

1. BACKGROUND

Mexico has traditionally stressed the importance of education and training for the well-being of its population and the country's development. The Mexican Constitution states that all Mexican citizens are entitled to an education and also that all firms have to give their workers on-the-job training. This legal framework creates the basis for a continuous demand for educational and training services and the equipment and systems needed to grant them.

In 1921, the Secretariat for Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública - SEP) was created to enforce the Constitution and the Law on Education, which guarantee free and laical education to all Mexican citizens through the public school system. Both kindergarden and primary school levels are obligatory for children between the age of 3 and 14. Middle education consists of two levels: secondary school (secundaria) and high school (preparatoria or bachillerato), each of which usually takes three years, and which lead to undergraduate and graduate studies. There are also technical middle schools, which grant a technical degree without further studies. At the superior levels there are three alternatives: university, technical or teaching (normal) studies. At any level, from kindergarden to university, education is granted by public, state and private schools.

Mexico's progress in relation to education is undeniable. The percentage of total population without any education dropped from 44% in 1960 to 13% in 1980. At the mandatory primary school level, total students within the 6-14 age group in school increased from 63% in 1960 to 97% in 1990. Total student enrollment in kindergarden increased from 230,200 in 1960 to 2.3 million in 1989; primary school students grew from 5.4 million to 14.7 million and at the secondary level from 227,000 to 4.4 million during the 1960-1990 period. High school students doubled in ten years, as did college students.

At the same time, Mexico's Federal Labor Law entitles all workers to receive on-the-job training in order to improve their living standards and productivity based on general criteria spelled out by such Law. Mexico's total economically active population (population over 12 years of age seeking or having work) totals 32 million, of which 65% are men. Currently, Mexico has to create approximately one million jobs annually to absorb the new incoming labor population.

Mexico's population growth rate is closely related to the need for future educational and training services. Although the country's population growth rate has slightly slowed down, from 3.2% during the 1970s to 2% during the past decade, it still is one of the highest in the world. For 1990, total population is estimated at 86 million, of which 55% is under 20 years of age. By the year 2000, population is expected to reach 104 million, of which 41% will be under 20 and 61% under thirty years of age.