

Latin America Must Address Challenges while Embracing New Opportunities in Education

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- The World Economic Forum on Latin America is taking place in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, on 16-18 April 2012.
- The Latin American education system must face technology challenge while addressing old woes.
- Partnerships between private companies and the public system are needed to improve education standards.
- Prejudice against state-run schools persists.
- For more information about the meeting, visit: www.weforum.org/latinamerica2012.

Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, 18 April 2012 – Latin America needs to address challenges to its education system while embracing new challenges offered by technology if Latin American schools are to become a guarantee for a better future. Partnerships with private companies and public institutions may help address some of these challenges agreed at panel today at the World Economic Forum on Latin America in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.

"It's important not to let the government alone deal with the problem. The focus should be the society," said **Felipe Vergara**, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Lumni, Colombia, a Social Entrepreneur who helps set up funds to finance education for low-income students in Latin American countries. "It is important to understand education as a national passion. We need to change the status of our teachers," he said, emphasizing the need for proper training of professionals in the education system.

Yet the gap between the quality of public and private education was criticized. "Public schools have to stop being the schools for the poor," said **Esteban Bullrich**, Minister of Education for the Federal Capital, Argentina, a Young Global Leader. He added that prejudice against state-run schools persists.

"In Chile, public schools disappeared. You need to place public education on the agenda ... the goal is to recover public education," **Kenneth Giorgio Jackson Drago**, Student Activist, Federación de Estudiantes Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile, a Global Shaper. "Talent is evenly and broadly distributed in society. But the [education] system is prejudicial to society," he said. The financing system for higher education sometimes means former students have to work in an area they did not choose just to repay their debts, he said.

The use of technology, computers and smart phones may also help break down the walls of traditional classrooms as teachers may be accessed by students outside the classroom, said **Peggy Johnson**, Executive Vice-President and President, Global Market Development, Qualcomm, USA. "Investments need to be redirected towards technology investment," she said. Nevertheless, Bullrich said: "The school will change its function in the future. But the teacher will never disappear."

Examples across Latin America have shown that there is little use in disseminating technology if teachers themselves are not properly trained, the panel agreed.

Notes to Editors

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