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Comparing the American and Chilean K-8 Education Systems

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## **ABSTRACT**

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the future of our children, the future of our countries, and the future of our world. Thus, the K-8 systems are one of the most important to examine. This paper examines the comparison between the American and Chilean K-8 education systems. Throughout the paper, the comparison is examined through the structure and history of the system, private vs. public education, successes and failures of the system, student empowerment and movements, and the future of education in each country. The systems are compared and contrasted and conclusions are reached about what we can learn through this. This analysis aims to educate the reader about the history, the current day, and the future of education and how we can learn from another education system.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Wake up at 7 am, arrive at school at 8 am, take classes all morning, go to lunch, take more classes, play a sport or instrument, go home, and repeat it all over again the next day. Does this sound familiar? This is the life of the average student in the United States and one that the majority of children experience. For the average student, going to school is not something that is thought about deeply. Instead, school is a compulsory part of life that becomes a routine until you make it to your high school graduation or you drop out. Some students love school and spend their days deeply connecting with the material while other students doze off in class and barely make it through the school day. The physical act of learning in an environment with other students from teachers who have mastered their skills is experienced all around the world and can be defined as “school”, but seldom does our own education focus on learning about other countries' education systems. When compared to other countries, there are many ways that the US education system succeeds, but there are also many failures that can be explored and researched. One effective way to dive deep and understand the US system is to compare it to another country's system. One country, in particular, Chile, has been on the news for various protests and student movements, but what are the similarities and differences in the K-8 education systems of The United States and Chile? The K-8 education systems in the United States and Chile will be examined in reference to five categories including how their schooling is structured and their history, private vs. public education, their individual successes and failures, protests/movements for student empowerment, and the future of education.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The American System**

#### **2.1 Structure and History**

Before the current structure of education took the form to what we know it to be today, there was a long history that preceded it. Marked by significant educational disparities, specifically before the Industrial Revolution, education and opportunity varied greatly depending on race, gender, and social class. Public education was class-based with the working and lower classes having fewer benefits and the higher class given more advantages. The curriculum was locally determined offering another area of great difference and disparities between states, towns, and counties. (Paterson, 2021). As times evolved through the 1800s and education became more crucial in the eyes of politicians and the “rule makers” at the time, “Most states had accepted three basic assumptions governing public education: that schools should be free and supported by taxes, that teachers should be trained, and that children should be required to attend school” (Paterson, 2021, para 1). But if children were going to be required to attend school and if schools were going to become free, then something had to change with the current state of education that the US was operating under.

As the economy underwent rapid industrialization and a more diversified economy began emerging, the need for a stronger and more educated/unified workforce became increasingly apparent. Teachers assumed a more structured role in the classrooms and began formally instructing relevant curricula as the creation of schools was advocated for as a fundamental human right for all. Horace Mann, also known as the “Father of American education,” helped to

create unified school systems and curricula in the mid-1800s as he pushed for “common schools” for everyone to attend and the right to universal education. (Carleton, n.d.). Alongside common schools, there were also “normal schools”.

According to *A Short History of Education in the United States*,

The process of instilling in future citizens the norms of moral behavior led to the creation of the first uniform, formalized national educational curriculum. Thus, “normal” schools were tasked with developing this new curriculum and the techniques through which teachers would communicate and model these ideas, behaviors, and values for students who, it was hoped, through formal education, might desire and seek a better quality of life. (2021)

The concept of school and the right to education was an idea that was put in place by the founding fathers in America. In order to preserve democracy and build well-educated citizens, schools became extremely important and valued in society. In 1875, US President Ulysses S. Grant championed an amendment to the Constitution to mandate free public schools and prohibit funding of religious schools. Even though this amendment was not seen through to completion, the underlying idea took root and paved the way for the establishment of distinct public and private school systems in the US.

The right to education became an essential part of our society as various movements focused on the equality of students. In the 1900s, K-8 education became mandatory and compulsory as children were pulled from working in factories and were instead educated in schools. This change from children working in factories to children being educated in classrooms

shifted into the future of education that we know now. In the model that we have today children attend school from preschool or kindergarten until high school and then are free to decide how they want to spend their time after. K-8 education as a whole varies greatly from state to state, but overall there are two main choices that a parent has when sending their children to school: private or public school. There are alternative options such as homeschooling, boarding schools, and charter schools, but public and private schools as a whole are the most common systems and the two systems will be examined further.

## **2.2 Private vs. Public Education**

According to The U.S. Department of Education's website,

Education is primarily a State and local responsibility in the United States. It is States and communities, as well as public and private organizations of all kinds, that establish schools and colleges, develop curricula, and determine requirements for enrollment and graduation. (2021)

The K-8 education system is generally divided into three types of schooling: public, private, and homeschooling. There are other options for secondary education such as charter schools, boarding schools, and immersion schools, but most of the general education system is divided between public and private education giving parents a choice of what school they would like their child to attend.

According to the most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics, public school enrollment outnumbers private school enrollment with around fifty million

students enrolled in the public system and six million in the private (Pierce, 2021). Since the most two common choices for parents are public and private education in the US, it is important to look at how these systems compare and differ. According to The U.S. Department of Education, public and private schools have systematic differences when referring to sources of support in schools, the role of choice in determining schools, characteristics of students and teachers, school and class size, and academic programs/support services (1997). Public schools depend on funds from the government, state, and local levels while private schools rely on tuition payments. With a difference in funding comes a difference in price as most public schools are free for students and most private schools charge a tuition rate that can vary greatly based on location, services offered, and other factors. Public schools can often determine the amount of tuition they charge based on the area they are located. This can be a barrier for low-income families that want to send their children to private schools because of the associated benefits, but most private schools do offer scholarship opportunities to their students. Private schools also can fundraise from nonprofits or other donations and events such as galas, marathons, etc. Public schools are often attended with minimal choice as you attend the school that is closest to your home address while private schools are chosen as an alternative to their public counterparts. According to the article, families with annual incomes over \$50,000 per year have more of a choice as they can afford to send their kids to private schools without applying for scholarships leading to satisfaction with their school (NCES, 1997, p. 6).

Public schools tend to have more diverse populations, have more students with limited English skills, and students with more personal problems, such as drug abuse and alcohol abuse, due to their financial situation (NCES, 1997, p. 8). The teachers in private schools are less often from marginalized backgrounds, are paid a higher salary and given more benefits, and are often

less qualified than the public school teachers as private school teachers have more of a choice when creating curriculum and fewer years of teaching experience overall (NCES, 1997, p. 10). Elementary school teachers in private schools tend to spend more time on core subjects and on the community aspect of schools creating a more rigorous academic program. Public schools tend to have larger enrollments with larger class sizes and teachers with less autonomy as they follow strict curriculum guidelines. Public schools also pose a higher exposure to crime or threats, have parents who are not always involved in the lives of their children, and have a lesser sense of community within their schools (NCES, 1997, pp. 20,25).

Again, every student will have a different experience with the private or public k-8 system based on their upbringing, socio-economic status, personal identity, and the location they are based in. Therefore, it is hard to have a standard for all schools, whether it be private or public when individual states and communities have jurisdiction over the education that is being offered. It can be hard for parents to decide where to send their students to school and realistically it is a choice that plenty of parents are not able to make. If our education system had a more streamlined way of educating children and fought to fill the gaps in inequality between the two systems, our children could be much better prepared for the real world. As with every education system, there are many things that the US education does well and many areas where it lacks.

## **2.3 Successes and Failures**

Since The United States is one of the largest countries in the world with fifty individual states, the quality, accessibility, and school itself can vary greatly from state to state, town to town, and city to city. It is hard to form a generalization about the standards in schools when

individual states are up to jurisdictions over schools. Everything truly is up for debate based on statistics and personal experience, however, across the board, there are some areas that the US education system falls short on and some areas that the US education succeeds in.

According to The Century Foundation, we are underfunding our, “K-12 public schools by nearly \$150 billion annually, robbing more than 30 million school children of the resources they need to succeed in the classroom” (Grimshaw, 2020, para 1).

Furthermore,

Local districts use property taxes to fund schools, and the economic condition or tax base of the area, whether affluent or disadvantaged, influences the amount of funding the schools receive. This disparity in funding between differing communities creates funding gaps: districts with a lower tax base suffer the consequences of poorly funded schools. (Grimshaw, 2020, para 2)

Where there is a lack of funding for schools comes a lack of funding for teachers as they are grossly underpaid throughout the US. Many teachers have been leaving the profession as they are overworked, cannot afford to live on a teacher’s salary alone, and are facing high rates of stress and burnout (Allegretto et al., 2022). The gaps in funding for schools and teachers are some of the largest shortcomings of the k-8 US education system, but there are also additional problems with overcrowding in schools, gaps in the curriculum, and lack of education for those from under-represented identities.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided another layer to the aforementioned problems in our education system. At the height of the pandemic, many children and adults were required to stay home and quarantine. While this quarantine period was necessary for the health and well-being of the US's citizens, children, especially in the K-8 age range, lost crucial years of in-person schooling and socialization. At the time, the future of K-8 education was up in the air as some schools shut down completely and went remote while others continued in-person schooling and others did a mix of both. While children were stuck at home, many became addicted and glued to technology as a form of entertainment and coping with the harsh reality of the world. Some parents became disconnected and overall the effects on K-8 students can be felt in both public and private schools as the years that these children lost were pivotal to the setup of their education.

There are areas where the American K-8 education system falls short, but there are also many areas where the system succeeds. The US education succeeds in following trends in technology as many schools are able to educate their K-8 students in STEM fields and with upgraded technology. The US education system also offers many extracurricular activities that are generally available for anyone to participate in including but not limited to a variety of sports teams, choirs, musicals, and instruments. Also, the value of American education is another one of the successes as our economy is viewed as a powerhouse, and our general education is viewed positively in the eyes of many employers and further education programs such as graduate school (*Pros and cons of US education system- know all pros and cons, 1970*)

No education system can be perfect and serve everyone, but there is always something to learn from lived experiences, statistics, and comparisons to other countries. When compared to

other countries, the US is no stranger to protests as they have been used in educational contexts for years as a tool to drive change.

## **2.4 Protests and Student Empowerment**

Protests, marches, strikes, and laws have proven time and time again to be an effective way of advocating for change in our society. Within the realm of the US education system, this is no different. According to *The Troubled History of American Education after the Brown Decision*, to look further back in history to the 1950s when racial segregation was still very present, one of the most important decisions made in the history of education was the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision which stated that racial segregation in schools was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment after a young girl was denied admission to an elementary school due to her race (2023). This Supreme Court ruling caused an uproar as it threatened white supremacy and pushed for integration not segregation based on race. This ruling paved the way for the future of education in the US.

There have been varying protests in the US, on both the local and state levels, over funding for schools and teachers, curriculum, social and cultural issues such as gun violence, and school closures. One movement, Red for Ed, took place in 2018 in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, and Kentucky as teachers advocated for funding, higher salaries, and improved working conditions through strikes, rallies, and walkouts (Covington, 2022). Although the impact was varied, overall, the movement resulted in increased funding, salaries, and policy changes throughout the board and sparked a larger conversation about issues within the US education system for both students and teachers.

One of the largest protests includes the walkouts and protests advocating for stricter gun laws after the 2018 shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. According to an article, *How the Parkland Students Pulled off a Massive National Protest in Only 5 Weeks*, this protest was at the secondary level, but the k-8 students and teachers, and members of the community also participated (2021). The students who organized these protests and walkouts also called to action three primary demands: passing a law to ban assault weapons, stopping the sale of high-capacity magazines, and implementing laws that require background checks on all gun purchases, including online and at gun shows. The students created a GoFundMe that raised over 1.7 million dollars, organized marches and protests, and created the March For Our Lives, an organization that works to combat gun violence in the US. Although they had great success in their protest, there was minimal response from the US government at the time. They did respond by upping some safety measures in school and trying to shift towards an increased focus on mental health with students, but there was not a direct answer to the root of the problem - guns. As mentioned earlier, protests are one way to bring attention to some of the problems that our education system is facing and a way to empower students. The future of education does lie in the hands of policymakers, but where is that future headed towards?

## **2.5 The Future of The American Education System**

Although it is nearly impossible to predict exactly the future of education in a country where education varies greatly from state to state, school to school, and person to person, there are some predictions that can be reached based on previous data. There has been research on the future of public education that examined four factors: performing general education requirements, servicing learning needs, maintaining fiscal accountability and competitiveness,

and meeting ethical responsibilities. The four factors were similarly viewed as important, but the factor of performing general education requirements, such as keeping up with technology, was deemed the most important (Ausburn et al., n.d., p. 35). However, the study also concluded that the future of education could be in trouble if there is no change present and if the role of education does not change and evolve with the current environment (Ausburn et al., n.d., p. 36).

According to an article from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the role of education has changed after the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to do so (2020). Although this article is more about the hopes of what education will look like, it is still relevant to touch on the general hopes of a university that is known for being one of the top educators in America. The article states that, “the role of the teacher in the school community is irreplaceable” (What the future of education looks like from here, 2020, para. 5), cutting edge research and policymaking needs to occur to shape more policies regarding the future of education, and in twenty-five years the future of our education system will be based on trends in, “Changing student demographics, access to higher education, structural inequality, and the focus of school leaders are all longer-term trends that, according to panelists, will influence the future of education” (What the future of education looks like from here, 2020, para. 8).

Overall, the future of education in the country is ever-changing and growing given the conditions, politics, and experiences in private and public education. It is hopeful that the education system continues to improve and that all of America’s children are educated to the full extent that they need to be, but the reality is that the future is always changing and it is up to those currently in power to ensure the safety and quality of education in the US for years to come.

## 2.6 Personal Experience

In my own experience, I have worked at a private catholic school as an After-School Activities Program Aide and occasionally as an In-Classroom Aide for children from kindergarten through eighth grade in the American school system. Additionally, I have worked in a similar role in a public school, too, so I am able to draw comparisons between the two. In the area that I worked, our school systems are generally well-funded and have all of the materials they need to ensure the student's success. While working in this education system, I saw firsthand a lot of the positives and negatives about the education system as a whole. In the private school, there is obviously a cost barrier as I have been made aware that most of the children there are from the middle to upper class and oftentimes have one parent who can stay at home and provide extra care for their children. The private school I worked at did offer some need-based scholarships, but seemingly most of the children there can afford the tuition which is set at over six thousand per student per year compared to the free public school system. As for the children's overall behavior, I noticed that in the public system, we had many more children with behavioral issues, whether that be outside on the playground or inside the classrooms, and we had certain restrictions on the way that we disciplined the children. However, in the private system at my specific school, we lacked the resources to help children with severe mental health issues or with learning disabilities. At the public school, the salaries ranged, but overall all of the teachers and staff, including my role, were paid significantly more than at the private school. The overall attitudes of the staff and teachers I found to be similar at both schools where most staff think that they should be compensated with better salaries, that they love their job and profession and that is what keeps them in the role, and that teachers, in general, are under-appreciated.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Chilean System**

#### **3.1 Structure and History**

Chile is a country that may be overlooked when thinking of the world's top education systems, but according to the World Bank, "The gross enrollment rate in primary education was 99.28%, and Chile's literacy rate for adults (15 and older) was 97.9% (Gitnux, 2023). In addition, Chile ranks 48th out of 180 countries in the 2022 World University Rankings" (Gitnux, 2023). Therefore, Chile is a country whose education system can be evaluated closely as their enrollment rate and literacy rate is high.

Chile's education system has changed and evolved through time as most other systems have too. In the earlier 16th to 18th centuries known as the Colonial Era, the Spanish colonized Chile. With that, the Spanish brought Catholicism and their own education system to the Chilean region as education was mostly distributed through the church until they eventually lost their authority over time (Campbell, 1959, p. 353). In 1833 public education became the responsibility of the state and Chile became the first country in Latin America to have a public system of education.

The next era that brought change was the Independence and early Republic era in the early 19th century. After the Chilean War of Independence, there were changes to education as it became more secular and the influence of the Catholic church died down leading to the creation of more public schools (Campbell, 1959, p. 354)

In 1900, the University of Chile became recognized and in 1929 education between the ages of seven to fifteen became compulsory. Education reforms in the 20th century focused on making schools accessible and equitable to everyone through increased funding, training teachers, and overall improvement.

When evaluating Chile's education system and economy, it is important to mention the military role of Augusto Pinochet and the impacts of a country surviving a dictatorship. Former president and general, Pinochet was the director of a coup in September 1973 and a dictator that remained in power until his death in 1990

(<https://www.hoover.org/research/what-pinochet-did-chile>). During his regime, he “violated human rights, shut down political parties, canceled elections, constrained the press and trade unions, and engaged in other undemocratic actions during its more than 16 years of rule” (*What Pinochet did for Chile*, n.d., para. 2). The effects of his dictatorship are still felt in Chile as it is one of the most conservative countries in South America and the implications of his imposed neoliberalism were felt in the education system as schools were pushed to become privatized therefore leading to increased inequality (Thelwell, 2021).

### **3.2 Private vs. Public Education**

The Chilean education system is divided into three sections: municipal schools, private non-voucher schools, and private voucher schools. “Municipal schools are run by municipal authorities and offer free education. Private voucher schools receive government subsidies and include for-profit and nonprofit secular, as well as religious, schools” (Wilson et al., 2016, p. 8). In order to make the best comparison to the US's system of mainly public and private schools,

we can examine the differences between municipal schools, or Chile's version of public school, and private voucher schools.

In Chile, much like the USA, private schools receive funding from private sources like tuition and donations from other for-profit companies or religious organizations. Public schools are funded by the government. Only around seven to nine percent of the population attends a private school. The government has a standard for curriculum for all schools that has to be followed under the Ministry of Education, although some personal implementation can be added in private schools, and all private secondary school graduates must sit for standardized examinations. As with most private schools, education comes with a large cost, this is a barrier as only those who have enough money can send their children to these schools. Unlike the US, after the Pinochet dictatorship, until recent reforms, almost anyone could start and operate a school. Now, the restrictions and regulations are much stricter making for a more uniform system with room for improvement.

Public schools in Chile, or municipal schools, are overseen and run by the municipality and its authorities which caters to students who do not pay to attend school. With that being said, the public schools primarily serve those who are unable to afford the cost of attending private school. Similarly to the US, public schools generally are larger and have a more diverse range of students through socio-economic status and can only provide what resources that they are able to.

According to a study conducted on school reform in Chile,

First, starting in 1994 municipal elementary schools were not allowed to charge parents fees, while all privately run voucher schools could. Second, municipal schools were required by law to accept all who applied. Private voucher schools, in contrast, were allowed to consider results from admissions tests and parent interviews when making admission decisions. Third, municipal schools had to comply with labor laws that made it virtually impossible to fire a low-performing teacher. Privately run voucher schools had greater freedom to terminate employment. (Elaqua, 2008, para.10)

The research conducted shows some of the advantages of the private school system in Chile compared to the public one, but again the main barrier at play is the cost of attending these schools which a majority of the population cannot afford. The data shows that over time in 2002 that more children are now being educated at the municipal level.

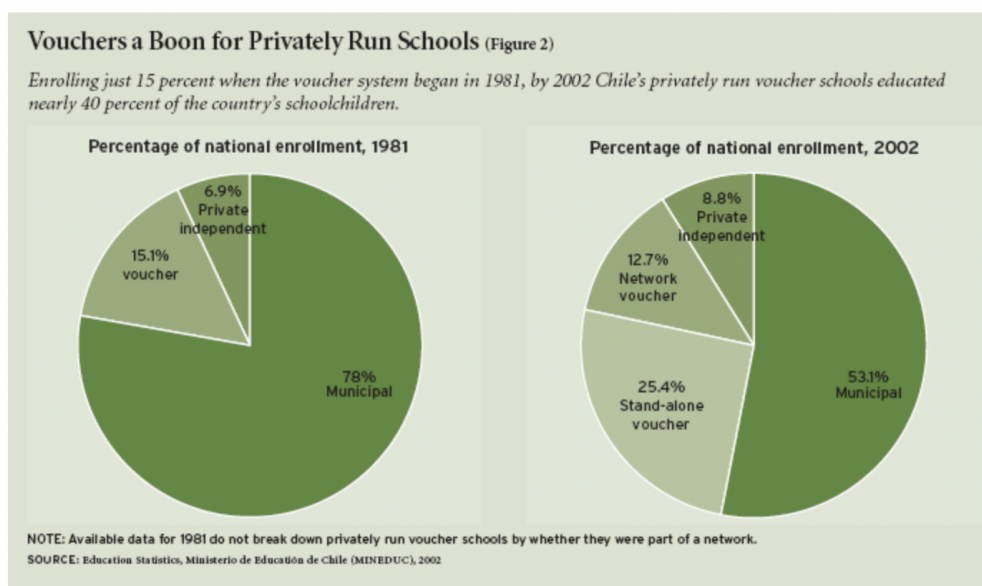


Figure 1: Percentage of Chilean Students in Private vs. Public School

### 3.3 Successes and Failures

The Chilean education system is a system that has sparked interest and further investigation through the years as it has ranked as one of the highest performers on standardized tests consistently in Latin America, maintains high literacy rates, and has made strides in implementing reforms due to student protests. (Elacqua, 2008). Overall, when compared to the American system, Chile has put forth effort into increasing access to education and improving the overall quality of its education systems, but there is still much work to be done. One way that Chile has improved its education system is through the reform called *Ley de Inclusión*. The Ley de Inclusión created on May 29th, 2015 mandated three things: no profits in schools that receive public financing, free education in voucher schools, and no discriminatory practices in admission processes (Wilson et al., 2016, p.12). This law hopes to improve access to education, ensure equal opportunity to students, and restore the right to education while allowing K-8 students to integrate into their educational environment. From the aforementioned examples above, Chile is an example of an education system in South America that is generally successful as its economy helps support its higher literacy and enrollment rates, however, the economic distribution is still very unequal between the different socio-economic classes.

According to the executive summary,

Chile is a country at the crossroads. Following dramatic economic growth in the last two decades, it is the only South American country to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), yet remains the most unequal OECD country.

Increasing educational attainment holds promise for reducing this income inequity, but Chile

must first correct failures in its largely market-based education sector in order to drive increased attainment for all Chileans. (Wilson et al., 2016, p. 5)

With the growth of voucher schools in Chile pictured below, most students are attending these schools while remaining segregated from their peers due to their socioeconomic status. Although Chile has a high literacy rate and performs well on standardized tests, the system has been criticized for being too test-heavy and working more on memorization than comprehension and application.

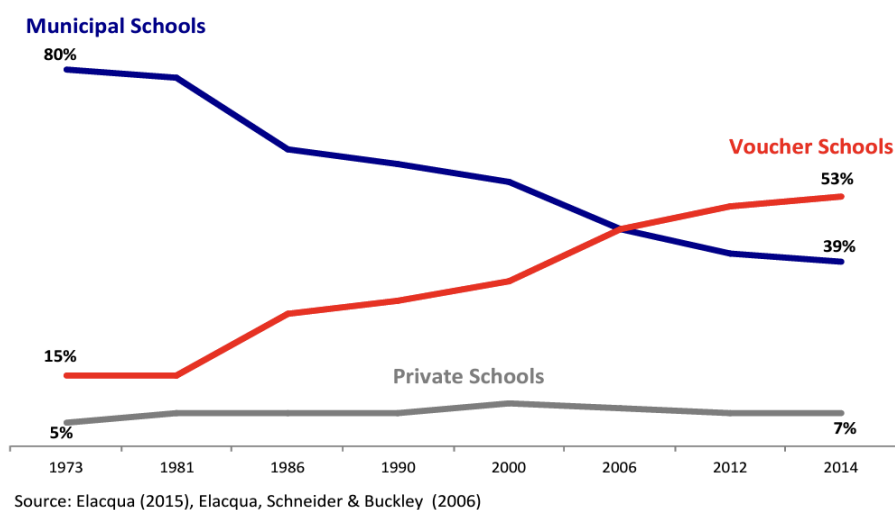


Figure 2: Chilean Municipal, Voucher, and Private School Enrollment

Overall, the US and Chile have similar problems when it comes to K-8 education and their successes and failures as most lead back to the issue of inequality both within socio-economic status and schools themselves.

### 3.4 Protests and Student Empowerment

Chile is no stranger to protests and social movements as Chile's citizens are often standing up for what they believe is right throughout history. In regards to the education system, Chile's citizens are standing up for access to education, the quality and funding of schools, and the constant inequality that the citizens and students are facing that can prevent them from getting the fullest experience from their educational journey.

The student protests of 2006 against the dictator Pinochet's regime, also known as "The Penguin's Revolution" due to the color of the uniforms students wore and the national bird of Chile being a penguin, gained momentum as one of the largest student protests of its kind as students protested increased bus fares, university entrance exam fees, and other inequities in the education system. This movement led to widespread student moments and protests as over one thousand students were arrested and hundreds of schools participated. Eventually, there were threats of a national student strike and about 790 thousand students were in the streets protesting their right to education as police threw tear gas on them and the protests grew to over one million students according to an article from Swarthmore's database (2012). After the president witnessed the acts of the police and listened to the protests from the students, she dismissed the head of police and offered to work to improve infrastructure, funding for free lunches for students, extending the time on student passes for transit, and offering free entrance exams to university. She was unable to offer a free bus fare for each student, so protests continued until the momentum of the protests died down and schools resumed their normal programming. This program is a great example of the power that protests and student empowerment can have as they were able to make tangible change.

Another notable protest in Chile took place from 2011 to 2013. According to this website, “students, teachers, and other supporters demanded a widespread transformation of Chile’s public education system, calling for free, quality public education and increased government funding to override the unfair distribution of vouchers that monetize the education market” (Uncertainty in Chilean higher education: a tale of two protests, 2018, para. 2). The president at the time, Sebastian Piñera, succumbed to the student’s requests and offered scholarships and increased education funds, but the protesters were not happy with this. When the next president, Michele Bachelet, was elected, she “implemented a corporate tax to raise \$5 billion in revenue for public education and promised to grant free public university education to 60% of the “most [economically] vulnerable” Chilean students in addition to scrapping the voucher system. She did not, however, formally end the privatization of education, leaving the original demands of the students largely unmet” (Uncertainty in Chilean higher education: a tale of two protests, 2018, para. 3).

### **3.5 The Future of The Chilean Education System**

Economic prosperity in comparison to other Latin American countries is one aspect of Chile's success within the education system, but economic prosperity alone cannot be the only indicator of academic prosperity. After the 2006 protests called attention to the education system and its future, there are some probable outcomes for the future of the Chilean education system.

According to a report, the Chilean government needs to put student learning first through three principles:

Ensuring that student learning is kept as the true center of the education system, supporting key actors across the education system to deliver the policies being promoted, and aligning policies for coherence while adapting them as needed to ensure that structures, resources, and processes effectively converge into a national vision of education. (Some final reflections on education policy implementation in the current Chilean context,” 2017, p. 26).

If Chile is able to continue reforming its education system to make it equitable for all, then it will be on a good path. Much like the US, however, there is a lot of work that needs to be done to ensure the future of education and many areas that can be improved upon. Arguably, the biggest issue that seems to be plaguing the education system is the level of inequality.

### **3.6 Personal Experience**

In my own experience, I studied abroad in Santiago, Chile during the spring semester of the last year of my undergraduate career. Although I did not have any direct experience working in a school there, a lot of my classes focused on learning more about the economy, inequality, and education systems in Chile. Additionally, I lived with a host family there and was able to ask my host parents and my two host brothers, aged seventeen and five, about their experiences in school. I found that many of our dinner-time conversations revolved around the education system and how we could compare and contrast them to the American system. According to my host families and the lessons I had in class there, many of them referenced the inequalities in Chile and confirmed the ideas of the research and belief that if you have the money to send your kid to a private school they will be properly set up for college and for the rest of their career, but that money was definitely a barrier too to good education.

In my classes in Chile at my study abroad center in Santiago, we talked a lot about how the role of Pinochet and his dictatorship shaped the country and the impacts it had on it today. When I was there, everyone I spoke with was very anti-Pinochet due to the human rights violations he committed, the raging economic inequality that is still plaguing the country today, and the political unrest/lack of democracy. However, my professor mentioned that there are some die-hard fans of Pinochet who claim that he fixed their economy and prevented the spread of leftist ideologies from spreading throughout the country. What most can agree on, is that the effects of his dictatorship are still felt in Chile. I found it very interesting learning more about their education system and taking part in it, although I was at a higher education level. I learned a lot about the inequalities the country faces, the views of the people that I was able to speak to, and things that Chileans wish could be improved within their own systems.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Overall Comparison**

In the American K-8 education system, education is variable as states are left up to individual jurisdictions and each school district provides a different educational experience. The curriculum is narrowed as private and public schools have different regulations in regard to it and academic achievement has been promoted through a focus on standardized testing and academic achievement. However, the issue of funding disparities between lower and higher income still posed a challenge in providing an equitable opportunity for all students.

In comparison, Chile attempts to have a more consistent experience educationally, but historically there have been issues with funding and inequality such as the US's system. Chile has done a good job, however, in reforming some of its systems and in responding to the public's demands, but work can always be done to improve it further.

To enhance both countries' education systems, policymakers could learn from each other's history and structure, successes and failures, and protests/movements for student empowerment. The American system can benefit from trying to create a more centralized approach to education with less variation in curriculum while the Chilean system can benefit from working on creating well-rounded individuals through the K-8 system and focusing less on test prep and more on educating the whole student. Perhaps the two countries could collaborate and exchange ideas and opportunities on how to improve their systems. Overall, the main goal should be to educate all citizens and give everyone a fair and equal chance at attaining a quality education that will set them up for the future.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

When analyzing the K-8 education systems in the United States and Chile, there are disparities when referencing the structure and history, the private vs. public system, successes and failures, student empowerment and protests, and the future of each system. Despite the shared object of providing the best for its students educationally, socially, and emotionally, there are different outcomes within each country that underscore the interconnectedness of the deep history, culture, and economy/ mobility of each country and their respective system.

While the United States seems to follow a more decentralized approach allowing for more customization and options, Chile follows a more centralized approach with respect to local and state authorities when mandating the education system. This is true in both the pedagogical approaches of how students are taught and what they are taught, but it also extends to funding, allocation of resources, and the mobility of students through educational opportunities.

The idea of education as a whole is complex and there will never be one answer for how a country should go about educating its population. What works for one country may not work for another and there are many factors to consider including the country's economy, population, history, and access to resources. Extending beyond that, every student's educational journey will be different depending on the factors in their lives including their socioeconomic status, their reason or motivation for attending school, the resources that the school has, the area they grew up in, their identity, and more. When making comparisons between two systems, it is important to look at the systems as a whole and realize that there will never be one correct way to educate as it is such an individualized experience. What one can reflect on, however, are ways to address

challenges within the education system and how countries can learn from other's successes and failures. The future is inevitable and is something that we cannot predict at the current moment, but what holds true, is that the future of our world and its citizens will be greatly disadvantaged without proper access to equitable and meaningful education where students and teachers can feel educated, valued, and supported. By comparing two of the world's education systems, we can reflect on our own experiences in school and reflect on how we can do better to improve the future of the generations that come after us.

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