

<b>Article title</b>	Historical Context of Secondary Education (Guatemala)
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### Keywords

1. indigenous Maya
2. colonialism
3. escuelas normales
4. diversificado
5. bachillerato

### Glossary terms

1. *Bachillerato*: a type of upper-secondary school program in Guatemala. Equivalent to 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade in the USA and similar to ICSED Level 3. It is not compulsory, but is required for entrance into a university program. It is a more specialized tract, with students focusing on specific types of certificates (e.g., teaching, tourism)
2. *Básico*: lower-secondary school in Guatemala. Equivalent to 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grades in the USA and similar to ICSED Level 2. This education is compulsory and focuses on general education.
3. *Diversificado*: a type of upper-secondary school program in Guatemala. Equivalent to 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades in the USA and similar to ICSED Level 3. It is not compulsory, and lasts one year longer than a *bachillerato* program, providing the earned certificate/diploma more academic respect.
4. Indigenous Maya: A general term to describe the 7-10 million people living in southern Mexico, Belize, El Salvador, western Honduras, and Guatemala who claim heritage from the Maya peoples who were living in these areas at the time of the Spanish conquest. There are more than 30 unique Maya cultural and heritage groups today, many of them with native languages that are not mutually intelligible.

## Text of the article

### Historical and conceptual evolution of secondary education

#### *Pre-Conquest Education in Guatemala*

Little is known about formal education practices in Guatemala before the genocidal conquest and resulting colonization by Spanish *conquistadores* in 1524, led by Pedro de Alvarado. At the time, of course, Guatemala was not an independent nation-state; that would not occur until 1821 (when the Captaincy General of Guatemala, which included all present-day countries in Central America, plus the current Mexican state of Chiapas, except for Panama declared independence from Spain) and again in 1847 when Guatemala proclaimed itself an independent republic (Woodward, 2005). Instead, Guatemala, southern Mexico, and other places in Central America were part of a loosely-connected organization of indigenous Maya city-states.

At the time of the conquest, the Mayan education system was informal, with only the children of the rich and powerful receiving anything similar to formal education – and this tended to be directed by religious leaders and focused on government and war. The non-elites' education was limited to learning the trades and skills of their parents (Woodward, 2005). Based on more recent history, it is clear that indigenous Maya groups highly value education; for example, during Guatemala's 36-year civil war (1960-1996), when many indigenous Maya groups living in the highlands of Guatemala had to flee their homes and live in hiding, they quickly established classrooms for their children to continue learning (Communities of Population in Resistance of the Sierra, 1990). The importance these communities placed on education during an armed conflict later described as a genocide (Higonnet, 2009) likely indicates a long tradition of valuing education.

### **Chronology of Changes**

#### ***Education During Colonialism and the Early Republic***

After the Spanish conquest in 1524, modern-day Guatemala was part of the Spanish colonial empire in the Americas as a portion of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, until 1821. For nearly three centuries, the indigenous peoples lived under the often-harsh rule of the Spanish crown, which was habitually supported by the Catholic Church. Various religious orders, such as the Franciscans, were involved in governing local communities, and the Jesuits were particularly involved in the education system during this time (de Santa María, 1978; Woodward, 2005). The influence of these religious orders on both public and private education in Guatemala is still apparent in the names and missions of various secondary schools and universities, such as the Universidad Francisco Marroquín, named after the first Bishop of Guatemala – who also founded the School of Saint Thomas to education indigenous Maya peoples (now Universidad de San Carlos, the main public university in Guatemala).

After Guatemala and the rest of Central America established independence from Spain in 1821 and became part of the United Provinces of Central America, public education became a serious political issue (Woodward, 2005). In the 1830s, various political leaders, such as Mariano Gálvez, championed education reform; however, these plans did not gain enough political support to be implemented (Woodward, 2005). After Guatemala proclaimed itself an independent nation in 1847, the law required that all 6-year-old to 14-year-old children attend national public schools; however, because of extreme poverty and a large portion of the population living in very rural areas, the Guatemalan army complained in 1899 about more than half of its soldiers being illiterate (Adams, 1995). It was also during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that public **Escuelas Normales** (normal schools) began allowing students to earn a teaching certificate. These secondary schools, the first one of which opened in 1875, provide their students with the opportunity to earn the credentials necessary to teach in primary and secondary schools (Batz & Caballeros, 2019). A university degree was not required for teaching certificate in Guatemala.

#### ***Secondary Education in the Twentieth Century***

Beginning in 1899 and continuing into the early part of the twentieth century until the CIA-supported coup against the democratically-elected government of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán in 1954, public education was relatively well-supported and academic achievement was valued and respected. This is particularly true during the short administration of Manuel Estrada Cabrera, when Greco-Roman temples were built all around the country to celebrate *Minervalías*, parties and processions mostly to celebrate the power of the president and his government, but also to recognize the achievements of students and their teachers (Rendón, 2002). A period known as the "Ten Years of Spring" began in 1945, with the election of Juan José Arévalo and continuing with the election of Arbenz in 1950 (Grandin et al., 2011). Arévalo's administration ushered in important education reform; unfortunately, these reforms (which reinforced existing laws and commitment to public education) were short-lived. With the overthrow of Arbenz's government in 1954, Guatemala quickly slid into violence, dictatorial leadership, civil war, and genocide.

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During the 36-year civil war, from 1960 until peace accords were signed in 1996, secondary school and university students were widely engaged in political activism and protests, demanding not only their right to an education, but also for basic civil and human rights. This student activism included increased democracy and civics among student leadership in public secondary schools and street demonstrations (del Rosario Ramírz, 1997; Sandoval, 1997). The federal government quickly responded to these attempts at self-government and democratization in schools by implementing a militarization program in the schools (Sandoval, 1997).

In 1996, peace accords were signed in Guatemala to end the civil war. Part of the peace accords recognized the rights of students to an education, and the rights of indigenous Maya students to learn (at least some of their academic subjects) in their own indigenous language. Public education for primary and *básico* (i.e., lower secondary) school is technically compulsory and free in Guatemala (though often still cost prohibitive for many families). Unfortunately, the education system in Guatemala is one of the least equal in Latin America (Batz & Caballeros, 2019), especially for students from poor homes and for indigenous Maya students. This inequality is apparent in many ways: the condition of the school buildings and supplies, the qualifications and ability of the teachers, and whether the students are able to attend a private school or not (Batz & Caballeros, 2019).

### Structural Changes

Currently, the Guatemalan secondary education system is a mix of public schools (supported by government funding) and private schools (that either charge tuition and so serve the elite of the country, or are run by non-governmental organizations or churches). *Básico* schools (similar to middle school or junior high school in the USA; ISCED level 2) usually lasts for three years (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*) and is compulsory. Most students in *básico* are between 12 and 16 years old. Even though *básico* is compulsory and free (if the students attend a public school), it is not uncommon for *básico* students to drop out of school to begin working or because their families cannot avoid the associated costs (e.g., supplies, uniforms, transportation, etc.).

### Trends and projections

#### *Secondary Education in Guatemala Today*

After completing *básico*, students can attend school as part of a *bachillerato* program or a *diversificado* program (ISCED level 3). These programs are similar to high school in the USA, and are not compulsory – meaning there are relatively few public, free *bachillerato* and *diversificado* programs for students to attend; instead, most students in these secondary education programs attend a private school and must pay tuition. Students in these programs are usually between 15 and 18 or 19 years old, and most are attending a *bachillerato* or *diversificado* program that will provide them some type of credential for employment (e.g., teaching – which still does not require a university degree, accounting, tourism, etc.). It is after completing a *bachillerato* or *diversificado* program that students can continue, if they choose, into tertiary education at a technical school (*técnicos*) or university (see Batz & Caballeros, 2019, for more information on the current education system and teacher training).

### Role of technology and other innovations

Technology use in education in Guatemala has been and continues to increase, similar to what has been observed globally (Cajas, 1998; Galla, 2016). The implementation of technology, particularly in schools located in rural and less wealthy areas, continues to face obstacles. Education experts and scholars continue to call for increased funding and use of technology in secondary schools (Asturias de Barrios & Arellano, 2007).

### Further reading and online resources

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