

Benito Juárez Scholarship in Tlaxcala: School Retention and Structural Tensions of Social Mobility

Beca Benito Juárez en Tlaxcala: Permanencia Escolar y Tensiones Estructurales de la Movilidad Social

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Cite: Jaimes, E. (2026). Beca Benito Juárez en Tlaxcala: Permanencia Escolar y Tensiones Estructurales de la Movilidad Social. *Mujer Andina*, 5(1), e050104. <https://doi.org/10.36881/ma.v5i1.1330>

Mujer Andina, Julio - Diciembre 2026, Vol. 5(1)



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No conflict of interest declared

Received: 07/05/2026

Reviewed: 21/07/2026

Accepted: 10/08/2026

Published: 30/08/2026

Abstract

In Mexico, social mobility constitutes a core priority on the public agenda, as evidenced by recent governmental educational programs. Within this context, promoting student retention is fundamental to the socioeconomic development of any nation. This article aims to analyze how the Benito Juárez Scholarship interacts with the structure of Upper Secondary Education (EMS, by its Spanish acronym) and Higher Education in the state of Tlaxcala, evaluating its scope and tensions as a facilitating factor for student retention, educational equity, and social mobility amidst local territorial and institutional inequalities. The study adopted a qualitative documentary analysis approach, complemented by descriptive statistical data to conduct a comparative analysis among reports from the Federal Ministry of Public Education, the State Ministry of Public Education (SEPE-USET, 2024), and the regional report by ECLAC, UNESCO, and UNICEF (2025). Findings reveal an upward trend in the program's effectiveness regarding educational improvement; however, its

impact remains conditioned by structural, economic, and territorial factors. In conclusion, Tlaxcala represents an illustrative case of progress in educational coverage and equity in Mexico, even as structural tensions persist that constrain the full realization of student retention and social mobility.

Keywords: social mobility, high school education, public investment, scholarship policy, social development.

Resumen

En México, la movilidad social constituye una prioridad en la agenda pública, como lo evidencian los recientes programas gubernamentales en materia educativa. En este contexto, promover la permanencia escolar resulta fundamental para el desarrollo socioeconómico de cualquier nación. El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la articulación de la Beca Benito Juárez dentro de la Educación Media Superior (EMS) y Superior en el estado de Tlaxcala, evaluando sus alcances y tensiones como factor facilitador de la permanencia, la equidad educativa y la movilidad social frente a las desigualdades territoriales e institucionales locales. La investigación adoptó un enfoque cualitativo basado en el análisis documental, complementado con datos estadísticos descriptivos para realizar un estudio comparativo entre los informes de la Secretaría de Educación Pública Federal, la Secretaría de Educación Pública del Estado (SEPE-USET, 2024) y el reporte regional de la CEPAL, UNESCO y UNICEF (2025). Los hallazgos muestran una tendencia ascendente en la efectividad del programa para la mejora educativa, aunque su impacto continúa condicionado por factores de carácter estructural, económico y territorial. Se concluye que Tlaxcala representa un caso ilustrativo de los avances en cobertura y equidad educativa en México, si bien persisten tensiones estructurales que limitan el logro pleno de la permanencia y la movilidad social.

Palabras clave: movilidad social, educación media superior, inversión pública, política de becas, desarrollo social.

Introduction

Education serves as a fundamental mechanism for social mobility to which every state aspires. Recognizing this implies acknowledging that public policies oriented toward educational access, retention, and completion have reached a juncture requiring greater transparency and accountability. This necessity arises not only from persistent challenges surrounding coverage and equity, but also from the imperative to evaluate the effectiveness of governmental strategies designed to mitigate educational inequality in territories such as Tlaxcala, where socioeconomic

disparities continue to present enduring obstacles (SEP, 2024). Consequently, the analysis of the Benito Juárez Scholarships proposed herein evaluates the program not merely as an isolated economic assistance policy, but as part of a broader strategy for the redistribution of educational capital aimed at altering the life trajectories of youth beneficiaries.

From this perspective, the Benito Juárez Scholarship aligns with an extensive tradition of social programs (Hernández Licona et al., 2019) that link

redistributive justice with educational investment. The program constitutes a policy effort to counterbalance the structural effects of poverty and school dropout, though its scope can only be fully comprehended within the broader framework of fiscal sustainability and the impact evaluation of federal educational policies (Carro Olvera & Lima Gutiérrez, 2024). Beyond transferring monetary resources, the scholarship reflects the Mexican state's logic of articulating social inclusion, student retention, and accountability—elements that collectively underscore its relevance as a tool for development. Globally and nationally, the educational landscape exhibits both progress and ongoing tensions; official figures indicate that the net coverage rate in Upper Secondary Education (EMS) hovers around 80.0%, with pronounced disparities across federal entities as well as between rural and urban areas (SEP, 2024). These disparities are compounded considering that vulnerable populations—such as youth living in poverty and rural or indigenous communities—face connectivity, transportation, and academic motivation barriers that directly impair their educational trajectories (Mejía-Pérez et al., 2023).

The objective of this article is to analyze how the Benito Juárez Scholarship interacts with the structure of the EMS and Higher Education systems in Tlaxcala, evaluating its scope and tensions as a facilitating factor for student retention, educational equity, and social mobility amidst local territorial and institutional inequalities. Beyond quantifying coverage metrics, this study adopts a qualitative perspective to examine the tangible effects of cash transfers on educational continuity and students' sense of belonging. This analytical framework aligns with contemporary paradigms in Mexican educational policy, which view evaluation not as a mechanism for administrative control, but as an institutional learning process designed to measure the public value of a given policy intervention (Carro Olvera & Lima Gutiérrez, 2024).

The sustainability of these programs depends on achieving a balance between equity and efficiency, as highlighted by the regional analysis

conducted by ECLAC, UNESCO, and UNICEF (2025), which underscores that investing in human capital without a long-term approach can yield ephemeral outcomes. Consequently, education must be understood as a public good whose return on investment is measured not solely in economic terms, but also through social metrics (UNDP, 1990). Recognizing this requires viewing scholarship systems not as mere welfare assistance, but as expressions of state capacity to convert opportunities into effective educational achievements (World Bank, 2018) and, by extension, into upward social mobility.

Examining how this program articulates with the structure of the Upper Secondary Education (EMS) and Higher Education systems in Tlaxcala offers a pertinent case study for understanding the relationship between educational policy, social equity, and holistic human development. This analysis relies on verifiable data drawn from the Ministry of Public Education, the 2024 State Education Program, and international reports that substantiate the need for long-term sustainable funding—insights that are captured in this study through a qualitative lens. The primary value of this paper lies in understanding how the educational framework of EMS and Higher Education in Tlaxcala is structured, and how Mexican educational policy translates the institutional ideals of social justice and the democratization of knowledge into concrete practices.

Social Mobility and Education in Mexico: A Necessary Overview

The educational system has been analyzed through the lens of scholarship policy, bringing to light a central contradiction within Upper Secondary Education (EMS) and Higher Education in Mexico: the push to expand educational coverage without succeeding in eradicating inherited inequalities. Historically, scholarly literature has framed education as the primary vehicle for upward social mobility, enabling graduates to integrate into the formal labor market (Coneval, 2018; Martínez-Martínez & Martínez-Martínez, 2013). However, as Mejía-Pérez et al. (2023) demonstrate,

increases in schooling or formal retention within an educational institution do not automatically translate into intergenerational socioeconomic advancement. While education operates as a mechanism for inclusion, it simultaneously functions as a reproducer and classifier of enduring socioeconomic and territorial disparities.

At the national level, the educational system serves 34.8 million students, of whom 5.5 million are enrolled at the upper secondary level (SEP, 2024). Despite these aggregate figures, significant disparities emerge in the state of Tlaxcala. For many beneficiaries, the Universal Benito Juárez Scholarship plays a crucial role in supplementing household income, with these monetary transfers helping prevent youth from prematurely entering the labor market before completing their high school education (SEP, 2024).

Nevertheless, while cash transfers alone are insufficient to meet a family's basic needs, this financial support has proven effective in mitigating early school dropout. Yet, it does not overcome entrenched structural obstacles, such as the concentration of educational offerings across a narrow set of subsystems. Additional factors, including limited pedagogical and socio-emotional support, a lack of role models, and weak linkages with the productive sector, further hinder academic trajectories—particularly among the vulnerable population segments previously described.

These structural barriers become particularly critical during the transition between upper secondary and higher education. Although authoritative documentation from prominent international institutions—such as the Santiago Declaration and regional investment guidelines (ECLAC et al., 2025)—stresses the need to treat educational funding as a strategic investment to reduce inequality and enhance educational and social mobility, the reality between upper secondary and higher education in Tlaxcala reflects ongoing challenges. Disruptions in educational trajectories, low public absorption rates at universities, and heavy enrollment concentration

in a limited number of public institutions (and to a lesser degree in private high schools) demonstrate that while the scholarship retains students through the upper secondary level, they subsequently face intense competition when attempting to enter higher education.

According to Mejía-Pérez et al. (2023), private higher education institutions offering programs in health sciences disproportionately target women, illustrating a subtle yet visible form of occupational and gender segregation. Although this provides an entry pathway for women into tertiary education, graduates from these institutions are highly likely to enter low-paying segments of the labor market, thereby perpetuating structural limits on social mobility.

Consequently, in the state of Tlaxcala, the Benito Juárez Scholarship serves as a crucial supplement to household income; however, achieving true social cohesion and equity requires a more comprehensive strategy (ECLAC et al., 2025). That is, scholarship systems must form part of an integrated, well-articulated policy to strengthen educational quality—one that considers expanding public higher education infrastructure, diversifying the territorial offering of degree programs, and implementing effective transition schemes toward professionalization and decent employment for Tlaxcalan society.

Social mobility in Mexico exhibits persistent tensions between the career expectations generated by academic attainment and the actual opportunities available within the local context. Even in sectors where higher education should foster intergenerational advancement, such as teaching, prevailing labor conditions and institutional constraints impede progress (Mejía-Pérez et al., 2023). The authors demonstrated that despite completing university degrees, many female graduates face job precariousness and low graduation/degree completion rates, which severely restrict their socioeconomic advancement. This phenomenon reflects a broader structural issue: education alone cannot guarantee upward mobility unless accompanied by policies that active-

ly promote equity and the effective recognition of professional labor.

Upward mobility serves as a complex indicator of national development, as it simultaneously integrates dimensions of educational attainment, occupational status, and income levels. Within the conceptual framework established by Mejía-Pérez et al. (2023), educational mobility measures the relationship between parental educational levels and those achieved by their offspring, whereas occupational mobility assesses shifts across the labor hierarchy. The Mexican context reveals that while education remains a potential catalyst for change, its impact varies considerably depending on social origin and territory. Disparities across urban and rural zones, alongside those tied to gender, continuously reproduce patterns of inequality over time.

Finally, upward mobility cannot be decoupled from public investment in education. Financial sustainability—defined as the state's institutional capacity to maintain and expand educational spending without compromising macroeconomic stability—is an essential condition for social policies to yield long-lasting effects (ECLAC et al., 2025). In Latin America, public expenditure on education averages 4.2% of GDP, a lower figure than that recorded in 2019, thereby constraining the system's redistributive potential (UNESCO, 2024, as cited in ECLAC et al., 2025). Ultimately, development cannot be evaluated solely through economic growth, but must also account for the degree to which education alters inherited intergenerational social positions.

Methodology

This study was developed using a qualitative documentary approach, which is particularly suitable for understanding the meaning, internal logic, and effects of a public policy through its own normative and institutional instruments, given that official documents are not mere administrative records, but rather construct social realities and guide concrete actions. Although data are presented throughout this paper using graphs and

figures, it should be noted that the integration of numerical information is purely descriptive for comprehension purposes, rather than a strictly quantitative inquiry.

As Corbetta (2007) highlights, qualitative documentary studies make it possible to examine the conceptual framework, decisions, and assumptions that guide a public intervention, since a document is not merely a record but a generator of reality and meaning. Analyzing official texts critically thus enables a deeper understanding of how policy is constructed and legitimized. Under this logic, the methodology was grounded in the systematic review and critical interpretation of institutional, normative, and academic sources related to the Benito Juárez Basic Welfare Scholarship Program. Following Gadamer (2012), this approach entails a horizon of understanding in which the institutional text dialogues with the social conditions under which it operates, implying that interpretation is not neutral but situated within a specific context. This is further complemented by Chaves Montero (2018), who argues that triangulating quantitative data with documentary evidence provides a more comprehensive and holistic view of the dimensions under study.

Furthermore, the analysis drew inspiration from the policy implementation perspective developed by Aguilar Villanueva (2003), who notes that public policies can only be comprehensively understood by studying both their formal provisions and their practical execution, requiring researchers to look beyond official documentation into operational realities. Consequently, this investigation utilized operating rules and institutional evaluation reports as its primary corpus—documents that configure the program's governing institutional framework (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, 2019; Plan Estatal de Desarrollo de Tlaxcala, 2021; Programa Sectorial de Educación, 2020; SEP, 2024; SEPE-USET, 2024).

International documents were also consulted, including reports from regional organizations (ECLAC, 2025) and recent empirical studies (Dzib-Moo et al., 2025; Mejía-Pérez et al., 2023; Salcedo Montoya, 2024) that provide evidence on

similar scholarship programs and their impacts. This document corpus enabled the construction of a comprehensive overview of the regulatory framework, educational priorities, and indicators associated with coverage, student retention, and school dropout—establishing the empirical foundation for the present analysis.

The document analysis was organized into three distinct phases: in the first phase, a comprehensive review of the legal and programmatic instruments defining the operation of the Benito Juárez Scholarship was conducted, which entailed examining not only its Operating Rules but also national and state planning documents; this review enabled the identification of its alignment with the principles of the New Mexican School, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda, and the educational priorities of the state of Tlaxcala. The second phase consisted of comparing national strategies linked to coverage and retention against the indicators reported in Tlaxcala, thereby contextualizing the state-level case study within broader national and regional dynamics. Finally, the third phase involved analytical interpretation, in which findings from official institutional documents were integrated with the reviewed academic literature to triangulate diverse analytical perspectives regarding the phenomenon under study.

Following Aguilar Villanueva (2003), the analysis examined the tensions that emerge between policy design and real-world implementation, recognizing that such tensions are not implementation anomalies, but inherent characteristics of public policy execution as guidelines transition from paper to practice. This approach avoided simplistic normative assessments that evaluate policies solely by their deviation from an abstract ideal, developing instead a grounded understanding of the operational challenges facing the program.

Regarding epistemological stance, the research adhered to established qualitative public policy frameworks (Corbetta, 2007) by explicitly assuming key premises regarding the nature of knowledge, interpretation, and validity. The theoretical

foundation was anchored in hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2012) and policy implementation studies (Aguilar Villanueva, 2003), facilitating a coherent dialogue between normative policy design and critical interpretation. Rather than operating purely inductively or deductively, the analysis maintained a continuous dialogue between empirical findings and theoretical constructs, enriching the understanding of the Tlaxcala case study while refining qualitative policy analysis frameworks.

Results

The Benito Juárez Scholarships: Beyond Financial Assistance

As part of the institutional, regulatory, and programmatic review, findings reveal that, according to the National Coordination of Benito Juárez Welfare Scholarships (2023), these grants constitute one of the public policies with the greatest social reach within the contemporary Mexican educational system. Their purpose transcends the mere distribution of monetary resources, functioning as a policy instrument that bridges educational equity and distributive justice. This program aims to guarantee the constitutional right to education by mitigating the socioeconomic disparities that have historically conditioned school persistence among vulnerable youth (Dzib-Moo et al., 2025). The economic component aligns with the formative paradigm of the New Mexican School (Nueva Escuela Mexicana), where equity, inclusion, and holistic development serve as central pillars of the educational process. Consequently, scholarship provision should not be interpreted as a passive welfare mechanism, but rather as a human-development-oriented policy that strengthens the nation's social and educational capital. Empirical evidence from Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco confirms that scholarships contribute to reducing school dropout, though their efficacy remains intertwined with familial and emotional factors, as economic vulnerability often intersects with psychosocial conditions that affect educational continuity (Dzib-Moo et al., 2025). Thus, the scholarship operates within a framework of comprehensive well-being rather than as an isolated financial subsidy.

The origins of the Benito Juárez Universal Scholarship are directly linked to the policy directives of the National Development Plan 2019–2024 (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo), a foundational document that framed social and educational transformation around principles of justice and collective welfare. According to the SEPE-USET Annual Program (2024), this national framework articulates with the Sectoral Education Program 2020–2024 (Programa Sectorial de Educación) and subnational planning instruments, such as the Tlaxcala State Development Plan 2021–2027 (Plan Estatal de Desarrollo de Tlaxcala), to consolidate an educational model grounded in inclusion, equity, and the reinforcement of state stewardship (SEPE-USET, 2024). This alignment demonstrates that the scholarship program does not operate in isolation, but as an integral component of a coordinated national public policy spanning federal, state, and local tiers of governance.

From a legal and administrative perspective, the 2024 Operating Rules of the program establish that the Ministry of Public Education (SEP), operating through the National Coordination of Benito Juárez Welfare Scholarships, is the governing body responsible for ensuring that public funds are allocated in accordance with principles of efficiency, effectiveness, economy, honesty, and transparency (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2023a). This regulatory framework provides institutional legitimacy to the program by adhering to Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution and Article 77 of the Federal Law on Budget and Fiscal Responsibility. The Presidential Decree of May 31, 2019—as documented by Salcedo et al. (2024)—established the National Coordination of Benito Juárez Welfare Scholarships as the agency tasked with unifying and monitoring financial support for students living in poverty, thereby reinforcing the state’s social mandate regarding public education.

This structural evolution enabled the right to a scholarship to achieve constitutional status through the constitutional reform of May 8, 2020, which amended Article 4 to mandate the establishment of a national scholarship system prioritizing families in situations of poverty (Salcedo

et al., 2024). Consequently, the foundation of the program is not merely budgetary, but is anchored in a constitutional commitment toward equity and social justice, closely aligned with the New Mexican School framework and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education).

An examination of the program’s evolution demonstrates a significant transition from a targeted intervention model—characteristic of previous social policies such as Prospera—toward a universal coverage framework in which eligibility criteria expand to encompass all public Upper Secondary Education (EMS) students. According to Salcedo et al. (2024), this paradigm shift commenced during the 2019 fiscal year, when beneficiaries of Prospera-Educación were automatically transitioned into the newly created “Benito Juárez Universal Scholarship” program. The policy was explicitly designed to guarantee educational continuity without imposing minimum grade-point average (GPA) requirements, providing bimonthly financial stipends that initially stood at 1,600 MXN and were subsequently adjusted to 1,900 MXN in 2024, pursuant to active operational guidelines (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2023a).

This universality implies not merely a numerical expansion of the beneficiary registry, but a profound redefinition of the program’s social approach. The logic of academic merit as a condition for access is abandoned in favor of a more inclusive social-rights principle. Thus, the scholarship ceases to function as a compensatory measure targeted exclusively at those in extreme poverty, becoming instead a tool for structural inclusion aligned with the constitutionally enshrined framework of well-being. UNAM research examining the impact of high school scholarships between 2011 and 2019 demonstrated that targeted financial assistance was insufficient to prevent school dropout, thereby justifying the transition toward a universal model with broader territorial and demographic coverage (Álvarez Díaz de León et al., 2023). The program has consolidated into a national policy characterized by standardized procedures and digital beneficiary registries that enable system-

atic tracking. The 2024 Operating Rules specify tools such as the School Finder and Status Finder, which enhance transparency regarding both selection and registry maintenance (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2023a). While this universal approach has fostered a perception of distributive justice and institutional trust among the student population, case studies—such as research conducted in Nayarit—note that non-recipient students exhibit slightly higher GPAs, underscoring the imperative to strengthen pedagogical and socio-emotional support for scholarship recipients (Salcedo et al., 2024).

Beyond its economic dimension, the Benito Juárez Scholarship operates as an instrument of social justice designed to dismantle the structural mechanisms of exclusion that have historically constrained educational mobility in Mexico (Coordinación Nacional de Becas para el Bienestar Benito Juárez, 2023). As Dzib-Moo et al. (2025) argue, educational policy must be evaluated on its capacity to integrate inclusion, equity, and persistence—dimensions that form the core of holistic development at the upper secondary level. The social justice promoted by this program extends beyond the redistribution of financial resources to foster genuine opportunities for youth to construct autonomous, dignified life paths that transcend their socioeconomic origins. Official diagnostics by SEPE-USET (2024) indicate that Tlaxcala maintains an 81.0% coverage rate in Upper Secondary Education (EMS), accompanied by a concerning 10.2% dropout rate. These figures highlight the strategic function of the scholarship in curbing student attrition, particularly in rural settings where financial scarcity remains a persistent barrier to educational continuity. The bimonthly stipend thus represents not a charitable welfare entitlement, but a necessary prerequisite to realizing the fundamental right to education within an environment defined by persistent inequality.

However, as highlighted by the comprehensive impact study conducted by Dzib-Moo et al. (2025), economic benefits alone do not guarantee academic success, given that true social justice necessitates psychoeducational policies that foster

self-esteem, community engagement, and family co-responsibility throughout the educational process. Only when financial support is complemented by human and social capital does the scholarship transition from a basic monetary transfer into a genuine mechanism for transformation.

Following the institutional review of the Benito Juárez Scholarships, the second phase involved a strategic comparison linking coverage and student retention. The empirical findings presented below derive from official statistical data generated by the Ministry of Public Education of the State of Tlaxcala and SEPE-USET for the 2025–2026 academic year. The data are presented in their entirety to ensure fidelity and empirical verifiability. The analysis is structured around three core axes: the structural configuration of the Upper Secondary Education (EMS) system, the offering of higher education across public and private institutions, and graduation and degree completion indicators, which collectively illuminate the dynamics of educational continuity within the state.

To this end, establishing a comprehensive diagnostic of the EMS system's structural configuration in Tlaxcala is essential. According to the state catalog of educational offerings for 2025–2026 (SEP, 2025b), Tlaxcala records an enrollment of 55,158 students at the upper secondary level, distributed across 122 academic centers belonging to ten distinct educational subsystems. This institutional structure demonstrates a diversification strategy designed to address youth educational needs through modalities ranging from general academic high schools to technical and agricultural options. The variety of subsystems reflects an ongoing effort to expand coverage, accommodate diverse student profiles, and offer academic and technical alternatives tailored to the state's regional demands.

The enrollment distribution reveals a pronounced concentration across three primary subsystems that collectively absorb more than three-quarters of the state's upper secondary student population. The Colegio de Bachilleres de Tlaxcala (COBAT) leads this distribution with 16,612 students,

Table 1.
Upper Secondary Education (EMS) Enrollment by Subsystem
in Tlaxcala, 2025–2026 Academic Year

Subsystem	Enrollment	Campuses	Percentage
COBAT	16,612	23	30.1%
CECyTE	14,043	32	25.5%
DGETI (CBTIS/ CETIS)	11,610	8	21.0%
CEMSAD	3,822	25	6.9%
CONALEP	3,421	3	6.2%
CEBES	2,816	21	5.1%
DGETA (CBTA)	1,792	3	3.2%
DGB	473	1	0.9%
Community Tele- High School	377	5	0.7%
BTED	192	1	0.3%
TOTAL	55,158	122	100%

Note. Adapted from PLANTELES_EMS.xlsx data (SEP, 2025b).

accounting for 30.1% of the total enrollment. It is followed by the Colegio de Estudios Científicos y Tecnológicos (CECyTE) with 14,043 students (25.5%), and the Dirección General de Educación Tecnológica Industrial (DGETI), which serves 11,610 students, representing 21.0% of the state’s total enrollment. Together, these three subsystems anchor the educational offering in Tlaxcala.

A particularly revealing aspect of this analysis concerns the relationship between the number of academic centers and student enrollment across subsystems. While CECyTE operates 32 campuses to serve 14,043 students—yielding an average of 439 students per campus—DGETI concentrates 11,610 students across only 8 campuses, resulting in an average of 1,451 students per institution. This disparity indicates significant variation in operational scale and institutional capacity, reflecting differentiated organizational models tailored to specific policy logics.

Conversely, subsystems oriented toward rural communities and dispersed populations demonstrate a distinct coverage strategy compared to urban educational models. The Centers for Upper Secondary Education Distance Learning (CEMSAD), with 25 campuses serving 3,822 students, averages just 153 students per center, whereas the Community Tele-High School records an average of 75 students per campus. This pattern reflects an explicit decentralization strategy designed to extend educational services to localities where demand is lower but access is equally critical. This dynamic is especially pertinent to scholarship programs aimed at improving student retention, as these figures highlight institutional efforts to expand coverage into geographically marginal-

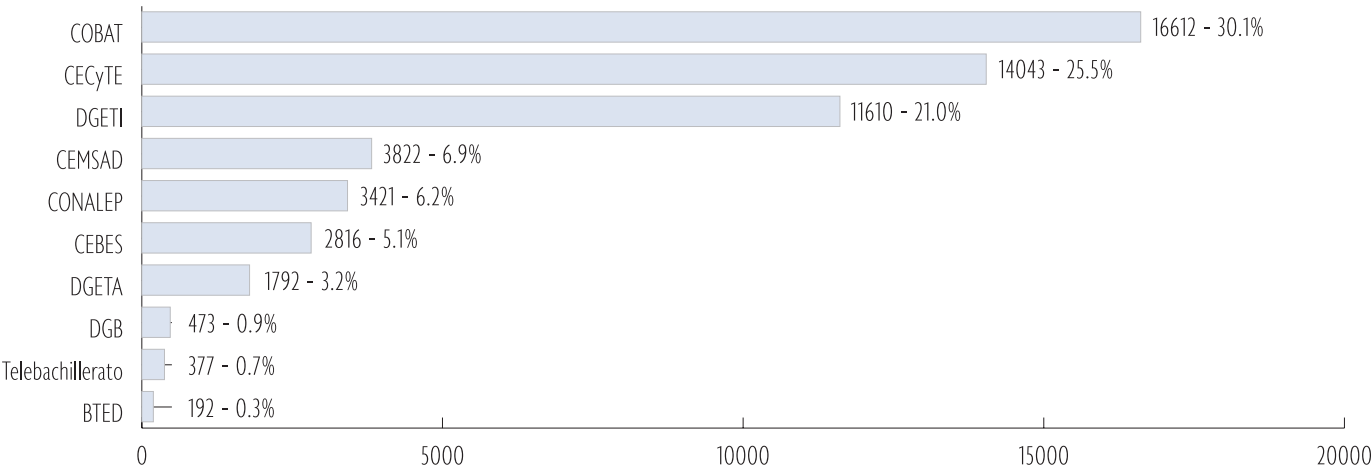


Figure 1.
Upper Secondary Education (EMS) Enrollment by Subsystem in Tlaxcala, 2025–2026 Academic Year (Total: 55,158 students).
Note. Adapted from PLANTELES_EMS.xlsx data (SEP, 2025b).

ized areas that have historically faced restricted educational access.

The territorial distribution of the 122 upper secondary educational centers in Tlaxcala follows a decentralization framework aimed at ensuring access across all 60 of the state’s municipalities. Analysis of official catalog data confirms the presence of educational centers in both municipal seats and low-density rural localities. This geographic dispersion is a key determinant of the efficacy of student persistence programs like the Benito Juárez Scholarship, directly influencing the feasibility of educational continuity for youth across diverse regional contexts.

CECyTE stands out as the subsystem with the broadest geographic dispersion, operating 32 academic centers that represent 26.2% of the state’s upper secondary educational infrastructure. This spatial configuration enables technical high school options to reach rural communities such as Tequexquitla, San José Teacalco, and Cuamantzingo—localities that have historically faced restricted access to upper secondary education (SEP, 2025b). Similarly, CEMSAD operates 25 campuses distributed across rural areas, comprising 20.5% of the state’s educational facilities. With a presence in communities such as Guadalupe Tlachco, Pueblo de Jesús, and Santa Anita Huiloac, CEMSAD reflects an institutional effort to expand coverage into traditionally marginalized regions (SEP, 2025b).

State High School Educational Centers (Centros Educativos de Bachillerato Estatal, CEBES) complement this coverage with 21 campuses representing 17.2% of the total, while COBAT operates 23 centers strategically situated in areas of higher population density. However, this institutional diversity does not imply operational homogeneity. Although numerically fewer with just 8 campuses, DGETI centers comprise large-scale facilities in urban hubs such as Apizaco, Huamantla, and the capital city of Tlaxcala, collectively serving over 11,000 students (SEP, 2025b). This structural variation underscores significant disparities in physical infrastructure and available educational resources

based on subsystem classification and geographic location.

Public Higher Education Offerings in Tlaxcala

An analysis of higher education in Tlaxcala reveals an institutional framework comprising eight public institutions with a combined enrollment of 14,212 students. This figure takes on added significance when contrasted with the 55,158 students currently enrolled at the upper secondary level, suggesting that, in strictly numerical terms, approximately one out of every four high school graduates could access a placement in the state’s public higher education institutions. While this calculation does not account for variations in graduation efficiency or individual preferences regarding professional training, it provides an approximation of the actual absorption capacity of the higher education system, highlighting structural limitations in accommodating demand at the tertiary level.

Table 2. Public Higher Education Institution Enrollment in Tlaxcala

Institution	Enrollment	Percentage
Universidad Politécnica de Tlaxcala (UPT)	6,234	43.9%
Instituto Tecnológico de Apizaco (ITA)	4,138	29.1%
Instituto Tecnológico del Altiplano de Tlaxcala (ITAT)	987	6.9%
Universidad Tecnológica de Tlaxcala (UTT)	788	5.5%
Instituto Tecnológico Superior de Tlaxco	684	4.8%
Universidad Politécnica de Tlaxcala Región Poniente (UPTrep)	654	4.6%
UPIIT-IPN (Unidad Profesional Interdisciplinaria)	617	4.3%
Universidad Intercultural de Tlaxcala (UIT)	110	0.8%
TOTAL	14,212	100%

Note. Data retrieved from CONCENTRADO_IES_E_IPEST.xlsx, Sheet: "IES MATRICULA GRAL", SEPE-USET (2024).

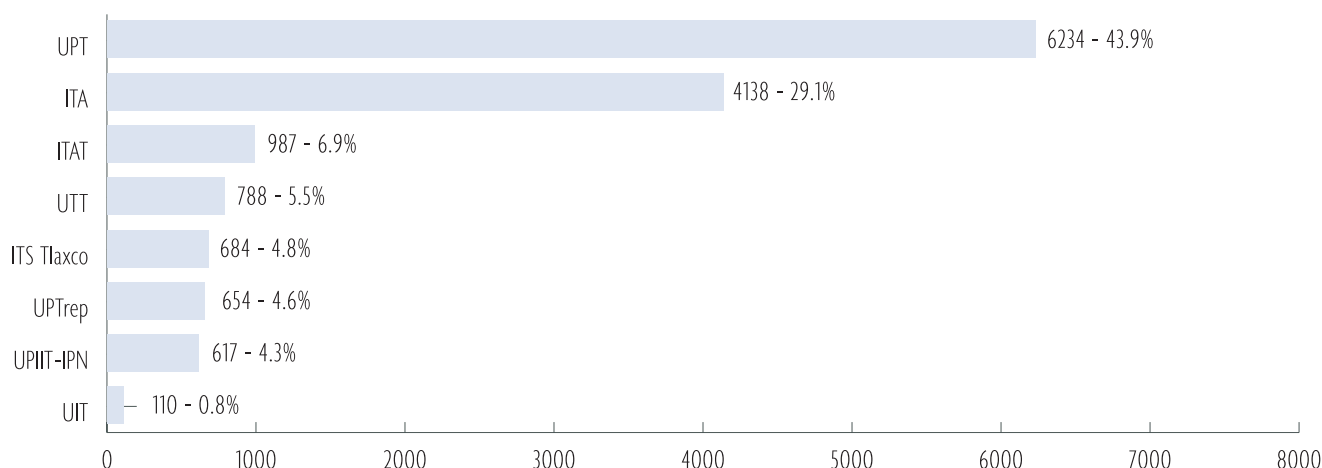


Figure 2.

Enrollment at Public Higher Education Institutions in Tlaxcala

Note. Data retrieved from CONCENTRADO_IES_E_IPEST.xlsx, Sheet: "IES MATRICULA GRAL", SEPE-USET (2024)

Enrollment concentration is particularly pronounced: the Polytechnic University of Tlaxcala alone absorbs 43.9% of public higher education students, with an enrollment of 6,234. Meanwhile, the Technological Institute of Apizaco serves 29.1% with 4,138 students. Together, these two institutions concentrate 73.0% of the state's public tertiary enrollment (SEP, 2025b). This concentration raises critical questions regarding the diversification of academic programs and the spatial distribution of educational opportunity, as such geographic clustering may constrain institutional choices for students with diverse discipline interests or limited physical mobility toward these major urban centers.

Disaggregated gender data across select institutions reveal differentiated enrollment patterns that shed light on access dynamics and academic field preferences. At the Technological Institute of the Tlaxcala Highlands (Instituto Tecnológico del Altiplano de Tlaxcala), men constitute 60.3% of total enrollment (595 students) compared to 39.7% women (392 students), reflecting a predominantly male demographic. Conversely, the Intercultural University of Tlaxcala (Universidad Intercultural de Tlaxcala) displays a female-majority composition, with 71 women (64.5%) and 39 men (35.5%). Meanwhile, the Higher Technological Institute of Tlaxco exhibits near-gender parity, enrolling 341 men and 343 women (SEP, 2025b). These variances point to gendered disparities in vocational profiling and disciplinary selection across institutions.

Private Higher Education Institutions (IPEST)

The private higher education sector in Tlaxcala comprises 37 institutions (Instituciones Particulares de Educación Superior, IPEST) that collectively serve 4,764 students—a figure equivalent to approximately 25% of total public higher education enrollment. This creates a mixed higher education system where private options supplement state provision, demonstrating a substantial private-sector footprint in local tertiary coverage. A particularly striking finding involves gender distribution: women account for 65.0% of private enrollment (3,095 students), whereas men represent the remaining 34.9% (1,662 students) (SEP, 2024). This inverse pattern relative to specific public technical institutions suggests that private universities may be disproportionately attracting female students seeking specialized degree programs or alternative instructional environments.

Table 3.

Gender Distribution in Private Higher Education Institutions (IPEST)

Category	Quantity	Percentage	Institutions
Men	1,662	34.9%	---
Women	3,095	65.1%	---
TOTAL	4,764	100%	37

Note. Data retrieved from CONCENTRADO_IES_E_IPEST.xlsx, Sheet: "IPEST MATRICULA GRAL", SEPE-USET (2024).

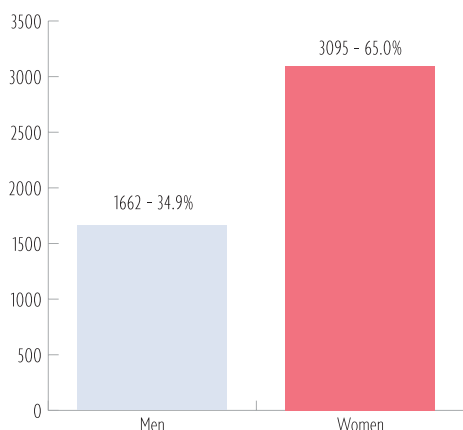


Figure 3.
Gender Distribution in Private Higher Education Institutions (IPEST)
Note. Data retrieved from CONCENTRADO_IES_E_IPEST.xlsx, Sheet: "IPEST MATRICULA GRAL", SEPE-USET (2024).

This feminization of higher education enrollment within the private sector can be explained, at least in part, by the nature of the academic programs predominant among these institutions. Nursing schools occupy prominent positions among private higher education institutions (IPEST) with the largest student populations: the Isabel de Hungría School of Nursing (Apizaco campus) serves 578 students, followed by the Florencia Nightingale School of Nursing with 577 students, and its Zacatelco campus with 283 students. Historically, nursing education has maintained a predominantly female demographic (SEP, 2024), which helps explain the distribution observed across the private sector as a whole, as this vocational orientation reflects deeply rooted gendered patterns in field selection toward caregiving and health sciences.

Among the private institutions with the highest enrollment are also the Center for Higher Studies of Tlaxcala with 508 students, the University of the Highlands with 300 students, the University of the Tlaxcala Valley with 263 students, and the School of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation which registers an identical count of 263 students (SEP, 2024). The latter, much like the nursing academies, belongs to the health science domain, reinforcing the private sector's predominant focus on health and caregiving professions. This indicates that private institutions have identified and responded to specialized demand in these fields,

where job markets remain relatively stable within the state context.

Graduation and Degree Completion Indicators in IPEST (2021–2023)

An analysis of graduation and degree completion records across private higher education institutions provides insight into study completion dynamics, complementing the analysis of student persistence addressed by scholarship programs. During the 2021–2023 period, private institutions in Tlaxcala reported a cumulative total of 2,858 graduates and 2,164-degree recipients yielding an aggregate degree completion rate of 75.7%. More recent data from these specific institutions were unavailable to further contrast these figures. Nevertheless, significant institutional and annual variations emerge, pointing to differences in academic rigor, administrative procedures for credentialing, or socioeconomic barriers faced by graduates attempting to complete formal degree certification. This gap between program completion and formal credentialing constitutes a critical dimension in understanding complete educational trajectories.

Table 4.
Graduates and Degree Recipients in Private Higher Education Institutions (IPEST) in Tlaxcala (2021–2023)

Year	Graduates	Degree recipients	Graduation rate	Year variation
2021	901	656	72.8%	---
2022	1,006	758	75.3%	+11.7%
2023	951	750	78.9%	-5.5%
TOTAL	2,858	2,164	75.7%	---

Note. Data retrieved from CONCENTRADO_IES_E_IPEST.xlsx, Sheet: "ESTADISTICA IPEST", SEPE-USET (2024).

The analysis of graduation and degree completion (titulación) metrics within private higher education institutions (IPEST) reveals that the institutions generating the largest cumulative number of graduates during the 2021–2023 triennium belong predominantly to the health sciences sector. The Isabel de Hungría School of Nursing (Apizaco campus) recorded 388 graduates and 294 degree recipients, yielding a 75.8% completion rate, with its Calpulalpan campus reflecting similar fig-



Figure 4. Graduates and Degree Recipients in Private Higher Education Institutions (IPEST) in Tlaxcala (2021–2023)
Note. Data retrieved from CONCENTRADO_IES_E_IPEST.xlsx, Sheet: "ESTADISTICA IPEST", SEPE-USET (2024).

ures. Conversely, the Florencia Nightingale School of Nursing reported 331 graduates but only 177 credentialed degree holders—a 53.5% completion rate (SEPE-USET, 2024). This substantial discrepancy below the sector average underscores institutional and socioeconomic hurdles that impede formal degree attainment following academic completion.

Notably, certain institutions exhibited completion rates exceeding 100%. This dynamic reflects deferred degree processing from prior cohorts graduating in subsequent years. For instance, the Metropolitan University of Tlaxcala (Universidad Metropolitana de Tlaxcala) registered 78 graduates alongside 118-degree recipients during the period, while the British Higher Institute of Tourism (Escuela Superior de Turismo Británico) recorded 37 graduates and 53 degree recipients (SEPE-USET, 2024). These patterns demonstrate that degree completion operates on a temporal trajectory distinct from academic exit, conditioned by administrative, financial, and institutional constraints.

In the analytical synthesis phase, empirical findings from documentary analysis were integrated with real-world operational data to evaluate how scholarship programs support educational coverage and student retention across upper secondary (EMS) and tertiary levels. This phenomenon can be

examined through distinct theoretical frameworks. Parker and Vogl (2024) take a favorable view of scholarship policies as social justice mechanisms aimed at guaranteeing the fundamental right to education for children, adolescents, and youth. However, they critically interrogate the fiscal allocation strategy of the President Andrés Manuel López Obrador administration (2018–2024) compared to previous governance frameworks. This perspective aligns partially with Rodríguez-Gómez (2020), whose in-depth analysis of the institutional design of the Benito Juárez Scholarship program warns that structural modifications may undermine educational continuity, thereby restricting long-term intergenerational social mobility.

These empirical results illuminate the operational role of the Benito Juárez Scholarship within Tlaxcala's educational system, demonstrating that official administrative metrics do not fully expose the institutional friction points governing school persistence. Although Tlaxcala reports 55,158 students across 122 EMS campuses—representing undeniable progress in raw coverage—76.0% of total enrollment remains concentrated within just three subsystems (COBAT, CECyTE, and DGETI), directly challenging claims of effective institutional diversification.

While aggregate data suggest sustained student persistence, Rodríguez-Gómez (2020) highlights the policy tradeoffs resulting from the transition from Prospera to Benito Juárez, which abandoned over two decades of accumulated evaluation expertise. Prospera operated as a multi-dimensional human capital initiative integrating health, nutrition, and education into a comprehensive poverty-alleviation model. In contrast, the current Benito Juárez framework isolates educational stipends from broader social welfare drivers, weakening its redistributive efficacy for socioeconomically vulnerable populations.

Continuing with the examination of data across upper secondary education (EMS) institutions in the state of Tlaxcala, operational and scale disparities among subsystems generate unequal educational experiences. While COBAT serves

16,612 students across 23 campuses (an average of 722 students per center), DGETI concentrates 11,610 students within just 8 campuses (averaging 1,451 students per center). This institutional density directly impacts student tracking, academic monitoring, and persistence rates. In contrast, rural subsystems such as CEMSAD and Community Tele-High Schools operate small, localized units prioritizing geographic reach over infrastructure. However, territorial coverage does not guarantee equivalent instructional quality; profound structural and social inequities persist, leaving students in these rural centers particularly vulnerable.

In higher education, spatial and institutional concentration patterns are even more severe: the Polytechnic University of Tlaxcala (Universidad Politécnica de Tlaxcala) and the Technological Institute of Apizaco (Instituto Tecnológico de Apizaco) absorb 73.0% of the total public undergraduate population, severely restricting options for secondary school graduates. Furthermore, public university capacity allows only one in four upper secondary graduates to secure a seat, exposing a structural bottleneck that financial stipends alone cannot resolve. This structural limitation reinforces the arguments of De la Cruz-Flores (2021)—synthesizing Nery (2019)—who positions scholarships as one of the primary public policy tools used over recent decades to foster educational equity by facilitating access and persistence for historically marginalized groups. Nevertheless, economic redistribution by itself is insufficient to achieve social equity. Drawing on contemporary theories of social justice, De la Cruz-Flores concludes that financial stipends must be complemented by targeted policies that explicitly account for the social, cultural, and territorial disadvantages that exclude a significant portion of graduates from tertiary placement.

Within private higher education institutions (IP-EST), distinct gender dynamics emerge: women account for 65.1% of total enrollment, heavily concentrated in nursing degree programs, which perpetuates patterns of gendered occupational segregation and entry into vulnerable labor markets. Regarding graduation and degree comple-

tion the aggregate rate of 75.7% masks sharp institutional variations. In several cases, completion rates exceed 100% due to time-deferred credentialing from prior cohorts, pointing to persistent financial and administrative obstacles that post-secondary graduates face after concluding their coursework.

Dual education systems remain severely underdeveloped in Tlaxcala, enrolling a mere 114 students across five institutions and concentrated overwhelmingly at the Technological University of Tlaxcala. Scaling up work-integrated learning models represents a critical avenue for aligning academic programs with regional labor market demands.

Taken together, this empirical synthesis demonstrates that the Benito Juárez Scholarship operates within a deeply fragmented and unequal institutional matrix. While the policy effectively supports basic school persistence, financial transfers alone are incapable of bridging structural gaps in educational coverage, instructional quality, and university absorption capacity.

This finding reinforces the theoretical perspective of Aguilar (2019, as cited in De la Cruz-Flores, 2021), who argues that scholarship programs must be evaluated strictly within the broader architecture of educational equity policies. Aguilar asserts that direct stipends have served as the state's primary redistributive tool over recent decades to expand access and retention.

While Parker and Vogl (2024) acknowledge the intrinsic value of scholarship programs as instruments for upgrading living conditions and fostering human capital formation, they conclude that the current universal policy design reduced the fiscal progressivity of public spending. Their empirical findings demonstrate that households located in municipalities with higher poverty indices received fewer net resources relative to the predecessor framework (Prospera), thereby eroding the overall redistributive capacity of national social policy. Evaluated from this political economy perspective, social mobility depends not merely on the provision of monetary transfers, but on pri-

oritizing public investment toward the most socio-economically marginalized populations.

This assessment is shared by Rodríguez-Gómez (2020), who warns of the loss of vital institutional capacities built over more than two decades of targeted social policy. Similarly, Aguilar (2019, as cited in De la Cruz-Flores, 2021) maintains that direct stipends have served as the federal government's primary redistributive mechanism to expand educational access and persistence in recent years. However, Aguilar argues that such compensatory public policies, relying exclusively on financial transfers, have proven fundamentally insufficient for mitigating the deep-seated structural inequalities that constrain vulnerable youth.

These analytical perspectives illustrate a clear theoretical divide between economic efficiency models and social justice frameworks. Scholars such as Parker and Vogl (2024) and Rodríguez-Gómez (2020) focus their analyses on the distributive efficiency of public expenditures, fiscal progressivity, and the formal institutional design of social programs. Conversely, Aguilar (2019, as cited in De la Cruz-Flores, 2021) examines the broader social justice dimension, asserting that genuine social mobility extends far beyond incremental household income gains achieved via cash transfers. True mobility requires guaranteed access to high-quality education, irrespective of the structural vulnerabilities or spatial disadvantages surrounding each student.

These preceding theoretical perspectives illustrate a clear divide between economic-distributive models and social justice frameworks. Scholars such as Parker and Vogl (2024) and Rodríguez-Gómez (2020) focus their analytical efforts on the distributive efficiency of public expenditures, fiscal progressivity, and the formal institutional design of social welfare initiatives. In contrast, Aguilar (2019, as cited in De la Cruz-Flores, 2021) examines the broader social justice dimension. For this author, true social mobility extends far beyond incremental household income gains achieved through monetary transfers; rather, it demands guaranteed access to high-quality

education regardless of the structural vulnerabilities or spatial disadvantages surrounding each student.

Finally, although Tlaxcala reports an 81.0% upper secondary (EMS) coverage rate and a 10.2% dropout rate, there is a distinct absence of state-level disaggregated data capable of evaluating the direct causal impact of the scholarship program. This empirical deficit underscores the imperative for developing more robust longitudinal monitoring mechanisms to analyze the educational trajectories and socioeconomic outcomes of youth who drop out or remain outside the school system.

Conclusions

International institutions dedicated to fostering equitable global development increasingly emphasize human development frameworks as the primary mechanism for nation-building. Under this paradigm, healthcare, nutrition, and education constitute the essential pillars for securing citizen well-being and social welfare. In an effort to narrow the structural inequality gaps that have reproduced across generations, the Mexican state has implemented social public policies designed to assist historically disadvantaged populations through targeted and universal interventions.

The current federal administration restructured the national scholarship framework, introducing distinct operational shifts compared to legacy social programs. Most notably, the eligibility criteria transitioned from a merit-based model to a universal compensatory approach. Under this design, direct financial transfers are provided to all enrolled students residing within municipalities categorized by varying levels of marginalization. This universal orientation aims to support socio-economically vulnerable youth, promote school persistence across appropriate age-grade cohorts, and mitigate early labor market entry.

Education remains an indispensable driver of social and economic development, acting as a primary catalyst for intergenerational mobility.

However, this analysis of Tlaxcala's educational system and its intersection with the Benito Juárez Scholarship demonstrates that despite broad territorial coverage at the upper secondary (EMS) level—encompassing 122 campuses across ten subsystems serving over 55,000 students—geographic presence alone does not guarantee equitable learning conditions or homogenous educational experiences. The concentration of 76.0% of total EMS enrollment within just three subsystems exposes deep structural disparities that constrain educational choices based on spatial and institutional location.

Consequently, the Benito Juárez Scholarship operates within an institutional environment characterized by persistent tensions between expanding coverage and ensuring quality, as well as between providing cash transfers and offering comprehensive student support. While the bi-monthly stipend of 1,900 MXN constitutes a critical economic lifeline for youth in vulnerable and rural contexts, empirical evidence indicates that monetary transfers alone are insufficient unless paired with robust pedagogical, institutional, and socio-emotional interventions. Monetary assistance in isolation cannot function as a standalone engine of social mobility, as underlying structural, institutional, and spatial barriers continue to hinder educational trajectories.

Furthermore, critical bottlenecks persist in the transition from secondary to tertiary education. The public higher education system in Tlaxcala possesses the capacity to absorb only approximately one-quarter of high school graduates with 73.0% of public university enrollment concentrated within just two institutions. Thus, while universal stipends support retention throughout upper secondary schooling, they cannot dismantle the structural barriers that students encounter when attempting to access tertiary education.

The analysis further demonstrates a marked feminization within private higher education institutions, where women account for 65.1% of total enrollment, heavily concentrated in health science programs. Although this reflects significant progress regard-

ing access to higher education, it simultaneously reproduces gendered patterns of occupational segregation that may constrain women's social mobility due to the labor precariousness characteristically associated with these fields.

Additional empirical indicators, such as the 75.7% overall degree completion rate (*titulación*) and the extremely limited scope of dual education models—enrolling a mere 114 students state-wide—demonstrate that systemic educational barriers extend well beyond initial program completion (*egreso*). Overcoming these bottlenecks demands integrated public policies that effectively facilitate transitions into the formal labor market and professional practice. Furthermore, the high spatial concentration of National System of Researchers (SNI) members, with 77.8% affiliated with a single higher education institution, confirms an acute imbalance in the distribution of scientific capacities across the state.

Taken as a whole, Tlaxcala exemplifies both the progress and the underlying structural tensions characteristic of the broader national educational system: expanding coverage and universal financial support mechanisms coexist alongside persistent challenges regarding educational equity, tertiary absorption capacity, and alignment with regional labor market demands. While the Benito Juárez Scholarship represents a valuable compensatory policy tool, its full impact remains contingent upon its articulation with comprehensive strategies that integrate instructional quality, socio-emotional support, and opportunities for dignified employment.

Although this study provides an overarching system-level perspective across educational tiers, it offers a foundational baseline for future disaggregated research. Subsequent studies should examine specific subsystems by characterizing their physical infrastructure alongside structural economic, social, and cultural conditions. Furthermore, future scholarship should deepen the empirical investigation into the intersection between economic metrics and social dynamics, recognizing that while these dimensions are inherently in-

terconnected, a nation's macroeconomic growth remains conceptually distinct from the broader human development of its society.

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