

THE EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN MEXICO AND SOME PUBLIC POLICY LESSONS

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ABSTRACT

It can be said that inefficiency in the spending and the low quality level in public education has been the norm in the case of Mexico. The newest Constitutional Reform carried out by the Mexican government aimed to improve the education sector by introducing some of the most important changes in the educational field in the history of Mexico. According to the official discourse, this reform has two main objectives: 1) to open the way for the State to recover the rectory of education from the hands of unions, and 2) to improve the skills and competencies of teachers through a new scheme of incentives based on the evaluation of their performance. This paper uses an extensive review of the literature to provide the reader with a wider vision about the reforms in the Mexican education sector since the 1950's, and provides, at the same time, a general overview of the government's agenda in terms of education. Whether this new reform is going to help improve the education quality for millions of students through the implementation of the New Public Administration is still something unknown since its benefits will be reflected at a medium and long term, with the PISA test being an excellent thermometer to validate the improvements to the education system.

KEYWORDS: Public education, new public administration, Education Reform, organizational change.

INTRODUCTION

A prolonged crisis of efficiency in the provision of state services, such as public education, can contribute to seriously harm the legitimacy of an entire national political system (Lipset, 1987). *Legitimacy* is not something irrelevant for organizations and institutions. Legitimacy might be understood as a major

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resource for the survival organizations as it embodies a social judgment of acceptance, appropriateness, and desirability, facilitating its access to resources (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). The legitimacy of institutions and organizations is, in this way, immediately connected to beliefs about their social suitability and ability to carry on the tasks for which they were created (Habermas, 2007). Therefore, it should not be a surprise that for governments all over the world, their legitimacy is naturally linked to their level of efficiency in the management of state systems (OECD, 1997). In practically all of the Western world, the economic crises of the 70's and 80's threatened the legitimacy of the state monopoly in the administration of public services making evident the inefficiency of the public sector to provide the necessary services to citizens, such as health or education (Pierson, 1996). Thus, during the 1980s, both, in Mexico and in most of the Western countries, administrative reorganizations started to take place in the public sector in order to modernize the systems controlled directly by the state (Ferlie, Ashburne, Fitzgerald & Pettigrew, 1996; OECD, 1997).

In the case of Mexico, a series of neoliberal policies were adopted during the 1980's, having as aim to increase the government efficiency by incorporating a market approach for the public administration (Babb, 2001; Grindle, 1996). The adoption of such policies, as Charbonneau (2012) reports, were a common practice shared by the OECD. This new approach for public management was called the New Public Administration (NPA), first developed in the United Kingdom as an alternative to the bureaucratic model for public management. The NPA principles were rapidly seen by many countries as the answer for improving efficiency in government expenditure and as an answer to increase the quality of public services. In Mexico, the principles of the NPA were adopted, at least partially and at times discursive, as part of the government solutions in order to promote efficiency and quality in the public sector, starting with this a new era characterized by the evaluation of state institutions.

SIX DECADES OF EDUCATIONAL REFORMS:

AFTER THE MODERNIZATION OF BASIC EDUCATION

The new education reform in Mexico is simply the latest in a long series of reforms that have been undertaken in the basic education system since 1952. History shows us that reforms to improve the quality of Mexican basic education system have been constant. At least four educational reforms have been carried out from 1952 to 1975. One of the most important reforms was in 1959 with the implementation of the National Plan for the Improvement and

Expansion of Primary Education in Mexico (also known as the Eleven Year Plan), which finally allowed a controlled expansion of the enrollment and the institutionalization of basic education during the fifties (Latapí, 1975; López and Verdugo, 2006). The Eleven Year Plan was designed by the then Secretary of Public Education Jaime Torres Bodet, and represented a true comprehensive reform that contained policies to increase national expenditure on education, update textbooks, contents and programs, create mandatory teacher training courses, increase teacher's wages, and to build and rehabilitate elementary schools. These policies achieved remarkable results in the quantitative level, since it was possible to expand the enrollment of basic students from 5,994,079 to 11,177,294 within ten years (Organization of Ibero-American States, 1997).

However, in qualitative terms, the outcome of the reform carried on during the late 50's over the quality of the teaching and learning processes were quite a different matter. According to Latapí (1975), teachers lacked support and guidance resulting in a markedly heterogeneous and deficient quality of public education. The fact of the low teaching quality was acknowledged by Agustín Yáñez, Secretary of Public Education during the Seventies, who mentioned that the poor academic results of elementary students were related to a poor professionalization of the teachers (Latapí, 1975).

THE SNTE: SYNDICALISM AND COLONIALISM OF THE MEXICAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Although most of the education reforms carried by the different federal administrations since the second half of the 20th century have counted with the support of the general public, certainly, as Santibañez (2008) points out, they never had an open support from the teachers since their wages and labor conditions suffered a continuous pauperization to the extent that the vast majority of unionized faculty began to join the ranks of marginalization and poverty during the early 70's. Even though *National Union of Education Workers* (SNTE) did not have enough power to impose its agenda on the federal government, it certainly had an important power of negotiation through its capacity to obstruct the implementation of policies originated by the reforms and, in this way, each of the reforms to the educational system represented a window of opportunity for the union to gain leverage in topics outside the scope of the defense of the rights of teachers (Street, 1992).

Through a long series of negotiations and agreements the State ended up materializing, and least in part, its new policies, and moderated the demands for a teacher's salary increment with the help of the SNTE. In this way, the

teacher's union gained ground to control strategic areas of administration of the Ministry of Public Education (Rodríguez, 2015; Street, 1983). On time, the negotiations that took place between the SNTE and the federal government during the 1970's led to the institutionalization of union participation in the processes of entry, promotion and permanence of teachers. As a political agent of the State, the SNTE dedicated to operate as a valuable actor for the federal government by counteracting the power of other important unions and groups of organized workers, as the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), and operated as an agent to delegitimized the criticism to the government made by left-wing parties during the 70's (Rodríguez, 2015). In other words, during the 70's, the SNTE, gained enough power *de facto* to dictate the national agenda regarding education and generated important policies for the elementary level.

It was in the 70's that the SNTE reinforced its corporatism and increased its influence, in virtually, all areas of management and decision-making in the education sector *colonizing* the national Ministry of Education (Street, 1992). The cases of anomalous situations such as the inheritance or sale of faculty positions and illegal payment of benefits and the opacity over the management of finances as well as the destination of resources controlled by the SNTE started to become more and more visible to the public in general and, at the beginning of the 1980's, the "considerable level of corruption encrusted in the teachers' union [had] ... seriously affected the administrative and technical functioning of the educational system nation wide (Latapí 1980, p. 136) .

The SNTE, as well as other education union groups with major influence in the political arena not only affected the technical and administrative functioning of every aspect of the Mexican education system, but also, severely delegitimized the collective demands of education workers. This, did not prevent that teachers' unions, especially the SNTE and the CNTE, from obtaining important positions of authority in key areas of the educational system. With all, as highlighted by Latapí (1980) and Street (1992), it was more than evident that unions had become pernicious agencies to improve the quality of elementary education, preparing the ground for the formulation of new changes in the national educational system in the years to come.

NEOLIBERALISM AND EDUCATION: NEW POLICIES FOR THE MODERNIZATION OF THE EDUCATION

As previously mentioned, since the 1980's, important international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, emphasized the need to improve the efficiency of public administration and

conditioned the developing countries seeking for resources to make changes in the management of public services provided by the state (Babb, 2001; Elias Sarker, 2006; Grindle, 1996). In the case of public education, the focus of such changes was mainly focused at the elementary level (Vázquez, 2015). Thus, without much resistance, a whole series of policies were adopted in Mexico aligned to the neo-liberal principles which aim was to modernize and improve the different systems and institutions in charge of the State (Babb, 2001). In this way, the so-called modernizing policies gave birth to a new era in order to decrease the remarkable inefficiency and low performance of the national public education system (Alcántara, 2008).

The new neo-liberal policies pursued the introduction of necessary changes in order to decentralize the administration of the national Ministry of Education. Under this approach, the Mexican State, stimulated the participation of the private sector in the provision of different public services and facilitated the opening of markets and free competition. Likewise, the State undertook to responsibility of elaborating situational diagnoses for the public sector in order to restructure and decentralize several public service systems trying to promote efficiency in government expenditure and raising at the same time the quality of public services.

In the last decade of the 20th century the legitimization of the neo-liberal *modernizing* policies revolved around the need for a Reform of the Mexican Public Education System, *ad-hoc* with the approach of the New Public Administration, as a mean to adapt institutions to the new reality of internationalization and global competition. Thus, during the first years of the 1990's, the word *modernization* became the new 'mantra' of the federal government, and was immediately linked to other concepts such as quality and efficiency. There by, the modernization of public institutions implied a deep reorganization-aiming to boost the efficiency and the quality of public administration. In other words, it was implied that a modern government should translate into a greater efficiency in the use of resources and greater quality of public services.

According to Alcántara (2008), one of the most recent and far-reaching educational reforms occurred during the administration of President Salinas de Gortari in the early 1990's, where both, the SNTE and the federal government signed the National Agreement for The Modernization of Elementary Education (ANMEB), and published a General Education Law (LGE). These normative instruments constituted the most representative general mechanisms of the State to revalue the teaching function and to reorganize, rearticulate and subordinate the different actors of the national education arena according to the neo-liberal policies oriented to promote the quality and efficiency of government administration (Fierro, Tapia and Rojo, 2010). Under this new

legal framework a brand new order of relation between the state and municipal started, implementing with this a new set of labor rights and obligations.

Through these set policies, a new scheme of promotion and professional development known as the *Magisterial Career Program* was put in place which –at least on paper– was a fairer and more meritocratic way to determine teachers professional growth. According to the federal government and the SNTE, this new program would promote the professionalization and continuous training of teachers in an attempt to raise their productivity using a new scheme of stimulus. Under this scheme teachers would have been granted access to higher salary levels based on their academic training, job attendance, participation in workshops and seminars, as well as their professional performance and years of service. In other words, there was new an attractive carrot, but also, there was an absence of the necessary mechanisms of accountability for those who did not meet the new professional demands. As part of the negotiations, the Ministry of Public Education and the SNTE would be responsible in the conduction and operation of this new teacher improvement program, but it is worth saying that it was the SNTE who actually had greater weight in the operation of the program, having under its control the administration and distribution of resources for teachers (Martínez and Vega, 2007).

According to official data, in 2000, at least 650,000 teachers were incorporated into the new Magisterial Career Program. In practice, these policies had consequences *de facto* since the general public assumed that the poor student performance were due by teachers' lack of professionalism, leaving aside the attention of other elements such as social inequality, the degree of poverty, and disinterest or lack of support from parents. Studies such as the one presented by Martínez and Vega (2007), presented empirical evidence on the ineffectiveness of this new stimulus program as a policy for improving educational quality. And in fact, paradoxically, students whose teachers did not participate at all in this program exhibited better learning outcomes than the students whose teachers did participate in the program. In other words, the effect of this policy was the opposite as intended since many of the research concluded that the more stimuli the teachers received, the lower the learning performance of their students, and vice versa. From this it can be said that the implementation of the Magisterial Career Program did not improve in a significant way the quality of education, as was demonstrated by the students' performance on the national elementary test ENLACE and EXCALE, and in the international test PISA. Given these evidences, the policies to increase the quality and the efficiency in the educational system turned out to have a rather limited success to say the least.

A deficient learning is the most visible manifestation of the lack of quality in education systems (Schmelkes, 2010). Table 1, shows the evolution of the results obtained by Mexico in the PISA evaluation providing and insight about the backwardness and poor state of the public education system and the inefficiency of the modernizing policies in education. It is convenient to compare the results of the academic achievement of Mexican students with those obtained by South Korean students, since South Korea during the 70's presented a remarkable degree of socioeconomic backwardness compared to Mexico.

TABLE 1. SCORES OBTAINED BY MEXICO IN THE INTERNATIONAL EVALUATION PISA (2000-2012)

MATHEMATICS					
Country	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012
Mexico	387	385	406	419	413
South Korea	547	542	547	546	554
OECD	500	500	498	499	494

Country	SCIENCE					READING SKILLS				
	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012
Mexico	422	405	410	416	415	422	400	410	425	424
South Korea	552	538	522	538	538	525	534	556	539	536
OECD	500	499	500	501	501	500	494	492	496	496

Source: OECD Pisa Results. Recovered from <http://www.oecd.org/>

Due to poor the low performance of Mexican students, in both, national and international learning achievement tests, the federal government began to steadily increase the expenditure in education as a sign of its commitment to educational improvement (OECD, 2010). This gradual increase in educational spending can be seen in more detail in Table 2, which shows the evolution of the national expenditure on all levels of education and the evolution of expenditure in elementary level carried out by the Mexican government from 1990's to date.

TABLE 2. NATIONAL EXPENDITURE IN EDUCATION AND EXPENDITURE IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION 1990-2016 (IN MILLIONS OF MEXICAN PESOS)

Year	Total National Expenditure on Education	Basic Education	Year	Total National Expenditure on Education	Basic Education
1990	29, 722.8	9 266.9	2004	534, 461.1	209 492.3
1991	40, 644.2	13 014.2	2005	595, 453.4	226 578.5

1992	53, 234.3	18 750.9	2006	645, 722.4	253 240.7
1993	66, 256.9	25 715.1	2007	694, 454.8	266 358.1
1994	77, 339.20	33 747.0	2008	762, 222.9	295 277.4
1995	90, 113.2	40 036.2	2009	816, 975.4	299 671.0
1996	148, 683.3	54 326.4	2010	882, 117.5	314 729.1
1997	188, 156.9	71 844.0	2011	952, 414.1	336 839.5
1998	246, 571.0	101 274.3	2012	975, 723.3	348 647.1
1999	290, 925.9	119 519.3	2013	1,082,839.3	366,850.4
2000	353, 052.4	144 718.5	2014	1,198,949.8	396,974.7
2001	394, 685.8	160 593.4	2015	1,248,009.9	430,650.8
2002	439, 387.4	177 285.4	2016	1,257,994.1	450,979.3
2003	495, 110.5	198 578.6			

Source: Presidency of the Republic (2012); Ministry of Public Education (2016c).

It can be said that inefficiency in the spending on education has been the norm in the case of Mexico. According to data from the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE, 2015), during Ernesto Zedillo's administration (1995-2000), the government spending on education grew in real terms at an average annual rate of 10.2%, continuing the level of expenditure during the administration of Vicente Fox (2001-2006) who increased the rate in 3.2% annually, while during the term of President Felipe Calderón (2007-2012), education expenditure grew 2.5% annually. From 1994 to 2009, real growth was 136% in educational spending, but this increase did not translate into an increase in learning quality as evidenced by PISA test results (see Table 1).

The most recent data from the OECD (2016) shows that 96% of Mexico's expenditure on education is allocated to cover the salaries and the maintenance of schools in detriment of other aspects such as investment in infrastructure, professional training, or equipment and purchase of educational materials. Similar conclusions as the one made by the OECD can be observed in other studies, such as the one carried by México *Evalúa* (2010), which concludes that less than 5% of education expenditure is used in aspects non related to the operating costs of the education system.

The modernizing policies of the 1990's than continued during the decade of 2000 were formulated with the aim of increasing the quality and modernizing the educational apparatus through its decentralization. However, as reported by Fierro *et al.* (2010) in his report to the OECD, the decentralization model... was conditioned on its design and implementation by a set of political factors: a presidential regime, and a single/hegemonic party with a corporate structure. The result of these reforms at the organizational level resulted in the *administration* of the educational system now carried by the federative entities,

but with the peculiarity that the real conduction of the substantial decisions in the national educational agenda continued to be in the hands of the SNTE, under the supervision of the federal government. This, limited significantly the independence of states for the formulation of real changes regarding their own needs and contexts. It can be added that the federal government through the reform did not propose a change in relation to the pernicious relationship between SNTE, the rest of the teachers' organizations and the SEP. On the contrary, it coerced the federative entities through the General Education Law to validate the whole set of agreements signed over time between the federal government and the different union organizations (Latapí, 2004). Thus, it was evident that in order to achieve greater efficiency in the cost-benefit of resources and to improve learning processes inside the classrooms it would be needed a total reorganization in the management of the national education system.

THE PUBLIC POLITICS AND THE REAL POLITICS

At the end of 2000's first decade, it was necessary to reform the public education system in order to raise its quality and reduce disparities and inequity by improving and modernizing teaching-learning processes towards the 21st century (Ministry of Public Education, 2016a). With this goal in mind, in December 2012, the first steps were taken so that the Mexican state regained the leadership of the basic education system (Government of the Republic, 2013). Thus emerges the *Constitutional Reform in Educational Matter*, known among public opinion simply as educational reform. This reform was formulated under an approach aligned to the precepts of the New Public Administration, seeking to increase the efficiency of spending on the administration of the educational system, through the implementation of mechanisms that allowed to make transparent the use of resources, limit control of unions on the management of the education system, promote accountability and improve the professionalization of teachers through new incentive schemes.

The first actions to implement the new reform was the initiative to modify articles 3th and 73th of the Mexican Constitution, which established the creation of a new scheme of entry, permanence, and promotion within the magisterial career, based on the evaluation of performance, and gave the schools greater autonomy in their management, establishing the necessary regulatory mechanisms to make them subject to accountability.

The Educational Reform implied a huge task in terms of public policy since it required the creation of a broad consensus and obtaining the support of the main political forces of the country (Government of the Republic, 2013). The

political consensus to give the green light to the new Constitutional Reform in Educational Matters was given through the so-called *Pact for Mexico* (2013). This pact was one of the most important political agreements in recent history for the design and implementation of public policies (OECD, 2015a), which translates into an important mechanism for finding the agreements and meeting points on the topics of the public agenda between the strongest political institutions in the country.

The Constitutional Reform in Educational Matters is undoubtedly one of the great results of the Pact for Mexico and set the stage for the promulgation in 2013 of the current *General Law of the Professional Teaching Service and the Law of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education*, as well as Such as the reforms to *General Law of Education* and *Law of Fiscal Coordination*.

With this, the Constitutional Reform in Educational Matters is one of the most important transformations in educational matters in the country's modern history, constituting, at least on paper, the central project necessary to achieve national success and development in the country in the 21st century (Government of the Republic, 2013).

Curiously, a central theme of this reform is not about the academic, but political, mainly through a reformulation of the union conquests of the teachers. Since the announcement of the educational reform in 2012, various voices from the teaching profession have noted their opposition to changes in the education system, arguing that the objectives of the reform were the privatization of public education, the weakening of labor rights of Education, and the dismissal of teachers through a punitive evaluation mechanism (Ahmed and Semple, 2016). According to the Government of the Republic (2013), it is through the evaluation of teachers that teachers' formative weaknesses can be detected and help them improve their work in the classroom, but specialists like Gil Anton (2014) referred that the focus of the evaluation contains some political, legal, labor and administrative dyes, pointing out the way in which current educational policy conceives the teaching profession as an input to improve, and guilty of all educational failures.

Hence, one of the points of greatest discussion about the approval of the educational reform in the Chamber of Deputies was precisely deciding what to do with teachers who presented poor results in their assessments and, if these evaluations depend on the permanence of teachers in the education system (Ramos, 2012). But perhaps, as Secretary of Education Aurelio Nuño said, the main reason for resisting this reform is represented by the loss of resources and power obtained by the main teachers' unions (Ministry of Public Education, 2015).

According to the official discourse, the new educational reform wants to achieve two broad general objectives: 1) to open the way for the State to recover the rectory of education from the unions, which, as Muñoz Armenta (2005) reports, practically came to colonize and exercise control of the national educational system; And 2) to establish a new basis for professional teacher service based on merit. Both objectives are based on four pillars:

1. Reorganization of the education system.
2. Reorganization of schools.
3. Professionalization of schools.
4. Relevance of learning content.

One of the objectives of the new educational reform is to promote a change in the political organization and the power structure of an educational system that has presented serious deficiencies for several decades (Ministry of Public Education, 2015). The lack of state control over the basic education system has been noticeable for years, even losing control over the teaching-administrative payroll of basic education. Incredible as it may seem, up until a few years ago, official data on elementary statistics in the education sector, such as the exact number of teachers, the exact number of administrative workers, and even the precise number of schools of basic education in the country, were almost impossible to obtain (México Evalúa, 2014).

Unlike the previous reforms, the new educational reform draws special emphasis on reducing teacher union power in the management of the basic education system, and also, this new reform emphasizes the creation of incentive mechanisms that promote the professionalization of the workers of the education, at the same time that it establishes a greater autonomy of management to the schools. Thus, using the instruments provided by the NAP, the policies for the continuous improvement of the schools contained in the reform were designed, with the creation of mechanisms for constant monitoring and periodic evaluations of the performance of teachers and schools based on quality standards fixed by autonomous organizations completely external to the teacher unions, linking the results of evaluations to meritocratic schemes of sanctions and incentives (Navarro, 2014).

The lack of information on the state of public service systems leads to opacity and acts of corruption, a key aspect of this new reform is the generation and transparency of information on public systems in order to improve efficiency in their management, because of this requirement is that within the new educational reform the National System of Information and Educational Management was created.

Under this premise, in 2013, the federal government decided to make a national census (with a cost of 740 million pesos) through the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) with the intention of generating reliable data regarding the state of the education sector in terms of human, material, technical and financial resources (FLACSO, 2014). Thanks to this census a series of severe anomalies in the payroll of teachers was detected in which an important expense of public resources was found. Among some of the data, there are about 39,222 aviators who represent 2% of the total national educational payroll. Also 114,998 workers were detected, despite having retired, resigned and even died, were still active workers as teachers or administrative staff enjoying benefits and wages. Another anomaly that emerged from the census was the existence of at least 426 school sites that only existed on paper, since no one was able to locate these schools (Ministry of Public Education, 2016b).

To put into perspective the size of the anomalies found in the payroll of education workers, it can be pointed out that the amount of resources that have not had a justified channeling equals 6.7 times the resources allocated in a year to improve social infrastructure of the education sector, or almost 8 times the annual budget for all teacher training programs, and would amount near half of the Federal Government grant to the National Autonomous University of Mexico, or about 17 billion of Mexican pesos, (México Evalúa, 2014).

The loss of the state rectorship over public education was mainly due to the actions of two highly influential organizations in the national educational scene, the National Union of Education Workers (Sindicato Nacional de Los Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE) and the National Coordinator of Education Workers (Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, CNTE). Both organizations maintained for decades, almost absolute control over the payroll of the teachers and administrative staff (in-service and retired) of the public education system, and they were also the ones who ultimately controlled the management areas essential for the administration of the education system. In other words, a teacher who maintained a dispute or bad relationship with the union risked being punished by being sent to a school site far from his or her place of residence, or would jeopardize his professional advancement and thus the opportunity to obtain better wages and benefits.

For decades, it has been in the public domain that before the new reform the unions had the authority to guarantee graduated teachers positions as teachers, as well as permissiveness for the inheritance or sale of jobs positions, justifying it as one more of the labor conquests achieved by education workers (Ahmed & Semple, 2016; Bensusán y Tapia, 2013; Muñoz Armenta, 2005; Santibañez, 2008).

The control exerted by trade unions on aspects such as the entry and promotion of teachers, control over the stimuli and professional advancement and other areas of the educational life of the education workers has historically been a central part of the political power of teacher's unions in order to have a significant impact on the education sector's agenda (Loyo, 1997, 2001). Hence, as noted by Aurelio Nuño, Secretary of Public Education, the recovery of the rectory of education by the state requires a major reform to an educational system widely clientelist, corporative and opaque (Secretary of Public Education, 2016b).

Undoubtedly, one of the aspects that allowed to achieve the new educational reform was the support that the federal government obtained from the National Union of Workers of Education (SNTE), as this organism endorsed the federal government reform initiative, a fundamental support to move forward in one of the main reforms of the current administration. As reported by Kaufman and Nelson (2004), in Mexico, as in the rest of Latin America, teacher unions represent the most visible and important interest group in the educational field, and have historically been the main opponents to any Reform of education systems. This can be seen, for example, in statements made by trade union leaders such as Artemio Ortiz, General Secretary of the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE), who in a statement announcing the intentions to reform the education sector stated that such a reform would be an instrument to attack public education and teachers' labor rights by seeking to elevate evaluation as an element to determine admission, permanence, promotion in employment, and teacher wages (Zepeda, 2012).

There has been an extensive debate about whether this reform is truly comprehensive, or if, on the contrary, this reform only applies some political instruments of the NAP to regain state control over the basic education system without altering the teaching learning process within the classroom. Three years after the enactment of educational reform, the changes that have been promoted in the basic education system seem to be more related to the consolidation of a state control mechanism and the regularization of the educational apparatus than to the assurance of the Processes that tend to raise the quality of learning (Gil Anton, 2014).

The policies of the New Public Administration used by the Mexican Government to reform educational systems have traditionally included the establishment of new forms of relationship between the State and system actors, with conditional financing being one of the main instruments used by the government to break with the *status quo* and introduce changes in education systems. In the Mexican case, the paradoxical element is that the biased selection that has been made of the instruments of public policy has

distorted the reformist spirit and, instead, has reinforced the leadership role of the government over educational institutions.

CONCLUSIONS

The New Public Administration appears as a mechanism of change in the Management model of the institutions of public education, moving from a highly bureaucratized centralized control, to a decentralized model of state supervisory that gives greater autonomy of management to the institutions. Organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have made the New Public Administration the ideal mechanism to solve the problems of inefficiency and poor quality of public sector services (Elias Sarker, 2006; Nickson, 2002; OECD, 1997). But the particular context and prevailing characteristics of public administration in Mexico –historically based on corporatism and political patronage– appear to hinder the implementation of major qualitative changes in the basic education system by not having the necessary conditions for a wide application of The New Public Administration, the same problem can be found in the reform made at the higher education level (Acosta, 2009; Ibarra, 2009; Moreno, 2014; Ordorika, 2006).

The wave of government-led reforms through the NAP is not confined to the basic education system alone. On the contrary, some of the most important reforms had to do with the design of policies to promote changes in the higher education system in order to move from a corporatist and bureaucratic model to different schemes of –University-State– relationship that allows to improve the efficiency and accountability of higher education institutions (Meek, Teichler, & Kearney, 2009; Muñoz, 2006; Ordorika, Martínez and Ramírez, 2011).

The problems that led to a reform at the higher level are similar to those found at the basic level, such as “the difficult process of professionalization of academic and administrative personnel [...] and the building of bureaucratic structures that have not been fully calibrated to ensure its effective and legitimate functioning” (Ibarra, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, the reform in basic education reflects similar elements to those contained in the higher education system reform with which various areas have been progressively modified, such as:

- Professionalization and reordering of academic staff.
- The design of a national system of institutional quality assurance through the creation of evaluation institutions.

- The evaluation and constant accountability on the improvement of institutions, study programs and academic staff.
- Update of curricular plans and programs, inclusion of technologies and tutoring programs, and the renewal of university governance and management structures.
- Creation of a new finance scheme based on the university's performance.

Undoubtedly, reforms at the basic level have had greater media coverage than reforms at the higher education level, grabbing the attention of the general public. Constant reforms at the grassroots level are heralded as the introduction of changes to the large-scale system, but the lack of continuity of the policies contained in these reforms indicates their low level of success. This is contrary to what happened with the gradual reform carried out at the higher level, where the continuity of policies has been a constant (Acosta, 2009; Moreno, 2014). The reform, although it does not seem to have led to substantive changes in the Mexican system of higher education. The first and most prominent was the linkage between the allocation of funds for universities and their institutional performance.

Grindle (1996) points out that successful implementation of the NAP requires certain highly focused state capabilities, such as: a) *the institutional capacity* of the State to exercise its authority and effectively regulate the interactions of actors in the education system; b) *the technical and administrative capacity* to drive changes in the management and administration of institutions; c) *the political capacity* to establish effective channels for conflict resolution. In addition to the above, there must be the capacity for persuasion to add the different actors to this new reform. As Moran, Rein and Goodin (2006) point out, it cannot be expected that public policies will be implemented in the way that they are planned for the simple fact of having been approved. The actors in charge of carrying them out must be persuaded if these policies will succeed in the practice.

The perception of the evaluation of teachers as a punitive mechanism has been the aspect where there has been a greater controversy and discrepancy between the actors of educational reform (Ahmed & Semple, 2016). The attitude of the government, according to Gil Anton, has been to create through the media a summary judgment and the 'demonization' of teachers, simplifying the systemic problems of public education and putting on the table the mandatory teacher assessment –raised to constitutional rank– as the only solution to the low educational quality.

The full success of educational reform at the basic level is uncertain because they face a number of state disabilities that reflect what Nickson

(2002) denominates as an immature administrative system, in which it is not advisable to implement the New Public Administration because the potential gain in efficiency in administrative management will almost certainly be overshadowed by the high costs that result from problems of coordination and political instability

In reality, the benefits of the new educational reform will be reflected at a medium and long term, with the PISA test being an excellent thermometer to validate improvements to the education system (OECD, 2015b). According to the OECD, Mexico has improved its results in math and reading, but the improvement is so slow that if the present pace is maintained, it would take more than 25 years to reach current average OECD levels in math, and over 65 years in reading. Educational reform is an undeniably necessary aspect that has to be made, but it is risky to express today an opinion on whether the modifications that have been made to the educational apparatus will result in an integral improvement of learning, or it is just a modification of work related topics between the magisterium and the State.

In brief, from the 80's to date, educational reforms in Mexico have been inspired by the set of mechanisms offered by the NAP. History shows us, however, that the implementation of these mechanisms has been done selectively, taking care to avoid those disruptive measures of the academic-pedagogical status quo and opting, instead, for policy instruments aimed at recovering bureaucratic-Education systems in charge of the State.

The contrast between the “noisy” processes of the reforms developed in the basic education system vis-a-vis the “subtle” but consistent processes carried out in higher education. The available evidence allows us to affirm that the results have been more positive in higher education, where there have not been major reforms, but processes for ongoing improvement oriented to the quality and efficiency of the system. Thus, the success of a reform depends not on how disruptive it is, but on the gradual conviction it generates in the actors involved, through incremental actions sustained over time.

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