

# JCU ScholarShip

## Do Conditional Cash Transfers Deliver? An Empirical Assessment of Argentina's 'Progresar' Program

Item Type	Thesis
Authors	Zaza, Catalina
Citation	Zaza, Catalina. "Do Conditional Cash Transfers Deliver? An Empirical Assessment of Argentina's 'Progresar' Program". Master's Thesis, John Cabot University, Rome, Italy. 2025.
Download date	2026-06-08 14:50:48
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/1218">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/1218</a>



**John Cabot University**

Do Conditional Cash Transfers Deliver?

An Empirical Assessment of Argentina's 'Progresar' Program

Catalina Zaza

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
International Affairs

First Reader  
Prof. Bogdan Gabriel Popescu

Second Reader  
Prof. Dalia Mattioni

Fall 2025 Graduation

© Catalina Zaza, 2025

# Do Conditional Cash Transfers Deliver?

## An Empirical Assessment of Argentina's 'Progresar' Program

Catalina Zaza\*

### Abstract

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs), particularly educational scholarships, are widely used by governments to promote school enrollment, retention, and completion among socioeconomically disadvantaged students, but their effectiveness depends on critically assessing their durability, scope, and contextual variation. This study evaluates whether students who received Argentina's Progresar scholarship between 2018 and 2020 achieved higher school completion rates, using a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) model to measure the program's impact. The analysis shows that, despite the program's potential and supporting evidence in the literature, its measurable effect on educational outcomes lasted only one year, raising questions about the value of short-term evaluations and the heterogeneity of impacts across cities. By identifying the program's limited duration of effectiveness, the study contributes evidence to inform the design of more robust and context-sensitive educational policies.

---

\*Email: [grcatalina.zaza24@johncabot.edu](mailto:grcatalina.zaza24@johncabot.edu)

## Table of contents

Dedication	3
Introduction	4
Literature Review	9
Theory and Argument	14
Methods	18
Data	19
Findings	21
Discussion	25
Conclusion	27
References	29
Appendix	34
AI Transparency Statement	40

## Dedication

I would like to thank the Master's director, Professor Michael Driesen, and Professor Dalia Dalia Mattioni for their support. A special thanks goes to Professor Gabriel Popescu, who, despite meeting with me countless times, always treated me with great patience and kindness.

To my sister and my parents, a quienes extraño muchísimo y espero ver pronto

## Introduction

Cash assistance programs are widely recognized as promoting equity in education. One of their functions is to reduce barriers to school participation by addressing direct costs (school expenses, supplies and textbooks) or indirect costs (opportunity cost of time, foregone wages, transportation cost, plan meals, etc.) of schooling (De Hoyos et al., 2017). In the literature, these programs are framed in general terms as instruments of social inclusion, reduction of poverty, and meeting essential basic needs. When directed towards children from vulnerable groups, they contribute to better overall health outcomes and ensure the continuity and completion of education. They embody governments' commitment to fairness and equal opportunities (Bastagli et al., 2019; OECD, 2018; Navarro Leal et al., 2021; Krüger, 2012)

The research question is whether exposure to government aid programs, particularly scholarships, enhanced school completion among children of school age in Argentina. Specifically: *Did agglomerations in Argentina that received the “Progresar” scholarship between 2018 and 2020 exhibit higher school completion rates?*

Here, an agglomeration refers to a cluster of urban localities situated within metropolitan areas or large cities where population is concentrated. Within the framework of the Permanent Household Survey (EPH), which serves as the primary data source for this study, the agglomeration functions as the fundamental unit of analysis and provides the analytical foundation for the research. For further details, see [Data](#)

Understanding the effectiveness of student-targeted cash transfer programs is both empirically and theoretically relevant. While it may seem intuitive that scholarships and conditional cash transfers improve educational outcomes, less is known about how long these effects last, and which specific dimensions of students' trajectories are most impacted. This study addresses that gap by examining not only whether “Progresar” improved educational outcomes, but for how long its effects persisted, something that it is overlooked in the literature (Cavalcanti, 2025; Soares et al., 2010; Barajas, 2021; Ordóñez-Barba and Silva-Hernández, 2020)

This also matters from a policy perspective because it contributes to the broader debate on how social policy interacts with institutions in decentralized settings. Argentina has the peculiarity of being a federal system in which the education sector operates autonomously. This means that national

educational policies are designed centrally in the capital, but implemented locally through subnational structures. This regional heterogeneity plays a critical role in shaping educational outcomes and can significantly mediate the program's effectiveness. For instance, the authors Daniel García Delgado and Cristina Ruiz del Ferrier ([García Delgado and Ruiz Del Ferrier, 2021](#)) argue that wealthier cities in Argentina, such as Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Santa Fe, have greater fiscal capacity and local resources, which enable them to maintain more schools, offer broader curricular options, and access a wider range of materials and technology. As a result, these urban agglomerations tend to exhibit better educational outcomes, such as higher school completion rates. In contrast, poorer cities, including Formosa, Corrientes, and La Pampa, often face budget constraints, infrastructure deficits, and limited institutional capacity, which negatively affect school maintenance, completion rates, and the overall quality of education.

By shedding light on the duration and regional variation of scholarship impacts, this study offers new evidence to design truly inclusive public policies, making essential for policymakers to account for these regional specificities and institutional differences.

Focusing on the methods and data, the program “Progresar,” officially named “Programa de Respaldo a Estudiantes Argentinos” was launched in 2018 by the then National Argentinian Government. Its objective was to expand access to education and support young people in completing their primary, secondary, tertiary, or university studies. It was implemented by the Ministry of Education and administered by the social security agency ANSES ([Melendez et al., 2020](#); [Panigo and Di Giovambattista, 2014](#)). This program was nationwide and eligible to students across the country.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of “Progresar” scholarships among the various cities nationwide. This shows that the cities with the highest exposure to the policy (green) are the northern cities, which coincides with the low-income agglomerates in Argentina and those with the lowest school-completion rates ([Manzano and Sandra, 2024](#); [Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos de la Republica Argentina \(INDEC\), 2018](#)). On the other hand, the cities with the lowest exposure (concentrated in the main urban centres like PBA1A and PBA2, referring to different zones of Buenos Aires, as well as Santa Fe, Córdoba and Neuquén) which are comparatively wealthier urban cities. This data was taken from the [Permanent Household Survey \(EPH\)](#), conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC) of Argentina, which constitutes the central basis of the entire study.

The figure shows how the program is implemented most intensively in the northern provinces of

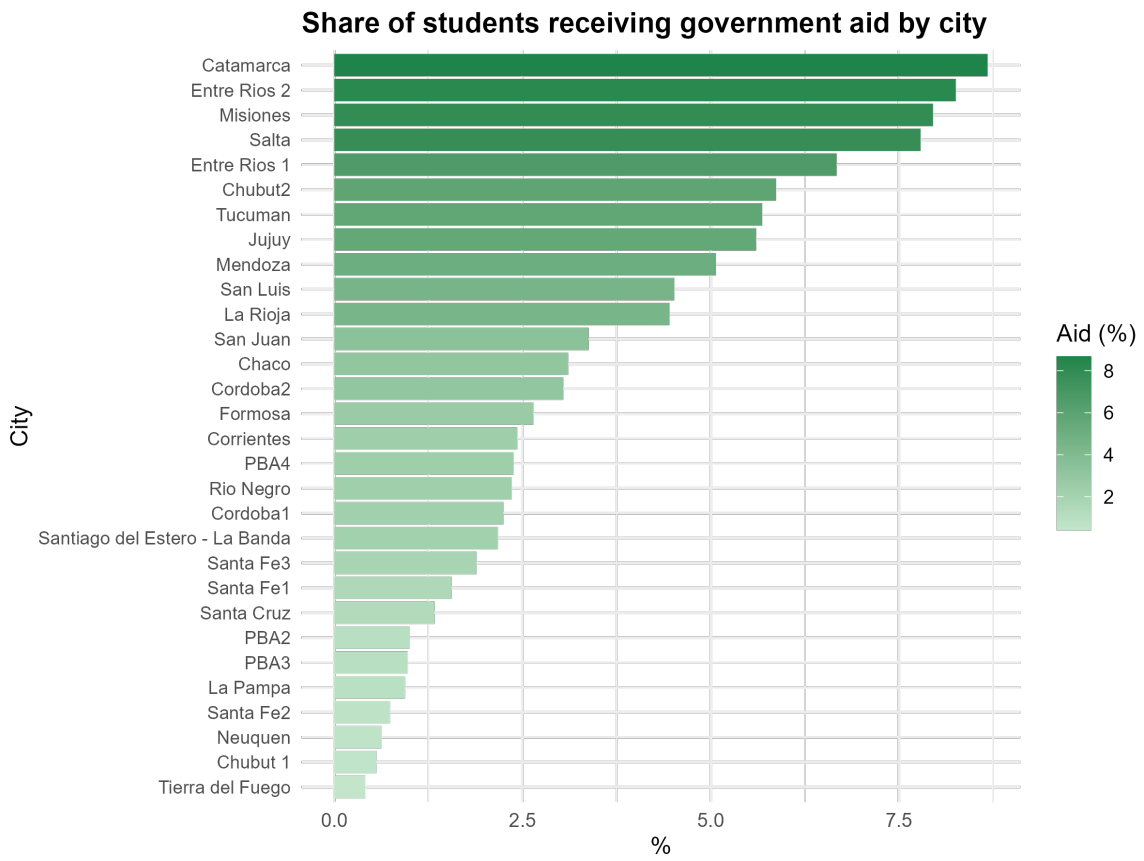


Figure 1

Argentina, namely Catamarca, Salta, Misiones, and Entre Ríos. This pattern corresponds to regions with higher levels of poverty and social vulnerability, which likely increases the demand for cash transfer programs. Therefore, it is plausible that scholarship would more prevalent in such areas. These cities also tend to exhibit lower rates of school completion, as households face greater economic constraints that limit access to educational opportunities (Bonfiglio et al., 2020; Brichetti et al., 2021). Consequently, programs like “Progresar” are more heavily concentrated in these provinces, as it is expected that areas with higher poverty require greater program investment.

Data from the years covered (2018 to 2020) from the “Observatorio de la Deuda Social Argentina” (ODSA) show that, the national child poverty rate reached 47.3%. The report emphasizes that the northern cities of Argentina remain the most affected, with child poverty rates in some cities well above the national average, for instance, in certain urban agglomerations, like Misiones, the proportion of children living in poor households reaches or exceeds 75%. In this context, the concentration of the program in these areas probably reflects an effort to reach the populations most in need of educational assistance (Tunon, 2019). This is further substantiated by evidence from national reports (Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales (CNCPS), 2020; Manzano and Sandra, 2024; Iucci et al., 2024)

In contrast, southern provinces such as Tierra del Fuego, Chubut, and Neuquén exhibit lower policy coverage. These areas tend to have relatively lower poverty rates and a smaller proportion of students facing economic barriers to education, resulting in reduced demand for the scholarship.

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of “Progresar” scholarships among the various cities nationwide. Pointing out which ones are more and less exposed to politics

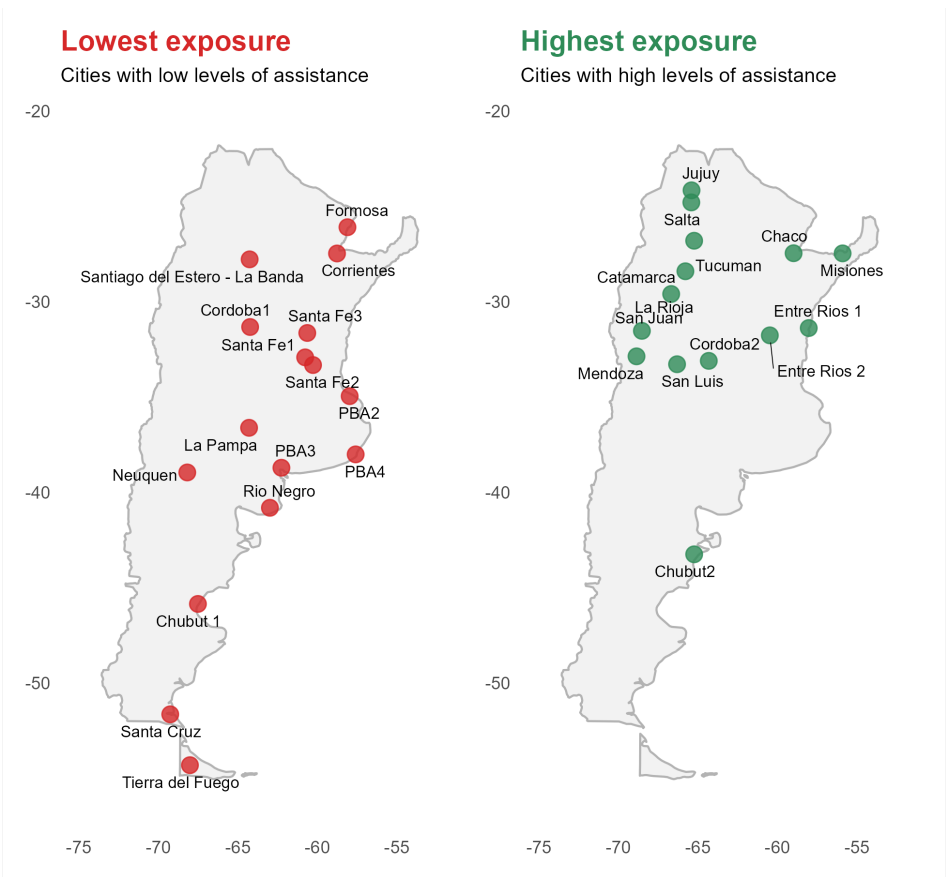


Figure 2

The findings of this paper suggest that although the program has a measurable short-term impact, its effects tend to fade after one year, revealing limitations in its transformative capacity. These findings are therefore difficult to reconcile with the prevailing view in the literature that scholarships consistently work and improve educational outcomes (Bastagli et al., 2019; Soares et al., 2010). This opens up an important question regarding the value of short-term studies, which can help identify errors and improve program design, as well as highlight the diverse contexts in which such policies are implemented, for instance, the specific case of educational system in Argentina.

From a methodological perspective, this study applies causal inference techniques, specifically Difference-in-Differences (DiD) models, to estimate the short-term impact of scholarships on various educational outcomes. While some prior studies have used correlational approaches or randomized controlled trials (RCTs), DiD allows for both causal estimation and disaggregated analysis across regions and educational levels, offering new insight into how institutional structures and timing shape the effectiveness of educational interventions.

The following sections are structured as follows: first, I reviewed the existing literature on cash assistance programs. Next, the “Progresar” program is introduced, and the methodological approach employed in the analysis is outlined. The paper then presents the empirical results and concludes with a discussion of their theoretical and political implications, as well as policy recommendations.

## Literature Review

The effectiveness of conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs targeting students has been widely studied and praised, particularly in developing countries. Assessment have conclude that *“Cash transfer programmes are a popular social protection tool in developing countries that aim, among other things, to improve education outcomes in developing countries (...) conditional cash transfers (CCTs) and unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) improve the odds of being enrolled in and attending school compared to no cash transfer programme. The effect sizes for enrolment and attendance are always larger for CCTs compared to UCTs... (Baird et al., 2014, p.42)*

While these programs are often designed to promote educational attainment and reduce inequality, their real-world impact can vary significantly depending on institutional context and implementation. In Argentina (a country that invests heavily in social protection policies) it is particularly relevant

to examine the impact of student-focused initiatives. Given its federal and highly decentralized education system, studying the effects of such programs across different settings becomes essential to understand this phenomenon. Evidence from multiple international assessments indicates that students in Argentina from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds consistently perform worse in educational outcomes ([Andrada et al., 2016](#); [OECD, 2019](#)). From an institutionalist perspective, it is precisely these institutional arrangements (manifested through policies on funding, resource allocation, territorial organization, social stratification, and access disparities) that, rather than alleviating inequalities, often serve to perpetuate them ([Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012](#)). While public policies may be explicitly aimed at reducing such disparities, the way they implemented in the ground frequently fails to achieve their goal.

In addition to examining the institutional landscape and delivery mechanisms, it is also crucial to analyze the short-term effects of the program. This helps identify when the impact begins to materialize, how long it lasts, and whether it persists or fades over time. Such insights are key to improving program design, identifying implementation gaps, and understanding what works, and what does not.

On a special note, scholarships can be conceptualized as a subtype of CCTs when they provide monetary support to student's contingent upon specific educational requirements, such as enrollment, attendance, or academic performance. While traditional CCTs target households and link transfers to both health and education behaviors, scholarships narrow the focus to the individual student and explicitly tie financial aid to educational achievement. In this sense, scholarships represent a specialized form of CCT aimed at fostering completion rates outcomes through direct investment in learners ([Soares et al., 2010](#))

At the global level, CCTs and scholarships are directly linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, Quality Education, which calls for inclusive and equitable access to primary and secondary education, and sometimes even higher educational levels. Specifically, target 4.1 emphasizes universal completion of free, quality schooling. UNICEF ([UNICEF, 2020](#)) and UNHCR ([UNHCR, 2021](#)) over the years have implemented scholarships to support vulnerable populations, ensuring continuity of schooling despite crises. These initiatives demonstrate that these schemes are both national policy tools and global development strategies. More broadly, these programs can also contribute to SDG 1 (No Poverty), because they reduce financial limitations, prevent child labor,

and break the cycle of poverty, since education is one of the strongest predictors of income mobility (Soares et al., 2010)

CCTs align closely with SDG 4 by expanding equitable access to education and with SDG 1 by reducing financial barriers that perpetuate poverty. International organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNHCR play a key role in translating these global goals into practice by supporting governments in designing and scaling scholarship and cash transfer programs. Initiatives like UNICEF’s “Transfer Project” demonstrate how SDG commitments materialize through technical assistance and evidence-based models that strengthen national CCT systems and improve educational outcomes.

Building on these global commitments, the “Transfer Project” supported provides one of the most comprehensive international examples of how cash transfers can strengthen educational outcomes across diverse contexts. It is relevant to mention this study as it covers several developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (including Malawi, Zambia, Kenya, and Ghana), analyzing more than 20 projects over a span of more than 20 years, thereby providing robust evidence on this topic.

Reviews consistently show that cash transfers reduce child labor by 8–12% and increase secondary school enrollment by up to 15% (Bhalla et al., 2018; Handa et al., 2021; Tirivayi et al., 2021). A specific requirement for students was the obligation to undergo regular medical testing. This condition illustrates how cash assistance is increasingly tied to behavioral incentives. By embedding aid within national social protection systems, the “Transfer Project” shows how conditional stipends not only improve access to education, enabling more students to attend and complete school, but also reduce inequalities and create a more secure future earning potential for beneficiaries.

Still, these studies cover the entire 10-year implementation period of the policy, overlooking its immediate impact or the point at which the policy began to make effect. This represents a gap in the literature that this paper seeks to address.

In Latin America, CCTs programs have emerged as some of the most influential policy instruments to reduce poverty and increase equality in general, and in particular scholarships, to expand educational opportunities and reduce dropout rates. Proof from large-scale assessments demonstrates their effectiveness: with respect to conditional cash transfer programs, Colombia’s “Familias en Acción” increased school enrollment by 5 to 7% points, particularly among rural and low-income households (Ham, 2016) In Nicaragua, the “Red de Protección Social” produced long-term educational gains,

including an additional 0.6 years of schooling on average and measurable improvements in literacy and numeracy skills that persisted even a decade after the program's implementation (Maluccio and Rafael, 2005)

The most extensive program in terms of both coverage and outcomes is Brazil's "Bolsa Família". Peer-reviewed evidence documents significant improvements in education, health, and inequality reduction. Children in "Bolsa Família" households showed higher school attendance rates compared to non-beneficiaries, with impacts ranging from 4 to 7% points depending on age group and geographic region (Cavalcanti, 2025; Soares et al., 2010)

In reference to specific targeted education scholarships, Mexico's "Prospera" program is the most ambitious, pioneering, and long-standing scholarship program in Latin America, running for more than 20 years by now (Niño-Zarazúa, 2021) The results consistently demonstrated positive impacts: secondary school enrollment has increased by 10 percentage points among boys and 20 percentage points among girls (Rodríguez Gómez, 2020; Ordóñez-Barba and Silva-Hernández, 2020). Also primary school enrollment among beneficiaries rose by 10% points (Schultz, 2004), while also was documented a significant improvements in grade progression and completion (Behrman et al., 2013).

It also produced results beyond educational outcomes, generating broader social benefits, including delayed fertility and increased labor market participation (Segura-Pérez et al., 2016; Ordóñez-Barba and Silva-Hernández, 2020). Government reports (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social de México (SEDESOL), 2015, 2018) also highlighted improvements in nutrition and preventive health care, reinforcing the program's multidimensional approach to poverty alleviation. Given that it is a large-scale program implemented over several years, evaluations in the literature are typically conducted as long-term, national-level studies (Barajas, 2021; Rodríguez Gómez, 2020).

These findings are particularly relevant because they provide evidence that similar public policies have been effective in both Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrating their potential applicability in Argentina.

After this overview of the literature, the question arises: why is the Argentine case particularly worthy of study? Argentina is a particularly relevant case for study because, although scholarships play a central role in supporting education, there is little systematic research examining this country. At the same time, Argentina has a long history of investing heavily in social protection. About 60% of

the national budget goes to social spending, including programs like “Progresar”, which all together represent around 12% to 15% of the country’s GDP (García Delgado and Ruiz Del Ferrier, 2021). This high level of investment makes it essential to evaluate the real outcomes of these policies. Moreover, international assessments (Andrada et al., 2016; OECD, 2019) indicate that the overall performance of Argentine students has been declining over time, underscoring the importance of evaluating the effects of these policies in the short term, and determining whether the government’s investments and efforts are sufficient.

Beside, what makes “Progresar” unique and worth studying is the way it works within Argentina’s federal education system. Like Brazil’s “Bolsa Familia” and Mexico’s “Prospera”, “Progresar” it is a national federal policy. But in Argentina, due to the decentralization of the national education system (which gave provinces full control over their own educational management) each province runs its own education institutions and school programs. The national government can create programs directed at students and provide funding, but the subnational governments are in charge of putting it into practice.

This means that the Argentinian federal administration does not control how education policies are implemented on the ground, and this affects how “Progresar” actually reaches students (Dávila, 2018). Since each province is different in terms of access to schools and infrastructure, capacity to manage educational programs and student enrollment and graduation rates, it is expected that the results of the policy are likely to differ across cities.

The way in which the program unfolds is highly diverse depending on context. Some capital cities have more schools, institutions and better services, while provinces far from the center often face serious challenges in education. So, even though “Progresar” has the same rules everywhere, its impact can vary depending on the local education system and provincial context.

Although previous studies provide valuable insights, the literature still lacks in two points:

1. *Institutional Federal Gap*

Based on the previous distinction regarding decentralized federalism, the main gap in the literature concerns the analysis of this specific federal education system. The existing literature on Mexico (Barajas, 2021; Niño-Zarazúa, 2021; Ordóñez-Barba and Silva-Hernández, 2020; Rodríguez Gómez, 2020) and Brazil (Cavalcanti, 2025; Ortiz-Juarez et al., 2012; Soares et al., 2010) offers limited

analysis of inter-city variation in program outcomes, and the evidence available suggests that results remain largely consistent at the national level. This consistency is often attributed to strong federal coordination, which reduces regional disparities in implementation and ensures relatively uniform program performance. In contrast, Argentina, despite also being a federal country, maintains a highly decentralized education system in which provinces exercise substantial autonomy. This institutional configuration provides a unique opportunity to examine how decentralization shapes policy effectiveness, revealing dynamics that remain not seen in more centrally coordinated federal systems. Such federal variation is rarely addressed in the literature, creating a gap in understanding how national scholarship programs operate in contexts where subnational governments control key components of educational delivery.

## *2. Temporal Gap*

Another gap in the existing literature is related to the time frame of impact evaluations. Most studies on scholarship or conditional cash transfer programs focus on long-term effects, typically assessing outcomes 10 or even 20 years after implementation, such as “Prospera” in Mexico. While long-term evaluations are valuable, they often overlook the immediate or short-term changes that occur when the program is first introduced. Perhaps this is due to the widespread assumption that “scholarships always work”, and that once delivered, their effects continue over time. But this is not always the case, and the evidence from this study shows the opposite. By challenging this assumption, I aim to foster a more nuanced discussion about the actual impact of scholarships on educational outcomes. Understanding these early effects is essential for improving policy design, targeting, and student retention.

## **Theory and Argument**

Argentina’s federal system is distinctive in the field of education because authority over program implementation lies primarily with the provinces rather than the central government. While national policies such as curriculum guidelines or funding programs are established at the federal level, each province retains autonomy in adapting, executing, and monitoring educational initiatives. This decentralization generates significant heterogeneity across regions, with differences in resources, administrative capacity, and policy priorities shaping outcomes (Ruiz, 2023; Faletti, 2004). Unlike

Mexico and Brazil, where federal governments play a more centralized role in education, Argentina's model emphasizes provincial prerogatives.

The nation has a long tradition of social assistance programs. The first major initiative was the “Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar”, which provided cash transfers to households with unemployed adults and dependent children (Ortiz-Juarez et al., 2012). At its peak in 2002–2003, it reached more than 2 million beneficiaries, nearly 20% of the labor force, with a monthly transfer of 150 pesos (about 50 USD in 2002). Introduced when unemployment had climbed to 25%, it became one of the largest social assistance programs in Argentina's history (Garganta and Gasparini, 2015). However, it targeted unemployed adults with children and did not evaluate educational outcomes.

In 2009, the “Asignación Universal por Hijo” (AUH) extended family allowances to informal and unemployed workers (Jiménez and Jiménez, 2015). The AUH guaranteed monthly transfers per child under 18, conditional on school attendance and health checkups. By 2013, coverage expanded to more than 3.5 million children, nearly 30% of all minors (Garganta and Gasparini, 2015). The program is recognized as a milestone in rights-based social policy, reducing child poverty and increasing school enrollment by 3–4 percentage points annually, especially in secondary school (Gasparini and Cruces, 2013; Jiménez and Jiménez, 2015; UNICEF, 2020). Yet, as with earlier programs, transfers went to household heads, and evaluations focused on households rather than individual students.

Within the theoretical framework of conditional cash transfers and scholarships, the “Progresar” program exemplifies a nationally coordinated intervention operating in a highly decentralized educational system. Unlike other programs targeting households or relying on administrative selection, “Progresar” introduces a self-targeting mechanism (Ruiz, 2023), where eligible students actively apply to receive support.

The program also embodies a policy experiment in federal educational governance, as its implementation depends on provincial authorities, while the rules and financial support are determined centrally. This interaction between national standards and local execution generates heterogeneity in potential outcomes, offering a conceptual lens to explore why similar programs may yield different results in distinct contexts.

The eligibility criteria were organized along three dimensions: identity, socioeconomic status, and academic performance. Under the identity dimension, applicants were required to be either native-born

or naturalized Argentine citizens, or foreign residents with at least two years of legal residence in the country, and of school age up to 18 years for formal education. Regarding socioeconomic status, the household income of the applicant's family could not exceed three minimum wages, thereby situating beneficiaries within the lower-income strata of the population. Finally, under the academic dimension, applicants had to be enrolled in and actively attending an officially recognized educational institution, and were required to pass a minimum percentage of courses each year in order to retain the scholarship ([Centro de Economía Política Argentina \(CEPA\), 2025](#); [Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales \(CNCPS\), 2018](#))

With respect to regionality, “Progresar” applied a principle of national uniformity, meaning that stipend amounts were identical across the country, with no regional differentiation.

Another important characteristic was that the funds provided by “Progresar” were not earmarked exclusively for direct educational expenses such as tuition, books, or supplies. Instead, beneficiaries managed the funds autonomously, without vouchers or restricted spending cards. Nevertheless, the program maintained sector-specific conditionalities: recipients were required to remain enrolled and successfully complete the academic year. The delivery mechanism was tied to these conditions, as ANSES (Administración Nacional de la Seguridad Social de la República Argentina) transferred the stipend periodically into beneficiaries' bank accounts, while withholding 20% of the payment until proof of regular attendance and academic progress was submitted. This design ensured compliance with educational requirements ([Deldivedro et al., 2020](#))

Regarding the stipend amount, at its inception in 2018, the monthly payment ranged between 1,250 and 1,600 Argentinian pesos (approximately 40 to 45 USD at the official exchange rate of that year), depending on the level of study. In 2019, the amount increased slightly to around 1,750 and 2,000 Argentinian pesos (equivalent to 39–44 USD at the annual official exchange rate), and by 2020 it reached approximately 2,100 and 2,250 Argentinian pesos (about 30–32 USD, according to the official annual exchange rate) ([World Bank, 2022](#)). Although nominal increases were introduced, cumulative inflation between 2018 and 2020 (which exceeded 100%) significantly reduced the real value of the scholarships. Combined with recurrent national currency devaluations, the real purchasing power of the stipends did not improve substantially ([Centro de Economía Política Argentina \(CEPA\), 2025](#); [Miguez, 2021](#); [World Bank, 2022](#))

Regarding the general theoretical framework, educational attainment can be understood as the outcome

of three interrelated dimensions: individual incentives, household constraints, and institutional structures (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos de la Republica Argentina (INDEC), 2018; Arevalo, 2018). Operationally, educational attainment is measured as the school completion rate. Incentives are defined as the receipt of scholarships by individual students, while household constraints are captured by the economic disadvantage of beneficiary households.

CCT programs are grounded in the assumption that financial incentives reduce the opportunity costs of education and increase school engagement among disadvantaged populations. Within this perspective, scholarships are expected to improve school completion by alleviating financial barriers and reinforcing student motivation.

I argue that educational scholarships, as documented in the state of the art, play an important role in improving educational attainment by reducing financial barriers and incentivizing students to remain and finish school. Prior research shows that targeted aid programs can increase completion rates by alleviating household constraints and offering support.

Building on existing literature, this paper examines the impact of Argentina’s “Progresar program” positing that municipalities with greater exposure to government scholarships are likely to exhibit higher school completion rates than those with limited or no exposure. By adopting a measurement-oriented approach, the analysis estimates the short-term effects of the policy broadly, and also the variations among cities and regions in the country.

Once this has been established, the hypothesis is the next on: “*Cities with greater exposure to government aid through the “Progresar” program will experience higher school completion rates relative to cities with lower or no exposure*”

And the causal logic can be represented as follows:

- **Predictor (IV):** School Completion Rate
- **Outcome (DV):** Government Scholarship Program (“Progresar”)

Figure 3 is a directed acyclic graph (DAG) which provides a clearer explanation:

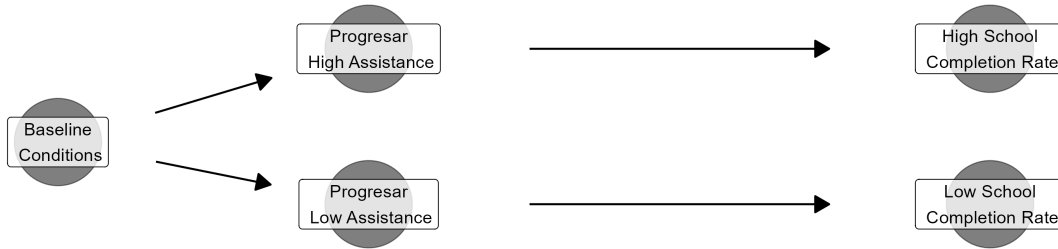


Figure 3

## Methods

This study uses a quantitative research design to estimate the causal effect of state assistance, specifically the scholarship program “Progresar” in Argentina, on school completion rates in the country.

The research design leverages the fact that the Argentinian national government offered the “Progresar” scholarship program to students who voluntarily apply and meet specific criteria. As a result, some urban agglomerations experienced high levels of program penetration, while others with similar demographic and economic profiles saw significantly lower participation, or none at all.

It is important to note that the assignment of beneficiaries was not random but rather based on administrative criteria aimed at identifying those in greatest need. This approach resulted in the formation of a treatment group (composed of vulnerable sectors receiving assistance) and a control group (those receiving less or not at all). The targeted roll out of the policy created a contrast between high-impact and low-impact areas, which enables a credible estimation of the program’s effects. This strategic allocation reflects an intentional effort to reach the most disadvantaged populations, as opposed to a randomized or geographically arbitrary distribution.

The central strategy is a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) design, comparing changes in school completion rates between high-aid and low-aid agglomerations (cities) before and after the relaunch of the program. This is complemented by an event-study analysis to assess the validity of the parallel trends assumption

and to explore the dynamics of the policy's effect over time (Bertrand et al., 2004) The unit of analysis is the urban agglomeration or city, with a total of 32 units (N=32).

The temporal domain spans 5 years, from 2016 to 2020. The analysis is deliberately truncated in 2020, since the COVID-19 pandemic led to the creation of other large-scale social assistance programs (such as the “Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia”, “Tarjeta Alimentar” and “Potenciar Trabajo”) that may overlap with “Progresar” and introduce risks of collinearity in the estimation. Therefore, this time frame allows for the observation of the immediate impacts of “Progresar” on educational outcomes, while avoiding contamination from concurrent emergency policies.

## Data

This study uses data from the Permanent Household Survey (EPH) conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC) of Argentina. The EPH provides rich microdata at both the individual and household levels, including demographic, educational, and socioeconomic information. For the purpose of this analysis, the individual and household files were merged to create a unified dataset linking individuals' educational outcomes with household characteristics such as income, employment, and access to government transfers. This yielded a total of 1,779,720 observations and 58 socioeconomic variables. The dataset was then filtered to include only school-age students (6 to 18 years old), resulting in approximately 38,000 cases.

The analytical sample covers the period from 2016 to 2024, allowing for the examination of both pre and post-policy periods. The Progresar program was launched in 2018 and given the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, I define 2020 as the last studied year to simplify the visual analysis and isolate the effects of the policy under study. By ending in 2020, I focus the analysis on the relevant policy window while minimizing confounding effects. Subsequent trends up to 2024 are located in the appendix of this study to add contextual data.

The **dependent variable (DV)** is the percentage of students who completed primary and secondary education (formal education). This measure focuses specifically on households that reported receiving the direct economic aid or cash transfers.

The key **independent variable (IV)** captures exposure to government aid, coded as a binary treatment:

- Regions with higher access to state transfers are classified as treated (treated = 1).
- Regions with lower access serve as the control group (treated = 0).

In terms of temporal scope:

- Periods after the relaunch of the policy in 2018 are classified as post (post = 1).
- Periods before the relaunch are classified as pre (post = 0)

Rather than classifying agglomerates as treated in a binary mode (received aid = treated; did not receive aid = control), the also analysis employs a continuous treatment variable. This approach captures the intensity of program exposure by measuring the proportion of students receiving aid within each agglomerate, thereby providing a more representative assessment of whether and to what extent the policy affected school completion rates. The cutoff was of 6%, represents the upper quartile of the distribution, thereby reducing the risk of misclassifying marginal cases and strengthening the comparative validity of the analysis. Using this criterion allows for a clearer distinction between high-exposure and low-exposure agglomerates, improving the robustness of the DiD design.

The baseline DiD model is specified as:

$$SC_{it} = \gamma_i + \lambda_t + \delta_{DID}T_{it} + u_{it}$$

Where:

- $SC_{it}$ : School Completion represents the percentage of students who completed school with government support in city  $i$  at year  $t$ .
- $\gamma_i$ : is a region fixed effect that controls for time-invariant characteristics of each city (e.g., baseline education quality, socioeconomic structure).
- $\lambda_t$ : is a year fixed effect that controls for shocks common to all cities in a given year
- $T_{it}$ : is the treatment indicator (binary or continuous exposure to aid)
- $u_{st}$ : is an idiosyncratic error term

The coefficient of interest,  $\delta_{DID}$ , captures the causal effect of government aid (scholarships) on the rate of school completion. A positive and statistically significant estimate of  $\delta_{DID}$  would indicate that cities more exposed to government aid experienced greater improvements in school completion

rates after the policy implementation.

To test the validity of the DiD design and assess dynamic effects, I estimate an event-study specification:

$$SC_{it} = \gamma_i + \lambda_t + \sum_{k \neq -1} \delta_k D_{t=k} \times Treatment_i + \alpha_s t + u_{it}$$

Here,  $D_{t=k}$  is a dummy variable with  $k = 1$  (2018) as the baseline.  $Treatment_i$  indicates whether city  $i$  ever received government aid.  $\delta_k$  is the coefficient of interest: it measures the effect of aid on school completion in each relative year  $k$ , compared to the baseline year  $k=+1$  (2019). Lastly,  $\alpha_s t$  shows the city-specific linear trends, allowing each city to follow its own trajectory over time.

## Findings

The main DiD results are represented in Figure 4. Before the implementation of the program, the confidence intervals overlapped, which indicates that there were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups. Once the program was introduced in 2018, however, a clear jump can be observed in the treatment group, particularly in cities with greater exposure during 2019 and 2020. Yet, this positive effect does not persist: completion rates subsequently decline, suggesting that the program ceased to be effective in achieving its initial objective of improving educational completion.

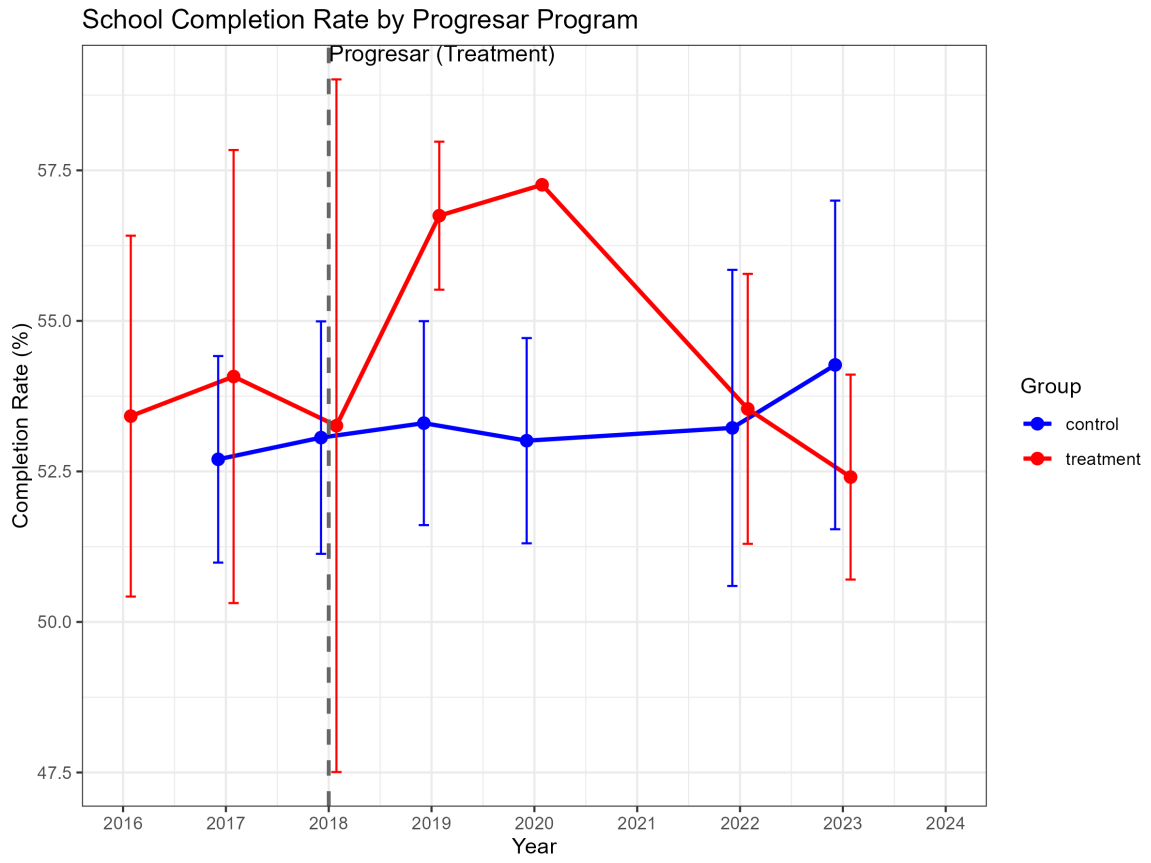


Figure 4

The effect becomes more evident when attention is restricted to the selected years (2018-2020) on Figure 5. The [appendix section](#) provides the disaggregation of the educational outcomes variable across different education levels for additional context. Here, a summary is presented comparing primary and secondary education.

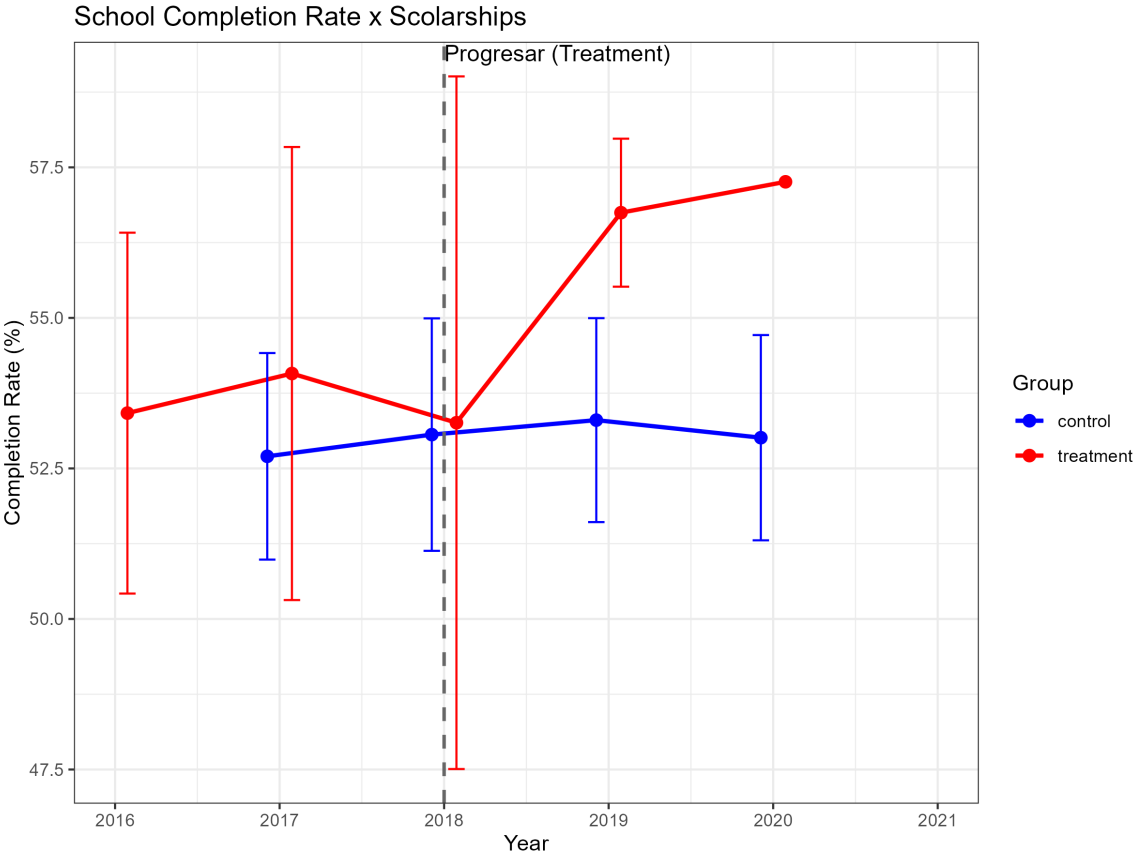


Figure 5

In addition, I estimate supplementary DiD models under this framework:

- Model 1 captures the basic DiD effect of the intervention on school completion rates by implementing the treatment variable in binary form (treated vs. control). The specification estimates the average effect of being located in a high-aid city on completion outcomes, while controlling for year fixed effects and region fixed effects, with standard errors clustered at the agglomerate level.
- Model 2 adds city-specific linear trends that allow each agglomeration to have its own time trend, reducing bias from different pre-treatment trajectories.

The first two models include the interaction term  $\text{treatment} \times \text{post}$ , which is the key DiD variable: it captures treated cities in the post-intervention period. Its coefficient therefore measures the causal effect of the program.

- Model 3 evaluates the estimation of the continuous treatment variable, the welfare assistance rate, examining how changes in the intensity of welfare support affect school completion.
- Model 4 uses continuous treatment plus city-specific trends, as in Model 2. It tests whether varying levels of welfare support impact completion while accounting for different local trajectories.

The summary in Table 1 shows that most coefficients are not statistically significant, as their p-values are relatively large (above 0.1). The only exception is a marginally significant coefficient ( $p < 0.10$ , denoted by a single star) in model 2, which is negative. Model 2 incorporates city-specific linear trends, allowing each urban agglomeration to follow its own temporal trajectory. By accounting for these city-specific trends, the model more accurately reflects the heterogeneity between cities and controls for differences in pre-treatment trajectories. In this context, the negative coefficient of  $-1.515^*$  suggests that, once these trends are taken into account, the program appears even less effective, reinforcing the conclusion that it does not produce a positive effect on school completion. In the other models, coefficients are positive, but the lack of statistical significance indicates that there is insufficient evidence to conclude a robust treatment effect.

Table 1

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Binary treatment	0.104	-1.515*		
	(1.278)	(0.661)		
Welfare assistance rate			0.065	0.002
			(0.171)	(0.101)
Num.Obs.	210	210	210	210
RMSE	4.41	1.83	4.41	1.86
Std.Errors	by: nombre_aglomerado		by: nombre_aglomerado	
FE: region	X	X	X	X

On summary, the analysis shows that when the program started, completion rates increased in cities with greater exposure during 2019–2020, suggesting an initial positive effect. However, these gains did not persist, as completion rates subsequently declined. Moreover, three out of four of the estimated coefficients are not statistically significant, with large p-values and substantial standard errors indicating imprecise estimates. While most of the coefficients are positive, implying a potential improvement in school completion, the statistical evidence is inconclusive.

## Discussion

This study contributes to the literature by providing an empirical evaluation of this social assistance program using multiple model specifications, offering methodological insights into how welfare intensity interacts with educational outcomes. These findings suggest that, under current conditions, the program does not exhibit a measurable impact on school completion rates, highlighting the need for further investigation into contextual factors and implementation dynamics.

Broadly speaking, these findings also illustrate the effects of the Argentinian national educational system. The impact of the policy is not strong, likely because it is highly heterogeneous due to decentralization and the existence of uneven educational structures. It is plausible that in areas where the policy has achieved greater penetration (typically in more economically disadvantaged cities), there are also fewer resources available for investment in education, such as limited human resources, inadequate school and technological infrastructure, greater dependence on national transfers, and

restricted coordination mechanisms between local and national government and ministries. All these conditions contribute to lower institutional educational capacity, which in turn diminishes the overall impact of the policy.

Originally, the “Progresar” program was designed to promote school completion, aiming to operate as an “inclusive institution” ([Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012](#)), in the sense that broadens access to opportunities and supports social mobility. However, its implementation takes place within heterogeneous contexts, which may limit its inclusive potential. As a result, the program’s outcomes vary and in some cases, existing educational inequalities may persist rather than diminish.

In light of these findings, and given the policy-oriented nature of this paper, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Implement impact assessments and program monitoring.

This study has demonstrated that the Progresar program exerts only a short-term impact on school completion. This finding carries both theoretical and practical implications: theoretically, because there is limited research on the short-term effects of cash transfer programs in Argentina; and practically, because regular evaluations—conducted quarterly or semi-annually—could prevent the program from perpetuating inefficiencies and failing to achieve its objective of improving educational outcomes among the most vulnerable students. Therefore, robust mechanisms of monitoring, evaluation, and accountability must be considered an essential component of such policies ([UNESCO, 2022](#)). These mechanisms should be properly communicated to the national government, which should be held accountable for their implementation and maintain effective feedback channels with subnational educational systems ([Gazeaud and Ricard, 2024](#))

This approach would enable policymakers to identify challenges and areas for improvement in real time, rather than allowing the program to continue operating with persistent inefficiencies. Monitoring educational outcomes at the local level would facilitate targeted strategy adjustments in cities that require additional support. This, in turn, connects directly to the second point of analysis.

2. Complement demand incentives with supply investments.

Studies have demonstrated that cash transfers can only achieve their intended impact when implemented within a well-functioning educational framework—characterized by adequate infrastructure, well-trained teachers, appropriate learning materials, and supportive school environments ([OCDE,](#)

2021; [Evidence and Lessons from Latin America \(ELLA\), 2012](#); [Medellín et al., 2015](#)). Financing students individually does not, by itself, guarantee improvements in academic performance or the completion of studies. Demand-side incentives (such as scholarships) must therefore be complemented by supply-side interventions, meaning that resources should also be directed toward strengthening the educational environment in which students learn. In the absence of complementary investments in the education system, such policies like “Progresar” are likely to fail.

In Argentina, as previously discussed, not all cities share the same educational conditions. Wealthier regions possess greater resources to invest in the construction and maintenance of classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, as well as in the provision of didactic materials such as textbooks, digital devices, and reliable internet connectivity. By contrast, poorer regions often lack such support, leaving students in precarious circumstances and making it difficult for them to complete their studies when the broader educational environment does not provide adequate assistance. To mitigate these inequalities and ensure that support reaches all regions equitably, the national government should adopt a needs-based funding approach, allocating additional resources to vulnerable areas or those with weaker educational conditions ([OCDE, 2021](#); [Ham, 2016](#))

The analysis has two main limitations. First, there is a lack of reliable data to assess the educational institutional strength, resources, or administrative capacity of each region, which constrains the ability to evaluate how local implementation shapes policy outcomes. Consequently, the reasons why the program’s effects diminish over time remain uncertain, potentially linked to the dynamics of Argentina’s decentralized federalism, but not conclusively demonstrated. Second, the available indicators from the EPH survey, such as completion rates and enrollment, capture quantitative outcomes but do not adequately reflect educational quality, learning achievements, or broader student well-being, thereby limiting the scope and depth of the conclusions.

## **Conclusion**

This article initially established the hypothesis that students exposed to the this program would achieve higher improved outcomes, as the literature generally suggests. However, the results demonstrate the opposite: while the policy appears to generate positive effects in the short term, these impacts fade away after one year. Moreover, the findings are not sufficiently strong or conclusive, raising questions

about the program's effectiveness

The contribution of this study lies in its focus on the short-term effects of the policy, an aspect that has received limited attention in the literature. The findings underscore the importance of conducting short-term assessments, as they allow for the identification and correction of design flaws, particularly in the context of public policies that directly affect the most vulnerable students. In addition, the study brings to the forefront the discussion of Argentina's decentralized educational federalism, opening the way to examine its broader consequences for policy implementation and equity.

From a global perspective, these findings highlight the importance of incorporating short-term evaluations into the design of social and educational policies. By systematically assessing early outcomes, policymakers can identify weaknesses in advance, thereby improving program effectiveness and reducing wasted resources. In the case of "Progresar", the evidence suggests that initial gains do not persist, which underscores the need for adaptive mechanisms that allow corrections.

Despite the insights provided, several questions remain unanswered. First, it is unclear why the short-term positive effects of "Progresar" fail to persist, raising the need to investigate the mechanisms through which initial gains dissipate. Maybe, it is because of this second reason. The broader implications of Argentina's decentralized federalism in educational policies remain unresolved. In particular, the role of institutional heterogeneity across provinces has not been sufficiently explored. This lack of data limits the understanding and underscores the need for comparative research across diverse institutional contexts.

Finally, the reliance on quantitative indicators from the national survey leaves open the question of how these policies affect educational quality, learning outcomes, and broader student well-being.

## References

- Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J. (2012). *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*. Crown, New York.
- Andrada, M. J., Torres, V. E. R., and Bertone, C. L. (2016). Análisis de los Resultados de las Puntuaciones obtenidas por los Países Latinoamericanos en las pruebas PISA. *Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales*, 7(12):13–40. Accessed on December 2, 2025. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11336/136391>.
- Arevalo, C. (2018). Universal Child Allowance (AUH): A Contribution to the Discussion on the Role of Conditionalities. Accessed on November 19, 2025. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/argentina/media/4186/file/Universal%20Child%20Allowance%20\(AUH\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/argentina/media/4186/file/Universal%20Child%20Allowance%20(AUH).pdf).
- Baird, S., Ferreira, F., Özler, B., and Woolcock, M. (2014). Conditional, Unconditional and everything in between: a Systematic Review of the Effects of Cash Transfer Programmes on Schooling Outcomes. *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 6(1):1–43. Accessed on December 2, 2025. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10.1080/19439342.2014.890362>.
- Barajas, G. (2021). Prospera, Programa de Inclusión Social: ¿Una Nueva Estrategia de Atención a la pobreza en México? *Revista Gestión y Estrategia*, 25(50):103–120. Accessed on November 22, 2025. Available at: <https://gestionyestrategia.azc.uam.mx/index.php/rge/article/view/569>.
- Bastagli, F., Hagen-Zanker, J., Harman, L., Barca, V., Sturge, G., and Schmidt, T. (2019). The Impact of Cash Transfers: A Review of the Evidence from Low- and Middle-income Countries. *Journal of Social Policy*, 48(3):569–594. Accessed on November 16, 2025. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279418000715>.
- Behrman, J., Parker, S. W., and Todd, P. E. (2013). *Prospering through Prospera: A Dynamic Model of CCT Impacts on Educational Attainment and Achievement in Mexico*, volume 16. The Econometric Society. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3982/QE2291>.
- Bertrand, M., Duflo, E., and Mullainathan, S. (2004). How Much Should We Trust Differences-in-Differences Estimates? *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 119(1):249–275. Accessed on November 29, 2025. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/119/1/249/1876068>.
- Bhalla, G., Handa, S., Angeles, G., and Seidenfeld, D. (2018). The Effect of Cash Transfers and Household Vulnerability on Food Security in Zimbabwe. *Food Policy*, 74(4):82–99. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306919217301781>.
- Bonfiglio, J. I., Vera, J., and Salvia, A. (2020). Radiografía de la pobreza en Argentina: privaciones sociales y desigualdades estructurales. Observatorio de la Deuda Social Argentina (ODSA). Accessed on December 3, 2025. Available at: <https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/handle/123456789/16629>.
- Brichetti, J. P., Leonardi, M., Eugenia, R. M., Serebrisky, T., and Solís, B. (2021). The Infrastructure Gap in Latin America and the Caribbean: Investment Needed Through 2030 to Meet the Sustainable Development Goals. BID. Accessed on November 28, 2025. Available at: <https://publications.iadb.org/en/infrastructure-gap-latin-america-and-caribbean-investment-needed-through-2030-meet-sustainable>.
- Cavalcanti, D. M. (2025). Health effects of the Brazilian Conditional Cash Transfer Programme over 20 years and Projections to 2030: a Retrospective Analysis and Modelling Study. *The Lancet Public Health*, 10(7). Accessed on November 26, 2025. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(25\)00091-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(25)00091-X/fulltext).
- Centro de Economía Política Argentina (CEPA) (2025). El Deterioro del Programa Progresar:

- licuación y caída en la cobertura. Accessed on November 26, 2025. Available at: <https://centrocepa.com.ar/informes/652-el-deterioro-del-programa-progresar-licuacion-y-caida-en-la-cobertura>.
- Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales (CNCPS) (2018). Reporte de Monitoreo Becas Progresar: Tercer trimestre 2018. Accessed on November 26, 2025. Available at: [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/beca\\_progresar\\_3t\\_2018\\_v3.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/beca_progresar_3t_2018_v3.pdf).
- Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales (CNCPS) (2020). Segundo Informe Voluntario Nacional de la Argentina 2020. Foro Político de Alto Nivel Sobre el Desarrollo Sostenible de las Naciones Unidas. Accessed on December 3, 2025. Available at: [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/2deg\\_ivn\\_2020.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/2deg_ivn_2020.pdf).
- De Hoyos, R., Rogers, H., and Miguel, S. (2017). Out Of School and Out Of Work Risk and Opportunities for Latin America's NiNis. World Bank. Accessed on November 19, 2025. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/87c770c3-3bb6-5191-897b-871e18b7c48c/content>.
- Deldivedro, V., Iacobellis, S., Pedersoli, C., Pierpaoli, L., Quartulli, D., Serial, M. A., and Steimberg, S. (2020). Evaluación del Programa Progresar: Programa de Apoyo a la Equidad y Efectividad del Sistema de Protección Social en Argentina. Argentinian Ministry of Education. Accessed on November 28, 2025. Available at: [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/evaluacion\\_progresar-final.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/evaluacion_progresar-final.pdf).
- Dávila, M. (2018). Rankings Universitarios Internacionales y Conflictos por la Regulación de la Educación Superior. *Revista Iberoamericana de Ciencia, Tecnología y Sociedad*, 13(37):67–84. Accessed on November 27, 2025. Available at: <https://ojs.revistacts.net/index.php/CTS/article/view/50>.
- Evidence and Lessons from Latin America (ELLA) (2012). Learning from CCT Evaluations. Evidence and Lessons from Latin America (ELLA). Accessed on December 2, 2025. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a5eed915d622c0006dd/111213\\_ECO\\_ConCasTra\\_BRIEF4.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a5eed915d622c0006dd/111213_ECO_ConCasTra_BRIEF4.pdf).
- Faletti, T. (2004). Descentralización educativa en Argentina: Condicionantes Institucionales y Consecuencias Políticas. *Revista Electronica de Estudios Latinoamericanos*, 2(8):14–36. Accessed on November 30, 2025. Available at: <https://publicaciones.sociales.uba.ar/index.php/elatina/article/view/6229>.
- García Delgado, D. and Ruiz Del Ferrier, C. (2021). *La Protección Social en América Latina: el Estado y las Políticas Públicas entre la crisis social y la búsqueda de la equidad*. Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) Argentina, 2 edition. Accessed on November 20, 2025.
- Garganta, S. and Gasparini, L. (2015). The Impact of a Social Program on Labor Informality: The case of AUH in Argentina. *Journal of Development Economics*, 115(12):99–110. Accessed on November 18, 2025. Available at: [10.1016/j.jdeveco.2015.02.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2015.02.004).
- Gasparini, L. and Cruces, G. (2013). Poverty and Inequality in Latin America: A Story of Two Decades. *Journal of International Affairs*, 66(2):51–63. Accessed on November 26, 2025. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24388285>.
- Gazeaud, J. and Ricard, C. (2024). Learning effects of Conditional Cash Transfers: The role of class size and composition. *Journal of Development Economics*, 166:103–194. Accessed on November 30, 2025. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2023.103194>.
- Ham, A. (2016). The Impact of Conditional Cash Transfers on Educational Inequality of Opportunity. *Latin American Research Review*, 94(3):153–175. Accessed on November 16, 2025. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/latin-american->

- [research-review/article/impact-of-conditional-cash-transfers-on-educational-inequality-of-opportunity/F23258BA0CF47DD90FCC7A3C5BF32D81](https://research-review/article/impact-of-conditional-cash-transfers-on-educational-inequality-of-opportunity/F23258BA0CF47DD90FCC7A3C5BF32D81).
- Handa, S., Otchere, F., and Sirma, P. (2021). More Evidence on the Impact of Government Social Protection in Sub Saharan Africa: Ghana, Malawi and Zimbabwe. *Development Policy Review*, 40(3):1–22. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: [10.1111/dpr.12576](https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12576).
- Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos de la Republica Argentina (INDEC) (2018). Informe Tercer Trimestre 2018. 23(12):1–190. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: [https://sitioanterior.indec.gov.ar/ftp/cuadros/publicaciones/indecinforma/indec\\_informa\\_12\\_18.pdf](https://sitioanterior.indec.gov.ar/ftp/cuadros/publicaciones/indecinforma/indec_informa_12_18.pdf).
- Iucci, M., Santarsiero, L., and González, H. (2024). Información estadística oficial e investigación social. La EPH, sus usos, potencialidades y desafíos metodológicos. *XII Jornadas de Sociología de la UNLP*. Accessed on November 9, 2025. Available at: [https://sedici.unlp.edu.ar/bitstream/handle/10915/181539/Documento\\_completo.pdf-PDFA.pdf?sequence=1](https://sedici.unlp.edu.ar/bitstream/handle/10915/181539/Documento_completo.pdf-PDFA.pdf?sequence=1).
- Jiménez, M. and Jiménez, M. (2015). Asistencia Escolar y Participación Laboral de los Adolescentes en Argentina: el Impacto de la Asignación Universal por Hijo. International Law Organization. Accessed on November 18, 2025. Available at: <https://researchrepository.ilo.org/esploro/outputs/encyclopediaEntry/Asistencia-escolar-y-participacion-laboral-de/995219087602676>.
- Krüger, N. (2012). La Segmentación Educativa Argentina: Reflexiones desde una perspectiva micro y macro social. *Paginas de Educacion*, 5(1):137–156. Accessed on December 2, 2025. Available at: [10.22235/pe.v5i1.605](https://doi.org/10.22235/pe.v5i1.605).
- Maluccio, J. and Rafael, F. (2005). Impact Evaluation of a Conditional Cash Transfer Program: the Nicaraguan Red de Proteccion Social. *International Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)*, 141. Accessed on November, 11, 2025. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2499/0896291464RR141>.
- Manzano, G. L. and Sandra, D. (2024). Incidencia de la Pobreza y la Indigencia en 31 Aglomerados Urbanos. *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos de la Republica Argentina (INDEC)*, 9(7):2–28. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: [https://www.indec.gov.ar/uploads/informesdeprensa/eph\\_pobreza\\_03\\_252282AE14D2.pdf](https://www.indec.gov.ar/uploads/informesdeprensa/eph_pobreza_03_252282AE14D2.pdf).
- Medellín, N., Ibararán, P., Stampini, M., and Miguel, V. J. (2015). Moving Ahead: Recertification and Exit Strategies in Conditional Cash Transfer Programs. IBD. Accessed on November 30, 2025. Available at: <https://publications.iadb.org/en/moving-ahead-recertification-and-exit-strategies-conditional-cash-transfer-programs>.
- Melendez, C. E., Torres, M. A., and Yuni, J. A. (2020). Análisis del Programa de Respaldo al Estudiante Argentino (Progresar) para la Educación Superior. *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Educativos*, 50(3):1–26. Accessed on December 2, 2025. Available at: <https://rlee.iberomx.com/index.php/rlee/article/view/131>.
- Miguez, S. (2021). Scholarship Policy Evaluation. The case of Progresar scholarships in Argentina. Master’s thesis, Universitat de Barcelona. Accessed on November 25, 2025. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/2445/180061>.
- Navarro Leal, M. A., Navarrete-Cazales, Z., Rivera Peña, J. R., and Rojas-Moreno, I. (2021). Políticas Educativas. Una mirada Internacional y Comparada. *Sociedad Mexicana de Educación Comparada*, 34(2):85–110. Accessed on December 2, 2025. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353729386\\_Políticas\\_Educativas\\_Una\\_mirada\\_internacional\\_y\\_comparada](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353729386_Políticas_Educativas_Una_mirada_internacional_y_comparada).
- Niño-Zarazúa, M. (2021). *Mexico’s Progresar-Oportunidades-Prospera Programme and the rise of Social Assistance in Latin America*. Oxford Academic. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/book/33547/chapter/287923097>.

- OCDE (2021). The Funding of School Education: Connecting Resources and Learning. OECD Publishing. Accessed on December 2, 2025. Available at: [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-funding-of-school-education\\_9789264276147-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-funding-of-school-education_9789264276147-en.html).
- OECD (2018). Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators. OECD Publishing. Accessed on December 2, 2025. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2018-en>.
- OECD (2019). PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do. OECD Publisher. Accessed on December 2, 2025. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>.
- Ordóñez-Barba, G. and Silva-Hernández, A. (2020). Progres-a-Oportunidades-Prospera: Avatares, Alcances y Resultados de un Programa Paradigmático contra la Pobreza. *Papeles de Población; SciELO México*, 25(99):77–111. Accessed on November 15, 2025. Available at: [https://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1405-74252019000100077](https://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1405-74252019000100077).
- Ortiz-Juarez, E., Lustig, N., and Lopez-Calva, L. (2012). Declining Inequality in Latin America in the 2000s: The Cases of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. Accessed on November 18, 2025. Available at: [10.1596/1813-9450-6248](https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-6248).
- Panigo, D. T. and Di Giovambattista, A. P. (2014). Widening Social Security Coverage : Evaluating Income Distribution effects of Argentina’s PROGRESAR. *Fundación para la Educación Superior y el Desarrollo; Coyuntura Económica: Investigación Económica y Social*, 44(2):105–126. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11336/2793>.
- Rodríguez Gómez, K. (2020). De Progres-a-Oportunidades-Prospera a las Becas Benito Juárez: un análisis preliminar de los cambios en la política social en el sexenio 2018-2024 en México. *Revista Mexicana de Análisis Político y Administración Pública (REMAP)*, 9(17):81–91. Accessed on November 15, 2025. Available at: [10.15174/remap.v9i17.324](https://doi.org/10.15174/remap.v9i17.324).
- Ruiz, G. R. (2023). Federalismo, Reformas Escolares y luz del Principio de Igualdad en Argentina. *Revista de Educacion*, 6(400):203–2035. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=8937989>.
- Schultz, P. (2004). School Subsidies for the Poor: Evaluating the Mexican Progres-a Poverty Program. *Journal of Development Economics*, 74(1):199–250. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: [10.1016/j.jdeveco.2003.12.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2003.12.009).
- Secretaría de Desarrollo Social de México (SEDESOL) (2015). Informe de la Evaluación Específica de Desempeño 2014-2015. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: [https://www.coneval.org.mx/EvaluacionDS/PP/CEIPP/Documents/EVALUACIONES/EED\\_2014\\_2015/SEDESOL/S072\\_PROSPERA/S072\\_PROSPERA\\_IE.pdf](https://www.coneval.org.mx/EvaluacionDS/PP/CEIPP/Documents/EVALUACIONES/EED_2014_2015/SEDESOL/S072_PROSPERA/S072_PROSPERA_IE.pdf).
- Secretaría de Desarrollo Social de México (SEDESOL) (2018). Evaluación de Consistencia y Resultados 2017-2018: PROSPERA Programa de Inclusión Social. Accessed on November 27, 2025. Available at: [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/343295/S072\\_InformeFinal.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/343295/S072_InformeFinal.pdf).
- Segura-Pérez, S., Grajeda, R., and Pérez-Escamilla, R. (2016). Conditional Cash Transfer Programs and the Health and Nutrition of Latin American Children. *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública*, 40(2):124–137. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: <https://www.scielosp.org/pdf/rpsp/2016.v40n2/124-137/en>.
- Soares, F. V., Ribas, R., and Osório, R. (2010). Evaluating the Impact of Brazil’s Bolsa Família: Cash Transfer Programs in Comparative Perspective. *Latin American Research Review*, 45(2):173–190. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available at: [10.1017/S0023879100009390](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100009390).
- Tirivayi, N., Waidler, J., and Otchere, F. (2021). Cash Transfers: Past, Present and Future. Evidence and Lessons Learned from the Transfer Project. UNICEF. Accessed on November 20, 2025. Available

- at: <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/5101/file/UNICEF-Cash-Transfer-Project-Research-Brief-2021.pdf>.
- Tunon, I. (2019). INFANCIA(S). Progresos y retrocesos en clave de desigualdad. UNICEF. Accessed on December 3, 2025. Available at: <https://www.elextremosur.com/files/content/20/20572/uca-pobreza-2019.pdf>.
- UNESCO (2022). La Encrucijada de la Educación en América Latina y el Caribe: Informe Regional de Monitoreo ODS4-Educación 2030. Accessed on November 21, 2025. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/37791/file/Education%20in%20Latin%20America%20and%20the%20Caribbean%20at%20a%20crossroads.pdf>.
- UNHCR (2021). DAFI Annual Report 2021: Now is the time. Accessed on November 27, 2025. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/dafi-annual-report-2021>.
- UNICEF (2020). Cash and Voucher Assistance Targeting for Education Outcomes: How to select beneficiaries to advance equity and maximize results. Accessed on November 26, 2025. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/93166/file/Cash%20and%20voucher%20assistance%20targeting%20for%20education%20outcomes%20-%20How%20to%20select%20beneficiaries%20to%20advance%20equity%20and%20maximize%20results.pdf>.
- World Bank (2022). Argentine Republic: Improving Inclusion in Basic and Higher Education additional financing addendum to the technical assessment. Accessed on November 26, 2025. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099905112152231358/pdf/P179668044cb1a0f082e205f86f2a71da7.pdf>.

# Appendix

## Educational outcomes disaggregation

To better understand the program's effects across educational stages, the treatment variable is disaggregated by level, allowing for more detailed specification analyses.

Figure Figure S1 – Pre-school:

The results display overlapping confidence intervals, suggesting no clear effect of “Progresar” at this stage. Notably, during the treatment years, school completion even appears to decline among children who received the scholarship.

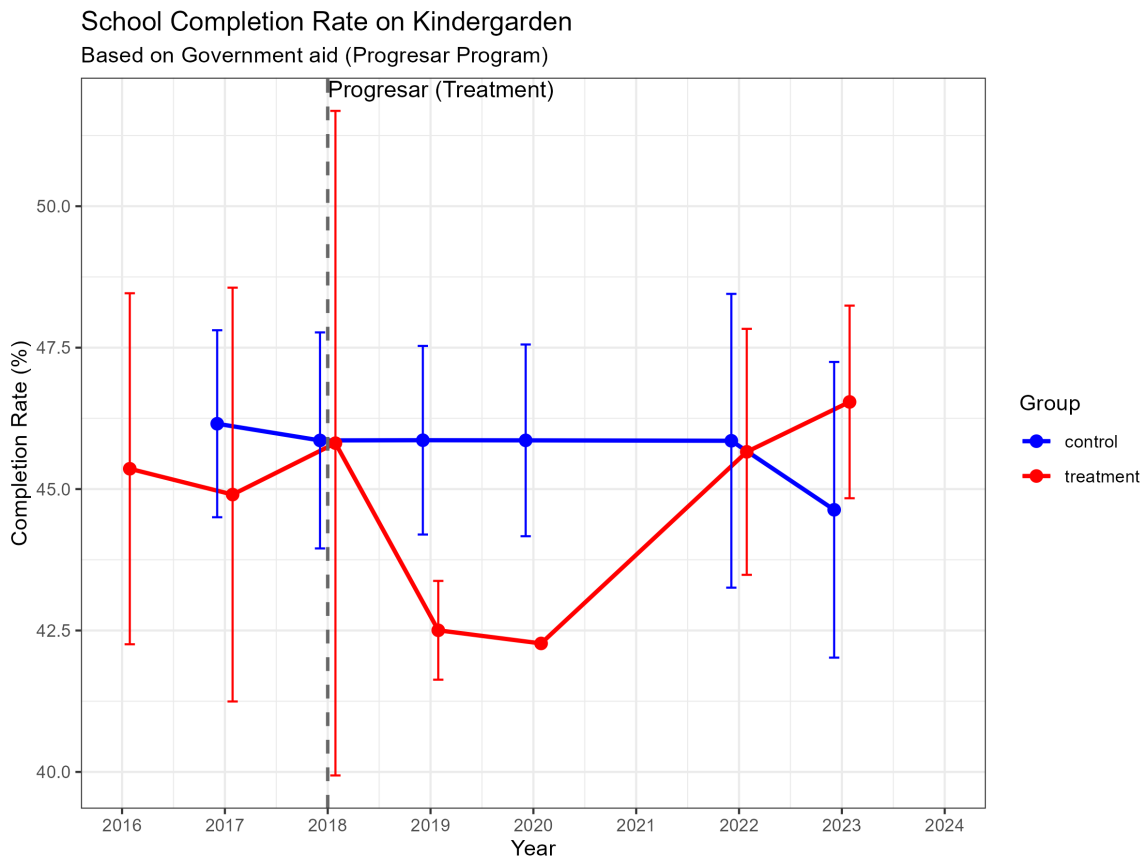


Figure S1

Figure Figure S2 – Primary Education

The pattern remains inconclusive and the results suggest that primary school students experience limited short-term benefits from the program, only the first year of implementation in 2018.

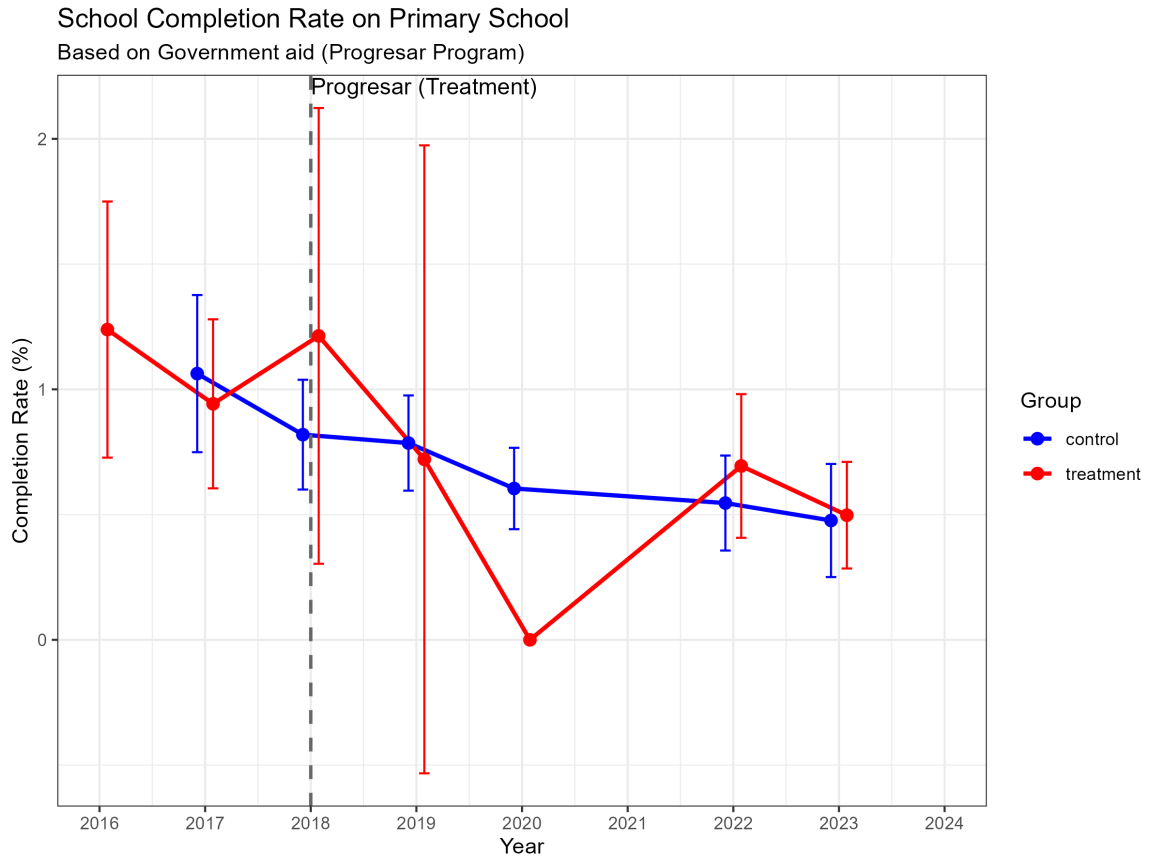


Figure S2

Figure Figure S3 – EGB (Educacion General Basica)

This figure corresponds to the Basic Genral Education level in Argentina, which represents the final two years of primary education for students aged 11 and 12. An initial increase in school completion rates is observed in the treatment group; however, this improvement is not sustained over time. This pattern reflects short-term responsiveness to the program,

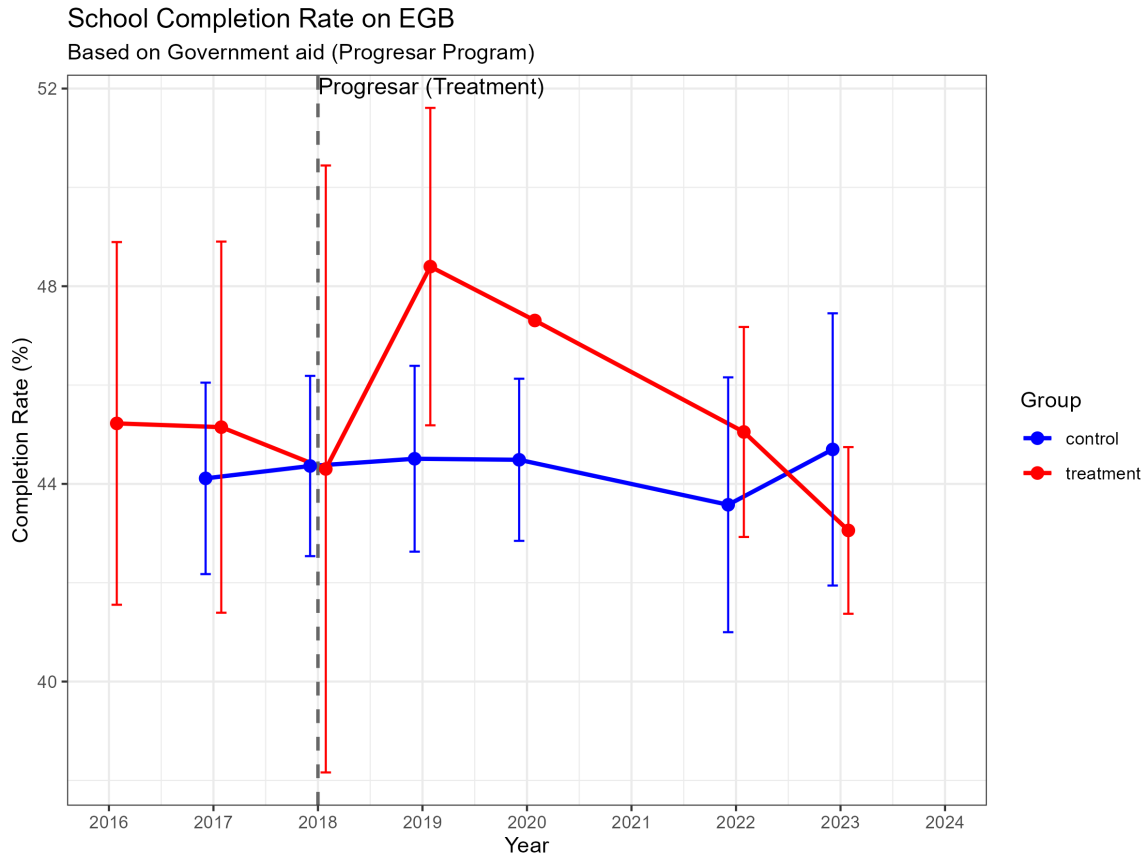


Figure S3

Figure Figure S4 – Secondary

At the roll out, the program appears to have had little to no effect. It is only in 2019 that the treatment group surpasses the control group, suggesting a potential impact. However, the confidence intervals overlap, indicating that the observed differences are not statistically conclusive.

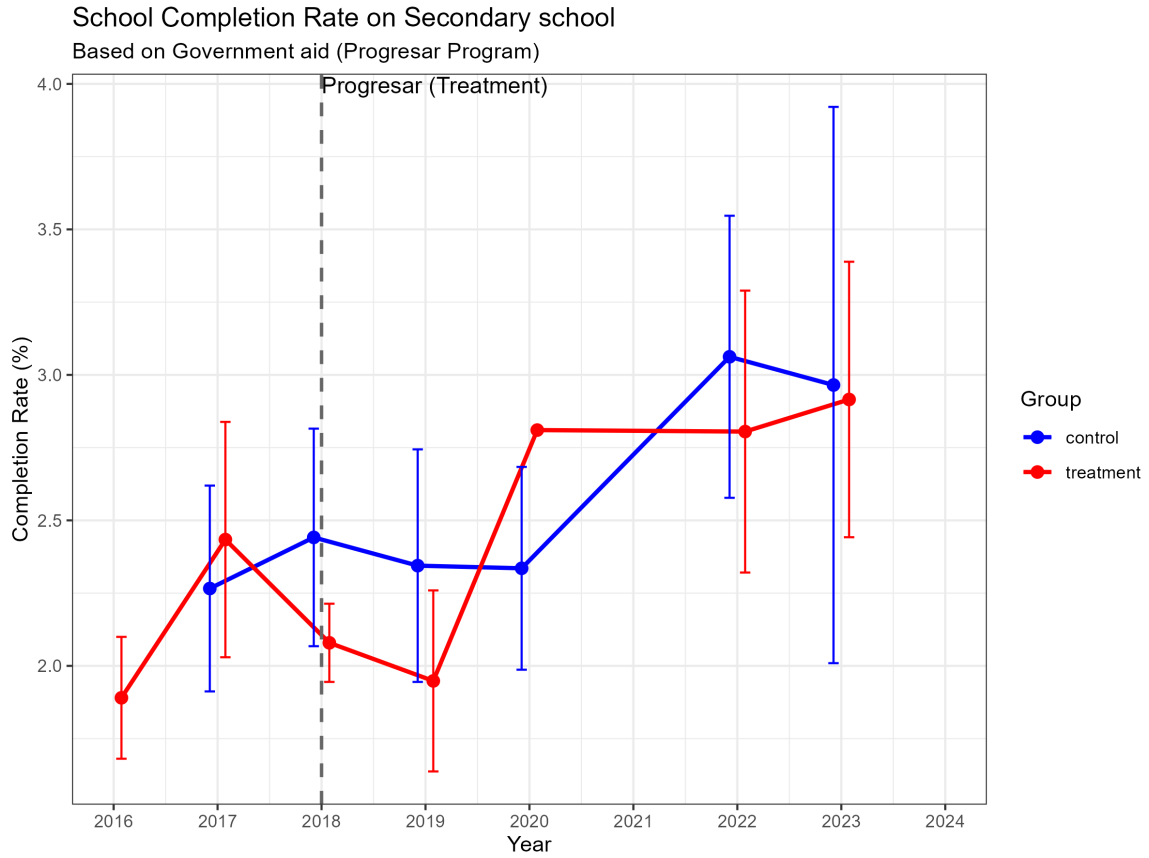


Figure S4

Figure Figure S5 - Polimodal

The Polimodal level, which in the Argentine system corresponds to the final two years of secondary education (ages 17 and 18), shows a an increase in school completion in 2019. However, this effect declines in 2020, likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that the initial gains were not sustained

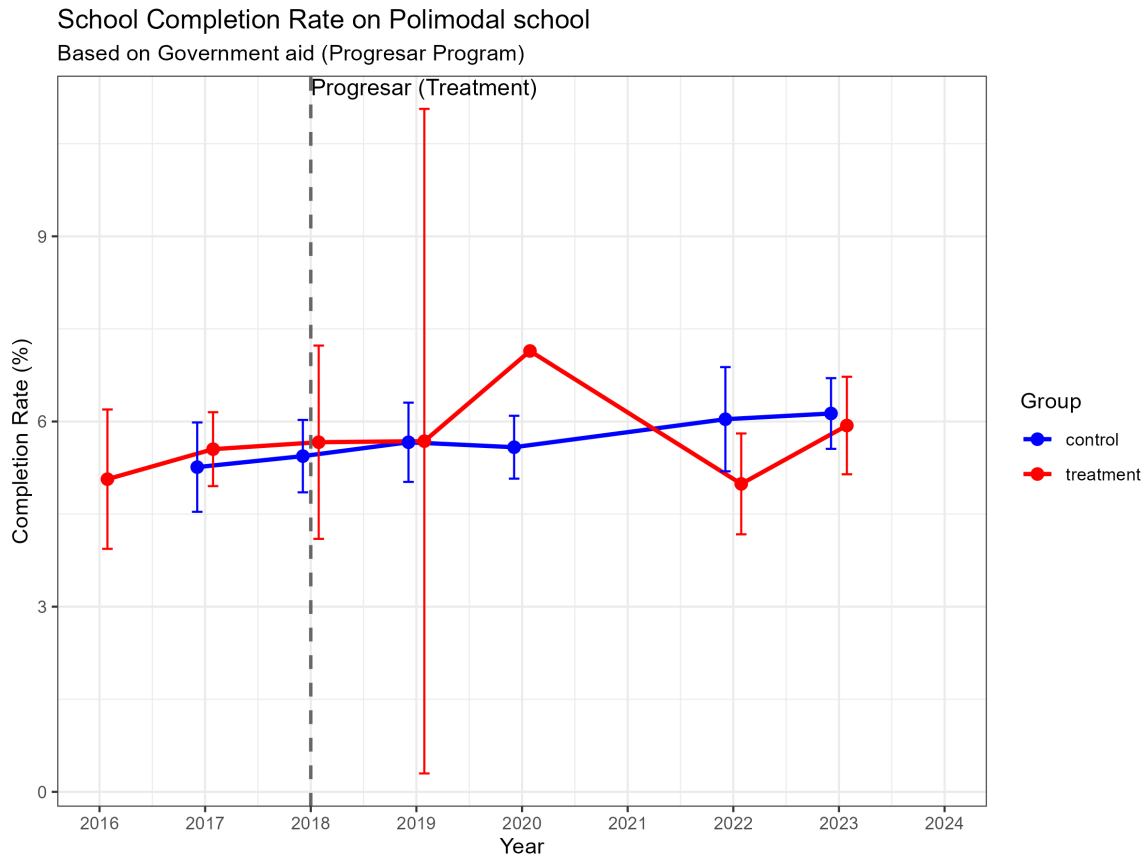


Figure S5

Figure Figure S6 – University At the university level, a similar pattern emerges. The effect becomes noticeable only a year after the treatment begins, but it quickly fades, suggesting that among young adults the impact of the program is also short-lived.

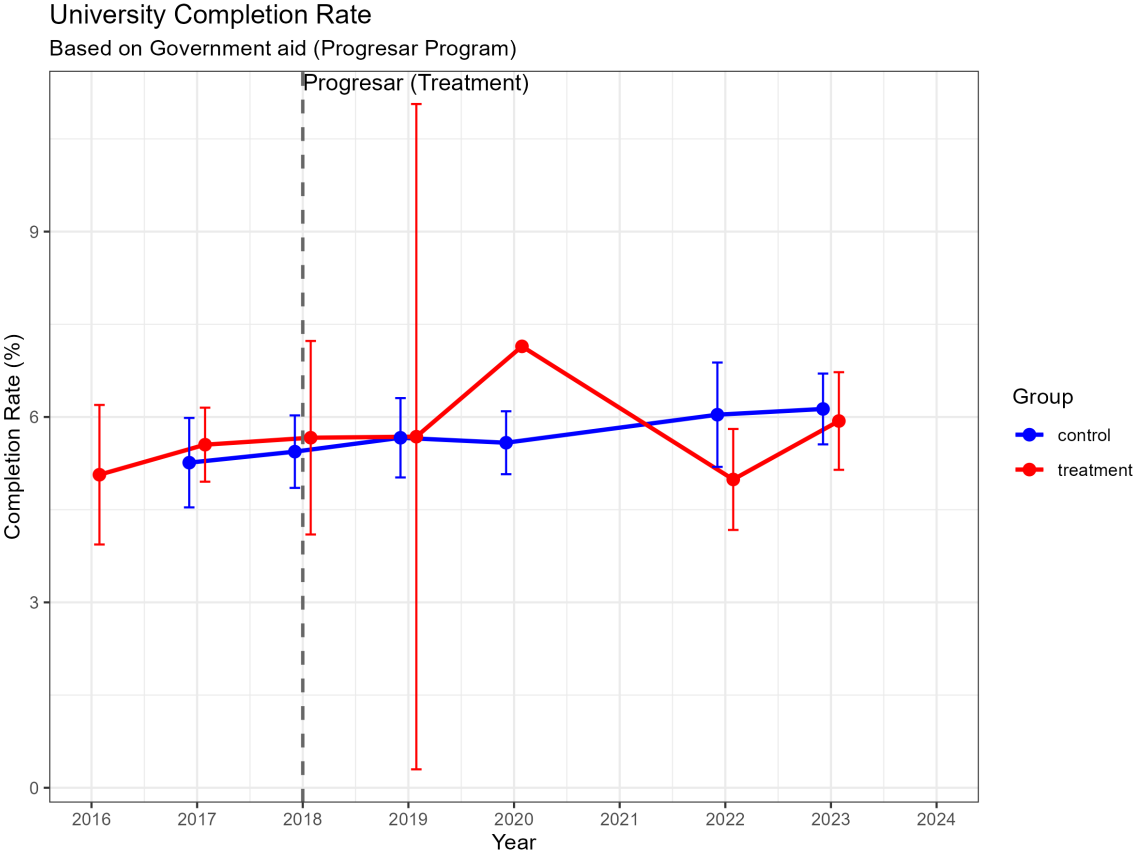


Figure S6

## **AI Transparency Statement**

### **Use of AI for Writing Support**

I employed artificial intelligence tools in a limited capacity to assist with the refinement of the written text. Specifically, I used AI to correct grammatical and syntactical errors in order to enhance readability and stylistic consistency. These interventions were strictly editorial in nature. The structure of the paper, the central argument, and the review of the relevant literature were developed independently in consultation with the advisor.

### **Use of AI for Coding Support**

I also used AI to resolve syntactical errors in R code. This primarily concerned the specification of regression models and the formatting of graphical output. The role of AI in this context was limited to correcting technical implementation issues, ensuring that the code executed properly.

### **Intellectual Contribution and Ownership**

The intellectual contribution of this paper—including its theoretical framing, methodological design, and empirical analysis—rests entirely with the author. AI assistance was confined to technical and editorial functions, comparable to the support that might otherwise be obtained from proofreading services or coding documentation. I remain solely responsible for the scholarly content, interpretation of findings, and framing the contribution to the literature.