

Alternative Education Programs for High School Age Students in Chile

Education and Urban Society
2020, Vol. 52(4) 561–589
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DOI: 10.1177/0013124519879428
journals.sagepub.com/home/eus



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Abstract

The provision of “alternative” education is increasingly common in the countries of the world, but highly varied in its forms and coverage. In its commitment to provide education for all to age 18, Chile recently expanded its system of schools for teenage dropouts and has funded research on how best to educate these youth. This article, based on data from a national sample of 18 recently established Second Opportunity Centers, describes student characteristics, their ambitions for their education and future, and their evaluation of their experience to date. Using a review of principally North American research findings as a guide, the study analyzes factors linked with grade repetition and withdrawal from school to suggest strategies that may be effective in increasing retention of students. This article concludes that, given multiple causes of school failure, reintegration into the education system requires multiple strategies.

Keywords

school failure, early school leavers, alternative schooling, second chance schools, Chile

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Introduction

With the reestablishment of democracy in 1990, governments in Chile have sought to provide education for all through high school (Espinoza, Castillo & González, 2013; Bellei, 2003; Cox, 2012; Donoso et al., 2012). Reforms emphasize both expansion of coverage and improvement of quality. Nongovernmental groups had since 1989 provided “second chance” schools for dropouts (Alvarado et al., 2013), but until recently, the government has included not-in-school youth (under age 18) in programs aimed principally at preparing adults for employment. Only a fraction of youth entered these second chance programs. About 50% of participants went on to higher levels of education and 25% dropped out (MINEDUC, 2010).

Public policy focused instead on reducing dropouts from the formal education system. Scholarships and family subsidies were offered to low-income families (Espinoza et al., 2012, 2018), and subsidies were offered to (public and private) schools for remedial programs for at-risk students. Special efforts were made to reduce high school dropouts (Cox, 2012; Donoso & Donoso, 2009; Espinoza et al., 2019). Over time, significant improvements were made in increasing secondary school attendance and completion, but still a sizable proportion of youth aged 18 and under were not in school (Espinoza et al., 2016; Osorio, 2013).

In 2015, the Ministry of Education announced the creation of a new program designed specifically for out-of-school students (MINEDUC, 2015). Designated officially as Integrated Centers for Youth and Adults (Centros de Educación Integrada de Adultos [CEIA]) and known as Second Opportunity Centers, these institutions enroll adolescents between 13 and 18 years of age. They admit students who, for one reason or another, have not completed their formal education and who have been out of school for at least 2 years. Their programs offer either a primary or secondary school certificate, during the day or evening. The programs are intensive, and progress is accelerated; students can in one calendar year complete two grades of high school.

This article analyzes characteristics of the students, their ambitions for their education and future, and their evaluation of their experience to date in their Second Opportunity Center.

Previous Research on Alternative Education

The provision of “alternative” education is increasingly common in the countries of the world, but highly varied in its forms and coverage (Foley, 2006; Glewwe et al., 2011; McGregor, Mills, te Riele, & Hayes, 2015; Oplatka, 2004; Sliwka & Yee, 2015). Today, adolescents not enrolled in school are

considered “dropouts” or “early school leavers” (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004; Lamb & Markussen, 2011; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012), but these categories often include students who have been “pushed” out of school because of academic failure or “antisocial” behavior (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). Early leavers include students with physical disabilities, intellectual impairment, psychological disturbances, drug or alcohol addictions, convictions for criminal behavior, and those who are parents (Hawkins, Jaccard, & Needle, 2013; Hosley, 2003; Sliwka, 2008). To date, more than 100 different indicators of vulnerability have been defined (Bowers & Sprott, 2012; Bowers, Sprott, & Taff, 2013; Morrison & Shoon, 2018).

“Alternative” schools take a variety of forms. One classification placed them in three categories (Raywid, 1983, 1994). The first two types of schools were designed to reduce withdrawal of students rather than serve those who had already left. The larger category of these includes “innovative” schools designed to make attendance “challenging and fulfilling for all.” Many of the state-subsidized, privately owned “charter,” and public “magnet” schools in the United States belong to this category (Lehr, Soon, & Ysseldyke, 2008). They differ from conventional schools in their organization, administration, and programs. A second category might be called “last chance” schools, as they are offered to students at risk of failure or expulsion from the regular school. Raywid (1994) called the third category of schools “remedial,” intended for students with academic, social/emotional, or conduct problems. Corrective schooling, it was thought, might make it possible for these students to return to their regular school.

Despite international convergence toward agreement on what should be taught and how to measure learning outcomes, countries continue to struggle with what to do with youth who do not conform to the expectations and standards of the mainstream or “regular” education system. Most countries in the European Union offer “Second Chance” schooling to youth 18 years or older who have not completed secondary school.¹ The major objective of these schools is to prepare students for entry into the labor market (European Commission, 2001). Belgium offers two options to dropouts (18 and over), an examination that if passed grants a diploma equivalent to secondary school graduation, or job preparation (Glorieux, Heyman, Jegers, & Taelman, 2011). A similar program operates in Greece (Papachristopoulou, Kiprianos, & Christodoulou, 2018). Zambia has created Second Chance schools to provide girls or young women with children to complete their secondary education (Wedekind & Milingo, 2015). Australia has expanded the services of its vocational education and training authority as an alternative for students (more than 30%) who have failed to complete secondary school (Ross & Gray, 2005).

Second Opportunity Centers are not unknown in Latin America, but most, following the European model, are organized to provide school and

vocational training to youth 18 years of age and over (Corchuelo et al., 2016; Salva, Nadal, & Melià, 2016).

The Second Opportunity Centers of Chile might belong to a fourth category of alternative schools, as they prepare dropouts for university attendance. Given the recency of their establishment, it is not clear whether they will be known as remedial institutions or primarily as a school that differentiates instruction to match students' interests and abilities.

These alternative schools are clearly different from conventional schools. Great emphasis is placed on moving from a uniform to a highly diverse program matched to students' interests and abilities. They define themselves as collaborative rather than remedial institutions, including family members in the educational process, using cooperative learning practices, and flexibility in scheduling (Eroles & Hirmas, 2009).

A number of studies have identified program elements that can be effective in the reduction of vulnerability or prevention of dropout (e.g., Carver & Lewis, 2010; Wilson & Tanner-Smith, 2013). The types and characteristics of students who are most responsive have also been studied (Day, Mozuraityte, Redgrave, & McCoshan, 2013; Dowling, 1994; Moger, 2010; Sullivan & Downey, 2015). Given the variety of students served in these schools, there is, however, no set of practices best for all students (Rumberger, 2011). The application of uniform standards of performance, as in regular schools, reduces an alternative school's likelihood of success.

The complications of providing differentiated instruction are not fully understood. A recent review of U.S. research on dropout prevention noted that most current research on dropouts and alternative schools is limited to relatively few variables and contexts. Most studies assess experiences in a few schools. As a consequence, the researchers conclude that there is little empirical evidence to support recommendations of specific practices (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). After reviewing the experiences of 70 alternative schools in the state of Iowa in the United States, Gilson (2006) concluded that

effective schools of any type are still guided by simple characteristics such as caring instructors, relevant curriculum, and students that are motivated to succeed in areas where they have not always been successful. These characteristics are very subjective in nature and difficult to test for. (p. 60)

Alternative education in Chile. Research on dropouts in Chile has generated a series of findings like those reported for the United States. The principal nonschool factor in Chile is the home situation of the student. Poverty and employment, ethnic origin, family dysfunctionality, and low family commitment to education are other contributors (Espinoza et al., 2014, 2016; PREAL, 2003). Intraschool

factors are poor attendance, low performance, repeating linked with drug addiction, and psychological conditions. Dropouts are seen as replacing the goals and values of family and school with those of peers and “the street” (Espinoza, Castillo & González, 2013; Magendzo & Toledo, 1990).

Prior to the government’s decision to create a system of Second Opportunity Centers, a private, religious foundation in Santiago (Sùmate) opened several second opportunity schools, promoted as a form of “educational reintegration.” A detailed study of students’ reactions to their new school was consistent with findings from other countries. What students liked most about the experience was the positive school climate, especially the absence of conflict and violence among students; positive relationships with teachers, who were friendly and not punitive; and respect for individuality and culture differences given by teachers and classmates (Alvarado et al., 2013). A second study provided examples of graduation and successful transition from three Second Opportunity schools to a postsecondary institution, but did not provide details on the schools’ effective practices (Chapple, 2016).

By 2016, the government opened 134 Second Opportunity Centers in Chile, at least one in each of the country’s 15 regions. Most are found in the central metropolitan area of the capital, Santiago, and others in the regions of Concepción and Valparaíso. These three regions have 47% of the nation’s CEIA facilities. Total national enrollment in Second Opportunity Centers is 30,261 students, of which 32.5% are in the Santiago metropolitan area, as shown in Table 1.

The Centers are located in large cities and also in isolated rural areas; as a consequence, they vary considerably in enrollment, from 215 to 976 students. Given their location, some centers may experience staffing shortages for a year or two. The student to professor ratio varies from 8.6 to 22.9 but is under 15.5 in half of the centers. Professors are equally divided between women and men. Most (67%) teach only in the Center. About half have full-time work (35 hr or more per week). Almost all (97%) are certified teachers, averaging more than 10 years in the profession. Around half worked in adult education centers prior to the founding of the Second Opportunity Centers in 2015. At this point, we have no information about course offerings or instructional practices.

At this stage, the new program has not been in operation long enough to assess its effectiveness in enabling these students to complete secondary education. We can, however, describe the characteristics of those who have chosen to enroll and assess their reaction to the program they have experienced so far. The critical issue is the fit between the program and the characteristics of the student population. Does the program offer enough variety and flexibility in content and instruction to engage students who withdrew from a more conventional curriculum and pedagogy? A full answer will be possible only after

Table 1. Number of Second Opportunity Centers (CEIA) Distributed by Region and Enrollment (2016).

Region	CEIAs	Enrollment
1	2	804
2	6	1,184
3	7	1,232
4	6	2,226
5	14	3,694
6	10	2,276
7	8	1,443
8	23	3,010
9	13	1,124
10	8	996
11	2	88
12	3	732
13 (Metropolitan Santiago)	26	9,832
14	5	910
15	1	710
Total	134	30,261

Note. CEIA = Centros de Educación Integrada de Adultos.

several cohorts have completed their studies; for now, we can only assess whether current (newly enrolled) students are pleased with their experience.

The analysis for this study of students in Second Opportunity Centers is guided by the following set of research questions:

1. **Research Question 1:** Are the student populations in each Center homogeneous with respect to the personal and family characteristics associated with their separation from school? Alternatively, are there distinct patterns of individual and family characteristics associated with dropping out? Can distinct groups of students be identified?
2. **Research Question 2:** Are students' objectives for their participation in their Center related to the factors associated with dropping out of school? Do these vary according to the group in which a student is categorized?
3. **Research Question 3:** Are students' evaluations of their experience in their Center associated with their reasons why they might drop out or with their objectives for participation?
4. **Research Question 4:** What factors are most associated with Center "success" to date based on students' evaluations?

Method

The present study is descriptive, in the sense that it proposes to identify and characterize the factors that appear to contribute to the retention of students in Second Opportunity schools while categorizing their expectations with respect to their futures. This information will establish the benchmarks for later studies of the long-term impact of the Centers on their students. The research design is nonexperimental, based on an ex post facto analysis. This approach was adopted given the impossibility of manipulating the variables that might contribute to reentry into the formal system.

Sample

Participants in the study were selected using a cluster sample, stratified by region. Other studies (MINEDUC, 2010) have indicated that dropouts are distributed proportionately across regions, in clusters corresponding to the location of the CEIAs. The sampling frame was constructed using 2016 statistical data and technical assistance from the Ministry of Education. The universe was defined as including 30,262 adolescents between 13 and 18 years of age enrolled in CEIAs. Opting for a total sample with a confidence level of at least 95%, we first selected a number of Centers from each region in relation to the region's total CEIA enrollment. This produced a total of 18 Centers. During the months of November and December 2016, we visited each of the Centers. Students were selected probabilistically on the basis of total enrollment in their Center, yielding a sample size of 1,112 students and a sampling error of 2.88%.

Data Collection

Data for the study were obtained using a questionnaire which took approximately 30 min to complete. We asked students about their families and living conditions, personal characteristics and customary behaviors, ambitions for the future, and participation in and evaluation of the activities of their Second Opportunity Centers. Students were asked to write in the number of persons living at their residence, their age in years, and the number of times they had repeated. There were no missing data.

Analysis

The analysis is presented in three sections. The first briefly describes the Centers (officially, CEIA, Proyectos de Reinserción Escolar, or Second Opportunity Centers) and then in more detail the family situation of the

students. The second section reviews several characteristics of the students and then examines the extent to which these are related to their history of school failure and repetition. The objective of these two sections is to identify different sets of factors that appear to have contributed to academic failure.

A third section is based on the students' attitudes toward various aspects of the program in which they currently are enrolled. The questions are of two kinds: One set asks students about their plans and their activities in their Center; the second asks students to evaluate various aspects of the Center and the program, and staff, with specific attention to how the program has contributed to their learning. The objective of this section is to identify whether different students' responses to the program can be classified in ways that link them to their background situation and experiences.

Most of the questions in this section permit multiple answers. For example, we asked students to select from a list plausible reasons for leaving the Center they are currently enrolled. Principal component analysis (PCA) was used to identify the groups of students who chose the same set of alternatives. This indicated the number of distinct groups or clusters. We then used the SPSS version of k-means cluster analysis to build the clusters (Antonenko et al., 2012).

Results

Second Opportunity Centers and Their Students

Our objective is to identify various groups or types of students, relating background experiences and attitudes to their reaction to the current program and their vision of their future. This information is relevant for deciding how Centers might diversify their programs to respond more effectively to different kinds of students.

The 498 girls and 614 boys in the sample are relatively equally distributed across the Centers. The students vary in the number of times they had repeated before coming to their Center. Some (127 or 11.4% of the sample) had not yet or never repeated, more than a third (34.4%) had repeated twice, and 10.1% had repeated four or more times. In the absence of specific information, we have estimated when these students first failed in school. We have assumed that in the year following, they repeated the grade. On this basis, we have estimated, for each student, the grade failed first and their age at that time. We use 2-year groupings for age to approximate the actual distribution of children's ages in grades. Table 2 presents the results.

This estimation indicates that most students in this study did not begin to fail and repeat in the regular school until about age 13. In the Chilean system,

Table 2. Approximate Age and Estimated Grade at Time of First Failure in Regular School.

Approximate age	Estimated grade	N	%
8-9	3	2	0.2
9-10	4	5	0.4
10-11	5	22	2.0
11-12	6	39	3.5
12-13	7	98	8.8
13-14	8	204	18.3
14-15	9	246	22.1
15-16	10	298	26.8
16-17	11	142	12.8
17-18	12	56	5.0
		1,112	100.0

this age corresponds approximately to the eighth grade, the last year of the second cycle of Basic education. According to these estimates, one third (370) of the students enrolled in the Second Opportunity Centers failed in the second cycle of Basic education (i.e., before entering Grade 9). The other two thirds (742) began to fail and repeat once they entered a secondary school.

The 18 Centers vary significantly in terms of the proportion of their students failed at the end of the Basic cycle. More of those located in the middle (and most populated region) of Chile have higher proportions of students who had failed the eighth grade. They also vary significantly in terms of the average number of courses their students had repeated.

Family Characteristics

Most of the students in this sample (84.6%) live with one or both parents (and with grandparents and siblings). Table 3 shows how these proportions vary by education level of the parent or guardian. About 34% live in a household with both parents, another 42% live just with their mother, and 10% live only with their father. The proportion living with just one parent is higher than the average for 12 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.² Another 7.8% of the students live with one or both grandparents and not with their parents. A small percentage (4%) is living with one or more siblings, and 3% with an aunt or uncle (but not parents). Girls and boys have similar living arrangements. There is no relationship between who the student lives with and the age (or school level) in which the student first failed.

Table 3. Educational Attainment of Parents or Guardian.

Level of education	Both parents (%)	Mother only (%)	Father only (%)	Grandparent (%)	Uncle or aunt (%)	Sibling (%)	Total, <i>n</i> (%)
None	1.3	1.9	1.9	2.3	0	13.6	24 (2.2)
Basic	32.9	31.0	33.0	34.5	44.1	34.1	363 (32.6)
Secondary	46.8	48.8	51.9	52.9	35.3	43.2	535 (48.1)
Technical	10.7	10.1	6.6	5.7	14.7	4.5	106 (9.5)
Higher	8.3	8.1	6.6	4.6	5.9	4.5	84 (7.6)
<i>N</i>	374	467	106	87	34	33	1,112
%	33.6	42.0	9.5	7.8	3.1	4.0	100.0

Note. $\chi^2 = 40.375$, $p = .004$.

Less than 20% of the parents or guardians have had any postsecondary education. The average for all OECD countries is 31.4% for those parents in the 41- to 54-year-old category and 39.6% for those between 31 and 44 years. There is a small but significant difference in education level of the different kind of parents or guardians. Education levels are higher when both parents are present, in mother-only homes, and when an uncle or aunt is the guardian. Fathers and grandparents are less likely to have had postsecondary education. There is no relationship between the education level attained by parents or guardians and the grade level at which the student first failed.

Slightly more than half of the households have four or fewer persons living in them. There is no association between the size of the household and the age at which the student first failed.

Some 61% of the students stated that their parent or guardian owns or is buying the home in which they live. Some 56% of the students described the economic situation of the household as passable, bad, or worse. In most households (60%), parents or guardians do not participate in any community, sports, or religious organization. According to students' responses, one in four households included a person (other than the student) with a physical disability or permanent illness. None of these characteristics distinguish between students who fail early or later.

The students' families and households vary in a number of dimensions, such as marital stability, income, and education, commonly considered to be associated with school failure and repetition. We do not find, however, any significant relationships between these variables and student failure and repetition. It may be that the students who attend Second Opportunity Centers are not representative of the larger group of those who have failed and

Table 4. Age of Student by Parent/Guardian.

Age of student	Parent/guardian						Total, <i>n</i> (%)
	Both parents (%)	Mother only (%)	Father only (%)	Grandparent (%)	Uncle or aunt (%)	Sibling (%)	
13-15	15.2	25.5	24.5	23.0	38.2	61.4	262 (23.6)
16	25.7	25.5	23.6	29.9	8.8	6.8	272 (24.5)
17-18	59.1	49.0	51.9	47.1	52.9	31.8	576 (52.0)
<i>N</i>	374	467	106	87	34	33	1,112

Note. $\chi^2 = 141.78, p < .000$.

repeated. We cannot test that hypothesis with these data, but we can look for other variables that account for why some students fail earlier than others and differences in reactions to the Centers' program.

Student Characteristics

The sample includes 498 girls and 614 boys. Although there is no difference in average age, girls are less likely than boys to have failed first in the eighth grade. The likelihood of failing increases for both boys and girls beginning with age 13, but more rapidly for boys than girls. Girls are more likely than boys to fail for the first time only once they reach 15 years of age. In this sample, 16.3% of the girls have never repeated, compared to 7.5% of the boys. Most (89%) of the students have repeated one or more course, with boys repeating more times (2.1) than girls (1.8). Although small, all these differences are statistically significant.

More than half of the students in the sample are 17 or 18 years of age (Table 4). Boys and girls do not differ in their distribution of ages. Those living with their uncle or aunt tend to be a bit younger, and those living with one or both parents are older. The 18 Centers vary widely in the age distribution of their students: In some, half of the students are 13 to 15, whereas in others most are 17 or 18.

Most (83%) students stated that they do not belong to an indigenous population; of those that do, most are Mapuche (130 or 12% of the total sample).³ The indigenous students are enrolled in all but one of the Centers but are slightly more numerous in the south of Chile. Ethnic identity does not differ by gender, and Mapuche students fail and repeat at the same rate as all other students.

About 44% of the students reported one or more handicaps (e.g., 25% find it difficult to concentrate, 19% have vision problems). There is no relationship between handicaps and age or with whom a student lives. There is a very small but significant correlation (.078) between the number of times students have repeated courses and the number of handicaps they report. Students who reported difficulties with concentration (285 or 25.6%) were on average likely to fail at an earlier age than those not reporting this handicap ($\chi^2 = 19.132, p = .006$). Boys were slightly more likely to report this problem than were girls.

Less than half (44%) of the students reported that the economic situation in their household is "good" or "very good." It is most severe in households headed by a mother alone, a bit less so in homes with two parents, and best in households headed by a father, grandparents, or uncle or aunt ($p < .005$). The economic situation of the household is related to how students get along with their guardians; relationships are poorer in households with more economic problems ($\chi^2 = 227.32, p < .000$). On the contrary, neither of these two variables is associated with the student's age at first failure or number of times repeated.

Some 20% of the students said they are currently employed (although by law this is not allowed). Current employment is unrelated to the number of past course repeats or age of first failure. Older girls (but not necessarily older boys) were more likely to be working, but this is not associated with their history of repeating.

Students' Current Attitudes Toward Education

Students were asked to choose from a list all the kinds of organizations to which they belong. Most frequently mentioned are soccer fan clubs (27%) and sports teams (10%) by boys and religious groups by girls (7%). Only 20% of the girls but 51% of the boys had participated in some organization. There is no relationship between kind or number of organizational memberships and previous dropping out of courses.

Students were asked where they meet with their friends. The PCA produced three factors explaining 55% of the variance, with a highly significant Bartlett test score and a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) of .623. The most common meeting place is someone's home (60%). A second place is on the street, in a park, or public square (46%). Boys and girls differ clearly in their answers: Girls more often meet in homes, boys on the street. A third choice was the Internet (20%), followed by sports events, movies and discos, malls or commercial centers, neighborhood centers, or a workplace. The center of the first cluster (649 students) was the home; the second cluster with 278

Table 5. Preferred Place to Meet With Friends, Age of First Failure, and Times Repeated in Regular School.

	Home	Public places	Street	χ^2	p value
Age first failed	14.72	14.55	14.35	26.60	.006
Times repeated	2.76	3.18	3.23	56.02	.000
N	649	185	278		

students was located in the street or workplace; the remaining 145 students were characterized as meeting friends in a variety of different places, home and also in commercial centers and on the Internet.

As Table 5 indicates, which place is the preferred place to meet with friends is related to frequency of repeating, independent of gender. Boys and girls who meet friends in homes had repeated less often than those who prefer to meet friends on the street or in other public places such as commercial centers or the Internet.

The students were presented with a list of 12 recreational activities and asked to check all of those in which they engage (Table 6). Students who listed listening to music, talking with friends, sports, playing computer games, or going to parties and dances as recreation, on average, had repeated more often than others. The only activity associated with a lower rate of repeating was reading newspapers, magazines, or books.

Cluster analysis identified three distinct groups of students. One prefers sedentary, individual activities such as listening to music or reading. This group included 424 students. A second group, with 302 members, engages in everything, except being with a partner and participating in an organization. A third group (386 members) prefers talking with friends and family as well as listening to music and reading, but not sports or video games. Girls check the same number of activities as boys, but differ in their preferences. Boys are more often in one of two groups, one engaging in everything, another listening to music and reading; girls more often prefer activities with friends and family. There is, however, no significant difference between members of the three groups with respect to when they first failed or how often they had repeated.

Students were presented with 10 alternatives to the question, “What do you want to do in the future?” Girls on average name 2.4 of the choices listed on the questionnaire, whereas boys average 2.0. About 28% of the students checked none of the options, 36% checked one, 16% two, and 11% three. No student checked more than five. The most popular desire for the future was to “get a good job” (43%) followed closely by “earn more money” (41%). A sizable proportion (30%) said they would “just like to be with friends.” On the

Table 6. Recreational Activities in Which Students Engage by Gender.

	Number yes	%	<i>r</i> with times repeated
Listen to music	896	80.6	.061*
Go out or talk with friends	650	58.5	.116**
Be with family	639	57.5	.029
Watch television	607	54.6	.001
Play sports	444	39.4	.111**
Video games, computer	364	32.7	.064*
Be with my partner	362	32.6	.044
Go to shopping centers	360	32.4	.003
Go to parties or dancing	358	32.2	.104**
Go to the movies	205	24.7	-.016
Read newspaper, magazines, or books	204	18.3	-.079**
Participate in an organization	87	7.8	-.026

Note. Average number = 4.74, *SD* = 2.79, *r* with times repeated = .104**.

p* = .05. *p* = .01.

contrary, 23% would like to finish secondary school, 18% would like to go to the university, and 17% would like to earn a technical (postsecondary) or professional degree. Only 14% stated they would like to "form a family." The other options, chosen by less than 12%, referred to maturing as a person.

Girls who had repeated more often were more likely to have thought about different options for their future than those with fewer failures, but the difference was not large. For boys, plans are unrelated to how many times they had failed. Overall, therefore, there is no relationship between frequency of failing and choices of future activities.

The number of different options for the future that students think about was, however, linked to what they were experiencing at home. Students who reported that their home relationships are "very good" on average chose one option for the future, but an average of two if they saw relationships as "very bad" ($\chi^2 = 31.38, p < .000$). Students who saw their family economic situation as "very bad" named more options for the future (2.4 on average) than did those who saw the family economic situation as "very good (0.86 options).

Table 7 reports these relationships having combined the variables into four sets of future options, referring to money or employment; education; leaving home (form family, move, own home); and other (nothing, only be with friends, realize myself as a person). The average number of options named in each set is significantly, but moderately, negatively correlated with the student's evaluation of their relationships with others in their home or the home's

Table 7. Correlation Between Home Relationships and Home Financial Situation and Number of Different Future Options Considered.

	Categories of future options				Number chosen
	Money/work	Education	Leave home	Other	
Home relationships	.235	.251	.155	.212	.289
Financial Situation	.310	.156	.079	.182	.270

Note. All correlations are significant at .01.

financial situation. In other words, students who rate home relationships as “very good,” and those who rate the home’s financial situation as “very good,” name fewer options for the future.

The association between home relationships and home financial stability, and the number of future options that students mention, is consistent with the assumption that people who are more concerned or anxious about their future consider more alternatives than those who are anxious. Girls considered more options than boys, with respect to work and money, and education, but not to leaving home or other concerns.

Not shown in the table is the finding that the number of future options considered varied with whom the student was living. Students living with their father, or another adult not their mother, named fewer future options than those living with their mother. The association between the household situation and planning for the future is, however unrelated to gender; boys and girls did not differ in the number of options they named.

Later in the questionnaire, students were asked to check all of a list of nine “problem” situations that had occurred in their family. Items included “lack of communication,” problems with alcohol,” and “physical or psychological abuse.” Most students reported few situations; 20% listed none and another 34% only one; the mean was 1.92 situations.

Answers to two of the items were significantly related to frequency of repeating. Use of drugs (by self) was more frequently cited by boys (15%) than by girls (8%) and was associated with a higher frequency of repeating. Difficulties with siblings were more frequently cited by girls (19.3%) than by boys (12.1%) and were associated with more frequent repeating. The number of items checked correlated ($r = .336, p < .05$) with responses to the rating scale of relationships with parents or guardians.

The PCA indicated two groups of students, those with no definite pattern of choices ($n = 782$) and those who listed “lack of communication,” “economic problems,” “bad relationships among parents and children,” and “lack of time for sharing” together ($n = 330$). There is a tendency for boys (73.3%

compared with 66.7% of girls) to fit the “no definite pattern” category of family situations, whereas girls more often are in the “lack of communication” cluster (33.3% compared with 26.7% of boys). There is no difference between the two clusters in terms of average number of times repeated.

Slightly more than half (54%) of the students stated that they have never experienced discrimination. Of the nine options, the most common occurrence of discrimination was in response to the student’s “physical appearance” (20%) followed in frequency by “social class” (12.1%). Students reporting discrimination are more likely to have some form of physical handicap (which is not related to the frequency of repeating courses). There is a significant but modest correlation ($r = .158$) between the number of handicaps reported and discrimination; gender is not related. There is also a small, negative correlation ($r = -.059$) between discrimination and the number of times the student has repeated. Those reporting more discrimination repeat less.

The questionnaire asked students to check all the reasons they could have for leaving their Center. About half agreed that they have no reason to leave at this time. Among those offering possible explanations, boys were more likely to say that it would be because they would be expelled (23% compared with 15% for girls), because they would like to work (21% vs. 16%), or because they don’t like to study (11% vs. 5%). Girls were more likely to say that it would be because of family problems (21% compared with 12% for boys) or trouble with their classmates (11% vs. 7%). The more often a girl has repeated a course, the more likely she is to consider expulsion as a reason for leaving the current course and the less likely she is to think that family problems might be a cause.

Students chose from among a list of six opinions about the value of education for their future. Three of the possible opinions minimized the importance of the program. The most common response (66%) was positive: “It is the only thing that will allow me to move ahead.” PCA (Table 8) yielded three distinct components. Note that boys preferred the more general response, that education would make it possible to move ahead in life, whereas the girls preferred to identify how that would happen, that is, by receiving a postsecondary degree.

The students grouped in three clusters. The largest cluster, with a positive response to “It is the only thing that will permit me to move ahead,” included 572 students. The second largest, with 421, had as its center the item “It will help me to become a technician or professional.” A small group of 66 was not impressed by their current program; they checked “For me it is not too important.” As with other questions, boys were in the less specific cluster, whereas girls more frequently identified degree attainment as their goal. The differences are small but statistically significant ($p = .011$). Independent of gender,

Table 8. Principal Component Analysis of Responses to “What Do You Think About the Importance of the Education You Are Receiving for Your Future?”

Alternative	Component			Percent yes		Significant difference
	1	2	3	Girls	Boys	
Will allow me to move ahead	-.785		.302	63.3	68.2	*
Learn things useful later on		.547	.324	22.3	23.0	
There are other more important things	.575	.380		5.4	6.4	
For me it is not too important	.431	-.494	-.470	4.6	4.2	
I can get good jobs without studying	.398		.720	6.8	8.2	*
It will make me a technician or professional	.386	.723		43.2	33.9	***
Percent variance explained	26.6	21.1	17.4			

Note. Component loadings less than .300 have been removed for clarity.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .000$.

students in the degree-oriented cluster had on average repeated fewer times than those in the less specific cluster.

The next question asked students what they specifically expect or hope to do on finishing their current studies. Would they keep studying or go to work, or were they unsure of what to do or whether they would finish? Almost 62% of the boys, compared with 54% of the girls, said they would take a job. On the contrary, 61% of the girls said they would keep studying in another place compared with 49% of the boys. About 9% said they would wait a few years and then go back to studying. Only a tiny fraction of the students (less than 3%) thought they would not finish the course.

The next question was, “If you were to abandon your schooling, how would it affect you?” The students responded that they would “not earn good wages” (52%), would not know what to do (39%), and would have bad jobs (38%). Only 17% chose what might be considered a more optimistic response—that then they would have time to work; 16% stated that they would have to look for some other way to learn. Boys and girls chose essentially the same responses.

Students were asked where they could acquire useful skills if they did decide to not continue studying. The most common choice was on the job or worksite (54%), followed by at home with family (28%). Girls are significantly more confident that they could learn on the job (59% girls vs. 52% boys), whereas boys are more confident that they would learn through the

Internet (32% boys vs. 21% girls) or in the neighborhood or on the street (18% boys vs. 7% girls). The responses are not associated with differences in repeating.

The Centers offer as activities sports and recreation, social and psychological workshops, arts workshops, training in specific crafts or jobs, and others. The level of participation was low. About 28% of the students participated in no activities and another 57% in one. The boys were more active in sports, but differences in participation in other activities were not statistically significant. There is a small but significant correlation ($r = .10$) between activity level and prior membership in organizations outside the Center, but no relationship with number of repetitions.

Student Evaluation of the Program

The questionnaire asked four questions that evaluate the student's experience in the program. First, students were asked to rate on a 5-point scale (from *very good* to *very bad*) four aspects of the Center: classrooms, computer lab, ability to hear/listen to professors, and capacity of professors to solve problems. Average ratings ranged between *acceptable* and *good*, with highest ratings for professors. Ratings of the Centers were not associated with the student's sex or the number of times he or she has repeated. Younger students are more positive in the judgments than older students. Students' ratings on the four items were highly correlated.

A similar scale was used to assess evaluation of the staff of the Centers. Professors received the highest, 75% rated as *good* or *very good*. The director and other professionals (psychologists, social workers) each were rated as *good* or *very good* by 65% of the students, and administrative support staff was rated by 68% of the students. Lowest ratings were given to classmates (54% *good* or *very good*). Ratings of staff are highly correlated with ratings of facilities (.668). Younger students are slightly more enthusiastic, but ratings do not vary systematically with sex, parents' education, or who the student lives with at home. There is no relationship between frequency of repeating and ratings of the staff. There is, however, a significant positive correlation between participation in Center activities and staff ratings ($r = .179^{**}$). Responses to these five items also were highly correlated.

A factor analysis, Varimax rotation of answers to the nine items in the two rating questions, produced one factor that explains 50% of the variance among the items. All nine items have significantly high loadings. We interpret this factor as a measure of student satisfaction with their experience in their Center.

Scores on Satisfaction varied significantly across the Centers. Differences in Satisfaction were not, however, associated with the year in which the

Center opened, its total enrollment, number of teachers, or the ratio of students to teacher. In the absence of any further variables describing the Centers, we looked for student variables associated with Satisfaction.

The overall rating is related to age (younger are more positive, $p = .001$). Students who meet friends at home (rather than on the street) are more enthusiastic ($p < .000$), as are those who plan to achieve and make money ($p = .010$), attain a tech or professional degree ($p < .000$), think that leaving the Center would have bad consequences ($p = .019$), and prefer learning from the Internet ($p < .000$). Students who participated in more organizations and activities outside the Center, and those who have participated in more activities in the Center, are a bit more enthusiastic than those whose participation is lower.

The third evaluation question asked what the Center was doing to discourage students from abandoning their studies. Only 13% of the students responded that the Center does nothing. The most frequent intervention is to help students with low grades (48%), followed by help with family problems (45%), talking with parents or guardians (38%), and helping students with behavior problems (37%). Of the five possible interventions listed, the average was 1.87.

Girls receive slightly more attention than boys, but there is no difference in attention as a function of the identity of the parent or guardian, their education level, the age of the student, or the number of times they have failed in the past. Students who participate in Center activities report more help ($r = .145^{**}$) and rate the Center and staff more highly. There is no relationship between the number of interventions reported and number of times repeated.

Although students may not be good judges of how much they have learned, their beliefs about how much they are learning may be an indicator of their likelihood to remain in the program. As Table 9 shows, most students believe that, thanks to the activities of their professors, they have learned. Scores on this measure are highly correlated with the other three evaluation questions reviewed above. Like the others, scores on this measure are related to gender, with girls more approving. Students whose parents have more education are less positive about the Centers. Those students who prefer home to the street are positive and also have more clearly defined achievement goals for the future.

Students' Characteristics and Evaluation of Their Center

The students in this sample of participants in Second Opportunity Centers differ in various ways from Chilean students between 13 and 18 years of age in regular schools. First, average education levels of the parents and

Table 9. Responses to "Have You Learned More Because of the Activities of the Professors?" by Gender.

Response	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Total, n (%)
<i>Strongly agree</i>	39.4	32.7	397 (35.7)
<i>Agree</i>	35.5	40.1	423 (38.00)
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	22.5	21.8	246 (22.1)
<i>Disagree</i>	0.8	3.3	24 (2.2)
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1.8	2.1	22 (2.0)
	100	100	1,112 (100)

Note. $\chi^2 = 12.717, p = .013$.

guardians are lower than those of young adults in Chile today. This may be because these parents are an older segment of the population or because they are less well educated than their age peers. Second, a single mother is head of household for almost 40% of the students, much higher than the national average. The students' self-report of disabilities is much higher than official statistics. Indigenous students are about twice as common as in the general population. In other words, students who fail and repeat grades are different from their majority of the classmates in a number of different ways.

There are some significant differences in the social behavior of girls compared with boys. Girls are more likely to meet their friends in one another's homes, whereas boys more often meet their friends outside the home. Boys are much more actively engaged in sport activities; girls engage in more passive activities and belong to fewer organizations, clubs, or teams.

Girls have more focused goals for the future, more often specifically mentioning their desire to obtain a technician or professional degree, and more frequently indicating they want to get a good job and earn more money. The number and clarity of goals is not related to how often a student has repeated, but is related to the situation experienced in their current home. Those who are less happy at home are more likely to have thought about what they would like to do in the future.

Most students have a positive attitude toward their experience in their Center; they appreciate the facilities and the staff and believe they are learning. Satisfaction with facilities and staff has a slight (barely significant) relationship with the number of activities a student would like in the future. Confidence that he or she is learning has no relationship with plans for the future.

Both boys and girls differ among themselves in various ways. They differ in when they first failed in school, how often they have repeated, their

Table 10. Proportion of Students Failing in Basic Education Compared to Those Failing in Secondary Level, by Characteristics.

Factor	Basic (%)	Secondary (%)	Significance level
Family not intact	73.0	63.1	.001
Low parent education	31.4	36.5	.050
Male	60.8	52.4	.005
Preferred place to meet friends	Street	Home	.007

situation in their household, their experience of discrimination, and consequently in their beliefs about their own potential. Although this study did not ask, we can assume that differences in their attitudes toward schooling and themselves have been shaped by experiences in other schools. They differ in their assessment of their current experience in a Second Opportunity Center, and consequently in their plans for the future.

Relatively few of the student characteristics variables are significantly related to their failure and repetition or to their assessment of their experience in the Second Opportunity Center. Table 10 indicates that students were more likely to fail while in Basic education if they were not living with both parents; 73% of the Basic level failures were in that situation, compared with 63.15% of those whose failure came in secondary school. On the contrary, students whose parents had lower levels of education were more likely to fail in the Secondary level. About 60% of the students failing in the Basic level were boys, whereas in Secondary level only 52% of the failures were by boys. Students failing in Basic were more likely to say they preferred to meet friends in the street or a park, whereas those failing in Secondary preferred to meet in a home. No differences in terms of where failure first occurred were associated with student activity level, relationships with parents or the economic situation in the home, belonging to an ethnic group or having some kind of impairment, working, or having been discriminated against.

Table 11 lists factors significantly related to the study participants' ratings of the Center they are in, of the various staff members of the Center, or whether they feel they are learning from their professors. On average, the participants' ratings are more positive if parents are more socially active, if relationships in the home are good, if the participant is younger, and if they prefer to meet in homes. Ratings are less positive when parents have higher education levels and if the participant belongs to an ethnic group or is impaired in some way. Other variables are not significantly related to the participants' ratings.

Table 11. *p* Values of Factors Significantly Related to Higher Positive Ratings of Center, Staff, and Learning Outcomes.

Factor	Center	Staff	Learning
Parent education	-.023	NS	-.004
Parent activity	.004	.031	NS
Relationships at home	.000	.000	.000
Current age 13-15	.001	.000	NS
Meet in homes	.000	.001	.009
Indigenous	-.013	-.013	NS
Impaired	-.006	NS	NS

Note. NS = not significant.

Discussion

One immediate conclusion emerges from the data reviewed above. As found in other studies in other countries, there is no single factor, or even a small number of factors, that explains why these students had difficulty in remaining in a regular school. No single or small set of characteristics or patterns of living stands out as distinguishing between students who have repeated once and those who have a history of failure in school. Some students appear to have disengaged from the formal system because they found more satisfaction or meaning in other activities, most commonly in interaction with others who had not “bought into” the school ethic. Some girls apparently had difficulties in school because of difficulties at home, because of either childbearing or childrearing, or conflict with parents. In short, dropouts in Chile match Doll’s three categories of “push, pull and fall out” (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). In general, girls list more preferred future options, implying greater concern about how to survive once adult. Boys are relatively less concerned about future employment or education. Some students are highly motivated to succeed in their current Second Opportunity Center, but there is no clear association between their failure in school and their current level of motivation. The students in the various centers are heterogeneous, and they will probably react differently to any given intervention. These conclusions are consistent with earlier experiences in Chile (Alvarado et al., 2013; Chapple, 2016), as well as in the United States, hence the growing popularity of alternative schools.

The diversity of factors associated with withdrawal from school develops in the complex and unstable home and community environments in which most of these students have lived. Learning is facilitated by regularity and consistency; uncertainty about what will happen next, or the effect of a given response, hinders acquisition of a repertoire of effective behaviors. Persons

raised in conditions of high uncertainty are seen by others as less intelligent, less reliable, and less likable. As a group, they are more likely to differ from each other than a group of people raised in greater stability.

So, although they all are out-of-school youth, they perceive the world, especially in relationship to themselves, in different ways. They also differ in their level of self-understanding, in their ability to understand what would most please them. The students from homes where people get along with each other and have few financial problems might name some ambitions or objectives they have. Those from more turbulent homes cast a wider net, either because they are not sure what they want or are not sure which of their objectives can be achieved.

In Chilean society, as elsewhere, girls and women have less freedom of movement than do boys and men, and consequently are less likely to be affected by an uncertain environment outside the home. The study shows that boys are more likely to replace the stability of the home with the turbulence of the street, reported also by Espinoza et al. (2014). Yet, some boys and girls respond favorably to the climate of the Second Opportunity Centers, suggesting that staff have been reasonably successful in creating a positive, welcoming environment that engages some students, cited by other authors as the critical determinant of persistence in an alternative school (Blazar & Kraft, 2016; Ruzek et al., 2016).

In summary, consistent with prior research in other countries (e.g., Bowers & Sprott, 2012; De Witte et al., 2013; Rumberger, 2011), the students attending the Second Opportunity Centers left regular schools for various reasons. To engage this variety of students will require a program that differs from the more uniform program experienced in their regular school. Rather than a “last chance,” they will respond best to a proactive model matched to their abilities and interests (Leone & Drakeford, 1999).

Conclusion

Given the purpose and design of this study, the data do not tell us much about the Center’s impact. As a consequence, we have learned little from this analysis about how best to organize and operate schools to help more or all failed students recover. We do not yet have a complete catalog of varieties of students, nor varieties of effective interventions. We expect that future studies will make it possible to distinguish between more and less successful centers and to identify elements of their program that most contribute to the reintegration of these students into formal education. Until we have more understanding, Chile’s best strategy may be that of Gilson (2006) and Sullivan (2015), to provide caring instructors, a relevant curriculum, and encouragement to students to work toward their dreams.


Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by the National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development of Chile (CONICYT) through the FONDECYT Project No. 1161433.

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Notes

1. In Europe, school attendance is compulsory to age 18. Officially, there are no dropouts younger than 18.
2. No data is available for Chile (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016).
3. Indigenous people were in 2015 about 9.0% of the total population (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, 2017).

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