

The Process of Inclusion in Higher Education of the Beca 18 Program in Vulnerable Populations of Huanuco, Peru

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to analyze the situation of the young beneficiaries of the Social Program called Beca 18, not only its percentage of admission but, above all, the factors that determine that some of its beneficiaries decide to drop out. It is a study based on basic research, in which inductive and deductive methods with sequential design were used, as well as documentary analysis techniques together with observation, interviews, and surveys. The sample consisted of young beneficiaries of the program who are studying in public or private Universities or Technological Institutes in the Department of Huanuco. The results showed that 62% of the beneficiaries came from agricultural areas and the rest from working families and/or informal workers. In terms of academic performance, 15% stated that they needed academic reinforcement. On the other hand, concerning the development in social spaces of higher education, 34% state that they have been victims of marginalization for cultural reasons; 44% affirm that there is marginalization based on economic position; and 26% express feelings of not belonging to the university social group. Finally, 68% of beneficiaries indicate that there are scholarship recipients who did not complete their professional careers. Based on these figures, this research concludes by indicating that, although the purpose of the Beca 18 Program is to promote the continuation of higher education for young people with few resources and in a state of vulnerability, it is not enough since it does not intervene in aspects such as social inclusion (inequality, marginalization, and belonging) and the interculturality of the beneficiaries, which encourages them to drop out of university.

Keywords: Educational scholarship, higher education, educational quality, social inclusion.

1. Introduction

According to the National Household Survey (2013), only 22% of young people under 23 years of age who complete their high school studies can access higher education. Of this group, 15% drop out at some point during their studies. Likewise, only 8% of young people between 25 and 34 years of age, who live in poverty or extreme poverty, manage to complete their higher education. In addition, in this context of the pandemic, the

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university dropout rate in 2020 was 18% (around 174,000 students), mainly for reasons of economic solvency, connectivity, and/or academic leveling (INEI, 2020).

These and other related figures are evidence of a persistent problem in Peru that, although it has tried to mitigate through the implementation of various public policies and/or social programs, it has not resulted in sustainable and effective solutions over time. Part of this problem lies in maintaining a purely monetary approach and not addressing other variables, especially those related to social and cultural dynamics. This is what this study has identified in the Beca 18 Program.

First implemented during the administration of former President Ollanta Humala, Beca 18 was designed as a social program, whose main objective is to reduce the educational gap in access, permanence, and completion of higher education studies, focusing especially on young people from poor and extremely poor households. This scholarship is aimed at the population between 16 and 22 years of age who have also studied in state schools. It mainly finances undergraduate studies in public and private universities and institutes nationwide. It also covers the costs of academic leveling, tutoring, enrollment, tuition, board, study materials, English classes, and graduation, as well as housing, food, transportation, and health insurance (PRONABEC, 2020).

Although based on the description above, it may be indicated that the program is the most adequate and meets all the needs that the beneficiaries may require, as will be shown in the following, this is not entirely true. In this sense, the following hypothesis will be defended: The effectiveness of the Scholarship 18 Program is positive in the access to Higher Education; however, it is weak in the permanence and conclusion of the professional careers of its beneficiaries. Consequently, the program would not be fulfilling its objective of reducing the educational gaps in the poor and extremely poor sectors.

To support this hypothesis, it has been decided to divide the article into four main parts. First, a review of the materials and methods used will be made, in order to give reliability to the results obtained. As a second point, the product of this research will be presented, which, in statistics, outlines the current situation of the beneficiaries of the program under analysis. On this basis, in a third point, the central discussion of the research will be presented, i.e., the causes that may explain the university dropout of the young beneficiaries of the program. Finally, the conclusions reached will be presented.

2. Material and Methods

According to Santiago Valderrama (2013), basic research at an explanatory level was used. This was done to develop an overall picture of the situation of young beneficiaries, having an analysis based on the construction of a theoretical framework and, in turn, designing an explanatory format that seeks not only to describe or approach the problem but also to find the causes of the problem. In this sense, the methodology used was both inductive and deductive.

The population or sample consisted of 78 beneficiaries of the program in the Department of Huanuco. Of these, 62 young people from different institutions of higher education were taken as a representative sample for the evaluation of the results. Regarding the collection of information, the following techniques were used: documentary analysis, observation, interviews, surveys, file recording, and the pertinent instruments: questionnaires, documents (magazines, books, among others), and interview guides. All of which served to systematically diagnose and conceptualize the effectiveness of the Beca 18 Social Program. Finally, the data were processed through the SPSS V21 statistical program and presented in tables and graphs.

3. Results

According to the methods used, as well as the tools described, the following results were obtained:

3.1. Eighty-five percent of the beneficiaries receive a monthly allowance of 1,000 Nuevos Soles. However, the program makes a differentiated economic allocation, since the remaining 15% receive 774 Nuevos Soles. In perspective, these amounts are considered relatively reasonable for financing higher education in provinces such as Huánuco.

3.2. 23% of the beneficiary population reports a delay in the delivery of the subsidy, a relatively low figure, as 77% have no problems related to this aspect.

3.3. The amount received is considered insufficient by 33%, while 67% believe that the amount received is adequate to cover their needs.

3.4. 62% come from families engaged in agricultural activities. This figure is relevant since this particular activity is considered subsistence or self-consumption.

3.5. Of the beneficiaries, 78% are from the Huanuco region, 48% come from the Huanuco province, and the remaining 30% are from other provinces in the region, while 22% come from other regions of the country, but say they live in Huanuco.

3.6. Thirty-four percent indicate having a family income of fewer than 300 Soles per month. Likewise, 22% say they live on less than 1,000 Soles per month. These are relevant data, as they allow classifying these young people within the economically poor population.

3.7. 87% say they receive an additional contribution of 100 Soles from their parents. Only 13% receive 400 Nuevos Soles or more as support. It should be noted at this point that all of these young people would not be able to study at a higher education center without the support provided by the program.

3.8. 81% express their intention to continue their studies, even if they were to lose the Beca 18 grant.

3.9. Fifteen percent express having deficiencies in their studies, while 61% state that they need academic reinforcement. Only 21% indicate that they do not need any type of academic reinforcement or support.

3.10. Thirty-four percent indicated that they have been victims, at least once, of marginalization in their study centers, mainly for cultural reasons. On the other hand, 66% say they have not experienced this type of situation.

3.11. 44% recognize that there is discrimination and/or marginalization of the poor in universities and higher education institutes. 1.61% consider that marginalization of the poor is permanent. Another 20% stated that it happens rarely and, finally, another 20% said that such marginalization happens rarely. It is worth noting that none of them claimed that such a situation does not exist.

3.12. 71% of students say they have not been offended in their self-esteem, and 29% say they have been offended at some time.

3.13. A worrying 10% believe that teachers assign lower grades to students from poorer social conditions, compared to those with better social conditions.

3.14. 26% have feelings of not belonging to the social group of their study centers. Although 74% of the students do feel that they do belong, the first figure is still a cause for concern.

3.15. 55% consider and recognize that Beca 18 covers all their study-related needs, while, on the contrary, 45% indicate that it is not enough.

3.16. 68% claim to know at least one student beneficiary who did not complete his or her studies.

4. Discussion

Education is a fundamental right recognized in the Political Constitution of Peru (articles 13, 14, 16, and 17), as well as in various international documents, among which the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and various International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions, among others, stand out. The latter, according to the IV Final and Transitory Provision of the Constitution, have constitutional rank and must be respected and complied with. Given this legal framework, it is evident that the right to education is not a mere declaration of intentions, but rather, it is an obligation for the Peruvian State.

In this regard, Landa affirms that this right is part of the set of rights known as “rights to benefits” (2006), which unlike other rights such as life and/or dignity, are not effective with their mere enactment; on the contrary, they also require a series of actions to make them effective in reality. Thus, it is not only relevant but is also, and above all necessary for the State to implement public policies or other actions aimed at granting this right fully to all citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic situation, gender, race, and culture, among others. This context is complemented by the World Bank's statement that, since the '90s, the neoliberal economic model has not worked perfectly, so the State has had to intervene, especially with the poorest sectors, to correct the imperfections of the model. According to Sanguinetti (1996) and Callinicos (2006), these imperfections are because, in the liberal design, it was considered that citizens were equal among themselves so the State should limit its intervention in social relations to the minimum, an approach that was later overturned by the overwhelming reality of countries such as Peru, which do not have a symmetrical dynamic in social relations. On the contrary, there are deep gaps that prevent a horizontal relationship. Concerning education, according to Moreno and Aguirre (2020), neoliberal adjustments have had a strong negative impact on access to education for the poor.

According to Alexandra Carrasco (2020), the neoliberal impact on education can be translated into two main axes. First, by considering that the State should not intervene in social relations, privatization and commercialization processes of public higher education are promoted. Second, in direct relation to the first factor, it is relevant to promote the privatization of education, since it is considered that the State is inefficient in bureaucratic management, which is why it would not make efficient use of public resources. The author also emphasizes that the acceptance of this model is also because the organizations that influence the design of national educational policies, such as the World Bank, among others, have been part of the dissemination and perpetuation of neoliberal thinking. However, as will be seen throughout the presentation, this model cannot be perpetuated, since it does not consider the innate difference between people in the same society, especially one in which some gaps are difficult to combat from the economic aspect alone, in the merit of which, according to Moreno and Muñoz (2020), there is what they called the return of the State in higher education, a collegiate neo-statism.

Based on the above, it is evident that the construction and implementation of social programs such as Beca 18 seek to make the right to education effective, in such a way that the social gaps generated by the lack or deficient realization of this right are reduced. That is, to achieve a democratization of education (Giovine and Antolín, 2019), at least in terms of access. However, as Bonal (2009) has argued, social programs are characterized by being exclusively monetary. That is, they are based exclusively on the economic factor and consider that the delivery of monetary subsidies is the most effective way to reduce social gaps, thus ignoring that this type of problem has a multisectoral treatment

involving social issues, and cultures, among others. Thus, in the specific case of Beca 18, the subsidy is given to the young beneficiaries, making other factors invisible. As expressed by Vries and Grijalva (2021), public policies assume that the main reasons behind dropout are economic; however, in their study, it was found that the main reason lies in what they called “youth culture”, which involves other factors in addition to the purely economic and even academic ones.

Similarly, Jennifer Chan de Ávila (2013), in her research “social inclusion and equity in Latin American Higher Education Institutions”, points out that social programs have generated positive results, but have forgotten other exclusion factors such as, for example, those originated in the lack of inclusion in the educational system. Likewise, he indicates that the inclusion of a population with different social and economic conditions in an environment where inequality exists is a problem that is not considered in the intervention processes of these programs. Therefore, it is logical that in a program such as Beca 18, where young people who, for the most part, come from a poor economic stratum, with poor school education, feel marginalized when they are inserted into the social dynamics of universities or institutes where it is common for them to interact with other young people who, possibly, have had greater and better opportunities.

As developed by Ariño (cited by Mercedes de Los ángeles et al., 2019), the current context is determined by a universal service university, that is, to achieve the greatest possible number of admissions, the main effect of this being relative democratization (since it only focuses on admission) and normalization of this educational stage, i.e., that the fact of pursuing higher education is something inertial, of common order. This is not part of Peru's reality, since this “normalization” has not yet been achieved. However, leaving aside this mismatch of reality, the truth is that this study presents a valid picture and that is that, having more open access to higher education, there is a growing heterogeneity in the composition of the classrooms and a significant asymmetry in educational competencies. That is, having students from different families and social categories, with different cultural and economic backgrounds and capitals who, for these reasons, will have different academic formations, sometimes totally asymmetrical. This is revealed in this study because 62% report coming from a family dedicated to agricultural activity, while at least 34% report having a family income of fewer than 300 soles per month. This, together with the other statistics, reflects this disparity, which is the element that constitutes the heterogeneity to which the author refers. In addition, if this characteristic is not adequately addressed, it generates conflicts and social ruptures, as represented by the 26% who say they do not feel a sense of belonging and the 34% who say they suffer from marginalization.

It is relevant to highlight this feeling of not belonging because, as indicated by Vargas (2019), several researchers point to psychological well-being as a variable related to academic performance. For Predes and Saucedo (2018), when the person does not fit the imaginary or institutional profile of the average student, that is, when he/she does not feel part of the social group he/she enters, the difficulties to conclude a career increase, it is clear that it is a factor to take into consideration and that has not been valued by the executors of the Beca 18 program. Meanwhile, according to the results, 61% (more than half) say they need academic reinforcement and 26% have a feeling of not belonging, which may be generated in the case of the beneficiaries because they feel excluded in the social environment of the University and/or Higher Institutes.

As Ana Valeria Hanne and Ana Inés Mainardi (2013) state in their article “Reflexiones sobre la inclusión de grupos en situación de vulnerabilidad en la educación superior” (Reflections on the inclusion of groups in vulnerable situations in higher education), the young people who are beneficiaries of these programs are indeed part of groups in vulnerable situations, because either by their age, ethnicity, gender, economic situation, physical characteristics, health status and/or cultural or political circumstances, they are at greater risk of having their rights (in this case the right to education) violated, fractioned

or annulled. What Gibney (2014) has called “atrophied citizenship”, i.e., people who formally belong to a State, since they hold their respective nationality and, therefore, their rights are recognized and protected. However, in the material or practical sphere, their ability to exercise these rights and enjoy certain privileges is “atrophied” by informal features of society, for example, racism, classism, and sexism, among others. Based on this, since, as the results show, 34% state that they have been marginalized for cultural reasons and 44% recognize discrimination against the poor, it can be said that a large percentage of beneficiaries may fall into this category of “atrophied citizenship”, since their right to education can and is, in reality, threatened and even annulled. Proof of this can be found in the statement of 68% regarding university dropouts.

Up to this point, the relationship between the importance of addressing social factors and the reduction of university dropout rates among young beneficiaries of the Beca 18 program is demonstrated, factors that were not taken into consideration in the planning and execution of the above-mentioned format, making it weak in its objective of reducing the gaps in access to education for people living in poverty or extreme poverty. In addition, the approach taken by the program also makes invisible the intersectionality of young people, that is, their belonging to different social groups (Convention of Belém do Pará, 1995). By reducing the intervention to a mere economic subsidy, it ignores that its beneficiaries are not only young people who want to continue their higher education but also belong to a specific social-economic stratum, with their difficulties and characteristics; likewise, they belong to different cultural groups with particular manifestations and customs and even with a mother tongue other than Spanish. Similarly, they may even face different situations among them due to their sex, gender, and sexual identity. The author Palomar Cristina (2018) highlights the gender factor since she indicates that it influences not only the access and continuation of higher education but also the development of professional life, being that, even though currently more women obtain a professional degree, in the working world they have fewer privileges, opportunities, positions, and resources than their male colleagues.

These aptitudes of each beneficiary are an integral part of each young person and must be appreciated in their integrity to achieve a successful insertion in socially different and, in fact, contrasting environments. As stated by Chiroleu (cited by Beltrán and Obeide, 2021), inclusion is based on the recognition that society is not homogeneous and that diversity is a component that deserves to be revalued. Thus, by transferring this concept to public policies focused on education, as argued by Krainer and Chávez (2021) and Didou (2018), the authors seek to break with formal or school-based education that consolidates a hegemonic and homogeneous culture, as this only contributes to categorizing other different cultures as inferior. Instead, there should be an intercultural awareness that seeks the recognition of the interrelation of many cultures within the same social space, in this case, universities and institutes.

It should be pointed out that the purpose of this article is not only to expose a problem that, as has been demonstrated, is evident, but also to generate possible solutions to this situation. Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed. In principle, social programs in general, and not only Beca 18, should design an insertion of the beneficiaries considering a multisectoral and intercultural perspective. Although, as Krainer and Chávez (2021) argue, the inclusion of the intercultural education approach has been late and much more conflictive in higher education, this does not prevent it from being resumed and/or reinforced. Likewise, due to the type of benefit granted by the program, that is, one focused on the insertion of young people in social spaces such as universities and institutes; the stages of accompaniment of young people should be taken into account, considering their intersectionality. In addition, the promotion of leadership among these young people should be sought, since, as indicated by Gómez et. al, (2021), the main factor for sustainable and effective inclusion is the leadership of one or more of its members, which will empower them both individually and collectively. Finally, there

should be greater awareness of what it means to have the right to quality education, not only based on access to studies (at any level), but also on the satisfaction of this right, which, according to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), quoted by Claudia Lovón and Carlos Castro (2020; 2016), must satisfy the following characteristics:

- A. Availability: This characteristic requires the existence of educational institutions and programs in sufficient quantity, as well as the conditions for their full and proper functioning, including trained teachers and study materials (ESCR Committee 1999).
- B. Accessibility: This characteristic requires that educational institutions and programs be accessible to all without discrimination. It also implies accessibility geographically or through technological resources.
- C. Acceptability: This characteristic demands that teaching programs and pedagogical frameworks be relevant, culturally appropriate, and of high quality.
- D. Adaptability: This characteristic requires that education be flexible enough to adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities, as well as to the needs of learners in varied cultural and social contexts (ESCR Commission 1999 para. 6).

The concern that various international documents have for education, especially quality education, is well known. It should be noted that the aforementioned characteristics are not restricted to school space, on the contrary, they must be observed even in higher education contexts, whether in universities or technological institutes, this does not ignore or violate the university autonomy that Law 30220 has recognized to them, marking a starting line that must be followed in every instance, especially if what is sought is the reduction of social gaps, since a comprehensive view that does not ignore the interculturality of society is the most appropriate for that purpose.

5. Conclusions

As seen throughout the presentation of this paper, there are still difficulties to overcome in the effective reduction of social gaps, which are so marked in society. Not without reason, many social scientists affirm that Peru is a sum of individuals with very few citizens, alluding to the large social sectors in a state of vulnerability that, despite formally being holders of rights, cannot exercise them adequately, as is the case of the right to quality education, public health, personal identity, decent work, etc. The appropriate way to confront this reality is not by denying or suppressing it, because it would be attacking the very identity of a country like Peru, which is so multicultural and diverse. On the contrary, the answer lies in a multidisciplinary approach that considers social and even psychological factors that directly affect the sustainable implementation of programs such as Beca 18.

The results and statistics reaffirm this need, because, although there is progress in access to higher education, this should not be restricted to the provision of economic subsidies, another approach is needed that takes into account the 26% of young people with feelings of not belonging, the 15% and 61% who say they need academic reinforcement, the 34% who indicate having suffered marginalization and, finally, the 44% of young people who recognize discrimination based on their economic situation. National and international documents and regulations are the first steps toward this objective, but they are not enough to have a real impact on social structures; only intercultural and multisectoral treatment will be able to achieve this objective. Especially in aspects related to such fundamental aspects of society as education, as Nelson Mandela once said, education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.

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