Student Aspirations and Student Futures in the Context of Educational Reform: The Case of El Salvador

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Beginning in 1969, with some help from outside agencies, El Salvador launched a major educational reform. While touching all levels of the school system, its primary emphasis was on seventh, eighth, and ninth grades (called Third Cycle).

One dimension of the reform was improvement in the quality of instruction. To accomplish that, the Minister of Education made comprehensive changes in the system of instruction, including curriculum reform, instructional television, extensive retraining of teachers, new printed materials for students and teachers, and bureaucratic reorganization. From all evidence, the quality of instruction was sharply improved (Hornik, et al, 1973).

The second significant dimension of the reform was an increase in the quantity of students who entered and completed Third Cycle. In 1966, before the Reform began, there were fewer than 22,000 students matriculated in public seventh, eighth and ninth grades. They, along with some 2?,000 private school enrollees, constituted only 22% of the number of young people of appropriate age (13-15) for the three grades. By 1973, more than 65,000 students were enrolled in public Third Cycle classrooms. Counting an additional 26,000 private school students, the Third Cycle matriculation was 34% of the total number of 13-15 year olds. The large increase in enrollment brought on by the elimination of tuition resulted in a change in average social background of students, with more students from poorer and rural homes able to register for the first time.

This great expansion reflected the underlying premise of El Salvador's Educational Reform that El Salvador's development demanded the absorption of the poor population into an expanding modern sector. Salvadoran planners believed that their country's primary natural resource was people, and that only through massive education and training would Salvadorans become competent workers in an increasingly sophisticated industrial economy. For the country's labor force to work effectively at such middle level administrative and technical positions, the planners believed that at least nine years of education were essential. Thus they stressed the need for bringing many more students through that level, with the explicit expectation that many if not most would end their formal schooling at that time.

In the pre-Reform period, secondary schooling had been largely reserved for privileged students bound for the university. However, under the Reform, the vast expansion in secondary school enrollments meant that university aspirations could no longer be fulfilled by most ninth grade graduates and high school would be beyond the reach of many. El Salvador was not willing to commit its most limited resources to a concomitant expansion of opportunities at the university level and, although new technical training programs were mounted at the advanced secondary level (Bachillerato), there would not even be sufficient room in these programs to absorb all the Third Cycle graduates. Noting these changes in its second five-year plan, the Ministry of Education arbitrarily set a 60 percent limit on the number of secondary school students who would be allowed to continue their education beyond the ninth grade(1). Implicit in these expansion and diversification policies, therefore, was the expectation that students would have to change their traditional view of secondary school as a stepping stone to the university.

From the earliest research in El Salvador, it was discovered that secondary students held startlingly high educational and occupational aspirations. In 1969, only 6 percent of the seventh graders surveyed planned to quit school after the ninth grade, 54 percent expected to finish an advanced secondary (Bachillerato or Carrera Corta) degree, and 40 percent had set their sights on the university. Because these students had enrolled in seventh grade before the great expansion, many could reasonably expect to fulfill their aspirations for more schooling. However, students who entered in subsequent years when enrollments swelled almost 300 percent were sure to be disappointed if they too maintained such high hopes for the future.

From the inception of the Reform, for four years, an evaluation team including staff from Stanford University's Institute for Communication Research and Salvadoran personnel, studied the Reform comprehensively. Among the many aspects of that work was a focus on student aspirations. The evaluation team wished to determine whether or not the Ministry of Education's new conception of the ninth grade as a terminal point for most students would be accepted by students and reflected in a downward adjustment of their aspirations. This question was examined in three ways. First, data were gathered on the students' educational and occupational aspirations as they entered the seventh grade, and those aspirations were monitored during each cohort's Third Cycle career. Second, the influence of various background variables and parental attitudes on those aspirations was analysed. Finally, in an attempt to go beyond the hypothetical aspirations that were expressed by students on survey questionnaires, the Reform's first group of ninth grade graduates were interviewed midway through the following year to see if their hopes and expectations had been fulfilled.

Students Aspirations over Four Years

Educational Aspirations

A battery of survey questions administered over six measurement waves and four years was used to gather data on students' educational aspirations. Three separate cohorts of students were studied. Cohort A, 902 students, entered seventh grade in 1969 and completed ninth in 1971. Cohort B, including 707 students, entered in 1970 and finished in 1972. Cohort C included 600 students studied from their entrance in 1971 through the end of eighth grade the following year. Questionnaires were administered at the beginning and end of each school year. Sampling information can be found in Hornik et al (1973). The repetition of identical questions over time allowed researchers to chart changes in students' aspirations as they passed through grades seven to nine. Although it was not possible to determine whether the aspirations represented realistic expectations or mere fantasies of the students, the responses did give a reliable picture of how far the students would like to go in school under ideal circumstances. Table 1 presents a summary of the aspiration levels of the three student cohorts at the beginning of seventh and the end of ninth grade (end of the eighth grade in the case of Cohort C).

Looking first at Cohort A, we find that this group's educational aspirations rose dramatically over the three years. Students who wished only to finish the ninth grade diminished by about 9 percent, those wishing to finish advanced secondary studies declined by about 11 percent, while the group of students wanting university studies increased by about 20 percent and, by the end of the ninth grade, included the majority of students in Cohort A. Cohort B students

TABLE 1

Educational Aspirations for Cohorts A, B and C
for All Measurement Waves

(Percentages)

	Seventh Grade		Eighth Grade		Ninth Grade	
COHORT A: (N=902)	Begin	End	Begin	End	Begin	End
Finish 3rd Cycle:	10.7	4.1	5.2	4.9	2.2	2.2
Finish Secondary:	53.6	44.9	55.3	50.7	46.6	42.6
Finish University:	35.7	51.0	39.4	44.3	51.3	55.1
COHORT B: (N=707)						
Finish 3rd Cycle:	9.2	6.3	2.8	3.7	--	2.4
Finish Secondary:	52.6	47.9	43.3	38.2	--	43.9
Finish University:	38.1	45.8	53.0	58.1	--	53.6
COHORT C: (N=600)						
Finish 3rd Cycle:	9.6	6.9	--	6.6		
Finish Secondary:	45.7	46.3	--	45.3		
Finish University:	44.6	46.9	--	48.2		

followed a similar pattern and finished ninth grade with proportions of students in the three aspiration levels almost identical to those of Cohort A.

Although Cohort C students came from poorer homes and from families where neither the mother or father had much formal education (see Table 17 in footnotes), their levels of educational aspiration were quite similar to those of Cohorts A and B. Yet, the changes in aspiration levels were less dramatic in this group, at least up to the end of eighth grade. Cohort C exhibited high educational aspirations at the beginning of seventh grade and maintained them through the eighth grade, while Cohorts A and B started lower but rose faster over the same period.

Occupational Aspirations

Over the four years of research students were continually asked to specify what careers they would like to pursue once they finished school. The results of this investigation are summarized in Table 2. Occupational choices were divided into three levels according to how much schooling would be required to qualify for different positions. The first level required little or no education, the second included certain skilled jobs or trades that customarily demanded some schooling beyond the Third Cycle, and the third level required some post-secondary or professional training.

Not surprisingly, the general pattern of the students' occupational aspirations coincided with that of their educational aspirations. Where there was inconsistency, the data indicated that students desired more education than was generally required to qualify for a certain type of job. By and large, students increased their job aspirations during their Third Cycle careers. Comparing the final measures of each cohort,

TABLE 2

Occupational Aspirations for Cohorts A, B and C
for All Measurement Waves

(Percentages)

	Seventh		Eighth		Ninth	
COHORT A: (N=902)	Begin	End	Begin	End	Begin	End
Level One:	6.8	2.6	2.3	2.2	2.3	1.8
Level Two:	59.4	55.1	60.1	56.9	52.7	54.0
Level Three:	33.8	42.3	37.6	40.9	45.0	44.2
COHORT B: (N=707)						
Level One:	2.5	2.6	1.7	2.0	--	5.9
Level Two:	62.5	56.9	53.3	50.9	--	54.2
Level Three:	35.0	40.5	45.0	47.1	--	39.9
COHORT C: (N=600)						
Level One:	3.4	2.6	--	4.5		
Level Two:	67.1	63.7	--	57.9		
Level Three:	29.5	33.7	--	37.6		

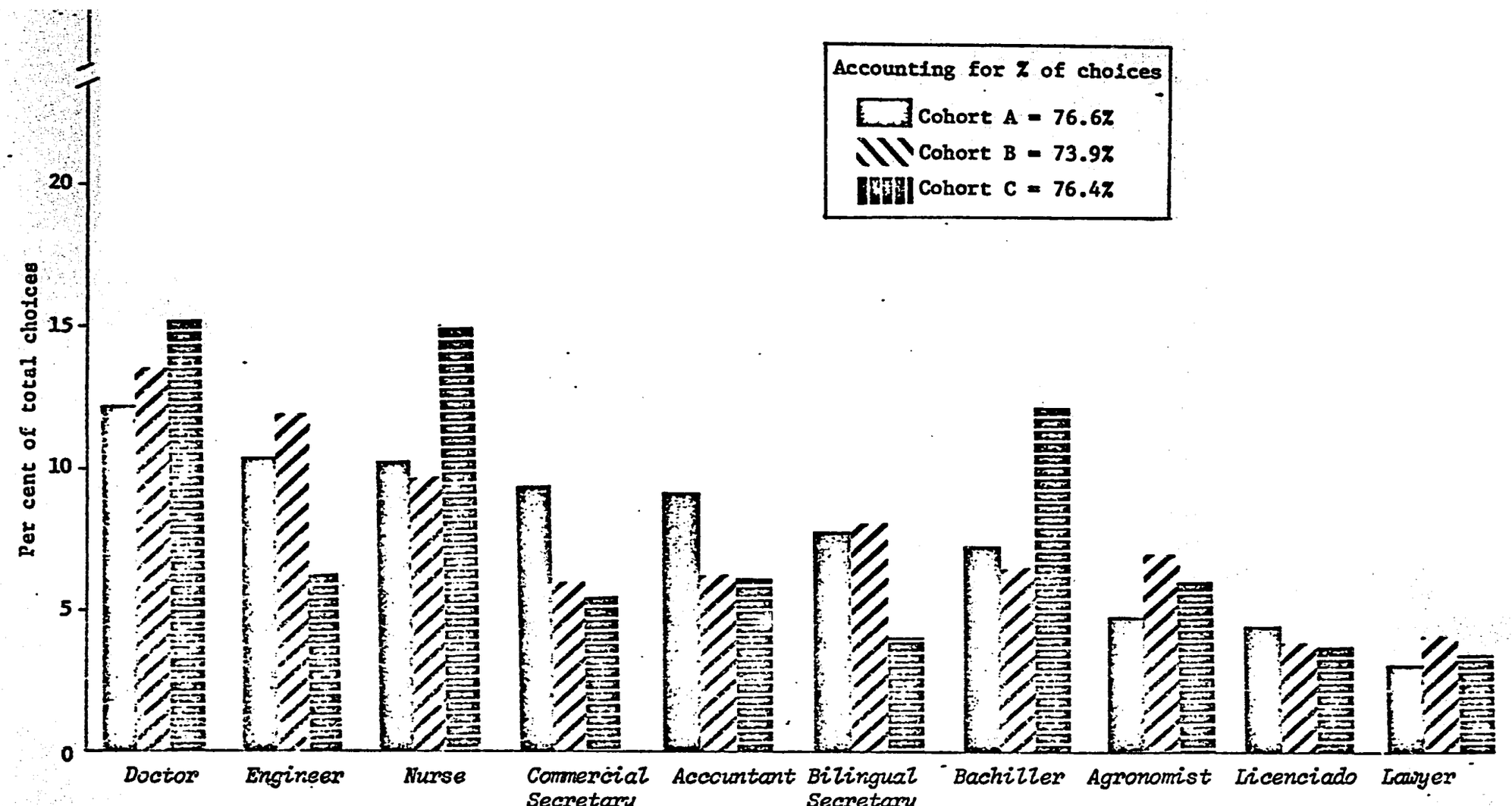
a somewhat lower level of occupational aspiration was found in each succeeding group. The fact that there was no corresponding decline in the pattern of educational aspirations of the three cohorts suggests that the students were quite realistic in their judgments, since in a scarce job market the educational requirements for all jobs would inevitably rise and it would therefore be wise to get as much school as possible before going to work, regardless of what level of job they aspired to.

Career Preferences

Over the four years of research, a stable picture emerged of the kinds of careers aspired to by Salvadoran students. Ten career choices accounted for about 75 percent of the students' preferences; the other 25 percent were spread over perhaps 20 to 30 jobs. The ten leading career selections, which were remarkably consistent for all three student cohorts and across six measurement waves were, at level two: accountant, commercial secretary, nurse, bachiller (advanced secondary school graduate), bilingual secretary, and agricultural technician. At level three, the favorite choices were: doctor, engineer, licenciado (university graduate), and lawyer. Occasionally, other choices appeared in the top ten, but these only accounted for a small percentage of the students.

Figure 1 presents a graphic view of the most popular choices for each student cohort at the end of eighth grade. They are arranged in a descending order of preference for Cohort A and illustrate some differences among the three cohorts. There were some noteworthy changes in popularity among the top ten career choices within the three cohorts. The careers of accountant and commercial secretary declined somewhat,

FIGURE 1 Top Ten Occupational Choices for Cohorts A, B, and C at end of eighth grade



while agricultural technician, doctor, engineer, and licensiado all rose. The remaining careers of nurse, lawyer, bachiller, and bilingual secretary held more or less steady.

Sex Differences in Educational and Occupational Aspirations

The differences between the levels of educational and occupational aspirations have been noted, with students generally opting for more schooling than would be considered necessary for the particular jobs they desired. A second important difference emerged when the aspiration levels of boys and girls were compared. As Table 3 illustrates, across the three cohorts from 7 percent to 17 percent more boys than girls sought university education the last time aspirations were measured. At that time, the majority of boys aspired to the university while most girls aimed at advanced secondary school programs.

There were also sharp differences in the level and kinds of career choices expressed by boys and girls. Table 4 summarizes the data for Cohorts A, B, and C. Girls aspired less to professional careers than the boys but the gap narrowed somewhat over their three years of Third Cycle. By the end of ninth grade, 51.1 percent of Cohort A boys chose professional careers as opposed to only 35.5 percent of girls. For Cohort B, the percentages were 45.1 and 33.2 respectively; and for Cohort C (end of eighth grade), 44.4 and 27.1.

A few careers were favored by both boys and girls, notably doctor, bachiller, licenciado, teacher, and accountant. Others were selected exclusively by one group or the other: nurse and secretary for girls; agronomist, mechanic, industrial technician, lawyer, and engineer for boys. The career preferences of girls were relatively few, with nursing the overwhelming first choice of all three cohorts. Boys expressed a

TABLE 3

Educational Aspiration by Sex for Cohorts A, B and C
at the Beginning and End of Their Schooling (end 8th for C)

	Finish Third Cycle Only		Finish All of Secondary		University Studies or Post-Grad	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
COHORT A: (N=902)						
Begin 7th	12.7	7.1	43.5	65.1	42.8	26.9
End 8th	5.9	3.9	45.7	57.0	48.4	39.2
End 9th	2.8	1.6	34.3	52.6	62.8	45.8
COHORT B: (N=707)						
Begin 7th	11.5	5.5	49.9	56.6	38.4	38.0
End 8th	5.2	1.4	32.9	44.7	61.9	53.8
End 9th	2.3	1.3	40.9	48.9	56.7	49.8
COHORT C: (N=600)						
Begin 7th	13.1	5.5	42.9	49.6	44.0	44.9
End 8th	8.9	4.0	40.5	56.1	50.6	39.9

Gains over 2-3 years: University Ed.

Cohort A:	Boys:	+20.0
	Girls:	+19.1
Cohort B:	Boys:	+18.3
	Girls:	+11.8
Cohort C:	Boys:	+6.6
	Girls:	-5.0

TABLE 4

Occupation Choice Levels by Sex for Cohorts A, B and C
at the Beginning of Seventh and End of Ninth (Eighth for C)

	Level One		Level Two		Level Three	
COHORT A: (N=902)	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Begin 7th:	6.7	0.9	58.5	83.0	34.4	16.0
End 9th	3.1	0.3	45.4	64.2	51.5	35.5
COHORT B: (N=707)						
Begin 7th	3.6	0.0	52.9	74.5	43.8	24.1
End 9th	4.4	1.4	49.4	64.1	46.2	34.5
COHORT C: (N=600)						
Begin 7th	6.2	0.0	52.5	83.1	41.3	16.9
End 8th	3.1	1.2	50.7	69.1	44.4	27.2

much greater variety of career aspirations.

The large differences in the aspiration levels of Salvadoran boys and girls were not particularly surprising. Parallel sex differences with regard to learning were also found (Hornik et al, 1973) and the results were consistent with studies conducted on the secondary school systems of other developing countries. The sex differences in aspiration of secondary school students in all parts of the world reflect deeply rooted cultural attitudes and values. These attitudes and values affect not only achievement, but also how boys and girls form career goals and appraise different job opportunities. The following sections will examine these factors in more detail and discuss how much they influenced aspirations in El Salvador.

The Formation of Student Aspirations

Within the pattern of high educational and occupational aspiration there was considerable variation among students. In order to identify the sources of this variation and to determine which students would be likely to seek university degrees and which would be satisfied with alternative academic programs, the relation of aspirations to various background variables and parental attitudes was examined.

Six control or student background variables were defined: sex, age, father's education, wealth, urbanization, and general ability.* For aspiration, a three-point index was created out of the students' responses to questions on educational and occupational aspiration: "2" was assigned to students who aspired to both university studies and a professional

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* Wealth was defined by the presence or absence of a television set in the home; general ability was tested on the level 4 Habilidad General exam prepared by Guidance Testing Associates, additional details in Hornik et al, 1973.

career; "1" was assigned to students who aspired either to the university or to an occupation requiring university training but not to both (in the large majority of cases, students who were assigned to this category had university level educational aspiration but lower occupational aspiration); and "0" was assigned to students who had middle or low range aspirations for both education and career.

Within each cohort and across all measurement waves, the relationships between the aspiration index and the control variables were consistent. Boys held higher aspirations than girls. Also, as Table 5 illustrates children of well educated parents, children from urban, wealthier homes and children who entered seventh grade at a younger age all expressed higher aspirations than their less advantaged companions. In addition, General Ability Test scores were positively related to aspiration levels. However, that relationship was little higher than would have been expected given the strong relation of the other background variables with general ability. The other five background variables were significantly related to general ability; and it is likely that they were prior to and probably causal of general ability (see Hornik, 1973). A proper way of examining the effect of general ability on aspirations therefore was to estimate the amount of variance in aspiration accounted for by general ability over and above the variance accounted for by the five other variables. Table 6 presents an analysis of each cohort's aspiration scores as they entered seventh grade noting the amount of variance in those scores accounted for by background and general ability. As that table indicated General Ability predicted no more than 1 percent additional variance in aspiration for any of the three cohorts.

While each of the five control variables (excluding general ability) were significantly related to aspiration, together they did not explain

TABLE 5

Correlations: Aspirations Index x Control Variables, All Cohorts

	Cohort A N=902		Cohort B N=707		Cohort C N=600	
	Aspiration Beg. 7th	Aspiration End 9th	Aspiration Beg. 7th	Aspiration End 9th	Aspiration Beg. 7th	Aspiration End 8th
Fath. ed.	.20	.21	.26	.25	.22	.34
Wealth	.24	.22	.23	.28	.33	.35
Age	-.18	-.15	-.21	-.25	-.17	-.23
Urbanization*	.13	.21	.07	.20	.24	.31
Sex**	.21	.20	.11	.11	.15	.18
General Ability	.17	.18	.19	.27	.22	.27

*rural = 1, urban = 5

**female = 0, male = 1

TABLE 6

Variance in Aspiration Accounted for by Control Variables, All Cohorts, Beginning of Seventh Grade

	Cohort A N=703	Cohort B N=591	Cohort C N=462
Variance accounted for by 5 control variables (sex, age, fath. ed., wealth, urbanization)	.129	.117	.154
Variance accounted for by 5 control variables plus General Ability	.135	.122	.161

very much of the variation in that variable. Referring again to Table 6, one finds that these variables explained no more than 16 percent of the variance, leaving 84 percent due to other influences (2).

When this analysis was extended to aspiration scores at the end of three years for Cohorts A and B and at the end of two years for Cohort C, there was an increment in predictive power of the five control variables only for Cohort C. Table 7 reports the variance in aspiration explained by the five control variables in the final surveys of each cohort. Even though 23 percent of the variation in the aspirations of Cohort C students could be explained by the five control variables, there was clearly a great deal more to the formation of aspiration than the interplay of these background factors.

However, the background factors do serve a useful function in helping to predict what the future aspirations of Salvadoran students are likely to be. Assuming that the causal process for the formation of aspiration will be unchanged in the future (e.g., that present influences will continue to have the same importance and that no new influences appear), the mean aspiration levels of future Third Cycle students can be estimated (3).

As the number of students in Third Cycle increases, the socioeconomic characteristics of the average student are likely to change quite radically. There was a clear decline in mean socioeconomic status from Cohort B to Cohort C. As more and more students finish primary school and are thus eligible to enter seventh grade, that trend should increase. From the data reported above, it was also known that students from lower socioeconomic strata held lower aspirations. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that a higher proportion of future students will come from lower social strata and that they will have lower aspirations (4).

TABLE 7

Variance in Aspiration Accounted for by Control Variables, All Cohorts, End of Ninth Grade (Cohorts A and B), End of Eighth (Cohort C)

	Cohort A N=703	Cohort B N=591	Cohort C N=462
Variance accounted for by sex, age, fath. ed., wealth, and urbanization	.128	.147	.230

However, it is unlikely that fewer than 35% of future ninth grade graduates will aspire to university level education and professions. The remaining 65% are at least likely to seek to complete high school.

Parental Attitudes and Student Aspirations

A special study was conducted in 1970 to explore parental attitudes and their relation to student aspirations. A sample of 247 parents of eighth grade boys was interviewed. The parent sample was stratified by urban or rural residence, by son's presence in an ITV or non-ITV class, and by the aspiration levels of the sons.

Table 8 displays the levels of schooling Salvadoran parents desired for their sons and the levels the sons themselves aspired to at the beginning and end of the eighth grade. The parents' educational aspirations for their sons were strongly related to the demographic variables discussed earlier in this chapter. Seventy-five percent of the parents from the capital city of San Salvador wanted their sons to continue through the secondary or university level, while less than 40 percent of parents from the most rural areas held a similar preference. Mothers had generally lower aspirations than fathers. A majority of the mothers said they wanted their sons to study no more than a Carrera Corta (short commercial course available to ninth grade graduates); only 35 percent of the fathers said that a similar amount of schooling would be sufficient. When urbanization was controlled, the sex differences were qualified somewhat. As Table 9 illustrates, the aspirations of urban mothers fell between those of the urban and rural fathers, but rural mothers were heavily concentrated at the lower half of the scale. Less than 35 percent of rural mothers wanted their sons

TABLE 8

Comparison of Parents' and Sons' Educational Aspirations

(Percentages)

	Finish 9th grade	Finish advanced secondary course	Finish university
Parents (Sept., '70) N=247	9	52	39
Sons (Mar., '70) N=247	9	39	43
Sons (Oct., '70) N=231	5	37	58

TABLE 9

Educational Aspirations of Parents for Sons
By Sex, with Urbanization Levels Controlled

(Percentages)

	Finish PB	Finish CC	Finish Bach.	Finish Univ.
Urban men (N=74)	5	28	15	51
Urban women (N=67)	5	34	18	43
Rural men (N=46)	11	30	24	35
Rural women (N=59)	15	53	8	24

to study beyond a Carrera Corta. The high incidence of missing husbands and the poverty of many rural families suggested that rural mothers were counting on their sons to become family breadwinners as soon as possible.

To gain a richer understanding of the rationale behind the parents' aspirations, they were asked to specify what advantages would accrue if their sons completed some advanced schooling. The number of different advantages the parents could give covaried to a significant degree with both the level of their own education and the education they wanted for their sons. hus, 42 percent of the parents with no schooling and 57 percent of the parents at the lowest aspiration level could not name more than one advantage or reason why their sons should finish ninth grade. In contrast, over 45 percent of the well-educated parents and those who wanted their sons to reach the university were able to express three or more advantages.

Three underlying themes were extracted from the scores of different advantages Salvadoran parents associated with the amount of schooling they desired for their sons. Of prime importance to over 40 percent of the sample were the kinds of jobs a young man would qualify for by staying in school beyond the ninth grade. Tied to the aspirations of this group for advanced academic training -- Carrera Corta, Bachillerato, or university -- was the vision of a career which would guarantee their sons, and indirectly themselves, a more secure future.

A second theme was that of self-esteem. Parents who cited this "advantage" took note of the need for their sons to act independently and with self-confidence in their society. Educated persons, they felt, could not be taken advantage of in ordinary business affairs. The patriotic sentiment that educated people were of greater value to the nation was another frequently mentioned advantage related to this same theme.

The final theme, encompassing approximately a quarter of the responses, was that of "helping the family." To be sure, this theme was related to employment, but it also bore a directness and sincerity that deserves special mention. Parents who envisioned such an "advantage" emphasized the important role that an educated son would ultimately be expected to play in his family. In this sense, advanced schooling implied increased responsibility for the educated son. Parents who responded in this way were generally poor and from rural areas. To a great extent, they seemed to regard an educated son as an emissary who would eventually provide for other members of the family who had not enjoyed the same opportunities and good fortune.

When parents were asked what occupation they would most like to see their sons enter after completing school, 33 percent favored a professional career, 47 percent a middle level occupation, and 20 percent a low level job. Although these selections were somewhat lower than the ones the boys themselves had chosen (see Table 10), it was clear that the parents' preferences for their sons had not been unduly restrained by how they regarded their own situations.

Familiar variations according to sex and place of residence were echoed in the job preferences stated by the parents. Although a middle level career was the typical choice of respondents of both sexes and from each urbanization category, substantial differences were uncovered in the proportions choosing high and low level occupations. Forty percent of all male parents desired a professional career for their sons as against 27 percent of the female respondents. By coincidence, the exact same percentages also distinguished urban and rural respondents. As expected, rural women held the lowest aspirations for their sons -- more than 25 percent of this group mentioned a low level job as a first choice.

TABLE 10

Levels of Job Aspirations of Salvadoran Parents and Their Sons

(Percentages)

	JOB LEVELS		
	Low	Middle	High
Parents (N=247)	20	47	33
Sons (N=247)	3	47	50

The five careers most frequently mentioned by the parents are listed in Table 11, alongside the ones selected by their sons earlier in the same year. On the surface it would appear that there was considerable agreement between parents and sons, and that the two generations overlapped in their assessments of what are the most desirable occupations in El Salvador. To determine whether the overlapping choice patterns of parents and sons were coincidental or the result of personal interaction, the parents were asked if they knew their sons' job preferences and, if so, to state what they were. As a measure of the consistency between the generations, the actual choices of the boys were then cross-tabulated with the ones their parents attributed to them.

Sixty-eight percent of the parents said they knew what jobs their sons aspired to, and this proportion did not vary substantially when the groups were broken down by sex, urbanization, or SES. However, when the choices the boys had made at the beginning of the year were matched against the ones their parents had indicated, it was discovered that there was agreement in only one-quarter of the cases. The most probable explanation for this was that the majority of parents were not really aware of their son's choices, but were reluctant to admit it. When asked to be specific, they therefore gave what amounted to a best guess of their sons' preferences. The contrasting levels of reported aspiration revealed that the parents' estimateds may have been based largely on their own preferences.

With few exceptions, it was discovered that Salvadoran parents had little contact with or knowledge of their sons' schools, yet they placed a tremendous importance on education per se. Perhaps because of their own lack of experience in this area, the parents did not seem to have directly influenced the educational aspirations or expectations of their

TABLE 11

Careers Most Frequently Selected by Parents and Sons and the Proportions of Respondents Who Mentioned Them

Parents	Sons
Accountant (26)	Engineer (19)
Doctor (10)	Accountant (13)
Engineer (8)	Doctor (12)
Agricultural technician (8)	Bachiller (10)
Mechanic (7)	Agricultural technician (8)

sons; rather, their influence had been indirect and tied closely to underlying variations in their own educational experiences, social class, sex, and place of residence.

The ability to obtain a steady, well-paying job was the sole justification for advanced schooling in the eyes of most Salvadoran parents. The positions they envisioned for their sons paralleled the choices the sons themselves had made, but there was little evidence that parents and sons had discussed this topic among themselves. Nevertheless, the occupational aspirations of both generations were concentrated largely on the careers which traditionally have promised social mobility and prestige.

The Follow-up of the First ITV Graduates

A reasonable critic might view the whole question of student aspirations with some skepticism. Were the aspirations expressed on a series of paper and pencil questionnaires true expectations, or were they just the fantasies of young people who knew full well that they would probably have to be satisfied with considerably less? An attempt was made to answer this question within the student questionnaires. The students' second choice aspirations, were solicited, their willingness to leave school after the ninth grade for a good job was checked, and they were asked how sure they were that they would achieve their educational aspirations. The responses to such questions were ambiguous; some confirmed and some called into question the students' intentions.

Another method for assessing the validity of students' aspirations was to check up on the students after their graduation from the ninth grade. To this end, a sample of 400 Cohort A graduates was interviewed

in 1972. The principal purposes of the follow-up study were to discover what had become of the first group of students under the Reform and to see whether their careers conformed to the career and educational aspirations they had expressed before graduation (Ingle, 1973).

The answer for the great majority of students in the sample was that their educational aspirations were consistent with what they were doing, As Table 12 indicates, of the 392 graduates who were finally interviewed, 86 percent were continuing their education.

Table 13 reveals that there was a slightly high proportion of girls than boys continuing their education. However, when the "studying and working part-time" group was added to the "studying only" group, the proportions of boys and girls involved in some type of study activity was about equal.

About 50 percent of the graduates who were continuing with their education were enrolled in an academic Bachillerato as Table 14 indicates. Thirty-two percent of the graduates continuing their education were studying commercial or business administration; eight percent were in the industrial Bachillerato; and about 10 percent were dispersed among the various new Bachilleratos (e.g., agriculture, fishing and navigation, hygiene and health, hotel and tourism, teacher training, fine arts, etc.).

Of the 336 graduates continuing their education, about half were able to enroll in a bachillerato in the same city or town where they finished their Third Cycle education, but the other 50 percent either had to commute to other cities and towns on a daily basis (26 percent) or had to establish their residences in new locations (24 percent). This trend suggested that conditions were set for a migration of Third Cycle graduates to the bigger towns and cities, further retarding the development of rural areas and intensifying the overcrowding of El

TABLE 12

Percentage of Graduates Involved in Different Activities

(N=392)

(N=336)	Studying	86%
(N=15)	Studying and working	4%
(N=16)	Only working	4%
(N=25)	Neither working nor studying	6%

TABLE 13

Percentages of Male/Female Graduates Studying

(N=392)

	Boys (N=217)	N	Girls (N=175)	N
Studying	82%	178	90%	158
Studying and working	6%	12	2%	3
Only working	5%	11	3%	5
Neither working nor studying	7%	16	5%	9

TABLE 14

Distribution of Graduates Among Different Bachillerato Programs

(Percentages)

	Academic Program	Comm. or Bus. Administration	Industrial	Others	N
Total	50%	32%	8%	10%	336
Students who were in TV classes	43	37	9	12	209
Students from control classes	60	8	25	6	48
Students from Traditional classes	63	22	6	9	79

Salvador's urban areas.

Table 15 presents a breakdown of the reasons the students gave for continuing their studies. They included the desire (1) to undertake university studies; (2) to better their chances for a good job; (3) to improve their over-all knowledge; and/or (4) to earn a degree or title.

All the graduates in the sample (including those graduates who were "only working" or "neither working nor studying") were asked about their future plans. As Table 16 indicates, the majority of the graduates planned to continue their studies on either a full-time or part-time basis; and of these, 88 percent opted for the bachillerato studies. Only nine percent indicated an interest in the subprofessional study programs. Whether or not students wished to attend the university, most indicated that they did not wish to forfeit the option of university studies in the future. Table 16 outlines the percentage breakdowns on the various work-study combinations the graduates cited.

It is not known, of course, how many of these students will actually finish their bachillerato studies and go on to the university. Longer range follow-up studies will be required to evaluate the graduates' future career paths. But there can be little doubt that the aspirations expressed by these students reflected genuine expectations and when it is recalled that 25 percent of the students had changed their residences so as to be able to attend bachillerato, it is hard to doubt the students' commitment to education. Yet, more than half of the ninth grade graduates still in school were enrolled in the traditional bachillerato programs leading to the university. This suggested that the young people were aspiring to high level administrative and professional careers rather than to the middle-level technical and business programs toward which the Educational Reform had hoped to

TABLE 15

Reasons Graduates Gave for Continuing Their Education

(Percentages)

1.	Aspirations for university studies	35%
2.	Better one's chances for a good job	32
3.	Improve one's general knowledge	27
4.	Obtain academic degree or title	21
5.	Better adapt to the changing times	11
6.	Secure prestige and statu associated with education	10
7.	Better prepare oneself for the role of parenthood	9
8.	Earn more money	4

TABLE 16

Future Work/Study Plans Proposed by Graduates

(Percentages)

1.	Continue with present Bachillerato studies full-time	68%
2.	Begin first year of a Bachillerato program full-time	3
3.	Look for part-time job and continue Bachillerato	17
4.	Continue with a Carrera Corta program	4
5.	Begin Carrera Corta program	2
6.	Look for part-time job and continue Carrera Corta	3
7.	Part-time or full-time work only	2

direct them.

It may also be that the large percentage of ninth grade graduates who were continuing their studies is an indication of how difficult it is for young people to find work in El Salvador. Of the 56 graduates who were not studying full-time almost half were unemployed. El Salvador may be in for trouble in the future if job opportunities cannot be found for ninth grade graduates and aspirations are transformed into increased frustration and social unrest.

This finding calls into question the basic assumptions of the investment in educational reform. El Salvadoran planners perceived this massive effort as a necessary investment in the country's only natural resource as a precedent to industrial development. If, in fact, there are no jobs for graduates, the correctness of the investment must be questioned. It is, of course, too early to tell. In future years job opportunities may open up. However, clearly enough, this external criterion, available employment at a level suitable for ninth grade graduates, will be one important measure of the success of the educational reform.

Summary and Implications

In order to assess the career and educational aspirations of Salvadoran students under the Reform, comprehensive studies were conducted throughout the four years of research. Aspiration data were gathered on each student cohort as it entered the seventh grade and from time to time throughout each cohort's career in Third Cycle (grades 7-9). The relation of various background variables and parental attitudes to student aspirations were analyzed in some detail, and, in an attempt to get beyond the hypothetical aspirations that had been expressed by the students on various questionnaires, a follow-up study of the first group of ninth grade graduates was undertaken in the second semester following their graduation.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine whether the Reform produced great changes in student aspirations since there was no comparable baseline data from before 1969. Nevertheless, the data gathered in the four year period convey one clear warning: the aspirations of students for both education and jobs were so high as to present a real problem to Salvadoran planners in the immediate future.

1. Advanced schooling was clearly regarded by students as the key to success in El Salvador. More than 90 percent of the students surveyed in each of the three cohorts wished to continue their studies beyond the ninth grade, and approximately 50 percent hoped to obtain a university degree. In the first two student cohorts, the desire for advanced studies increased over time; in the third and last cohort, a high level of educational aspiration was expressed at the beginning of seventh grade and retained throughout the last two years of research.

Given El Salvador's high level of unemployment and the shortage of well paying jobs at the middle level, it was understandable that so many

students aspired to university careers. They apparently recognized that the best jobs would be awarded to university graduates, and that a good job was the best guarantee of social prestige and mobility in the years ahead. To this extent, their educational aspirations must be considered realistic. These same aspirations must be considered unrealistic, however, in terms of the students' actual chances for fulfilling them. The probability of students continuing through the university will actually be reduced if enrollment projection for Third Cycle are eventually realized.

2. How far the students said they wanted to go in school and how confident they were of getting there varied according to sex, socio-economic status, place of residence, and general ability, although general ability did not appear to exert as much influence as other factors. Boys from the higher social strata who lived in an urban area were the most desirous of pursuing a university career.

3. The students' occupational aspirations were more closely tied to their origins than their education aspirations, with Cohort C students exhibiting somewhat lower job aspirations than the other two cohorts, but the desire for professional employment was high among all but the most rural students. It was clear that the status of different jobs was of great importance to the students, and job status was apparently determined by traditional values and by the academic degrees customarily required to qualify for different positions. The consistency between the students' educational and occupational aspirations indicated that the students had not made random responses, but had probably given some prior thought to their choices.

4. A sample of Salvadoran parents interviewed in 1970 expressed generally lower education and occupational aspirations for their sons

than the sons had for themselves. There was considerable variation among the parents, however, according to sex, urbanization, and SES. Urban fathers who had some schooling beyond the primary level held the highest aspirations for their sons, while rural mothers, who rarely had completed more than one or two years of school, expressed the lowest aspirations.

The parents placed great importance on education for their children, but their ability to provide guidance was limited by their own lack of schooling and their lack of knowledge of El Salvador's school system and the Educational Reform. Little evidence was found to suggest that parents had consciously attempted to mold their sons' aspirations. A large majority of the parents, in fact, said they would support whatever their sons decided to do, although their magnanimity was often tempered by an admission that it would be difficult for them to pay all the expenses that an advanced academic program would entail.

In contrast to the boys, who tended to justigy their high aspirations in idealistic and often altruistic terms, the parents were practical in their thinking. Advanced schooling was necessary, most believed, because it would enable their sons to obtain good jobs. Furthermore, earning potential would be increased and good salaries would allow the sons to assist other members of their families. Particularly attractive to the parents were middle-level, white-collar jobs.

5. A follow-up study of ninth grade graduates provided the first hard evidence on what happened to students schooled under the Reform. On the one hand, the findings were encouraging. Over 85 percent of the students were continuing their education and the Reform was to some extent achieving its objective of directing more students into the diversified technical career programs at the Bachillerato level. On the

other hand, the results were discouraging. Half of those students continuing their education were enrolled in the most traditional of the Bachillerato programs leading to the university. This suggested that the young people were aiming for professional careers, rather than to the middle-level technical jobs the Educational Reform had hoped to fill.

Conditions were being set for a migration of Third Cycle graduates to the cities. The 50/50 percentage split between graduates who were able to continue their education in the same town where they finished ninth grade and graduates who were forced to commute to other towns and cities or to establish their residences in new locations illuminated a strong urban migration pattern. This may argue for a greater decentralization of schools away from urban areas in the future and/or the development of viable non-formal schooling alternatives in the various geographic localities of the country. The considerably higher proportion of graduates from the rural areas who were neither working nor studying and the lower proportion of rural students among full-time students underscores the inequality of educational opportunities for the rural student and also argues for the above alternatives.

The students' high educational aspirations and expectations were not surprising in a country where schooling is still regarded as a sure passport to success and social mobility. When access to higher education is limited, its value and attraction may become exaggerated. This seems to be what has occurred in El Salvador

El Salvador's universities will not expand at the rate which would be necessary to satisfy the aspirations of today's Third Cycle students. With the plan to make nine grades of basic schooling available to all children, entrance to the prestigious Bachillerato level may also become

more exclusive, despite the government's attempts to expand and diversify education at that level. It must be concluded, therefore, that the high educational aspirations of students are not realistic in terms of the tangible opportunities available to them in the near future.

If, as the evidence suggests, students are unrealistic in the assessment of their own chances for obtaining higher education and the most prestigious professional jobs, an important task of El Salvador's educational planners in the coming years will be to help students made the adjustment between their personal aspirations and the changing realities and needs of their society. Through their ambitious and far-reaching Educational Reform, the Salvadorans have expanded opportunity and improved the efficiency of their educational system, but they do not seem, as yet, to have encouraged young people to think about alternative forms of technical training and employment.

Footnotes

(1) ODEPOR, "Plan Quinquenal del Ramo Educacion, 1973-San Salvador, p. 21

(2) Estimates of explained variance carry with them the assumption that all variables were measured in a perfectly reliable fashion. This assumption is clearly untenable, for aspiration reliability was probably between .55 and .65. Since unreliability implies an underestimate of explained variance, the reported estimates could be 50 to 100 percent too small. Even if we assume such an error, however, approximately 70 percent of the variance would remain unexplained, still a large percentage.

(3) This may be a shaky set of assumptions. If more and more Salvadoran students are forced to leave school at the end of ninth grade, it is reasonable to expect that students entering seventh grade will take note of this trend and lower their aspirations accordingly. New information of this sort can not be taken into account since we have no estimate of what its effect is likely to be. An additional assumption of such forecasting is that the causal processes are essentially linear; that the change in the dependent variable resulting from a given increment in the independent variable will be the same no matter where in the range of the independent variable that increment occurs. For example, if we use a five-point urbanization scale, it is assumed that a change from 0 to 1 on that scale will have the same effect on aspirations as a change from 4 to 5. While that is a general assumption of all correlational analyses, it is particularly critical when one wishes to make predictions about populations whose characteristics may be quite different than the one for which the parameters were estimated.

(4) To estimate how much decline is likely to take place, a regression equation was used to predict Cohort C aspiration at the end of eighth grade from the five control variables estimated with unstandardized coefficients. Unstandardized coefficients simplified the generalization of the model implied by the equation to a population with different characteristics than that for which the equation was generated. That equation was quite similar to that for Cohort B aspiration at the end of eighth grade with the same five variables, which gives us confidence that the same causal processes were operating for both cohorts, despite some sharp differences in average socioeconomic makeup.

Once the equation was available, hypothetical estimates were made of the characteristics of future Third Cycle populations on each of the five independent variables. While there was no way of knowing precisely what future students' characteristics will be, some educated guesses could be made. In Table 17 the first column displays the unstandardized coefficients for each of the variables in the regression equation. The second and third columns display the observed sample means for Cohorts B and C on the five independent variables and aspiration at the end of Eighth Grade. Column four represents

TABLE 17

Prediction of Aspirations of Future Student Cohorts

	Coefficient from Cohort C equation	Observed mean Cohort B	Observed mean Cohort C	Hypothetical Sample as distant from C as C is from B	Hypothetical sample lowest limits of SES
Sex (% male)	.32131	55.98	52.7%	49.42	49.42*
Fath. Ed. (1=Part primary) (2=All primary)	.11119	2.0444	1.839	1.6336	1.25
Age	-.04424	13.616	13.8217	14.221	14.221
Wealth (% TV ownership)	.336	49.93%	41.95%	33.97	30.00
Urban (1=Rural 5=City)	.09857	2.2447	2.0556	1.8675	1.800
Intercept	.744				
ASP (end of 8th)		1.1669*	.8624*	.7599**	.6999**
% University		58%	43%	38%	35%
% Non-University (almost always high school)		42%	57%	62%	65%

*observed

**estimated mean, given Cohort C coefficients and hypothetical means for the control variables

hypothetical case #1; it is assumed that future students would be as different from Cohort C as Cohort C was from Cohort B. In column five, hypothetical case #2 is represented. The mean characteristics in case #2 are estimated lower limits; it was expected that the children in Third Cycle would never be less advantaged in background than is represented in those figures.

Given those characteristics, and the equation from Cohort C, we estimated likely future aspirations. If Cohort B had a mean aspiration of 1.17 on our three-point aspiration scale, and Cohort C a mean of .86, hypothetical Cohort 1 might have a mean of .76 and Cohort 2, a mean of .70. Those figures can be converted into the percentage who had educational and occupational aspirations at the university level, and the percentage who did not, by dividing those students who were inconsistent in aspiration 50/50 between university and non-university levels. The final two rows of Table 17 report those percentages. As a best guess, assuming a sharp decline in socioeconomic level of the seventh grade entrants in the next few years, future Third Cycle cohorts are still likely to include a substantial proportion expecting to go on to the university (35 percent) with almost all the rest expecting to finish an advanced secondary school program. As discussed in the final section of this chapter, those aspirations are very unlikely to be fulfilled.

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