



TEAM MEXICO

Agencies Represented: The National Council for Education Development and The National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy

Problem: Only 14.6% of indigenous children in Mexico completed high school in 2015; the illiteracy rate for indigenous people over 15 years old was 17.8% compared to 5.5% for the rest of the country

Policy: Mobile Pedagogical Tutors Strategy, begun in 2009

Objective: Measure and evaluate the lasting impacts of the tutoring strategy, and gain a better understanding of the resources required to scale up nationwide

Funding: Government funding with technical support from the World Bank

THE PROBLEM:

Children in very marginalized communities in Mexico, especially those with an indigenous background, display educational outcomes that are dramatically worse than students in the rest of the country. In 2015, 80 percent of 6th grade students in indigenous schools did not reach a basic level of competency in Spanish, compared to the national average of 49.5 percent. Similar gaps were found for math. Only 14.6% of indigenous children in Mexico completed a high school education, and the illiteracy rate for indigenous people over 15 years old was 17.8%, compared to 5.5% for the rest of the country.¹

The National Council for Education Development (CONAFE) is a semi-autonomous government agency that delivers educational services to rural and highly marginalized communities, which often comprise indigenous people. The teachers in CONAFE schools are not professionals, but rather semi-trained community members, and the educational outcomes have not been encouraging: students in CONAFE schools have a higher dropout rate and far lower test scores compared to students in schools operated by the Ministry of Education.

THE POLICY:

In order to deliver educational services to highly marginalized communities, CONAFE adopts a community based model, where recent secondary school graduates receive training and serve as teachers, or “leaders for community education” in their home communities. In exchange for their service, the teachers receive a monthly stipend and a scholarship to continue their studies upon completion of at least a two-year term. The community usually provides the teachers with food and accommodation.

CONAFE initiated a mobile tutoring program in 2009 to boost the quality of teaching and education in the most remote regions it serves. The tutors, known as APIs after the program’s Spanish language acronym, Asesores Pedagógicos Itinerantes or Mobile Pedagogical Tutors, are recent university graduates hired to provide educational support services. Many of the tutors, or APIs, come from indigenous communities and the CONAFE school system, and speak indigenous languages in addition to Spanish. During their one to two-year commitment, the APIs spend about two weeks per month in each of the two communities to which they are assigned. The APIs are trained to support the local CONAFE teachers in the classroom and provide them with additional on-the-job trainings, tutor struggling students, and help involve parents in their children’s education. They are paid 6,000 Mexican pesos (about 296 US dollars) per month, and like the local teachers, they are typically housed and fed by community members, which builds community engagement and trust.

¹ Data from the Intercensal Survey 2015 (<http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/proyectos/enchogares/especiales/intercensal/>), The National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (<https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/239921/01-presentacion-indicadores-socioeconomicos-2015.pdf>), and CONEVAL (https://www.coneval.org.mx/Medicion/MP/Paginas/Pobreza_2016.aspx). Accessed July 2, 2018.

The goal of the API program was to improve student learning and reduce the student drop-out rate between CONAFE primary and lower secondary schools.² However, the program as it was originally structured did not lead to the desired learning improvements or higher secondary school enrollment. Therefore, between 2014 and 2016 the Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund at the World Bank contributed funding and technical assistance for a pilot intervention and related data collection to test different ways of improving the tutoring program. The pilot was funded by the World Bank and implemented as a randomized control trial in Mexico's poorest region, Chiapas, for two school years in communities that had never received the API tutoring program. The results of the evaluation, finalized in 2017, showed that compared to the 100 schools in the control group (which received no tutoring program at all), students in the 70 schools receiving the API intervention improved their learning outcomes and the probability of transitioning from primary to lower secondary school. The effects were even larger in the 60 schools that received a modified program, where the API tutors received an extra week of training and had bi-monthly meetings to share strategies and lessons with tutors in other communities.³ The evaluation also contributed to the knowledge on how to design and implement comprehensive teacher training, and under what conditions parents' participation can effectively improve schooling outcomes.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND STATUS:

The results from the evaluation of the 2014-2016 pilot intervention in Chiapas have led to a number of policy changes. Due to the positive impact of the modified program, CONAFE adapted its API tutoring strategy nationwide by extending the training of tutors from seven to ten days, using the training materials from the Chiapas pilot, and introducing "peer-to-peer" meetings for the tutors. CONAFE also began prioritizing the hiring of tutors who speak the same local language as the community. These changes could have a large impact on educational performance in indigenous schools nationwide: CONAFE currently has 2,099 API tutors working in more than 4,000 communities across Mexico, reaching over 40,000 primary school students.⁴

Despite the positive results of the Chiapas pilot, CONAFE believes it is essential to assess whether the impact persists once the tutors move on to different schools. To do so, CONAFE selected a random sample of schools from the 2014-2016 treatment group, to stop receiving the added components of the tutoring program beginning in September 2016. CONAFE continues to regularly collect data on student and teacher attendance and performance in all its schools nationwide. The National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL), a semi-autonomous government agency responsible for evaluating federal social development programs and measuring poverty in Mexico, will fund the follow-up data collection in order to help CONAFE to compare data from 2018 to the baseline data from 2014, as well as to the results achieved in 2016, when CONAFE piloted changes to the tutoring program. This will allow them to understand the lasting impacts of the pilot change to the API program, identify the most effective pedagogical improvement strategies, and examine the resources required to scale up relevant program changes nationwide. While CONEVAL will lead the evaluation, with full funding from the Government of Mexico and technical support from the World Bank, CONAFE is responsible for translating findings into additional program improvements.

² Mexico: Increasing Education Accountability through Community-Based Pedagogical Assistants, the World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/sief-trust-fund/brief/mexico-increasing-education-accountability-through-community-based-pedagogical-assistants>

³ "El impacto de corto plazo de los Asesores Pedagógicos Itinerantes: Evidencia de un piloto en Chiapas." Presentation by Ciro Avitabile and Alonso Sánchez, World Bank, February 27, 2018.

⁴ Mexico: Increasing Education Accountability through Community-Based Pedagogical Assistants, the World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/sief-trust-fund/brief/mexico-increasing-education-accountability-through-community-based-pedagogical-assistants>

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Funding: CONAFE has a relatively tight budget, but hopes that if the follow-up evaluation by CONEVAL finds positive and lasting results, it will help CONAFE secure funding and political support to continue and scale-up additional improvements to the tutoring program.
- High turnover: For many tutors, participating in the CONAFE program adds additional work experience to their professional resumes and provides them with an opportunity to give back to indigenous and marginalized communities. However, many tutors quit after one year due to the low pay and challenging living arrangements. CONAFE is currently not reaching its goal of an 85% year-to-year retention rate.
- Language: CONAFE foresees challenges finding and retaining tutors who speak the local languages of the communities.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Positive results from program improvements: During the 2014-2016 pilot, the progression rate from primary to lower secondary school rose by 14 percentage points in schools where the mobile pedagogical tutors had received extra training and had bi-monthly “peer-to-peer” meetings, compared to the control group schools. Student scores increased by 10% in reading and 5% in math, and socioemotional skills and parental involvement also improved in the treatment schools compared to the control group.
- A model for social impact: The randomized control trial shows that the API tutoring program, with the additions made during the 2014-2016 pilot, can be a cost-effective way to help children in the most disadvantaged areas of Mexico. CONAFE and CONEFAL believe that partnering with the tutors, who speak the same language as and sometimes come from indigenous and marginalized communities, strengthens trust and represents an effective model for working in hard-to-reach places, one that other countries could learn from.
- Adaptation: CONAFE has already had success making program modifications based on the 2017 impact evaluation results.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- The team from Mexico hopes to share their experience thus far and learn about other countries' experiences implementing programs and interventions that target remote, marginalized communities.
- They would like to learn more about how to collect data in a cost-effective way and how to use administrative data to complement impact evaluations.
- Based on the findings from the 2018 CONEVAL evaluation, CONAFE will refine the API tutoring program, attempt to secure the necessary funding and support, and consider how best to scale program changes for maximum impact.

Written in consultation with Alonso Miguel de Erice Dominguez, Director of Policy Evaluation, Mexico National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL), with support from Ari Gandolfo and Kelly Dale. Thank you to Carmen Gladys Barrios Veloso, Alfonso González Ramírez, and María Irene Hernández Torres from CONAFE, Osmar Marco Medina Urzua from CONEVAL, and Ciro Avitabile from the World Bank for comments. © Results for All, July 2018. For more information, contact info@results4all.org.