



EN
COR
TO

SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS TO RECOVER LEARNING

An Educational Intervention Beyond the School

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

This document analyzes the implementation of evidence-based practices such as the MIA Learning Camps and their potential to function as an effective response to foundational learning gaps—that is, deficits in reading and mathematics skills experienced by students even when they attend school regularly.

The document describes the methodologies that underpin these camps: Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) and Combined Activities for Maximized Learning (CAMaL), as well as their implementation model, which centers community engagement beyond the formal school setting through summer learning programs facilitated by trained community volunteers.

The practical and social implications of these camps are examined, and reflections are offered for public policy and community-based actions aimed at addressing learning gaps.

Introduction

Available evidence shows that there is a global learning crisis, which worsened after the prolonged closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of these closures, Latin America and the Caribbean was one of the regions where greater inequality emerged, along with learning disruption, reduced school engagement, high dropout rates, learning gaps and learning loss, and widening educational disparities (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2020; Boruchowicz, Parker, & Robbins, 2022; World Bank, 2020).

Mexico is no exception. Evidence documents the pandemic's impact on learning. In PISA 2022, Mexico was the third-worst performing OECD country in mathematics and reading comprehension, and the country with the lowest score in science. Mexico also ranked 35th out of 37 OECD member countries, with an average score of 407 (the OECD average is 478) (IMCO, 2023). In addition, in southern Mexico, the share of children and adolescents who were able to read a simple story decreased from 75% in 2019 to 58% in 2021, and the share who correctly answered division problems fell from 49% to 20%. Learning poverty—understood as the inability to read and understand a simple text by age 10 (World Bank, 2021a)—also increased, averaging 21.5% in reading and 29.3% in arithmetic (Hevia, Vergara-Lope, Velásquez-Durán, & Calderón, 2022).

These results underscore the urgent need to address learning gaps, defined as “the absence of expected learning relative to learners’ age and grade level” (Vergara-Lope & Hevia, 2018, p. 47), in order to



SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
MARCH 2026 / NUM 7

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

protect students' educational trajectories and equip them with tools that enable lifelong learning—such as reading, numeracy, and problem solving (UNESCO, 1990).

In this context, it is necessary to design and implement effective and sustainable actions—namely, evidence-based practices—to improve the foundational learning of children and adolescents in Mexico. To address these challenges, the Independent Measurement of Learning (MIA) Special Advocacy Program has developed a set of educational innovations focused on foundational reading and mathematics for primary and lower secondary education, known as Learning Camps. These are implemented in different modalities: (a) school-based: during class hours within schools; (b) extracurricular: outside regular hours in school or community spaces; and (c) summer courses: during the school break (Velásquez-Durán, Hevia, & Vergara-Lope, 2021; 2024).

As discussed below, one of the defining features of these innovations is their flexibility and their capacity to adapt to diverse contexts, including by engaging communities in these processes. Foundational learning gaps can be addressed both inside and outside the school, and social and community participation is essential not only to understand the severity of the problem, but also to propose solutions that are sustainable over time (Hevia, Vergara-Lope, & Velásquez-Durán, 2023).

To examine this in depth, we share an implementation experience of Learning Camps in the Summer Course modality in the Juluchuca micro-watershed, in the municipality of Petatlán in the state of Guerrero. This was a community-driven and participatory response to learning gaps, beyond school systems, and it was made possible through a strategic partnership between MIA and the Regenerando de Sierra y Mar Association (ReSiMar). This partnership made it possible to bring educational innovations to children and adolescents in this area, focused on: (a) reducing learning gaps and foundational learning loss in reading and mathematics; (b) strengthening participants' motivation to learn through playful and community-based strategies; and (c) fostering community participation. Next, we offer reflections on how these types of camps can be consolidated as an effective response to the educational context described above (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020; UN, 2020).

Implementation of MIA Learning Camps

Methodology

MIA Learning Camps are educational innovations aimed at improving foundational learning in reading and mathematics. They are grounded in the methodologies Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) and Combined Activities for Maximized Learning (CAMaL), and they



SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
MARCH 2026 / NUM 7

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

incorporate three pedagogical principles: learning as a process of construction (a constructivist approach), education as a socializing practice, and assessment to improve educational achievement (formative assessment) (Nava, Hevia, Vergara-Lope, & Velásquez-Durán, 2023; Velásquez-Durán, Vergara-Lope, & Hevia, 2024).

Their distinctive pedagogical feature is “grouping children by achievement level and orienting activities to the level at which they are” (Banerjee et al., 2016, p. 3). This approach consists of organizing participants by their actual learning level, developing collective learning activities designed for each level, and frequently assessing their progress (Banerjee, 2012). In the Summer Course modality, MIA Camps become community, educational, and recreational spaces to strengthen learning during school holidays, operating as an intensive course with playful, hands-on, and community-based activities.

Implementation process

These camps were implemented through collaboration between MIA—contributing its academic, pedagogical, research, and evidence-based practice development experience—and ReSiMar, an organization known for its community, educational, and environmental regeneration work in the Juluchuca watershed, Guerrero. This made it possible to connect education with

environmental care, while also strengthening social cohesion by involving families, volunteers, and youth from the community who served as facilitators after receiving training from MIA in the implementation of these educational innovations.

Overall, four clearly differentiated processes were carried out: (a) diagnosis, a simple formative assessment to identify children’s and adolescents’ learning levels, conducted using valid and reliable literacy and mathematics instruments developed by MIA, known as MIA Plus (Hevia & Vergara-Lope, 2016); (b) level grouping, which made it possible to organize six camps in total—three in reading and three in mathematics; (c) implementation of the level-based educational interventions, serving 44 children and adolescents (55% girls and 45% boys) between 5 and 13 years old, enrolled from preschool through second grade of lower secondary; and (d) final measurement, to identify each participant’s progress and the overall camp results.

Results in improving foundational learning

In reading, the assessment identified whether children and adolescents could read syllables, words, sentences, a short story (Story), and answer two inferential comprehension questions (Comprehension 1 and 2). In mathematics, it assessed whether they could identify numbers between 10 and 99, perform



SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

simple additions (Addition 1), additions with regrouping (Addition 2), simple subtractions (Subtraction 1), subtractions with regrouping (Subtraction 2), divisions, a problem involving addition and subtraction (Problem 1), a problem involving multiplication and division (Problem 2), and fraction addition. After the intervention, results showed an increase in the share reaching the

Comprehension 2 level (the highest level in the MIA Plus instrument), from 32% to 40% (see Figure 1). In mathematics, there was also an increase at the highest level of the MIA Plus instrument—Fractions—from 0% to 8%, while Problem 2 increased from 0% to 12%, Problem 1 from 4% to 12%, Division from 16% to 20%, and Subtraction 2 from 16% to 36% (see Figure 2).

Figure 1.
Results of MIA Learning Camps in reading

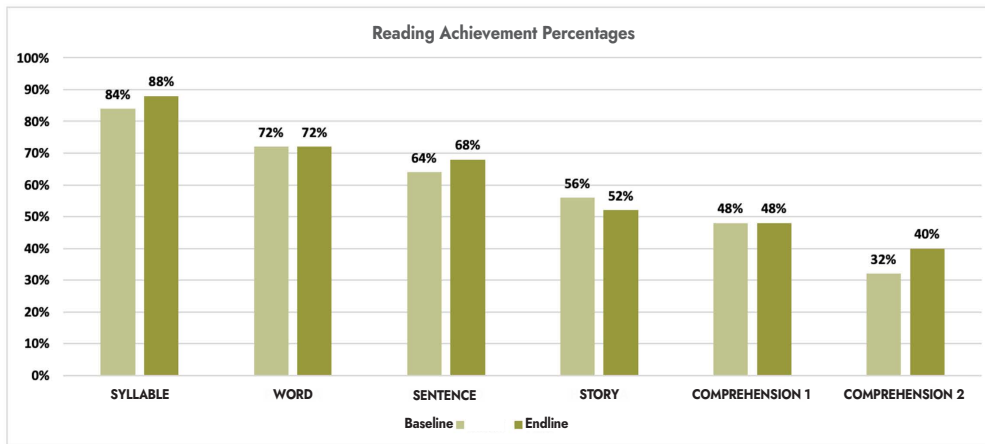
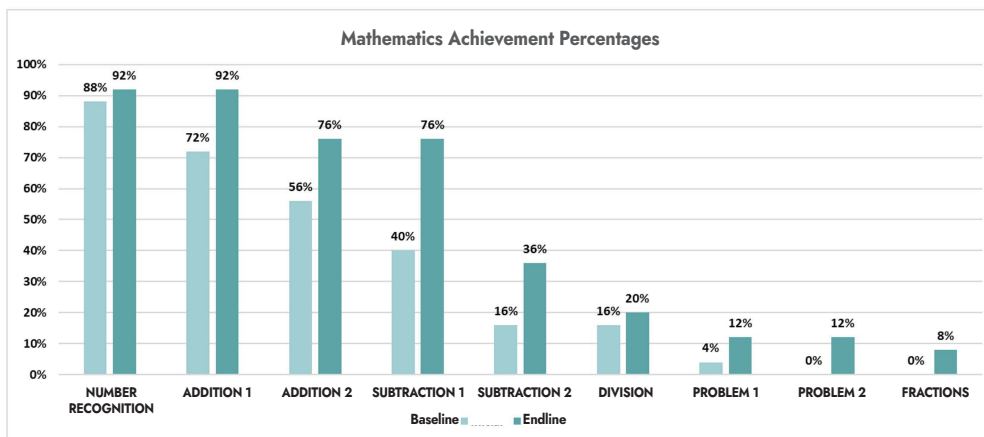


Figure 2.
Results of MIA Learning Camps in mathematics





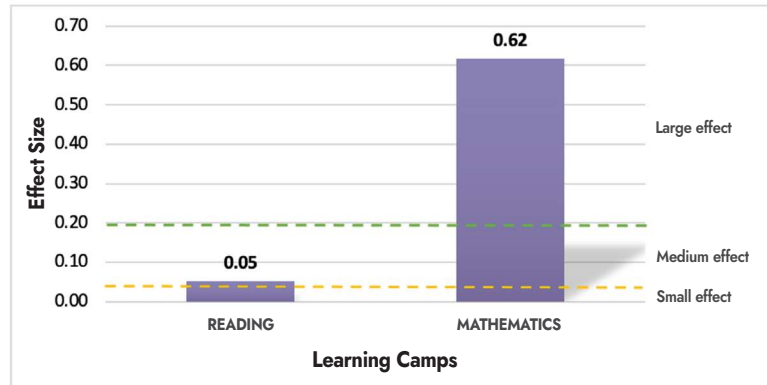
SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
MARCH 2026 / NUM 7

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

Figure 3.
Effect size of MIA Learning Camps in standard deviations



Overall, the results indicate a 15% improvement in mathematics ($p < 0.01$; Student's t significant at 0.01) and a 2% improvement in reading. According to the scientific literature, effect sizes in causal studies of educational interventions such as MIA Learning Camps are classified as follows: (a) an effect size smaller than 0.05 is considered small; (b) between 0.05 and less than 0.20 is medium; and (c) 0.20 or higher is large (Kraft, 2020). Using these reference points, reading shows a medium effect (Cohen's d : 0.05), while mathematics shows a large effect (Cohen's d : 0.62) among participants—meaning their foundational learning improved thanks to the MIA Learning Camps educational intervention (see Figure 3).

Policy implications

As noted, there is a learning crisis clearly evidenced by international, regional, and national assessments, alongside an increase in

learning poverty (Boruchowicz, Parker, & Robbins, 2022; ECLAC, 2020; Hevia, Vergara-Lope, Velásquez-Durán, & Calderón, 2022; IMCO, 2023; World Bank, 2020; 2021b). This scenario reveals that current education policies face a structural challenge: schooling without learning. Although efforts have been made to increase enrollment and keep students in school, the current education system has not been able to guarantee effective conditions for students to acquire foundational learning such as reading, reading comprehension, basic arithmetic operations, and problem solving (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, UNESCO & UNICEF, 2021). Moreover, the existence of homogeneous curricular policies focused on grade level—rather than children's and adolescents' real learning levels—hinders timely, differentiated responses to learning gaps. To make matters worse, the lack of formative assessment mechanisms greatly limits the system's ability to identify learning



SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
MARCH 2026 / NUM 7

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

gaps in a timely manner and respond with targeted, effective, and sustainable strategies.

The implementation of MIA Camps reported in this document shows that, when emphasis is placed on formative assessment (using simple, valid, reliable instruments that can be applied at the community level), it is possible to guide strategic pedagogical decisions to reduce learning gaps and learning loss (Hevia, Vergara-Lope, & Velásquez-Durán, 2023). However, agile systems for diagnosis and targeted intervention at the local level are not always considered in every context.

The results associated with the large effect size in the mathematics camps provide empirical evidence that targeted, short-duration educational innovations based on the TaRL principle can generate significant improvements (Velásquez-Durán, Hevia, & Vergara-Lope, 2021; 2024). This calls into question the idea that only long-term structural reforms can produce relevant change, and it opens an opportunity to incorporate accelerated learning recovery strategies during academic break periods. From a social perspective, improving foundational learning through interventions like these can help reduce inequality gaps in vulnerable contexts and safeguard children's and adolescents' educational trajectories. In addition, community-based models can strengthen social cohesion and increase the involvement of families and the broader education community.

When comparing the results of this specific intervention with other MIA experiences, we find that, in this case, gains in reading are smaller than those generally observed. This may be due to transfer issues (unidentified limitations in training) and/or insufficient contextualization of the selected materials. However, in line with evidence-based practice principles, these limitations—far from being considered a “failure”—allow us to learn from the experience and propose adjustments for future versions of the camps.

A lesson derived from the above is that MIA Learning Camps are promising as an evidence-based practice that is sustainable and scalable; nevertheless, their adoption faces challenges such as budget constraints and local follow-up and support processes. Likewise, implementing models such as grouping by real learning level may generate initial resistance in contexts accustomed to organizing students by age or grade. Despite this, in the current context there is growing appreciation for intensive and cost-effective programs for learning recovery, provided they are accompanied by training strategies, contextual adaptation, and a process of continuous follow-up and monitoring. This underscores the need for education policy to place greater weight on local and micro-regional innovations that respond not only to specific geographic realities—such as micro-watersheds—but also to socioeconomic, cultural, institutional, pedagogical, and demographic realities, among others, that shape learning opportunities in each territory.



SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
MARCH 2026 / NUM 7

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

A summer course, while a golden opportunity to carry out interventions, involves several hours per day during school holidays and must be presented as a “break” from more rigid and structured school periods. This means it must be engaging and enjoyable for children and adolescents while still fulfilling

the goal of improving foundational learning. This becomes a challenge that is addressed through the playful activities included in MIA Learning Camps. On this point, various testimonies from students and facilitators agree that these camps successfully bring together learning and fun.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY REFLECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

The learning crisis in Mexico is expressed in low performance on national assessments and in a structural phenomenon of gaps and loss in foundational learning that disproportionately affects children and adolescents in vulnerable environments. The data presented in this document—especially the effect sizes—provide evidence that it is possible to generate significant improvements by implementing accelerated, targeted, evidence-based educational innovations: MIA Learning Camps. These camps are pedagogically relevant because they are grounded in TaRL and CAMaL principles, with clear transformative potential in contexts with learning gaps. At the same time, their

implementation underscores the importance of connecting research, academia, civil society, and local communities in educational processes, showing that community participation and place-based work strengthen both the effectiveness and the social ownership of educational innovations.

Overall, the findings stand out in three ways: (a) formative assessment is a fundamental component that makes it possible to have an objective diagnosis of each child’s and adolescent’s real learning levels; (b) learning gaps and learning loss require targeted strategies, and TaRL and CAMaL represent a viable alternative to address them; and (c)



SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
MARCH 2026 / NUM 7

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY REFLECTION RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT.)

collaboration among diverse actors with the community enables the sustainability and scaling of evidence-based practices such as MIA Learning Camps.

For these findings to transcend and become practical, real improvements, it is necessary to engage in dialogue with municipal and state authorities around three key points: (a) the use of formative assessment mechanisms through simple instruments that can guide the implementation of targeted interventions, and above all, allow timely identification of

potential learning gaps; (b) the organic incorporation of Teaching at the Right Level strategies—that is, flexible intensive recovery schemes during strategic periods such as school breaks or at the beginning of the school year—supported by follow-up and monitoring of progress; and (c) the scaling of contextualized educational innovations where community participation and territorial work strengthen implementation, ensuring sustainability and improved educational trajectories for children and adolescents.

References

- Banerjee, A. (2012). Teaching at the Right Level. Poverty Action Lab. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/Teaching%20at%20the%20Right%20Level.pdf>
- Banerjee, A., Banerji, R., Berry, J., Duflo, E., Kannan, H., Mukherji, S., Shotland, M., & Walton, M. (2016). Mainstreaming an Effective Intervention: Evidence from Randomized Evaluations of “Teaching at the Right Level” in India (Working Paper 22746). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w22746>
- Boruchowicz, C., Parker, S., & Robbins, L. (2022). Time use of youth during a pandemic: Evidence from Mexico. World Development, 149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105687>
- ECLAC (CEPAL). (2020). Education in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic [web version]. <https://www.cepal.org/fr/node/51998>
- Hevia, F. J., Vergara-Lope, S., & Velásquez-Durán, A. (2023). Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL). An adaptation for Latin America and the Caribbean. Concept note. USA: UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/45421/file/Ense%C3%B1anza%20en%20el%20nivel%20adecuado%20-%20ESP.pdf>



SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
MARCH 2026 / NUM 7

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

Hevia, F. J., & Vergara-Lope, S. (2016). Educational assessments conducted by citizens in Mexico: Validation of the Independent Measurement of Learning (MIA). *Innovación educativa*, 16(70), 85–108.

http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1665-26732016000100085&lng=es&tlng=es

Hevia, F. J., Vergara-Lope, S., Velásquez-Durán, A., & Calderón, D. (2022). Estimation of the fundamental learning loss and learning poverty related to COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 88, 102515. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102515>

IMCO. (2023). PISA 2022: Two out of three students in Mexico do not reach the basic level of learning in mathematics.

<https://imco.org.mx/pisa-2022-dos-de-cada-tres-estudiantes-en-mexico-no-alcanzan-el-nivel-basico-de-aprendizajes-en-matematicas>

Kuhfeld, M., & Tarasawa, B. (2020). The COVID-19 slide: What Summer Learning Loss Can Tell us about the Potential Impact of School Closures on Student Academic Achievement. NWEA.

https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2020/05/Collaborative-Brief_Covid19-Slide-APR20.pdf

Nava-Lara, S., Hevia, F. J., Vergara-Lope, S., & Velásquez-Durán, A. (2023). Pedagogical principles of the Learning Camps of the Independent Measurement of Learning (MIA) project. Mexico: CIESAS, UV.

United Nations. (2020). Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond.

https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf

UNESCO. (1990). World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs. World Conference on Education for All.

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000127583_spa

UNESCO. (2022). The state of global learning poverty: 2022 update.

<https://www.unicef.org/media/122921/file/StateofLearningPoverty2022.pdf>

Velásquez-Durán, A., Hevia, F. J., & Vergara-Lope, S. (2021). Improvement in Basic Learning through the Scaling Up of Educational Innovations. In Ishamel I. Munene (Ed.), *Ensuring all Children Learn: Lessons on Inclusion and Equity from the South* (pp. 183–200). Lexington Books. ISBN: 978-1793636270



SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
MARCH 2026 / NUM 7

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

Velásquez-Durán, A., Vergara-Lope, S., & Hevia, F. J. (2024). Educational innovations with a playful approach for better foundational learning in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. In B. Jamil, F. Hevia, I. Roy, I. Munene, P. Rose, & R. Sabates (Eds.), *Foundational Learning: Insights from the Global South* (pp. 36–49). Vitasta Publishing. ISBN: 9788119670536.

Vergara-Lope, S., & Hevia, F. J. (2018). Foundational learning gaps: The elephant in the room of Mexico's education reform. In A. Martínez & A. Navarro Arredondo (Eds.), *Qué podemos reformar de la Reforma educativa: Una mirada sobre sus principales alcances y retos*. Mexico: Instituto Belisario Domínguez. Senate of the Republic.

World Bank. (2020). COVID-19: Impact on education and policy responses [web version].
<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/143771590756983343-0090022020/original/Covid19EducationSummaryesp.pdf>

World Bank. (2021a). What is Learning Poverty?
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/what-is-learning-poverty>

World Bank. (2021b). Actuemos ya para proteger el capital humano de nuestros niños: los costos y la respuesta ante el impacto de la pandemia de COVID-19 en el sector educativo de América Latina y el Caribe. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35276>

World Bank, UNESCO, & UNICEF. (2021). *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery*. The World Bank, UNESCO & UNICEF.



SUMMER LEARNING CAMPS

Anabel Velásquez Durán
Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán
Felipe Hevia de la Jara

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
MARCH 2026 / NUM 7

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

Anabel Velásquez Durán

PhD in Educational Systems and Environments, Master's in Virtual Education, and BA in Administrative Computer Systems (Universidad Veracruzana). Researcher at the Institute for Educational Research at Universidad Veracruzana. Postdoctoral fellow at CIESAS (SECIHTI). Director General of the Independent Measurement of Learning (MIA) Program. Member of Mexico's National System of Researchers and of the Mexican Council for Educational Research. Certified training agent (STPS). General coordinator of international research projects (Hewlett, Tinker, PAL Network, SUMMA, IDB, UNICEF, Kellogg Foundation).

She has completed research stays at UNAM and at the UNESCO/ICDE Chair. She has 20 years of professional experience, including: training human resources in higher education and graduate programs; developing educational innovations; providing corporate consulting for online corporate universities; coordinating online course development; and strategic leadership in ICT. She has published books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed articles in specialized journals, and has supervised numerous master's and doctoral theses in higher education institutions.

Samana Vergara-Lope Tristán

She holds a BA, MA, and PhD in Psychology from the Faculty of Psychology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She has taught courses, served on evaluation committees, and supervised numerous undergraduate and graduate theses across a range of higher education institutions. Her publications include three books and several book chapters and peer-reviewed journal articles. She completed an academic semester at Harvard University in 2022, was a visiting professor at the University of Chile (2018–2019), and is currently an academic visitor at

the University of Seville (2025–2026). Since 2015, she has co-coordinated the Independent Measurement of Learning (MIA) project, which has received several awards and has helped improve learning outcomes for more than 300,000 children in Latin America. She is a full-time researcher at the Institute for Educational Research at Universidad Veracruzana and served as coordinator of the PhD program in Educational Research from 2021 to 2025.

Felipe Hevia de la Jara

PhD in Anthropology from CIESAS and research professor at CIESAS-Golfo since 2009. Member of the Mexican Academy of Sciences and Mexico's National System of Researchers. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard University, the University of Seville, and the University of Chile. He coordinates the MIA Program, which seeks to reduce educational gaps through

citizen-led assessments and has been recognized by the Inter-American Development Bank and Mexico's Congress. His research focuses on political anthropology and education. He has published more than 100 academic works and has taught in Mexico, Chile, Brazil, and Spain.

MEXICANOS PRIMERO is a civil society organization that advocates for ensuring the right to learn for children and youth by driving improvements in Mexico's education policy.



www.mexicanosprimero.org