Preventing high school dropouts in La Paz and El Alto

The causes, consequences, and prevention strategies of school desertion in Bolivia.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Bolivian education sector knows many bottlenecks, like similar countries in Latin America such as Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Problems such as the inequalities between urban and rural areas (*e.g.* respectively high and low literacy rates) and different ethnic groups, the contrast between high enrollment rates and low completion rates, and the difference in completion rates between primary and secondary education are common and widespread. Bolivia shows many similarities with this Latin American pattern, even though progress has been made in the last decades due to increased attention from international agents and increased investments of the Bolivian government. Nowadays, school desertion is one of the major challenges that the Bolivian education sector is facing, especially in secondary education. Statistics show that the rate of school desertion in Bolivia dropped from 10% to less than 6% over the last decade. However, education experts indicate that less than half of all adolescents in Bolivia graduate from high school with a diploma. This is a problem of major concern: without a well-educated population it is hard for Bolivia to escape from the position of least-developed country on the Latin American continent. This thesis aims to research the current causes and consequences of school desertion in secondary education in Bolivia, and the diversity of prevention strategies that is currently in place. The research is framed by the right-based approaches, which see education as one of the human rights that all individuals are entitled to.

Objectives

The main objective of this thesis is formulated in the following research question:

What are the causes of school desertion in secondary education in Bolivia and what measures can be taken to improve this situation?

This thesis aims to combine existing literature with empirical data obtained during a field work period of 15 weeks in order to provide a complete overview of the current situation of school desertion and prevention strategies in Bolivia . The research is conducted in the cities of La Paz and El Alto in the west of Bolivia. These cities provide an interesting context: two interdependent large urban settlements characterized by migration, located alongside each other, with a diverse population, and very different from each other in terms of economic activity and culture. An extensive literature study on school desertion and prevention hereof has been taken in order to obtain a good basis and overview of the yet existing knowledge and (secondary) literature on the research topic. The collection of primary data has been carried out by using different methodological techniques, both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data was obtained by handing out questionnaires to students, teachers, and parents of students. A total of 312 respondents filled out the questionnaire: 219 students, 32 teachers, 61 parents; the respondents were selected by using stratified sampling (students and teachers) or by convenience (parents). The questionnaires were filled out in school and aimed at providing the research with information and viewpoints on the causes of school desertion and prevention strategies, the quality and value of education, and bottlenecks in education.

The qualitative methods used in this research are focus groups and in-depth interviews. The six focus groups were held with students from all different grades in high school. These groups were mostly used as a means to generate information on the students' views on their school, the quality of their education, motives for scholar desertion and how the school is handling this problem, and their personal experiences with fellow students who dropped out.

The interaction between the students provided the researcher with valuable insights and additions to the information from the questionnaires.

The second qualitative method that was used are in-dept interviews with key informants such as education personnel (school directors, teachers, supporting staff), education experts (professionals working in education or in organizations focusing on education), and high school drop outs. A total of 18 interviews were held. These interviews have given the researcher a broader view on the educational sector and its recent developments in Bolivia, insights in the local situation, and their personal experiences and stories.

Main findings and conclusions

School desertion is a complex process: every drop out has a personal story in which different stakeholders, causes, motivations, and contextual factors interact that result in the student quitting school. The main stakeholders in the drop out-process, including the prevention strategies are:

National government: the national government bodies that are responsible for national education policymaking and school desertion prevention programs.
Local (municipal) government: the local government bodies that create local education policy and school desertion prevention initiatives.
NGOs and CBOs: the currently active national and local non-governmental organizations (like PLAN, FyA), and community-based organizations.
School director: the school director of the secondary schools.
Teachers: the teaching staff in the secondary schools.
Other education personnel: supporting staff (janitors, lunch-mothers, secretary etc.) and members of the JE.
Students: the adolescents currently enrolled in secondary education in La Paz and El Alto, aged 11-20 years old.
Drop outs: former students in secondary education who at some point dropped out of school.
Parents: the parents/guardians of the students/drop outs.
Family and household: the direct relatives (also non-familiar) that are in close day-to-day contact with the students, with whom the students share a house.

The main causes of school desertion in Bolivia can be divided into two categories: in-school and out of school causes. The in-school causes are those within the school environment, out of school causes are those influences caused by political, economic, and family issues as well as involvement in criminal activity. The most influential in-school causes are:
(1) Accessibility: the supply of schools and their accessibility. This is not so much a problem in urban areas, since secondary schools are numerous. However, in rural areas of the country this is problematic: the people live spread over a large area where schools are not always close by and hard to reach.
(2) The facilities, resources, and maintenance: many schools are in a poor state of maintenance, know a lack of school supplies (books, computers), lack of teachers, and are a depressing/boring environment for the students.
(3) The quality of education, teaching, and learning outcomes: many students complained on the quality of education and teaching which influences their motivation negatively.
(4) Safety: both at school and in school transportation the safety of the students is not always guaranteed. Cases of abuse (physical, psychological, or sexual) in school by students or education personnel or on the way to school have been frequently reported.

(5) The school ambience: discrimination and bullying of students by other students or education personnel is still common.

The most important out of school causes of school desertion are:

(1) The household context: the household composition (the more siblings, the less likely that all will attend school), the education level of the parents (a low educational level of the parents has a negative influence on the education prospects of their children) , the control and support of the parents, and family problems are all factors that may contribute to school desertion;

(2) Income and financial circumstances: the direct and opportunity costs of school compared to the benefits of attending school are reasons for not attending school. A student (or its family) can decide to go working instead of going to school in order to contribute to the family income or to provide its own income.

(3) The cultural context: gender: traditionally education is seen as less important for girls than for boys. Nowadays most people see the value of secondary education as equal for both boys and girls, but traditional viewpoints are still present.

(4) Health: health problems of students are often not the prime reason to drop out of school, but are a result of other influencing causes such as poverty and household circumstances. Less healthy students (malnutrition for example) attend school less frequently, experience difficulties in learning, are more likely to repeat grades, and drop out early due to poor levels of attention, and low motivation. The sickness of relatives of students is influential as well, since it may force the students to stay at home and take care of the patient or household.

(5) Teen pregnancies: teen pregnancies are the main cause for female students to drop out of high school. When a girl becomes pregnant and gives birth, it is very difficult to stay in or return to school because of physical difficulties, and having to take care of the child (either by staying at home or by providing an income).

Other out of school causes for school desertion are the consumption of alcohol, and the involvement in gangs or criminal activity.

The prevention strategies that are in place are of a diverse nature: some are national governmental programs, others are locally or personally initiated, and all tackle a different aspect. The government is seen as the main duty bearer to implement initiatives to combat school desertion. The most important initiatives of the Bolivian government are the recent education reforms by president Morales (including teacher training), and the implementation of nutritional and CCT programs. Local governments, such as the municipality in El Alto, have these types of programs in place as well. At an even more local level, in the schools, the prevention strategies vary per school and individual. School directors and teachers actively try to prevent school desertion by informing, motivating, and talking to the students and their parents. Some schools have the JE actively participating, whereas others purposely leave the JE out of these kind of student affairs. Other strategies include the organization of extracurricular and festive activities, school transportation, and sexuality education.

The effectiveness of all different strategies varies: it is important though to keep in mind the different factors that interact in the complex process of school desertion. Many causes that are not being tackled by national/local government programs are being tackled by individual initiatives.

List of abbreviations

ASEP	Avelino Sinani y Elizardo Perez
BJA	Bono Juana Azurduy de Padilla
BJP	Bono Juancito Pinto
CBO	Community-based organization
CCT	Conditional cash transfer
CLADE	*Campaña Latinoamericana por el Derecho a la Educación*, or Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latina America and the Caribbean
EFA	Education for All
EIB	*Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe,* or Intercultural (and) Bilingual Education
EU	education unit
FyA	Fe y Alegría
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
ICCP	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
INE	Instituto Nacional de Estadística
JE	*Junta Escolar* or School Board
MAS	*Movimiento al Socialismo* or Movement for Socialism
MDG	Millenium Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
RBA	Rights-based approach
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

List of Latin American terms and expressions

Chacha Warmi	Aymará concept of the unity of man and woman. A man and woman are not complete if they are not united in marriage.
Dia del Mar	23rd of March, when the Bolivians commemorate the loss of their access to the Pacific Ocean to Chile in the Pacific War in 1883.
Dia del Niño	Day of the Child on the 12th of April. The students do not have class during this day and different kinds of activities are organized by the school to celebrate 'childhood'.
Machismo / Machista	The structuring of power relations amongst and between men, as well as between men and women. Focusing on the latter, the women are seen as inferior to the men and men exercise power and control over them.
Moreno	Usually used to describe ones skin color (light to darker brown) or hair color (brunette). In certain areas used in a discriminatory way.
Normal	Teachers training institute.

Semana Santa	The Holy Week before Easter.
Voceador	Person that drives along in the minibuses in La Paz and El Alto, shouts the destination of the minibus, and collects the money from the passengers.

List of tables, figures, and boxes

Tables

Table 1.1. Human rights and capabilities. 21
Table 1.2. Social benefits of education. 28
Table 1.3. Completion rates of primary and secondary education in Latin America of children aged 15-24 years, in 2007 (in %). 30
Table 1.4 Literacy rates and mean years of schooling in Latin America, in 2007. 30
Table 1.5. School desertion in Latin America for adolescents aged 15-19 years, in 2008 (in %). 32

Table 2.1. Population growth in La Paz and El Alto, 1950-2010. 40

Table 3.1. Education enrollment percentages in Bolivia and the department of La Paz, 2009. 49
Table 3.2. Overall illiteracy rates (%), expected years of schooling, and dropout rates in Bolivia (%), 2001. 50

Table 4.1. School desertion rates in secondary education, 2000-2009 (%). 60
Table 4.2. Teachers and their approach: gender differences, in (%). 64
Table 4.3. Motives for discrimination. 66
Table 4.4. The value of secondary education by gender, in (%). 71
Table 4.5. Student's responses concerning decision-making. 76

Table 5.1. The government as duty bearer, in (%). 80
Table 5.2. Conditionalities of the BJA. 83
Table 5.3. Programs that prevent school desertion: the differences between La Paz and El Alto, (in %). 85
Table 5.4. Teachers' interventions to prevent school desertion. 86
Table 5.5. Sources of information on sexuality. 89
Table 5.6. Extra activities at school. 97

Table 6.1. Causes of school desertion and corresponding prevention strategies 103

Figures

Figure 2.1. Bolivia's landlocked position in South America. 38
Figure 2.2. The position of La Paz and El Alto. 40
Figure 2.3. The position of the districts Cotahuma (green) and Villa Adela (blue). 41
Figure 2.4. The hilly surroundings of Cotahuma. 41
Figure 2.5. A typical street in Villa Adela, El Alto. 42

Figure 3.1. Conceptual model. 51

Figure 4.1. Causes of school desertion, (in %). 62
Figure 4.2. Who is the discriminator? (in %). 65
Figure 4.3. Perspectives on higher education for girls, in (%). 72

Figure 5.1. Current strategies that stimulate students to finish high school, (in %). 80

Figure 5.2. Promotional road sign for the BJA. 84
Figure 5.3. Taking class pictures with the llama. 91
Figure 5.4. The clowns at the Día del Niño celebration. 91
Figure 5.5. New ideas to prevent school desertion categorized, in (%). 93
Figure 5.6. One of the class rooms in El Alto. 96
Figure 5.7. The concrete common area in El Alto. 96

Boxes

Box 1.1. Article 26 of the UDHR.
Box 1.2. Articles 13 and 14 of the ICCP. 24
Box 1.3. The Education for All movement. 25
Box 1.4. The education-fertility relationship. 26
Box 1.5. Learning outcomes in Latin America. 28
Box 1.6. School desertion in Guatemala . 29
Box 1.7. School desertion in Peru. 33
Box 1.8. CCT programs in Latin America. 34

Box 2.1. The Gini index. 38
Box 2.2. The beginning: early 20th century. 43
Box 2.3. ASEP law, 2010 - Constitutional mandates of education. 44
Box 2.4. NGOs in the Bolivian education sector. 46

Box 3.1. FyA on educational justice. 56

Box 4.1. Jhonny (4th grade). 63
Box 4.2. Eli, mother. 67
Box 4.3. Edoardo (2nd grade). 68
Box 4.4. Carmen. 69
Box 4.5. Child labor in Bolivia. 69
Box 4.6. Mario (19 years old). 70
Box 4.7. Patricia (17 years old). 73
Box 4.8. Ten months. 73
Box 4.9. Ana. 75
Box 4.10. Ana Maria (6th grade). 75

Box 5.1. Naming the programs. 81
Box 5.2. Bono Escuela. 82
Box 5.3. *Prevenir con Educación* 2008-2015. 88
Box 5.4. Research notes (1) – Bono's. 95
Box 5.5. Research notes (2) – Semana Santa. 95
Box 5.6. Mothers in university. 99

Box 6.1. Research questions 101

Table of contents

Acknowledgements **5**
Executive summary **7**
List of abbreviations and Latin American terms **11**
List of boxes, figures, and tables **13**
Table of contents **15**
Introduction **17**

1. Theoretical and thematic framework **19**
1.1. Introduction 19
1.2. Theoretical framework: rights-based approaches 19
1.2.1. The emergence of rights in the development paradigm 19
1.2.2. Connecting human rights and development 20
1.2.3 The debate on RBA 23
1.2.4. The universal right to education 24
1.3. Thematic framework 25
1.3.1. Education and development 25
1.3.2. The value of education 27
1.3.3. Education in Latin America 28
1.3.4. Education and gender in Latin America 31
1.3.5. School desertion in Latin America 31
1.4. Conclusion 35

2. Regional framework: the geographical and historical context **37**
2.1. Introduction 37
2.2. Geographical and socio-political context 37
2.2.1. The country: Bolivia 37
2.2.2 The cities: La Paz and El Alto 39
2.2.3. The districts: Cotahuma and Villa Adela 40
2.3. History of the Bolivian education sector 42
2.3.1. The 1994 reforms 42
2.3.2. Evo's election and the ASEP law 44
2.3.3. The involvement of external actors in the Bolivian education system 46
2.3.4. The contemporary Bolivian education system 46
2.4. Conclusion 46

3. Research outline **49**
3.1. Introduction 49
3.2 Research background 49
3.3. Research objective and questions 50
3.4. Conceptual model 51
3.5. Methodology 52
3.5.1. Research strategy 52
3.5.2. Selection of the research area 52
3.5.3. Description of the research schools 53
3.5.4. Data collection 54
3.6. Fe y Alegría 56

3.7. Main biases and limitations 57
3.8. Conclusion 58

4. The causes of school desertion in Bolivia 59
4.1. Introduction 59
4.2. School desertion in Bolivia 59
4.3. In-school causes of school desertion 62
4.3.1. Accessibility 62
4.3.2. Facilities, resources, and maintenance 63
4.3.3. Quality of education, teaching, and learning outcomes 63
4.3.4. Safety 65
4.3.5. School ambience 65
4.4. Out of school causes of school desertion 66
4.4.1. The household context 66
4.4.2. Income and financial circumstances 69
4.4.3. The cultural context: gender 71
4.4.4. Health 72
4.4.5. Teen pregnancies 73
4.4.6. Other causes 75
4.5. Decision-making around school desertion 76
4.6. Conclusion 77

5. Preventing school desertion in La Paz and El Alto 79
5.1. Introduction 79
5.2. Stakeholder mapping 79
5.3. Which strategies and whose responsibility 80
5.4. Existing strategies to prevent school desertion 81
5.4.1. Financial support 81
5.4.2. Teachers' practices 85
5.4.3. Enhancing motivation and support 87
5.4.4. Sexuality education 88
5.4.5. Other measures 89
5.5. New ideas to prevent school desertion 92
5.5.1. Students 93
5.5.2. Teachers and other education personnel 97
5.5.3. Education experts 98
5.6. Conclusion 100

6. Conclusions, discussion, and recommendations 101
6.1. Introduction 101
6.2. Conclusions 101
6.3. Discussion 104
6.4. Recommendations 107
6.4.1. Further research 107
6.4.2. Program initiatives 107

References 109
Appendices 115

Introduction

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.
Nelson Mandela

An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.
Benjamin Franklin

A human being is not attaining his full heights until he is educated.
Horace Mann

Education has an outstanding reputation in terms of development, as is illustrated by the quotes from Nelson Mandela, Benjamin Franklin, and Horace Mann. It is seen as a powerful tool to lift individuals, societies, and even whole nations out of a state of poverty and may lead to a more prosperous future. Education has long been a luxury good and only available for the wealthy elite. Not until the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by the United Nations it was accepted as a universal social good, and initiatives to promote education for all have been widespread ever since.

Even though statistics may indicate otherwise, Latin America knows many bottlenecks in its education sector: high repetition and drop-out rates in primary and secondary education, a lack of equity in the provision of education leaving certain social groups at the margin of the educational system, language problems, functional illiteracy, the low flow rate from primary education to higher levels of education, and severe problems with learning achievement and the quality of education only represent the tip of the iceberg. Bolivia is no exception: the discrepancy between urban and rural areas is huge, the high enrollment rates contrasts with the low completion rates, and the difference in completion rates between primary and secondary education is striking (respectively 94.9% and 52.4%). Other education experts indicate that less than half of all adolescents in Bolivia graduate from high school with a diploma. This is a problem of major concern: without a well-educated population it is hard for Bolivia to escape from the position of least-developed country on the Latin American continent.

One of the main problems of the education sector in Bolivia is school desertion: children dropping out of school before completing it. The reasons that underlie this process are diverse: financial struggles within the household, family problems, alack of interest and a low quality of education are just a few important factors to bear in mind. In order to fully grasp the complexity of the phenomenon of school desertion it needs thorough investigation. The objective of this research is to identify the main causes of school desertion in secondary education in Bolivia, and to evaluate the current strategies that are in place to prevent this. It also focuses on new strategies and the feasibility of these ideas. This thesis aims to combine existing literature on the country with empirical data obtained during a field work period of 15 weeks in La Paz and El Alto in order to provide a complete overview of the current situation.

The thesis begins with outlining the theoretical and thematic framework in which the research has been placed. This first chapter pays attention to the emergence of (education) rights in the development sector and how these two concepts are connected. It continues by scrutinizing the link between education and development, and framing the contemporary education sector and its bottlenecks in Latin America.

The second chapter gives the regional framework, both geographical and historical. The geographical context informs on the three levels where this research has been conducted: the country, the cities, and the districts within these cities. The historical context provides

information on the development of the Bolivian education sector from the early 1900s until the recent reforms in 2010, and on the contemporary characteristics of the education sector. The first two chapters lead to the presentation of the research outline in chapter three. The research objective and questions, conceptual model, methodology, and main biases and limitations of the research are discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, the host organization Fe y Alegría will be introduced.

Chapters four and five will present the results of the research as conducted in La Paz and El Alto. Chapter four emphasizes on the main causes of school desertion in La Paz and El Alto by combining existing literature with the statements from education experts, professionals, high school students, drop outs, and their families. Other causes that are only present on a national level and not in the research area will be shortly discussed as well. Chapter five focuses on the strategies that are in place to prevent school desertion in secondary education. All different kinds of strategies will be discussed, including national, regional, local and individual ones. The second half of this chapter looks at new initiatives to prevent school desertion that have been mentioned by all the different actors in this research and how realistic and feasible these ideas are. The final chapter presents the conclusions of this research and formulates the answers to the research questions. Subsequently, these findings will be discussed in the light of the regional context, the existing literature, and other case studies as described in the first chapters. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research on this topic and for program initiatives for local prevention strategies.

1. THEORETICAL AND THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

1.1. Introduction

In this chapter the theoretical and thematic frameworks that support the thesis will be elaborated on. The concepts of education and access to education are central to this research. The theoretical framework is based on the rights-based approaches (RBA), the universal right to education, and what influences these have had on the contemporary development debate. The thematic framework focuses on the role of education in development thinking, the importance of education, and important aspects of education and scholar desertion in Latin America.

1.2. Theoretical framework: rights-based approaches

1.2.1. The emergence of rights in the development paradigm

The rights-based approaches (RBA) emerged in the early 1990s as an important approach in development thinking. Until that point, development and human rights were operating isolated and independent from each other. Both domains did not consider the other domain as important or influential in their work. "Development practitioners did not consider human rights issues as part of their professional domain: they neither weighed the implications of their own work on human rights outcomes, nor sought explicitly to affect human rights through their work." (Uvin, 2002: 1). Marks described the differences between the two domains as follows:

> "Development goals tend to focus on the material conditions that allow people to benefit from economic processes in ways that improve their condition; human rights goals tend to deal with normative constraints on power relations to ensure human dignity and the elimination of repressive and oppressive processes; and those of health concentrate on the requirements of physical, mental and social dimensions of human existence" (2005: 2).

The breach between human rights and development has been closing, albeit slowly. The organizers of a prestigious UN-sponsored 1999 Conference on Nutrition and Human Rights stated that "the human rights approach to nutrition is not even on the radar screen" and that "interaction between the [UN human rights machinery] and the UN development agencies has been essentially non-existent" (*Ibid.*). Eitherway, the similarities between the two are evident: both deal with the improvement of the human condition, which has lead to the incorporation of human rights in the development paradigm.

Much progress has been made since the late 1990s and the before separated domains have approached each other in several ways. In the first place, human rights vocabulary entered the development thinking and appears now in official statements, policies and document. Secondly, development organizations have included human rights principles and objectives in their programs and thereby created new goals, objectives and criteria for their partners. Human rights organizations have shifted their strategies too and now add development to their approach (Chapman, 2005: 2). Where development organizations were talking about 'basic needs' before, they came to realize that these needs were basically human rights. A good example is the lack of safe drinking water, which is in essence a violation of an economic and social right (Rand and Watson, 2007: 4). This recognition has prompted an evolution from a development model based on filling poor people's needs, to one in which people are able to

claim what is rightfully theirs: the RBA (*Ibid.*). More attention was given towards the respecting and protecting of human rights, given that violation of these rights will impede social justice and economic progress from happening (Uvin, 2002: 2).

As Cornwall and Nyamu-Musemi (2004) and Tsikata (2004) point out, there is no single RBA, there is however common thinking on its basic elements. These elements derived from several internationally drafted and ratified documents, such as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Bill of Rights[1]. The basic elements include an express linkage to rights, greater accountability on the part of states and international actors, a greater stress on empowerment, participation and non-discrimination, and attention to vulnerable groups. Rand and Watson contribute that 'the rights-based approaches are aimed at creating the conditions under which people can live in dignity and peace and develop their full potential' (2007: 4). Nowadays, the RBA has been accepted by many major organizations such as the UN and its agencies, the World Bank, several bilateral development agencies, and international development NGOs like Oxfam, CARE, and Save the Children.

1.2.2. Connecting human rights and development

As stated before, there is not one single rights-based approach; Cornwall and Nyamu-Musemi argue that there are "plural rights-based approaches, each with different starting points and rather different implications for development practice" (2004: 1415). Marks (2005) continues by saying that distinctions can be made by looking at the way in which an approach or framework connects human rights to human development. He has elaborated seven different approaches within the RBA: the holistic approach, the human rights based approach, the social justice approach, the capabilities approach, the right to development approach, the responsibilities approach, and the human rights education approach. All these approaches will be discussed shortly and the (sometimes small) differences will be addressed.

The *holistic approach* emphasizes that there are no distinctions between the different human rights and that they should not be divided in different categories: political and civil rights on one hand, and economic, social and, cultural rights on the other. The political and civic rights are 'freedoms from' rights, characterized by violations that must be redressed regardless of resources. The economic, social, and cultural rights are of a programmatic nature, calling for cooperation and utilization of resources (*Ibid.* 2-3). All these rights are indivisible and interrelated, and all should be taken into account when put into practice, not only the most relevant or convenient ones. A good example can be found in urban planning, where it is not enough to solely consider the right to shelter. The rights to food, health, education, information, and work should also be kept in mind.

The second approach, the *human rights based approach*, has been defined by different scholars (see *e.g.* Frankovitz *et al.*, 1998; Häusermann, 1998). The main points are that development cooperation should be formed by a framework based on human rights law. This framework will shape the way in which development assistance or aid will be delivered, the responsibilities of both donors and recipients, and the way in which it is monitored and evaluated. This approach also promotes human-centered development and equal rights and access for all, not distinguishing between people on their sex, ethnicity, age etc. (Marks, 2005: 5). Important concepts of this approach are the express linkage to rights, accountability,

[1] The International Bill of rights consists of theUniversal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

empowerment, participation and non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups; aspects that were already mentioned in paragraph 1.1.1. Some of these were already of growing importance in development thinking: the concept of good governance can be easily linked to accountability, transparency, and participation.

The *social justice approach* focuses on eliminating social disparities and inequalities, and the pursuit of social justice (*Ibid.* 6). Marks states that "social justice captures an important feature of the human rights framework for development, namely the emphasis on the moral imperative of eliminating glaring social inequality within societies and structurally-imbedded patterns of international support for those inequalities" (*Ibid.* 8). Many international NGO have incorporated this approach into their mission statement nowadays. Good examples hereof are Oxfam International with its mission "to build a future free from the injustice of poverty" (Oxfam, 2012) and CARE International with its slogan 'Defending dignity. Fighting poverty." (CARE, 2012).

The fourth approach is based on the ideology of economist Amartya Sen as described in his book 'Development as Freedom' in 1998. Sen argues that development is the enhanced freedom to choose and lead a valuable life. These enhanced choices are called capabilities, the way in which these are exercised are called functionings. Primary needs such as shelter and nutrition are considered as basic capabilities, but also more complex concepts like self-esteem and social integration (Sen, 1993: 31). Sen defines poverty as deprivation of basic capabilities; economic factors (*e.g.* income) are of lesser importance when trying to fight poverty (but definitely not unimportant). Sen does not provide a full list of basic capabilities, other academics (see Desai, 1995; Nussbaum, 2000; Alkire, 2002) have tried to do so. Nussbaum (2000) listed ten capabilities essential to a full, valuable life, based on Sen's capabilities approach, and has linked these to the relevant articles in the UDHR, see table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Human rights and capabilities.

Capability	Relevant articles in UDHR
1. Life: a normal length of life.	Article 3 on right to life.
2. Health: good health, including reproductive health, adequate nutrition, and shelter.	Article 25 on the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and family. Article 12 of the ICESCR on the highest attainable level of physical and mental health.
3. Bodily integrity: free movement, secure against assault, choice in reproduction.	Articles 3, 4, 5 and 13 on the right to life, liberty, and movement.
4. Senses, imagination, and thought: being able to use senses, to imagine, to think, to reason, informed by education.	Article 18 on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; Article 19 on freedom of opinion and expression; Article 26 on the right to education; Article 27 on participation in cultural life.
5. Emotions: attachments to things and people, emotional development.	Articles 12 and 16 on the right to marriage and found a family, and non-interference in privacy, family, home or correspondence.
6. Practical reason / thought: conception of the good, critical reflection and planning life.	Article 18 on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.
7. Affiliation: social interaction, protection against discrimination, friendship, and respect.	Article 1 on equality in dignity and rights; Article 2 on non-discrimination; Article 18 on thought and conscience; Article 19 on opinion

	and expression; Article 20 on peaceful assembly and association; Article 29 on duties to the community and respect for the rights of others.
8. Other species: respect for and living with other species.	Not in the UDHR, but mentioned in international environmental instruments and in several draft texts on human rights and the environment, but not in the Universal Declaration, except by implication in Article 28.
9. Play: being able to laugh, play, and enjoy recreational activities	Article 24 on rest and leisure.
10. Control over ones environment: politically (choice) and materially (property).	Article 19, 20, and 21 on speech, association, and political participation; Article 17 on property; Article 23 on right to work and free choice of employment.

Source: Laderchi *et al.*, 2003; Marks, 2005; UDHR.

Marks argues that "public policy tends to focus on functionings: food consumption or health care delivery, for example. Sen and Nussbaum propose that public policy should instead focus on capabilities" (Marks, 2005: 11). The *capabilities approach* connects development to freedom and the civil, political, social, economic, and cultural choices it associates with. This approach has been adopted by the UNDP and measures the scores in its Human Development Index by looking at the capabilities of life expectancy, literacy, education, and standards of living of a country.

The *right to development approach* is the fifth approach on Marks' list. In this approach, development itself is seen as an human right which should be respected and acted upon. The first notions of this idea rise in the early 1970s, in 1986 it was proclaimed as a human right in the Declaration on the Right to Development by the UN. The declaration puts the human person and realization of all human rights central in development. The adoption of this right has caused difficult situations when developing countries pressured and forced donor states to live up to it, whereas donor states did not take the declaration that literally. Marks: "the right to development is used rhetorically to amplify Third World demands on the industrialized world for a transfer of resources, in the form of foreign aid or debt forgiveness. The challenge from the beginning has been to translate the hopeful but ambiguous language of the Declaration into concepts that are meaningful to economists and useful to the rethinking of the development process" (2005: 14).

The involvement of human rights in international politics and relations have lead to legal norms implying obligations by states to respect, protect, promote, and fulfill the rights in question and duties on individuals and other non-state actors to contribute to the realization of those rights (*Ibid.* 16). It is thus not solely mere abstract ethic principles, but also duties and responsibilities. Therefore, Marks' sixth approach is the *responsibilities approach*. He described three types of duties under international human rights law that establish direct and indirect responsibilities: the correlation of rights and duties as a notion of moral philosophy, the duties individuals have to others and to the community, and the duty to exercise rights responsibly (*Ibid.* 17-22). The main actors with these duties and responsibilities are governments. However, individuals, companies, and organizations have to respect them as well, and it is the government's task to check them.

The seventh and final approach is the *human rights education approach*. This approach focuses on educating people in a non-formal way about their own rights. The six most important goals are enhance knowledge, develop critical understanding, clarify values, change attitudes, promote solidarity, and alter behavior or practice; ultimately this will lead to empowerment of the people. "The essence of these ideas is that the most effective means of enhancing people's capabilities is to facilitate their own social transformation through participation in the decisions that affect development"(Marks, 2005: 23). This approach can take many different forms: from small scale community groups, to nationally operating human rights committees. Many organizations (People's Decade for Human Rights Education and Human Rights Education Associates) have incorporated this approach in their strategies, as well as the World Health Organization in their reproductive health and rights program.

1.2.3. The debate on RBA

This part will give an overview of the pros, cons, and the current academic debate on RBA. The RBA will be discussed as one uniform concept, without paying attention to the different approaches discussed in the previous paragraph. Therefore, some of the arguments given in this part will fit some approaches of RBA better than others.

Some scholars argue that the incorporation of human rights in the development paradigm is just the latest fashion and that nothing has changed essentially (Uvin, 2002; Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). Uvin argues that since the 1990s, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies have used the human rights discourse more and more, mentioning human rights in their official documents and statements etc. According to him, "much of the human rights conversation still amounts to little more than rhetorical repackaging (2002: 5). The concepts mentioned in the human rights discourse have been present in the development field for a long time and he asks why there has not been acted on these ideas before (*Ibid.* 8).

The new discourse was relatively easy to use, since it combined well with their yet existing strategies with a serviced-based approach. However, Uvin argues that it had not been used correctly: "by postulating that development projects and programs by definition constitute an implementation of human rights, the important distinction between a service-based and a rights-based approach to development is obscured" (*Ibid.* 3). The relationship between the duty bearers and right claimers must be put central, as Windfuhr (2000) explains:

> "Besides the general misconceptions related to ESC-Rights (economic, social, and cultural), one additional basic misunderstanding often comes up in discussions on how to integrate ESC-Rights into development cooperation: the concept that development cooperation automatically implements ESC-Rights because it is oriented to improve health or food situations of groups of the population. A rights-based approach means foremost to talk about the relationship between a state and its citizens."

Also, many initiatives taken to promote human rights in development are not of a clear development nature. Uvin takes the example of the recommendations of the 2001 Human Development Report of the UNDP. The majority of these recommendations (*e.g.* align national laws with international human rights standards and commitments, and strengthen a network of human rights organizations) are of legal or technical nature. "These are all potentially useful activities, but they do not reflect any mainstreaming of human rights into development practice." (Uvin, 2002: 9).

The reason why development agencies and institutions used this new human rights discourse, is "to benefit from the moral authority and political appeal of the human rights

discourse. The development community is in constant need of regaining the high moral ground in order to fend off criticism and mobilize resources. As the development community faces a deep crisis of legitimacy among both insiders and outsiders, the act of cloaking itself in the human rights mantle may make sense, especially if it does not force anyone to think or act differently" (Uvin, 2002: 4).

Uvin argues as well that the incorporation of the human rights-discourse has lead to the addition of new goals and criteria for development agencies and new programs with specific human rights aims. Some of these (*e.g.* good governance) are not even backed by international human rights law, which is one of the strongest pros of this approach. "By stipulating an internationally agreed set of norms, backed by international law, it provides a stronger basis for citizens to make claims on their states and for holding states to account for their duties to enhance the access of their citizens to the realization of their rights" (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2004: 1416). However, Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi continue by saying that many countries, specifically underdeveloped countries, do not have the institutions and systems in place to enforce their rights. If these are in place, often the poor people do not have access or cannot afford access to these systems.

The RBA are a relatively new phenomenon in the development field and a consensus on how to link the two has not yet been reached. However, many institutions, organizations, and scholars already work with the combination of development and human rights, even though most are still searching for the right way to incorporate one into the other.

1.2.4. The universal right to education

As mentioned before in paragraph 1.1.1., the rights-based approaches are grounded in several internationally agreed upon instruments and documents, which provide "globally recognized standards for what it means to live in dignity" (Rand and Watson, 2007: 4; see also box 1.2, Article 13.1). The right to education is written down in article 26 of the UDHR, see box 1.1.; and in articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCP), see box 1.2. The main points on education are similar in both documents and will be discussed briefly. First of all, everyone has the right to education. Primary education is free and compulsory, and all higher education should be freely and equally accessible and available for all. The education is directed at the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It promotes respect among all nations, racial or religious groups. Finally, parents have the liberty to send their children to a school of their choice.

Box 1.1. Article 26 of the UDHR.

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. (…)
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Box 1.2. Articles 13 and 14 of the ICCP.

Article 13

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

2. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right: (a) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all; (b) Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education; (c) Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education; (d) Fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education; (e) The development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued, an adequate fellowship system shall be established, and the material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

4. No part of this article shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principles set forth in paragraph I of this article and to the requirement that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Article 14

Each State Party to the present Covenant which, at the time of becoming a Party, has not been able to secure in its metropolitan territory or other territories under its jurisdiction compulsory primary education, free of charge, undertakes, within two years, to work out and adopt a detailed plan of action for the progressive implementation, within a reasonable number of years, to be fixed in the plan, of the principle of compulsory education free of charge for all.

1.3. Thematic framework

1.3.1. Education and development

Education has not been a universally accepted social good until 1948 when the UDHR was adopted by the UN. Before, it was only accessible by the elite and the majority of people were excluded from it. Education is considered as the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills that contribute to personal development and the creation of human capital (the stock of productive skills of an individual (Hanushek, 2008: 24)), and human capital formation is

expected to play a major role in the reduction of poverty (Maldonado and González-Vega, 2008; Zapata, Contreras and Kruger, 2011). Schooling can be obtained either through formal schooling or other informal ways outside the educational system. Education does not only contribute to development on a personal level, but its benefits transmit also "across generations and communities at large" (Wordbank, 2011: 2). Therefore, a whole society or country will profit and can move forward by investing in education (Carvajal, Morris and Davenport, 1993). Modern societies have embraced this positive output of schooling early on, and still locate many funds towards national education.

Since 1948 plans to further stimulate the accessibility and quality of education in less developed countries have been developed by national governments, development agencies, NGOs, and international institutions. One of the most influencing international initiatives has been the Education for All (EFA) movement: a global commitment of 164 countries, leaded by UNESCO, to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults, which has been active since 1990. Governments, development agencies, NGOs, civil society and private sector work together to reach the EFA goals set in the Dakar meeting of 2000 (see box 1.3). The Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed upon in the same year, and achieving universal primary education is one of the eight different goals. A total of 189 countries is striving to reach this goal by 2015 and already has booked great progress.

Box 1.3. The Education for All movement.
The Education for All meeting, in 2000 has resulted in the Dakar Framework for Action, with six goals they aim to achieve in 2015:

Goal 1: Expanding and improving early childhood care and education.
Goal 2: Provide free and compulsory primary education for all.
Goal 3: Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults.
Goal 4: Increase adult literacy by 50%.
Goal 5: Achieve gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015.
Goal 6: Improve the quality of education.

The main challenges in Latin America in achieving these goals are the lack of expansion and improvement of early childhood care and education; high repetition and drop-out rates in primary education; difficulties in increasing educational opportunities for young people and adults; a lack of equity in the provision of education, leaving certain social groups at the margin of the educational system; functional illiteracy; and severe problems with learning achievement and the quality of education. Since 2000, much progress has been made, but the region's social, economic, ethnic, and gender inequalities remain constraining further progress. Especially the problems with marginalized groups, like indigenous peoples and urban slum dwellers, remain present (UNESCO, 2011a: 3-4).

School enrollment rates are still the main indicator for measuring education around the world and the main focus of the development initiatives just mentioned. However, getting children to school and preventing school desertion is one aspect of improving education. When schooling is seen as investing in human capital, it is important to pay attention to the quality of schooling as well (Hanushek, 2008: 24). "Evidence shows that it is what students learn— not the number of years that they spend in school— that leads to growth, development, and poverty reduction" (Wordbank, 2011: 3). The amount of knowledge acquired in a certain amount of years of schooling in one country does not have to be equivalent to that of another country. One year of schooling in Bolivia may not produce the same 'knowledge-output' as one year of schooling in the Netherlands. Therefore, it makes it difficult to compare countries to each other only looking at enrollment rates. Attention to the quality of education is needed in order to further develop the education sector around the world.

The global attention by institutions and NGOs on education, both on enrollment and quality issues, demonstrates its importance in development. "The relationship between educational quality and school attainment (…) means that actions that improve quality of education will yield a bonus in meeting goals for attainment." (Hanushek, 2008: 28). The following paragraph discusses the benefits of education in people's lives. Paragraphs 1.3.4. and 1.3.5. will focus on two important aspects of education in Latin America: gender issues and school desertion.

1.3.2. The value of education

The influence of education in one's life is difficult to measure, since it is hard to isolate the 'education effect' from other aspects of one's life. But, there are important features that must be highlighted. The level of education influences peoples lives in several ways: not only economically, but also on a more personal and familiar level. "(E)ducation helps people become healthier, secure better jobs, earn more, and have greater voice in their affairs" (Worldbank, 2011: 2). It is widely accepted that the total amount of years and quality of schooling is proportional to the income one earns (Mincer, 1970; Psacharopoulos, 1994; Stromquist, 2001; Jamison, Jamison and Hanushek, 2007; Hanushek, 2008; Patrinos, 2008; Manacorda, Sanchez-Paramo and Schady, 2010). In low-income countries, an additional year of education adds about 10% to a person's income on average (UNESCO, 2012: 4). However, the relation between poverty and education is complex, and Stromquist emphasizes that this should be understood correctly: "It is not that (people) are poor because they have no education; rather, they have no education because they are poor." (2001: 43). Children from poor households are more likely to drop out of school than children from richer households. The EFA movement sees education as a key right that unlocks other human rights and investing in education facilitates achieving the MDGs. It has listed five reasons why education must be at the forefront of future international development conferences:

(1) Education reduces poverty and promotes economic growth – as described above.
(2) Maternal education improves children's nutrition and chances of survival – a higher level of education of the mother lowers child mortality, lowers the incidence of underweight or stunted children.
(3) Education helps fight HIV/AIDS and other diseases – education promotes knowledge about HIV/AIDS and other diseases, as well as safe sexual behavior.
(4) Education promotes gender equality – the historical gender bias in education is in favor of boys, investing in education would enforce gender parity in education and empowerment of girls and women.
(5) Education promotes democracy and participation in society – the effects of education do not end in school, but will continue in the society.

The benefits of education are not solely a personal gain and have consequences on a familiar, intergenerational, social, and national level too. The familiar, intergenerational, and social benefits of education are diverse, in table 1.2. the most important ones are listed.

Table 1.2. Social benefits of education.

Benefit type	Findings
Child education	Parental schooling affects child's schooling level and achievement.
Child health	Child's health is positively related to parental education.

Fertility	Mother's education is inversely related to daughter's births.
Own health	More education increases life expectancy.
Spouse's health	More schooling improves spouse's health and lengthens life expectancy.
Job search efficiency	More schooling reduces cost of search, increases mobility.
Desired family size	More schooling improves contraceptive efficiency.
Technological change	Schooling helps research and development and diffusion.
Social cohesion	Schooling increases voting and reduces alienation.
Crime	Education reduces criminal activity.

Source: Patrinos, 2008: 59.

Education can boost economic growth on a national level too: an additional year of schooling for the population can lift the national GDP by 0.37% annually (UNESCO, 2012: 5). An increase in education levels of the population is associated with an improvement in many key factors in development and welfare, such as productivity, social mobility, poverty reduction, the construction of citizenship and social identity, and, definitively, the strengthening of social cohesion (ECLAC, 2011: 5). Thus, education does not only lead to economic growth of the individual. It contributes significantly to the development of an individual, its direct surroundings, and the country and its population on an economic, cultural, political, and social level.

Special attention is needed for the education of girls: since their position has lagged behind for centuries, much progress can be made by educating this formerly neglected group. The education of girls and (future) mothers has a range of positive effects on themselves and their children, which table 1.2 already has shown. The mother's education level has a greater impact than the father's education (Filmer, 2006). A higher level of education empowers women too and enables them to make important life decisions, which is illustrated by box 1.4.

Box 1.4. The education-fertility relationship.
Latin America is the region in the world where the education - fertility relation, a negative correlation, is the strongest, The gap in the total fertility rate between the most and least educated women is highest in Peru, with 4.9 children; in Bolivia it is 3.4 children.

Source: Castro Martin and Juarez, 1995.

1.3.3. Education in Latin America

This paragraph will give an overview of both the primary and the secondary education sector in Latin America and the progress it has made in the last decades. Latin American education can still be characterized by inequality: the differences between boys and girls, socioeconomic- and ethnic groups remain large. The sector has expanded primarily on coverage and access. Universal access to primary education was already practically achieved in the early 1990s by most countries in the region: the access rate is now at 97%. The differences between boys and girls or different socioeconomic groups are very small; however, those groups with the lowest access rates are those living in extreme poverty, those living in rural areas, indigenous persons and those belonging to groups of African origin (ECLAC, 2011: 9). This expansion has impacted

the quality of service provision negatively and the quality of the education provided has become less and less, see box 1.5. Another problem is the fact that "the region has failed to transform the education system into a powerful mechanism for equalizing opportunities" (*Ibid.*5). This inequality continues to exist partially due to the environment and available income in the home, as well as the differentiated access in terms of how much they learn in the education system and how far they manage to advance through it (*Ibid*. 5-7).

Box 1.5. Learning outcomes in Latin America.
The Programme for International Student Assessment study of 2009, conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), assesses the acquisition of key competencies in the areas of reading comprehension, sciences, and mathematics for a sample of 15 years old students (divided in quartiles by their socioeconomic and cultural status) in different countries. In 2009, nine countries in Latin America and the Caribbean participated: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay. The results showed that Latin American students have severely deficient performance in the key competencies and they performed worse than most other participants in the study. The most problematic competency was reading: *e.g.* 90% of the Peruvian students in the first quartile failed to achieve the basic literacy proficiency needed to participate as citizens in the modern world.

Source: ECLAC, 2011: 11-12.

Latin America gives a rather positive and homogenous picture when looking at primary education, whereas a different picture emerges when looking at secondary education. The differences between the different countries are larger, the regional attendance rate drops to 88%, the number of students falling behind grows, and the inequalities increase, derived from their ethnic origin, geographic location and socioeconomic factors (*Ibid.* 9). Ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples have a higher chance of dropping out, and more girls than boys finish secondary school. Table 1.3 gives insight into the completion rates of at least primary and secondary education of eleven countries in Latin America. The table illustrates perfectly the differences between primary and secondary education: the lowest rate for primary education completion is 70.8% in Nicaragua, whereas for secondary education two countries have a percentage of 15% (Ecuador and Honduras). In the past decades, especially after accepting the EFA goals and MDGs, much attention was paid and funds were invested to increase the access to primary education which resulted in good outcomes on primary education completion. However, the attention for secondary education has lagged behind and the effects hereof are visible, as displayed in table 1.3.

Table 1.3. Completion rates of primary and secondary education in Latin America of children aged 15-24 years, in 2007 (in %).

	Primary education	Secondary education
Argentina	96.3	56.3
Bolivia	94.9	52.4
Brazil	69.9	43.1
Chile[2]	92.2	56.5
Ecuador	78.5	15.0
Honduras	78.0	15.0
Mexico[2]	92.7	35.0
Nicaragua[2]	70.9	28.2
Peru	88.8	64.2
Venezuela	98.4	57.5

Source: IADB, 2012

Table 1.4. gives an overview of the literacy rates and mean years of schooling of seven countries in Latin America: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Peru, and Venezuela. The literacy rates are high, only Honduras and Ecuador score well below the 90% (relatively 83.6% and 84.2%). The mean years of schooling fluctuates between 6.1 years in Honduras and 9.1 years in Peru. The data is specified in urban and rural areas for this indicator, which shows the differences within the countries clearly. The Andes countries of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru all demonstrate the inequalities between different parts of the country. These countries are known for the large share of indigenous peoples living in the rural areas of the country. People living in urban areas have around five years more schooling than their rural counterparts. In the countries of Brazil and Honduras this number lies around the four years of schooling. Schooling in the countryside of Latin America is completely different than in the cities. Schools are small, often only one room where several grades are taught (multi-grade schools), or not all grades are taught in one school; the facilities are bad, sometimes no electricity or running water; and teachers are badly educated and scarce. These numbers demonstrate that the differences within the countries remain big and inequalities continue to influence the education sector and the educational outcomes of the region.

Table 1.4. Literacy rates and mean years of schooling in Latin America[3], in 2007.

	Literacy (%)	Years of schooling		
		National	Urban areas	Rural areas
Bolivia	90.7	8.4	10.3	5.5
Brazil	90.0	7.9	8.6	4.6
Colombia	92.7	-	-	-
Ecuador	84.2	8.9	10.3	5.9
Honduras	83.6	6.1	8.0	4.2
Peru	89.6	9.1	10.9	5.7
Venezuela	95.2	9.3	-	-

Source: ECLAC, 2012.

[2] Data from 2007 was not available for these countries, therefore data from 2006 (Chile) and 2005 (Mexico and Nicaragua) was used.

[3] The mean years of schooling is calculated for the economically active population of 15 years and older.

1.3.4. Education and gender in Latin America

Many Latin American countries have made great progress in achieving gender equality in education in Latin America. The enrollment gap between boys and girls, which historically has been in favor of boys, is decreasing, mainly due to increased national and international attention for girls' education (Worldbank, 2011: 2). The EFA movement and MDGs, both already described in paragraph 1.2.1., are good examples hereof. Nowadays, in many Latin American countries girls outnumber boys in enrollment statistics, especially in secondary and tertiary education (Stromquist, 2001: 42; UNESCO, 2011b; Worldbank, 2011: 2). However, this positive image given by data and numbers gives a rather distorted picture of the Latin American reality and does not mean that the differences between boys and girls have vanished. Gender equality in education is more than mere statistics and enrollment figures:

> "Although there is no apparent gender gap in enrollment, a greater proportion of Bolivian girls never enter the formal school system, and among children that enroll in school, 24% of girls drop out before completing primary school compared to 19% of boys. The outcome gaps are even greater along ethnic lines: 42% of indigenous children drop out before primary school completion compared to 14% of non-indigenous children." (Zapata, Contreras and Kruger, 2011: 590).

The Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE) signalizes several points of concern which hinder reaching full gender equality in education, their most important points being culture, the classroom, discrimination, and school desertion (CLADE, 2011). These points of concern will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 4. Latin American culture and its perception on gender forms the starting point for many of these just-mentioned problems. "Within the cultural sphere, gender asymmetries are expressed and reproduced through definitions of femininity and masculinity (including prescribed types and range of emotions) supported by such mechanisms as ideology, sexuality, language, law, schooling, and the mass media, among many others." (Stromquist, 2001: 45). In Latin America, men are ought to be dominant and reign in the public spheres. Women are subordinate to the man, but the private sphere is their domain: taking care of the family and house (Pape, 2008). This stereotype role that is prescribed to Latin American women is reproduced within the family and school. Schoolbooks reinforce these stereotypes with pictures and assignments of Juan going to work or Maria cleaning the house. Also teachers confirm this, by giving more attention to boys than girls, albeit both positive and negative attention (CLADE, 2011: 7).

The differences between urban and rural areas remain striking and give a more negative picture when considering gender differences. "Girls tend to enter primary school slightly older than boys and to leave at earlier grades" (Stromquist, 2001: 42). Due to more traditional thinking, education for girls is seen as less important. Girls are ought to become caring wives and mothers, and therefore do not need to continue learning and studying. They are taken out of school to help out in the family or to earn an income and support the family.

1.3.5. School desertion in Latin America

Improving the enrollment rates and quality of schooling are important focus points of development-thinking related to education. Both aim to present the student with good qualitative knowledge and skills. A point of great importance is to keep the children at school and prevent them from dropping out. "School desertion is a topic of increasing importance as efforts to increase schooling levels are expanded. Almost all developing countries are rightfully

concerned about the problem of low school completion rates" (Hanusheck, Lavy and Hitomi, 2006: 3).

Latin America knows large differences between primary and secondary school completion, as table 1.3 in the previous paragraph already illustrated. "These differences in access, progression, and completion of education slowly increase through the secondary school cycle, perpetuating a chain of inequality through the education system itself." (ECLAC, 2011: 10). The rate of school desertion increases in secondary education: "given that primary education is moving towards universal coverage, and that most desertion by children from vulnerable families occurs during secondary education (as the opportunity cost is greater for older children, in terms of lost family earnings), the extension of benefits for children attending school throughout the secondary cycle emerges as a priority" (*Ibid*. 31). According to a study of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in 2002, 37% of Latin American adolescents (aged 15 – 19 years old) drop out of school before completing secondary education. A large part of these students already leave the education system during primary school, an other large part of drop out students leave the system during the first year of high school. Table 1.5 demonstrates the school desertion levels of several Latin American countries on a national level, as well as by geographical area..

Table 1.5. School desertion in Latin America for adolescents aged 15-19 years, in 2008[4] (in %).

	National	Urban areas	Rural areas
Brazil	19.7	18.1	27.5
Bolivia	18.9	13.9	28.8
Chile	12.2	11.3	18.6
Ecuador	25.8	17.6	41.0
Honduras	49.4	32.5	64.3
Guatemala	48.2	34.7	62.3
Mexico	38.4	31.2	49.9
Peru	25.4	18.4	37.7
Venezuela	18.8	-	-

Source: ECLAC, 2009.

The table shows that Bolivia is performing quite well compared to neighboring and similar countries in the region. With a school desertion rate of 19.4% it performs better than other countries with large proportions of indigenous peoples: Peru has 25.4%, Mexico 38.4%, and Honduras even 49.4%. Also, the table affirms again that the differences between urban and rural areas are big. The lowest national difference can be found in Chile, where the difference is just over 7 percent points; in Honduras the difference is over 30 percent points.

Most existing literature on school desertion focuses on primary education and even though many characteristics for primary and secondary education are the same, there are some differences to observe as well. The groups that are most vulnerable for dropping out are ethnic minorities and indigenous groups: they are most affected by the unequal conditions in the region. "Difficulties in gaining equitable access to the education system are related to a higher incidence of poverty, the distance that must be travelled to reach schools, the quality of the education institutions to which they have access, the relevance of curriculums, and discrimination, which serves to reduce their educational opportunities" (*Ibid.*). Another

[4] Not all countries could provide data from 2008, therefore the year closest by was used. The date for Chile and Guatemala originates from 2006, the data for Bolivia and Honduras from 2007.

vulnerable group for dropping out are students from a home environment where education is not considered as important or valuable: "a child from a home environment that does not favor education is ten times more likely to fall behind than one from a home with a good educational environment" (*Ibid.*). A larger share of males than females drop out of secondary education, since they enter the labor market earlier. However, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2008) there is evidence that this trend is reversed in young people from indigenous groups in the rural areas, where they are often involved in agricultural activities. A final vulnerable group is those students from families with a low socioeconomic level. Students from the highest income complete secondary education four out of five times; whereas barely one out of five students from low income families finishes it (*Ibid.*). Boxes 1.6 and 1.7 provide more information on the cases of Guatemala and Peru, the Bolivian case will be discussed in-depth in chapter 4.

Box 1.6. School desertion in Guatemala.

The Guatemalan education system knows many bottlenecks that induce school desertion at all levels. Only 3 out of 10 children that enter primary school make it till the 6th grade and the drop out rate for children from 15 to 19 years old is almost 50%. It is the country with the lowest educational coverage in the region, the quality of education is low, and the population is very poor. The fact that over 20 Mayan-languages are spoken in addition to Spanish, makes it hard to improve the access to and quality of education. The problems are more severe in rural areas of the country, and rural and indigenous children are the most excluded: the school desertion rate is 34.7% in urban areas, 62.3% in rural areas. The main reasons for school desertion are high opportunity costs and low quality of schools. Opportunity costs are especially high in rural environments, in terms of lost labor for households. The low quality of schools reduces the motivation of students and their parents to finish their education.

Source: Martinic, 2003.

Box 1.7. School desertion in Peru.

A large share of the population of the Andean country of Peru is of indigenous decent and therefore has an indigenous language as its mother tongue. However, the first bilingual education policies were not issued until 1972, education was only available in Spanish before then. In spite of increased attention from the national government and other institutions since then (including the promotion of intercultural bilingual education policies (EIB)), the position of the indigenous peoples still lags behind: they repeat and drop out of school more, and attend schools with poorer infrastructure and poorer quality of education. Almost all indigenous children are enrolled in primary education, but they perform worse than their non-indigenous counterparts in key subjects such as mathematics and language. The indigenous children living in rural areas are even more disadvantaged due to less available EIB programs and poorer infrastructure.

Source: Cueto *et al.* 2009.

The main causes for school desertion can be categorized as 'in-school causes' and 'out of school causes' (Barnes, 1999: 14). Barnes (*Ibid.*) defines out of school causes as those influences by political, economic, and family issues as well as involvement in drugs, alcohol, gangs, and/or criminal activity. Out of school causes are influential and numerous in Latin America, the most important ones being poverty and child labor, family problems, pregnancies

and early marriages, and cultural issues (Stromquist, 2001; Patrinos, 2008; CLADE, 2011; Grigoli and Sbrana, 2011). The in-school causes are those within the school environment, like failing to learn, school climate, quality of education and teachers, and infrastructure and maintenance (Barnes, 1999). The coherency and inter-connectedness between several of these causes, both in- and out of school, is evident. When a student is not stimulated by its family to continue studying, and they force him/her to go working instead, it is only a matter of course that his/her grades will drop. It is important to bear in mind that school desertion is not a distinct or isolated event, but a process where a range of factors influence the eventual outcome. The backgrounds of these different causes will be scrutinized in chapter 4 of the thesis.

Latin American governments and international operating institutions and NGOs have introduced several measures to combat school desertion in the past few decades, most important and widespread being new education policies, the conditional cash transfer (CCT) and school nutrition programs (Grigoli and Sbrana, 2011: 2). The new education policies aim to improve the quality of education provided in the country, and make education apt for local circumstances. Both CCT and school nutrition programs focus primarily on the out of school causes for school desertion. CCT programs aim to reduce poverty by making the program conditional upon the receivers input and this receiver will only get money from the government if certain criteria are met, see box 1.8. Governments hope that by awarding money to families

Box 1.8. CCT programs in Latin America.

Conditional cash transfer programs have been part of social policy in several countries in Latin America: *Oportunidades* and *PROGRESA* in Mexico, the *Bono Juancito Pinto* in Bolivia, *Red de Protección Social* in Nicaragua, *Chile Solidario* in Chili, *Bolsa Família* in Brazil, and *Juntos* in Peru. These last two will be briefly discussed. Both programs are financed by its national governments. The money is awarded to the female head of the household with the idea that she would spend the money on the children and the benefits would spread over the whole household.

Bolsa Família in Brazil: poor Brazilian families receive 22 *reais* per month ($12 USD), per child that is attending school. Additionally, there are some health-related conditionalities, duch as the due immunization of children aged under 6, pre- and post- natal check-ups for mother and child. Families in extreme poverty receive an additional 68 *reais*, and do not have to comply with the conditionality of attending school. In 2011, over 12 million families received the *bolsa família*.

Juntos in Peru: selected households receive 100 *soles* ($38 USD, an average increase of 13% of their income) if they comply with the conditions of the program. These include: pre-natal checks, possession of an identification document, 85% presence at school, and periodic checks on health. In 2010, half a million households participated in the program, which has benefitted over a million children.

Bolivia knows CCT programs as well, such as the nationally government-endorsed *Bono Juancito Pinto* program. In this program families receive 200 *bolivianos* ($29 USD) per child that finishes a year in primary school. This program and other Bolivian initiatives to prevent school desertion will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 5.

Source: Duryea en Pagés, 2002; Jones, Vargas and Villar Marquez, 2007; Morais de Sa e Silva, 2010.

that send their children to school the enrollment and completion rates of schooling will increase. The CCTs "aim at improving educational attainment, (but) when it comes to policymaking, the link between CCTs and education policies has been weak, contrary to what one would expect." (Morais de Sa e Silva, 2010). Morais de Sa e Silva has researched three different CCT programs (one of them being *Bolsa Família* in Brazil, as described in box 1.8.) and in none of these cases there has been coordination between de CCTs and the policies concerning education quality. She continues:

> "At the same time, education policymakers, education scholars, teachers, and school principals have not taken part in CCT policymaking. If CCTs are expected to make an educational contribution that goes beyond improving access, the policymaking divorce between them and education policies needs to be considered. Otherwise, expectations will have to be kept low and CCTs' limits to building human capital should be recognized."

School nutrition programs come in different forms, but basically come down to the (local) government handing out a nutritious snack or meal at school. Children have to be present at school to receive this, and thus functions as a stimulant for parents to send their children to school. Programs that focus on improving the in-school conditions are also widespread, both governments and organizations work on improving school accessibility, infrastructure and maintenance of the school buildings, improving the curriculum and teaching skills of the teachers etc.

The consequences of school desertion are quite clear when one considers the value and benefits already mentioned in paragraph 1.2.2. Not only is it important to keep the personal losses of those students dropping out in mind: these students will probably never reach their full potential and will struggle to improve their living conditions. Hanusheck, Lavy and Hitomi (2006: 3) highlight that school desertion is a topic of concern on a larger scale as well: "both because of lost investment opportunities for society and because of general inefficiency in the provision of public schooling".

1.4. Conclusion

This chapter has given the theoretical and thematic backgrounds which form the backbone of this thesis on school desertion in Bolivia. The recent emergence of human rights within development has brought about new ways of incorporating these rights into new approaches for development. The first part of this chapter has highlighted the diversity of ways in which this can be achieved and the still ongoing debate this has caused. Education is a universal human right, and therefore fits within these new approaches of development. It has been at the center point of many international development institutes and organizations since its benefits and ways it can contribute to the development of a country are diverse and widespread. Education promotes economic growth and reduces poverty, improves the health situation of mothers and their children, helps fight diseases, promotes gender equality, democracy, and participation etc. However, many Latin American countries know a high rate of school desertion (20% to 50%) in primary and secondary education, and experience difficulties fighting this problem. The regional differences and different ethnic groups within countries make it even harder to improve the current situation. The main causes of school desertion can be divided in in-school (school quality, infrastructure, accessibility etc.) and out of school causes (household context, financial circumstances, health problems etc.). The measures that have been taken to prevent school

desertion are diverse: from reforming the education system and policies in order to improve education quality, to implementing programs to stimulate school attendance.

2. THE REGIONAL FRAMEWORK: THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the geographical, socio-political and historical context in which the research has been conducted. It starts with the geographical, socio-economic, political and cultural context of Bolivia. It continues on describing the two cities where the research is conducted: La Paz and El Alto. Their interdependent development and relationship are important factors to bear in mind when trying to understand the local context. The districts of Cotahuma and Villa Adela will be shortly introduced as well, in order to fully grasp the local conditions of the research area. The chapter continues by presenting an overview of the development of the education sector and its curriculum, the involvement of external actors herein, and concludes with a short overview of the contemporary education system of Bolivia.

2.2. Geographical and socio-political context

2.2.1. The country: Bolivia

The Plurinational State of Bolivia (or Bolivia) is a landlocked country situated in the centre of South-America, see figure 2.1. The country gained independence in 1825, after almost 300 years of colonization by the Spanish. Before the Spanish colonization the Bolivian territory belonged to the Inca empire. The country is geographically divided into two areas by the Andes: the *altiplano* in the west (a highland plateau of the Andes) and the lowland regions (Amazon basins) in the east. Its most important natural resources are similar to other countries within the Andes region. Besides natural gas, hydrocarbons and petroleum, there are many different minerals like tin, zinc, silver, lithium, and iron to be found in the Bolivian soil. The agricultural sector cultivates mainly soybeans, coffee and coca. The economy thrives on the export of these crude natural and agricultural products.

Bolivia has 8.3 million inhabitants according to the last census held in 2001, estimates hold that the population has grown to over 10 million inhabitants in 2012. The population is a mix of different ethnic backgrounds: mainly of indigenous, Spanish or African decent, or a mix of either one of those (mestizos and mulatos). There are over 30 groups of indigenous origin present in Bolivia, primarily the Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní. Over 62% of the Bolivian population considers itself indigenous, this percentage being higher in rural areas (77.1%), than in urban areas (53.2%)[5]. It is an urbanized country, with the 64.2% of the population concentrated cities like Santa Cruz, La Paz, El Alto and Cochabamba. The urbanization process took off in the 1950s when people migrated from the rural to the urban areas in search of work and a better, prosperous life.

[5] The census of 2001 indicated that 62.2% of the population considers itself indigenous (ECLAC, 2002). However, numbers on the auto identification of being indigenous or not differ from 55.8% (INE, 2008) to 75-77% (Mamani, 2006). I chose to use this number, since it has been copied by many other institutions like the ILO and UNDP.

Figure 2.1. Bolivia's landlocked position in South America.

The country is underperforming in terms of development, comparing it with other countries in the region: scoring an HDI of 0.663, Bolivia is ranked 108th in the Human Development Reports (HDR). It is scoring slightly worse than the world average (0.681) and Latin American and Caribbean average (0.731) (UNDP, 2011: 128). The country has a GDP of US$17,339,882,191, belonging to the middle lower income level, and one of the poorest countries on the continent. A large part (68%) of this GDP has to be contributed to the production of the informal sector, which is the largest in the world (Worldbank, 2009: 6). The informal sector in Bolivia has been expanding since the 1950s, when many people migrated to the urban areas in search for a job, while the formal sector could not provide these. Nowadays, over 60% of the population lives below the national poverty line (UNDP, 2011: 128). This is partially due to the large income inequality: Bolivia has an Gini-index of 57.3, which is among the highest in the HDR (*Ibid*. 136), see box 2.1.

Box 2.1. The Gini index.

The Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption expenditure among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality. This data compares Bolivia's performance compared to other countries in the region and the best and worst performing countries in the world.

Bolivia	57.3	Honduras	57.7	Peru	48
Colombia	58.5	Mexico	51.7	Sweden	25.0
Ecuador	49	Norway	25.8		

The past decade has been very interesting period looking at the political changes that took place. In 2005, after several turbulent years of mass popular uprisings, strikes and protests, Evo Morales was elected president of Bolivia. Being the first Bolivian president of indigenous origin, a coca farmer himself and political leader of the Movement for Socialism (MAS), Morales is absolutely different than every other president Bolivia had seen before, and many scholars has indicated his election as a historical turning point for the country in terms of democracy, participation, citizenship and equality (see *e.g.* Van Cott, 2003; Dunkerley, 2007; Rochlin, 2007; Schroeder, 2007; Howard 2009). He was reelected in 2009, with over 60% of the votes. His presidency has evoked strong reactions, both positive and negative. Many Bolivians with indigenous origins felt that Bolivia finally had a president that could represent the realities of the country. His election faced much opposition from the 'half-moon' departments in the east of the country (Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija), who cannot identify themselves with Morales' indigenous-centered policies.

One of the biggest changes Morales has brought about is the new constitution which was approved in 2009. The constitution defines the country as a plurinational, unitary, communitarian, free, independent, sovereign, democratic, intercultural, decentralised state, with territorial autonomies. It is founded on political, economic, juridical, cultural and lingual pluralism and acknowledges the pre-colonial existence of 36 different indigenous groups and their rights to autonomy, auto governance, their own culture, institutions and consolidation of their territories. The new constitution illustrates what the main objectives of Morales' policies are: a focus on the national, internal development of the country, emphasizing the indigenous background of the country and its people. These objectives are also to be found in Morales' educational reforms, which will be discussed in paragraph 2.2.

2.2.2. The cities: La Paz and El Alto

The cities of La Paz and El Alto can be seen as one conurbation in the western part of Bolivia, see figure 2.2. With a total of 1.4 million inhabitants it is the second biggest urban centre of the country, after Santa Cruz in the east (1.6 million), and houses 16% of the total Bolivian population. The two cities are fascinating: both in their physical appearance and situation, as well as in their political, economic and cultural interdependency. La Paz is situated in a valley of the Andes, surrounded by steep mountains and hills. It lies at an altitude of around 3,600 meters above sea level, and therefore makes it the highest seat of government in the world. It has been the political core of the country since 1899 and the rest of the country, including El Alto, is seen as the political periphery (Arbona and Kohl, 2004: 255). Both La Paz and El Alto are known for political unrest, road blocks and protests in the streets, since all political decisions are taken here.

El Alto is situated at the *altiplano* (high plateau), on top of the mountains and hills surrounding La Paz at an altitude of 4,000 meters above sea level. Because of the limitations of growth in La Paz due to the surrounding mountains, El Alto became the main area of settlement for migrants and its number of inhabitants grew exponentially over the last decades. The conurbation has known two major immigration waves: the first one in the 1950s, the second one in the 1980s. The total population of El Alto in 1950 was not more than 11,000, whereas La Paz had over 320,000 inhabitants (*Ibid.* 258). The migration wave in the 1950 was caused by rural-urban migrants, who were fleeing from the *haciendas* to the city, in search for work and a better future. The main reason for migration in the 1980s was twofold: both droughts caused by El Niño and the closing of state mines (resulting in high unemployment rates) triggered the migration to the cities (*Ibid.* 258). Table 2.1. shows the growth of both cities in the last decades,

illustrating the impact of these migration waves on the population perfectly. The table shows as well that the number of inhabitants of El Alto outgrew La Paz for the first time in the early 2000s.

Figure 2.2. The position of La Paz and El Alto.

Both location and altitude are important factors in predicting class, level of city services present, and other urban amenities within the conurbation (*Ibid.* 255). This is visible in the different types of employment in the two cities. In La Paz, people work in government employment, public sector and services. El Alto provides jobs in manufacturing, transport, commerce and marketers. However, the informal sectors are the biggest, absorbing the largest share of labor in both cities (*Ibid.* 261).

Table 2.1. Population growth in La Paz and El Alto, 1950-2010.

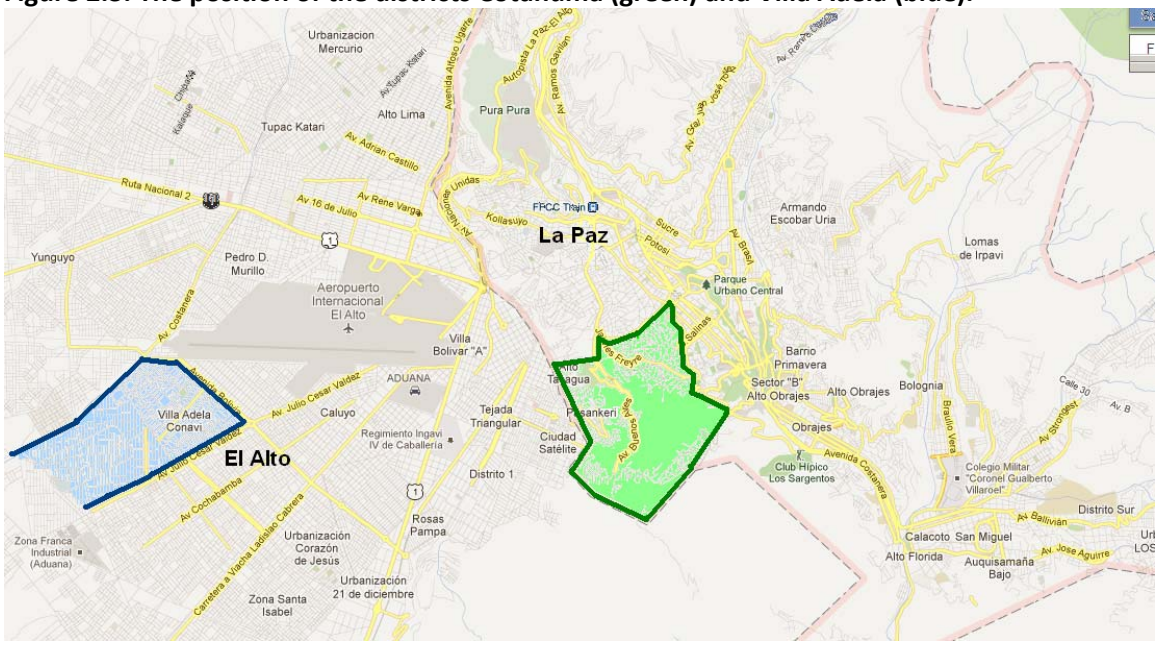
Year	La Paz	El Alto	Conurbation La Paz – El Alto
1950	321,063	11,000	332,063
1960	363,00	30,000	393,000
1970	563,020	60,000	623,020
1976	635,283	95,434	730,717
1985	650,000	223,239	873,239
1992	713,378	405,492	1,118,870
2001	723,293	649,958	1,373,251
2010	732,000	962,097	1,700,097

Source: Arbona and Kohl, 2004: 258.

2.2.3. The districts: Cotahuma and Villa Adela

This research has been conducted in one district in La Paz (Cotahuma) and one district in El Alto (Villa Adela); both districts are indicated in figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3. The position of the districts Cotahuma (green) and Villa Adela (blue).



Cotahuma is a district on the western slope of La Paz with an altitude ranging between the 3,500 and 4,000 meters. Ravines and gullies with water from the highlands alternate with built-up areas. The difficult terrain has not stopped the quick development of the district from a settlement area for migrants from the rural areas of the country to a permanent residential area. Over 150,000 people reside in 80 different neighborhoods in this district, mainly of Aymará decent. The majority of the inhabitants have Spanish as their mothertongue (almost 80%), over 15% of the population speaks Aymará. The biggest problems are the unstable ground conditions (land slides), social and health problems, and the lack of access to basic services. Almost 38% of the total population of Cotahuma has reached secondary education as the highest level of education, more men than women (46% and 32% respectively). Figure 2.4. gives a view over the district and its surroundings.

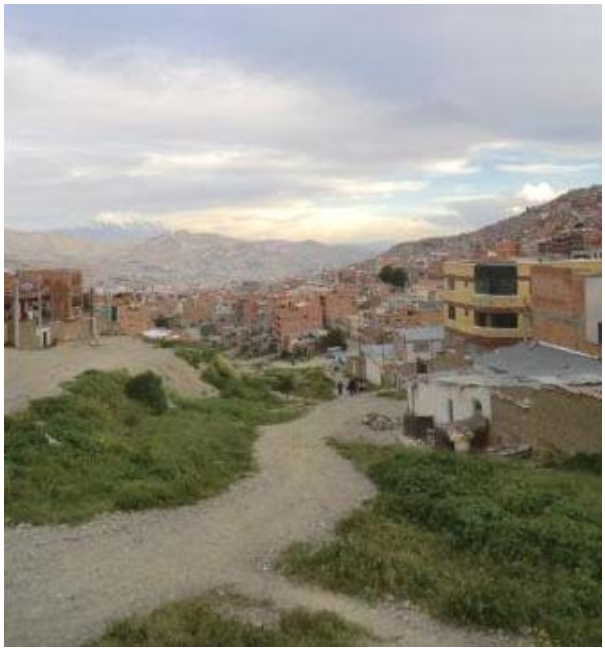


Figure 2.4. The hilly surroundings of Cotahuma.

Villa Adela is situated in the west of the altiplano of El Alto and is one of the oldest districts of El Alto. In its almost 40 years of existence it has welcomed many migrants and has developed from a temporary settlement area into a vital neighborhood in El Alto. The complete flat terrain and low buildings form a big contrast with the setting of Cotahuma, see figure 2.5. The vast majority of the inhabitants is from indigenous decent (around 80%) and the indigenous languages are much spoken. However, a large part of the inhabitants speak or understand Spanish as well, especially amongst the younger generations. The district has access t the most important basic services: electricity and water are present, as well as schools (both primary and secondary), a police station, and a health centre. An important role in the provision of these services is played by *Jesús Obreras¸* a Catholic organization that is very active in this district. The main problems in this district are the provision of basic services: still not everyone is has access to them, and the safety. The district knows many incidents of crime: robberies, abuse of drivers, thefts, murders etc. Even though a police station is present, there is not enough manpower to address these problems.

Figure 2.5. A typical street in Villa Adela, El Alto.

2.3. History of the Bolivian education sector

2.3.1. The 1994 reforms

The official education system in Bolivia has known many significant changes in its rather short existence. It changed from a unifying, exclusive, and discriminatory system in order to maintain the class differences in the late 19th century to an open system with room for different cultures, languages and priorities in the beginnings of the 21st century. The history of the education system from the beginning until the 1994 reforms is described in box 2.2. The first relevant education reforms took place in 1994, when after a lengthy and complicated reform process law 1565 was accepted by the Bolivian government. Law 1565 is based on two fundamental principles which form the basis of the new and more inclusive education system: interculturality and popular participation. The main goals of the reforms were quality and efficiency, relevancy, coverage and equal access, permanence of educators in the system, equal gender rights, and individual and collective identity development (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 89). One of the most important changes was the introduction of *Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe* (EIB, Intercultural and Bilingual Education) as an official state policy.

Box 2.2. The beginning: early 20th century.

The first notions of an attempt to provide education through the state were in 1880 (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 82). The main aim of education in the late 19th and early 20th century was to impose the Spanish culture and language on the indigenous populations of Bolivia, and, by doing so, civilize them. The state only provided education Spanish, and initiatives by other organizations for providing it in indigenous languages were scarce. These initiatives focused mainly on improving literacy among the indigenous population, hoping it would help liberating them from the ongoing oppression (*Ibid*. 83). The first half of the 20th century, the Bolivian state "used education to 'remake indians into productive peasants' so that they could take part in the progress of the Bolivian state on the conditions of the ruling classes, erasing the indigenous languages, communal memories, traditions, and identities" (Larson, 2005: 34, as quoted in Drange, 2007).

The revolution of 1952 resulted in changes in the education system, mostly affecting the indigenous population. The reforms of 1955 introduced a nation-wide twofold education system, including the rural areas of the country. The main aim of these reforms was assimilating the indigenous people into the national, dominant, mestizo, hispanicizing, Spanish-speaking culture (Canessa, 2006: 245; Regalsky and Laurie, 2007: 235; Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 84). Education was different for urban and rural areas, but not adapted to the local circumstances and people, since it was still provided only in Spanish. Thus, the 1955 reforms actually worsened the gaps between the different ethnic groups (Regalsky and Laurie, 2007: 242). Children could be punished for speaking indigenous languages, and wearing traditional costumes in public was prohibited. The period of military rule, which commenced in 1964, ended the twofold education system formally, but in practice the differences between urban and rural areas remained. The 1970s and 1980s were marked by social unrest, economic instability and major budget costs in the public sector, including in education (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 86; Regalsky and Laurie, 2007: 242). Lopes Cardozo speaks of a crisis of the (rural) education system: teachers lost their jobs, university autonomy was destroyed, and the teachers' union was abolished (2007: 86). The institutional framework for education was weak and without the capacity to make long-term plans or central coordination (Contreras and Talavera Simoni, 2003: 11). In the mid 1980s unions, peasant social movements, and international multi-lateral donors like UNICEF and UNESCO saw the need for a major education reform in Bolivia. These actors pressed the state into establishing a more inclusive education system in the country. Finally, law 1565 was accepted by the Bolivian government in 1994.

Not only was this the first time that Bolivia addressed its diverse multicultural and lingual population, but it was also the first country in Latin America establishing these kinds of policies. Providing intercultural and bilingual education would strengthen the self-esteem and performances of (indigenous) children, which would lead eventually to the strengthening of the cultural identity which was demolished in previous decades (Albó, 2007). Other important tools that were constructed to achieve these goals were popular participation mechanisms (like the JE), student-centered teaching and learning methods, and the restructuring of education, teacher training and administrative systems. Also a system to monitor the quality of education was developed, but this ended already in 2002 (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 89).

The 1994 reforms brought about much critique: especially on the big gap between the policy itself and the pace and mode of implementation of these policies. The reforms did not reach all the schools and students as was agreed upon in the drafting process (Howard, 2009: 585). The policies faced much delay and resistance in the schools, with the teachers and with

the parents. Schools and teachers detested de new curriculum, teaching in a new language, and the big changes they had to make in their day-to-day practices. Parents, either indigenous or non-indigenous, did not want their children to learn indigenous languages. It would not prepare them for a better future like Spanish does (indigenous parents), or it would make them backward (non-indigenous parents). The sole focus on primary education in law 1565 is the next problem, secondary and tertiary education were left out of the picture. The progress made in the first phase of the children's formal education would not be prolonged in the following years.

2.3.2. Evo's election and the ASEP law

When Evo Morales was elected president in 2005, he developed his policies around the renewed attention for indigenousness. His political party MAS and he himself were among the first actors that took 'the national identity' to the political arena and made it a center point to base their policies on (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 95). It fits also within Morales' aspirations of decolonization, and sees education as the core vehicle for a thorough social, political and economic restructuring of Bolivian society (*Ibid*. 102). Morales decided to change the education system completely, since it was alienated (foreign), subjected, and subordinate before, and replace it with a revolutionary and foremost liberating one (Los Tiempos, 2010). The process to draft this new education law took almost five years, and resulted in the law Avelino Sinani y Elizardo Perez[6] (ASEP) in 2010.

The ASEP law is already different than the previous 1994 education law since it applies to all levels of formal education: from initial or pre-primary to post-secondary schools, and including public, private and schools by convention. Education is mandatory until the *bachillerato,* meaning the sixth and final year of secondary school. Points 1, 5 and 6 of article 1 of the ASEP law describe the ground principles or pillars on which the law is based, see box 2.3.

Box 2.3. ASEP law, 2010 - Constitutional mandates of education.

- Each person has the right to education at all levels, in a universally, productive, free, integrated and intercultural manner without discrimination.
- Education is unitary, public, universal, democratic, participatory, communitarian, decolonizing and of quality.
- Education is intracultural, intercultural and multilingual in the whole education system.

Source: Ministerio de Educación, 2010: 1.

According to Lopes Cardozo (2011: 105-107), the four pillars that form the basis for the new education system are decolonization, inter- and intraculturalism, productive and communitarian education. The first and most important pillar is decolonization: Morales argued that the previous reforms were initiated by foreign powers (multilateral and international donors), and Bolivia needed to design its own education laws. Morales' government stated earlier that all its public policies need to be developed in line with the values, principles, knowledge and practices of the Bolivian peoples; all actions of public servants need to be orientated to preserve, develop, protect, and promote the cultural diversity through an intracultural, intercultural and multilingual dialogue (Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2009: 2-3). The second pillar is inter- and intraculturalism. Interculturalism focuses on the student's interaction with other cultures

[6] Avelino Sinani and Elizardo Perez were two important indigenous teachers who set op the first rural school in 1931-1940 in Warisata, Bolivia.

besides their own, whereas intraculturalism aims at developing the own, personal culture or identity of the student. Interculturalism has been a central pillar of education policies since the 1994 reforms. The notion of intraculturalism is new, but is easily related to Morales' government goals of developing policies in line with the Bolivian history and culture. Productive education, the third pillar, aims at educating students that will contribute to society after graduating. Another objective of the ASEP reforms is making parents, students, and the community participate in education: communitarian education, the fourth and final pillar. This results in the creation of student councils, participation of parents in the JE etc. (Ministerio de Educación, 2010: 3-10). An important role is played by the teachers, or 'soldiers for liberation and decolonization' as Morales calls them. Investments are being made in the education of these teachers (prolonging the teacher's training program) and the government is pushed by the teachers' union to increase the wages.

Since the ASEP law is relatively recent, it is hard to say whether the government has succeeded in its implementing or not. However, many different actors have already expressed their discontent and critiques on the reforms. Teachers and other education practitioners have complained that they have not been included (enough) in the drafting process of the law. They state that it was designed by officials and experts and that their experience and practical knowledge was not consulted. Teachers and schools also complained about the lack of communication between the Ministry of Education and the schools who have to implement the new law and feel like they didn't receive enough information or guidelines about the changes they have to make. Another point of debate is the creation of the new curriculum, which pays much attention to local (indigenous) knowledge, languages, and traditions. This curriculum should be locally relevant but at the same time nationally applicable. Many practitioners feel like it is impossible to create such a curriculum that contains all the subjects mentioned and is accepted by the schools, teachers, students and their parents throughout the country. They also question whether this new curriculum will unify the Bolivian people or actually create a stronger division between the different ethnic groups. Ms. Van Dam, education expert at the Embassy of the Netherlands in La Paz, foresees difficulties for the new curriculum: since it is oriented at local knowledge, needs and practices, it misses the link with the outside world', the link to the occidental, global knowledge of biology, history, or mathematics. Another bottleneck she sees is the fact that there are no fixed end goals in the education system, it is not written down what knowledge or skills the students should master after a certain grade.

A different cause of concern is "the lack of capacity of among indigenous groups to systematize their cultural heritage" (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 131). Many indigenous cultures only have an oral tradition, thus teaching this can cause problematic situations. Lopes Cardozo (*Ibid.*) continues by stating that "the lack of knowledge of indigenous languages of teachers, in regards to full implementation of the plurilingual character of education" is also problematic. Not enough teachers master the native languages sufficiently in order to teach them, standalone teach students in this languages.

According to Ms. Alzérreca, education and gender expert at the UNFPA, the ideas of the ASEP reforms are good, but the executing and operating part is missing. The reforms are not yet being enforced or implemented: "you cannot find the new curriculum at schools and there are no plans of bringing the reforms to the schools." . She also states that the ASEP reforms are not incorporated in the teacher's education units, *normales.* She argues that profound changes and a change of mind must be made before true change is going to come.

2.3.3. The involvement of external actors in the Bolivian education system

In the short history of the Bolivian education system, many international and regional external actors have been involved in its development. Since the 1970s, (inter)national NGOs interfered mainly in providing education in rural areas where national governments where absent. Many of these NGO's were funded by the Catholic Church, which historically play an important role in the provision of education on all levels, including teacher training (Lopes Cardoz, 2011: 127). Many religious schools formed already part of the public school system when the 1994 reforms took place and their curriculum was already similar to the reformed one. The church still plays an important role in the Bolivian education sector. This role is becoming more restricted due to the ASEP reforms which aim at secularizing education: making it public and non-religious.

One of the first players in the region was the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), which started their activities in 1945. This Christian American organization became active in the remote areas of Peru (the Amazon basin) and Bolivia, providing bilingual literacy training and Bible studies (Freeland 1996; García, 2004). Major non-governmental players in the education field in Bolivia, especially with regards to the 1994 reforms, were UNICEF, UNESCO, GTZ (Germany), SIDA (Sweden), DANIDA (Denmark), AECID (Spain), Finland, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Inter-American Development Bank, JICA (Japan) and the Netherlands (*Ibid*.), see box 2.4.

Box 2.4. NGOs in the Bolivian education sector.
The different NGOs that became involved intervened in different aspects of the Bolivian education sector. "UNICEF supported the development of teaching materials, GTZ and AECID supported intercultural and bilingual teacher education, and DANIDA offered their support particularly in the Amazonian region."

Source: Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 127.

2.3.4. The contemporary Bolivian education system

Bolivia's national education system consists of public schools, private schools, and schools by convention. The formal education is divided into four cycles: initial or pre-primary, primary, secondary and post-secondary or higher education. Non-formal education focuses on adult and special education. Before the ASEP reforms, primary education consisted of eight grades, whereas secondary education only consisted of four grades. This changed into two periods of 6 years, thus primary and secondary education being of equal length. Many education units in densely populated areas already were structured as a primary and secondary school in one building, with one teaching the morning turn and the other the afternoon turn. Hence, the change did not cause many problems because they could easily shift the two grades from one turn to another. In many rural areas, where only a primary school was present or the students were taught at multi-grade schools, it did cause difficulties. They had to create two extra grades to comply with the new system.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has given the regional context to put the research into the right framework. The geographical aspect of the country, the cities, and districts are important to bear in mind when reading this thesis. The location of the research area and the socio-political developments this area has experienced have shaped the current position where the area finds itself in. La Paz and El Alto, both being migration hubs, have experienced high expansion rates in the second half of the 20th century and have struggled to keep up with its own progress. The provision of basic services in the two cities is growing, but still not areas are being reached; the districts of Cotahuma and Villa Adela are good examples hereof.

The historical aspect of this chapter, the evolution of the education sector in Bolivia, has shown the many problems and bottlenecks the education sector has overcome in the past century. It has changed from an exclusive and discriminatory system into an open system with room for different cultures, languages and priorities in the beginnings of the 21st century. The current ASEP reforms aim at transforming Bolivian education into a Bolivian-initiated and -owned system, with attention for local cultures and knowledge, involvement of the community, which forms productive students that contribute to the country's development. The effects of these reforms are not clear yet, since their implementation takes longer than anticipated.

3. RESEARCH OUTLINE

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the outline of the research as has been conducted in the field work period February – June 2012 in Bolivia. The first part will introduce the research topic, which will lead to the research objective and research questions. The third paragraph visualizes the research in the conceptual model, where the research and related concepts are represented graphically. The fourth part will inform on the methodology that has been used while carrying out the research: the research strategy, selection of the research area and a description of the research schools, and information on the data collection. Fe y Alegría, the host organization with whom the researcher has collaborated during the field work period, will be introduced in the fifth part of this chapter. The chapter concludes with presenting the main biases and limitations for the research, for these are important factors to bear in mind while reading this thesis.

3.2. Research background

The Bolivian education sector is performing quite well when comparing it to neighboring and similar countries in Latin America, as can be concluded from data in chapter 1. The national mean years of schooling is 8.4 years, making Bolivia end in the middle compared to other Latin American countries. However, the 4.8 year gap between urban and rural areas positions the country at the top end of inequality within a country. The completion rate for primary education is high (94.9%), but with only 52.4% of the population finishing secondary education it is clear that still much progress can be made.

Table 3.1 displays the enrollment rates in the Bolivian education sector for 2009. These data come from another source and year than the data used in chapter 1 and provide a slightly different, more optimistic picture. The table is divided into the total education system (consisting of initial, primary, and secondary education) and secondary education separately, in the country as well as the department of La Paz, and also demonstrates the gender differences.

Table 3.1. Education enrollment percentages in Bolivia and the department of La Paz, 2009.

		Bolivia			Department of La Paz		
		Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
2009	Total education	74.15	74.48	73.80	75.10	75.24	74.96
	Secondary education	60.05	59.91	60.20	69.60	70.46	68.70

Source: INE, 2010.

Looking at the total education system, it shows that almost three quarters of the Bolivian children is enrolled in education. The differences between men and women are small, with a bit more boys enrolled than girls. The statistics show that enrollment in secondary education is much lower: only 60% of all children are going to a secondary school. La Paz is performing slightly better on all points, and especially on secondary education: almost 70% of the children in the department of La Paz are enrolled. The main weakness of the coverage and access of the Bolivian education sector lies in its insufficient presence in rural and poor areas (Worldbank, 2006: 2).

Comparing the enrollment rates for the department of La Paz (75.1%) with a rural department like Chuquisaca (67.7%), it becomes evident once more that the differences between rural and urban areas are big. Many poor and rural areas are underserved in terms of educational infrastructure, which is also reflected in other data in table 3.2. The percentage of illiteracy, the expected years of schooling and the percentage of dropouts in 2001 illustrate these differences very well. The level of illiteracy is over four times as high and the percentage of dropouts is three points higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Also, the children in urban areas receive almost double as much years of schooling than their rural counterparts.

Table 3.2. Overall illiteracy rates (%), expected years of schooling, and dropout rates in Bolivia (%), 2001.

Illiteracy			Expected years of schooling			Dropouts		
Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
13.28	6.44	25.77	7.43	9.23	4.19	6.65	5.39	8.66

Source: INE, 2002.

The Bolivian education sector performs quite well when compared to other countries in the region, although it still presents many of the malfunctions that are characteristic for the region. The inequalities between urban and rural areas, between different ethnic groups, between boys and girls, and the differences between primary and secondary education remain striking and deserve more attention.

3.3. Research objective and questions

Even though progress has been made in the last decades, the challenges and problems in the Bolivian education sector remain present. The increased attention for promoting and respecting human rights and the linkage of human rights with development practices have made education an important topic of many development agencies and organizations. Inequalities in education between different regions in Latin American countries and the different (ethnic) population groups persist in existence and influence the educational outcomes negatively. An important point of concern that rose in light of the theoretical and thematic framework is the rate of secondary school completion and school desertion. Researchers, both academics and international institutions, cannot provide a clear picture on school desertion and its rates, but it is evident that the numbers are high and should be reduced. However, it has become clear that the situation at secondary schools is worse than at primary schools and action should be undertaken to improve the situation.

This thesis aims to gain a deeper understanding of the current situation of school desertion in secondary education in Bolivia, and thereby contribute to the yet existing literature and empirical research on this topic. The research specifies on secondary education, which will provide valuable insights since most literature focus on primary school drop outs only. It will focus on the causes of school desertion in secondary schools, by elaborating on information from students, teachers and education experts. The thesis also has the objective of looking into national and local programs or policies that are in place to prevent students from dropping out and how successful or effective these measures have been until now, and searches for new possibilities for such programs. The main research objective is to provide an insight in the current situation, the causes and the consequences of school desertion in urban Bolivia, and to provide an overview of yet existing and possible new measures to combat school desertion. This results in the following main research question:

What are the causes of school desertion in secondary education in Bolivia and what measures can be taken to improve this situation?

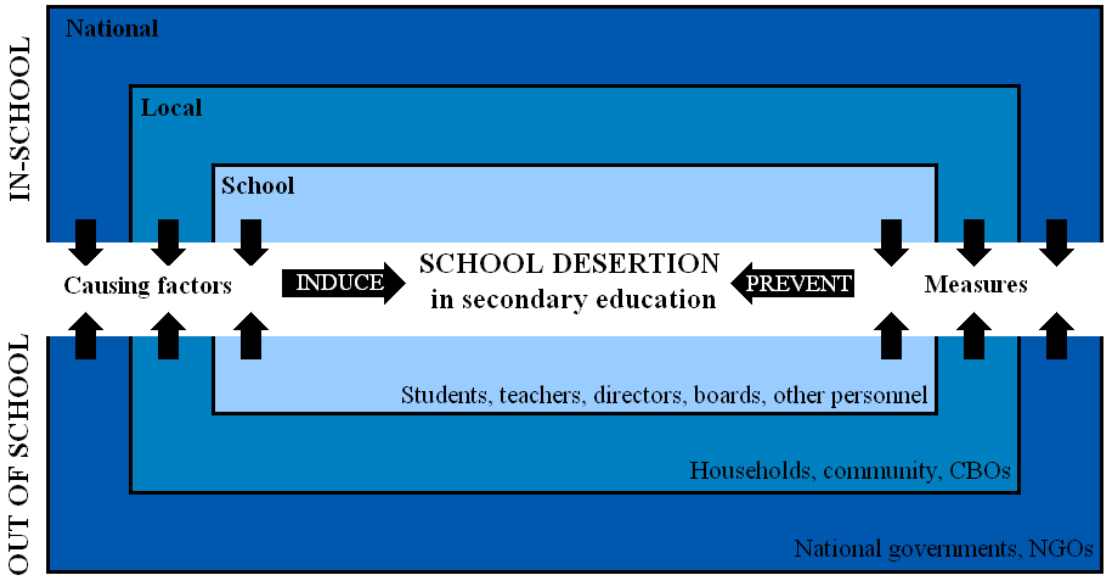
In order to answer the main research question it is divided into five sub research questions:
1. What are the current policies of secondary education in Bolivia?
2. How is secondary education provided in Bolivia?
3. What are the main causes and consequences of school desertion in secondary education in Bolivia?
4. What strategies are in place to prevent school desertion in secondary education and how effective are these?
5. What new measures can be taken to prevent scholar desertion in secondary education?

Since the research was conducted in the cities of La Paz and El Alto, the thesis will focus on the causes of school desertion in secondary schools in these cities, with personal stories from students, drop outs, teaching staff, and education experts to illustrate the contemporary situation. However, not only the urban situation in Bolivia will be discussed. Information on the whole country will be scrutinized throughout the thesis, based on literature and information from interviews with education experts.

3.4. Conceptual model

The conceptual model visualizes the research and related concepts, in order to obtain a better understanding of the research and research topic. Figure 3.1. represents the conceptual model, and contains the main concepts and topics of the research.

Figure 3.1. Conceptual model.



The causing factors of school desertion on the left side of the model are determined by national, *e.g.* education policies; local, *e.g.* household context or street gangs in the community; or school influences, *e.g.* discrimination at school. These factors can be of an in-school nature (upper part of the model) or out of school nature (lower part of the model). The right side of the model represents the measures that can be taken to prevent school desertion in secondary education. These measures are as well determined by the level in which they originate: national, *e.g.* education reforms; local, *e.g.* support from family; or at school, *e.g.* the organization of extra-curricular activities. These can also be divided in in-school and out of school measures, depending on where they are directed at: either improving school conditions or improving the conditions in the household or community.

3.5. Methodology

3.5.1.Research strategy

The research started with a literature study on the topic of school desertion and prevention hereof, which aimed at obtaining a good basis and overview of the yet existing knowledge and (secondary) literature on the research topic. This part of the research had been executed during the researcher's stay in Bolivia. Given that most of the primary data collecting would take place inside the schools, the literature study focused mainly on (inter)national and local information and data on school desertion, and yet existing policies, programs, and measures to prevent it. The information on these topics was expanded by conducting interviews with education experts during the field stay in Bolivia in February - June 2012.

The research strategy for the collection of primary data was developed departing from the information obtained during the literature study. The collection of primary data has been carried out by using different methodological techniques, both qualitative and quantitative. Combining these different techniques, also known as triangulation, mixed-methods research, or Q-squared, is used not only to validate research data, but also to obtain a more profound and wider understanding of these data (Olson, 2004: 23). Both methods can complement each other, and reduce the impact of its weaknesses (Bryman, 2008). Information from qualitative methods like in-depth interviews can serve as a rich addition to the dry, static results of quantitative research. Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires can support and clarify ideas and theories that came forward during the qualitative part of the research. In this research, data is obtained through a total of 312 questionnaires, 6 focus groups and 18 in-depth interviews. The combination of these different methods resulted in a richer and more complete, comprehensive and reliable set of research data than would have been obtained by only using one method.

3.5.2. Selection of the research area

The determination of the research area took place in consultation with the host organization Fe y Alegría (FyA), which will be introduced in paragraph 3.6. Due to the limited amount of time available and organizational difficulties, it was decided to conduct the research only in the cities of La Paz and El Alto and not in other parts of the country. However, the contrasts between the two neighboring cities in the highlands of Bolivia provided an interesting background for this research. In each city, two secondary schools were selected from the same district: two in Cotahuma in La Paz, and two in Villa Adela in El Alto.

The districts and schools were selected in consultation with the host organization and after visiting several schools. Because of the short time frame available, the four selected schools were selected by if they could provide the researcher with space, time and opportunities to conduct the research and their willingness to participate. The selected schools are all public schools by convention. Schools by convention are founded by the state in

cooperation with a private institution or organization. The schools are public, free, accessible for everyone, and the national curriculum is taught. The difference lies in the fact that the schools are under direction of an external organization, which means extra guidance, programs and projects to develop their believes, norms and values more thoroughly. In this case, the schools are under the direction of FyA and are thus not representative for the whole secondary education system in Bolivia.

3.5.3. Description of the research schools

All schools were the research is conducted are schools by convention, as has yet been described. The research schools are under the direction of FyA, meaning more attention to the Christian religion, beliefs, norms, values, the Bible, and student and community participation. This attention is directed at the directors, teachers, students, and parents so that the whole community can benefit from FyA's actions. This part gives a short introduction of the four schools, and the families and communities in which they serve[7].

Santo Tomas

Santo Tomas is a secondary school that teaches only the final four grades of secondary, due to the recent ASEP reforms. The school is located in the Cotahuma district of La Paz. A total of 390 students are enrolled, with five more girls than boys there is almost gender equality. The director describes the socioeconomic situation of the majority of the families as poor, only a tiny percentage belongs to the middle class. Most families are third generation migrants that came to La Paz in the 1950s-1960s, and hold on strongly to their Aymara descent. These families are working mostly in the informal commerce sector, and run their own (family) business. Many students work in their family business or another job in the morning to contribute to the family income. The school only teaches in the afternoon turn, so this does not interfere with their lessons.

Ignacio Calderón

The education unit Ignacio Calderón is situated in the district Cotahuma, La Paz, and teaches both the primary and secondary level. A total of 621 students are in this school's secondary education, and there is an equal amount of boys and girls enrolled. It is a popular school and children from all neighbourhoods in the district come here. According to the school director it is because of "its good name and the school's prestige". Most students come from families from the wealthier middle class: their parents have good jobs with a stable income and can afford to send their children to a good school further away from home. The director states that many students come from migrant families, but probably a little less than other schools in the area. There is also a large share of families with low to very low resources, and they struggle to make a decent living.

Cuerpo de Christo

Cuerpo de Cristo is a large education unit in the district of VillaAdela in El Alto, where all three levels are being taught. The total number of students is 1331, 601 of them are enrolled in secondary education. There are slightly more girls than boys in this level, but the difference is not noteworthy (309 girls, 292 boys). The socioeconomic status of most of the families can be described as between poor and poor-middle class, but many differences can be observed. "There are many families with limited resources, they need to work from dawn to dusk". This

[7] The information in this paragraph is obtained via interviews with the school directors and data from FyA.

income deficit is mainly caused family problems, and many students live in one-parent-families because the father left or died. Another worrying family situation is the families with numerous children. Often, one or two of these children do not attend school since they have to watch the younger children, or work to contribute to the family income. These types of families have an unstable situation at home, which influences the performance of the students deeply. Families with a sufficient income, *e.g.* when the father works as a mason or even as a lawyer, can offer their children more security at home, which results in better school performance. But students from these type of families are outnumbered by those students from migrant families: "We're in El Alto, most of our students are from migrant families."

Villa Alemania

Villa Alemania is a young, but large education unit in VillaAdela, El Alto. The school was founded in 1995 and teaches all three levels: initial, primary and secondary. Of the total of 1151 students, 476 are enrolled in the secondary school. Most students live close to the school, only a few have to travel over half an hour to get there. Most students come from second or third generation migrant families of Aymara origins, and families are quite big. Most parents of students have paid work, albeit in the formal or informal sector. A little over 40% of the parents work in the formal sector, almost the same amount works in the informal commerce and have their own little shop or street diner. Older children of big families are often forced to work in the family's business or help out taking care of their siblings, and education is not seen as a priority for them. "The parents don't have time to work and take care of their children, and expect of their older children to contribute at home".

3.5.4. Data collection

The four schools where the research was conducted could not provide the researcher with a list of students or home addresses of the families of the students due to privacy issues of the students and their families. Therefore the participants in the research were selected in a non-representative way, the selection techniques differed according to the target group of the questionnaire. In the following part, the different research methods, both qualitative as quantitative, as well as the target groups and selection techniques will be discussed.

(1) Questionnaires. The main focus of the questionnaire was to obtain data on their viewpoints and ideas on scholar desertion and the prevention hereof. It has been applied to three different target groups, which were thought to be the most important actors: students, teachers, and parents of students.

A total of 312 respondents filled out the questionnaire. The largest group consists of students, since their viewpoints were considered the most valuable in this research. The student is the one who is actually abandoning school, or sees its classmates do so. They know all about motives and reasons for scholar desertion, bottlenecks in education, and points of improvement at their school. A total of 219 students from all different grades in the four secondary schools completed the questionnaire. Since there was no sampling frame available[8], the students were selected using stratified sampling. The researcher selected 5 male and 5 female participants in each grade of the school.

Teachers have valuable knowledge and experience about scholar desertion, since they witness it happening day by day. They also know more about the background of students and

[8] The school directors could not provide the researcher with a list of students due to privacy issues.

their motivation to actually drop out. Therefore, 32 teachers completed the questionnaire. Eight teachers from every school were selected by stratified sampling (4 male and 4 female teachers).

The parents form the second largest group: 61 in total. Academic literature points out that often the familiar background is of utmost importance in a student's educational career (see *e.g.* Carvajal, Morris and Davenport, 1993). Parents can play a vital role in stimulating the student to continue their studies, or the complete opposite. Approaching the parents was hard, given that the researcher was not aloud to obtain all the home addresses of the students[9]. Different methods were used to approach these respondents: attending parental meetings at school, talking with parents who came to school to pick up their children, participating in scholar festivities, and the questionnaire was given to a large group of students with the hope that the parents would fill it out at home. This final method was proven unsuccessful, since almost none was returned. Almost all respondents are parents which are physically present at school, whereas many parents never show up at school for meetings, festivities or picking up their children. Thus, the difficulty of approaching this target group resulted in a non-representative convenience sample (Laws, Harper and Marcus, 2003: 366).

(2) Focus groups. The researcher organized six focus groups of ten students each within the schools, one in each grade. These groups were mostly used as a means to generate information on the students' views on their school, the quality of their education, motives for scholar desertion and how the school is handling this problem, and their personal experiences with fellow students who dropped out. The researcher decided not to conduct one-on-one interviews with the students, as that might not have resulted in an open and spontaneous conversation. The group dynamic and presence of fellow classmates ensured that the students could speak freely and spontaneously, and could express their views on the subject. The focus groups were conducted directly after filling out the questionnaire and thus the same selection method was used. Appendix I gives the topic list that was used during these focus groups.

(3) Interviews. During this research a total of 18 interviews were held by the researcher, an overview of the interviewees, their role/expertise, and the topic list of the interview can be found in appendix II. The interviews had different purposes: obtain information from experts and authorities in the educational field, obtain ideas and thoughts from main actors in the educational field, and obtain personal life stories of secondary school drop outs. All interviews held were semi-structured: they followed a certain schedule with themes and topics, but with enough 'scope for the interviewees to develop their responses' (Willis, 2006: 144) and enough room for the researcher to get into details if necessary. The interviews with experts provided a broader view on the educational sector in Bolivia, the recent developments in this sector and their ideas on how the problem of drop outs should be handled. The interviews with school directors and other educational personnel gave more insight in the local situation at school, their personal experiences and stories. The interviews with the drop outs were all about their personal story. These interviews were less structured than others, since it was most important to make the interviewee feel comfortable and safe, in order for them to open up to the researcher and tell their story. These interviewees were selected by snowball sampling. Often during interviews with the school director or during the focus groups with students an exemplary drop out-case was brought up to illustrate their stories. The researcher took advantage of this situation by asking for contact information of these drop outs.

[9] The school directors could not provide the researcher with a list of home addresses of the students due to privacy issues.

Besides these interviews, numerous conversations with different actors were held in a more informal setting. In these conversations the subject of this research was discussed, as well as the personal opinion of these actors, and provided the researcher with valuable information. These actors include FyA personnel (experts on formal and informal education in La Paz), parents, students, and education personnel (teachers, secretaries, janitors, members of the *Junta Escolar* (JE)).

3.6. Fe y Alegría

The research is carried out in cooperation with FyA. Since its involvement in the research had influence on the execution of the research itself, it is of importance to introduce this organization properly. FyA is a non-governmental organization (NGO) which sees education as a means for people to see their own potential and possibilities for development. It originated in Venezuela in 1955 as a private initiative to increase the educational coverage of the least advantaged groups in society (Latorre and Swope, 1999: 33). It describes itself as an 'integrated popular education movement' with a Christian background. Besides improving education, FyA also wants to change existing social structures and form citizens that actively participate in their communities. It tries to accomplish these goals by involving the local communities, organizations, and private groups in their activities, and by entering into agreements with local and national governments. Its activities include the building schools for both formal and informal education on all levels, the formation of teachers, participation in community development and the providing of social services etc. Nowadays FyA is present in 19 different countries on 3 different continents: Latin America (Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Bolivia, El Salvador, Colombia, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Argentina, Honduras, Chile, Haiti, and Uruguay), Africa (Chad), and Europe (Spain). FyA started its activities in Bolivia in 1966, and currently 3% of all school age children attend the organization's schools (*Ibid.* 34).

Even though FyA does not mention it explicitly in its mission statement or documents, the ideology it propagates links well with the principles of the rights-based approaches. The mission of the organization is based on the Christian principles of justice, freedom, participation, fraternity, respect for diversity and solidarity. Their actions are directed towards the impoverished and excluded peoples in order to contribute to the transformation of the society (FyA, 2012a). Their main area of intervention is education, and educational justice is one of the most important aspects of their ideology, as box 3.1 illustrates.

The one approach that fits FyA's ideology best when looking at Marks' seven approaches to RBA, discussed in paragraph 1.1.2, is the social justice approach. This approach focuses on eliminating social disparities and inequalities, and the pursuit of social justice (Marks, 2005: 6). Marks states that "social justice captures an important feature of the human rights framework for development, namely the emphasis on the moral imperative of eliminating glaring social inequality within societies and structurally-imbedded patterns of international support for those inequalities" (*Ibid.* 8). FyA's commitment to educational justice and attention for the most impoverished and excluded peoples in society indicates that its strategy is

Box 3.1. FyA on educational justice.

"Educational justice is understood as ensuring that everyone had access to the fundamental right of education, respecting the freedom of students and parents to choose the kind of education they want, and committing the state – as guarantor of the common good – to provide the means to make this right a reality, on equal terms, both through formal and private education."

based on human rights.

3.7 Main biases and limitations

While conducting a social research in a developing country like Bolivia, one may encounter different biases and limitations that affect the research and researcher. The following five points are important to keep in mind:

(1) *Collaboration with FyA*. FyA has been enormously helpful during this research, and had provided the researcher with information and a good network in the Bolivian educational field. However, it is also a source of bias. As mentioned in paragraph 1.3.3, all schools were the research was carried out were FyA-schools, which means that there are already programs in place to further develop these schools and its students. FyA employees also commented that the situation at these schools is better than at public schools: better infrastructure, more and better trained teachers, more study material, less drop outs, more involvement of the local community etc. This situation is known as the 'project bias' (Laws, Harper and Marcus, 2003: 361). Thus, the overall picture given in this thesis is probably not representative for all secondary schools in Bolivia. It does however provide an insight in the current situation at secondary schools and the opinions of different actors involved.

(2) *Being a young Dutch woman*. The research is conducted by a young, white, Dutch, female researcher. Being of a completely different socio-cultural background, and being visibly physically different than the research population has brought up many reactions during the fieldwork. Even though these reactions were mostly positive, it was obvious that the researcher was seen as an outsider by the local people. The presence of the researcher at the schools was thoroughly prepared by visiting the schools several times before the research started, introducing the researcher to key individuals within the schools by FyA personnel etc., in order to make both the researcher and the respondents acquainted with each other. However, it have caused the respondents to provide social desirable answers, and omit negative experiences and stories or critical viewpoints.

(3) *Language*. Spanish is not the mother tongue of the researcher, nor of some of the respondents which have an indigenous language as their native language. The whole research has been carried out in Spanish: communication with the host organization, schools, respondents etc. An interpreter was not used, since the level of Spanish of the researcher was sufficient and local people were willing to help out if translation was needed. However, information may be lost by misinterpretation or misunderstanding during conversations and interviews.

(4) *Time*. As mentioned before, only a limited amount of time was available to carry out the research in the field. The three and a half month spent in Bolivia were used to its full potential, resulting in a large amount of research data, and valuable and informative insights in the work methods of FyA.

(5) *Objectivity*. The points 1 - 4 all contribute to the final point in this paragraph: objectivity. This research is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The easiness of processing quantitative data into numbers and figures is complete opposite to the difficulties of interpreting qualitative data. The socio-cultural, political, economic and

educational background of the researcher makes that the research and her interpretations cannot be completely objective. This must be taken into account while reading the thesis.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has given the outline of the research as conducted during the field work in Bolivia, as well as an overview of the used methodology and limitations of the research. The field work in Bolivia, from February until June 2012, consisted of conducting interviews and carrying out questionnaires and focus groups with different actors in the education field: students, teachers, directors, and education experts from local and national organizations and institutes. This thesis is the end product and combines the findings of the field work with the available existing literature on school desertion.

4. SCHOOL DESERTION IN LA PAZ AND EL ALTO

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will scrutinize the current situation of school desertion in Bolivia. It will start with describing the general characteristics like frequency, who drops out, at what age etc. It continues on in the second paragraph by giving the main in-school causes for students to drop out: accessibility; facilities, resources, and maintenance; the quality of education, teaching and learning outcomes; safety; and at last the school ambience. The third paragraph describes the main out of school causes for school desertion: the household context; income and financial circumstances; the cultural context – gender; health; pregnancy; and other causes. All these causes will be illustrated by personal stories from drop outs and their parents and teachers. The information given throughout the whole chapter is derived from the field research conducted in La Paz and El Alto, as well as from yet existing literature on the topic. Given that this thesis aims to give an overview of the causes of school desertion in the whole country of Bolivia and research only has been conducted in an urban part of the country, extra literature was needed in order to provide the total picture. Some causes of school desertion are only present in rural parts of the country and not in the cities where the field work was conducted. The combination of information from the interviews (with experts on education, education staff, students, drop outs and parents), focus groups with the students, the statistical data from the questionnaires, and the literature review provides a rich set of data, and will give insights in not only the general aspects of school desertion, but also the personal stories behind it.

4.2. School desertion in Bolivia

Data from the National Statistics Institute (INE) of Bolivia shows that school desertion has decreased much in the past decade. The national school desertion rate in secondary education was almost 10% in 2000, and has reached a level of 5.72% in 2009 (INE, 2012). This decrease is mainly caused by the Bolivian government who invested in education accessibility and quality, and developed programs and measures to prevent students from dropping out. National and international NGOs and CBOs have supported the Bolivian government during this process, and also had an important role creating programs of their own. The fifth chapter will discuss the subject of preventing school desertion in depth.

The differences between urban and rural areas are striking in this aspect of education as well, with the urban areas making faster progress in combating school desertion than the rural areas. As stated before, data on education is often crooked and it is difficult to draw conclusions solely based on national data, because differences between regions in the country can be large. This can be exemplified by looking at the provinces of La Paz and Beni. Beni is situated in the tropical east of Bolivia and is used as a representative for the rural areas of the country and as an opposite to La Paz. Ben In La Paz, the school desertion rate dropped from 10.54% in 2000 to 4.67% in 2009 (*Ibid*.); whereas in the rural province of Beni this rate only dropped half a percent point in the 2000-2009 time span. This difference can be attributed to the rural rate being much lower to begin with (8.41%, compared to 10.54%) and the completely different circumstances. There are certain Guaraní communities in the tropical east of Bolivia (Beni *a.o.*) where almost all girls attend school and boys much less. Table 4.1 shows the national school desertion rates in secondary education, as well as for the departments of La Paz and Beni. All rates dropped during

this time span, albeit more spectacularly in urban areas than rural areas. The drop out rate for boys is higher than for girls throughout the whole country.

Table 4.1. School desertion rates in secondary education, 2000-2009 (%).

	Bolivia			La Paz			Beni		
	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
2000	9.94	11.03	8.71	10.54	11.69	9.12	8.41	8.49	8.32
2009	5.72	6.64	4.78	4.67	5.23	4.06	7.87	8.31	7.41

Source: INE, 2012.

The schools in La Paz and El Alto found it difficult to provide exact data on school desertion at their education unit. Some schools gave a percentage and some schools could name the exact number of drop outs in the last years. Their estimates fluctuate somewhere between 3% and 5% of their student population. The secretary at a high school in El Alto comments:

> "many students just disappear. They don't inform us if they are going to move, are dropping out, or getting enrolled at another school close by, or if something else has happened. The past year, we 'lost' a total of 16 students in our high school. Only two times we received a letter from the student or its parents in which they informed us of their voluntary withdrawal."

Therefore, exact numbers on drop outs are almost impossible to calculate. All directors agreed upon the national statistics that the rate of school desertion has dropped in the past decade.

Of all the teachers that participated in the research, 62.5% states that they have experience that one of their students had abandoned college[10]. The majority of these teachers, 60%, sees this happening once or twice a year. A stunning 10% claims that more than four of their students per year drop out. One of the elder teachers explained that he is the mentor for two different final year classes. Since he is chosen by these students as their mentor, he stands very close to his students and every year he sees a handful of his students dropping out. The teachers that replied negative, and thus do not experience school desertion with their students have different explanations. For one teacher it was only her first year of teaching after graduating from the *normal* (Bolivian teacher training institutions), and she did not had the situation of one of her students dropping out *yet* (her emphasis). Another teacher added that he often was not sure if a student dropped out, because the student just did not show up for class anymore.

The most vulnerable group for school desertion contains students from families with insufficient financial resources. Students in secondary education are of an age where they are well aware of the financial problems at home, and know that they can contribute by getting an income. Also students with an unstable situation at home are at risk, these students cannot find the support and motivation at home to continue studying.

Both national data and education experts point out that more girls than boys attend and finish high school. However, the school directors have a different experience. Most say it varies per year, and that there is no significant difference between boys and girls. Asking the teachers to describe their most recent case of school desertion, they respond that 45% of the drop outs

[10] The teachers teach a subject in high school, and thus share classes with many more teachers. In the questionnaire teachers could indicate if they had the experience of one of their students dropping out, it could be that different teachers of one school refer to the same student.

were male, 55% were female, which is not in line with the national. A school director from La Paz says that at his school it is mostly girls that drop out: pregnancies are the second greatest cause for school desertion at his school, after economical and familiar problems.

School desertion happens throughout the whole six years of secondary, but the education personnel can observe various peaks. A school director from El Alto knows that at her school students either drop out in the first grades or in the last grades of secondary:

> "When students finish primary school and start secondary school, often they are not very motivated to continue studying for six more years. It seems too long to them: six more years."

She adds that it seems that for these students it is hard to keep motivated and they do not understand the importance and benefits of their education. Regarding drop outs in the final years of secondary, she thinks that students are easily distracted by the 'big money':

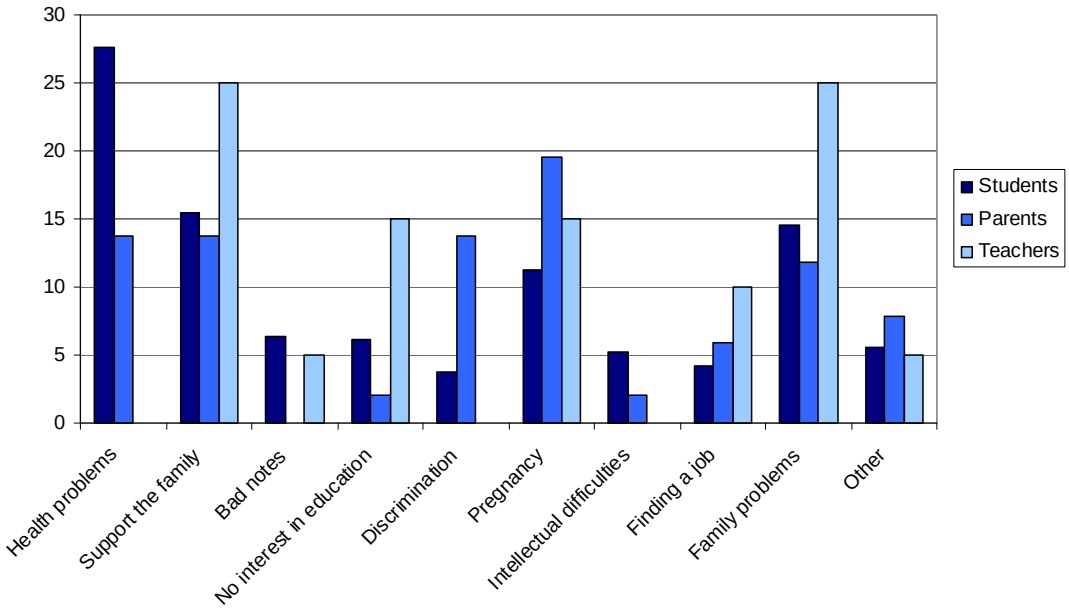
> "They don't see the importance of their education and choose to go working instead. I can understand their reasoning: why stay in school for a year more, while you can already make money?"

Students from all grades that are enrolled in high school in La Paz and El Alto were asked if they sometimes found it difficult to motivate themselves to go to school. A total of 28% of the students responded with yes, 43.6% answered that they did not found difficulties in motivating themselves. The explanations they gave are very diverse, some expected and some very surprising. Some students indicated that they would rather be playing with their friends or toys, rather than going to school every day. Others said that school was hard or boring, that teachers were annoying, or that they did not like doing homework or did not do their homework. Students also mentioned that they were less motivated due to family problems or that they had to work besides their studies which caused time pressure. The more surprising responses were that the student did not feel comfortable at school, that they felt discriminated by their classmates, that the quality of schooling was insufficient, or alcoholism.

The same students, as well as their parents, were asked what potentially would be the principal reason to drop out. These outcomes are displayed in figure 4.1, together with the outcomes of the teachers when asked what the reason was of their most recent case of school desertion. Thus, the figure shows what students and parents think are the most important causes, compared to the actual causes according to the experience of teachers, and there are some differences to be observed.

Most students argue that health problems, supporting the family, family problems, and pregnancies are the most important reasons to drop out. The parents agree with the students and add discrimination as an important factor for school desertion. The results from the teachers tell a slightly different story: supporting the family and family problems count for half of the desertion cases, the lack of interest in education and pregnancies count for another 30%. It becomes clear from this first consultation that the causes for school desertion are diverse and differ per person and situation. The following paragraphs will describe all different causes mentioned by these actors, as well as other causes that came to surface during the literature study and interviews with experts. Important to notice is that these causes often are interrelated and different ones can occur in one single case of school desertion, as will become evident by reading the personal stories in the boxes.

Figure 4.1. Causes of school desertion, (in %).



4.3. In-school causes of school desertion

In-school causes of school desertion are those issues and problems that originate within the school environment. The different causes that are being discussed in this paragraph are: accessibility; facilities, infrastructure, and maintenance; the quality of education, teaching, and learning outcomes; safety; and school ambience. Not all these causes were proven relevant during the research in the schools of La Paz and El Alto: some were only mentioned by education experts and not at all by the students themselves, and are only present in rural areas of the country.

4.3.1. Accessibility

Colclough and Lewin (2000) state that educational access can be restricted by an inadequate supply of schools or education places in many countries. “While the lack of schools is more likely to affect initial access rather than drop out, there is evidence that limited school supply influences drop out. For example, if schools are in short supply it is more likely they would be located further away; and there are generally fewer secondary schools, making the transition problematic in some places” (Hunt, 2008: 37). When looking at the accessibility of high schools in Bolivia, a two-sided story can be observed. Accessibility is often not a problem in urban areas, such as in La Paz and El Alto. High school are numerous and students do not have to travel that far to reach their school. The students often walk from their homes to school, or go by public/school transport. Some students expressed their discontent on their way of transportation during the focus groups. The most mentioned problems were having to walk to school in bad weather conditions (rain/cold) and the bad and dirty roads they had to walk on, as the story of Jhonny in box 4.1. illustrates. These arguments are nevertheless not valid for dropping out and just represents the adolescent’s annoyances.

The situation is completely different in rural parts of the country, where high schools are scarce, absent or far away. Often children have to travel to a larger town, since there are just no high schools nearby, which makes the transition from primary to secondary school hard. The distance and time it costs to get to these schools, and the lack of safety for the students and the inability of control for the parents when trying to get to school are important reasons for both students and parents to quit school and stay at home. The safety of the student in home-school transportation will be discussed in sub paragraph 4.2.4.

Box 4.1. Jhonny (4th grade).
"I sometimes find it hard to go to school, because it is very far and things happen on our way so that we are late for class. I go together with my two sisters, but sometimes they don't walk very fast. And when it rains it takes more time to get to school because the roads are wet and dirty. When I know we left home too late, and we will arrive late at school, I sometimes want to stay home and not walk for half an hour. But my mom always tells me to go."

4.3.2. Facilities, resources, and maintenance

Many high schools lack the facilities and resources to provide adequate education to their students. Students complained that the school was not a stimulating environment to continue studying for them. The most eminent problems that arose are the state of the schools itself, the lack of teachers, and the low amount of teaching material and other resources available. The school buildings are often in a poor state, since there are no funds available to maintain these properly. The buildings are cold, are not isolated, and have broken windows, which is a problem during winter time when it can get really cold. Some students commented that they found their schools 'depressing': "in class it's fine, we decorate the walls with posters and other stuff, but the hallways and open areas are boring".

The lack of teachers is mainly a problem in the rural areas of the country: rural schools do not attract many teachers, who do not feel like moving to an isolated part of the country and teach in poor conditions for a low salary. The schools are often small and multi-graded: several grades are taught by only one teacher (Vaillant, 2011: 387), which results in classes with a mix of students from different ages, knowledge- and skill levels. The teacher cannot give every student the attention it deserves or needs, which is most problematic for students with learning difficulties or special needs. The third mentioned problem, the lack of teaching material and other resources, aggravates the just mentioned problems. Many schools do not have sufficient teaching material to provide to all the students, do not have a library or only a very small one, cannot provide access to computers and internet for students etc. Students also mentioned that they were missing the opportunity to perform extracurricular activities at school, such as sports, dancing, other clubs (*e.g.* arts) etc. the organizing of these kinds of events would enlarge their motivation and support for the school definitely.

4.3.3. Quality of education, teaching, and learning outcomes

The quality of education, teaching, and the learning outcomes are important factors that determine the student's and its family's motivation to go to school: "teaching and learning can influence children's experiences of schooling, their motivations and the move towards dropping out (Hunt, 2008: 39). If a student does not feel like he is acquiring valuable knowledge and skills, his motivation for schooling drops easily which may end in desertion. "Low quality teachers or school resources reduce the expected gains from attending school, which may result in spotty school attendance and consequently lead to repetition and desertion"(Bedi and Marshall, 199:

657). Many students commented that the content of their education, and the quality and way of teaching where below standard and that this influenced their motivation for school.

In the focus group with students from 4th grade, a boy said that he didn't learn much in school and was repeating stuff he already knew the whole time. Even though the Bolivian curriculum has undergone extreme changes in the last decades trying to make it more locally relevant for the students, it has not yet generated the expected results. Another boy from the 4th grade focus group stated that the lack of capacity of the teachers was really annoying, and a girl added that the teachers didn't organize or prepare their lessons well. The problem of inadequate and un-motivated teachers is characteristic for whole Latin America; Vaillant (2011) blames this on two fundamental issues: the low status of teachers and the inadequacy of teacher education. Teachers receive a low salary, and do not obtain the adequate training to work with children and young adults living in difficult circumstances. The situation is worse in rural areas than in urban areas of the country. Teachers, often the newest and least qualified ones, work at multi-grade schools, and struggle with language issues (*Ibid.* 387-388). Most teachers are trained and teach in Spanish, whereas many rural students have an indigenous language as their mother tongue. Teaching at a multi-grade school is challenging for both the teacher and students. The teacher has to divide his attention between many students of different ages and levels, which disadvantages students with special needs or learning difficulties. Students are placed in a room with students from other grades and therefore do not receive the profound knowledge transfer they would receive in a single-grade school.

One of the main problems of Bolivian education and teaching that was stresses by ms. Alzérreca is the fact that it is of a sexist nature: teachers treat boys and girls differently in class, examples in books use stereotypical gender roles (Juan who is going to work vs. Maria who is cleaning the house) etc. In the questionnaire, the students were asked about the way the teacher treats boys and girls in class: if the teacher treats them differently and if the teacher pays more attention to one sex than the other. The results are displayed in table 4.2, and specified by sex.

Table 4.2. Teachers and their approach: gender differences, in (%).

	In class, the teacher treats boys and girls differently.			*The teacher pays more attention to … in class.*		
	Disagree	Indecisive	Agree	Boys	Girls	Equal amount of attention
Student – Total	50,5	26,9	22,7	3,3	9,3	87,4
Student – Boys	53,8	23,6	22,6	2,9	13,3	83,8
Student – Girls	47,3	30	22,7	3,7	5,5	90,8

The majority of the students feels like the teachers do not treat boys and girls differently and that both sexes receive an equal amount of attention in class. Over 22% of both boys and girls argues that the teacher does treat boys and girls differently. Boys say that girls get a softer, more careful, and simpler approach by their teacher. They often do not refer to this treatment as wrong, but explain it by stating that girls need a more gentile treatment than boys. Interesting to see is that 13.3% of the boys responded that girls get more attention and only 5.5% of the girls thinks so the other way around. The teachers agreed with the fact that they treat boys and girls differently: they argue that they should be treated differently, since boys need a different, harder, and tougher approach than girls.

4.3.4. Safety

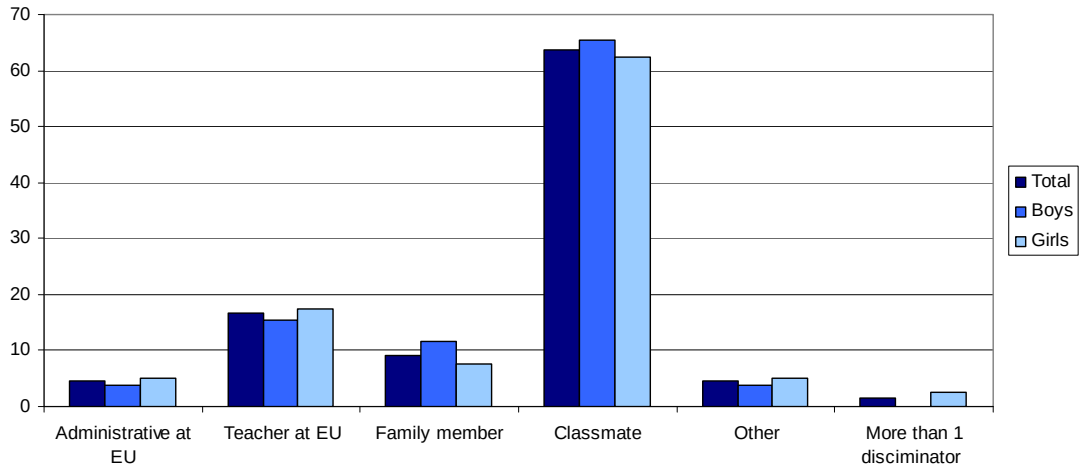
An important cause for school desertion is the safety of the students: both at school (physical, verbal, or sexual violence) and in home-to-school transportation. The schools that participated in the research have a strict no-violence policy, which counts for student-teacher and student-student relations. Two students that filled out the questionnaire expressed that they have been victims of violent actions at high school, in both cases the aggressor was a fellow student. The little amount of literature that explores the relation between violence at school (physical, verbal or sexual) and dropping out states that violence affects the children's motivation to go to school and therefore could lead to dropping out (see Boyle, 2002; Liu, 2004). Ms. Van Dam comments that sexual violence and intimidation is a big problem: either between students or between teachers and students. It affects mainly girls, with fellow male students or teachers being the aggressor, and diminishes their motivation to go to school.

The second point, transportation, refers to the transportation of the students from their homes to school and back. This issue was not relevant while conducting the research in La Paz and El Alto, since most students attend a school close to their homes. Though, high schools are not common in some scarcely populated areas in rural Bolivia and students have to travel a long time to get to school, either by foot or by school/public transportation. Some parents keep their children from school, since it is not safe for them to get there. Stories of children getting physically or sexually abused, or kidnapped while on their way to school are widespread.

4.3.5. School ambience

The school ambience can be described as the communication and interaction between students themselves, as well as between them and their teachers. An unfriendly or hostile school ambience can diminish the student's motivation to continue going to school. Since the in-class interaction between students and teachers already has been described in paragraph 4.2.3, this paragraph will focus solely on discrimination at school. A total of 31.8% of the students that participated in this research indicated that they felt discriminated at least once during their time in high school. This rate is higher amongst girls than boys, respectively 37.6% and 25.7%. Figure 4.2 displays the actors by whom the students have felt discriminated, the results are specified by sex but the results show no striking difference between boys and girls.

Figure 4.2. Who is the discriminator? (in %).



It is clear that most students felt discriminated by their fellow classmates: 63.6%. According to existing literature discrimination among classmates occurs at every school, is not dependent on a country or education level, and focuses mainly on the physical features of the bullied-one (see Janssen *et al.,* 2004; Kepenekci and Cinkir, 2006). More important to notice is that 16.7% of the students felt discriminated by a teacher at their school and 4.5% by other administratives of the school (director, supporting staff, other personnel). This is a worrying situation since it influences the student's academic performance and motivation to go to school deeply. Figure 4.1 shows that discrimination is a legitimate reason for almost 5% of the students and almost 15% of the parents to drop out of high school. However, teachers have indicated that this has not been the case in recent drop outs, and added that discrimination is never the sole reason for a student to quit school but functions more as an aggravating factor.

The different motives for discrimination are diverse. The most-mentioned one is the student's physical appearance (49.1%), which is in line with the findings that classmates are the largest group of discriminators. The other motives are of such a variety that it is hard to categorize them, the most important and striking ones are displayed in table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Motives for discrimination.

Physical appearance	Mostly the way of dressing Because I have *moreno* skin For the weight that I have For the color of my skin Because they say I'm a bit fat
Gender	There still are persons that think like before, that women are less than men. Maybe because the girls don't participate that much and they don't take us into account that much.
Teachers	He favors others, and insults us all the time The teacher always treats me badly, everything I do is wrong
Shame / cannot tell	I can't I'm sorry, I don't want to tell anyone because what they said was very strong.
Family or household context	Because of poverty. For being more educated than the rest of the family, and they are jealous. Because they think they are from the high society in La Paz, and I live in El Alto.

4.4. Out of school causes of school desertion

Out of school causes are those influences of political, economic, social, communitarian or familiar nature that take place outside the school environment. The causes that are mentioned in this paragraph are the household context, which includes family composition, education level of the parents, motivation and control, and family problems; income and financial circumstances, such as poverty and child labor; the cultural context, with an emphasis on gender differences; health; teen pregnancies; and ends with other causes such as alcoholism and criminal activity.

4.4.1. The household context

The ways in which the household context is related to high school desertion and composition are plural: the household composition, the education level of the parents, the control and

support of the parents, and family problems are all of influence and will be discussed in this sub paragraph.

The composition of the household is comprised by the presence of siblings, both parents, other family members and other relatives. Different actors in the research have commented on the influence of the presence of one of these household members and their findings are twofold. The amount of siblings can bear both positive and negative consequences for student's enrollment and school completion. Some parents and education experts argued that a high amount of siblings would cause a financial burden on the parents: there is not enough money available to send them (all) to school and thus some are forced to go working instead, either in the household or a paid job. Others argued that larger household sizes would enlarge the chances of al siblings to go to school, since all siblings can divide the workload that is put on them by the parents. The same counts for a household that is comprised of many other family members or relatives: it can be a burden (more people to provide for) or a blessing (more people to help provide an income and to share the household tasks with).

The education level of the parents is of importance and influence for the level of education the children might receive, as has been stated already in chapter 1. A higher amount of years of studying of the parents increases the access to education, leads to higher attendance rates and lower drop out rates (Hunt, 2008). All parents that participated in the research, by filling out the questionnaire or being interviewed, where asked if they had children that dropped out of school and how many years of education they had received. The parents with children that had dropped out had an average of 6.5 years schooling, the parents without children that had dropped out had an average of 9.8 years, a difference of 3.4 years. Parents who did not receive many years of education, or no education at all, do not understand the value of education and cannot provide the support for their children to continue, according to one of the school directors in El Alto and as the quote from one of the parents in box 4.2 illustrates.

Box 4.2. Eli, mother
Eli, the mother of a 17-year-old girl who dropped out of school due to her pregnancy:

"Why should she continue with school? She has a baby now to take care off, that is more important than school. I did not even finish primary school, so she is lucky to have reached the 3rd grade of secondary. Now it is enough and she has to take care of her baby and make money for the family, because life isn't for nothing."

The motivational problems of students could be tempered if the students were stimulated at home to continue studying. A history teacher from La Paz says that the situation at home has changed in the past decades:

> "nowadays, often both parents have jobs and there is no one home during the day and the kids are left alone. Before, the mother stayed home and watched the kids, cleaned the house. Now, nobody is there to help them with their homework, to encourage them to study instead of going to the streets and discover way more interesting things than school for kids this age.".

Several teachers and directors, as well as education experts stated that parents nowadays exercise less control on their children, and that these experience more freedom than before. A school director in La Paz thinks the lack of control of the parents is a serious problem and has various explanations.

"Sometimes the children do not live with their parents because they live too far, but with other relatives who live closer or even alone by themselves. These parents are not that connected to their children's school and education, and this has its effects on the motivation of the students."

See also the story of Edoardo, a student in the 2nd grade of a high school in El Alto in box 4.3.

Box 4.3. Edoardo (2nd grade)
A school director in El Alto tells: "Right now, we have a student in 2nd grade, Edoardo, and we are worried about him dropping out. He is late every day, is not well rested, doesn't take care of himself, doesn't have any interest in school. His mom died 3 years ago and his dad already has a new wife and family. Edoardo lives with his aunt now, but doesn't feel very at home there. We tried to get in touch with his father, but he shows no interest. Other attempts to get in contact with his aunt also had lead to nothing. We are very worried that one day he doesn't show up and we will never see him again."

The school director adds that the contact with and physical presence of the parents at the school is decreasing. "Sometimes we invite the parents to come and talk with the teachers. But, usually only the parents of the kids that perform well come. The kids that perform badly don't show up.". She also notices a big difference between local parents and parents from migrated families: "The rural parents are not prepared, they don't know this way of contact with the school.". The lack of control and commitment of parents influences the motivation of the student and their self-esteem in a negative way. A female student in the fourth grade said: "It's hard to stay motivated because I don't have the support from my parents and older brother, and they are important to me." Not all students are stimulated by their family to continue on going to school in order to graduate and obtain a diploma, which makes the choice to drop out easier.

Family problems are often mentioned by students themselves as an important disturbing factor in their motivation to go to school. Children cannot focus on their school work when the situation at home is unstable: when their parents fight continuously or their father is an abusive alcoholic. As figure 4.1 indicates that between 10% and 15% of the students and parents think that family problems are the principal reason to drop out of school, whereas teachers have the experience that this is the cause in 25% of the cases. Family problems can be considered a broad category: violence and fights at home, (sexual) abuse of the children, economical or financial problems, divorce of the parents, and sickness or death of one of the siblings or parents are only a selection of the problems pointed out by the different respondents and experts. Often one problem leads to a new problem, or amplifies a yet existing problem, as is illustrated by the personal story of Carmen in box 4.4. These problems are an important factor of instability in student's lives and makes it hard for them stay focused on their school work. A school director in La Paz argues that "the children loose interesting their education. They don't sleep well and often arrive late at school, or don't show up at all."

Box 4.4. Carmen
A Spanish teacher in El Alto on one of their recent students that dropped out: "Carmen's mom had legal problems, and they were always travelling from La Paz to Oruro, Cochabamba and back. Her dad died, and she could not stay with other family members. Due to all this travelling, we lost control and contact with Carmen and her mom. She showed up every now and then, and wasn't motivated at all. We tried to stay in touch with her mom, but this was very hard since they were always on the road. Eventually her mom sent us a letter to inform us of her voluntary withdrawal. It's sad, she was a clever girl."

Many families experience a certain degree of fights, violence, or (sexual) abuse, at home according to all directors. However, these problems are kept at home and not taken out in the public or discussed at school. The students struggle with these issues, and cannot find a place or person to talk about it. One school director in El Alto says that problems at home affect the children heavily, also in the economic sense. "The children want to help the family and find a job, since financial difficulties are often the source of many fights between the parents. They think the fighting will stop when there is enough money". She also knows a case of a drop out student who was so fed up with the situation at home that he decided to leave home and find a job. He did not want to be dependent on his parents anymore, and thought that he would be better off by himself. Family problems often force students to focus on other aspects of their lives besides their education. Family is very important in a traditional country like Bolivia, and children are exposed to many problems that should not be on their minds at that age.

4.4.2. Income and financial circumstances

Poverty is one of the main reasons for children to start working, either in the domestic sphere or an actual paid job, in order to contribute to the family's income. Child labor interferes with children's educational advancements (Zapata, Contreras, and Kruger, 2011: 588) and influences their results heavily. "If working as a child translates into lower educational attainment, then the future economic well-being of children might be in jeopardy since education is one of the most important tools to increase income and escape from poverty." (*Ibid.*). More in depth information on child labor in Bolivia can be found in box 4.5.

Box 4.5. Child labor in Bolivia
According to research by Zapata, Contreras, and Kruger almost 86% of the Bolivian children aged 7-14 years participated in domestic or market work. Over 84% participates in domestic tasks. These activities are more common among girls (88%) than boys (80%), and among indigenous (91%) than non-indigenous children (82%). The total amount of time spent on domestic tasks is around 15 hours (girls 17 hours, boys 13 hours). Over 28% of the children performed work at the market: 32% of the boys versus 25% of the girls. The difference between indigenous and non-indigenous children is big (58% vs. 18%). On an average, children spent 21 hours per week on their market activities.

Source: Zapata, Contreras, and Kruger, 2011.

The direct and opportunity costs of school compared to the benefits of attending school as well as the quality of the school experience are reasons for not attending (Barnes, 1999: 18). When a child is kept at home it can help generate an income by either work or enabling the parents to work more by taking over their tasks and responsibilities. Attending high school is free of charge

for students, but parents do spent money on school supplies (pens, notebooks), uniforms, contributions for special events etc. On the other side, many poor households also acknowledge the value of an education for their children. These parents expect the child to finish school and find a well-paid job, and send remittances to the rest of the family.

The story of Mario in box 4.6 demonstrates the different forms of formal and informal work in which students in high school can get engaged. Many students work to support the family and do not receive a salary: they help out in the family's business (informal shops and diners, minibus etc.), take care of younger siblings, help cooking and cleaning the house etc. Other students go find actual paid jobs, whether it is combined with school or it results in them dropping out. The importance of education and obtaining a diploma is underestimated by students, which is confirmed by the school directors and experts. "When they start working they feel really rich, because they finally earn their own money. They do not realize that their income will never grow, and that they will be stuck in that type of jobs for rest of their lives."

Box 4.6. Mario (19 years old)

"I've always worked. I combined it with school when I was younger, but I dropped out 4 years ago. My dad drives the minibus, and when I was about 10 years old I started to join him on his rides as a *voceador*. I shouted the destinations of the bus and tried to get all the chairs filled. I also collected the money from the passengers. When I started it was exciting: I could see the city and all this different people. I would go to school in the morning, and ride with my dad in the afternoon and night. After a while the work got boring, but I had to go, to help my dad. Sometimes I also went with other drivers, and I would earn 35 or 40 *bolivianos* per day. My parents also made me go to school because they think education is important. They didn't go to school much themselves. My dad works at the minibus and my mom as a housekeeper. They want us to have a better future. My brothers like going to school, I don't, I'd rather be outside. I stopped school when I was 16 I think. I was in 4th grade and got to know a couple of guys in the streets. They were a bit older and one of them worked at this garage, auto shop. I went there once to check it out and it was very interesting. Since then, I skipped school every now and then to help there, and in the afternoon I would go home and go in the minibus with my dad. My parents didn't know anything, until my mentor came by one night and ask my parents about my absence. They were really mad and made me go back to school. But I still went to the garage and eventually Pedro, the owner, said he could use a help in the garage, and he would give me a salary. So I decided to stop school and work for Pedro instead. My parents were very mad at me, but they couldn't change my mind. I still go with my dad to help him out sometimes. And now, I can also help him when the minibus is broken."

There is a clear division to observe in what type of jobs boys and girls end up. Girls usually take over the role of the mother in the family household: they take care of younger siblings, cook diner, clean the house etc. They also help out in the small family businesses, which are often the mother's responsibility: the informal little shops and street diners for example. When girls get a paid job outside the familiar spheres, it is often as domestic employee or street vendor. Boys are expected to do heavier labor, and bring in a decent salary. They end up in a wide range of professions like taxi drivers, minibus drivers, *voceador*, construction work, and street vendors.

4.4.3. The cultural context: gender

The Bolivian culture plays an important role in school desertion in La Paz and El Alto, especially when looking at gender differences. Culture still fuels the different attitudes, conceptions, and expectations parents have towards their sons and daughters. An important concept to keep in mind when trying to understand Bolivian culture is *machismo*, a typical Latin American concept. *Machismo* encompasses the structuring of power relations amongst and between men, as well as between men and women. Focusing on the latter, the women are seen as inferior to the men and men exercise power and control over them. This results in specific roles in society for both genders which lead to different attitudes, conceptions, and expectations for boys and girls (Chant and Craske, 2003: 14-17). There have been many important changes, but still a big change of attitude is needed: "This is a *machista* and patriarchal society. The realization of the importance of education of the daughters is growing, but still lags behind on boys." The idea that education is more valuable for boys than girls is still very much alive in Bolivia: "Parents take their girls out of school sooner than boys: they think it's not necessary that their daughter gets to a high education level, since she will not end up in a job where she needs it." Not many women pursue an academic career and continue studying after high school. Ms. Alzérreca argues that this is because of the cultural phenomenon of *Chacha Warmi*. *Chacha Warmi* finds its origins in the Aymará culture and means that men and women complement each other, and form the basis of equilibrium. Their unity in marriage and having children are seen as ideal, and should be strived for. Certain roles are prescribed to the men and women in this marriage: men work, provide the income, act in the public space, while women take care of the family and household. This implies that women don't need to get educated, and limits their chances.

Even though data has showed that boys drop out of high school more often than girls do, it is important to keep these cultural differences in mind too. Ms. Van Dam states that the contradiction lies in the fact that families favor their sons over daughters to receive a high education, but also take their sons out of school to earn a salary or their daughters to make them help out at home (see box 4.5). She also knows that the cultural factor is stronger present in the rural areas of the country, and that the situation in La Paz and El Alto is more moderate.

With this information in mind, the questions if education was equally valuable for both sexes and if girls need a high level of education were asked to the respondents of the questionnaire. Table 4.4 shows the responses of the students, teachers, and parents to the question: *Secondary education is most valuable for…?*

Table 4.4. The value of secondary education by gender, in (%).

Secondary education is most valuable for…?				
	Boys	Girls	Equally valuable	Indecisive
Student	5,2	3,3	87,8	3,8
Teacher	6,3	0	93,8	0
Parent	8,5	3,4	83,1	5,1

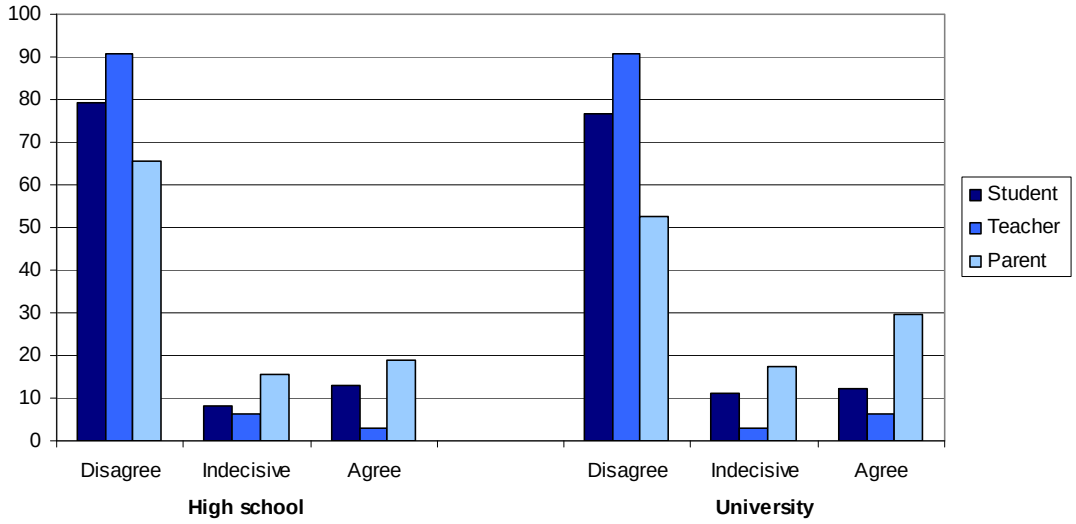
The largest share of all respondents thinks that secondary education is equally valuable for boys and girls. Over 5% of the students, 6.3% of the teachers, and 8.5% of the parents thinks it is more valuable for boys than girls, and many of these respondents have commented on their choice. They state that 'boys have more opportunities than girls', that 'they will go working in the future and the girls will stay at home', but also that ' boys are favored because of the existence of *machismo'*. A smaller group responded that secondary education is more valuable for girls, or were indecisive on this matter. Their comments were: 'girls, because they are more responsible than boys', or ' indecisive, because there still exist places where they respect men

more than women, or were they take advantage of women.'. These answers show that the traditional men-women role division is still strong, but more progressive ideas are present too.

When parents are asked if it is permitted for children to quit school when they have to help the family, almost 10% answered yes. A total of 16.4% of the parents would prefer a boy to drop out, only 6.6% would prefer a girl to do so. Their motives for choosing boys over girls are mainly that boys find a paid job more easily than girls do, and that it is safer for boys than girls to be 'outside'[11]. The ones that favored girls to drop out mentioned that these had more responsibility and where thus of more value, or that these could help out at home.

The whole group of respondents was asked if they agreed with the following statements: *Girls don't need to continue studying after high school* and *Girls don't need to go to university.* The answers to both questions are displayed in figure 4.3. This figure shows that the largest part of the respondents disagrees with both statements and argues that girls should continue studying after finishing high school. Important to notice is that the parents score lower than students and teachers, and more parents agree with the fact that girls should quit after high school. The differences between the two statements are not big: a slightly bigger share of students and parents agree with the statement on university, than on the statement on high school.

Figure 4.3. Perspectives on higher education for girls, in (%).



4.4.4. Health

Health problems of students are often linked to other factors, such as poverty and household circumstances. Different studies suggest that children with health problems such as malnutrition and stunting attend school less frequently, experience difficulties in learning, are more likely to repeat grades, and drop out early due to poor levels of attention, low motivation and poor cognitive functions (see Pridmore 2007). A study by Daniels and Adair (2004, in Pridmore 2007) in the Philippines showed that taller boys and girls were protected from late enrolment in school, less likely to repeat grades and drop out. One of the study's conclusions was that by improving childhood nutrition, the probability of completing high school could increase.

[11] When asked to clarify the term 'outside', the parents explained that they refer to the world outside the safe home and school environment.

Many students (27.6%) and parents (13.7%) mentioned that health problems influence school desertion. A history teacher from El Alto comments that health problems are often a reason to keep the children at home for a couple of days, but that in his experience almost never a child drops out because he/she is ill. Students that come back to school after a period of illness do experience difficulties in catching up with the curriculum and reintegrating with the students. The director adds that she thinks that parents sometimes use illness as an excuse, to keep the children at home when they need to help out in the household or family business.

The illness of family members or relatives can affect the school attendance rate of students negatively. Students, especially female students according to one school director, are expected to take on the role of caregiver or tasks and responsibilities when someone in the household falls ill. The story of 17-year-old drop out Patricia in box 4.7, whose mother became ill when she was 14, describes the consequences of such an event. She stated that after being away from school for a couple of years it is hard to go back, even though she might want to. The fact that her family relies on her now and the difficulties she faces when re-entering school keep her from finishing high school.

Box 4.7. Patricia (17 years old)

"I dropped out of school when I was 14. My mom got sick, and she couldn't take care anymore of my brothers and sister and the shop. Since I'm the oldest daughter, I had to help with the household and take care of my mum. I have an older brother too, but my parents decided that he should stay in school because a daughter is more useful at home. My mum is a bit better now, but I never went back to school. I'm responsible for the cleaning, washing, and cooking at home, and I take care of the kids. Sometimes, I also help in the shop, but my brothers and sister help too. I would like to go back to school, but it is too difficult now. My family needs me, and I don't know if they would let me go back. I also don't know if the school would let me back in, since I'm older now."

4.4.5. Teen pregnancies

Teen pregnancies are a worldwide cause of high school desertion for female students. According to figure 4.1, pregnancies are present in the top four causes for school desertion: over 10% of the students and 20% of the parents have listed pregnancy as the most important cause, whereas teachers have the experience that in 15% of the cases, the student dropped out of high school due to pregnancy. It affects girls much more than boys: pregnant girls are made fun of in class by their classmates and often fall behind on the curriculum during their pregnancy, whereas boys escape this situation almost entirely. After giving birth, girls experience great difficulties in returning to school not only by having to catch up on the curriculum, but also by having to take care of the child.

All school directors replied that pregnancies occurs between one and five times every year. A study by Alfonso (2008: 11) affirms this: "early childbearing is still of an important magnitude among Bolivian teens[12], (…) 27.8% of Bolivian (female) teenagers were sexually active, 3.6% was

Box 4.8. Ten months

The difference between the average age at first sexual intercourse (15.6 years old) and the average age at first birth (16.4 years old) in Bolivia is only 10 months.

Source : Alfonso, 2008

[12] In this article by Alfonso, teens are defined as persons between the age of 15 and 19 years old. The information used in her article relies on the outcomes of the Demographic and Health Questionnaire of 2003.

pregnant, and 12.6% had already borne a child[13]". Other important facts that Alfonso states in the article are that the incidence of teenage sexual activity, pregnancy, and motherhood in Bolivia is increasing, and that many Bolivian teenagers become pregnant around the time they have their first intercourse, see box 4.8 (*Ibid.* 12). Alfonso also states that the education level of teenagers has a major influence on their sexual activity: Bolivian teenagers with higher levels of education have a lower rate of pregnancy and motherhood compared to
their counterparts with no education or only primary schooling (*Ibid.* 16*)* and concludes in line with a study by Guzmán *et al.* (2000) that pregnancies might be responsible of only 17% of school dropouts in Bolivia.

Ms. Alzérreca explains that teenage pregnancies are a result of the taboo on sexuality and a lack of sexuality education:

> "Sexuality is a taboo subject, it's dirty. The Aymará language doesn't even have a word for it. They don't talk about sexuality, sex, and the possibility of pregnancy at home, nor at school. Therefore, the kids don't have any knowledge on the subject, nor on sexual abuse or violence and the possibilities to report this, or saying 'No'. The number of teenage pregnancies will remain high if this doesn't change."

She also argues that many kids end up marrying due to teenage pregnancies, since that is 'the right thing to do' according to their families. If girls are married at such a young age, it is evident that they will not finish school and will have to take care of the baby and family. They either form a new family with the father of the child or stay with their own parents. When they get pregnant very young, they most likely stay with their own family and the father of the child is not affected that much by the pregnancy.

All directors have the experience of dealing with pregnant girls in their education unit, and state that pregnancy has serious consequences for the girls. A school director from La Paz: "Pregnancy usually occurs in the final grades of high school. The first months they keep coming to school, but eventually they show up less and less. The main reasons are the physical problems they encounter, as well as the talking and bullying at school." Many pregnant girls fear that the school direction is going to kick them out, since they would set a bad example for the other kids in school. However, this is against the law and schools should make it as easy as possible for the girls to continue their studies after the baby is born. Reality teaches that this is very hard to accomplish. Many girls do not return after giving birth: schooling is just not a priority anymore, they have to take care of the baby or provide the family with an income. A return to school in order to graduate takes a lot of effort from both the girl and her family, as well as the school itself. The stories of Ana and Ana Maria in boxes 4.8. and 4.9. illustrate the problems of teenage pregnancy and its consequences very well.

[13] The actual number of mothers is higher, since women under the age of 15 years old are not included in this study. The study reveals that 2.1% of the female teenagers 13 years or younger of age already had borne a child.

Box 4.9. Ana

The director of Villa Alemania on one of their recent students that dropped out: "Ana dropped out last year, when she was in the sixth and final class of high school. She got pregnant by a boy from the same year, but a different class. When she found out she was pregnant, she didn't want to come to school anymore out of shame and out of fear of the reactions from her classmates and she developed serious psychological problems. We, the education unit, offered her different possibilities, hoping that she would finish her year and would graduate. She was so close! We had several meetings with her, and her parents and discussed the possibilities for her to come back after giving birth, or she could make special appointments with the teachers for discussing home work or extra lessons. Her mentor talked to her privately a couple of times. We tried everything. But still, she and her parents decided to quit school. She really didn't want to go anymore. Right now, we have no idea how she is doing. She already should have the baby, but we haven't seen her since."

Box 4.10. Ana Maria (6th grade)

"I discovered that I was pregnant when I was in the last months of the 4th grade. I was really in shock, and was scared to tell everyone, especially at school. I thought they might kick me off school, and that I couldn't finish it. I was also scared of what people where going to say, and if all the kids would start talking bad about me. But, the school really helped me a lot. The helped me tell my classmates in class and we talked also with my parents, about how we all together were going to deal with the situation. Luckily, my mom was willing to watch Antonio while I'm at school. I have two younger sisters too, so it wasn't a really big problem. After his birth, I went back to school as quickly as I could, and try to catch up. I am now in 6th grade, I supposed to graduate last year, but I repeated 5th. The teachers helped me a lot: they answered all my questions, and if I needed some extra time it was always possible. I'm really happy to be graduating this year, but I don't know yet what I'm going to do after high school. I think I have to talk to my parents about that."

One school director said: "the process of being pregnant, giving birth to a child, and caring for this child have an enormous impact on the young girl's life. She has to get her priorities straight and only with a lot of help of everyone around her, including family, friends, and the school, she can finish and get her diploma. But it is difficult.". The stories of Ana and Ana Maria describe some of the difficulties these young mothers encounter and the different possible end situations.

4.4.6. Other causes

Alcoholism is a big and worrying problem according to a school director from La Paz. This cause came forward after the questionnaire was developed, and therefore is not included in figure 4.1. She does not refer of the drinking problems of many parents of her students, but to the amount of alcohol that the students consume. "Many boys and girls drink much and there is little control of the parents.". She does not know where they get the alcohol from, or when and where they exactly drink. Her assumption is confirmed by a couple of students, who wrote down that alcoholic drinks made it hard for them to stay in school and keep motivated. The consequences of this behavior are diverse, and the director of Ignacio Calderón mentions the three most important ones at her school. First, the consumption of alcohol leads to the creation of *pandillas*, or gangs. Both boys and girls participate in these gangs, and drinking is often one of the requirements to enter such a gang. The activities that these gangs undertake are numerous and differ per gang, but can include vandalism, robbery, drugs trafficking etc. A second consequence

of alcoholism is unwanted pregnancies. Students practice unsafe sex more often when they are drunk, and pregnancies at every age in high school are now a common phenomenon. The third consequence of alcoholism is increased violence at home, among students, and in the streets. This violence may result from drunken students engaging in fights, but also as a result from the activities of the gangs. Research by Dearden *et al.* (2005) affirms her findings and states that increased alcohol intake can lead to depression and suicidal behavior, and has a major influence on academic performance, violence and sexual behavior.

4.5. Decision-making around school desertion

The decision to drop out of high school is not taken easily. One has to bear in mind that every drop out story is different and the specific circumstances influence the decision-making heavily. The decision follows often after a long process in which the student's different opportunities are looked upon and involves different actors: the student, parents, other family members or relatives, friends, and school. Almost all the drop outs that were interviewed said that it was a conjoint decision of their parents and themselves, even though some were more forced into the decision by their parents than others. The story of Mario in box 4.6 is the only example of a student deciding on its own to quit school: an un-motivated student who had other interests than school and decided to go work instead. A 18-year-old female drop out: "After we found out I was pregnant, my parents talked to me about the possibilities of staying in school, and also about the time and money it costs to raise a baby. They made me realize that it was the best decision for my baby to quit school so I have more time for him." The school plays an important role in this process. Most students that felt stimulated by their school and teachers to continue really looked into the different possibilities of staying or returning to school. Students that did not have good contact with school felt let down and saw too many difficulties to continue or return.

The students that are enrolled in high school were asked if they would drop out of school if their parents insisted on it. A total of 74.2% of the respondent disagreed and 15% agreed with the statement, almost 11% was indecisive. The arguments they gave were diverse, the most common and striking ones are listed in table 4.5.

Table 4.5. Student's responses concerning decision-making.

If my parents would ask to drop out of high school, I would do it.	
Disagree	Agree
They would never ask me that, because education is important.	If they would need economical help, I would.
I want to be a tourist guide, so I have to stay in school and learn English.	They must have good reasons to ask me, so I would listen.
If they would ask me that, I would run away from home.	Yes, they know what's best for me.
No, I like school and I want to stay here with my friends.	If my family needs me, I would stop school.
Why would they ask that?	

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has given a broad overview on school desertion in Bolivia and the main causes that underlie this phenomenon. Even though the rate of students that drop out of high school has decreased in recent decades, it is still a worrying problem in the education sector. The causes of school desertion can be divided in two categories: of an in-school and out of school nature. In-school causes such as accessibility, facilities, quality, and ambience originate within the school itself and define the learning experience of the student. The out-of-school causes are influences from outside the school environment: the household context, poverty, financial problems, health issues etc. Both categories are of importance when looking at school desertion, albeit that some are more relevant for rural areas than urban areas and the other way around.

5. PREVENTING SCHOOL DESERTION IN LA PAZ AND EL ALTO

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 scrutinized school desertion at high schools in Bolivia and the causes hereof. This chapter aims to look at the existing strategies to combat school desertion in Bolivia, as well as at new ideas for these types of strategies. Prevention measures of all different kinds will be taken into consideration: national or local government initiatives, the practices of teachers and other in-school activities, and ways to enhance the motivation of the student and support of those surrounding the student. The chapter starts with a small overview of the different stakeholders in preventing school desertion, and the opinion of these stakeholders on current prevention strategies and responsibility. It continues by giving an overview of the currently existing strategies that prevent school desertion and their effectiveness. This paragraph will combine the findings from the research with existing literature in order to provide the complete picture. The fourth paragraph will focus on new ideas to prevent school desertion that came forward during the research. Students, teachers and other education personnel, parents and the education experts all have a different opinion on what the best way to prevent school desertion is; this paragraph will discuss all the mentioned ideas and how realistic and feasible these are.

5.2. Stakeholder mapping

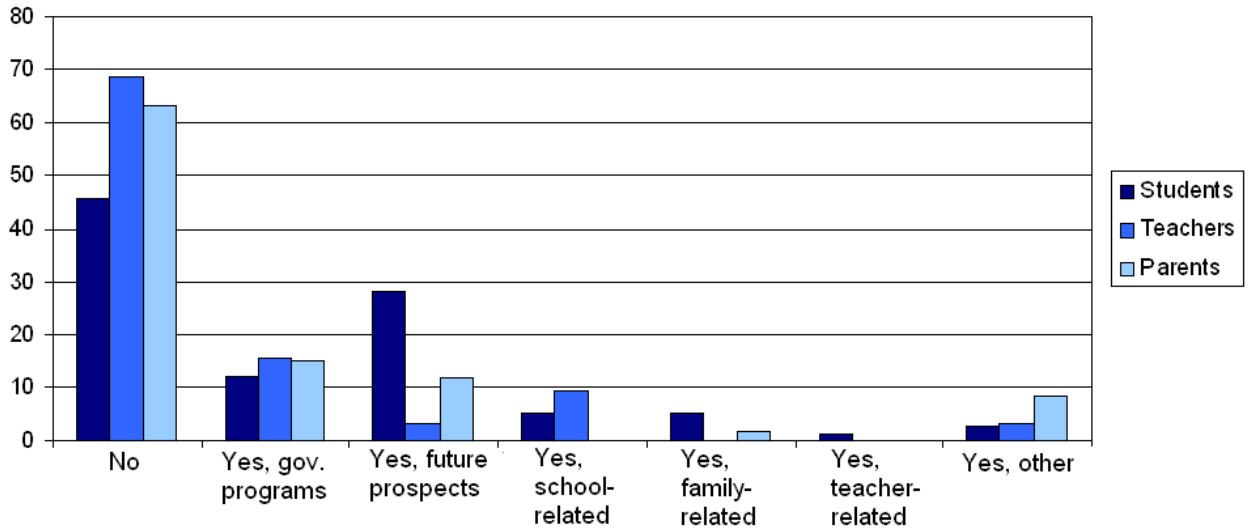
The following descriptions aim to provide a complete and clear overview of the different stakeholders that are present in the different strategies to prevent school desertion in Bolivia. All the stakeholders and their role will be discussed throughout this chapter.

National government: the national government bodies that are responsible for national education policymaking and school desertion prevention programs.
Local (municipal) government: the local government bodies that create local education policy and school desertion prevention initiatives.
NGOs and CBOs: the currently active national and local non-governmental organizations (like PLAN, FyA), and community-based organizations.
School director: the school director of the secondary schools, in this research all are appointed by FyA.
Teachers: the teaching staff in the secondary schools.
Other education personnel: supporting staff (janitors, lunch-mothers, secretary etc.) and members of the JE.
Education experts: professionals who are specialized in different aspects of education (gender and education, special education etc.) or work in/for an education-oriented organization. A list of the key informants is included in the appendices.
Students: the adolescents currently enrolled in secondary education in La Paz and El Alto, aged 11-20 years old.
Drop outs: former students in secondary education who at some point dropped out of school.
Parents: the parents/guardians of the students/drop outs.
Family and household: the direct relatives (also non-familiar) that are in close day-to-day contact with the students, with whom the students share a house.

5.3. Which strategies and whose responsibility

The previous chapter showed that high school desertion still is a problem of importance in the Bolivian education sector. Different measures to prevent high school students from dropping out are already in place and are organized by different actors in the education field. All participants of the questionnaire were asked if there are currently strategies in place that stimulate students to finish high school, the results hereof are displayed in figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. Current strategies that stimulate students to finish high school, (in %).



Most respondents answered that currently were no programs, policies, or other measures that encourage students to continue studying. Almost 30% of the students said that their future prospects were the biggest incentive: the possibility to continue studying or get a good well-paid job in the near future. Government programs are the most important stimulant for 12% of the students and 15% of the teachers and parents. Other strategies that the respondents mentioned were school- and teacher related or family related: in particular the support and advice from family and teachers, and school activities.

The respondents were also asked if the government should develop programs to promote finishing high school, table 5.1 gives the results. The majority of the respondents thinks that it is the governments' task to develop programs to promote finishing high school and thus prevent desertion.

Table 5.1. The government as duty bearer, in (%).

The government should develop programs to promote finishing high school.			
	Disagree	Indecisive	Agree
Students	16.9	18.3	64.8
Teachers	18.8	6.3	75.0
Parents	12.1	19.0	69.0

There are many general national plans and programs in Bolivia that promote human rights, equal rights for boys and girls, and the indigenous rights, which also include the access to

education. Some examples hereof are: *Plan Nacional de Acción de Derechos Humanos* (National Action Plan for Human Rights), *Plan Nacional para Igualdad de Oportunidades - "Mujeres construyendo la Nueva Bolivia para Vivir Bien*" (Nation Plan for Equal Opportunities – "Women building the New Bolivia to Live Well"), and *Municipios Amigos de la Niñez y Adolescencia* (Municipalities Friends of Children and Adolescents). However, since these programs do not have the prevention of school desertion as their spear point and other governmental programs do (see paragraph 5.3.), these will not be discussed here. During the focus groups with students it became clear that they do not think it is solely the responsibility of the government to create such programs. They also see a role for the school and families to stimulate them, the students, to continue their studies. Teachers, education experts, and parents themselves said that the parents play an important role too. "Parents have the biggest influence on the children. They are their role models." (teacher from La Paz).

5.4. Existing strategies to prevent school desertion

The currently existing strategies to prevent students from dropping out have been categorized into four different groups which will be discussed in the following sub paragraphs: financial support, teachers' practices, enhancing motivation and support, and lastly other prevention strategies.

5.4.1. Financial support

Financial short comings and poverty are amongst the most important causes of high school desertion, as became clear from the previous chapter. Research has shown that households with access to credit in times of income shocks or shortages are less likely to withdraw their children from school (Hunt, 2008). The Bolivian government and several municipal governments have installed different initiatives to support and reward those families that enroll their children and actually attend school. These conditional programs are proven more effective on school enrollment and attendance than unconditional programs (*Ibid*.), where poor households are simply given money without any conditions attached. There are currently no unconditional programs in operation in the research area; therefore these will not be discussed in this paragraph.

Bolivia knows two important national CCT programs that benefit children in school: the *Bono Juancito Pinto* (BJP) and the *Bono Juana Azurduy de Padilla* (BJA, also known as the *Bono Madre Niño Niña*). The municipal government of El Alto has a local CCT program in place: the *Bono Wawanakatasaki*. See box 5.1 for information on the naming of these programs. Even though the BJP only operates in primary education and not in secondary, it will be discussed in this paragraph since the other programs were modeled after the BJP and there have been calls to expand the BJP to secondary education.

Box 5.1. Naming the programs.

Juan Pinto, or more affectionately Juancito Pinto, was a young soldier from La Paz who entered the military at the age of 12 to fight in the Pacific war against Chile. He has a heroic status in Bolivia due to his heroic performance and death in one of the war's battles.

Juana Azurduy was a Latin American, Bolivian, guerilla military leader who fought against the Spanish crown for the independence of the continent. She was known for her leadership, fighting skills and determination. At one point, she actually fought while being pregnant and returned to the fight shortly after giving birth to her daughter.

Bono Wawanakatasaki is an expression in Aymará which translates into: for the children.

Bono Juancito Pinto

The BJP was introduced in 2006 and aims to increase school attendance and reduce school desertion rates in primary education by awarding an annual cash transfer of 200 *bolivianos* ($29 USD) for all children enrolled in and attending public primary schools. The program is modeled on the *Bono Escuela* program in El Alto and shares many similarities with CCT programs in Brazil and Mexico (*Bolsa Família* and *PROGRESA* respectively, see box 1.8; see box 5.2. for the *Bono Escuela*). The program benefitted children from first to sixth grade at the start in 2006, in 2008 the program was expanded and included all children in primary school, thus till eighth grade. In 2011, the program reached almost 2 million children and over 350 million *bolivianos (*$50 million USD) was spent (Los Tiempos, 2011). The main financers of the program are the YPFB for 53% (*Yacimientos Petroléferos Fiscales Bolivianos,* the state-owned and run petrol company), the Treasury for 33% and COMIBOL for 13% (*Corporación Minera de Bolivia,* the Bolivian Mining Corporation) (Molina, 2010: 67*)*. The bono is handed out by the armed forces, students must present an identification document or birth certificate and a declaration from school that states they are enrolled and attended class that year in order to obtain the money.

The households that receive the BJP are free to decide where the want to spend the money on. Usually it is used to benefit the children according to several teachers and school directors: new clothes, shoes, school supplies etc. Other households save the money for unexpected costs, new expensive goods such as refrigerators, or large repairs to the house. They also say that there are always cases where the money is spent badly on luxury items like alcohol, a new flat screen television etc.

Box 5.2. Bono Escuela.
The *Bono Escuela* (or *Bono Esperanza*) was a program of the municipality of El Alto that started in 2002. It handed out 50 bolivianos ($7 USD) to mothers with children in the first grade of primary school and scarce financial resources. The municipality aimed to give the mothers an incentive to send their children to school, even though this might be hard due to their poor circumstances. The mothers must go personally to the town hall with a document of identification of themselves, and a photocopy of it with the details of the child written on it (name, grade, name of the school) in order to receive the bono. In the first three years of the program, more than 32 000 mothers with students in 220 different schools participated.

Source: La Razón, 2012

The results and effects of the BJP are not quite clear. “Authorities report a decline in school dropout rates from 5.2% to 2.8% following the introduction of the Bono Juancito Pinto and a reduction in the illiteracy rate” (Calí, Jemio, and Luis, 2010: 5). Yáñez (2012) states that the BJP has contributed to a reduction of non-assistence in primary school and a reduction of poverty levels. On the other hand, an analysis by Vera Cossío (2011) shows that the BJP did not have any global impact on enrollment or reducing child labor. The people who received the BJP, both children and parents, state that the BJP does work as an incentive for them to go to school or send their children to school. Many students in high school referred to the BJP when they were asked to name some government initiatives to prevent school desertion, even though they are not receiving this bono anymore. Students feel like they can contribute to the financial position of their households, whereas parents can use the money to provide goods for their children.

The BJP program only grants students in primary education. Due to the ASEP reforms, the education system changed from eight grades in primary and four in secondary education in two cycles of six years, as already has been described in paragraph 3.2.4. The BJP changed

alongside with these reforms and continued to grant the 200 *bolivianos* students now in the first and second grade of secondary education. Many people, including participants in this research and other professionals in the education field call for an expansion of the program to secondary education as well (see El País, 2012), but the Bolivian government has not yet responded to this initiative. A school director from La Paz comments on this topic: "The Bono Juancito Pinto only awards funds to primary students, not for those in secondary. I think it would be a stimulant for the students, look at El Alto. The local municipality is giving out bono's and I heard the results are good. I think it would work here too."

Bono Juana Azurduy de Padilla

The BJA is a conditional cash transfer program introduced in 2009 for pregnant women in Bolivia. The bono gives funds to uninsured new mothers as an incentive for them to seek medical care during and after their pregnancies. The main goal is to reduce maternal and infant mortality. Table 5.2 gives an overview of the different conditionalities and corresponding funds the mothers can receive, the total amount can lead up to about $150 USD.

Table 5.2. Conditionalities of the BJA.

Conditionality	Funds
Pre-natal medical visits/check-ups, four in total	50 *bolivianos* per visit, 200 *bolivianos* in total
Childbirth	120 *bolivianos*
Paediatric medical check ups, until the child's second birthday	125 *bolivianos* per medical appointment

Source: Weisbrot, Ray, and Johnston, 2009.

This program does not have 'prevention of school desertion' as its core goal. However, several students did say that these funds helped pregnant girls in high school during and after their pregnancy. The mandatory controls with the doctor make sure that the mother is well-guided throughout her pregnancy. The 9-month period of guidance by the doctor helps the mother to prepare better for the changes that are ahead of her during the pregnancy and after giving birth. The story of a female 18-year-old student and a mother herself, from La Paz illustrates this quite well:

> "I am receiving the Bono Juana Azurduy, my baby was born almost a year ago. One of the teachers told me to go to the health centre for check ups and that I would get the bono in return. The money was definitely a good extra! The check ups with the doctor were very helpful. The doctor prepared me for all the things that were about to happen. For example, the changes of my body, giving birth and how painful that is, how I had to take rest to recover from the delivery of my baby. The first meeting he also asked me what my plan was with school. I actually hadn't been thinking about it until he mentioned it. He told me to talk about it with my parents and with the people at school, so I did. He really helped me to think about my future with a baby. Now I still go to see the doctor, goes he can answer all my questions. The money? I give it to my mother. I still live with my family and the money from the bono is just added to the rest of the family money, so we can all eat and have clothes, including my baby."

Figure 5.2. Promotional road sign for the BJA.

Bono Wawanakatasaki

The local municipal government of El Alto created a local conditional cash transfer program with the same goals and conditionalities as the BJP: increase school attendance and reduce school desertion by awarding grants of 200 *bolivianos* to those students that comply with the conditionalities of enrollment and attendance in school. The bono has had different names in the past: *Bono Wawanakatasaki*, *Nayraru Sartañataki*, and *Programa de Apoyo a la Reducción de la Deserción Escolar en El Alto* (PARDEEA)[14]. The recipients of this bono are different than those of the BJP: only those students who are not eligible to receive the BJP, receive this bono. In practice this means that children in pre-schools, kindergarten and students in high schools from the third grade and up receive it, if they possess an identification document or birth certificate and a declaration from school that affirms that they attended 80% of the classes.. The municipality of El Alto invests 19 million *bolivianos* on an annual basis in this program and reaches 90 000 students. The municipality does struggle with getting their own budget right, which has resulted in a delay of the disbursement of the bono last year. The results and effects of this bono have not been researched much. The municipality of El Alto itself claims that the rate of school desertion has dropped from 12% to 3% since the introduction of the bono.

Looking back at figure 5.1., it appears that only 12% of the students feel stimulated by governmental programs, which includes the *Bono Wawanakatasaki*, to continue studying. Since this bono only is implemented in El Alto and not in La Paz, it is interesting to see whether there are differences between the two cities. Table 5.3. displays the results and it is clear that the respondents from El Alto feel more like there are government programs in place than the respondents from La Paz, respectively 17.2% and 8.9%.

[14] The last mentioned name is the one that is currently in use: *Programa de Apoyo a la Reducción de la Deserción Escolar en El Alto* (PARDEEA). This name is however not known amongst the recipients of the bono and all participants in the research referred to it as the *Bono Wawanakatasaki,* therefore this name is used throughout this thesis.

Table 5.3. Programs that prevent school desertion: the differences between La Paz and El Alto, (in %).

Yes, there are government programs in place that help preventing school desertion.		
	La Paz	**El Alto**
Total	8.9	17.2
Students	10.1	13.7
Teachers	18.8	12.5
Parents	2.4	44.4

It is interesting to see that the difference is mainly caused by the parents: only 2.4% of the respondents from La Paz compared to a convincing 44.4% in El Alto. The percentages of the students lie quite close to each other: 10.1% in La Paz and 13.7% in El Alto. This difference is explained by a school director from El Alto and one of his students:

> "Almost none of the students can keep the money for themselves. Maybe they'll get a couple of *bolivianos* to buy some sweets, but that's it. The money is usually spent by the parents in a more responsible matter than the children would do. It doesn't function as a stimulant for the students, but more as a stimulant for the parents to send their kids to school. The parents then hopefully will spend it wisely: like books, pens, or shoes." (school director)

> "It's very nice of the mayor to give us money when we finish another year in high school, but I have never seen that money. I think I should get the money and do with it whatever I want. I want a computer and internet. Now, my mother takes the money and we don't do anything special with it." (Julio, 17-year-old student)

The different CCT programs that are in place in La Paz and El Alto definitely contribute to improving the access to secondary education. However, the effects of these programs are not as widespread as hoped for beforehand. As Morais de Sa e Silva (2010) already had argued in chapter 1: to make an educational contribution that goes beyond improving access, the CCT programs need to invest in collaborating with education policymakers. Only then the programs will have real impact on other aspects of education such as quality, and will contribute to build human capital.

5.4.2. Teachers' practices

A little over 5% of the students answered that the support, advice and stimulation of their teachers helped them to continue studying. The teachers themselves also argue that they play an important role in motivating their students, a history teacher from La Paz: "I always try to make them understand that it is important to have a diploma if you want a nice job. It is a valuable piece of paper, especially here in the city." According to a school director in El Alto it is most important to "not stop to encourage the students, to show them their potential". The teachers see it as their responsibility to make their students enthusiastic and inform them of the possibilities and chances a diploma offers. All teachers stated that it is important to have good, personal contact with the students in order to be able to prevent desertion. They see several signs that can indicate that a student is about to drop out: the student shows up less at school, loses interest in school and his/her grades drop, is not focused and with his/her mind on different things, the students isolates him/herself from close friends etc. Out of all the teachers that have had at least one student dropping out, 85% has tried to prevent this from happening

by getting actively involved. Table 5.4. gives an overview of the most-used methods of the teachers to keep the student at school: most teachers sit down and talk with the student trying to convince him./her of the importance of education or looking at possible solutions for their problems. Many teachers also contacted the parents with hopes to convince them to keep their son or daughter in school.

One school in La Paz has created a system where the students from each class choose an assessor, a teacher or other staff member at school, by discussing and voting in class, followed by a written letter in which the students ask this person to be their assessor and explain why. Given that the assessor is chosen by the students, he or she enjoys the full trust of them and takes a position closer to the students then other teachers: he/she knows the personal background, the families, and realities and communicates with the family of the student as well. It is their task to undertake action whenever a student is missing class or when a case of desertion is impending. By talking to the student and family and consultation with other teachers and students the assessor tries to find an improvement or solution for the student's situation and prevent him/her from dropping out. This system is working well: the fact that the assessor is chosen by the students and not appointed by the school direction makes a large difference according to the school director. "We worked with a system of mentors before, when we just imposed the mentor to the class, and we saw that the relationship between the mentor and the class was forced. Now the students are in a powerful position where they choose themselves. We see that most assessors and classes are a match for years and that the relationship grows and grows."

Table 5.4. Teachers' interventions to prevent school desertion.

Talking with student on the importance of education	I tried to talk to her and tell how important education is.
	I talked to her and tried to get in contact with her family but I didn't succeed.
	I told the student it is not advisable to drop out and even almost threatened to report it to his parents. He really hated school and the relation with his parents was bad. He spend most of his time on the streets.
	We sat down and talked about the student's ambitions in life and her goals and dream job. I talked to her how she could realize those dreams and how important it is for society to continue studying.
Talking with student on possible solutions for the problems	We looked for options together, if she could combine working with attending school.
	I went to visit the parents and tried to make them understand that this decision wasn't right.
	She was pregnant, I sat down with her and her parents to discuss the possibilities: how she could stay at school as long as possible while pregnant, and how I would help her catch up on the curriculum when she came back after the baby was born.
Talking with parents	I talked with the parents, explained the importance of assisting school to them. But it didn't help. The parents didn't went to school either and argued that they ended up just fine and needed the financial support of my student now.
	I tried to convince her parents, but I couldn't. There situation at home became intolerable and they had strong reasons to keep her at home.
	I went to visit the parents and tried to make them understand that

	this decision wasn't right.
Other	I tried to help him by offering extra attention in class and extra lessons after class. He had learning difficulties and was being bullied, eventually he dropped out.
	I talked to the friends of the student and together we tried to convince him to stay.

5.4.3. Enhancing motivation and support

Future ambitions

Almost 30% of the students commented that their future prospects of advancing in life or getting a (well paid) job is stimulating them to continue studying and stay in school. They get these ambitions in different ways: from their personal motivation, from their parents, from their teachers, and other sources. One student explained that he likes watching a television show every Saturday morning: "it teaches me that school is important". Another student commented that all the advertisements from the universities make him aware of his future possibilities. The teachers tell about different careers and how to reach your goals and eventually your dream job. Others invited successful individuals to school to inform the students on their career, how they reached the position and which bottlenecks they encountered in this process. Most teachers told that they would expand these kind of activities, which will be discussed in paragraph 5.4.

Support of the parents

The support of the parents is utterly essential for students in order for them to finish high school. The following conversation between two boys from a 2nd grade class in La Paz during one of the focus groups illustrates this:

Jonathan:	The support of my parents is very important, it makes me want to be better and better.
Gabriel:	Yes, the support of my mom and my brother, for them I will continue studying, they are my motivation and we will advance in life.
Jonathan:	Yes, the main thing for me is that my parents feel proud of me and that I can reach my dream job and help those in need. Having a conversion between father and son is good: it makes me feel like I'm getting better in my studies everyday.

These students are lucky to have understanding parents who acknowledge the importance of getting educated and stimulate their children in pursuing their dreams. However, as has become clear from the personal stories of the drop outs in chapter 4, many parents do not see the importance and benefits of obtaining a high school diploma. A school director from El Alto says: "Many students come from migrant families where the parents did not receive many years of schooling, these students often do not receive the support at home that they need."

Intensive contact with the parents forms actively part of FyA's policy and is thus present in all the schools where the research is conducted. A school in La Paz has created the *Escuelas de Papas* (Schools for Parents) to tackle this problem. The *Escuelas de Papas* are meetings for parents of students at school, during these meetings the teachers and school director talk to and with the parents about different subject: the importance of an education, the equality between boys and girls etc. Attending these meetings is not obligatory for the parents, but

luckily there has been a good turn-out so far. The director: “It is important to inform the parents, this is unknown knowledge for many of them and they don’t inform themselves.” The feedback they got from the parents was positive: “most parents were happy that someone was willing to provide them with this information.”

5.4.4. Sexuality education

The problem of teenage pregnancies could be tackled by informing the students on sexuality, safe sex and birth control methods. Sexuality education is, unfortunately, not always incorporated in the curriculum of the secondary schools in Bolivia; this lack of sexuality education has already been highlighted in chapter 4. The Bolivian national government promised improvement by signing the Ministerial Declaration “*Prevenir con Educación*” (Prevent with Education) in 2008. This declaration promised expansion of sexuality education programs to prevent the further spread of HIV/AIDS, see box 5.3. One of the goals of this declaration is to reduce the number of schools that do not provide comprehensive sexuality education by 75% in 2015. The evaluation in 2011 showed that Bolivia is not making much progress: only an advance of 24% of the total implementation of the declaration has been made. The Ministery of Education is performing even worse, with only an 8% advance since the start in 2008. There are no initiatives that are going to measure and evaluate the current sexuality education programs in schools, and no initiatives that sexuality education is going to be included in the teachers’ training.

Box 5.3. *Prevenir con Educación* 2008-2015.

The Ministerial Declaration “*Prevenir con Educación*” (Prevent with Education) was signed in 2008 by seventeen Central and Latin American countries. Its aims are at creating public policies for sexuality education and youth-friendly health services to prevent new HIV infections among young people. The two responsible ministries (Education and Health) per country would collaborate to develop and implement these programs. The two main goals of the declaration are:

1) By 2015, every country in Latin America and the Caribbean will reduce the number of schools that do not provide comprehensive sexuality education by 75%.

2) Each country will reduce by 50% the number of adolescents and young people who are not covered by health services that appropriately attend to their sexual and reproductive health needs.

The evaluation in 2011 showed that Central America made a mean progress of 49% in reaching the goals, South America 41%. The best performing countries are Colombia (79%), Argentina (73%), and Guatemala (67%). The worst performing countries are Paraguay (18%), Belice (24%), and Bolivia (24%).

Source: IPPF/RHO, 2011.

The topic of sexuality was only discussed briefly in two focus groups with the students, one in the 4th grade and one in the 6th grade. When the topic of sexuality was introduced, the students became shy and a bit giggly, even though they were talking openly and spreading their ideas minutes before. This change of attitude already indicated that sexuality is a topic that is not often discussed with the students or they do not feel very comfortable talking about.

When asked if they obtained information on sexuality, practicing safe sex etc. most of the students say that they did obtain some information on the topic. Table 5.5. gives an overview of the different sources they mentioned and some comments hereon.

Table 5.5. Sources of information on sexuality.

Source	Comments
Friends	The students indicated that they talked among friends about sex. A couple of girls said that they knew a friend that got pregnant and that they talked with her about sex, pregnancies, and birth control.
Parents	Most students said that this was not something they talked about with their parents. Only some girls said that they talked with their parents on this topic and then mainly with their mothers, not their fathers. Girl: "We talked about being pregnant and having a baby." Researcher: "Also about sex and safe sex?" Girl: "No."
School	The students from 6th grade said that they had a presentation/talk from a lady from the health centre that informed them on sexuality once. The students from 4th grade said that they had seen a poster in the secretary's office.
Health centre	A couple of students saw some posters at the health centre that informed on sexuality. They added that sexuality wasn't the reason they went to the health centre, and that they 'accidentally' bumped into the information.
Other	Other mentioned sources of information are siblings/other relatives, radio, and television.

5.4.5. Other strategies

Improving quality

The quality of education is constantly under evaluation: the introduction of EIB and the ASAP reforms discussed in chapter 2 are clear examples hereof. These strategies aim to provide the best education possible in the local context. EIB programs provide education in other languages than just Spanish; the ASEP reforms aim at transforming Bolivian education into a system with attention for local cultures and knowledge, and involvement of the community.

It is interesting to see that many students complained on the teaching qualities of their teachers. All research schools are FyA-schools and FyA pays much attention to the quality of education their schools provide to the students. They offer continuous education and formation to their teachers by organizing workshops on different subjects, like the gender differences and the empowerment of girls in class. However, as stated in chapter 3, these schools are not representative for the whole secondary education system and it is interesting to look at other policies and initiatives that aim at improving the quality of teachers.

Morales envisioned an important role for the teachers, or 'soldiers for liberation and decolonization' in his education reforms. Recent government initiatives s such as the image of teachers as change agents, the increasing wage, and the extension of teachers' training from three and a half to five years (Lopes Cardoso, 2011) are positive developments that could lead to better trained teachers. The implementation of these changes lingers however, and opposition groups are questioning its legitimacy and relevance (*Ibid.*). Critics also state that the structural inequalities that are present in the Bolivian education sector (urban-rural) will persist

to exist, and these reforms will not change that (*Ibid.*).

Junta Escolar

Another measure that is present in all research schools is the establishment of a *Junta Escolar* (JE, school board). The JE usually consists of several active parents, who have the children's and school's interests as their core activity. The tasks and activities of the JE vary per school: the JE of one school in La Paz was only concerned with the maintenance and infrastructure of the school building, and was not involved at all in student affairs. The director of this school argued that most parents didn't want the JE to get involved in student affairs, since these are personal. Another school in La Paz had a very active JE, which was involved in both the practical affairs of the school as well as the student affairs. The JE undertakes action when a student is starting to fail class and the school fears the he/she is about to drop out: they try to get in contact with the student and the family, try to find the reasons for its upcoming desertion, and try to find a solution. The school director: "Sometimes the JE succeeds, sometimes they fail. When the student or the parents finally have made the decision to drop out, it is very hard t make them change their mind".

Nutrition

Bolivia knows many in-school programs that focus on the provision of food in school which are mostly funded by the local municipality, often in collaboration with NGOs. In 2008, over 88% of all the municipalities in Bolivia had programs in place to provide the school breakfast in schools, this rate drops to 74% for secondary schools (FAM-Bolivia, 2008). Over 280,000 students in secondary education receive the school breakfast, reaching 56.8% of all secondary students. This rate is lower because many municipalities do not consider this program as necessary in secondary education, and prefer to provide it in primary education. All research schools in La Paz and El Alto receive the school breakfast or other nutritional benefits (lunch, milk, or snack) from the municipality.

Research from FAM-Bolivia in 2008 did not find direct effects of the provision of school breakfast on the decline of school desertion or grade repetition. They did find effects on the health and growth of the children, and consider the school breakfast as a welcome addition to the students' diet. A school director from La Paz agrees and states that the school breakfast is a good thing, but not a measure that gets the children to school or prevents them from dropping out. Several students and parents mentioned these nutritional extras as stimulants to go to school, but it is most unlikely that it will prevent school desertion.

Extracurricular and festive activities

The students mentioned the extracurricular and festive activities act as enlargers for their motivation to go to school. Some high schools organize Olympiads in physics, chemistry or mathematics in which the students can participate. They prepare in groups at school under the guidance of their teacher and in the Olympiad itself they battle against other schools. Other schools have a school band in which the students can learn to play an instrument, practice with the band in the rehearsals, and perform in school festivities and parades. One of the festivities that was celebrated during the field work period was the *Día del Niño*, or Day of the Child on the 12th of April. The students did not have class during this day and different kinds of activities were organized by the school to celebrate 'childhood': the whole school was decorated with balloons and ribbons, there were clowns to entertain the children, llama's to take class pictures with, the school band performed etc., see figure 5.3. and 5.4.

Figure 5.3. Taking class pictures with the llama.

Figure 5.4. The clowns at the Día del Niño celebration.

Another example is the excitement of the students for their graduation ceremony. During the focus group with 6th grade students, they started talking about this event:

Dario: I'm really excited about getting my diploma.

Gustavo: Me too, it feels like I've achieved something when I have to get in front of all these people and get my diploma from the director and she will congratulate me and everyone will be applauding.

Dario: Yes, and my family is going to be so proud. I'm the first one in the family to get this diploma!

Sandra (not to the group, but to the other girls sitting next to her): My mother too. She promised me that I will get new shoes for that day and that she'll do my hair really pretty.

Marina (in response): I think I'm going to wear some make-up.

(four out of five girls start giggling and discussing their 'look' for the graduation ceremony)

Dario: … *chicas*.

Improving safety

The safety issues mentioned in paragraph 4.2.4., especially the transportation problems, have been tackled by both the Bolivian government and NGOs. The Bolivian government, mainly the local municipalities, has invested in school transportation systems in the last years, especially in the rural areas and also in El Alto. School buses would drive the children to school and back home safely. This guarantee of safe transportation, especially for girls, was very important for the parents. The future of school transportation is unsure however: the national government has cut the budget for school transportation. Ms. Alzérreca added that other actors (municipalities, NGOs, CBOs) are looking into taking over these services.

Different measures are taken in the rural areas of the country, since school transportation is not profitable. The students live dispersed throughout the surroundings of the school, in the mountains, far away from access roads, which makes a simple bus line to get all the students to school hard to establish. One of the recent developments encompasses the creation of *internados*, a type of boarding schools, both the Bolivian government as well as NGOs like PLAN and FyA have invested herein. The students live in the *internado* during the week from Monday until Friday, do not have to travel a long distance daily, they get fed and are watched by (teaching) staff, and in the weekends they can return home. Many applauded this initiative, but criticism and opposition to the *internados* arrived quickly. Some parents were not happy since they would miss the help of their children around the house during the week. The most appalling comments came from parents and students that stated that the *internados* were not safe: students witnessed and experienced (sexual) abuse among students and with staff. A new initiative has risen since these accusations: the host family. Students live with a host family that lives close(r) to the high school from Monday until Friday and leave for home in the weekends. Both parents and students prefer this option because it is a safer, familiar (parents can get in contact with the host family and visit), and more homely than the *internados.*

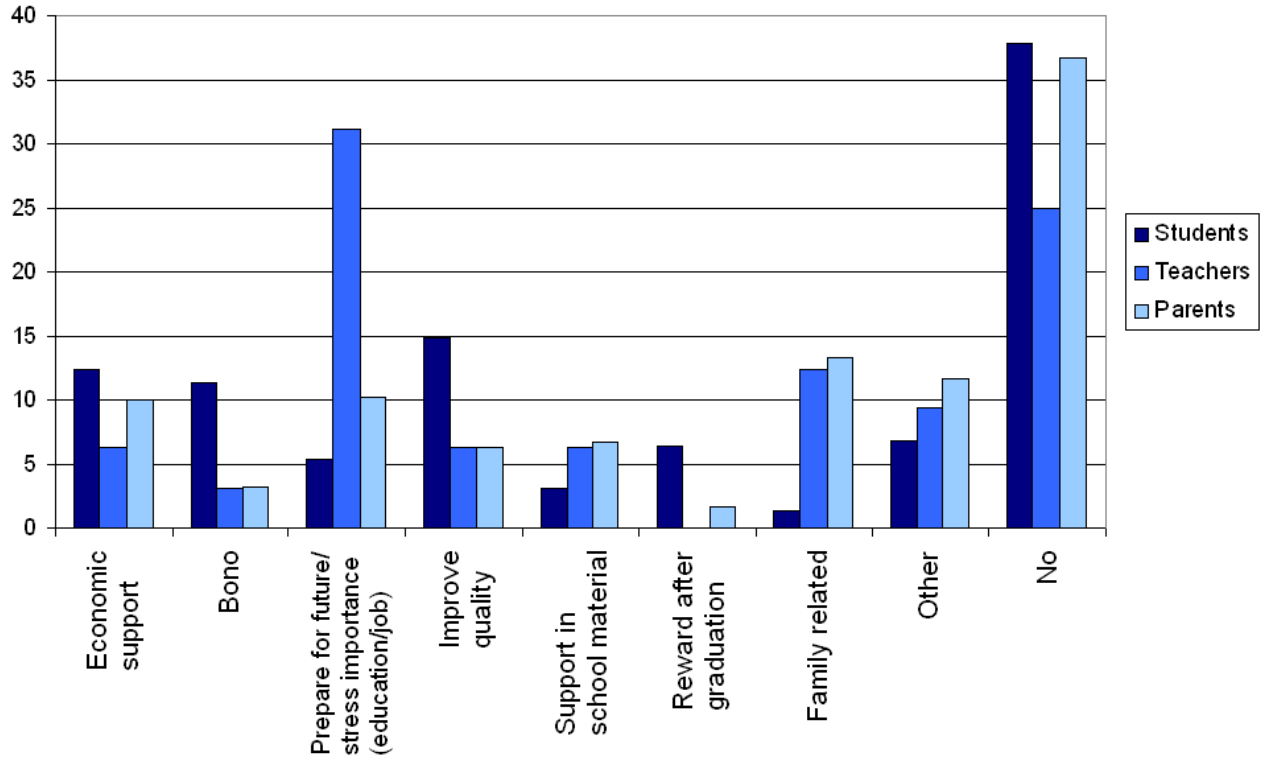
There is not much action being undertaken in La Paz and El Alto to finance a school transportation system or create *internados*. The problems are not that severe in the urban areas: there are sufficient secondary schools in mosot districts of the cities and children can often walk the distances to school.

FyA organizes workshops in collaboration with other locally active organizations in order to improve the safety of students at school and in their districts. Officers from the local police station come to talk about criminality in their neighborhood, alcohol and drugs, and gangs; people from the local health centers come to inform on sexuality and sexual abuse; representatives from the children's and people's defense organization talk about other types of violence etc. These workshops aim to inform the students of the dangers and problems they might encounter and how to act upon them.

5.5. New ideas to prevent school desertion

All participants in this research were asked if they had some new ideas to reduce the rate of school desertion, either new ideas or ones that already existed in other education units. This paragraph gives an overview of their input. Each group of participants will be discussed separately: students, teachers and other education personnel, and education experts. The ideas of the parents will be discussed throughout the other paragraphs since their input did not give any new ideas. Figure 5.5. gives an overview of the different answers of the respondents that filled out the questionnaire when asked if they had new ideas.

Figure 5.5. New ideas to prevent school desertion categorized, in (%).



The majority of the respondents (63.8%) did have them, their answers have been categorized into eight different categories: economic support, receiving a bono, prepare for the future / stress the importance of education/job, improve the quality of education, support in school material, a reward after graduation, family related initiatives, or other ideas[15]. The figure shows that the different respondents have different ideas on how to combat school desertion. Teachers and parents opted more often for preparation for the future and stressing the importance of education and jobs, as well as family related initiatives. The students came with ideas of financial support (conditional and unconditional), improving the quality of the education they are experiencing, and the receiving of a reward after graduation. All the different categories will be further analyzed in the coming paragraphs.

5.5.1. Students

The students really let their imagination go when asked what new ideas they had that would motivate them to stay in school, which was the intention of this question. It resulted in a wide range of ideas and initiatives, some more inventive or realizable than others. A couple of suggestions that were given might be typical for adolescent students, but not feasible to put into practice; ideas such as “give every student a new iPad with 1200 apps on it after finishing a year” or “give the students a Bono of 100 Bs. a month” could work but are just not realistic (but still: nothing ventured, nothing gained!). Most students followed more reasonable and executable lines of thought. Some thought of their own position and of the bottlenecks they have experienced in school, whereas other groups of students thought more in the lines of financial support for those families and students in need.

[15] The distinction between economic support and receiving a bono is that a bono are only received when a family or student meets certain conditions. Economic support is used as a term to describe unconditional programs.

Financial support

It is interesting to see that almost a quarter of the students think that extra financial support for poor families would be a good initiative, either in the form of direct economic support or through a bono with conditions attached. The number is much lower for teachers (not even 10%) and even parents (about 13%). The main motivation of the students to opt for extra financial support is that it would enable the poorer students to go to school since it will solve some problems at home. They are right until a certain level, explains a school director from El Alto:

> "Here in El Alto we see that the *Bono Wawanakatasaki* has a positive impact on the families. But, the bono only comes once a year, and is usually used to cover yearly or seasonal expenses, such as clothing, shoes, school supplies, maybe books. Sometimes the money is even spent on stupid things too. This once-in-a-year contribution doesn't lift poor families out of poverty. If the income of a family is too low to cover the daily expenses, then this Bono is not enough and children still will be forced to go working. Look at El Alto: we have a Bono for high school students, but we're not scoring better than La Paz in terms of school desertion. So does it really help? I don't know."

Almost 7% of the students argued that a reward after graduation would be a good incentive to finish high school. The content of this rewards varied from a vague 'presents', to certain amounts of money (100 Bs. to 500 Bs.), to explicit descriptions of luxury goods such as a computer, a laptop, or a new television. Ms. Zeballos from FyA understands these ideas, but thinks that the graduation diploma itself s already a 'present' and such gifts should be given within the family, not by the government.. She comments:

> "The achievement of completing high school and obtaining a diploma should be enough. Bolivia is becoming more and more *asistentialista*, but it's not normal to receive a reward every time you do something well or if you finish something. We need to get rid of this attitude, because it is not going to help our country moving forward. If we want to move forward we, the people, have to do it because we want to and not because there is some kind of reward at the end."

This vision is underlined by several teachers and school directors as well: the children (and parents) need to want to finish high school themselves, and not be stimulated by money, see box 5.4. as well. The different ideas that were given with respect to stressing the importance of education and preparing the students for the future will be discussed in the following paragraph.

Box 5.4. Research notes (1) – Bono's.

I discussed the system of bono's and that the municipality of El Alto has one in place for high school students with several teachers and the school director in La Paz. First they say that it is really good for the families and students and that it really helps. If the bono is spent wisely it is a very welcoming extra for many families. But if I ask the teachers if they can think of one case of a drop out at their school and if a bono (like the one in El Alto) would have prevented it, they start thinking: a bono would probably not have prevented it. Usually the student is already so deep in trouble that there's no way back. Most important is the student's and family's motivation, or like one teacher said: "If the motivation is good and strong, they will graduate. Unless something happens like a pregnancy, illness or death. But then, a bono wouldn't work either." It all depends on the circumstances and in what way families can overcome the difficulties in their lives. But the bono definitely stimulates parents to send the children to school, so in that way it works.

Improve quality

Many students reasoned from their own experiences in school and thought of ways to improve education and to enhance their motivation by making school more fun. Most of these ideas are of a relatively basic nature and can be executed on a local school level. They can be divided into four categories: improving the school itself, changing the school structure, improving teaching and the curriculum, and organizing extra in-school activities.

Students indicated that by improving the school itself they would feel more at ease and more at home at school: making the buildings less dull, repairing broken windows, expansion of the library ("with reading books as well, not only study books"), or installing more toilets can already make a big difference. Most of the classrooms were the children are taught are quite decorated with student-made posters and other informational posters on the painted walls, see figure 5.5. The common areas where the children play at free time and have their lunch are different at every school: some are bare with concrete walls and floors with not much going on, others had mural paintings (see figure 5.3., 5.4., 5.6. and 5.7.), or even trees and grass to run around in.

The school director of a school in El Alto explained that these areas were only decorated at special events, such as the *Día del Niño, Día del Mar*, and *Semana Santa*; see box 5.4.

Box 5.5. Research notes (2) – Semana Santa.

It is Semana Santa, the week before Easter, and today I visited a high school In El Alto. The school has been built like a quadrangle and the inner courtyard is covered: it is the common area where the children receive their breakfast, where they play during free time etc. It is an empty, boring space: it's cold and wet, nowhere to sit, no decoration on the walls, and you can smell the toilets in the corner. A week ago it changed: they put up several posters which describe the events during Jesus' last days before he was crucified. Usually, when the children are all in class, the courtyard is empty. Only the occasional student that has to go to the bathroom passes. Today I saw a group of 15 students with their teacher coming in. They needed to dress up in cloths, got instructions from the teachers and then started walking from poster to poster. It took me a while to figure out that they were re-enacting the last days of Jesus.

Figure 5.6. One of the class rooms in El Alto.

Figure 5.7. The concrete common area in El Alto.

Some students indicated that they would like to see the school structure changed into a more flexible system. They would like to see less strict rules or change the school hours in order to be able to combine school with work. The high schools only teach at one time frame a day: in the morning or in the afternoon (the exact times vary per school, but approximately from 8am until 12.30pm or from 1.30pm until 6pm). When children are expected to help out at home or in the family business as well, these school times might interfere with their schedule. A more flexible system could be a solution and has been proven successful in other countries (see Hunt, 2008). However, this would not be feasible in La Paz and El Alto. The supply of high schools in La Paz and El Alto is large, so student's can change high schools if the times would interfere with their personal schedule. This would be a more successful initiative in rural areas where the supply is scarce, since there are no high schools close by to change to.

The quality of education and the teaching capabilities are also a point of improvement according to 15% of the students. The research schools had not yet implemented the ASEP reforms fully, thus it is hard to say if this already had an impact on the quality of the content of the curriculum. It is important to keep in mind that the students that participated in this

research are all adolescents, a very interesting age where things are easily disliked. Since the quality of teaching and the capabilities of the teachers were not under investigation in this research, it is hard to say if this really is a point where improvement is needed. Some ideas that were mentioned Tutoring

The final point of improvements that was mentioned by the students is the organization of more in-school activities, either school-related or more fun-related; table 5.6. gives an overview of the different ideas. The school-related activities are aimed at facilitating the students' progress at school as well as enhancing the pleasure in school, where as the fun-related activities solely aim at the latter. The possibility of realization of these activities differs per school: the finances are the biggest obstacle. "There is no room in the budget to organize extra activities", according to a director from El Alto. "We already ask the parents for an extra contribution for special events such as *Día del Niño.* Two weeks ago the *Junta Escolar* decided that we have to improve the toilets. But there is no more room in the budget and I cannot ask the parents for more money. I already spoke with a couple of parents and they say they really cannot afford it.." All schools ask for a yearly contribution from the parents. This money is spent by the school in consultation with the *Junta Escolar* on different things: maintenance and repairs on the school building, organization of activities and trips, school lunch, the library etc. The director sees it as a burden to ask the parents fro more money, given that many students come from poor households. "I have to justify every *boliviano* I spend of that money. A lot of parents only want the money to be spend on pure educational purposes. It will be hard to convince parents that I'm spending their hard earned money on a psychologist or throwing parties for the students."

Table 5.6. Extra activities at school.

School-related	Fun-related
Tutoring	Sports and music clubs (including participation in competitions)
Homework hours	School dances
Personal development	Field trips
Psychological support	Olympiads
Field trips	
Olympiads	

5.5.2. Teachers and other education personnel

According to figure 5.4., the most mentioned idea by the teachers are preparing the students for their future and thereby stressing the importance of education (over 30%). It is interesting to see that most of the people that work at the school (teachers, directors and supporting staff) agreed upon the fact that financial support was not the solution to prevent students from dropping out. They consider it more important to stress the importance of education and prepare students for the future, than rewarding them. The ways in which the teacher would like to do this differ: some opt for more control and a closer relationship with the students (with or without the guidance of a psychologist), others want to enlarge the students' motivation and self-esteem somehow, others want to organize workshops that meet the students' interest and makes them aware of their own talents, or want to organize talks with successful role models with whom the students can identify. The ideas are endless, but all have the same goal: make the student realize that education is important and that getting a high school diploma is the best option for a good future.

Over 10% of the teachers and almost 15% of the parents argue that family-related

initiatives should be put into place in order to decrease the rate of school desertion. One physical education teacher from La Paz said: “Really, if the parents don’t know why their child is in school, why should they send him? I wouldn’t send my son to a place of which I don’t see the necessity if I can use his help at home as well.” The education personnel is well aware of the fact that many parents don’t value education that much, which is mainly to blame to their migrant origins according to the same teacher:

> “Many (parents) come from the countryside, they don’t have schools there. Not like here. But they don’t need education, because most of them work on the land. If you want to get a job here you have to get educated, that’s how the city works.”

The teachers used the word ‘awareness’ often when asked to describe how to improve the situation: make the parents aware of the school and the education their children are receiving, involve them. How? By organizing workshops, talks, *Escuelas de Papas*, more contact, call the parents in more often etc. These measures are relatively easy to implement and very feasible: paragraph 5.2.3. already described the *Escuelas de Papas* in one school in La Paz and the positive feedback from parents and teachers. School directors do comment that parents who are really not interested will not show up at these kinds of events. “They have to show up voluntarily, you cannot force them. Parents that were never interested in their children’s education will not magically show up if you organize events for them. And these are the ones you really want to come because they need the most work.” In order to include all parents, especially the hard to reach ones, there should some sort of incentive that makes them want to come:

> “We have to make sure that the parents don’t experience difficulties when they have to come to school. So we should organize something so they can bring their children, because they don’t want to leave them at home. Maybe someone to watches them and plays with them. Or maybe we should offer some kind of reward like a snack or meal.” (president of JE, El Alto)

5.5.3. Education experts

The education experts agree upon the fact that preventing school desertion is a difficult and complex thing to do:

> “It is a intersectional job: it’s not just the schools, or the teachers, or the students, or the parents, or the government, but also the culture, the economy, the way of life here in Bolivia. These things don’t change overnight, they need time.”

All the different factors and circumstances that contribute to school desertion make it a difficult event to prevent from happening. Most experts argue that the main responsibility lies with the government, but all stakeholders involved are responsible for change: parents, students, teachers, other education personnel, the community etc. They agree with Morales’ vision of ‘teachers as soldiers’ an assign them an important role:

> “The teachers are the principal actors of change. They are in contact with every actor in this process. Thus their training is very important.” But, she also sees difficulties: “It needs to start in the *normales*, but even there is no change since the *normales* are ruled by old-fashioned people.”

According to ms. Alzérreca, there are already some good initiatives in place, especially in the rural areas: "The *internados* and school transportation are solutions for the problems they are facing there. But then, the causes and difficulties are completely different in urban areas. Those things wouldn't work here in La Paz." The nature of the causes of school desertion in La Paz and El Alto make it difficult to implement programs preventing these. The problem of teenage pregnancies could be tackled by creating a support system for these young mothers. Now, they either have to leave the baby at home so the family can take care of it or take the baby to school, but this is more common in universities than high schools (see box 5.6.). The community could play an important role here: "Community centers could try to jump into this by offering daycare services, so that the teenage mothers can bring their babies when they are in school." She further stress that prevention programs should aim at informing parents, students, and the community: "Education should be a priority. It's a right, not a burden."

Box 5.6. Mothers in university.

The incidence of mothers in education is especially high in higher education: the rate of mothers among female students at the *Universidad Mayor de San Andrés* in La Paz is 63%. Even though there are so many mothers studying, there is no policy that is helping them. There is no support system such as a child day care or nursery. Most children, babies and older ones, are just taken to class by their mothers.

Source: Interview with ms. Alzérreca.

All the experts at Fe y Alegría had similar ideas to prevent school desertion which basically came down to 'educating children by educating their community'. In order to put the education of the students central it is important to inform their community of what the students are doing and learning in school. Therefore, FyA tries to involve the community as much as possible and would like to expand these activities. "Everyone should now that education has priority: parents, siblings, other relatives, friends, everyone." The *Escuelas de Papas* that are organized by the school in La Paz are a perfect example of the kind of activities FyA would like to develop in more schools. "We see that these *escuelas* are useful: parents need to get the information from the school, because they will not get it anywhere else."

The Bolivian government still has to work on the practical problems that impair the current education system: more schools and teachers are needed, and the new curriculum needs to be implemented. The lack of schools is especially in order in the rural areas of the country, whereas teachers are needed throughout the whole country. Ms. Van Dam: "Well-trained and motivated teachers are not the standard in Bolivia, but definitely needed." She also wants to wait and see what the results of the implementation of the ASEP reforms are. "We cannot say anything about it now, because the implementation is still in process. I hope that the reforms will bring about some needed changes in the curriculum." The biggest challenge lies in the Bolivian culture according to ms. Van Dam. It is still the standard for girls and women to stay at home and for men to earn the family income. "Girls are not expected to study, especially not in higher and tertiary education". She also argues that migrant families need special attention: "Migrant families moved to La Paz and El Alto to find work, so that is what they do: they find a job. Families that are 2nd -or 3rd –generation migrants are already more embedded in the urban culture, and you see that they are probably appreciating education more than their parents did."

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of the current existing strategies that are aiming at the prevention of school desertion in high schools. School desertion is caused by a variety of factors which makes the prevention strategies just as numerous and different from each other. The large-scale conditional cash transfer programs, like the bono's, aim at improving the standard of living of the student's household by granting financial support if the student attends school. These programs have proven to be successful, but still receive some negative critic as well. Another large-scale initiative is the implementation of the recent ASEP reforms, which aim to improve the Bolivian curriculum to make it more locally relevant. An interesting curriculum can definitely contribute to the interest in education of students, but since the implementation of the reforms is not yet complete it is not possible to say anything on the effects they have. Other strategies are more of a local character and are executed on a school level. These strategies are initiated by independent actors or small groups of actors. Teachers and school directors try to enhance the student's motivation by organizing talks in class/school. They try to involve the parents in their children's school and inform them on the importance of education. Some of these different strategies have been successful, others not. There are definitely still more initiatives and ideas to adjust existing strategies that are feasible and could contribute to the decrease of school desertion. However, one should keep in mind that the Bolivian context, its culture, and way of life, are significant constraining factors and are not easily changed.

6. CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

This research has aimed to provide an overview of the causes and consequences of school desertion in Bolivia, and what strategies are present to prevent this from happening. In the first part of this concluding chapter the conclusions will be presented. This paragraph will answer the main and sub research questions and follows their order, see box 6.1. for the research questions. The second part positions the conclusions in the contemporary development debate and links the results of the research with the theories and literature as discussed in chapter 1. Central to this paragraph are the position of this research within the RBA and the position of Bolivia compared to other case studies in the region. The final part of this chapter gives recommendations for further research on this topic, as well as on program initiatives.

Box 6.1. Research questions

What are the causes of school desertion in secondary education in Bolivia and what measures can be taken to improve this situation?

Sub questions:
1. What are the current policies of secondary education in Bolivia?
2. How is secondary education provided in Bolivia?
3. What are the main causes and consequences of school desertion in secondary education in Bolivia?
4. What strategies are in place to prevent school desertion in secondary education and how effective are these?
5. What new measures can be taken to prevent scholar desertion in secondary education?

6.2. Conclusions

The current education policies in Bolivia can be put in president Morales' framework of decolonizing the nation and putting the national indigenous identity back in the center. Morales sees education as core vehicle for a thorough social, political and economic restructuring of Bolivian society (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 102), and felt the need to change the alienated, subjected, and subordinated education system with a revolutionary and liberating one. These reforms resulted in the ASEP reforms, the implementation hereof started in 2010 and applies to all levels and forms of education present in the country. The four pillars that form the basis of the reforms are decolonization, inter- and intraculturalism, productive and communitarian education. The education is Bolivian-initiated and -owned, and there is much attention for local cultures, languages and knowledge. Another central point is the involvement of the students and their community in education. The aim of the reforms is to form productive students that contribute to the society. The ASEP reforms are a result of a century of progress in the education sector, which was once a exclusive and discriminatory one in the early 1900s into an open system with room for different cultures, languages and priorities in the beginnings of the 21st century. A key role is played by the teachers, or 'soldiers for liberation and decolonization' as Morales calls them: these stakeholders are very influential and can contribute greatly to the (successful) implementation of the reforms. The effects of the ASEP reforms are not clear yet, since their implementation takes longer than anticipated.

Secondary education in Bolivia is characterized by differences and inequality, similar to other countries on the Latin American continent. The differences between primary and secondary education, urban and rural areas, between different ethnic and/or socio-economic groups and between boys and girls are striking. Secondary education struggles to reach national coverage and access, whereas this had been reached for primary education years ago. Ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples have a higher chance of dropping out, and more girls than boys finish secondary school nowadays. The inequalities between different geographical parts of the country, mainly urban versus rural, are large: less amount of schools, smaller/multi-grade schools, bad facilities, and non-motivated teachers. This has resulted in great inequalities between urban and rural inhabitants of Bolivia., people in urban parts of Bolivia having up to five more years of schooling than their rural counterparts (10.3 and 5.5 years respectively) for example. The contemporary secondary education cycle encompasses six years and follows after six years of primary education. Students are free to choose the school they want to receive their education: in public schools, public schools by convention, or private schools. The public schools are free of charge, parents of students can be asked for a contribution fee to cover school expenses such as school lunch, celebrations etc.

Statistics show that the rate of school desertion in Bolivia dropped from 10% to less than 6% over the last decade. However, the completion rate of secondary education is just over 50% of all Bolivian adolescents. The main causes of school desertion in Bolivia can be divided into two categories: in-school and out of school causes. The in-school causes are those within the school environment, out of school causes are those influences caused by political, economic, and family issues as well as involvement in criminal activity. The most influential in-school causes are:

(1) Accessibility: the supply of schools and their accessibility. This is not so much a problem in urban areas, since secondary schools are numerous. However, in rural areas of the country this is problematic: the people live spread over a large area where schools are not always close by and hard to reach.

(2) The facilities, resources, and maintenance: many schools are in a poor state of maintenance, know a lack of school supplies (books, computers), lack of teachers, and are a depressing/boring environment for the students.

(3) The quality of education, teaching, and learning outcomes: many students complained on the quality of education and teaching which influences their motivation negatively.

(4) Safety: both at school and in school transportation the safety of the students is not always guaranteed. Cases of abuse (physical, psychological, or sexual) in school by students or education personnel or on the way to school have been frequently reported.

(5) The school ambience: discrimination and bullying of students by other students or education personnel is still common.

The most important out of school causes of school desertion are:

(1) The household context: the household composition (the more siblings, the less likely that all will attend school), the education level of the parents (a low educational level of the parents has a negative influence on the education prospects of their children) , the control and support of the parents, and family problems are all factors that may contribute to school desertion;

(2) Income and financial circumstances: the direct and opportunity costs of school compared to the benefits of attending school are reasons for not attending school. A student (or its family) can decide to go working instead of going to school in order to contribute to the family income or to provide its own income. Child labor is still common in Bolivia, both in the domestic as in the professional sphere. Boys and girls end up in different types of activities: girls are more likely

to take over domestic tasks whereas boys end up outside the domestic sphere.

(3) The cultural context: gender: traditionally education is seen as less important for girls than for boys. Nowadays most people see the value of secondary education as equal for both boys and girls. The traditional viewpoints are still present though: almost 30% of the parents think that there is no need for girls to start university.
(4) Health: health problems of students are often not the prime reason to drop out of school, but are a result of other influencing causes such as poverty and household circumstances. Less healthy students (malnutrition for example) attend school less frequently, experience difficulties in learning, are more likely to repeat grades, and drop out early due to poor levels of attention, and low motivation. The sickness of relatives of students is influential as well, since it may force the students to stay at home and take care of the patient or household.
(5) Teen pregnancies: teen pregnancies are the main cause for female students to drop out of high school. When a girl becomes pregnant and gives birth, it is very difficult to stay in or return to school because of physical difficulties, and having to take care of the child (either by staying at home or by providing an income).
Other out of school causes for school desertion are the consumption of alcohol, and the involvement in gangs or criminal activity.

The prevention strategies that are in place are of a diverse nature: some are national governmental programs, others are locally or personally initiated, and all tackle a different aspect. The government is seen as the main duty bearer to implement initiatives to combat school desertion. Table 6.1 gives an overview of the before mentioned causes of school desertion and the prevention strategies that are currently in place.

Table 6.1. Causes of school desertion and corresponding prevention strategies

	Causes	**Strategies**
In-school	Accessibility	School transportation
	The facilities, resources, and maintenance	*Junta Escolar*
		Extracurricular and festive activities
	The quality of education, teaching, and learning outcomes	National reforms
		Teacher training
	Safety	*Internados*
	The school ambience	Informing, teachers' practices
		Extracurricular and festive activities
Out of school	The household context	Enhancing motivation and support (parents and students), teachers' practices
	Income and financial circumstances	Financial support / CCT programs
	The cultural context: gender	Enhancing motivation and support (parents and students), teachers' practices
	Health	Nutritional programs
		Parent's education
	Teen pregnancies	Sexuality education
	Alcohol/gangs/criminal activity	Informing, teachers' practices

Simple' programs to relieve poverty by granting bono's combat only one factor that plays a role successfully, but do not take into account others. It is important though to keep in mind the different factors that interact in the complex process of school desertion. Many causes

that are not being tackled by national/local government programs are being tackled by individual initiatives.

The effectiveness of all different strategies varies. The implementation of the ASEP reforms has not yet reached a level that its effects can be discussed. The value of financial support programs, such as the BJA, is mainly recognized by parents but much less by the students themselves. The establishment of school transportation and *internados* can definitely be a solution to the problems in rural areas, if executed correctly. These national/regional strategies have proven to be somewhat successful, but there are definitely points for improvement. Besides these national/local strategies there are many initiatives taken on the school/personal level. The effects of these initiatives are smaller, since most of these initiatives are focused on a specific group (*e.g.* informing and involving the parents of one school) or on preventing individual cases (teachers talking and visiting students/families). The most mentioned new ideas to prevent school desertion focus on informing and preparing the students for their future, stressing the important of education (for both students as their families), getting the family involved, improving the quality of education and teaching, and financial support programs. The majority of the ideas are affirmations or elaborations on yet existing strategies.

Important to keep in mind when trying to prevent school desertion is that every case is different: every high school drop out has its own story, own coincidence of circumstances that cause him/her to quit school. An important factor that underlies the process of school desertion and is not easily changed is the Bolivian culture: the perception of gender, education and its importance contribute to the continuing prevalence of students dropping out.

The personal stories of the drop outs throughout this thesis have shown that often many different causes (poverty, sickness, gender etc.) 'cooperate'. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that prevention strategies are of such a diverse nature. There are definitely still more initiatives and ideas to adjust existing strategies that are feasible and could contribute to the decrease of school desertion.

6.3. Discussion

The discussion will put the conclusions in the perspective of the theoretical and thematic framework as discussed in chapter 1. It will start by linking the conclusions of the research with the historical development of the education sector in Bolivia, and placing it in the regional context of Latin America. Next, it will discuss the position of Bolivia within the RBA framework and its different approaches and some comments on the different prevention strategies.

Education has always been a focus point of development work, the emergence of human rights in the development paradigm has only strengthened this. The adoption of different human rights declarations such as the UDHR where the specific rights to education have been written down and the involvement of donor countries to promote these declarations have contributed enormously to the progress the education sector has made in the past few decades. The Bolivian education sector was characterized by exclusion until well into second half of the 20th century: education by the state was only provided in Spanish, and initiatives by other organizations for providing it in indigenous languages were scarce. The Bolivian government did acknowledge the potential of educating the indigenous masses somewhat, since it "used education to 'remake indians into productive peasants' so that they could take part in the progress of the Bolivian state (Larson, 2005: 34, as quoted in Drange, 2007). Unfortunately it was on the conditions of the ruling classes, and thereby aiming at erasing the indigenous languages, communal memories, traditions, and identities" (*Ibid.*). Thus, the true potential of the Bolivian population was not acknowledged until the reforms in 1994. The bilingual education

policies with attention for interculturality enabled the indigenous Bolivians to receive contextually relevant education for the first time.

The Bolivian case is similar to other neighboring Latin American countries, especially countries with similar characteristics such as a large indigenous population, culture and gender issues, and large difference between the urban and rural parts of the country like Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. Initiatives to improve the education system and prevent school desertion are quite comparable in these countries: the adoption of multi-lingual education to change from a excluding to an including system in Bolivia, Peru, and Guatemala among others in the 20th century, and more recently the implementation of CCT programs in Bolivia, Peru, Mexico, and Brazil. These reforms have contributed enormously to the accessibility of education and have been copied throughout the region.

President Morales has developed 'providing education that is locally relevant' as its core principle for his education reforms. He took the renewed attention for indigenousness and 'the national identity' to the political arena and made it a center point to base his policies on (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 95). The education reforms of 2010 aimed at replacing the old, alienated, subjected, and subordinate system with a revolutionary and liberating one, one that can serve as the core vehicle for a thorough social, political and economic restructuring of Bolivian society (Ibid. 102). The four pillars that form the basis for the new education system are decolonization, inter- and intraculturalism, productive and communitarian education. The values, principles, knowledge and practices of the Bolivian peoples are put central: everything needs to be orientated to preserve, develop, protect, and promote the cultural diversity through an intracultural, intercultural and multilingual dialogue (Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2009: 2-3). Quite a change to the discriminatory and exclusive policies in the country before.

The election of Evo Morales and his 'decolonizing' policies has brought about some changes in teacher education that are only to be found in Bolivia. The investments in teacher education (prolonging their training and increasing the wages) are unique, surrounding countries are cutting the budgets which results in lower wages, less years of training, and downgrading teachers' societal roles (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 236). It is hard to say if Morales' ASEP reforms are resulting in better performances in education and a lowering of the school desertion rate. The fierce opposition to the reforms and resistance of teachers and schools is strong and has slowed down the implementation; question is if the reforms will become fully implemented at one point.. The reforms promise many improvements that can contribute in the prevention of school desertion: a more apt and locally relevant curriculum could be more interesting for the students than the curriculum they are being taught now.

When looking at the different types of RBA as discussed by Marks (2005) and linking these more specifically to school desertion and prevention strategies we can see that the Bolivian government is adopting a *social justice approach.* The core idea of this approach is to eliminate inequality within societies based on the moral duty to do so, which is basically what the Bolivian national and local governments are doing by implementing the prevention programs they have developed. The bono's BJP and *Bono Wawanakatasaki* are in place to support the poorest households financially so that they can send the children to school. Other target groups at risk for desertion, for example pregnant girls, are also supported financially by the BJA. The nutritional programs are also aimed at reducing social inequalities: the poverty status of the household is of lesser influence when all the students are fed at school. The individually initiated strategies to prevent students from dropping out, mainly initiated by the teachers an schools, can also be put into the perspective of this approach. Teachers and schools are important stakeholder in this process and hold the responsibility of educating the students.

They are also in direct day-to-day contact with the student and exercise some control (to a certain extent) over them.

The value of education as described in paragraph 1.3.2. and its correlation with other aspects of development is important when linking the right to education with the development of the individual and society. The fact that education not only contributes to ones human capital and economic status but also to other aspects of welfare: improved health, productivity, social mobility, poverty reduction, the construction of citizenship and social identity, and, definitively, the strengthening of social cohesion (ECLAC, 2011: 5), is also reflected in the creation of CCT programs. These programs aim to tackle a diverse range of poverty-related factors such as education and health by granting a certain amount of money. The short-term goals of increasing the household income relate to the long-term goals of breaking the cycle of generative poverty. The improved access to education and health services that the CCT programs offer help reaching this long-term goal.

The fact that the money is handed out to the female head of the household contributes greatly to the gender differences that are embedded in Bolivian culture. The concept of *machismo*, the structuring of power relations amongst and between men, as well as between men and women where women are seen as inferior to the men and men exercise power and control over them, is strong (Chant and Craske, 2003). This results in specific roles in society for both genders: the mothers are responsible for the care for and upbringing of the children (*Ibid.)*. They are therefore expected to spend the money more wisely than the fathers would do. Moreover, giving the women an own source of income, independent from their husbands, strengthens their position within the household. Many other CCT programs, such as the *Bolsa Família* program in Brazil and *Juntos* in Peru, work by the same mechanism where the female head of the household receives the money in order to strengthen their position. The *Juntos* program in Peru even attached extra conditions for the male head of the household, making him more involved in and responsible for the upbringing of the children (Jones, Vargas, and Villar Marquez, 2007). These extra conditions could be very powerful in Bolivian CCT programs as well, since the cultural gender differences are still strong in the country.

Many causes of school desertion and prevention strategies that came forward during the research are also present in other countries in the region. The only surprising fact that came forward is the lack of sexuality education in Bolivia. Sexuality is not an openly discussed topic in Bolivian culture: it is a taboo subject and seen as dirty. The knowledge of high school students on sexuality is low and results in a high prevalence of teen pregnancies. Teen pregnancies are one of the most severe causes of school desertion and educating the students on safe sexual behavior could reduce this significantly. Bolivia performs bad in implementing the *Prevenir con Educación* program that aims to improve and expand sexuality education when compared to similar countries. Until 2011 Bolivia had made a progress of 24% in reaching the set goals, much worse when compared to similar countries such as Guatemala (67%), Peru (42%), and Ecuador (38%). The reason why? There is no general plan of operations to implement the program, there is no convention between the two responsible ministries of Education and Health, there is no campaign to inform the public, and no funds available. It seems that this program is just not considered important by the Bolivian government., which might indicate the sensitiveness of the topic of sexuality.

This research made clear that school desertion is a complex process where various constraining factors interact and cooperate. The causes for school desertion and the way these causes are being tackled are just as diverse, and a combination of all prevention strategies and stakeholders in this process is needed. The Bolivian context shows some similarities with

neighboring and comparable countries, but recent (political) developments definitely provide an unique picture.

6.4. Recommendations

The recommendations for further research will be discussed first, followed by recommendations for program initiatives to prevent school desertion.

6.4.1. Further research

This research has proven that every case of school desertion is different: a large variety of factors precedes the final decision to drop out of school. Therefore, it makes school desertion and preventing strategies complex processes to study. This research tried to give a complete overview of the main causes and prevention strategies, but due to the strict time schedule it was not possible to research every aspect in-depth. Further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the different causes that underlie school desertion, and in what way these interact. This will automatically lead to a better understanding of prevention strategies as well.

The limitations of this research as described in chapter 3 already presented the fact that the schools in this research are not representative for the whole secondary education system in Bolivia. The research has been conducted only in FyA schools: schools with better infrastructure, more and better trained teachers, more study material, more involvement of the local community, more programs in place etc. The picture of La Paz and El Alto described in this research is thus probably more positive than in other schools in the same area. The research highlights contemporary problems and bottlenecks, and many other stakeholders were interviewed as well in order to provide an as unbiased picture as possible. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to conduct further research in non-FyA public schools and see how the situation is there.

Finally, this research was only conducted in the urban areas of La Paz and El Alto, all information on the rural areas of Bolivia was obtained via education experts in the country or via existing literature. The differences between the different areas in Bolivia are large: urban versus rural, and Andes highlands versus tropical lowlands. The rural areas are more disadvantaged compared to their urban counterparts. The accessibility of secondary education, educational facilities, quality of education and teachers are only a few aspects that are delivered or performed worse. Further research in other areas of Bolivia may bring about different important causes of school desertion, or different strategies to prevent this.

6.4.2. Program initiatives

This thesis has given different strategies to combat school desertion in secondary education. First an foremost I would like to argue that when trying to prevent school desertion it is important to have a multi-facetted strategy. As argued before, school desertion is often a process where different factors are interacting and contributing to the end result: a student dropping out. All these different factors must be taken into account and a combination of strategies, albeit on a national or local level, is needed to effectively reduce the rate of school desertion. The following recommendations are ideas for local program initiatives that are relatively easy to implement in schools on an individual basis.

Inform & Involve

This research has shown that not only the students are important stakeholders in the process of school desertion. The role of the parents and other relatives is almost equally important, therefore it is important to involve them in their children's education and inform both groups on

the value of education and the prospects it offers. This can be done in many different ways: the *Escuelas de Papas* in La Paz have been very successful in getting the parents to school and informing them on and involving them in the school's activities. Students can be informed and enthused by having activities that make them think about their future, where/what they want to be in 10 or 20 years, and advising them on how to get there. Schools can invite professional adults to talk about their career and how they got there, they can spread promotion material from universities etc.

Improve and expand sexuality education

The problem of teen pregnancies can be reduced by expanding sexuality education in high schools. Most students are getting sexually active in high school, but do not receive the education to practice sex safely. Many students are simply not informed on sexuality, and high school is probably the ideal place to give this education to them. The Bolivian government is underperforming in the delivery of sexuality education and not really making an effort to expand these activities. Schools can take over this responsibility. An idea is to organize presentations/workshops in collaboration with local health centers in order to give the students the knowledge they need. It is important to prepare and plan these kind of events carefully and in coordination with the JE and parents. The topic is sensitive and not openly discussed in Bolivian culture, and no one should be embarrassed or offended when these activities are being executed.

Make school more interesting

During this research, mainly during talks with the students, there were many complains about the fact that going to school was boring. Students were not challenged: not by the curriculum, not by the teachers, not by the facilities that were present. By making school more interesting the motivation of the students will increase, which stimulates them to go and finish high school.
The curriculum is undergoing changes due to the ASEP reforms, but the results hereof are not yet visible. The reforms will hopefully adapt the curriculum in such a way that the students can relate better to things they are being taught. It can also be done by organizing extracurricular and festive activities as described in paragraph 5.5.1., by organizing Olympiads, clubs etc., or by making the school environment (the building, common rooms, classrooms) more appealing with painted walls, posters, decorations etc. School should not turn into a playing ground or circus, but action can be undertaken to make it a more enjoyable place.

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Appendices

Appendix I - Focus groups

Topic list for focus groups

Introduction
Introduction of myself and the research
Explanation of the focus group: goal/structure/how it will be used
Stress the fact that they can speak freely, that they can say what they really think.
Ask the participants to introduce themselves

Topic 1 My school
Describe the school: positive and negative points
Teachers
Contents of the education they are receiving

Topic 2 Motivation
Do you always feel motivated to go to school? Yes/no, why?
Does your family support you?
Do the teachers do anything to motivate you at school?
Are there things or events that stimulate you to go to school?

Topic 3 School desertion
Do you know someone who did not finish high school? (elaborate, who/why/when/ how is this person now)
Can you imagine yourself to not finish high school?
What would be a good reason for you to drop out?

Topic 4 Prevention of school desertion
How to prevent school desertion?
What kind of measures are in place that make them go to school?
Whose responsibility is it to develop prevention measures?
What other types of initiatives could work?

End of the focus group
Thanks for their participation
Any questions for me?

Appendix II - Interviews

List of interviewees and key informants

Name	Position or role
Anke van Dam	Expert on education in Bolivia at the Royal Dutch Embassy, La Paz
Alejandra Alzerreca	Expert on education and gender at the UNFPA.
Nancy Alé	National representative of the Girl Power project in Bolivia.
Mariana Coral Zeballos	Local responsible for the implementation of the Girl Power project in La Paz and El Alto, Fe y Alegría
Carmiña de la Cruz	National assessor for special education at Fe y Alegría.
David Adolfo Gonzales Aibo	School director at Santo Tomas school
Ruth Guevara	School director at Ignacio Calderón school
Hermana Virginia Cardenas Gonzales	School director at Cuerpo de Christo school
Felix Gutierrez Mamani	School director at Villa Alemania school
Luz Flores Castro	Spanish teacher in El Alto
Víctor Rodríguez Conde	President of the JE of a secondary school in El Alto
María Soledad Acebedo Aliaga	Secretary of a secondary school in El Alto
Mario	19-year-old drop out
Patricia	17-year-old drop out
Ana Maria	6th grade student, mother
Maria	18-year-old student, mother
Eli	Mother of a drop out

Other informants that contributed to this research are:

- Students in primary/secondary/ tertiary education
- Drop outs (from all levels of education)
- Teachers at the research schools
- Parents (of both students and drop outs)
- Other employees from FyA (both regional and national office)
- Participants of a workshop organized by FyA Internacional on education and gender (teachers, school directors, employees of other NGOs and CBOs in La Paz and El Alto)

These talks were not staged as an interview or I spoke with the informants in an informal conversation.

Topic list for interviews

School directors and teachers

Introduction

Introduction of myself
Introduction of the research
Explanation of the interview: goal/structure /how it will be used
Ask the interviewee to introduce him/herself

Topic 1 The school and its students

History of the school
Structure of the school
Number of students
Socio-economic background of students and families
Description of the district where the school is located

Topic 2 School desertion

Data on school desertion at this school
How often does it occur yearly?
What are the main causes?
Differences between boys and girls?
Case studies, examples of drop out students

Topic 3 Prevention of school desertion

Are there national/local prevention measures in place, not initiated by the school?
If yes, who initiated these and are they effective?
How does the school respond when a student is about to drop out?
Other ideas to reduce the rate of school desertion?

End of the interview

Thanks
Any questions for me?
Exchange contact information

Education experts

Introduction

Introduction of myself
Introduction of the research
Explanation of the interview: goal/structure
Ask the interviewee to introduce him/herself

Topic 1 Education system in Bolivia

Evo Morales' education policies
ASEP reforms: debate/what are the biggest changes/implementation
What are the most important bottlenecks in the contemporary education sector?
Differences between urban and rural areas
Gender differences in education

Topic 3 School desertion
Main carachteristics (who, when, how often)
What are the main causes?
Differences between urban and rural areas?
Gender differences?

Topic 4 Prevention of school desertion
How to prevent school desertion?
Are there prevention measures in place, not initiated by the schools themselves?
If yes, who initiated these and are they effective?
Whose responsibility is it to develop prevention measures?
What other types of initiatives could work?

End of the interview
Thanks
Any questions for me?
Exchange contact information