; among others). For an equivalent grade, the amount and depth of content covered in the curriculum have considerably deteriorated. This is reflected not only in the reports arising from PISA tests (www.oecd.org/pisa) but also in the perception of students, parents and teachers (TUÑÓN; HALPERIN, 2010). In terms of social programs' evaluation criteria, the *Fines* initiative is part of the kind of public interventions with remarkable levels of "products" (titling) with negligible impact (COHEN ET AL, 1998).

The peculiarity of the Plan lies not so much in the poor educational conditions, but in the creation of a parallel system that replaces the functions and scope historically assigned to the Adults branch. The difference between the two alternatives is evident precisely in the pay and working conditions of teachers; mentors of the *Fines* Plan are appointed to term, the so-called "extra" salary does not include contributions to social security, does not recognize employment tenure and it is not considered to calculate the annual bonus. In the province of Buenos Aires, the income rate per lecture hour in the Plan has been equated with that of the lecture hour in secondary level. However, this decision has not been sufficient to reach fair working conditions; with short term contracts, holiday pay and annual salary supplement are ignored. Furthermore, the fact that the duration of the job is 3-6 times shorter than a comparable position in the rest of the system implies savings of more than 70% based on differential teachers' payment¹⁴. The implementation of a parallel system aimed at education completion looks like a prologue for the gradual underfunding and subsequent elimination of the Adults branch and the consolidation of an educational system held by precarious teachers and learning.

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¹⁴ Naturally, this explains why there is lax monitoring of teachers' attendance and schedule compliance schedule. Low wages and no prospect of permanence cannot simultaneously demand promptness and justification of absence.

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