

Against All Odds: Outstanding Reading Performance among Chilean Youth in Vulnerable Conditions

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International studies show that the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on learning has increased in a number of countries and that poverty is a risk factor that puts children's academic performance at risk. However, there are students who, despite living in impoverished conditions, achieve solid academic performance. How they do so is a question of central importance. The present study uses the concept of "resilience" as a theoretical framework that can help us to answer it. It investigates various characteristics common to the students, families, and schools of Chile, and places emphasis on understanding resilience as it relates to the academic achievement of students with low SES. Multilevel models and comparisons reveal performance determinants associated with resilience, such as reading engagement and schooling conditions. This study highlights resilience as a framework for addressing the obstacles that face disadvantaged youth in developing educational systems.

Background

Current academic literature demonstrates that students of high socioeconomic status (SES) perform better academically than those of lower socioeconomic status (Dupriez and Dumay 2006; Schutz et al. 2007; Duarte et al. 2010). For Chile and the rest of Latin America, this is a particularly consistent trend and one that has been verified by numerous studies and international organizations.¹ In fact, in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries, the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveals that the SES of students' families is the most important factor explaining reading level variances among 15-year-olds, with Chile, Belgium, Hungary, and Turkey as the four countries where this association is the strongest (OECD 2010).

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¹ See Willms and Somer (2001), Treviño et al. (2010), Mizala and Torche (2012), and Valenzuela et al. (2013).

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