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THEDIALOGUE

FEATURED Q&A

Will More Latin Americans Embrace Mobile Education?

Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim said the new online educational platform "can be a model for other nations." // File Photo: Carlos Slim Foundation.

Q Mexican telecommunications magnate Carlos Slim last month launched Aprende, a free online educational platform that will offer training opportunities for anyone with Internet access and a smartphone. Have Latin Americans been embracing mobile learning opportunities? How well have formal education systems in the region incorporated online and mobile learning in their curricula? What audiences should providers of online learning tools seek to target? What are the main barriers to accessing and using such tools? How much will mobile education platforms change education outcomes in the region?

A Claudia Muñoz-Reyes, regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean at Seeds of Empowerment: "In 2012, Unesco published two working papers on mobile learning in Latin America, revealing that many Latin American governments have sidelined education initiatives that use mobile technology because they have already made substantial investments in one-laptop-per-child programs. The working papers investigated the use of mobile phones, either alone or in combination with other technological tools, and their potential to make learning more available and equitable, especially in places where there are few options for formal learning. The studies found that a majority of mobile learning projects ask students to interact directly with handsets and that this approach is considered effective for promoting experiential learning and building 21st Century skills. More recently, the massive open online course (MOOC) movement was a huge tidal wave in the university world, a potential revolution that has the primary aim

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The government has ordered some state-run entities to reduce working hours.

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Brazilian Court Freezes $6 Mn in Facebook Assets

Facebook has been in a dispute with Brazilian courts that have demanded it turn over data from its WhatsApp messaging service.

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Irregularities Marred Brazil Stadium Work: Auditor

A public auditor alleged construction companies overbilled Rio de Janeiro state for renovations on the Maracanã soccer stadium in 2014. The report came just weeks after Rio's governor, Francisco Dornelles, declared a fiscal emergency.

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Dornelles // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

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POLITICAL NEWS

Irregularities Marred Brazil Stadium Work: Auditors

Several financial irregularities marred the renovation of Rio de Janeiro's Maracanã soccer stadium ahead of the World Cup in 2014, improperly enriching construction companies at the expense of Rio's state government, public auditors announced Tuesday, The Wall Street Journal reported. The renovation of the stadium, which is to host the opening ceremony of the Summer Olympics on Aug. 5, cost 1.14 billion reais. At the time, the amount was equivalent to more than half a billion

> **"As we see, the objective was not just to carry out a soccer event, but to allow for the gross waste of public money."**
>
> **— José Gomes Graciosa**

dollars. The state auditing court, TCE, alleged the irregularities increased a contract for the stadium's renovation by more than 17 percent, the newspaper reported. To compensate, the auditing court ordered Rio de Janeiro state's finance secretary to withhold 198.5 million reais ($60 million) in payments to construction companies Odebrecht, Andrade Gutierrez and Delta Construções. The court also ordered the companies to either repay the money or defend the payments within 30 days. A representative from Delta Construções told The Wall Street Journal in an email that it left the consortium of companies that was renovating the stadium before the work was completed, adding that it has no other contracts with Rio and therefore is unaffected by the ruling. Odebrecht and Andrade Gutierrez declined to comment to the newspaper on the auditor's report. The TCE blamed Brazil's government for complying with a demand by soccer's world governing body, FIFA, that Maracanã be rebuilt to become a "white elephant." In the ruling, auditor José Gomes Graciosa said, "As we see, the objective was not just to carry out a soccer event, but to allow for the gross waste of public money." The three construction companies allegedly over-billed Rio's state government for some services and also charged it twice for items including employee meals. Last month, Rio's governor, Francisco Dornelles, said the state's increasing deficit could prevent it from providing public services, including policing and health care.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Cuba Orders Power-Saving Measures Amid Shortage

Cuban authorities have ordered residents to implement power-saving measures and have told some state-run entities to reduce hours of operation amid an energy shortage, the Associated Press reported. "The outlook is tight," Tourism Ministry official Yamila Rombaut told the wire service. "These will be difficult months." Fuel allotments for the agency's vehicles had been cut in half, Rombaut added. Cuba's vice president in charge of economic

Murillo // Photo: Cubadebate.cu.

matters, Marino Murillo, said Monday that the country was facing a tough economic situation due to falling prices for nickel, a major export for Cuba; missed production targets in the sugar industry; and other unspecified problems. Murillo said the energy problems will require strict savings and efficient use of energy and fuels in order to avoid blackouts. Half of Cuba's

NEWS BRIEFS

Some 500 Venezuelan Women Storm Past Guards to Buy Goods in Colombia

Some 500 Venezuelan women pushed past Venezuelan National Guard troops to cross a bridge into the Colombian border city of Cúcuta in order to buy food and other goods that are scarce in Venezuela, The Guardian reported. The women, from the Venezuelan town of Ureña, bought up toilet paper, flour, cooking oil and other items from markets in Cúcuta.

Brazilian Court Freezes $6 Mn in Facebook Assets

A Brazilian court has frozen $6 million worth of Facebook's assets in a disagreement over encrypted messages, according to local media, The Hill reported Tuesday. The ruling came Friday after Facebook-owned messaging application WhatsApp failed to turn over decrypted copies of messages as part of a drug trafficking case. WhatsApp encrypts data without giving Facebook the ability to decrypt it. Brazilian courts have been seeking decrypted messages since January, leading to a series of punishments to the technology company, including the jailing of a Facebook executive and a temporary ban on WhatsApp. WhatsApp has approximately 100 million Brazilian users.

Argentina's Central Bank Cuts Reference Rate

Argentina's central bank Tuesday cut its 35-day reference interest rate for the ninth week in a row, saying that pressures to reduce inflation appeared to be in line with the bank's expectations, Reuters reported. The bank cut the reference rate by 50 basis points to 30.25 percent, which in theory should make local bonds less appealing, while encouraging investment and growth. A central bank poll showed inflation for July is expected to be 2.2 percent, and that inflation over the next 12 months is expected to be 22.5 percent, the bank said in a statement.

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of changing the fixed dynamics of rigid university training models and the traditional organizational structures of universities. However, some challenges still remain in this innovative instructional model, such as authentication of students in evaluations and quality certification. Sustainable MOOCs should also aim to promote pedagogical models based on multiculturalism, the synthesis of local and global cultures and commercial processes. The Stanford Mobile Inquiry-based Learning Environment (SMILE) is mobile learning management server software, designed to create a highly interactive learning environment that promotes higher-order learning opportunities. Since 2012, SMILE has reached more than 25,000 educators in 22 countries engaging more than 750,000 learners around the world. Other interesting examples of MOOCs in Latin America and the Caribbean are the partnerships Coursera has generated with the IDB and with the Carlos Slim Foundation. Thus, mobile learning is an on-the-ground reality: students and teachers from Latin America are using mobile devices to access rich educational content, converse and share information with other learners, obtain support from peers and teachers, and facilitate productive communication. This helps students to manage skills in the knowledge economy and helps position them for better jobs in the increasingly competitive labor market in Latin America."

Sean Carroll, head of the Creative Development Lab at Creative Associates International: "The launch of the Carlos Slim Foundation's Aprende platform catches what is a swelling wave of self-paced learning available anywhere, anytime to mobile phone users—which now means almost everyone. Market studies show Latin America in the middle of the pack globally in terms of eLearning revenue and growth. At $2.2 billion this year (of $107 billion globally), revenues are smaller than in North America, Western Europe and Asia; but larger than in Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. At 15-18 percent year-over-year growth, the region's pace is slightly slower than Asia's, Eastern Europe's and Africa's, but well ahead that of North America, Western Europe, and the Middle East. With 20 percent or 20 million of Latin American youth neither in school nor in education or formal training (the so called 'ni-ni's), Aprende's focus on job skills and related training is needed. As in the rest of the world, formal education institutions in Latin America are not turning over their curriculums and pedagogy wholesale to eLearning, but the trends are clear. One oft-cited study suggests that whereas only five years ago, 45 percent of learning globally was classroom-only, 50 percent was blended (in-person and online/mobile) and only 5 percent was online-only, this year those numbers have shifted significantly to 10 percent classroom-only, 75 percent blended and 15 percent wholly online. A big key to the success of online/mobile learning is certification. Slim's accord with the Mexican government to recognize learning on Aprende makes the platform attractive and valuable. Though Aprende is available beyond Mexico, certification in other countries will be harder. Mexico, though, is by no means the only country taking a lead in the region. Brazil (26 percent) and Colombia (20 percent) both have eLearning growth rates larger than Mexico's, and are among the top 10 globally. Much of this eLearning growth of course is in corporate training, but it's not hard to imagine that demand will expand for Aprende and similar offerings to help up-skill current and future employees. I expect that we at Creative Associates will be using Aprende in our nearly 200 youth outreach centers, serving some 40,000 youth throughout Central America."

Federico Sucre, associate in the education program at the Inter-American Dialogue: "In the last two decades, the use of

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energy needs are covered by oil imports from Venezuela at just less than 100,000 barrels per day. Shipping data shows there has not been a reduction in shipments to Cuba, despite Venezuela's economic crisis, but energy consumption is up 30 percent in Cuba from five years ago, while generating capacity has remained the same for the island. For some government employees, the workday now ends at 12:30 p.m., and employees must turn off air conditioning by 11:30 a.m., said an official at the Center for José Martí Studies, which is part of the Culture Ministry. The policy took effect on July 1 and will be in place through the end of August. The official said each government entity is making its own decisions about how to best cut down on energy consumption.

BUSINESS NEWS

Retailer Liverpool to Acquire Chile's Ripley

Mexico-based department store chain Liverpool said Tuesday that it has agreed to acquire Chilean retailer Ripley, Reuters reported. The agreement values the Chilean company at 813 billion Chilean pesos ($1.2 billion). Liverpool said it struck a deal with Ripley's majority owners, the Calderón family, to acquire the

Ripley has 69 stores in Chile and Peru.

company for 420 Chilean pesos per share. The offer is a premium of approximately 25 percent over the Chilean retailer's closing price on Tuesday at the Santiago Stock Exchange. The Mexican company said it would consider the deal a success if it acquires at least 25.5 percent of Ripley. Ripley has 69 stores in Chile and Peru and was in discussions last year with other companies about its business development. The deal is subject to regulatory approval, Liverpool told Mexico's bourse in a statement.

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new technologies in education has become a policy priority in Latin America. Investment in access to new technologies has increased significantly, with initiatives such as 'One Laptop per Child' in several countries (notably Uruguay and Peru), but research shows that these programs have not been effective in improving student learning. More recently, mobile learning (m-learning) has emerged as a potential area of opportunity. The use of mobile phones is increasing at a fast pace in Latin America, reaching a penetration of 95 percent, according to Unesco, even in low socioeconomic groups. For smartphones, the estimated penetration is 55 percent. While this trend is increasing, countries in the region have not embraced the potential of m-learning to improve education access and provision at the national level. Some of the barriers to m-learning include the high cost and low availability of 3G connectivity, the rigid focus on 1:1 laptop programs and existing regulations restricting the use of mobile phones in schools. Most of the m-learning initiatives in Latin America are pilot programs run by the private sector.

They tend to target small groups and focus on specific, local needs. In order for m-learning to have a real impact on student learning, three factors must be considered. First, m-learning must be integrated into teacher training. Introducing new technological approaches without a solid pedagogical strategy has not proved effective, and m-learning will not be the exception. Second, countries must build on current technology programs. While 1:1 programs alone have not met expectations, they can provide the framework and IT knowhow that can be adapted to a solid m-learning strategy. Finally, pilot programs must be encouraged with a flexible, measurable and scalable approach that meets the demands of the education system rather than responding to the supply of the providers. As mobile devices such as smartphones develop and are increasingly able to provide the same functionalities as computers, mobile learning may offer a cost-effective solution, allowing schools to achieve a 1:1 learning environment without the expense of purchasing laptops for every student."

JOB POSTINGS

EDITOR'S NOTE: We are pleased to share Latin America-related job postings that readers of the Advisor and others have posted recently.

Astellas Pharma: Associate General Counsel, Latin America, Northbrook, Ill.

DirecTV Latin America/AT&T: Executive Director and Senior Legal Counsel, New York, N.Y.

Airbnb: Senior Counsel, Latin America, São Paulo/Miami

Textron: International Business Development Manager, Latin America, Miami

United Way: Director, Investor Relations, Latin America, Alexandria, Va.

Ford Foundation: Learning Officer, New York, N.Y.

Inter-American Dialogue: Country Coordinator in the Migration, Remittances and Development Program, Guatemala

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