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# **The Role of Neoliberal Ideology and Globalization in Limiting Citizen Access to a Quality Education in Mexico**

by

Kayla Fiala

A Major Research Paper  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of Political Science  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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**The Role of Neoliberal Ideology and Globalization in Limiting Citizen Access to a Quality Education in Mexico**

**By**

**Kayla Fiala**

**APPROVED BY:**

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**S. Brooks, Advisor  
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September 7, 2021

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to apply a content analysis to both ‘*Keeping Kids in School*’ (KKIS) and ‘*The Youth Connection*’ (TYC), grass-roots charities that fundraise educational resources and encourage Mexican students to stay in school, in order to identify recurring themes and collectivities of the Mexican education system. This study poses the question, “*How has neoliberal globalization played a role in devaluing and minimizing citizenry access to a quality education in Mexico*”? The two charities were chosen because their specific coordinating efforts—on behalf of shared interests to improve education in Mexico—reveals discursive constructions grounded on experiential knowledge from volunteering in Mexican schools. This study argues that Mexico’s insufficiencies in education cannot be analyzed in isolation from superior political and economic transformations within the state and, in turn, are a result of neoliberal globalization. Nonetheless, this approach goes beyond Marxian analysis. Instead it takes a modernist skeptical approach and utilizes post-structural feminist analysis to understand how intersectional subjective identities are constituted and produce collectivities. These collectivities formed specifically by KKIS and TYC, but also the communities they aid, and scholarship focused around them, reveal collective opinions regarding perceived classed, gendered and racialized subjective identities, institutionalizations and standpoints in the Mexican education system. This research paper argues that the normalization of inexperienced cheap labor is a main reason young Mexicans choose employment over school, a finding that is corroborated from an analysis of the media accounts of the KKIS and the TYC.

### **Keywords**

Neoliberal globalization, access to quality education, intersectionality, subjectivity, collectivity, inexperienced cheap labor, post-Fordist work, maquiladoras

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## **Chapter 1—Introduction**

### **The Mexican Education Crisis**

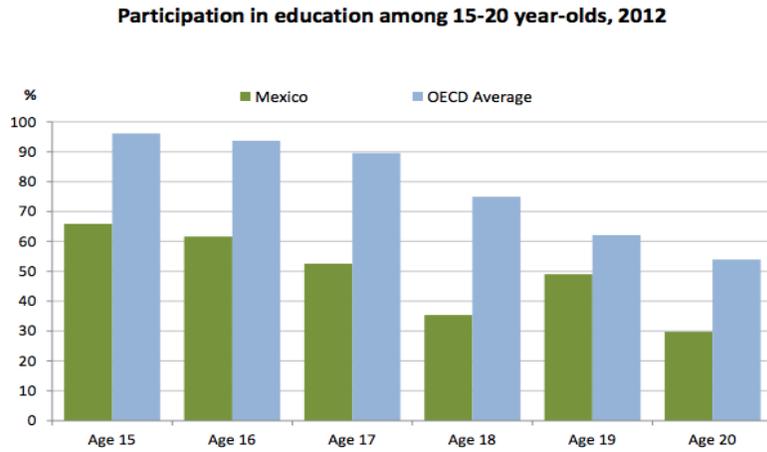
Mexico is facing a crisis in education. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) comprises 36 countries including Mexico. This intergovernmental economic association reveals in **Figure 1** that educational attainments in Mexico are far worse than the OECD average. Furthermore, Mexicans who do obtain an education do not tend to receive a quality education. The average student in Mexico has the lowest literacy, science and math scores among countries within the OECD (ICFDN, 2019). While Mexico has the 15<sup>th</sup> largest world economy, it nonetheless suffers massive exploitation issues preventing it from achieving gains in education. In fact, 15% of per capita GDP in Mexico is expended for primary education and 17% is spent towards secondary school education and these rates are lower than all countries in the OECD, other than Turkey (ICFDN, 2019). However, only 62% of Mexican children end up attending school (ICFDN, 2019). Even worse, only 45% complete high school, while in the United States 75% finish and earn a high school diploma (ICFDN, 2019). Furthermore, roughly 18% of the nation “lives in extreme poverty”, and in underprivileged areas school dropout rates, nonattendance, and grade repetition are severe (ICFDN, 2017). Additionally, among OECD states, Mexico has the lowest rates in school enrollment for those ages 15 to 19-year-olds, conceivably because scarcity pushes them to find employment rather than attending school (ICFDN, 2017). Not only are numerous Mexicans neglected opportunity in reaching higher education, they also face difficulties in finding employment. For those finished school ages 15 to 29, one in five are unemployed (ICFDN, 2017). **Figure 2** and **Figure 3** show that there are also gender disparities in education and consequently employment. In this vein, “1 in 10 young men and 3 in 10 young women are neither in education nor in

employment,” outcomes that compare unfavorably to the those for other OECD countries (ICFDN, 2017). **This study argues that the normalization of inexperienced cheap labor is a main reason young Mexicans choose employment over school and explains why only 62% of Mexican children end up attending school, and even worse, only 45% complete high school.** This paper conceptualizes inexperienced cheap labor as primarily in both Mexico’s burgeoning tourist industry and post-Fordist work from the surge of maquiladoras, which permits foreign-owned corporations to assemble in Mexico to exploit Mexican cheap labor, operating tariff and duty-free.

### **Case Selection**

Mexico is a progressively decentralized federal system that encompasses 31 states and the Federal District (DF) of Mexico City (Hecock, 2006: 951). All states hold a legislature of approximately 20 and 75 seats, in which two-thirds are elected through “first past the post single-member districts” (Hecock, 2006: 951). The other one-third is designated by a procedure of “proportional representation” (Hecock, 2006: 951). Also, each state elects a governor who holds office for six years, but cannot be elected consecutively (Hecock, 2006: 951). State governments are comparable in structure, but diverge because of the nature of parties influencing them and in their application of electoral competition. At the state level, Mexico possesses institutional structures imitating those at the national level. These are also analogous within other states. Hecock notes “this is something that clearly cannot be said of the cross-national studies within Latin America, let alone cross-regional studies” (2006: 951). Furthermore, the state level controls much in adaptations to political and economic variables, while controlling only some in historical and cultural variables—conjectured to affect spending.

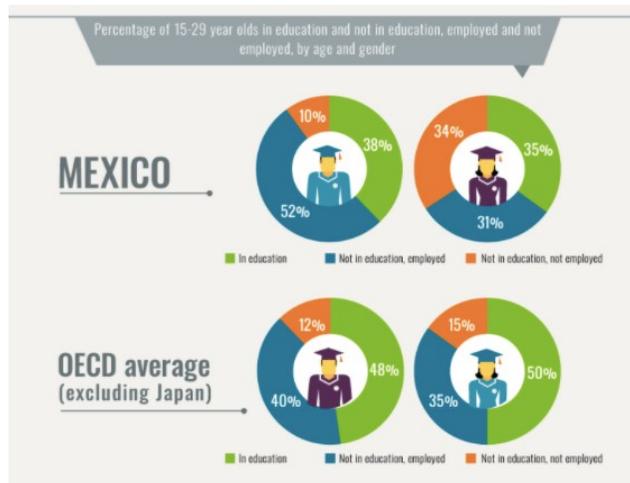
**Figure 1** (OECD, 2014)



**Figure 2** (ICFDN, 2017)



**Figure 3** (ICFDN, 2017)



## **Methodology**

### **Qualitative Content Analysis and Themes**

Qualitative content analysis involves a search for recurring themes. The aim of critical social research is to “observe the nature of inequality”, and to assess closely the underlying processes that explain the occurrence of unequal social relations (Esterberg, 2002:17). Hence, critical social researchers comprehend not just subjective experiences and feelings but, as well, power relations shaping our material world. Cycles of oppression continue, especially when its subjected individuals understand the oppressive conditions as normal or natural (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998:263).

To understand why educational attainments in Mexico are far worse than the OECD average, this research study asks the question, “*how has neoliberal globalization played a role in devaluing and minimizing citizenry access to a quality education in Mexico*”? This particular qualitative research study applies a content analysis to both ‘*Keeping Kids in School*’ (KKIS) and ‘*The Youth Connection*’ (TYC), grass-roots charities that fundraise educational resources and encourage Mexican students to stay in school, to identify recurring themes and collectivities of the Mexican education system.

### **What Are KKIS and TYC?**

**The *Keeping Kids In School* (KKIS)** charity specifically works to better public high school graduation rates in Playa del Carmen, Mexico (KKIS, 2021). Their mission “is to improve graduation rates and to prepare students to fundamentally and sustainably change their lives” (KKIS, 2020). To achieve their goals, they work with public school administrators, teachers, students and parents to foster programs that deliver financial aid, networks and

support. *The Youth Connection* (TYC) charity is a non-profit organization that orchestrates fundraisers in Canadian universities, to raise money to provide underprivileged students in Playa Del Carmen, Mexico, with school supplies and opportunities (TYC, 2021). In the summer TYC members travel to Playa del Carmen, Mexico to provide the fundraised school supplies. Members also work with translators to encourage students to pursue education rather than dropping out to work in tourism or supply labor to factories controlled by foreign capital (mainly from the U.S), which dictates the Mexican economy. TYC was founded by Arielle Grinberg at the University of Western Ontario. It has expanded in the past two years to the University of Windsor, the University of Waterloo, Laurier University, Ryerson University, and York University.

This study underwent a content analysis on both KKIS and TYC by investigating their media accounts. Media accounts have long been used by qualitative social researchers to examine social life. Inspecting media accounts are beneficial in conceptualizing how groups of people epitomize in coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests (Esterberg, 2002:124). The TYC and KKIS media accounts detail the aims of the organizations, their mission trips and volunteer efforts in Mexican schools, member blog insights disclosing narratives learned from doing charity work in Mexican schools, and hence reflect experiences also conveyed by teachers, students, the publics they serve, and even scholarship focused around the Mexican education issue.

Another strong suit of media accounts is that they are easily accessible and commonly free to access. With media accounts, Esterberg warns researchers to be careful of its “sources of bias” (2002:124). Factual errors may be apparent on media accounts. It is difficult to know for certain whether published information is correct. More importantly, social researchers must

always inspect “who published a particular account, for what purpose, and for what intended audience” (Esterberg, 2002:124). A media source could be biased in a particular direction. For this reason, it is imperative to describe the roles that may influence—or may be perceived as having an influence—on the research, and as well the information displayed on the KKIS and TYC media sites.

No members of KKIS or TYC benefit financially from being part of either charity. No member receives any form of compensation for volunteering with KKIS or TYC. Members are also not given free trips to give out school supplies, as they are required to pay their own way. The organizer of this research process (Kayla Fiala) is also the founder of the TYC charity chapter located in Canada, Ontario at the University of Windsor. TYC branches at various Ontario universities host fundraisers and awareness exhibitions to achieve the organization’s goals of improving education in Mexico. The KKIS charity is part of this mix, because they are who TYC partners with in Mexico to purchase and distribute school supplies. The KKIS charity is situated in Playa Del Carmen, Mexico. The region is described by KKIS as,

One of the top tourist destinations in Mexico where local people make less than \$10 per day. Here families cannot afford the costs of a public education; surviving day to day, week to week requires able bodied family members to work (KKIS, 2021).

These organizations do share some collective viewpoints of the Mexican education system. These charities, in handing out school supplies in Mexico, permit members to see first-hand that student drop-out rates are exceedingly high there. Also, both TYC and KKIS charities educate members about education statistics and the normalization of inexperienced cheap labor in Mexico. Furthermore, people join these charities for a reason, not because it looks like a “fun” club to be part of. In fact, many of the members part of KKIS are actually retired

American teachers. Before these teachers joined KKIS, they originally, ventured to Mexico to enjoy retirement. Teaching in the U.S, a developed country, then juxtaposing this reality by settling to a less-developed place, allowed them to see clearly the human rights issues in education and other major social disparities in Mexico. Hence, many retired teachers join KKIS out of their passion for school and a yearning to make a difference.

However, because this content analysis is being applied to TYC and KKIS media accounts—which feature the objectives of the organizations, their volunteer efforts in Mexican schools, member blog insights disclosing narratives learned from doing charity work in Mexican schools— this study recognizes this point of view derives from Western and Eurocentric life experiences and understandings. In this way, it is important to remind readers that low educational attainments and sending children to work early is normalized in Mexico. Western and Eurocentric life experiences place more value on education than those living in Mexico. The damage of entering the workforce prematurely is a Western/Eurocentric conceptualization. From analyzing members' statistics on TYC and KKIS media accounts. TYC members are in fact all Canadian university students ranging from ages 19-25 (TYC, 2021). They are also predominantly Caucasian and come from affluent socioeconomic statuses and classes. The members of KKIS are mostly above the age of 30 (KKIS, 2021). They are mostly American or Mexican and also come from more affluent socioeconomic statuses and classes.

## **Chapter 2—Analyzing the Effects of Neoliberal Globalization on the Education System in Mexico**

### **What is Neoliberalism?**

Neoliberalism is frequently associated with the term globalization. Neoliberalism is regarded as an economic theory that affects economic, political, and cultural aspects of civilization and comprises multifarious principles, ideologies, and practices. Conceptualized by Martinez and Garcia, they describe neoliberalism as:

A set of economic policies that have become widespread during the last 25 years or so. Although the word is rarely heard in the United States, you can clearly see the effects of neo-liberalism here as the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer.....Around the world, neo-liberalism has been imposed by powerful financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank .....the capitalist crisis over the last 25 years, with its shrinking profit rates, inspired the corporate elite to revive economic liberalism. That’s what makes it ‘neo’ or new (1997:1).

Ross and Gibson explain neoliberalism as the “prevailing political economic paradigm in the world today” and an “ideological monoculture” (Ross & Gibson, 2007:2). In this vein, when neoliberal policies are contested, a usual widespread retort is that there is no substitute to replace such market-oriented reform policies. In fact, neoliberal economic policies have fashioned enormous social and economic disparities among people and countries. For instance, the same mixture of rising personal debt and the broadening wealth gap that led to the Great Depression triggered the realities of our present economy which is bolstered with regressions in wages, savings rates, and the amount of labourers protected by private pensions (Ross & Gibson,

2007:2). Neoliberalism is also a political system, operating as a formal democracy where people are mere spectators who do not contribute significant participation in formulations. McChesney goes so far as to say that neoliberal democracy is a frivolous dispute over issues by parties that essentially follows “pro-business policies” irrespective of collective differences and varying disputes. He says, “democracy is permissible as long as the control of business is off-limits to popular deliberation or change, i.e., so long as it isn’t democracy” (1998:9). Ross and Gibson explain America’s “depoliticized” and unconcerned citizenry as a main reason neoliberalism has prevailed. They notably regard its prevalence as “one abetted by new education reforms” which also support its systemizations (Ross & Gibson, 2007:3).

Martinez and Garcia (1997) designate five key ideals of neoliberalism:

1. *The rule of the market.* Liberating free/private enterprise from any restrictions imposed by the state (government) no matter the social damage that results. The aim is total freedom of movement for capital, goods, and services, which is facilitated by trade agreements such as *North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)* which is now, since November 30, 2018 the new *Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA)* (Government of Canada, 2020), and *General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)*.
2. *Cutting public expenditures for social services* (such as education and health care).
3. *Deregulation.* Reduction of government regulation that might diminish profits, including regulations that are intended to enhance on-the-job safety or protect the environment.
4. *Privatization.* Selling state-owned enterprises, goods, and services to private investors (including public education services). Although usually done in the name

of increased efficiency, privatization has mainly had the effect of concentrating wealth in fewer hands and making the public pay more for its needs.

5. *Elimination of the concept of “the public good” or “community”* and replacing it with “individual responsibility” and pressuring the poorest people to find solutions to their lack of education, health care, etc. (Martinez and Garcia, 1997:2)

### **Neoliberalism and Education Reform**

The Mexican education system has experienced sequential reform activities since the early twentieth century Revolution. Most of these reforms intended to increase access to education. While national education has seen some improvement, quality education in Mexico remains quite inadequate. There is much evidence when it comes to education quality, that Mexico (along with the rest of Latin America, excluding Cuba) trails far behind the developed world (Hecock, 2006: 952). Delivering public education is an objective enshrined in the Mexican constitution (Scott, 2012: 108). Mexicans are assured 6 years of public primary education. Nonetheless, this objective is not generally accomplished. In fact, rural schools, specifically those in isolated regions, “often only include three grades and sometimes only one” (Scott, 2012: 108). Education therefore requires many to travel vast distances in order to attend. In this vein, school location is also a determinant of whether a Mexican citizen attends school or not. If Mexican schools reverted from profit-making establishments diminishing capital competition among institutes and became a valued social program in the nation, the government would make schooling more accessible for all. This could increase enrollment rates. Additionally, pursuing secondary education is an even more unlikely venture for most young adults in Mexico. This is because “students struggle to pay for living expenses while studying,

key classes are often full or not offered, strikes are not uncommon, and many students never graduate” (Scott, 2012: 109).

While the focus of this scholarship is particularly the deterioration of education in Mexico, this research also conveys that public education is deteriorating in North America and around the world because of neoliberal government policies. Education is a fundamental objective of the neoliberal scheme because of its relative market size. Ross and Gibson note that worldwide expenditures on education amount to more than \$1 trillion (2007:4). Furthermore, education is central to the economy, for it produces critical actors within the economy and also has the “potential to challenge corporate globalization” (Kuehn, 1999).

To comprehend education in Latin America in the twenty-first century, it is essential to grasp how a state’s international economic and political potencies affect governance and financing over the operations of school systems. The state and its distributive policies for education have seen dramatic modifications. The current education system has been degraded because of policies involving decentralization, deregulation, and privatization of education (Armove et al, 2013: 292). These policies can explain why there is an increasing gap between rich people and poor people, especially in Latin America. Reductions in state subsidies for public education have exacerbated Mexico’s already inequitable education systems. A reversal is needed within the Mexican education system, in order to provide greater resource concentrations for all levels of education. Resource concentration and proper subsidization in education will afford students a prosperous education. This paper conceives a “*prosperous education*” as one that appropriately directs people towards higher skilled job opportunities, rather than a basic education that dissuades students from prolonging education, often causing them to drop out to work in tourism or post Fordist work. Premature exit from the educational

system plays a major role in limiting specialization capabilities and minimizes capabilities for Mexican citizens to acquire stable wages that can adequately support their families.

### **American Imperialism in Mexico and the “Mexican Problem”**

The “*Mexican Problem*” is vital to this analysis, for it recognizes how America, beginning in the late 19th century, imposed a form of economic colonization on Mexico. This established an imperial ideology identifying Mexicans as the problem, which in turn became the main premise underlying American control of Mexico’s economic and cultural development (Gonzalez, 2007). Vinson and Ross argue that education should be comprehended in regard to setting and hence “spectacle and surveillance” (2000). Spectacle and surveillance explains how people and units are monitored by both larger and smaller entities. Vinson and Ross establish how “*disciplinary power*” must be conceptualized within a framework demarcated in part, rendering to the conjunction of surveillance and spectacle (2000). In conveying this, they refer to the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). The NCLB was the focal law for K-12 broad-spectrum education in America from 2002-2015. While the NCLB is an American policy, its influence extended widely and is thus applicable to the education crisis in Mexico. Hill regards the reshuffle of the schooling and education structures around the globe as “part of the ideological and policy offensive by neoliberal capital” (2007:107). This law for instance, held schools accountable for how kids learned and achieved. This neoliberal policy understood standardized testing as both a cost-effective and accurate evaluation of both student and teacher performance. However, this law was contentiously debated because it reprimanded schools that did not show progress.

Hursh argues that, over the past two decades, neoliberal policies have altered educational systems internationally. Reforms notably cause public schools to be replaced “with private, for-profit, competitive, market-based schools” (Hursh, 2007). Like the NCLB, these competitive market based transformations often direct that students and schools be assessed by standardized mechanisms. As previously mentioned, neoliberal reforms often see standardized testing as an economical and correct evaluation of both student performance and teacher effectiveness. On the downside, the “one-size-fits-all” method may not be most conducive to all learning types. Further, when schools continuously modify towards standardized mechanisms, this may discourage learning. Hursh argues that these degrade “the culture of the school, teacher professionalism and student success” (2007). Additionally, certain regulations under these policies suggest that schools wanting to exemplify sufficient levels of development, should make endowments towards tutoring—typically through private for-profit establishments. Moreover, schools that fail to meet projected targets may be confronted by administered regularities or forced by a private corporation to revert to a charter school. From Hursh one begins to comprehend the harmful and competitive nature of neoliberalism on educational reform initiatives.

Bridging from “spectacle and surveillance” and “disciplinary power,” Gilbert G. Gonzalez studies the history of American imperialism and the education of Mexicans. He identifies how America, beginning in the late 19th century, colonized economically in Mexico, establishing an imperial ideology identifying the “Mexican problem”. America’s economic colonization in Mexico produced a language of imperialism juxtaposing Mexicans as inferior. In fact, the implementation of railroads in Mexico, had supreme impacts on the constructed inferiority of Mexicans. Particularly because this development allotted Americans affordable

travel around Mexico when most of its citizens could not afford this luxury. Accessible travel and massive foreign observation produced a great deal of American literature condemning “inherent flaws in either Mexico’s culture or, more often, in Mexico’s biological makeup distinguishing Americans from Mexicans” (Gonzalez, 2007:94). Gonzalez’s research suggests the political and economic conditions inflicted over the Mexican immigrant community have led to a century of failed democratic schooling. However, Ross and Gibson contend “the struggle for democratic schooling is, ultimately, a struggle against imperialism” (2007:11). In this vein, the fight for adequate schooling in Mexico is also a struggle against American expansionism.

The superior/inferior relation stems predominantly from the ideal that “foreign capital, mainly from the United States, dominated the Mexican economy, while Mexicans supplied the labor power” (Gonzalez, 2007:91). Therefore, the culture and language created by American imperialism in Mexico identified Mexicans as the problem, and the solution presumed “that only foreigners, mainly Americans, could successfully guide Mexico towards economic and cultural development” (Gonzalez, 2007:88). Gonzalez conceptualized the “Mexican problem” and he demarcates this as a directory of “Mexican cultural and/or genetic pathologies” that hindered the nation’s ability to modernize independently (2007:88). The solution presumed “that only foreigners, mainly Americans, were capable of meeting the challenge and lead Mexico across the threshold of economic and cultural development” (Gonzalez, 2007:88).

Moreover, amid the culmination of the Spanish-American War and the Civil War, the U.S faced a swell of public opinion raised in later years of the 1860s professing American interests for either the: “1) annexation of Mexico or 2) its conquest by economic means, that is, largescale export of capital investments into Mexico” (Gonzalez, 2007:91). A policy referred to as the ‘peaceful conquest’ was formulated during the first decade of the 20th century

(Williamson, 2015:22). Some scholars refer to the economic domination of Mexico analogously to economic colonization. Parkes states,

Classic participants in the Robber Barons era held considerable investment interests in Mexico. Daniel Guggenheim, William Randolph Hearst, J. P. Morgan, Colis P. Huntington, Jay Gould, and corporations like Standard Oil, U.S. Steel, Phelps Dodge, Union Pacific, McCormick, Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe, Doheny Oil, among others came to control Mexico (1970).

Mexico swiftly advanced “into a virtual economic protectorate of the United States”, where American capital had a pivotal influence in Mexico’s affairs (Gonzalez, 2007:91). In fact, by 1910 over 1 billion dollars of American capital regulated Mexico’s railroads, mining, oil and considerable segments of agriculture (Gonzalez, 2007:91). As previously mentioned, U.S operations of railroad building in Mexico influenced prodigious societal transformations. Tracks were positioned through traditional farming villages causing habitants to relocate (Coatsworth, 1979:948). Furthermore, government subsidized de-peasanting “uprooted several hundreds of thousands of peasants” from common farming plots, causing mass resettlement patterns from villages to cities, and especially relocated labourers to Mexico City (Gonzalez, 2007:91). In this way, railroad construction radically restructured demographics by the infiltration of U.S. capital. Successively, migrants were also employed and transported by U.S establishments to labour sites which were generally located along northern states bordering America (Coatsworth, 1979:948).

By 1910, 200,000 laborers worked yearly for American corporations and this constructed the terms of Mexico’s first industrial working class (Gonzalez, 2007:91). ‘Mexican work’, was conceptualized as “*inexperienced cheap labor*”, and the ‘Mexican wage, was half of

the American wage for the same quality of work (Gonzalez, 2007:92). This imperial ideology that reified Mexican work' as "inexperienced cheap labor", continues to manifest today. Even though Mexico has the 15th largest world economy, past and present massive exploitation issues inhibits them from achieving gains in education. Hence why this study argues the normalization of inexperienced cheap labor as a main reason young Mexicans choose employment over school and explains why only 62% of Mexican children end up attending school, and even worse, only 45% complete high school.

### **Mexico's Neoliberal Restructuring has Transformed Primary and Middle Education in Two Ways**

The neoliberal prescription is very apparent in Mexico and most of Latin America. As previously mentioned, international economic and political potencies affect domestic financing, and neoliberalism has especially diminished spending on education in Latin America throughout the twenty-first century. It is essential to grasp how state neoliberal restructuring greatly influences the operations of school systems. Mexico's current education system is disintegrating because of policies involving government decentralization, deregulation, and especially the privatization of education (Arnove et al, 2013: 292). Mexico's neoliberal restructuring has transformed primary and middle education in two ways. Laurell explains how, first, public education has been modified to serve mainly children and youth from the underprivileged majority (2015:256). Second, middle and higher classes are commonly required to pay out of pocket to send their children either to private schools or abroad. Laurell clarifies how this transformation came about and blames American hegemony and its neoliberal propositions by institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The application of structural adjustment procedures in the 1980s, which intended to liberalize economies of Latin America and assimilate them in the global capitalist system, triggered a number of crises, notably in Mexico. The Trilateral Coalition in Defense of Public Education voices that the adjustment programs effected in Mexico beginning in 1982 “have spelled social devastation” (1997). Mexico’s inauguration of neoliberal structural adjustment spawned from the 1983 debt crisis, when the Mexican government approved a two-phase conventional IMF subscription (Laurell, 2015:250). The first phase, “aimed at reducing inflation and stabilizing public finances and the second aimed at achieving growth by structural reforms” (Laurell, 2015:250). By 1993, the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) was ratified between Canada, Mexico and the United States (Scott, 2012: 50). The conciliation of NAFTA is imperative, for it also established a new national and educational model for Mexico. The Trilateral Coalition regards the national model as “a state which abandons its responsibility to society, becoming a mere facilitator of private investment that actively generates higher levels of poverty in both rural and urban areas” (1997).

According to the Trilateral Coalition in Defense of Public Education, “the price to be paid for an economy at the service of payments on the foreign debt has been financed by selling off public entities one by one” (1997). Consequently, the 1980s resulted in educational budgets and teachers' salaries being cut (Trilateral Coalition in Defense of Public Education, 1997). When educational spending is reduced; school dropout rates increase also. For instance, “by 1995, primary school registration had not recuperated the levels and rhythm of growth present before 1983” (Trilateral Coalition in Defense of Public Education,1997). By 2014, Mexico’s yearly expenditure on spending per student plummeted well below the OECD average. By 2017, economic demands triggered the Mexican government to condense the educational budget by

11% (ICDFN, 2019). Mexico's textbook budget was also "cut by a third", and teacher preparation programs have been condensed by 40% (ICDFN, 2019).

Although state governments depend to some extent on federal transfers, they do hold prodigious autonomy in determining policy. For this reason, it is imperative to recognize influences that separate Mexican states in policy pursuits. When it comes to Mexico's neoliberal market restructuring, Hecock points to one predominant reform, the progression of administrative and fiscal decentralization (2006: 952). It started in 1978 and was intensified in 1992 with the "*Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education*" (Hecock, 2006: 952). While Mexico has ostensibly been a federal system, it has long remained comparatively centralized. This is mainly because the dominant Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) once controlled all state governments and was an extremely dominant and methodical party. However, Hecock explains when PRI's centralized control diminished, this augmented rising electoral competition in the 1980s and 1990s, and education was one of the first prescribed decentralization undertakings (2006: 952).

The role of the state in providing basic social services like education was weakened. These policies can be explained as frugally motivated, causing necessary social safety nets for marginalized populations to be substantially destabilized over the following two decades. Exchanges to decentralize and privatize economies caused governments to reduce subsidies in education. These outcomes also eroded national teachers' unions and minimized their negotiating powers (Arnove et al, 2013). In fact, Arnove conceptualizes national teachers' unions as "the single most important voice for a universal, free education system preparing individuals not only for productive economic roles but the exercise of democratic citizenship rights" (2013:310). Furthermore, these developments have devalued the functions and

capabilities of Mexican teachers. Notably, rural teachers lack the resources to promote learning among students. This also impacts Mexico's high dropout rates in education. From this point, it is important to acknowledge how rural teachers in Mexico have historically been the literate front-runners of Mexican society. Their purpose has not only been to teach children, but they were and still are approached by farmers and industry fronts to translate texts, grasp information forms and even argue for fairness in public transactions. They have been regarded as cultural community leaders and also "bearers of national history" (Laurell, 2015:256).

Privatization in education has been expended in Mexico in various ways. Even in public schools, students are increasingly charged student fees that were formerly free. As the educational sector revolved to private interests to source scholastic endeavors, policy planning distorted to private investor interests. Also, while education ministries came to obey private interests, this also demanded restructuring of self-supporting school systems (Arnove et al, 2013: 302). The main take away here is that converting schools to profit-making establishments limits access for all people. High-quality private institutions may be appealing to people of middle- and upper-class because they may deliver smaller classes, enhanced facilities, and atmospheres more conducive to learning. But paying for school is not affordable for all families. Especially in Mexico, a country where roughly 18% of the nation "lives in extreme poverty", and in underprivileged areas school dropout rates, nonattendance, and grade repetition are severe issues (ICFDN, 2017). Furthermore, many for-profit schools still lack in effectively disseminating a quality education (Arnove et al, 2013: 302). Numerous private schools in Mexico still face the consequences of congested classrooms, insufficient facilities, poorly compensated overworked teachers, and deprived instruction that does not foster proper learning. Additionally, when low-income students attend these schools at such a cost to their families,

they are experiencing “a second-rate education” that reduces their likelihood to pursue further educational opportunities, especially towards postsecondary levels (Arnove et al, 2013: 302).

### **Higher Education in Mexico**

Higher education in Latin America more recently saw university restructuring succeeding the model of privatization advanced in Chile. This reform began in the early 1980s and can be understood as the reversal of the Argentinean 1918 university transformation (Torres et al, 2002: 445). The Argentinean 1918 university transformation was more accessible to all people than the one currently prevailing in Latin America. The 1918 version was proclaimed at the time “as a model for the radical democratization of knowledge and access to higher education”(Torres et al, 2002: 445). Prior to 1981, Chilean higher education was a solitary system. In this way, institutes were legally acknowledged “as self-governing bodies, students did not pay fees and financing of universities was protected through public incremental funding” (Torres et al, 2002: 445). Torres et al explain,

In 1981, the higher education system experienced an institutional diversification, with the establishment of three vertical and hierarchically loosely articulated tiers (universities, professional institutes and technical training centers). The institutional power of the two traditional state universities was reduced: they were forced to give up their regional centers, a process that gave birth to 14 new public institutions (2002: 445).

Enrollment expansion in higher education became allotted to private institutions. Because of deregulation initiatives, institutional minimal requirement fixities within higher education

declined. For educational staff, civil servant status became eradicated, and a system creating discrepancy in salaries also proliferated.

On top of this, public universities are suffering monetary reductions from the Mexican government. This has more recently situated pressure on diversification of revenue sources, notably within the business sector. At the same time, aid is becoming progressively provisional. Therefore, this suggests, “financing is increasingly dependent upon evaluation according to ‘criteria of performativity’ established by government and market forces” (Torres et al, 2002:445). More recently, there has been an intensification of private profit-making involvement within public universities in Latin America. This development augments a rising authority of market forces within the university realm, involving a more competitive culture among professors, departments, and faculties of both public and private universities when it comes to funding, grants, contracts, student selection and other subsidy allocations.

### **Globalization**

It is appropriate to analyze Mexico in the context of globalization and its effects on social policy. Particularly because of Mexico’s involvement in trade liberalization with the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA), which was implemented in 1994. Opponents and supporters of free trade have looked to Mexico for analysis, to back their standpoints. Moreover, Mexican states in dissimilar degrees have integrated into the international economy, making this case conceivable to assess. One of the questions that arises is whether government spending cuts in education lead to declines in test scores and graduation rates. In fact, scholars investigated American states that underwent vast cuts in state spending on education throughout

the Great Recession (Jackson, Wigger, and Xiong, 2021:304-35). Based on this, Jackson stated in an interview on past research:

The short headline is that school spending cuts do matter; if you cut education spending, student outcomes will deteriorate. To give a longer headline, there's a good amount of recent research showing that when you give public schools or districts larger budgets, their students tend to do better (Jordyn, 2018).

This study also conveys of the numerous analyses seeking to understand the relationship between education and economic growth. The empirical results support the hypothesis that public spending on education affects positive economic growth in studies focused on Algeria, Nigeria and Poland (Mekdad, Dahmani, and Louaj, 2014; Kabuga, and Hussaini, 2015; Konopczyński, 2014). Likewise, Hecock (2006) puts forward in an effort to improve human capital, that governments should expend more on primary education. He reasons that expending more on primary education “should be uniquely attractive” to governments in developing nations facing difficulties attaining steady economic growth in the context of globalization, “as it is one of the few steps available to policymakers that leads both to gains in economic competitiveness and to greater equity” (Hecock, 2006: 950).

This paper mentions two cross-national competing hypotheses on social spending that have studied the effects of globalization (Adsera and Boix, 2002; Avelino, Brown, and Hunter, 2005; Garrett, 2001; Kaufman and Segura- Ubiergo, 2001) . First, the “efficiency hypothesis” suggests that higher levels of assimilation into the global economy will produce negative effects on social spending. In this vein, spending necessitates resources that could be collected by taxing business endeavours or through deficit expenditures that escalate interest rates. Both processes impair competitiveness and discourage possible investors. Because of this it is

predictable that business front-runners will encourage governments to reduce spending in general, including “social security spending and human capital investment (health care and education spending combined)” (Hecock, 2006: 950). Thus, when the demands of capitalism cause governments to spend less on social programs, this also minimizes access to basic rights like education. Second, the “compensation hypothesis” argues that trade openness and augmented exposure into the global economy positively affects social security and education spending. This hypothesis implies that increased emergence also faces governments with demands to counterbalance through spending on social programs.

However, these hypotheses could use deeper speculation. Particularly the context of the education sector in its function to the subnational level of government, and in comprehending different aspects of globalization. Firstly, similar to all public disbursements, education expenditures are most probable to be susceptible to the monetary constraints projected by the efficiency hypothesis. Conversely, it is quite improbable that pressures will be exerted for more expending on primary education as a means to recompense citizens confronting harms or amplified insecurity due to globalization. Hecock makes the point, “rather, those at risk due to exposure to the international economy (farmers, some workers, certain entrepreneurs, to name a few) are likely to lobby for various forms of social security, job retraining programs, business loans, and subsidies—not primary education spending” (Hecock, 2006: 952). In its place, compensating the efficiency hypothesis are the burdens of business demanding a more educated labor force. From this, states could receive pressure by business trailblazers to improve levels of human capital. This attribute also makes nations more appealing to potential external investors. Therefore, from Hecock, in observing the influence of globalization on education spending, the opposing hypotheses are not *efficiency* against *compensation*, but *efficiency* against a *human*

*capital* hypothesis (Hecock, 2006: 952). Likewise, it should be distinguished here that the two contending hypotheses are dependent on the development strategies that governments implement.

Trade liberalization could drive forms of social spending through compensatory dealings. From the logic delineated above, it might positively affect spending on primary education because of countries' determinations to be more economically competitive. Still, the efficiency hypothesis weakens this anticipation. Specifically, in the framework of *maquila export activity*. In formulating states to be more competitive, primary education is likely not a high priority in doing so. On top of this, "the maquila sector relies predominantly on low-skilled labor, and in addition to the resultant lack of demand to improve human capital, there may even be pressure *not* to invest for several reasons" (Hecock, 2006: 953). Manufacturers also dislike the financial consequences of higher taxes and social spending (which corresponds to the efficiency hypothesis). To remind readers, this paper conceptualizes inexperienced cheap labor arrives primarily from both Mexico's burgeoning tourist industry and post-Fordist work from the surge of maquiladoras—which permits foreign owned corporations to assemble in Mexico to exploit Mexican cheap labor, operating tariff and duty-free. It follows from this, says Hecock, that firms favor "a relatively docile, uneducated workforce rather than an educated group prone to organization and demands" (Hecock, 2006: 953). Moreover, higher levels of education could require corporations to pay laborers higher wages. Even when only minor gains in labor productivity are the result of this, especially when the nature of these jobs typically necessitates low skills.

Hecock also reasons that economic openness generally insinuates negative consequences on education spending (2006: 953). To understand the economic openness degree of a state,

quantitative analyses use *foreign direct investment* (FDI) as the indicator to comprehend a state's maquila sector of export processing. Though this is not ideal, it provides some insight into the degree to which nations partake in global trade. For instance, preceding the 1980s, FDI in the context of *import substitution industrialization* (ISI) policies were more wide-ranging. This is dissimilar from the FDI Mexico entices presently. Hecock puts forward before the 1980s, investments were interested in "tariff jumping" (2006: 953). That is, in order to expand access to shielded local markets and to gain more sophisticated market desires; investors were prone to be in favor of enhancements to human capital, regardless of expenses. FDI currently and remarkably in the context of NAFTA (even though it is no longer in effect) has largely altered this norm. Presently, investments seek to discharge labor costs accompanying low-skilled production. In this way, patrons look to locations based on factors where state officials lack jurisdiction. Close vicinity to the U.S. border is one key factor. Herzog explains,

Of the nearly 1500 foreign assembly plants built in Mexico since the mid-1960s, nearly 90 per cent are located along the northern border adjacent to the US. Clearly, the boarder location is valued by US interests. Here they are able to take advantage of Mexico's cheap labour costs, but are also strategically situated within easy reach of US highways airports and banking and communication facilities (1991:529).

Other factors include tax incentives (Jepsen, 2004). Nonetheless, due to the nature of the low-skilled labor requirements that many investors demand, improvements in education are prospectively least important to them when it comes to investing. Thus, both dimensions of globalization are projected to have negative effects on primary education expending.

Globalization has produced a model of neoliberalism that "amalgamates many local and national economies into a single global market, controlled by the World Trade Organization

(WTO)”, which is fundamentally controlled by the United States (Jaggar, 2013: 527). The prominence of the WTO directs how institutionalized neoliberal machineries have set the criteria for practises such as global trade, and plans appointed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank envisioned to ‘stabilize’ and ‘adjust’ third world nations like Mexico because of America’s attainment in leading its so-called “expert oriented economy”. But their priorities and decisions have sacrificed people’s basic needs in health care, housing, social services, employment, and notably education (Harrison, 2013:61). The Trilateral Coalition in Defense of Public Education explains that NAFTA, even though it has been replaced by the USMCA, made Mexico more obligated to pay its foreign debt, to adopt structural adjustment agendas, to invest sizable amounts in new infrastructure for the purpose of interesting foreign investment, to increase national security and military spending, and to progressively privatize public services. These conditions have resulted in substantial decreases in public spending for education and have inadequately subsidized the state’s responsibility for national education.

Another contextual analytical focus is gender inequality in globalization. In fact, the education crisis in Mexico disproportionately affects female students in comparison to male students. An identification of gender inequality in globalization validates why female students, more than males in Mexico, work precarious jobs rather than attending school. Various researchers contend that structural adjustment policies prefer hiring women for inexperienced labor over men (Çagatay and Özler, 1995; Safa, 1995; Standing, 1989), and this phenomenon is firmly recognized for Mexico (Alarcón- González and McKinley, 1999). Wilson states that in Mexico, “proportionately more women are involved in hotel and restaurant work than men” (2008:42). There are deeply engrained truths surrounding laws and cultural presumptions about

femininity, sexuality and marriage that assist in denigrating females' earnings, benefits and enforced protectionist policies in our globalized world (Harrison, 2013:561-68). According to Katz and Correia “a highly educated labor force is one of the key factors in promoting economic growth, and low levels of education are highly correlated with poverty” (2001:15). In this way, low education rates are a significant factor in maintaining high levels of poverty in Latin America. Parents in Mexico often invest in their son(s) education over their daughter(s) education.

In fact, choices by parents to invest in their sons' over their daughters' education can be placed on the anticipated discrepancies in net (costs) returns to boys' and girls' education.

Nonetheless, “at every level of schooling and early employment, girls pay a greater penalty than boys for not continuing in school or for working while in school” (Katz & Correia, 2001:47).

Females prodigiously undertake the burden of household chores and childrearing rather than pursuing higher education or career advancement. The majority of Mexican girls drop out of school to perform familial child-rearing duties or to enter precarious work forms to aid the domestic income. Outcomes include greater potential for young marriage, early childbearing, being incapable of finding employment because of negligible qualifications, a reluctance to take precarious job opportunities obtainable to women with little education that permits low-wages, unsafe working conditions and long working hours. Women's education has been verified to have considerable positive external effects, including a strong impact on one's,

Own fertility and reproductive health, having fewer children, the health and mortality of their own children, working in good paying full-time employment, and increased life expectancy (Katz and Correia 2001:15).

In fact, “Latin America is the only region with an increase of marriages every year” and internationally, Mexico has the eighth highest number of youth marriages (Roy, 2018). More than 320,000 girls among the ages of 12 and 17 cohabit a domestic partnership with a man and more than 80 percent of these adolescents left school because of this (Roy, 2018). Numerous females in Mexico marry young, causing them to have several children, rather than attending school.

### **Electoral Competition**

Another hypothesis considered by Hecock and important to this analysis is that electoral competition will have a positive effects on education spending. As scrutiny over social spending transferred from modern democracies to the developing world, academics started to inspect the influence of democracy on expenditure levels (Brown and Hunter, 1999 & 2004; Kaufman and Segura- Ubiergo, 2001; Stasavage, 2005). Basically, democracies are projected to expend more than authoritarian regimes, because incumbents often increase spending on popular programs in an effort to reach electoral triumphs. In exploring the role of neoliberal ideology and globalization in limiting access to education in Mexico, it is imperative to also discuss the role democracy plays. It is true that democracy promotes greater accountability and responsiveness than authoritarianism (Hecock, 2006: 953). Nonetheless, authoritarian leaders also take advantage of popular legitimacy. But from this, it is likely that elected authoritarian politicians will see substantial and often immediate reactions from their constituency from such displeasures. Moreover, democracies offer more networks for interests that boast education expenditures than do authoritarian regimes.

The Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), born out of the Mexican Revolution, culminating in 1917, once controlled all state governments. PRI continued to dictate politics at the national level until the 1980s. It then started to be contested by two major opposition parties, the Christian center-right National Action Party (PAN) and the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) (Hecock, 2006: 954). Since the Revolution, Mexico has embraced a democratic model, but was deficient in the level of satisfaction accompanying many liberal democracies. In this vein, all levels of government has seen many elections. These electoral competitions were far from fair, until more recently. Hecock says “victories by the PRI were all but assured” (2006: 954). During some periods this was due to an absence of challengers. At others, to blame were numerous fraudulent undertakings. In fact, presidential victory of the PAN’s Vicente Fox in 2000 symbolized the demise of PRI’s 70 years of authoritarianism. Hecock argues, because the development of democratization in Mexico instigated subnationally, this has preordained states to diverge broadly in their planes of electoral contestation (2006: 954). This has considerably altered political dynamics in Mexico.

Undeniably, as Mexico progressively democratized throughout the 1980s and 1990s, political dynamics became greatly imbalanced between states. Hecock explains:

Even after 2000, the PRI faced little competition in the legislatures of Puebla, Chiapas, and Vera Cruz, among others. In governor’s races, PRI candidates were in very little danger of losing in states such as Coahuila and Hidalgo. Nevertheless, in many states there are strong challenges to the PRI’s control of the governments, and in some states, it is the PRI that is in opposition. The PAN, for example, has held more than 50% of the legislative seats in a number of states, mostly in the northern part of the country. It is especially strong in states like Nuevo Leon and Guanajuato, where in 2003 it held 64%

of the seats. The PRD has been less successful at the state level, but its presence is felt almost everywhere. It is more popular in the poorer states of the south and has had consistently strong showings in the 1990s in such states as Guerrero and Morelos, where it has held over a third of the seats. At the executive level, at the beginning of 2004, only 16 of the 31 states had governors from the PRI (2006: 954).

The disparity among states and increased competition in Mexico, provides a case against the aims of this paper suggesting democratic neoliberalism along with globalization limits access to education in Mexico. Nonetheless, still noteworthy is how electoral competition may provide opportunities to prosper a nation's social policies. Legislators nominated that face minor risk of being ousted, or, when it comes to term limits will undoubtedly predominate in forthcoming elections, face fewer incentives to be receptive to their voters and will likely not suggest more spending on a state's social policies. Meanwhile, leaders who foresee robust electoral contests are prone to endorse policies that will make them well-liked during election time. Hecock puts forward the proposition that, "increases in education spending affect large and potentially politically active groups including parents, teachers, and business leaders interested in state-sponsored human capital investment" (2006: 954). Therefore, against the aims of this paper suggesting democratic neoliberalism along with globalization limits access to education in Mexico; levels of electoral competition could have positive effects on education spending. If true, this could weaken some points of this analysis in this study.

### **Ideology**

One other prospective effect on education spending is ideology. Literature on industrialized democracies (Hicks and Swank, 1992) accentuates the constructive effects of

labor-centred left-wing parties on social spending. Like electoral competition and against the objectives of this paper advocating that democratic neoliberalism along with globalization limits access to education in Mexico; left-wing parties could have positive effects on education spending. In Mexico's case, while the PAN and PRD can be branded as center-right and center-left, the ideology of the PRI is not as well-defined (Coppedge 1997, 1998). Following the Revolution, the PRI converted into the party of dominant power. PRI's ideology vacillated "from the revolutionary left to economic nationalism and then towards economic neoliberalism", terminating with the enactment of NAFTA in 1994 (Hecock, 2006: 954). Its modern materialization cannot be deliberated as leftist. The PRD surfaced out of the PRI's ostensible relinquishment of the left as it lingered with economic customs. The PAN, divertingly is pro-business, but additionally comprises rudiments of sturdy socially conservative Catholicism. Consequently, with concern to an ideological effect on education spending, the existence of the PRD in Mexico, "the lone left-wing party", is projected to encourage higher levels of spending on socially programs, notably education (Hecock, 2006: 954). Thus, in contradiction of this paper suggesting that democratic neoliberalism along with globalization limits access to education in Mexico; left-wing parties could have positive effects on education spending which, if true, may also weaken the strength of this study's central argument.

### **The Presence of Mexico's Tourism Industry and Post-Fordist Work from the Surge of "Maquiladoras" In Mexico**

In reviewing literature on this topic, this research suggests the normalization of inexperienced cheap labor as the main reason young Mexicans choose employment over school and explains why only 62% of Mexican children end up attending school, and even worse, only 45% complete high school. Inexperienced cheap labor is the result of Mexico's burgeoning

tourist industry and post-Fordist work from the surge of *maquiladoras*— which permits foreign owned corporations to assemble in Mexico to exploit Mexican cheap labor, operating tariff and duty free. *Post-Fordism* is a dominant understanding that must be discussed in regard to the deterioration of education in Mexico because of neoliberal government policies. Post-Fordism is the dominant system of economic production in most industrialized countries. It comes from the formulation of Henry Ford's automotive factories— in which workers work on production lines performing specialized tasks repetitively, and are organized through “Taylorist scientific management practices” (Bahnisch, 2000). Frederick Winslow Taylor’s modern theories of scientific management, referred to as “Taylorism”, are also important. Taylorism suggests and standardizes the one best way of doing a job to improve economic efficiency and labor productivity. The climate of post-Fordist and Taylorist economic organizing forms are common in Mexico because of the countless *maquiladoras*, permitting factories to operate tariff and duty free. In this vein, precarious work forms are common in Mexico.

Precarious work refers to labor where people are poorly paid, commonly insecure, unprotected, and the wage typically does not support a household. The social construct of these jobs focuses on lowering labor costs through “just-in time management practices” a feature of late capital modes of production (Sharma, 2014). Just-in time management practices also serve as invisible but also, undistinguished relations of power (Sharma, 2014). In this way, workers are constructed as disposable and renewable labor forms, which are also gendered and racialized to ensure the availability of such a labor pool. Thus, Mexico is a country relied on for its inexperienced, disposable and renewable cheap labor forms. It is an advantageous realm for foreign business owners and international corporations, who can economically relocate to Mexico and exploit Mexican workers for labour at lower costs to them.

The predominance of precarious and renewable work forms in Mexico can be said to have begun with the *Bracero Program*. The Bracero Program commenced during World War II when the American government recognized a lack in manual laborers because of the war. Scott accentuates the institutionalized mechanisms of the Bracero Program led to NAFTA, for its “industrial demands have kept the United States and Mexico bound in a turbulent marriage of convenience for decades” (Scott, 2012:49). In fact, Bracero in Spanish means “arm” (Scott, 2012:49). The government’s intention from the start in naming the program, set various standards. It envisaged “*braceros*” as signifying “strong manual laborers” (Scott, 2012:49). Additionally, this may have been conceived by Mexicans as a program offering opportunity for a new life “in the land of the free” (Javonne, 2020). However, “the goal of the program, was not to open the United States to Mexican immigration but to maintain a revolving door of labor migrants” (Scott, 2012:49). The Bracero Program functioned favorably for the U.S and thus it was extended until 1964.

Complexities began to surface especially in the mid-1950s when America’s economy suffered a recession. Apprehensions emerged that “too many braceros were staying on North American soil” (Scott, 2012:49). Hence, *Operation Wetback* was initiated by the U.S government and many employees who moved illegally or even legally were forcibly returned to Mexico. Scott observes,

It is not clear if the program branded these workers as having ‘wet backs’ from swimming across the Rio Grande River, or from hoeing vegetable crops in the hot sun. Nevertheless, this derogatory term for illegal laborers become the title of a massive program that existed between 1954 and 1958 (2012:49).

Correspondingly, with the “Mexican problem” and the Bracero program mentioned above, language played a major role in recruiting and justifying the ongoing economic domination by the United States over Mexico. This was especially so in maintaining cheap, disposable and renewable forms of labor.

The *Border Industrialization Program* (BIP) replaced Operation Wetback by 1964. It permitted resources to be transported across the Mexican border exclusive of export duties or tariffs to American owned corporations in Mexico where they could be manufactured by low-wage labor, and then transferred back to the U.S (Scott, 2012:50). Moreover, this process conceptualized the “*maquiladora*”, involving procedures permitting factory assembly in Latin America, tariff and duty free (Feenstra & Handson, 1997:374). Maquiladoras paved the way for the introduction of NAFTA. Multinational corporations from the U.S readily exploited the utilization of maquiladoras by importing materials and manufacturing them inexpensively in Mexico because of cheap wages and minimized duties. Already in the 1960s this low-wage model provoked *la huelga*, “the strike,” where enraged Mexican migrant workers protested for better wages (Scott, 2012:50). However, industrial demands denounced their voices and American capital maintained the system.

Likewise, Mexico’s tourism development sprouted exponentially in the 1970s. Mexico’s dependence on America—the chief tourist-sending nation for Mexico—and on transnational lending officialdoms, has considerably amplified Mexico’s tourism developments. In the progression of the Mexican hotel industry, Mexican-owned hotels have converted to “state-owned, then privatized, and then associated with transnational corporations in response the changing international economic climate molded by capitalist imperatives” (Wilson, 2008: 39). Tourism in Mexico is seen positively in terms of disseminating foreign currency earnings,

offering employment, and decentralizing migration flows. Mexico's tourism industry has succeeded in attracting tourists internationally because it is relatively cheap in comparison to developed states' vacation destinations. However, this cheapness is a result of the industry perpetuating low-wage and seasonal work forms among Mexican workers. The context of structural adjustment policies and recurrent economic crises has forced many Mexican citizens into inadequately compensated jobs within the tourist industry. Wilson states,

Inequalities in the tourism industry between domestic allied with transnational capital and the low-waged foot soldiers of the tourism industry are only reflections of inequalities found elsewhere in the capitalist system. When pointing to the low wages of those involved in tourism, it is important to ask what alternatives there are within the present global order: factories or maquiladoras, where the work is even more characterized by drudgery and where work-related illnesses are common (2008: 48).

Herzog's identification of, "the US-Mexico transfrontier metropolis" (1991) is significant in this regard. Transfrontier urbanisation explains the prevalence of ownership, property and business enterprises by American interests. As well, it rationalises the massive disparities in levels of economic development among American and Mexico. Occurring from "global forces—immigration and transnational manufacturing—generating a common circuitry that allows urban structure to transcend international boundaries" (Herzog, 1991:531). The (mostly foreign) investors/owners of tourist destinations or companies involved in infrastructural development in Mexico can be identified as the "transnational elite class" (Wilson, 2008:48). This is particularly demonstrated in Cancún and Los Cabos, for these are tourist centers planned by the Mexican government. Wilson explains the deeper cycles of mistreatment by the transnational elite have instigated the progression of urban structures

transcending international boundaries. For instance, in smaller tourist locations where indigenous populaces predominate, there is an ethnic correlation of exploitation. Not only is precarious work common, but so too are coercion and exploitation carried by “the local bourgeoisie,” recruited in place of the transnational elites. Wilson explains,

Exploitation is carried out by the local bourgeoisie rather than a transnational or nationalelite. The local mestizo and expatriate petite bourgeoisie owns and runs the accommodations, restaurants, and shops while the indigenous people either sell to those shops or vend their wares from market stalls or on the streets. While preserving the environment and the cultural values and integrating the community into tourism development. In *Mundo Maya* attention is focused on the rescue of archaeological zones and sustainable development. Living people are being trashed in the interest of capitalist development, and, as Marxist theory constantly reminds us, this is an integral part of capitalism (2008:49).

### **Comparative Overview of Neoliberalism on Education in Other States**

Mexico’s declines in education because of neoliberal installations are not unique. In fact, many other nations whom have adopted neoliberal reforms have seen similar diminishing effects to education. Significant to this installation. Stiglitz identifies that unlike Latin America, some Asian governments utilized interventionary mechanisms alongside globalization to encourage economic development. Unlike Latin America, some Asian governments did not abide to neoliberal recommendations and Washington Consensus policies. Instead, some Asian states endorsed export-oriented growth but placed limitations on imports. Countries China, Malaysia,

and Singapore encouraged foreign investment while South Korea and Japan avoided it and flourished notably (Stiglitz, 2006: 32).

The education system in Mongolia—is an imperative example illuminating the economics of policy borrowing. Mongolia was a Soviet satellite state for over 50 years, and it relied on appropriations from the USSR to maintain, (among other things) free education for all adolescents from primary school to tertiary school. As the Soviet Union demised, so did the economies and social service divisions of its prior satellites, involving Mongolia. The subsequent economic repercussions commanded plunging education in the early 90s. Approximations submit that public spending on education as a portion of GDP virtually “halved” from just 1990 to 1992 (Wu, 1994). Steiner-Khamsi says, in Mongolia, “finance is the engine for any reform and not surprisingly the concept of accountability” (2006: 672). The outcomes-based education (OBE) reform in Mongolia was put forward in spite of a grander public sector development. In (Steiner-Khamsi, Silova, & Johnson, 2013) they convey OBE derives from neoliberal programming. Similar to the NCB mentioned earlier, OBE also places importance “on data-driven, evidence-based accountability in the education systems” (Steiner-Khamsi, Silova, & Johnson, 2013).

The *Public Sector Management and Finance Law* (PSMF), in which was sanctioned by the Parliament of Mongolia in 2002, promoted culpability and productivity in governance and finance (Steiner-Khamsi, 2006: 672). The PSMF reform was subsidized by a \$25 million loan from the Asian Development Bank. Hence, in Mongolia, and as part of structural adjustment in the educational sector, decreasing access to education became the result. Notably, many rural schools became closed and the quantity of general education schools (offering all 10 or 11 grades) was decreased. Schools offering all grades were only accessible in “urban and semi-

urban areas as well as in a few rural centres” (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006: 673). On top of this, school quality diminished and mega-schools with more than 3,000 students were produced to cut back on administrative costs and support staffing (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006: 673). At the expense of shutting down remote rural schools, international subsidy was directed into the mega-schools, semi-urban schools, and regional schools. Owing to the swift decline of rural schools, officials of those schools also encountered complications acquiring qualified teachers to educate their nations youth.

### **Education Prior to Neoliberal Reforms in Mexico**

As mentioned prior, neoliberalism has fostered countries to embrace foreign investment. Seeing the gains accomplished by nations who opposed this, like South Korea and Japan, makes a strong case against the neoliberal model. The World Population Review, 2021 regards Japan as the second “most educated nation”. It also includes South Korea among, “other nations ranked highly in education” (World Population Review, 2021). Likewise, before Latin America embraced Washington Consensus policies, earlier periods saw vigorous government interventionist policies rather than deep reliance on foreign investment. These policies placed more restraint over imports, and utilized high tariffs tactics for some, rather than emphasizing expanding exports. From 1950 to 1980, Mexico’s per capita income grew by more than 2.8 percent annually (Stiglitz, 2006: 35). Botz specifically points to the era of the “Mexican Miracle”, in which he regards as a period of swift advancement of the Mexican economy at a 3 to 4 percent inflation rate from 1940–1970 (2016). Similar to Stiglitz, he argues that this “miracle” occurred due to the nationalist economic model, the swap of imports, and the re-positioning of the state’s nationalized industries that determined much of the national economy.

Preceding this, state-controlled union jobs aimed for workers' wages to stay low. It especially prevented workers, notably teachers, from demanding higher wages. It was this that commanded the first dissenter teacher crusade in Mexico. The movement was headed by a teacher, Othón Salazar (1924–2008), a member of a Young Communist Club in 1952 (Botz et al, 2016). He was quickly recognized as the trailblazer of the dissenting teachers of the Superior Normal School in Mexico City. The grand scheme of the Mexican Teachers Movement began in the mid-1960s. Dissenting teachers were mostly women indigenous teachers from the state of Chiapas. In fact, these bilingual and even multilingual teachers (who taught Spanish and one or more of the Mayan languages of the region), organized and effectively won teachers better wages.

To understand the strength of Mexican teachers and why this collectivity speaks volumes about the role of neoliberal globalization in minimizing access to quality education in Mexico; their political engagement needs to be acknowledged. The Mexican Teachers Union, the *National Syndicate of Education Workers* (SNTE), has 1.4 million members (Botz et al, 2016). This is the primary union affiliated with the PRI. In the SNTE, membership is virtually universal among all teachers in Mexico. There is a secondary, more leftist, faction within the union— the *National Coordination of Education Workers* (CNTE) (Hecock, 2006: 954). The CNTE surfaced as a caucus within the SNTE towards the end of the 1970s. There are approximately two hundred thousand members in the CNTE, and this faction endeavors to make the organization more democratic (Botz et al, 2016). Notably, CNTE has involved itself in strikes and direct engagements that in some periods, have immobilized the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Michoacán. Mentioning of the CNTE is imperative for this analysis, as it has played an instrumental role for the past thirty-seven years in a struggle to gain teachers better wages and to safeguard public education.

Numerous things shaped the framework for their primary exertions for an association among these educators. First, President Luis Echeverría (1970–76) terminated the outdated system of “Hispanicization of the Indians” (Botz et al, 2016). This made the SEP accountable for indigenous education which was to be taught in their native languages and Spanish. This allocated increased training in the rural normal schools. This permitted thousands of indigenous bilingual educators to adopt more leadership roles within their communities. Second, rather than teachers attaining only basic teacher education from rural normal schooling, many advanced to the National Teachers College and the Superior Normal School in Mexico City which has improved the role of teachers in Mexican communities (Botz et al, 2016). In fact, professors of the teachers college during this new development were engaged in the elements of Marxism and helped change the perspective of the teachers movement. Botz states, “the new teachers movement of the 1970s began with a struggle to raise workers’ wages but soon became a struggle focused against the SNTE’s bureaucracy” (2016). It was a multifaceted struggle. One against: the PRI, the SEP, the executives of the SNTE, and the local *cacique* (the political boss at the intersection of those three organizations). It was the bilingual teachers (who were mostly women) that utilized their biweekly seminars for students’ to explain to parents the aims of the movement, and this progressively constructed an alliance within Mexican communities.

Gordillo, an official from Local 9, was the first woman head of the SNTE (Botz et al, 2016). She endorsed the democratic opposition of the Local 9 victory in Mexico City, and her victory calmed the dissenting teachers. Gordillo dealt with a succession of political struggles and debates within the union. She swiftly assembled a new bureaucratic apparatus. Gordillo preserved political jurisdiction over the union in a similar manner as her predecessors. Because of Gordillo, the education system had developed remarkably, and more students advanced from

grammar to high school. On top of this, school budgets increased too, which promotes more resources to boost learning.

However, declines in education began again, especially since the presidency of Carlos Salinas (1988–1994) (Botz et al, 2016). Under this presidency, Mexico began to embrace the neoliberal economic model which opened up markets, relied on foreign investment, attacked labor unions and instilled cuts in social services (like education). Additionally, in 2008, president Calderón and Gordillo extended an arrangement called The Alliance for Quality Education (ACE) (Botz et al, 2016). ACE required that teachers take an exam before being employed by the SEP. While this provision seemed reasonable, it became generally understood that over-time this would instigate increased government control over teachers and the union. The CNTE opposed the ACE agreement, maintaining that its implementation was an attack on both the union and on public education. Moreover, when the PAN collapsed, and the PRD rejected use of fraud for its election successes; Mexico's citizens reverted to the PRI, choosing Enrique Peña Nieto as president (Botz et al, 2016). In December 2012, Peña Nieto arranged the leaders of the PRI, the PAN, and the PRD to sign the "Pact for Mexico" (Botz et al, 2016). This was an agreement imposing reforms of the: tax structure, banking system, on energy, telecommunications, and of education. Unfortunately, the education reform law gained provision from all three major parties, but was resisted by the Gordillo and the SNTE. Nonetheless, Congress embraced this in December 2012. On top of the added declines in education and the falloffs of the SNTE, the Peña Nieto administration on February 26, 2013 plotted for Gordillo to be arrested (Botz et al, 2016).

These actions caused the CNTE to view the new education reform law as an affirmation of war against the SNTE and their nonconformist movement. Similar to their views on the ACE,

the CNTE understood the education reform law as a confrontation over public education, the union, and teachers themselves. Thus far, the dissenting teachers have been unsuccessful in conceptualizing a political apparatus for their movement. The grand conflict of the CNTE against a series of Mexican governments has taken shape during a time where much of the labor movement has been vanquished or debased by their own government. Botz writes,

Political parties, government agencies, private employers, crooked lawyers, and gangsters control most labor unions in Mexico. The economy remains stagnant and emigration to the United States has become more difficult and less rewarding since the Great Recession of 2008 (2016).

All of this makes the CNTE's political struggles even more notable. The assassination of numerous of its campaigners, the detention of several of its trailblazers, and violent confrontations with Mexican police during protests have been parts of these struggles (Botz et al, 2016). The teachers' struggle for better public education continues in the face of such challenges.

### **Chapter 3—Recurring Themes or Collectivities Focused on Mexico’s Degraded Education System**

#### **Subjectivity, Identity, Collective Coalitions and Receiving a Quality Education in Mexico**

KKIS and TYC were chosen to undergo a content analysis because these specific coordinating efforts to improve education in Mexico reveal discursive constructions grounded on experiential knowledge from the experience of volunteering in Mexican schools. Discoveries from the content analysis provide insights into the nature of Mexico’s political and economic transformations and their effects on education. These collectivities formed specifically by KKIS and TYC, but also the communities they aid, and scholarship focused around them, reveal collective opinions regarding perceived class, gendered and racialized subjective identities, institutionalizations, and standpoints of the Mexican education system.

This qualitative examination uses content analysis of social media from both KKIS and TYC to demonstrate how neoliberal globalization has significantly degraded education in Mexico. The TYC and KKIS media accounts detail the aims of the organizations, their mission trips and volunteer efforts in Mexican schools, member blog insights disclosing narratives learned from doing charity work in Mexican schools, and hence reflect experiences also conveyed by teachers, students, the publics they serve, and even scholarship focused around the Mexican education issue. While themes noted may point towards a particular point of view, his paper acknowledges, following feminist researcher Hondagneu-Sotelo, that ‘verbal or representational constructs’ and collective viewpoints or themes do not perfectly explain political or economic realities (1996:93). However, verbal or representational constructs and collectivities do uncover disjuncture among these realms.

Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced *intersectionality theory* to understand the marginalization of Black women. In Crenshaw's works "*Demarginalizing*" and "*Mapping*", she,

Staged a two-pronged intervention. She exposed and sought to dismantle the instantiations of marginalization that operated within institutionalized discourses that legitimized existing power relations (e.g., law); and at the same time, she placed into sharp relief how discourses of resistance (e.g., feminism and antiracism) could themselves function as sites that produced and legitimized marginalization (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson 2013: 304).

Intersectionality theory works to conceptualize how social inequalities persist. It does so by dismantling and observing its effects on categories like gender, race, class, socioeconomics, culture, and location—to understand the nature of them and how they combine, overlap, or intersect in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups. For this reason, when examining power relations and social inequality and by putting KKIS and TYC members as the focus for analysis, intersectionality is used, "as an analytical tool to recognize better frameworks to grapple with the complex discriminations people face" (Collins, Bilge, 2016:3).

Depending on what is publicly displayed on KKIS and TYC's media accounts, this content analysis may disclose information about some members, students, and teachers, that is in the public domain in the form of website material, blog postings and the like. It reveals information about some members' lived experiences versus the lived experience of those they observe in Mexico and how age, race, gender, location, class, socioeconomic status, culture, and governmental assistance plays a role in Mexico's insufficiencies in education. Overall, this approach goes beyond Marxian analysis. It instead offers a modernist skepticism approach and

utilizes post-structural feminist analysis to understand how intersectional subjective identities are constituted and produce collectivities. Therefore, this scholarship argues that intersectionality has the ability to show how systems of power, such as capitalism, neoliberalism, globalization, structural adjustment programs, colonialism, racism, patriarchy and nationalism— intersect to produce social locations of disadvantage. For this reason, using intersectionality as an analytic tool, can potentially shed light on how capitalism and nation-state neoliberal policies converge to shape social inequalities, such as minimized rights to education in Mexico.

### **Recurring Themes or Collectivities**

#### **1. Collective Identity as a Precondition to Collective Action**

In analyzing TYC and KKIS media accounts, an important emerging theme is that both groups share a collective identity. Gonzalez (2008) questions whether collective identity is a prerequisite to collective action. In examining TYC's national website, it states:

The Youth Connection aims to spread awareness amongst youth groups in Canada about the detriments youth beyond our borders are facing. It is important to us that Canadian youth become aware of their positions of privilege and power, and use that for the greater good. We hope to inspire youth nationally to spread kindness, volunteer, and give to others who are less fortunate (2021).

In examining KKIS's website, they state similarly under one heading "*What Motivates Us?*," that:

Our collaboration with government social services, the department of education and school administrators has revealed an overwhelming need in our community. We see

first-hand how education can make a difference in an individual's life and the ripple effect it has throughout a community (2021).

From these impressions, Adib and Guerrier (2003) have argued that identity construction is mutually relational and contextual. In this way, the context in which this process transpires will structure the values, opportunities and positions individual identities transmit. While members of TYC or KKIS may not be familiar with what neoliberalism is, or its effects on globalization in diminishing a quality education for people in Mexico, it seems that they have both developed similar collectivities relating to the Mexican education system that are in accord with this scholarship. At the heart of this scholarship is the idea that Mexico's insufficiencies in education cannot be analyzed in isolation from superior political and economic transformations within the state, and in turn, are a result of neoliberal globalization.

As stated previously, cycles of oppression are reproduced especially when individuals subjected to them understand the oppressive conditions as normal or natural (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998:263). This analysis gathers that because of this, members of both groups have background knowledge on the political nature of Mexico's education system. The experiential knowledge members gain in volunteering, allow them to recognize Mexican public schools are degenerating because they are receiving less government financing, and that they are increasingly being replaced with private, for-profit, competitive, market-based schools. This study also suggests collective identity is in fact a precondition to collective action. Experiential knowledge gained from both KKIS's and TYC's volunteering efforts, is what causes members to remain part of these volunteer organizations, where they are expected to spread awareness about Mexico's deteriorated education system. Members do this by hosting events, fundraisers, and by posting on the organizations' media channels.

## **2. Both Collective Action Groups See Great Disparities in Education When Comparing the Mexican Education System to Canada and Americas Education System**

The second recurring theme discovered in analyzing TYC and KKIS media accounts is that both collective action groups see great disparities in education when comparing the Mexican education system to Canada and Americas education systems. TYC was originally founded by Arielle Grinberg at the University of Western Ontario. A TYC media statement by Grinberg states:

When I went down to Mexico and volunteered for the first time, my eyes were opened. I witnessed what children my own age had to go through to be in school. Many did not have backpacks and school supplies like I did. Some of the classrooms didn't have much other than a board and chairs. Worse yet, I saw that the classes above grade 6 were getting increasingly smaller. That was when I learned that most children had to drop out of school to earn an income to help support their family and themselves. When I came back to Canada, I couldn't shake any of it off. I realized then that I truly live in a world of privilege and power, and I could use that power to make a change. And so TYC was created and with it we have had so many incredible people working hard at making that change a reality (2021).

The disparities in education when comparing the Mexican education system to the Canadian and American education systems are significant. North America's economic dominance in the world is in large part reliant on free trade agreements that, for instance, cause people in Mexico to work in North American controlled factories on their homeland soil. While low-skilled employment may provide consistent, full-time employment, it also deters Mexican citizens from completing school. Moreover, it ensures the availability of a low-skilled, gendered

and racialized labor pool in Mexico. Agreements like NAFTA once proposed to lift Mexico up and better connect us globally by removing trade barriers. Yet, Canadian and American standards of living still are dramatically higher than Mexico's. In looking more specifically at social security spending and human capital investment, the two major social programs that become degraded are health care and education. While this study does not examine health care, it does consider the nature of Mexico's political and economic transformations and their effects on education. The state and its distributive policies for education have seen dramatic modifications. Kaufman and Segura-Ubiergo (2001) find that both democracy and neoliberal globalization have negative effects on social security spending. Mexico's current education system has been degraded because of policies involving decentralization, deregulation, and privatization of education (Arnove et al, 2013: 292).

Grinberg being raised in Canada, a developed nation, has been afforded the opportunity of high value educational opportunities. Furthermore, experiencing the advantages of being Caucasian and being born into a good standing socioeconomic family, has permitted her experiences to volunteer in Mexico as an English teacher. Grinberg states:

Coming from a first world country, it seemed pretty standard that when you finish high school, you go to university, get a job, start a family. But I learned that not everyone gets that chance. Most kids in developing countries like Mexico can't afford to go to school because they need to work during the school day to support themselves and their families. But that's where TYC steps in! We provide at-risk youth with the tools and resources they need to get the education they deserve (2021).

Essentially, Grinberg founded TYC out of a yearning to combat the educational injustices she witnessed travelling to Mexico.

A statement by one of KKIS's board directors, Gayle Collins, sheds additional light on the disparities in education when comparing the Mexican education system to North America's. Collins' positionality comes from serving 36 years as an American public high school teacher. When she retired, she became a part-time resident of Playa del Carmen and has been for 10 years now. This juxtaposition is the reason Collins says she is "committed to giving back to this wonderful community of Playa del Carmen by helping children succeed in school so they, too, can become productive and proud citizens of Playa" (KKIS, 2021). Matt and Allan, from North American Standards, have been supporting the KKIS Project for 8 years. Matt's statement on the KKIS site reveals a bit about his American background and social positionality. He says,

I would not have gotten my job without a university degree. Not only that, I needed to get good grades in order to be able to deliver the type of work expected at a high end law firm. Studying was the key to my success. Working there allowed us to save money to start a business and move to Mexico. Education is the key to advancement. With the acquisition of knowledge one can transcend their upbringing, and help create a life that is both fulfilling and enriching not only for them, but also for their family (KKIS, 2019).

Like Matt, Allan is also passionate about education. The KKIS blog post tells, "Allan couldn't stop asking around Playa del Carmen why kids were in the streets, and not at school" (KKIS, 2021). He observes,

The first thing that hit me in the face like a shovel, was the fact that I'm driving down the street and I'm seeing all these school aged kids playing in the street. I asked one of our Mexican employees why and her answer to me was: Most of those children are from families where their parents are not educated, they probably they don't have good jobs and can't afford to send them to school. They have to buy uniforms and school supplies.

Having been raised in the US, I just assumed that everyone got a free education. (KKIS, 2021).

Another KKIS blog post reveals of the common socioeconomic reality for Mexican students.

Under a heading “*What Motivates Us,*” it states,

A year’s worth of school supplies for one child costs on average, \$500 MXN pesos or \$20 USD. For many, this is a week’s worth of wages. There are children who are not going to school because their family cannot afford school supplies. And those that do attend, often do not have a pencil or paper to write with. How do they learn when they don’t have tools?

(KKIS 2021)

From this, it seems that many students in Mexico lack the tools necessary to learn.

Similarly, in viewing images and videos displayed on KKIS’s and TYC’s media sites, it is clear that school conditions in Mexico are far from adequate. The school buildings are quite basic.

The composition of the featured schools comprise perhaps 6-8 classrooms separated by cement-like walls. Also, Mexico is a country with hot temperatures. Classrooms are fairly small, and they lack air conditioning. Students fill each classroom in most pictures, leaving minimal room for mobility. Rooms typically have moveable desks and one large chalk board. Books, knowledge tools, computers, electronics and other learning technologies are relatively absent in all classrooms images. The surrounding “play areas” of the educational facilities are pads of cement deficient of play structures or even green space. School playgrounds are neither enticing for students nor conducive for learning.

### **3. KKIS and TYC See Disparities between Public and Private Schools in Mexico**

The third recurring theme learned from inspecting TYC and KKIS media accounts, is that there are major disparities between public and private schools in Mexico. Reductions in state subsidies for public education have exacerbated Mexico's already inequitable education systems. Chapter 2 of this paper discussed how Mexico's neoliberal restructuring has transformed primary and middle education in two ways. Laurell explains how, first, public education has been modified to serve mainly children and youth from the underprivileged majority (2015:256). Second, middle and higher classes are commonly required to pay out of pocket to send their children either to private schools or abroad. She clarifies how this came about and blames American hegemony and its neoliberal propositions by institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

The KKIS charity agrees with these points, as it specifically works to better public high school graduation rates in Playa del Carmen, Mexico. Kelly Caldwell one of the KKIS board directors, in her member testimonial shared the following:

You may know that I moved from NYC to Mexico in 2011. But you may not know that I have dedicated the past 9 years to addressing the sad reality that in the beautiful Riviera Maya (the coast between Cancún and Tulum), children don't go to school simply because they can't afford it. Yes, public high school is not free in many states in Mexico. I found that fact absolutely appalling! So, I joined an organization that over the past 10 years has raised money for school supplies and scholarships that help young people continue on to high school and university. We give 2,000 primary school students school supplies and currently have 75 high school students and 11 university students under

scholarship. Our high school graduation rate is 86% vs the national average of 30% (KKIS, 2021).

Similarly, the KKIS 2018 Annual Report shed lights on the complexities of class, socioeconomics, and the role of the Mexican government in sourcing scholastic endeavors. It notes that, “extraordinarily low wages for workers, combined with a public education system that is not free after 9th grade, results in many children in Mexico not attending school simply for lack of money” (KKIS, 2018).

Due to the educational realities in Mexico, founder of TYC’s Arielle Grinberg stated on TYC’s public Instagram account, “education shouldn’t have to be a privilege, it should be a given”(2019). Likewise, the KKIS site divulges numerous detriments of the public school system in Mexico. For instance, teachers “operate on a double shift system to maximize use of the limited school buildings” (KKIS, 2017). KKIS media also notes that public school teachers frequently work two six-hour shifts each day. A negative of this reality is that this minimizes teacher involvements in extra-curricular activities for students. For this reason, KKIS has helped build libraries in public schools, sponsor educational field trips and put on spelling bees and math contests (KKIS, 2021). Additionally, the KKIS 2017 Annual Report states,

KKIS envisions a future where education in Mexico is affordable for the majority. Where the completion of high school and university becomes more common. KKIS provides financial assistance, educational support and community connections to public school students, parents and teachers in order to help improve graduation rates in the public schools of Mexico (KKIS, 2017).

Unfortunately, privatization in education has been expanded in Mexico in various ways. Even in public schools, students are increasingly charged student fees for things that were formerly free. Overall, it can be gathered that converting schools to profit-making establishments, even in minimal ways, limits access for all people. Paying for school is not affordable for all families. Furthermore, when low-income students attend school at such a cost to their families, they are spending money on “a second-rate education” that reduces their likelihood to pursue further educational opportunities, especially at postsecondary levels (Arno et al, 2013: 302). In this connection, the KKIS blog states,

While 12 years of education in Mexico is compulsory, the average number of years of education is only 9. Students who want to go on to high school need to pay for an entrance exam, school fees, transportation and uniform costs. We are products of public school education and believe in the power of education to change lives. It is not a perfect system in any country, but we believe that all children should access to 12 years of education. Our collaboration with government social services, the department of education and school administrators has revealed an overwhelming need in our community. We see first-hand how education can make a difference in an individual’s life and the ripple effect it has throughout a community (KKIS, 2021).

#### 4. The Normalization of Inexperienced Cheap Labor in Mexico

The fourth recurring theme, developed even before exploring TYC and KKIS media accounts, is that inexperienced cheap labor in Mexico is normative. In reviewing the literature on this topic, research suggests that the normalization of inexperienced cheap labor is a main reason young Mexicans choose employment over school and helps to explain why only 62% of Mexican children end up attending school, and even worse, only 45% complete high school. This paper refers to precarious work as labor where people are poorly paid, commonly insecure, unprotected, and the wage typically does not support a household. Content analysis of both KKIS and TYC media accounts corroborates the view that inexperienced cheap labor is a main cause young Mexicans often choose employment over school.

Malú Martínez is a long-time mentor and volunteer on KKIS. An article displayed on the KKIS website “*Three Mexican Women in KKIS*” reflects on Martínez’s life story and what pushed her to become a KKIS mentor. Martínez, unlike many other members, grew up in Mexico. She is originally from the Municipality of Calvillo. Malú is the only one in her family who has a professional career. Her family did not believe education was important. Her four brothers have only high school degrees, and her parents hold only primary school certification. Martínez understands the normalization of labor over school in Mexico. This is confirmed especially in how “she worked in the mornings and studied in the afternoons, had 2 jobs at the same time to pay for school” (KKIS, 2018). In a similar vein, on TYC’s website, under the heading “*About the Project*,” one finds the following:

In Mexico, children are often forced to drop out of school to generate an income to support themselves and their families. It is our philosophy that children belong in school. Our goal is to help at-risk youth to obtain an education which will give them the

knowledge and skills necessary for improving their lives and their communities. We do this by giving educational necessities to students and teachers, as well as talking to students about the importance of education (TYC, 2021).

The author of the current study, Kayla Fiala, is also the founder of one of the TYC charity chapters located in Canada, Ontario at the University of Windsor. Like Grinberg (TYC's national founder), Fiala was also born in Canada, a developed country, in which has, like Grinberg, permitted her high value educational opportunities. Moreover, Fiala too experiences the advantages of being Caucasian and growing up in a well-off social class that has enabled her to spend time in Mexico. Fiala founded the TYC Windsor Chapter after witnessing major social disparities during her numerous visits to Mexico. She felt especially distraught by the many children roaming Mexican streets, approaching tourists with excursion packages, hair beading services, or selling hand-made trinkets and souvenirs. This normalization throughout Mexico conveys the predominance of its tourism industry and how it moves adolescents towards working and earning money, rather than attending school daily. This analysis conceptualizes how systems of power, like capitalism, neoliberalism and globalization produce such negative effects over race and class.

In a similar vein, the KKIS media site reveals statistics in crafting their *Scholarship Program*, which was developed to discourage high school dropout rates. The year before, “directors at several high schools told us that only 30% of the students who start high school actually graduate” (KKIS, 2018). This is because many frequently drop out, to pursue work instead. The 2018 article explains,

We sought out volunteer mentors, paired them each with our KKIS Scholars and thought we were on our way to making lots of graduates. Year 1: 33 students, 9 dropped, a 72%

graduation rate. Year 2: 50 students, 4 dropped, a 92% graduation rate. By year three, we had caught on to the fact that Keeping Kids in School requires much more than money alone! We learned that we needed to give more personal care and attention to the students, we needed to document our expectations in signed contracts and make contact with the kids on an ongoing basis. Year 3: 43 students, 1 dropout, a 98% graduation rate! (KKIS, 2018)

Based on the content analysis on both KKIS and TYC media accounts, this research concludes that both of these grass roots charities point to that inexperienced cheap labor as a main reason young Mexicans choose employment over school.

## 5. Teachers as Community Leaders and Drivers Towards Social Change

This section looks at TYC's and KKIS's understandings of the local teacher in Mexican communities. The final recurring theme exposed by this inquiry through inspecting TYC and KKIS media accounts is that both groups share the view that Mexican teachers are community leaders and drivers towards social change. Arnove conceptualizes national teachers' unions as "the single most important voice for a universal, free education system preparing individuals not only for productive economic roles but the exercise of democratic citizenship rights" (2013:310). This analysis goes further to inspect more secondary data focused on collective action pursued specifically by Mexican teachers, to dig deeper on this final underlying theme. Dissimilar from other social service segments, unions have a sizable influence on education. Teachers' unions in particular are among the most formidable labor associations in numerous developing nations and thus their coordinating efforts have the power to contest reforms they dispute and to demand improved resources in areas they feel are lacking (Corrales, 1999).

Mentioned in chapter 1, many of the members part of KKIS are actually retired American Teachers. Before these teachers joined KKIS, they originally ventured to Mexico to enjoy retirement. Gayle Collins, who before KKIS served 36 years as an American public high school teacher, has already been mentioned. Suzanne Filsinger, another KKIS board member and third generation teacher, holds a unique experiential position, for she was born in Mexico City but grew up in America. She lives in Playa year-round and says "KKIS brings me the opportunity to be useful by helping others accomplish their dreams, giving them the chance of reaching whatever they want through study" (KKIS, 2021). In a KKIS blog post the article, "*Education in Motion – Teachers taking action*" explains the productive action inspired specifically by public education teachers in Playa del Carmen. (KKIS, 2018). This article

specifically points to an influential teacher, Mike Humberto Balam Pinto, one of the founders of “*Eduactiva*”. With the help of three local teachers, they have created spaces where students can challenge themselves through three contest types: the Mathematic Challenge, the Spanish Spelling Bee or the English Spelling Bee (KKIS, 2018). Furthermore, through these contests *Eduactiva* is making a constructive impact in a community of 6,000 students from 12 different schools. Overall, the final recurring theme that Mexican teachers are community leaders and drivers of social change has become quite clear. Furthermore, their collective actions insightfully expose how capitalism and nation-state neoliberal policies converge to shape social inequalities, like minimized rights to education in Mexico.

## **Chapter 4—Conclusion**

In conclusion, this analysis argues that Mexico's insufficiencies in education cannot be analyzed in isolation from superior political and economic transformations within the state, and in turn are a result of neoliberal globalization. This study contributes to the literature concerning neoliberalism and education reform in Mexico, particularly through a content analysis of KKIS and TYC media accounts. This examination corroborated the views found in the literature on how neoliberal globalization has significantly degraded education in Mexico. The collectivities identified below, formed specifically by KKIS and TYC but also the communities they aid, and scholarship focused around them, reveal collective opinions regarding perceived class, gendered and racialized subjective identities, institutionalizations and standpoints of the Mexican education system.

While other forms of research focus mostly on secondary analysis of Mexican education statistics or from longitudinal analysis of ethnographer(s) situated in Mexico and in their school settings for extended periods, this investigation differs. Especially because both charities work to educate people globally, on the systemic and institutionalized factors responsible for Mexico's very low rates in school enrollment and literacy, science and math scores among countries within the OECD. The investigation of KKIS and TYC media accounts showed that persons participate in these groups out of a sincere yearning to improve educational standards in Mexico. Original reasons for joining vary, but many members derive their joining from vacationing there and witnessing children roam the streets and work rather than attending school.

In reviewing literature on this topic, this research suggests key findings that can, adequately be gathered into a broader historical, and ideological context to explain the persisting

education crisis in Mexico. First, this scholarship points to the normalization of inexperienced cheap labor as the main reason young Mexicans choose employment over school.. Second, it points out that inexperienced cheap labor is the result of post-Fordist work from the surge of maquiladoras, which permits foreign owned corporations to assemble in Mexico to exploit Mexican cheap labor, operating tariff and duty free. Third, the climate of post-Fordist economic organizing is common in Mexico because of the countless maquiladoras, permitting factories to operate tariff and duty free. In this vein, precarious work forms are common in Mexico. Fourth, Mexico's neoliberal restructuring has transformed primary and middle education in two ways. Public education is predominantly "for children and youth from the impoverished majority", whereas "upper- and upper-middle-class families send their sons and daughters to private schools or abroad" (Laurell, 2015:256). Fifth, the Trilateral Coalition in Defense of Public Education explains that NAFTA (replaced by the USMCA in 2020), made Mexico more obligated to pay its foreign debt, to adopt structural adjustment agendas, to invest sizable amounts in new infrastructure for the purpose of interesting foreign investment, to increase national security and military spending, and to progressively privatize public services. These conditions have resulted in substantial decreases in public spending for education. Sixth, school spending cuts do matter. When you cut education spending, student outcomes will likely decline. There is a relative large quantity of research supporting the view that when governments spend more on public schools or give districts greater budgets, students tend to fare better. Last, this study stresses gender inequality in globalization. In fact, the education crisis in Mexico disproportionately affects female students in comparison to male students. An identification of gender inequality in globalization validates why female students, more than males in Mexico, work precarious jobs rather than attending school. Females prodigiously

undertake the burden of household chores and childrearing rather than pursuing higher education or career advancement. The majority of girls drop out of school to perform familial duties or to enter precarious work forms to aid the domestic income.

In analyzing TYC and KKIS media accounts, this analysis identifies five recurring themes or collectivities. The first emerging theme is that both groups share a collective identity. This study also suggests that collective identity is in fact a precondition to collective action. These charities, in distributing school supplies in Mexico, permit members to see first-hand that student drop-out rates are exceedingly high. Because of experiential volunteerism efforts, members of both groups have gained first-hand knowledge on the political nature of Mexico's education system. Experiential comprehension from KKIS's and TYC's volunteering efforts, causes members to spread awareness and actively organize. The second recurring theme discovered in analyzing TYC and KKIS media accounts is that both collective action groups see great disparities in education when comparing the Mexican education system to the Canadian and American education systems. Agreements like NAFTA once proposed to lift Mexico up and better connect us globally by removing trade barriers. Yet, Canadian and American standards of living continue to be dramatically higher than Mexico's. The third recurring theme learned from inspecting TYC and KKIS media accounts is that there are major disparities between public and private schools in Mexico. Reductions in state subsidies for public education have exacerbated Mexico's already inequitable education systems. The fourth recurring theme developed even before exploring TYC and KKIS media accounts points to the notion that inexperienced cheap labor in Mexico is normative. Furthermore, in reviewing literature on this topic, this research suggests the normalization of inexperienced cheap labor is a main reason young Mexicans choose employment over school. Based on the content analysis of both KKIS and TYC media

accounts, this research concludes that these grass roots charities agree that inexperienced cheap labor is a main reason young Mexicans choose employment over school. The final recurring theme identified by this inquiry through inspecting TYC and KKIS media accounts is that both groups share the collective view that Mexican teachers are community leaders and drivers of social change. Nonetheless, special teacher efforts reinforce the claim that Mexican teachers are certainly community leaders and drivers of social justice. This role is also reflected in recent organized action by the Mexican teachers union, in opposition to social injustices and in support of educational rights.

The fight for adequate schooling in Mexico is a very deep rooted complex struggle that can also be identified as a struggle against American economic imperialism. Major reform is needed to overcome this and other systemic factors that have resulted in enormous inequality among Mexicans in their access to quality education. Greater resources need to be devoted to all levels of education. This is a necessary step to provide students from less affluent backgrounds with a “prosperous education,” one that appropriately directs people towards higher skilled job opportunities. This is an important step toward alleviating poverty more generally and reducing the wide socio-economic inequalities that exist in Mexican society.

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