

INTRODUCTION TO LATIN AMERICA

In size, political structure, and economic status, and people, Latin America represents ethnicities, languages and educational levels. The countries vary in size from the smallest Caribbean islands to the sprawling area of Brazil, which accounts for 40 or percent of the population of South America.

The economy in Latin America suffered intense, widespread economic troubles in the 1980s, and in many countries is still recovering. The region can be characterized largely by persistent poverty levels, and skewed income inequality. This is most evident in the division between urban and rural population, and is most prevalent in Brazil, Colombia and Chile.

The divides between rich and poor, urban and rural are reflected in the division between educated and uneducated. In many Latin countries, educational attainment and literacy rates in urban areas are dramatically higher than in rural areas. Providing education to the entire population remains a problem in many Latin American countries, although the situation is improving with every decade. The proportion of students who complete secondary school is low, and most countries have relatively high overall literacy rates. For much of the population, education is seen as the primary means to improve one's station in life. Generally, the people place a very high value on it, and work hard to provide a good education for their children.

The education systems vary country by country, but most have a similar structure as the U.S.; they have both public and private universities, and are on the same two-level undergraduate/graduate system used in the United States.

Language represents a significant factor in any decision to enter the Latin American market and the choice of program. Although Spanish and Portuguese are the primary languages spoken, English language courses are in high demand throughout the region. Access to technology is a second factor. Although internet penetration is rising in the region, technology adoption still lags significantly behind the U.S. and Europe.

Overall, the region, though not as ready for e-learning as Europe or parts of Asia, is largely untapped, and holds potential for a rapid expansion by higher education institutions.