¿Pura vida para quién? A Qualitative Study on the Removal of Benefits in Costa Rica's Conditional Cash Transfer Program *Avancemos* and its Effects on Secondary Students' Educational Trajectories and School-to-Work Transitions

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Abstract

This research examines the conditional cash transfer program *Avancemos* in Costa Rica, analyzing the effects of benefit removal on secondary students' educational trajectories and school-to-work transitions. The research employs a qualitative case study approach, drawing on Life Course Theory, school-to-work transition frameworks, and Rawlsian principles of social justice to understand how the lived experiences of students are affected when the benefit is removed. The study finds that while Avancemos effectively alleviated financial burdens and enabled student aspirations, its abrupt removal re-established significant financial barriers (e.g., for school materials, transportation, and food) for these vulnerable families, particularly exacerbating challenges for students in rural areas due to lacking local academic and labor market opportunities. Despite these barriers being put back into place, students largely demonstrated resilience and remained enrolled in school, suggesting that the monthly transfer enables intrinsic motivation by alleviating financial obstacles. These issues point to the need for policymakers to carefully consider the long-term implications on students' life trajectories when benefits are taken away.

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pura vida

1. *Dicho de una persona: Agradable o simpática.*
2. *Dicho de una cosa: Buena o agradable.*
3. *Dicho de una persona: Que goza de buena salud.*

(Real Academia Española, n.d.)

List of Abbreviations

CCT – conditional cash transfer

CRC – Costa Rican Colón

EPR – employment-to-population ratio

ILO – International Labour Organisation

IMAS – The Joint Institute for Social Aid

INEC – National Institute for Statistics and Census

LAC – Latin America and the Caribbean

LCT – Life Course Theory

MEP – The Ministry of Public Education

PSM – propensity score matching

STWT – school-to-work transition

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Overview of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs and Avancemos

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) are programs that provide financial assistance, typically to low-income households, contingent upon their commitment to making predetermined investments ("conditionalities") in their children's human capital, usually by means of healthcare (e.g., vaccinations) and/or education (e.g., school completion) (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). CCTs came into existence in the late 1990s, with some of the most famous programs being Mexico's *PROGRESA* (which has taken on other titles such as *Oportunidades*, *Prospera*, and *Becas para el Bienestar*) and Brazil's *Bolsa Família*. CCTs have since exploded both in terms of the number of participating countries, but also in terms of coverage within individual countries' programs, particularly in developing nations in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Sub-Saharan Africa (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009).

On a surface level, CCTs present themselves as a powerful and direct investment in human capital development, offering a pathway to improved health, education, and perhaps even poverty reduction. The underlying logic implies that financial incentives will directly translate into a healthier, more educated population, capable of escaping poverty. For children, the provision of financial support for school attendance and completion might be presumed to secure higher educational attainment, thereby enabling them to overcome economic disadvantages. The reality is, however, that the socioeconomic phenomenon that is poverty has complexities that transcend the capacity of financial assistance alone. This fundamental challenge identifies CCTs as a controversial instrument in modern social welfare discourse, especially when considering their educational and socioeconomic outcomes (or lack thereof). As a relatively young policy tool, thorough longitudinal evidence on their long-term impact on poverty reduction is still evolving, contributing to ongoing discussions about their sustained effectiveness.

Development of Avancemos Over the Years

Avancemos ("Let's Get Ahead") was established in 2006 with the primary goal of enhancing Costa Rica's human capital by supporting the education of low-income secondary students at risk of dropping out. However, after the country's economic recession in 2009, the program's focus gradually shifted. Under President Laura Chinchilla (2010-2014), eligibility criteria were relaxed, making the program more accessible to a wider audience. Her successor, Luís Guillermo Solís (2014-2018), standardized the stipend amounts, and later, Carlos Alvarado

(2018-2022) expanded the program to include primary school students and formally codified the CCT into law. Although the Program had begun as a tool for human capital development, it has most recently morphed into having a broader anti-poverty strategy (Borges, 2022).

Basics of the Avancemos Program

Avancemos is a national-scale program that focuses on families living in poverty with children in school years K-12 who require financial support to stay in or re-enter the public secondary education system.[1] After beneficiaries are enrolled based on poverty eligibility requirements, the student and guardian agree to meet certain co-responsibilities: students must attend a minimum of 80% of classes and cannot repeat a grade level more than two times. School enrollment and attendance are verified at the beginning, middle, and end of the academic year. Eligibility remains contingent on compliance with these co-responsibilities, with families at risk of losing access if they fail to meet the above-mentioned criteria, if their socioeconomic situation improves, or if the benefitting student exceeds 25 years of age (Hernández-Romero, 2016).

Monthly payments are delivered directly to the head of the household, which is usually the mother. Payment amounts increase depending on the student(s)' educational level to assist with rising costs associated with education; to further incentivize school attendance and educational achievement; and to reduce families' reliance on adolescent labor as the student reaches working age. There is no limit to the number of benefitting students in each family given that they meet eligibility requirements and co-responsibilities (Castellanos, 2015; Hernández-Romero, 2016). As of 2023, students in primary school receive 18,000 CRC ($36 USD) monthly; students in grades 7-9 receive 30,000 CRC ($60 USD) monthly; those in grades 10-12 receive 40,000 CRC ($80 USD) monthly (IMAS, 2023a).

Research Problem

In 2019, under the Alvarado administration, Avancemos reached its highest number of participating secondary students with a total of 203,205 (IMAS, 2020). Although this number slightly decreased in the final years under Alvarado, the largest decreases came during the administration of the current president of Costa Rica, Rodrigo Chaves (2022-2026). Chaves

[1] While Avancemos was initially created to only support secondary education, in 2022 it absorbed *Crecemos*, a similar CCT which provided economic incentives to families of students in preschool and primary education. It is now a unified program that still operates under the name Avancemos (IMAS, 2022).

assumed the presidency in May 2022 but starting in 2023, drastic changes came into effect for the Avancemos program. At the end of 2022, Avancemos had 188,810 secondary-aged beneficiaries (IMAS, 2023b). By the end of 2023, when Chaves had his first full year leading the country, the number of secondary-aged beneficiaries sharply declined to 122,084 (IMAS, 2024a). This number dipped even more at the end of 2024 reaching a low of 114,838 secondary-aged beneficiaries (IMAS, 2025).

The cutting of these benefits (or "scholarships," as they are often colloquially referred to) came to the public's attention in June 2023 when it was reported that fewer resources would be allocated to Avancemos, which would ultimately result in a reduction of over 113,000 benefits between primary and secondary students when compared to the year prior (Alvarado, 2023). Left-leaning politicians in the legislative assembly soon questioned and critiqued the current administration's priorities and "lack of social conscience" (Solano, 2023). However, the president of IMAS, Yorleny León, insisted that there were no cuts in benefits, but rather a "goal adjustment" since previous governments had implemented lofty goals without taking into account necessary financial resources (López & Martínez, 2023). The issue becomes even more convoluted in September 2023, when officials from the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) stated that the now 122,000 students who no longer received the benefit were not meeting the requirements of the Program, such as not meeting the poverty criteria, having graduated from public education, etc. (Cordero-Parra, 2023). What is more, Yorleny León further muddied the waters when she later admitted on March 3, 2024, that IMAS did in fact cut over 110,000 benefits; León justified these cuts once again stating that the previous government had "set the goal of 384,000 benefits irresponsibly knowing that there were 28 billion CRC missing." (Teletica, 2024).

Regardless of the reason for removing the benefit, it appears that it had a significant effect on the families who were impacted. Congressman Jonathan Acuña of the left-leaning political party *Frente Amplio*, was publicly outspoken on the issue and even received 766 complaints from affected families, which he later forwarded as an official memo to IMAS. Complaints included mothers discussing how they were unable to take their children or purchase materials such as notebooks and uniforms for their studies (Quirós, 2024). Public outcry went as far as to result in a protest organized by the Student Federation of the University of Costa Rica

(Matamoros, 2024). Eventually, however, IMAS would come to reinstate many of the long-missing benefits as they later announced that "starting in October, the Avancemos program will offer 100% coverage for high school students under the age of 18 who are registered as living in extreme poverty or basic poverty…" (IMAS, 2024b, para. 1). However, many students and their families went without this benefit for months, assuming that they got the benefit back at all. Was the damage already done?

Research Questions

Given the context of the above research problem, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How did the removal of Avancemos benefits affect the educational trajectories of secondary-aged students?
2. How did the removal of Avancemos benefits affect the school-to-work transitions of secondary-aged students?

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the existing literature on the challenges low-income youth face when transitioning from school to work in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), with particular attention to the Costa Rican context. We first examine the role of CCT programs with a focus on Avancemos, analyzing how these initiatives have attempted to reduce these barriers by incentivizing school retention and educational attainment among low-income youth. We then review both quantitative and qualitative research from Costa Rica and throughout LAC, highlighting the double-edged sword nature of CCTs: that they offer short-term financial support and improvements in education, yet they often fail to address deeper structural inequalities. We next address the mixed evidence regarding the long-term impact of CCTs, not only in improving educational outcomes, but also in facilitating meaningful access to the labor market. As a key part of the present study, we then address the consequences of CCT benefit removal or interruption in programs from other countries, demonstrating how student outcomes can be influenced when economic support is taken away. Next, we identify persistent structural barriers within LAC such as high youth unemployment, widespread labor market informality, and mismatches between skills acquired through education and those demanded by employers; all of which limit young people's access to stable and decent work, even if they are receiving a CCT benefit in the first place. Finally, the conclusion identifies critical gaps in the literature as it stands.

CCTs and Educational and Employment Outcomes

Empirical Evidence on Avancemos

Research on Avancemos can offer critical insights into the broad effectiveness, as well as the complications, of CCTs on educational outcomes in Costa Rica. Early quantitative studies, such as those by Duryea and Morrison (2004), focused on the program's precursor, *Superémonos*, and found that between 2.9 and 8.7% of beneficiaries are more likely to attend school compared to non-beneficiaries, but limited improvement in terms of students' academic grades, being that beneficiaries are just as likely to pass their classes as their non-beneficiary peers. The authors do

note, however, that their methodology has potential flaws, particularly their use of propensity score matching (PSM) in which they state, “our sample sizes may not always be sufficiently large enough to demonstrate significant differences across groups” (Duryea & Morrison, 2004, p. 14).

As the program evolved into Avancemos and expanded nationally, later research produced more favorable findings. Mata and Hernández (2015), analyzing data from the program’s initial years (2006-2007), use PSM and difference-in-differences methods to compare beneficiaries with non-beneficiaries. Their findings indicate a 14-16% reduction in dropout rates, suggesting that the financial support enabled a portion of beneficiaries to remain enrolled during the initial years of the program. Similar to the above study, the authors note limitations such as an overall small sample size and their quantitative methods having to rely on “stronger assumptions than other methods of evaluation” (Mata & Hernández, 2015, p. 18).

Building on these studies, Meza-Cordero and Gulemetova (2023) conducted more extensive longitudinal research using national survey data from 2006-2014. Applying similar statistical techniques, their study found that participating in Avancemos was associated with a 27% increase in school attendance with stronger effects for males (29%) and rural youth (over 31%), and the largest gains (55%) among students aged 18-21. Further, beneficiaries completed an average of 0.72 additional years of schooling, with the most significant gains again among male students (0.85 years). Crucially, however, the study states that poverty alone does not necessarily account for dropout; factors such as lack of interest in formal education, low school quality, and lack of information on the benefits of staying in school also emerged as key factors. Unfortunately, however, due to its use of PSM methods, this study also suffers from reliance on strong assumptions, notably that “Avancemos participants and nonparticipants did not differ in unobservable variables such as student motivation and parental pressures” (Meza-Cordero & Gulemetova, 2023, p. 38).

Further investigating Avancemos’s impact, Venegas-Cantillano et al. (2024) analyzed national survey data from 2015-2018, focusing on secondary school attendance among youth aged 12-19 and thus finding a statistically significant increase of 16%. Notably, the program appeared more effective in reintegrating students who had already left the system compared to retaining those still in school, with particularly strong results for boys and rural students in lower

secondary grades. Although attendance is a quantitatively measurable indicator, simply sitting at a desk does not equal educational attainment. Further, the researchers also note that "actual attendance (absenteeism) nor official enrollment cannot be verified through the survey, nor can it be confirmed if the person remains in the educational system in later months of the same year after the measurement was taken (which is done in June)" (Venegas-Cantillano et al., 2024, p. 3). This highlights that the data may not capture the full extent of educational engagement or longer-term retention within the same academic year.

Qualitative research has furthered the understanding of Avancemos's impact by investigating the motivations and constraints experienced by program beneficiaries. Castellanos (2015) finds that while rural youth often cite personal aspirations as their primary motivation to remain in school, Avancemos plays an enabling role by reducing financial burdens that might otherwise limit those aspirations. Parents with lower levels of formal education believed secondary schooling to be necessary in order to have upward social mobility. Thus, parents saw the program as more than just a monthly transfer. Families also said that the stipend was important for meeting basic needs of the home and for their children's education. Finally, the study cites lack of interest in formal education as a common reason for dropping out.

Lastly, Vargas-Brenes et al. (2012) provide an important dimension for qualitative research by interviewing students who dropped out of school despite receiving the Avancemos benefit. According to their findings, these students faced various barriers influencing their decision to ultimately abandon their studies. Reasons such as rural location and lack of support from teachers and peers all contributed to dropout regardless of the monetary incentive. These findings, however, are not necessarily generalizable to the wider population due to small sample sizes. Regardless, the researchers' conclusions align with Meza-Cordero and Gulemetova's (2023) broader argument: while economic assistance is necessary, it is not enough. Emotional, social, and institutional support structures are essential to ensure that students remain engaged and succeed.

Although limited, the evidence on Avancemos reveals a program that has achieved measurable gains in school attendance, especially for older youth, male students, and those in rural areas. However, the program's broader impact is later shaped by structural, institutional, and motivational factors. Quantitative studies affirm that the program has been particularly

effective in re-engaging dropouts, while qualitative research demonstrates the need for multidimensional strategies that go beyond cash transfers alone. Addressing household vulnerability, school quality, and student aspirations altogether is essential if CCTs like Avancemos are to promote not only access, but continued success in education.

Empirical Evidence from Other Countries' CCTs

Outside of Costa Rica, several studies corroborate the positive impact of CCTs on participation in school, especially at the secondary level. For example, Behrman et al. (2019) analyze administrative and testing data from Mexico's *Prospera* program, finding significant increases in enrollment rates at both middle and high school levels. Notably, the program shifted students initially toward online high schools before a later trend toward general high schools. While most research has focused on enrollment gains, this study is among the few to also find small but statistically significant improvements in academic achievement, particularly among Indigenous students. However, the researchers' method for calculating school enrollment is questionable. They used students' presence for the ENLACE national exam as an indicator, which they themselves admit is "an underestimation of the continuity of enrollment" (Behrman et al., 2019, p. 19). This is because some enrolled students might be absent on test day, or they might have repeated a grade and therefore would not take that specific exam.

The long-term educational and work-related outcomes of CCT programs have also been mixed. Millán et al. (2019) review the broader evidence on CCTs and identify consistent gains in educational attainment among children exposed to these programs. Yet, when it comes to learning outcomes, employment quality, or income, the effects are less clear and often statistically inconclusive, in part because many beneficiaries have not yet reached full adulthood or because studies lack sufficient longitudinal data.

Notably, however, one of the most rigorous long-term studies comes from Nicaragua, where Barham et al. (2013) evaluate the *Red de Protección Social*, a short-lived CCT program, ten years after it had ended. Even though this program only lasted for three years, the cohort of boys aged 9-12 under study retained positive impacts as a result of the CCT, specifically on finishing school in addition to improved language and math achievement. Barham et al. (2024) conducted a follow-up study on a cohort of students aged 9-12, a critical age for program participation due to higher dropout risks. Their findings indicate that involvement in the program

led to better labor market integration for both male and female participants in adulthood. Gendered effects, however, include higher earnings for men but both improved cognitive and reproductive health outcomes for women. While both studies (Barham et al., 2013; Barham et al., 2024) report largely positive long-term outcomes, they only focus on one specific cohort of students aged 9-12, limiting the ability to further generalize the benefit's impacts to other students outside of this demographic.

Other studies raise concerns about the limitations of CCTs in supporting transitions beyond school. de Oliveira and Pelinski-Raiher (2021), for example, analyze Brazil's *Bolsa Família* and find that while the program includes poor youth in education, it does little to improve their later outcomes in the formal labor market. Beneficiaries tend to remain in informal employment, earn lower wages, and face higher rates of unemployment. Additionally, due to program eligibility requirements, some youth may even intentionally avoid formal employment or underreport income in order to retain benefits, suggesting a discouragement to formal labor force participation. Unfortunately, however, this study shares the common limitation of using PSM, which has affected similar research as previously noted. Most importantly, the authors admit that they do not account for the severe economic crisis that occurred in Brazil in 2015, which would undoubtedly impact the general population's participation in the labor market.

A similar disconnect between educational gains and labor market success is observed by Rodríguez-Oreggia and Freije (2012) in their study of Mexico's *Progresa*/*Oportunidades* program. Analyzing data collected ten years after the program's launch, the study focuses on young adults aged 14-24 who remained in their original rural communities. Despite the program's well-recognized contributions to human capital development, the researchers find limited statistically significant effects on employment probability, wages, and occupational mobility when compared to the previous generation. These findings reinforce concerns that improved schooling alone may not result in better job prospects in contexts where labor markets are still weak and struggling.

Another area of emerging interest is whether CCTs shift beneficiaries' aspirations and decision-making. Outside of LAC, Dutta and Sen (2022) investigate *Kanyashree Prakalpa*, a CCT program in West Bengal, India, designed to reduce early marriage and promote girls' education. Their mixed-methods study finds that access to cash transfers empowers girls to

aspire to higher education and professional careers, challenging traditional gender norms and expanding life opportunities. While set in a different regional context, this research suggests that CCTs may foster not only behavioral changes but also shifts in values and expectations. This is yet another study that is limited by use of PSM. Further, this study focuses solely on girls' aspirations and not concrete outcomes of higher education and labor market participation.

Other studies are more skeptical of educational aspirations. Contreras-Suárez and Cameron (2020), using a regression discontinuity design, find that Colombia's *Familias en Acción* does not improve parents' educational aspirations for their children. In fact, participation is associated with a lower perceived likelihood of children completing higher education. This suggests that while CCTs may incentivize short-term educational behaviors, they do not necessarily cultivate long-term educational ambitions. The authors suggest that the monetary benefit and conditionalities of the program are what motivate households to send their children to school rather than educational aspirations.

Qualitative research provides additional perspectives on how recipients perceive the long-term objectives of CCTs. Breckin (2023), in a study of adult *Prospera* participants in Mexico, finds that many families believe the program helped their children avoid repeating the poverty cycle through educational attainment; participants demonstrated a clear understanding of the program's goals and reported improvements in their children's life opportunities. Crucially, however, the study relies on interviews with parents/guardians, rather than direct engagement with youth participants, meaning that the data reflect student experiences as interpreted by their caregivers. Regardless, these narratives highlight the importance of evaluating program outcomes not only through statistical indicators but also through lived experiences.

Although CCTs have demonstrated significant success in boosting school enrollment, attendance, and alleviating short-term poverty, their impacts on employment, aspirations, and transitions into adulthood remain uneven. Evidence suggests that without complementary services and a stronger focus on long-term trajectories, these programs risk falling short of their transformative potential.

Cessation of CCT Benefits in Latin American and the Caribbean and Beyond

The consequences of the sudden withdrawal of CCT benefits on student participants remain an underexplored area in the academic literature. However, there is growing evidence

suggesting that students and their families experience negative outcomes when they are removed from such programs. The unexpected removal of Avancemos benefits for some students in Costa Rica is a unique case in the grand scheme of CCT literature. Nevertheless, comparative examples drawn from other CCTs and welfare programs across LAC and beyond provide valuable context.

An especially relevant study explores the unintended effects on students that arose when Mexico's *Progresa* CCT ended. Wiegand (2019) finds that students who received the benefit during lower secondary level were 10-14% less likely to transition to upper secondary schooling after the payments ended. This implies that, due to the nature of the program, the recipients became dependent on the money and not truly invested in education. Interestingly, peers who did not receive the benefit actually showed increases in school attendance. Wiegand draws on behavioral economics to explain these results. Loss aversion, anchoring, and particularly the idea of motivation crowding, show how removal of benefits may very well cause demotivation. Within the same Mexican context, Márquez-Padilla et al. (2025) analyze the impact of Mexico's subsequent CCT, *Prospera*, with a difference-in-differences model. According to the researchers, the loss of benefits prompted significant drops in school enrollment, especially among secondary school-aged boys, and increases in adolescent labor. The study also critiques the replacement program, *Becas Benito Juárez*, for reducing coverage in the poorest communities, addressing the risks of abrupt shifts within long-established social protection institutions.

Similar patterns are observed in Colombia. Barrientos and Villa (2017), using a regression discontinuity design, evaluate the effects of later exclusion from *Familias en Acción* due to changes in eligibility criteria. Their findings show that losing access reversed previous gains in children's schooling and disrupted adult labor patterns, with a notable decline in formal employment among men. The study suggests that exclusion may not be a final exit but part of a recurring cycle, as many families eventually regained eligibility, a dynamic that raises questions about the rigidity and timing of exit strategies. The authors also propose that their "findings have far-reaching implications for the design and implementation of conditional cash transfer programmes, and more broadly for antipoverty transfer programmes" (Barrientos & Villa, 2017, p. 6), however, this could be a dangerous assumption without taking into account varying cultural, economic, and political contexts.

Studies have also uncovered challenges with engagement and retention in CCT programs. The team Asesorías para el Desarrollo (2005), through a mixed-methods study, investigated why some families declined to participate in or voluntarily exited *Programa Puente*, part of the *Solidario* social protection system in Chile. Findings point to multiple barriers, including inconsistent income, health issues, poor housing conditions, and generalized distrust in the system. Families often said the program conditionalities were either not aligned with their own realities or families viewed the conditionalities as too complicated. Reininger et al. (2018) expand on this by examining Chile's Ethical Family Wage program, focusing on involuntary exits due to non-compliance with program conditionalities Their analysis finds that voluntarily leaving the program was more common among households headed by women, young adults, and single parents, suggesting further inequities for populations who are more at-risk.

A similar concern comes from Uruguay, where Rossel et al. (2017) examine how conditionalities in the Family Allowances program can actually deepen vulnerability. Interviews with suspended beneficiaries reveal that program rules were not always transparent or effectively communicated. Limited access to health and education services worsened the risk of noncompliance, ultimately pushing families who were already in dangerous situations into deeper hardship. While an important first step, this research is still exploratory in nature as it seeks to "open the black box" (Rossel et al., 2017, p. 9) of causal relationships rather than testing whether vulnerability actually increases.

In the United States, Riccio and Miller (2016) assess the Opportunity NYC pilot, a short-lived CCT designed to reduce poverty and improve educational outcomes. Although the program at first succeeded in bringing families above the poverty line, those improvements disappeared soon after the program ended. In terms of education, the most beneficial outcomes were found among ninth-grade students who were already performing at or above grade level, particularly in reading; this group experienced higher graduation rates and increased enrollment in four-year universities. There is also some evidence of longer-term cognitive gains among younger children. However, the program had little to no lasting effect on elementary and middle school students, or on high school students who had struggled academically from the outset. These findings demonstrate that the program only provides short-term poverty relief and long-term educational improvements, but only for students who were already academically advanced.

Further, the program appears to not be as effective for students in elementary or middle school as compared to those in high school.

Lastly, Heinrich and Brill (2015) provide further evidence on the complications of pausing CCT benefits. In their research on the Child Support Grant in South Africa, the authors find that unclear eligibility rules and bureaucratic barriers often led to "dose loss," or intermittent access to benefits. These pauses in benefits were linked to lower educational attainment, particularly for girls, and an increase of risky behavior for youth overall. The study highlights the importance of consistency and clarity in these kinds of programs to ensure that cash transfers deliver their intended outcomes.

Altogether, this body of research addresses the importance of program continuity, careful attention to exit processes, and, perhaps most importantly, the long-term consequences of benefit removal. Whether through abrupt policy changes, administrative exclusions, or issues with enforcing policy, the withdrawal of CCTs can produce unintended outcomes that undermine both educational and developmental gains. These findings suggest that CCTs are not just financial tools, rather, they are embedded within broader institutional and social systems. Therefore, their design and exit strategies must be handled with special attention to the life trajectories of beneficiaries and the social contexts that mediate their impact.

Challenges and Trends in School-to-Work Transitions and Youth Employment in Costa Rica and Latin America and the Caribbean at Large

While CCTs attempt to reduce or even eliminate poverty, their method of doing so involves human capital investments, particularly in education and health (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). If the goal of this human capital development is to improve the employability of low-income individuals as a means to alleviate poverty, it is imperative to assess what exactly the prevailing labor market conditions within the region are in the first place.

Youth (un)employment remains one of the most pressing challenges throughout the general economy of LAC. While youth unemployment saw a small decrease from 14.5% in 2023 to 13.8% in 2024, it still remains almost three times higher than the adult rate (ILO, 2025). Young people aged 15 to 24 continue to face limited employment opportunities, especially within a regional context of high informality, a lack of new jobs, poor economic productivity,

and low wages. The International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies the persistent lack of stable and well-paid jobs for youth as a central concern for the region's future labor market.

A comprehensive ILO (2024) assessment places these trends in a longer-term perspective. Between 2000 and 2023, the youth unemployment rate in LAC fell from 14.7% to 11.6%, reaching historic lows during the post-pandemic recovery. Unfortunately, however, this improvement hides deeper structural issues: for example, the youth employment-to-population ratio (EPR) declined from 44.6% to 40.4% during the same period. This drop may reflect increased school participation or reduced working poverty, but it also indicates declining access to employment for youth. At the same time, age-based disparities widened: the youth-to-adult unemployment rate ratio rose from 2.5 to 2.8, and the youth-to-adult EPR ratio dropped from 0.7 to 0.6. Subjective assessments by youth further corroborate these issues. From 2017 to 2022, nearly 76% of young people across LAC reported concerns about job security, and by 2022, fewer than half believed their standard of living exceeded that of their parents. Additionally, in 2022, 79% of LAC youth stated that economic opportunities in their countries were insufficient (ILO, 2024).

In Costa Rica specifically, youth unemployment remains significantly higher than both the national adult unemployment rate and the regional youth average. As of the last trimester of 2024, 18.8% of Costa Ricans aged 15 to 24 were unemployed, which is well over double the adult rate of 6.9% (INEC, 2025) and still significantly higher than the LAC regional youth average of 13.8% (ILO, 2025). Although this is an improvement from the 48% youth unemployment peak during the COVID-19 pandemic (INEC, 2020), this substantial challenge remains.

Despite increasing levels of educational attainment, access to formal employment has not improved proportionately in LAC. Caroline Fawcett (2003) conceptualizes the school-to-work transition (STWT) as a "point of departure" to understand persistent patterns of youth unemployment in the region; in fact, many of the dynamics she identifies remain relevant today. Particularly, Fawcett notes a paradox in which rising education levels sometimes exacerbate competition for a limited number of decent jobs. In Costa Rica, nearly 70% of unemployed youth aged 15 to 25 have only 0 to 3 years of education, exacerbating the continued disadvantage for those with limited schooling (Fawcett, 2003).

One's socioeconomic background further shapes labor market outcomes. Youth from lower-income households face significantly higher barriers to employment. In Costa Rica, youth unemployment reaches 45% among those in the lowest income quintile, compared to just 9% among their wealthier peers (Gontero, 2023). These disparities are compounded by skill mismatches, informal labor, and unequal access to social protection.

Alam and de Diego (2019) emphasize the role of supply (of supply and demand) barriers to youth employment across LAC. On the supply side, while educational attainment has increased, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) remain underutilized. This disconnect exists between the skills that youth acquire in school and those that employers are seeking. For example, between 30 and 60% of youth in countries such as Bolivia and Colombia reported that their education was not relevant or only somewhat relevant to their current job (World Bank STEP surveys, as cited in Alam & de Diego, 2019).

These trends highlight the complex and complicated nature of youth employment challenges in LAC in the current job market. Structural inequalities, labor market informality, and mismatches between education and employment continue to limit opportunities for young people, making the STWT a critical area for policy intervention and social investment.

Research Gaps

Despite the large body of research on CCTs in LAC, there are still several significant gaps in the literature, particularly in regard to Costa Rica's Avancemos program and its role in shaping young people's educational and life trajectories. Much of the existing literature on Avancemos focuses on school enrollment and attendance, with little attention to post-secondary outcomes like educational paths, labor market insertion, or broader life trajectories.

Further, while several studies evaluate Avancemos while the benefit is active, few explore the consequences of its removal. Given the recent disruptions of the benefit in Costa Rica, there is an urgent need to understand how the suspension or termination of the benefit affects students and their families. There are still questions as to whether or not loss of financial support leads to changes in educational retention and career pathways, not to mention other areas of potential research such as students' emotional well-being or long-term aspirations. These issues are further compounded by the lack of longitudinal or follow-up studies that examine outcomes beyond immediate educational indicators.

Another area where the current literature is lacking is investigating young people's own goals and decision-making processes. Although work by Castellanos (2015) and Meza-Cordero and Gulemetova (2023) begins to address students' intrinsic motivations, most research on Avancemos focuses on macro-level outcomes rather than micro-level subjective experiences. As a result, there is a limited understanding of how students themselves interpret their own educational and professional trajectories, particularly in contexts of economic uncertainty or social vulnerability.

At the regional level, there is also a lack of comparative work focused on CCTs across Central America. Countries like Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico are prominently featured in CCT literature, yet smaller Central American nations remain underrepresented. Comparative analysis between Avancemos and programs such as Nicaragua's discontinued *Red de Protección Social* could reveal findings into the local contexts of program success.

Finally, few studies apply a life course perspective to analyze how social welfare policies intersect with transition periods during youth development. In particular, there is little theoretical application of how factors such as timing, historical context, and linked lives shape the experiences of young people navigating critical life stages such as school and work. LCT frameworks of life trajectories and agency offer a promising lens for better understanding the broader implications of CCT programs.

These gaps point to the need for research that not only evaluates educational outcomes in the short term, but also considers young people's long-term trajectories, lived experiences, and the social contexts in which they make decisions. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing more equitable and effective social protection policies for Costa Rican youth.

Conclusion

The empirical literature on CCT programs as a whole shows student beneficiaries have higher school attendance and higher educational achievement. These immediate indicators, however, do not necessarily translate into long-term educational and labor market outcomes. Avancemos is particularly successful in supporting rural and male students as well as re-engaging early school leavers, but its effectiveness is often lessened due to non-economic barriers. These include low school quality, unsupportive family or peer networks, and weak intrinsic aspirations or motivation. The flaws in the program align with more extensive LAC

trends where CCTs resolve immediate financial barriers to schooling but fail to change structural inequalities such as poor labor markets and a lack of post-secondary opportunities.

This review of the literature suggests that cash transfers are not a magic pill and must be supplemented by investments in education quality, vocational training as well as local labor market building. CCTs without holistic and contextual strategies will not create a sustainable pathway out of poverty. Instead, it will only provide temporary and partial relief. The present study addresses this claim as we shall later look at the consequences of removing the Avancemos benefit and how it may affect low-income youth's educational and career trajectories.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of this study which is based in Life Course Theory (LCT). We then explore further insights on school-to-work transitions as they fit within LCT and finally end with Rawlsian principles of social justice. Overall, the framework allows for an analysis that takes into consideration the dimensions of LCT in addition to ethical implications of social welfare policy.

Life Course Theory

The center of the theoretical framework of this study is based on LCT as established by Glen H. Elder and his book, Children of the Great Depression (1974/1999). Elder's longitudinal study on youth growing up during this time period examined the way in which historical and economic contexts shape one's life course. His findings affirmed that these children relied upon social networks and family support to recover from hardships during the Great Depression. Elder's work speaks to human agency, especially the ability for individuals to make choices regardless of social structures.

LCT establishes five principles on which the life course can be altered. Elder et al. (2002) delineate these principles as the following:

1. **The Principle of Lifespan Development:** This principle addresses the importance of long-term developmental processes for the entire lifespan, beyond just youth and adolescence and even into adulthood and ultimately up until death. By studying individuals' lives over significant periods of time, it may allow us to better understand how social changes affect one's development over the entire lifespan.

2. **The Principle of Agency:** Individuals shape their life course through choices and actions made within the limits of their social and historical context. Individuals are not passive agents of their situation, but instead they navigate options and make decisions based on what they perceive is possible given their available resources.

3. **The Principle of Time and Place**: Individuals' life trajectories are shaped by their experience of historical events and geographic locations throughout their lifetime.

4. **The Principle of Timing:** The timing of life events can significantly affect outcomes. In other words, a given event may alter an individual's life trajectory in a different way or to a different degree had it occurred during a different life stage (e.g., childhood, adolescence, adulthood).

5. **The Principle of Linked Lives:** This principle focuses on the interconnectedness of individuals' lives, especially the closest relationships between one's family and friends.

Shanahan (2000) expanded on LCT work by examining how different socioeconomic and historical events influence the timing and duration of life stages, not to mention disproportionate effects brought on by differences in race and class. Shanahan also explores how youth construct their biographies throughout diverse economic and institutional contexts. Heinz (2009) furthers this by examining how youth are able to achieve multiple transitions at the same time while still maintaining biographical continuity, even doing so when faced with disruptions in their life courses. Heinz also notes that aspects such as social class influence these transitions, a key point applicable to the present research involving low-income youth. Mayer and Müller (1984) provide yet another interesting perspective on the life course stating that trajectories are influenced when the welfare state provides economic support and employment opportunities.

The idea of the welfare state influencing life courses has emerged as another area of focus. Kohli (1986) argues that the state standardizes transitions through public services which in turn affects individual experiences. He defines a "tripartition" of the life course, that being preparation, activity and retirement. For the purposes of this study, preparation could be seen as education and activity as work.

School-to-Work Transitions

The school-to-work transition (STWT) can be defined as the specific stage in the life course in which young people move from education or training to the labor market. This process is not a simple or linear one as it often includes multiple stages and pathways that reflect larger social and economic influences (Kerckhoff, 2003; Sepúlveda, 2006). Scholars advocate for understanding youth not as a singular life stage, but instead more so as transition paradigms. For example, Roberts (2018) proposes an "origins-routes-destinations" model where one's background influence the routes taken, thus determining specific life outcomes.

The STWT is often associated with other social transitions like leaving the parental home, getting married, and starting a family, at least in the western world (Kerckchoff, 2003). However, this process has started to become more protracted and less uniform compared to previous generations. Key differences between current STWTs and previous generation's STWTs include precarious work, going back to school, or even a combination of these two at the same time (Corica & Otero, 2020). Researchers now propose more flexible and individualized trajectories and transitions instead of traditional linear models commonly associated with these previous generations (Sepúlveda, 2006).

The STWT can also provide a key vantage point for the analysis of change and continuity in the overall life course. Choices made during the STWT can have enduring, life-long consequences (Mills & Blossfeld, 2005). In fact, the STWT can actually impact the overall well-being and social positioning of youth (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019). Youth also use their entry into the labor market as a way establishing personal identity and meaning, not to mention for economic reasons as well (CEPAL/OIJ, 2003).

Structural and institutional factors also interact in shaping the STWT. Conditions within the labor market play a defining role in structuring young people's opportunities (Mills & Blossfeld, 2005; Corica & Otero, 2020). Education systems and workplace policies mediate the STWT (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019) and links between schools and employers can significantly affect pathways into work (Kerckhoff, 2003). In this regard, institutional "transition regimes" or "filters" differ depending on national contexts since they naturally differ in terms of levels of structuring these transitions.

The STWT is further influenced by social class and family background. Class, gender, race, and disability all shape length, smoothness, and outcomes of these transitions (Irwin & Nilsen, 2018). Youth from upper-class families may benefit from better and longer periods of education or more social capital. Youth from disadvantaged families, on the other hand, may experience early school leaving and immediate entry into poorly paid or unstable jobs (Alves, 2018; Corica & Otero, 2020). The unique role of intergenerational support can also alleviate some of these concerns, particularly in times of economic uncertainty (Brannen et al. 2018).

The STWT must also be understood as an interaction between structural forces and individual agency. Institutional and economic contexts influence these possible trajectories

(Heckhausen & Buchmann, 2018), but young people are not mere passive actors in this case. In fact, they actively make decisions and exercise agency based on their available resources and their aspirations (Mortimer et al., 2003; Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019). Agency, however, still remains rooted in sociocultural contexts although it may help mitigate some disadvantages. Even so, agency does not eliminate the structural barriers that shape transition pathways.

The STWT poses particular challenges in LAC. Young people face barriers to entering the labor market due to lack of experience (Espinosa, 2006) and even discrimination from employers based on physical appearance (Schkolnik, 2006). Thus, some youth rely on social networks or their own meritocratic beliefs, focusing instead on their own individual effort and resilience (Sepúlveda, 2006). These strategies demonstrate how agency is often used when disadvantaged youth are up against negative external influences.

It is clear that the STWT is an extremely complex process that involves broader life course developments shaped by agency, social background, institutions, and economic forces. It is therefore crucial to study this critical stage within the life course to understand how young people are responding to a changing world in the face of adversity.

Rawlsian Principles

John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (1971) provides a normative lens through which we can examine the potential consequences of CCT programs like Avancemos when benefits are removed. Rawlsian theory is grounded in two fundamental principles:

The Principle of Equal Liberty states that every person should have equal rights to basic liberties, including education. This principle supports the argument that financial assistance to low-income students should allow for equal educational opportunities. Analyzing Avancemos through this principle allows us to assess how the removal of benefits might infringe upon liberties by reintroducing constraints on access and opportunity in education.

The Difference Principle states that social and economic inequalities are permitted only if and when it benefits the least advantaged members of society. Regarding the removal of Avancemos benefits, the difference principle compels us to ask: does removing the benefit serve or harm the most vulnerable students? If the removal leads to worse educational, economic, or

life-course outcomes for low-income youth, this would suggest violating this principle and thus an injustice to the most disadvantaged group.

These principles allow for a deeper evaluation of CCT programs like Avancemos in terms of justice. Do such programs truly expand liberty and opportunity for these individuals? Will the withdrawal of these benefits ultimately hurt the people they are protecting now? These questions and more are what this research aims to explore.

Conclusion

This theoretical framework integrates not only LCT and STWT theories, but also Rawlsian principles of justice to evaluate the consequences of CCT benefit removal. LCT gives a temporal and relational framework, focusing on dimension such as timing and linked lives can shape trajectories. This is useful as it can be applied to study how withdrawal of financial support at crucial stages alters life course trajectories. The literature in STWTs places the life course within broader institutional and economic contexts and shows how a loss of support can compound existing inequalities and limit the future prospects of disadvantaged youth for decent work. Finally, Rawlsian theory introduces a normative dimension to the analysis, compelling us to evaluate the justice and fairness of when the benefit is removed. This collective framework allows for a multidimensional perspective which brings agency, crucial life-stages, and normative implications together. This ultimately guides the research in assessing not only what happens when students lose their Avancemos benefits, but why it matters for individuals and society as a whole.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology and processes used in this qualitative case study. This section describes the research design and rationale, sampling strategy, data collection method, and data analysis technique used. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the positionality of the researcher and the ethical considerations that guided the research.

Research Design and Rationale

This research is a qualitative case study grounded in an interpretivist epistemology. Given the study's goal to better understand how young students and their families interpret the removal of CCT benefits, a qualitative approach offers depth, richness, and flexibility to best capture these complex and nuanced perspectives. Instead of seeking causal generalizations, this study focuses on how young people make meaning of their lives and how abrupt changes can alter their educational and work-related trajectories, all within social and institutional constraints.

As noted by the previously mentioned theoretical framework, the design of this research is based on LCT and STWT frameworks as well as Rawlsian principles of justice. The integration of these theories provides a strong approach in examining how the loss of CCT benefits may influence secondary students' educational trajectories and STWTs while emphasizing justice and equity for socioeconomically disadvantaged youth.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was utilized for this research. The sample for this study includes students and their families from the San José, Guanacaste, and Limón provinces of Costa Rica; by sampling these provinces, both urban and rural populations were represented in the collected data. In order to maintain within the scope of the study, the following parameters were established to determine whether interviewees were eligible candidates: 1.) The student (and their family) at some point has had the CCT benefit removed; 2.) The affected student(s) is currently in secondary school or has at least participated in secondary school, in the case that they have already abandoned their studies.

In order to find eligible interviewees for the research, multiple strategies were employed: firstly, I contacted a local congressperson who had been publicly outspoken on the issue regarding the removal of Avancemos benefits. This then gave me access to a "leader of mothers" who maintained a WhatsApp group of many families throughout the country who had been

affected by the removal of benefits. While I did not have direct access to this group chat, this leader of mothers communicated on my behalf, and allowed me access to some families. A second method I utilized was professional connections at a post-secondary institution, the *Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje*, where I once taught English. These former colleagues of mine spread the word of my research and I even visited English classes to speak with students as well. Finally, I utilized social media, particularly Facebook and Instagram, to find families interested in participating. This last method was by far the most successful one as it easily spread the word of my research across the country and resulted in me receiving the last families needed for research purposes.

Initially, it was planned for this research to interview at least one family from each of Costa Rica's 7 provinces to try and gather a wide variety of perspectives across the country. However, this proved to be too difficult and infeasible, and the scope of interviewed families resulted in a limitation of only three provinces represented. In the end, eight students and eight parents/guardians were interviewed.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected between September and December 2024. Semi-structured, in-person interviews were conducted in Spanish and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, with student interviews typically being shorter than those of parents/guardians. The interview schedule used for these participants was rooted in LCT in order to better understand students' biographies and how their life trajectories have morphed over time based on the following five principles: (1) lifespan development; (2) agency; (3) historical and geographic context; (4) timing and life stages; (5) linking lives. Each of these five principles were addressed in interviews within distinct temporal dimensions (e.g., past, present, and future). While these interviews did feature a temporal dimension, the semi-structuredness of the interviews allowed students to express their lives in the past, present, or future, and guide the interview as they wished. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes to ensure their safety and comfortability. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Fieldnotes were also taken to capture additional contextual information, non-verbal cues, and the local environment.

Data Analysis Strategy

The data analysis for this research followed a thematic approach, integrating both inductive and deductive coding techniques to uncover insights into the effects of the benefit's removal on students' educational and professional trajectories. The entire analytical process was managed using the coding software Atlas.ti, which allowed for organization, coding, and the exploration of relationships within the data.

First, the corpus of transcribed interview data was read in its entirety multiple times. This initial step served to familiarize myself with the breadth of participants' experiences, allowing for the noting of initial impressions, recurring ideas, and potential areas of interest. Following this, a deductive coding approach was utilized, guided by LCT. A preliminary codebook was created, utilizing the key LCT principles of lifespan development, agency, time and place, timing, and linked lives as specific codes. These codes were then applied to the data, allowing for the identification of instances where participants' narratives exemplified these principles. Inductive coding of the transcripts was later carried out on a sentence-by-sentence basis to generate open codes from the data. This initial coding captured participants' information without imposing predetermined categorical themes. Codes were then refined and collapsed, leading to the discovery of emergent themes that reflected the participants' lived experience as they related to their educational journeys and STWTs. By coding both inductively and deductively, this ensured that the analysis was not only informed by theory but also grounded in participants' lived experiences.

Using Atlas.ti was essential in managing the large amount of qualitative data collected. The program allowed individual codes to be grouped into families and later identify themes. Similarly, it also helped generate reports that tracked the prevalence of codes which further helped development of themes.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As a white, American citizen who has both studied and taught in Costa Rica, my presence certainly influenced and informed this research. I have much love for the country that I have called my second home so many times before, yet I felt that I was often seen as an outsider regardless of my passion. The fact that a foreigner was so invested in the well-being of the locals seemed to encourage openness with some of my interviewees, but assumedly my mere existence

as a white American also caused hesitation and skepticism from other participants, questioning my motives of wanting to go into their homes and hear their stories. My prior affiliation with the U.S. Embassy as a Fulbright fellow and working with the *Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje* also informed participants' assumptions about my role, requiring clarification that I was actually conducting academic research independent of any governmental organization, American, Costa Rican, or otherwise.

Throughout this research, I maintained a personal journal, noting moments of discomfort, emotional reactions, and even power dynamics between myself and all those involved with the study. I was also conscious that participants could very well phrase their answers in a manner they thought might fit my "values" (or what they thought my values were), or what they thought might impress me or cause me to criticize the policy.

Ethical Considerations

This research follows the ethical dimensions and considerations as established by the GLOBED program. Informed consent, both verbal and written, was obtained from all participants, which included parental consent and minor assent in the case of student interviewees. All names and identifying details (e.g., neighborhood, name of high school) have been anonymized using pseudonyms. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question and/or withdraw from the study at any time. Particular care was taken when discussing potentially distressing topics such as economic hardship or educational disruption. Interviews with minors were conducted with at least one parent/guardian present at all times. No remuneration was provided for participation in the study.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodology used to conduct this qualitative case study. By employing an interpretivist epistemology, the research design, purposive sampling strategy, semi-structured interview method, and inductive-deductive data analysis were designed to ensure a rich understanding of the removal of the Avancemos benefit. Proper consideration of researcher positionality and ethical guidelines further ensures the integrity and trustworthiness of the study. This methodological framework underpins the findings presented in the next chapters and allows us to explore in-depth how the removal of CCT benefits has affected the educational pathways and STWTs of low-income youth.

Results and Analysis

This chapter presents and analyzes the study's findings, beginning with brief biographies of each student. Understanding each of their unique familial, socioeconomic, and personal circumstances is crucial for contextualizing the impact of the Avancemos benefit's cessation on their life courses. I then present the deductive findings, organized around the five dimensions of the LCT framework. Here, I use student-specific "mini case studies" to illustrate how the cessation of CCT benefits influenced each LCT dimension. Next, I identify the inductive findings, organized into emergent themes and subthemes, addressing both commonalities and anomalies from the data through direct quotes. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Student Biographies

Mariela Jiménez-Chavarría

Mariela, a fourteen-year-old from Nicoya, Guanacaste, lives with her mother and grandmother. Her mother, Patricia, supports the family through informal sales and clothing repairs while also caring for Mariela's sick grandmother, whose pension contributes to the household. They recently lost their Avancemos benefit due to the grandmother's pension and their home's asset value. Mariela, who attends night school alongside her mother, dreams of becoming a manicurist or a veterinarian despite their financial challenges.

Marvin Gutiérrez-Rivas

Marvin is a thirteen-year-old seventh-grade student living in Sardinal, Guanacaste, with his mother and two younger siblings. His family, refugees from Nicaragua, now reside in a humble one-bedroom home. Marvin's mother supports them through informal childcare, supplemented by occasional financial support from the youngest child's father. Despite these challenges, Marvin is a dedicated student who commutes to a local technical school and aspires to be a police officer or firefighter when he is older.

Mariana Solano-Castro

Fifteen-year-old Mariana lives in Curridabat, San José, with her grandparents, father, and uncle, along with her two younger sisters. She is a ninth-grade student who enjoys physics and math. The family's recent move was prompted by abuse from her mother, who reportedly misused their Avancemos benefit. Household income primarily comes from her grandfather's

declining construction business and her father's work as a security guard, which is all compounded by significant debt from her grandmother's recent illness. Despite their struggles, Mariana plans to attend college to study marine biology or law.

Natalia Solano-Castro

Natalia, Mariana's thirteen-year-old younger sister, is a seventh-grade student who enjoys social studies and is a member of the school's marching band. Her family recently moved in with her grandparents due to abuse from her mother. Natalia dreams of becoming a professional chef and hopes to move to Buenos Aires someday, despite the family's challenges.

Andrés Mora-Solís

Andrés is a seventeen-year-old student nearing completion of his final year of high school with academic interests in English and chemistry. He lives in Tibás, San José, with his mother, Roxana, the sole household income earner, and his older sister. The family relocated within the past few years due to crime in their former community, Alajuelita. Andrés plans to pursue higher education, with career aspirations in cyber robotics or systems engineering.

Brandon Salazar-Vargas

Seventeen-year-old Brandon is completing his final year of high school in Siquirres, Limón, where he lives with his mother and four younger siblings, all with special needs including Tourette's Syndrome, Down Syndrome, and autism. Brandon is musically inclined, playing multiple instruments in his local marching band. After graduation, he plans to attend college or enter the workforce, though he is not particularly fond of formal education. His mother, Dayana, a community leader, successfully advocated for the reinstatement of their Avancemos benefit after it was unexpectedly cut and even organized collective action for other affected families.

María José Chaves-Rojas

María José is a quiet sixteen-year-old, currently in ninth grade in Batán, Limón, living with her parents, younger sister, and father's cousin. Her family resides in a makeshift home with no running water and inconsistent income from her father, a handyman. Despite living in very humble conditions, María José dreams of furthering her education, traveling the world, and becoming a criminologist.

Daniel López-Porras

Daniel, in his second-to-last year of high school in Nicoya, Guanacaste, lives with his father and his father's girlfriend after his parents' separation. He enjoys traditional Costa Rican folklore dance, which offers travel opportunities. Daniel attributes his academic success to his parents' support and notes that a friend working for IMAS helped them obtain the Avancemos benefit in the first place. His household's financial support comes exclusively from his father, who works at a local furniture store. After high school, Daniel is considering studying to become a lawyer.

Key Findings

Findings Derived from the Life Course Theory Framework

Lifespan Development. The lifespan development of Andrés Mora-Solís indicates how effective early support can be and how youth may adapt to unexpected disruptions during the life course. Andrés had a stable childhood, often being encouraged by his mother, which helped him in his academic achievement. He described his elementary school experience as "normal," "fun," and "without so many worries," where he consistently achieved good grades. This stability early on in life was attributed to both Andrés's mother and from the Avancemos benefit, which supported him in purchasing school supplies and even helped the family as whole in affording costs for the entire household. Thanks to this consistent support, Andrés had minimal stressors and could focus his attention on his studies and extracurricular activities, like band.

The unexpected removal of the Avancemos benefit marked a turning point in Andrés's life. He expressed "surprise" and "confusion" when it was taken away, noting immediate financial difficulties for essential school expenses like "bus passes, copies, [and] supplies." Despite this, Andrés shows resilience and clear goals. He strongly believes he is "always moving forward" and that "the effort is always worth it," despite the new financial constraints. With or without the benefit, Andrés still wants to study cyber robotics or systems engineering and pursue his life-long dream of cooking. Andrés thinks of future generations too. He says if the benefit is reinstated, he would hope to use it for his children in the future if they would ever need it.

Agency. In terms of agency, the removal of financial benefits prevents students from making choices and pursuing opportunities. Daniel López-Porras, who is from Nicoya and in his second-to-last year of high school is an excellent example of affected agency. Due to his father's

lack of funds, Daniel was unable to afford workbooks and handouts, preventing him from completing certain assignments. This affected his grades negatively, particularly in biology. Crucially, however, he continued going to school. He says, “I feel that I was still able to do it with or without the materials I needed.” Here Daniel clearly articulates his agency of continuing to study no matter what the conditions are. Although he wants to go to school, his agency is constrained in completing assignments due to not being able to purchase school materials.

Daniel’s core aspirations also remain firm despite the benefit removal. He immediately referenced attending the University of Costa Rica to study law as his post-secondary goal. His commitment to a demanding career path significantly presents his agency, reflecting a deliberate choice about his future identity and career.

Time and Place. For Brandon Salazar-Vargas, the cessation of the CCT benefit did not occur in a vacuum; in fact, it intersected with and exacerbated the pre-existing challenges presented by specific historical events and his particular geographic location. His narrative shows how the removal of this support deepened the impact of broader societal shifts on his educational journey and future prospects.

According to Brandon, his educational experience was significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, a major historical event that impacted education worldwide. He explicitly states, “in the pandemic, from that period of time, well, I didn’t learn anything. It was like three years I never learned anything... no one learned anything.” This period of compromised education meant he was already on a less stable footing, especially during high school.

Brandon’s home location being in the Limón province presents inherent geographical and socioeconomic challenges that were intensified by the interruption of the benefit. He consistently points to transportation as a major hurdle to accessing opportunities outside his immediate semi-rural area. Moreso, the country’s primary university campuses and with them their more diverse offering of academic study are in the capital of San José, requiring costly and time-consuming travel. The interruption of the benefit not only removed a source of income, but it also heightened the already existing difficulties of pursuing education from a geographically isolated and economically vulnerable location.

Timing. Andrés Mora-Solís once again provides a shining example, but this time on the importance of the timing of the removal of his benefit, which occurred during his last year of high school. At 17 years old, he is right at the cusp of major life decisions whether it is pursuing higher education or going into the workforce.

This timing is crucial. Andrés mentions that while losing the benefits did not largely impact his grades or attendance, it still added financial pressure right when he had to focus on his final year of high school studies and plan for the future after graduating. As his expenses to complete high school and prepare for his next life stage were increasing, the financial benefit that had helped him pay for school supplies and transportation was cut. Andrés is planning for the future and wants to study cyber robotics or systems engineering, but the removal of his benefit at this critical juncture affects the financial feasibility of his goal and places additional pressure on him and his family at the very time he is trying to make this important transition to post-secondary education.

Linked Lives. The influence of the principle of linked lives on life trajectories is evident in the example of the Solano-Castro sisters, Mariana and Natalia. Their lives are very connected with family finances, relationships, and past challenges, particularly those involving their mother. Mariana and Natalia both describe a history of abuse and mistreatment from their mother, resulting in emotional distress. Their mother allegedly abused the benefit (according to the girls' grandmother), which prevented it from ever reaching the girls for their school expenses. According to Mariana, "my mom didn't give us the money, she kept it" and Natalia echoes that sentiment: "she kept the money for herself, and we never had anything to eat because she spent the money on herself." The benefit was never a part of their daily lives nor was it used for their educational needs, so its removal had little apparent impact on school attendance, participation, or grades. Removing the benefit did not create new hardship for these young girls. Rather, their lives had essentially stayed the same since they were mostly unaware of the benefit in the first place.

Importantly, both sisters see the possible return of the CCT as a collective family benefit, extending beyond individual school needs. Mariana notes its importance given her grandfather's and father's low wages and constant struggle to afford food for the large family. Natalia reinforces this, stating a reinstated benefit would "help us have more food at home." This

demonstrates that while the removal did not create a new crisis due to past misuse, its absence remains a missed opportunity for genuine family-wide relief and greater stability. For these linked lives, the benefit's potential to alleviate broader financial strain remains a significant, unfulfilled need.

Findings Derived from Inductive Analysis

The Benefit as an Educational Necessity. A recurring and dominant theme is the immediate and direct financial burden on families to cover necessities as they pertain to the students' schooling. While some students initially minimized the direct impact of the benefits' removal on their academic performance, the interviews reveal that the Avancemos benefit was a critical financial lifeline for covering essential educational expenses. The principal subthemes of these necessities were school materials (including uniforms), transportation, and food and snacks.

School Materials. Students and their families consistently mentioned the CCT's role in paying for school supplies such as notebooks, pencils, photocopies, textbooks, and uniforms, which became difficult (and at times impossible) to afford after the benefits stopped. Marvin Gutiérrez-Rivas's mother, Luciana, vividly describes her son having only one uniform set, which he washes daily in addition to his worn-out shoes, all of which cause him embarrassment.

> *Right now he doesn't have shoes, but thank God, now that I've gotten the Family Assistance grant, I've ordered two pairs of shoes. Right now he's wearing shoes that are so ugly that he's embarrassed [laughs]. They're shoes that are almost a year old, but he's still wearing them. I haven't been able to buy them for him because he didn't have any, but now that I got the* [Family Assistance] *grant… So, I ordered two pairs of shoes for him, and next week they're coming. Thank God he'll have them, so he won't be hiding in shame anymore... and especially for them... they're teenagers, it's embarrassing for everyone… He has some torn pants that are ripped right on his behind. I have to keep stitching them up... And he only has one* [emphasis] *uniform. He's been wearing that uniform all these months. But now that they're helping me… Maybe one month I'll buy him something, next month something else, a pair of pants... Well, for now, shoes. When I can, a change of clothes for school, the pants and the shirt, because he only has one. And he washes the uniform. Every day he has to wash that shirt and those pants. They're already so faded! [laughs]* —Luciana, Marvin Gutiérrez-Rivas's mother

Students and their families also discuss the difficulties in affording other school materials, such as notebooks, photocopies, and the like. In the case of Daniel, this inability to pay for these materials actually resulted in a lower biology grade this past year:

> *Well, I can give an example with my biology teacher: she assigned us to do a workbook, and it was very expensive... and I wasn't going to buy it because my dad didn't have* [the money]*, and so, since I didn't have the workbook, I didn't have my daily assignments, so, since I didn't have them, my grade was lower.* –Daniel López-Porras

Transportation. Transportation was another key factor that both students and their parents/guardians mentioned was essential in accessing their education centers in the first place. Regardless of rural or urban location, local municipal buses appear to be the most common method of transportation, which require payment regardless of one's status of being a student or not. When the benefit was removed from students, they had to seek out other methods of transportation. Andrés Mora-Solís talks about how getting to school was easier when he was an Avancemos student, but when his benefit was removed, he sought other methods of transportation:

> [Avancemos] *also made transportation easier for me because mostly… I used to have to go by walking or I had to get a taxi or an* [unofficial taxi] *because we didn't have a car so… Or we didn't have enough* [money] *to go by bus and we had to walk. And yeah, it was a bit far, but at the end of the day it was exhausting, honestly. Because it wasn't just going there, but going and coming back.* –Andrés Mora-Solís

The removal of benefits also has an interconnected effect on students' friends. Andrés continues:

> *Sometimes, it's about helping someone else so that they can get around. I understand what it's like to ask for at least 200* [colones] *to be able to take the bus. I also help so that others can get the bus, and, well, I'm counting coins to see if I can give something, but that's also difficult.*

Food and Snacks. The loss of the benefit also affected students' ability to afford food during long school days, leading to hunger. But not only does this pertain to the food during the school day, but also the ability to afford food in the household: María José states that getting the benefit back would mean "more food" at home. Dayana, Brandon's mother, emphasizes the importance of children having money for snacks, especially given their long school hours and the inadequate meals from the school cafeteria. Ana, the grandmother of the Solano-Castro sisters,

provides a detailed account of how her granddaughters sometimes spend long days at school with only lunch being served at the cafeteria:

> [Losing the benefit] *has also affected their nutrition because their schedule is mostly from seven in the morning until four in the afternoon. Ten past four, to be exact. So, when we can, we give them a thousand colones to buy a sandwich or something since they only serve lunch* [at the school]. *But they get really hungry. So sometimes they go hungry because there's no money to give them. We give them whatever we can. We give them a thousand colones, here a thousand or seven hundred colones. But... they come home like little lions and they want to eat because they've been hungry all day! They only serve lunch at this school. So, the food aspect has affected them a lot because we can't give them enough money to buy something, let's say, in the middle of the morning and something in the middle of the afternoon.* –Ana, grandmother of Mariana and Natalia Solano-Castro

Resilience in Pursuing Education. Despite the significant financial challenges posed by the benefit's removal, a prominent theme is the students' resilience. Most interviewees expressed determination to continue their education and achieve their professional aspirations, regardless of whether they had the benefit or not. They emphasized effort, concentration, and dedication as keys to their success. This suggests that intrinsic motivation and personal commitment are powerful drivers that, for many, surpass the direct financial limitations as they pursue their educational and professional goals.

Andrés provides a clear example of his educational resilience: "I always feel like I'm moving forward… Little by little I'm achieving my goals, even if it's hard, the effort is always worth it." And when asked about what additional supports he needed to keep him on the path to success, Andrés responded, "Well, nothing. I'll simply just continue studying, concentrate on what I have to do, and pretty much hand in what I need to hand in and… it's basically just going to school."

María José Chaves-Rojas is another notable example of this resilience, especially given the extremely humble conditions in which she and her family live. When asked how she felt about how she was currently doing in her life, she expressed a strong desire for self-improvement: "Well, I really want to do better… Do better, have a future, be able to study more, learn, and go see other countries."

Geographic Disparities in Opportunity and Access. The interviews demonstrate a clear disparity in perceived opportunities based on geographical location. Students residing in more rural areas (e.g., Limón and Guanacaste) consistently stated that their location presented greater challenges to accessing higher education and diverse employment opportunities. In particular, they noted the lack of universities and their academic offerings. Brandon Salazar-Vargas explains that living in Siquirres, Limón makes achieving his future goals "more difficult" due to access to higher education:

> *I mean, it's because of the… how do you say? Transportation. The college campuses, for example, the central ones and all that, where all the college majors are, are in San José. And here you have to take the bus all the way much farther than what you're familiar with… and yeah, it's another world, because here it's more… what's the word? Rural. And over there it's a lot more centralized and everything.* –Brandon Salazar-Vargas, 17

Sentiments such as Brandon's often necessitate a desire to move to the San José greater metropolitan area for university education. This is strongly echoed by Daniel, who, when asked if he believed his life would be different if he had lived in another part of the country, responded:

> *I think so, because… Let's say that I don't leave this area, so then I would be working in what is usually common here, which is agriculture, since we live in Guanacaste [laughs] and tourism, which is common by the beaches and all the other places here… And if I lived in another place, San José, there are many places… I'd like to go the University of Costa Rica after graduating high school, and that would mean me moving to San José, because there are more resources, everything necessary. So, I feel that, maybe, living somewhere else, I would have more opportunities for other things. That's why I'd like to leave here.* –Daniel López-Porras

Anomalies and Outliers

While the emergent themes provide a general understanding of the effect on the removal of Avancemos benefits, several anomalies or outliers from the data offer more detailed and sometimes contradictory findings, particularly concerning how the removal affected educational trajectories and STWTs. These outliers highlight unique, individual experiences involved with the program and/or its removal.

Non-Benefit of the CCT by Recipients. The most striking anomaly is from the Solano-Castro sisters, Mariana and Natalia. They both state that they were unaware they were receiving

the benefit and that their mother kept the money for herself and spent it on cigarettes and alcohol, according to the girls' grandmother. This is a significant outlier because for these students, the removal of the benefit did not represent a sudden loss of a resource they were actively using for their education or daily needs, but rather the cessation of funds that were already being misused within their household. This shows a potential flaw in the CCT program's distribution or monitoring where the intended benefit did not reach the students due to interfering family dynamics. For these sisters, the impact on their life trajectory was less about the removal of the benefit and more about the lack of its intended use in the first place.

Explicit Indifference Towards Academic Achievement. Brandon Salazar-Vargas's perspective stands out in its bluntness regarding academic achievement. He states that passing subjects "is easy in itself," and he sees no "value" in academic achievement declaring, "I'm not going to kill myself for something I can't do... because the recognition and all that really has no value for me and whatever." While other students generally express a desire to study and succeed, Brandon's pragmatic and somewhat indifferent approach to excelling beyond merely passing, combined with his statement that the loss of the benefit did not affect his ability to get good grades, presents a different dimension to resilience. It suggests that for some, the personal drive is towards completion rather than accolades, potentially limiting the perceived academic impact of financial constraints.

Direct Causal Link Between Benefit Loss and Lower Grades. Daniel López-Porras is the only student who explicitly and directly attributes a decline in his academic performance to the loss of the benefit. He recalls specific instances where not having the money for workbooks prevented him from handing in assignments and thus receiving lower grades in biology. Other students expressed difficulty in being able to afford supplies but without directly linking this to a negative effect on their grades. This direct connection shows a significant interruption in Daniel's education.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the study's findings on how students' educational trajectories and STWTs changed after Avancemos benefits were removed. The deductive analysis demonstrated how the removal of the benefit intersected with lifespan development, agency, time and place, timing, and linked lives from LCT, affecting individual trajectories. The inductive

analysis identified key themes, showing that the Avancemos benefit was essential for covering educational expenses such as school materials, transportation, and food. This inductive analysis also showed students' resilience in the face of financial constraints so as to continue with their schooling. The findings also highlighted persistent inequalities in accessing education and decent work due to geographical location, namely for students in rural settings. A few anomalies, like the Solano-Castro sisters never receiving the benefit, also arose from the data. Unique findings such as these offer distinctive insights into the varied impact of the benefit, or lack thereof. These findings altogether present a strong empirical base for the discussion in the following chapter.

Discussion

Interpreting Findings through the Life Course Theory Framework

Through LCT, student stories illustrate how the removal of Avancemos benefit affected their life courses, depicting a picture of resilience, unexpected challenges, and stark reality. The following sections will discuss each principle of LCT, as they pertain to the findings, in further detail.

The Principle of Lifespan Development

The Avancemos benefit allowed for Andrés Mora-Solís elementary education "normal" and "without so many worries," making it an essential component for his stable childhood and high academic achievement. This financial support, in addition to his mother's care, established a strong base in Andrés's life that covered things like school supplies and even a band uniform. The removal of the benefit proved to be a critical moment that created hurdles in being able to afford bus passes, copies, and other school necessities. This forced Andrés to "accommodate himself much better with money." Despite this disruption, Andrés's story demonstrates unfazed future goals. His dreams of cyber robotics or systems engineering remain firmly in sight, and his belief that "the effort is always worth it" reaffirms his commitment to success. This finding corroborates the literature on CCTs' foundational role in enabling early educational stability (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009) but adds a critical dimension by showing the long-term ripple effects and adaptive responses to their cessation.

The Principle of Agency

Daniel López-Porras from Nicoya, Guanacaste, experienced a more direct impact on his academic trajectory, as the loss of the benefit meant his father could no longer afford essential workbooks and handouts, directly leading to lower grades in subjects like biology. Here, agency was visibly constrained; he was unable to complete assignments, even with the will to do so. This finding aligns with the overall literature noting that while CCTs increase enrollment, learning outcomes can remain out of reach due to persistent financial barriers. Despite this, Daniel

remained strong: “I feel that I was still able to do it with or without the materials I needed,” is a powerful declaration of his personal drive to overcome obstacles through effort and resourcefulness. His commitment to physically attend school and his aspiration to study law at the University of Costa Rica reveal a powerful, persistent will, even when his path is made harder. This resonates with qualitative Avancemos research on student agency and motivations (Castellanos, 2015; Meza-Cordero & Gulemetova, 2023), but crucially demonstrates the limits of individual agency when structural financial barriers persist.

The Principle of Time and Place

The experience of Brandon Salazar-Vargas demonstrates how external events and geographical context can amplify the benefit’s removal. For him, the removal of support was not isolated; in fact, it collided with the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. His blunt statement, “in the pandemic... I didn’t learn anything,” demonstrates a significant historical shock that left him on shaky academic ground. Further, his home in the province of Limón presented inherent geographical and socioeconomic challenges such as local flooding and lack of public transportation. Brandon’s narrative suggests that significant events and geographical location can add an additional layer of complications that the benefit removal only worsened, making his educational journey even more difficult.

The Principle of Timing

For Andrés, the particular timing of when he lost his benefit was critical. This was during his last year of high school, the year just before he was about to make potentially life-changing decisions about his future, whether it be higher education or employment. Losing the benefit did not greatly affect his attendance or grades, but it brought with it financial strains when demands on his studies and future planning started increasing. The removal of economic support for school supplies and extracurricular activities, just as he was preparing for college, placed a significant strain on his aspirations for higher education. This finding echoes studies from other CCTs, which find that timing of benefit as well as support are crucial during key developmental periods (Barham et al., 2013; 2014; Riccio & Miller, 2016).

The Principle of Linked Lives

The story of the Solano-Castro sisters, Mariana and Natalia, provides a unique perspective for the principle of linked lives. For them, the loss of the benefit had little direct

consequence for their education. This, however, was due to the fact that their mother always misused the funds, meaning that the benefit never reached her children to support their education. Mariana stated, “my mom didn’t give us the money, she kept it,” a sentiment echoed by Natalia, who recalled, “she kept the money for herself... we almost never had anything to eat.” Despite this prior misuse, the sisters still viewed the potential return of the benefit as a collective family benefit, indicating a continued need for broader family support and food security.

Connecting Inductive Findings to the Academic Literature

Beyond the LCT framework, inductive analysis revealed several crucial themes that shaped students’ experiences following the benefit’s removal.

The Benefit as an Educational Necessity.

Consistent with the foundational premise of CCTs, this study revealed the Avancemos benefit to be a fundamental necessity and a critical lifeline for covering essential educational and basic living expenses (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). The interviews consistently showed the direct and immediate impact of its removal. For instance, Marvin Gutiérrez-Rivas’s mother, Luciana, heartbreakingly described her son’s embarrassment over worn-out shoes and a single, faded uniform, which she had to constantly repair. This corroborates literature discussing the role of CCTs in alleviating financial burdens related to school materials (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009).

Beyond supplies, the benefit significantly eased transportation costs, a critical barrier for school attendance. Andrés Mora-Solís, for example, recalled the ease of getting to school with the benefit and resorting to long, exhausting walks or unofficial taxis without it. The loss of funds also directly impacted students’ ability to afford food and snacks during long school days, leading to hunger. María José hoped for more food at home, and Brandon’s mother emphasized the importance of snacks given inadequate cafeteria provisions. Ana, the Solano sisters’ grandmother, vividly recounted them returning home “like little lions” after school, often having had only lunch, with no money for additional snacks. This impact on students’ well-being and ability to focus highlights the link between basic needs and effective learning, aligning with broader CCT literature that acknowledges the multifaceted support required for educational success.

Discontinuation of CCT Benefits and Educational Persistence

One of the most prevalent themes in the broader literature regarding the removal or cessation of CCT benefits is a decrease in school enrollment (Barrientos & Villa, 2017; Márquez-Padilla et al., 2025; Wiegand, 2019). The findings of this present research, however, strongly contradict this trend, as all student interviewees were currently enrolled in school; in fact, two students were mere weeks from graduating high school. This apparent contradiction may be explained by findings from Riccio and Miller (2016) in the Opportunity NYC CCT, which suggested that academically advanced students tended to have higher rates of graduation and subsequent enrollment in four-year universities. It is possible that the students in this study, despite having their Avancemos benefit removed, were already performing well in their studies or possessed a strong intrinsic motivation, making them more likely to persist and graduate regardless of the direct financial incentive.

This leads to a more nuanced understanding of student motivation. Amidst these struggles, a powerful theme of resilience emerged. Despite their financial challenges, most students showed determination to continue their education and achieve their aspirations. Andrés's wanting to "simply just continue studying, concentrate on what I have to do," and María José's desire to "do better, have a future, be able to study more" despite incredibly humble conditions, demonstrate an intrinsic motivation that, for many, transcended their direct financial challenges. This aligns with qualitative findings on student motivations within Avancemos itself, which identify personal aspirations as a primary reason for rural youth to stay in school (Castellanos, 2015; Meza-Cordero & Gulemetova, 2023).

Persistent Structural Barriers: Geographic Disparities

Student resilience, however, was often met with the challenges of geographic disparities. Students in rural areas, like Brandon in Limón and Daniel in Guanacaste, were well aware that their locations presented greater barriers for accessing higher education and diverse job opportunities. Brandon explained how college campuses and a broader range of college majors were mostly in San José, making achieving his goals more difficult within his rural area. Daniel echoed this, stating that without leaving Guanacaste, he would likely be limited to working in agriculture or tourism. His desire to move to San José for the University of Costa Rica demonstrated how location directly shaped his predicted STWT. This supports the literature on

persistent structural barriers to STWTs in LAC, including high youth unemployment and skill mismatches (ILO, 2025). The findings also illustrate Fawcett's (2003) "paradox," where rising education levels do not proportionally improve access to formal employment due to limited decent jobs, reinforcing the call for CCTs to be complemented with broader investments in educational quality and diversity in addition to labor market development.

Nuances from Avancemos-Specific Contexts

Qualitative research specifically on the Avancemos program further complements and often corroborates the findings of this present study, offering a richer understanding of the benefit's role in student retention and educational trajectories. For instance, Castellanos (2015) identified that while personal aspirations often serve as the primary motivation for rural youth to remain in school, programs like Avancemos are crucial in reducing the financial burdens that might otherwise impede the pursuit of those very aspirations. This resonates strongly with the experiences of students in the current study, whose unwavering future goals persisted despite the financial constraints introduced by the benefit's removal.

Existing literature on Avancemos students who abandon their studies frequently cites "lack of interest" as a common reason for dropping out, both qualitatively and quantitatively (Vargas-Brenes et al., 2012). However, these researchers also find many other causes for dropping out of school, even with the Avancemos benefit in place, including geographic isolation, unstable family relationship, and weak support from teachers and peers. The findings of the present study show similar problems with some students. Brandon faced learning disruptions stemming from the pandemic and also suffered the negative impact of his remote location. The Solano-Castro sisters, meanwhile, faced abuse from their mother, who also misused their Avancemos funds. Despite all this, these students continue studying, even when their benefit is removed.

Collectively, insights from the broader literature and the findings from the current study imply that though the CCT benefit certainly alleviates the financial burden associated with the costs of education, it may not necessarily be the cause of student retention or abandonment in all cases. Students' aspirations appear to play a crucial role in informing whether or not they stay in school and what their overall life trajectory may look like.

However, this begs the question: if student aspiration is a key reason as to why students stay in school, then what is the purpose of investing in human capital programs like Avancemos? The findings from this study show that the CCT is not the main driver of student aspirations but instead a key enabler. CCTs enable students to pursue their educational aspirations by alleviating immediate financial barriers. Thus, as a result, the students' inherent motivation may flourish instead of being constrained by poverty. This means that these investments are not really directed at incentives but instead aim to remove the obstacles that might prevent intrinsic motivation from translating into ongoing engagement in education, and overall better life outcomes.

Reflecting on Rawlsian Principles of Justice

If, then, Avancemos and perhaps other CCTs alleviate the financial burdens to student success and enable their aspirations, what does the implication of removing these benefits from students entail? The findings offer a valuable way to think about the implications of removing the Avancemos benefit.

Undermining the Principle of Equal Liberty

Rawls's (1971) Principle of Equal Liberty asserts that every individual should have an equal right to basic liberties, including access to education and the opportunity to participate fully in society. The initial purpose of CCTs like Avancemos was to uphold this principle by providing financial support to low-income students, thereby reducing the barriers that poverty imposes on school attendance and performance, thus expanding the freedoms of disadvantaged youth. However, the study's findings demonstrate how the removal of Avancemos benefits directly infringed upon these liberties for the interviewed students and their families.

The benefit was a critical financial lifeline for covering educational necessities like notebooks, pencils, photocopies, textbooks, and uniforms. Marvin's mother, Luciana, described her son's embarrassment over his worn-out shoes and single, faded uniform, highlighting a direct impact on his ability to present himself adequately for school. Daniel explicitly linked his inability to afford a biology workbook due to lack of funds to lower grades and an inability to complete assignments, directly showing how the loss of support constrained his educational opportunity and achievement.

Students and parents/guardians consistently noted that the benefit facilitated access to education by covering transportation costs. Andrés Mora-Solís, for instance, spoke of the ease of

transportation while he had the benefit and then later having to resort to long walks or unofficial taxis when the benefit was removed. This limited access to reliable transportation further hindered students' equal opportunity to attend school.

The loss of the benefit also affected students' ability to afford food and snacks during long school days, leading to hunger. The Solano sisters' grandmother describes them often returning home "like little lions" due to hunger, as the school only provides lunch and they lacked money for additional snacks. This arguably impacts a student's well-being and ability to focus on learning, undermining their opportunity for effective participation in education.

Violating the Difference Principle

Rawls's (1971) Difference Principle permits social and economic inequalities only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. Applying this principle to the removal of Avancemos benefits compels us to ask: did removing the benefit serve or harm the most vulnerable students? The evidence from this study overwhelmingly suggests that the removal of benefits harmed the least advantaged, indicating a violation of this principle.

The findings show that the withdrawal of funds created significant financial hardship for families, directly affecting their ability to cover educational necessities and basic needs. This disproportionately impacted low-income households, which are, by definition, the least advantaged.

The study also highlights how geographic disparities, particularly for rural students like Daniel in Guanacaste, meant greater challenges in accessing higher education and diverse employment opportunities in general. This reinforces the literature that CCTs struggle to influence deeper structural inequalities such as poor (local) labor market conditions and lack of viable post-secondary opportunities, and the benefit withdrawal only worsens these pre-existing disadvantages for the most vulnerable. Daniel's desire to move to San José for college highlights how his location directly shaped his perceived STWT, aiming his aspirations to higher-paying or more diverse job sectors outside of his rural province, whose local job market is focused on agriculture and tourism.

When viewed through the lens of Rawlsian justice, the findings demonstrate that the removal of Avancemos benefits directly undermines the Principle of Equal Liberty by

reintroducing financial barriers to educational opportunities for vulnerable youth. Furthermore, it violates the Difference Principle by harming the least advantaged and exacerbating existing inequalities, rather than improving these students' socioeconomic condition.

Conclusion

The chapter summarizes the entirety of the study, including its purpose, methodologies, and key findings. The conclusion also touches on the policy implications of these findings, study limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Study

This research sought to answer two core questions: (1) How has the removal of Avancemos benefits affected the educational trajectories of secondary students?; and (2) How has the removal of Avancemos benefits affected the school-to-work transitions of secondary students? The qualitative study aimed to study the impact of the removal of the Avancemos benefit in students' educational outcomes and STWTs from the frameworks of LCT and Rawlsian social justice. Examining lived experiences through in-depth student interviews explored how such a policy change influences individuals' development and their pathways towards education and work.

Summary of Key Findings

The findings confirm that removing the Avancemos benefit can have significant impacts on students' educational trajectories and STWTs. The monthly transfer may not necessarily change a student's life, but it makes their overall educational journey just a bit easier. On the other hand, removing the benefit could cause significant disruptions on students' life courses if they had been receiving the benefit already and are now lacking that financial support. Removing the benefit may actually cause more harm than if students had never received it in the first place.

Through the Lens of Life Course Theory

Removing the benefit created immediate challenges in obtaining daily necessities. This forced students to adapt and accommodate, yet, despite this, their goals and dreams often remained unchanged, demonstrating the principle of **lifespan development**. Students' **agency** was visibly constrained due to persistent financial barriers, although they still showed strong drive and determination to overcome these obstacles. The removal of benefits coincided with significant events like the COVID-19 pandemic and was exacerbated by geographical and socioeconomic challenges, demonstrating the principle of **time and place**. The principle of **timing** was exemplified by Andrés, who found himself without the benefit during the last year of high school, a key transition point into either higher education or work. Finally, the principle of

linked lives highlighted how family dynamics could either mitigate or exacerbate the benefit's impact. In this particular instance, the Solano-Castro sisters found themselves for many years not receiving the benefit due to their mother misusing it.

Inductive Findings

Inductive analysis revealed several key themes. The benefit was essential for covering school materials, transportation, and food and snacks during the school day. Its removal re-established these hardships that ultimately made students' school experiences more difficult. The students, however, showed their determination in pursuing education by continuing with their studies and attending classes despite these new barriers. Nonetheless, this intrinsic motivation was also affected by geographic imbalances, thus limiting the perception of future access to higher education and more job opportunities, especially among rural students. Individual cases presented anomalies, such as the Solano-Castro sisters, whose benefit was previously misused, highlighting vulnerabilities in the CCT program. Other outliers include Brandon's indifference to academic achievement or Daniel's direct link between benefit loss and lower grades, all of which provided deeper understandings of diverse student responses to hardship.

The study confirmed that the removal of CCT benefits re-created significant financial hardship, aligning with evidence on adverse effects of discontinuation. However, contrary to some literature on decreased enrollment, all interviewed students remained in school, suggesting that pre-existing academic achievement or strong personal aspirations might foster persistence even without the benefit. Furthermore, the findings corroborated Avancemos-specific research, emphasizing that while CCTs alleviate financial burdens, student aspirations often serve as the primary driver of school retention, with CCTs acting as key enablers of those aspirations.

Findings through Rawlsian Principles of Justice

The findings provide a compelling empirical lens to evaluate the practical implications of CCT policy on social justice, particularly concerning the removal of benefits. The loss of benefits directly re-established financial hurdles for essential educational supplies and transportation, thereby constraining basic liberties and equal opportunities in education. The hunger experienced by students also demonstrated how unmet basic needs undermine the ability to participate effectively in education, diminishing their freedoms, thereby undermining equal liberty. Furthermore, the withdrawal of funds created significant hardship for low-income

households, who are precisely the least advantaged. Instead of benefiting them, their situation worsened, and pre-existing geographic disadvantages were exacerbated, making it harder for the most vulnerable to overcome structural barriers, thus violating the difference principle.

Limitations of Study

One of the limitations of this study would be the small sample size and case study approach. While the individual narratives of the students and the context provided by their parents/guardians illustrate struggle and resilience, they were, at the end of the day, just a handful of biographies and stories. Their experiences cannot definitively speak for every single Avancemos beneficiary who has had their benefit removed.

Relatedly, the study relied solely on qualitative data. This approach excelled at identifying rich details of how a lost bus fare could derail a school day or the desperation of a mother trying to feed her children. However, this qualitative lens meant the research cannot offer statistical generalizations. There was no way to quantify, for instance, what percentage of students saw their grades decrease or how many were affected by the inability to afford reliable transportation.

Another limitation was the lack of a control group or any comparative data. The study deeply explores the experiences of students whose benefits were removed; however, it does not compare them to another group of students who either retained their benefits. This made it challenging to attribute every observed change strictly to the benefit's removal. Perhaps other factors were at play such as broader economic shifts or family challenges unrelated to the Avancemos program. Without a point of comparison, identifying the exact impact of the policy change was difficult.

Finally, perhaps the greatest limitation to this study is that it was not a longitudinal one. Despite incorporating LCT (of which lifespan development is a dimension) as a primary theoretical underpinning, the data primarily captured students' experiences almost immediately following the benefit's removal, focusing on their immediate reactions and future aspirations. This meant it primarily offered a very limited timeframe aspect, observing only a brief moment in the students' lives rather than a prolonged view of the actual long-term effects on their educational attainment and subsequent transitions into the workforce. Their current difficulties were evident, but the full trajectory of their lives remains to be seen.

Policy Implications

To overcome non-financial and structural inequalities, policymakers should invest more resources into educational quality and vocational training as well as develop growth in local labor markets in addition to these cash-only CCT programs. In addition to this, particularly for rural students, supplementary programming like career counseling, mentorship programs, etc. are necessary for them to be able to navigate limited STWT pathways due to poor local labor markets and lack of opportunities to post-secondary education. Policymakers also need to regularly review CCT eligibility criteria and exit strategies since an abrupt change may have substantial and disproportionate effects on the most vulnerable beneficiaries.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given these findings and limitations, there are several opportunities for future research. An important avenue for research would be long-term longitudinal studies that follow students whose CCT benefits are removed compared to those who retain them. This would allow us to measure the long-term impacts of CCTs on educational trajectories, STWTs, socioeconomic mobility, etc. Future researchers should also use quantitative data, such as academic grades, attendance, and income changes, along with qualitative stories and student biographies, to produce more generalizable and holistic understandings of benefit removal through mixed-methods research. Finally, comparative studies could compare student experiences across different geographical contexts within Costa Rica or across CCT programs in other countries in LAC and beyond to identify commonalities and differences in response to benefit removal.

Concluding Statement

This study sheds light on the significant and often challenging consequences of discontinuing benefits from CCT programs like Avancemos. By amplifying the voices of affected students, it reveals that while these programs are instrumental in enabling aspirations, their abrupt removal can re-establish barriers. This then challenges principles of justice and highlights the complex web of economic support, individual resilience and agency, and systemic inequalities. The findings from these narratives demonstrate the need for policymakers to establish social safety nets with care, and with a deep understanding of the long-lasting

implications of their removal. Yet, as this study concludes, broader questions regarding the efficacy of CCTs remain.

If the overarching purpose of educational CCTs is to build the human capital of a nation's youth, do programs such as Avancemos truly succeed? While many studies highlight positive outcomes in attendance, reinsertion, or academic achievement, this study's participants challenge these traditional indicators; their educational participation remained unaffected even after benefit removal. This begs the question: in terms of human capital, did the CCT genuinely effect meaningful change in these students in the first place? After all, their attendance and desire to study often came from intrinsic drive, personal aspirations, and strong familial support, rather than the benefit.

However, for these students, it is clear that the CCT did facilitate one crucial outcome: access to education. Monthly transfers eased the burden for low-income families by covering education-related expenses like notebooks, transportation, and daily snacks. Families' financial concerns of these expenditures disappeared with the benefit's introduction. But does this temporary financial incentive, then, create an illusion of sustained support? The benefit ends once the student leaves school, whether through graduation or abandonment, but what comes next? After all, regional challenges of skill mismatches, job informality, and a lack of decent work opportunities are well-documented. Are CCTs, then, merely designed to be "just enough" to graduate students from high school, only for them to struggle finding meaningful work, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty?

The CCT, with its monthly transfers, functions as a carrot on a stick: incentivizing school attendance and academic performance for a few extra dollars each month. Yet, this metaphor extends to a broader and darker implication of CCTs' purpose: will this government-backed investment into the lives of vulnerable youth, like the quiet María Jose Chaves-Rojas or little Marvin Gutiérrez-Rivas, genuinely transform their futures for the better? Or will these students' dreams forever remain just out of reach, victims of systemic failures left unaddressed by the powers that be?

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Appendix A

Interview schedule for student interviewees

Entrevista para <u>estudiantes secundarios</u> a quienes les han quitado el beneficio de la TMC Avancemos

Investigador: Luke Duceman

<u>Guion – Introducción</u>

Gracias por tomarse el tiempo para reunirse conmigo hoy. Mi nombre es Luke Duceman y soy estudiante de maestría en Política educativa para el desarrollo global (también conocido como el programa GLOBED) en la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. Estoy realizando una investigación para comprender mejor cómo la pérdida de la beca Avancemos afecta la educación de los estudiantes, sus planes de carrera y su trayectoria de vida en general.

Permítame explicarle el proceso de hoy: voy a hacerle varias preguntas y me gustaría que respondiera lo mejor que pueda. Por favor, sepa que esto no es un examen y no hay respuestas incorrectas. Me gustaría que fuera lo más honesto posible; este es un espacio seguro, sin juicios y nuestra conversación se mantendrá confidencial. Por favor, sepa que si hay alguna pregunta con la que no se sienta cómodo respondiendo, no está obligado a hacerlo. ¿Tiene alguna pregunta hasta ahora?

Me gustaría llevar un registro de nuestra conversación mientras hablamos. ¿Le parece bien si tomo notas durante nuestra conversación? También quiero asegurarme de captar sus ideas lo mejor posible y no perder ninguna información que me comparta hoy. ¿Me da su consentimiento para ser grabado/a?

He preparado esta carta de consentimiento para que usted (y su padre/ madre/ tutor) la revise. Por favor, tómese un momento para leerla y pregúnteme cualquier duda que tenga. Al final de la entrevista, usted y yo firmaremos la carta. (En caso de ser menor de edad, su padre o tutor legal también firmará).

Si en algún momento desea tomar un descanso o necesita algo, por favor hágamelo saber.

¿Tiene alguna otra pregunta antes de comenzar?

Listo, comencemos.

(GRABAR)

Preguntas introductorias (5-10 minutos)

- Cuénteme un poco de usted. ¿Cuántos años tiene y en qué grado académico está actualmente? (En caso de abandono escolar: ¿Cuál fue el último grado académico que completó?)
- ¿Qué le gusta hacer en su tiempo libre?
- ¿Cuál es su materia escolar favorita? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Dónde estudia? ¿Cuál es el nombre de su colegio? (En caso de abandono escolar: ¿Dónde estudió?)
- ¿Podría contarme un poco sobre su familia? ¿Con quién vive?
- ¿Cómo describiría su vida en casa y en su comunidad?
- En general, ¿cómo describiría su experiencia con el programa Avancemos?
- ¿Cómo se siente acerca de dónde está en su vida?

Sección 1: Experiencias del pasado

Tema: Desarrollo educativo y de la trayectoria de vida (10-15 minutos)

- Cuando era más joven, ¿cuáles eran sus metas en la vida?
    - ¿Cuáles eran sus metas académicas?
    - En ese momento, ¿qué tipo de trabajo imaginaba hacer después de graduarse del colegio?
- Cuando era más joven, ¿cómo era su vida?
    - ¿En la escuela?
    - ¿En casa?
    - ¿En general?
- ¿Qué cambió cuando usted comenzó a recibir la beca?
    - ¿Cómo era su vida?
        - ¿En la escuela?

- ¿En casa?
- ¿En general?

Tema: Contexto histórico y geográfico (7-10 minutos)

- ¿Usted cree que vivir en esta zona ha cambiado su experiencia en la escuela o el colegio?
  - ¿De qué manera?
  - ¿Cree que sería diferente si hubiera nacido o crecido en otro lugar?
- ¿Cree que la situación del país (como la economía o la política) ha influido en su educación? ¿De qué manera?
- Cuando era niño/a, ¿cómo era su experiencia en la escuela?
  - ¿Tenía muchas oportunidades en su educación cuándo era niño/a? ¿Cómo así?
  - ¿Cree que estas oportunidades han cambiado en estos días?
- ¿Cómo eran los trabajos en esta zona cuando era niño/a?
  - ¿En qué trabajaba la gente?
  - ¿Cree que estos trabajos han cambiado mucho hoy en día?

<u>Sección 2: Experiencias presentes</u>

Tema: Impacto de la pérdida del beneficio (7-10 minutos)

- ¿Cómo se sintió cuando supo que le iban a quitar la beca?
- ¿Cómo cambió su vida en el colegio cuando le quitaron la beca?
  - ¿Cómo cambió su participación en actividades escolares?
  - ¿Cómo cambió su asistencia en las clases?
  - ¿Cómo cambió su habilidad de sacar buenas notas?

Tema: Agencia y elecciones (3-5 minutos)

- Cuando le quitaron la beca, ¿usted cree que comenzó a tomar diferentes decisiones en el colegio? ¿Cómo así? ¿Por qué?

- **Probe**: ¿Cómo ha influido la pérdida de la beca en sus decisiones sobre continuar su educación o buscar trabajo?

Tema: Vidas vinculadas (5 minutos)

- ¿Cómo ha afectado la pérdida de la beca a su familia? ¿Ha habido cambios en la manera en que su familia se apoya mutuamente?
    - **Probe**: ¿Ha notado algún cambio en las relaciones que tiene con su familia? ¿Han cambiado las expectativas de su familia sobre usted desde la pérdida de la beca?

<u>Sección 3: Expectativas para el futuro</u>

Tema: Desarrollo de la trayectoria de vida y temporalidad (5-7 minutos)

- ¿Cómo ve su futuro en su educación ahora que ya no recibe la beca?
    - (Mientras no tenía la beca, ¿cómo veía su educación?)
- ¿Cómo ve su futuro profesional como trabajador ahora que ya no recibe la beca?
    - (Mientras no tenía la beca, ¿cómo veía su futuro como trabajador/a?)
- **Probe**: ¿Ha cambiado su visión del futuro desde que le han quitado la beca? Si es así, ¿de qué manera?

Tema: Contexto histórico y geográfico (3-5 minutos)

- Teniendo en cuenta las oportunidades aquí, ¿cómo cree que vivir en esta zona afectará sus planes futuros?
    - **Probe**: ¿Siente que esta zona le hace más fácil o más difícil lograr sus metas?

Tema: Agencia y elección (5-7 minutos)

- ¿Qué pasos tiene planeado para alcanzar sus metas futuras? ¿Hay algún desafío que le preocupe por la pérdida de la beca?
    - **Probe**: ¿Qué recursos o apoyo usted cree que necesita para mantenerse en el camino hacia sus metas educativas y profesionales?

- ¿Cree que necesita algo más en el colegio? Por ejemplo, más tiempo para estudiar, más apoyo de los profesores, etc.)

Tema: Devolución de la beca (5-7 minutos)

- En setiembre, los de la beca anunciaron que iban a cubrir todos los estudiantes de secundaria menor de 18 años en condición de pobreza que estén registrados en su sistema. Al escuchar esta noticia, ¿qué piensa?
  - ¿Aún le han devuelto la beca?
  - ¿Cree que le van a devolver la beca? ¿Por qué?
  - ¿Si usted vuelve a recibir la beca, ¿cómo cree que va a cambiar su experiencia en el colegio? ¿Su vida en general?

Sección 4: Información demográfica adicional y otras preguntas (5-7 minutos)

- ¿Cuál es su género?
- ¿Dónde nació?
- ¿Cuánto tiempo ha vivido en esta zona?
- ¿Actualmente tiene algún trabajo fuera de casa?
- ¿Alguna vez ha recibido otras becas o beneficios educativos?
- ¿Tiene acceso regular al internet? (Por medio de computadora, celular, etc.)
- Me gustaría hablar con uno de sus profesores o su orientador/a. ¿Hay alguien así en su colegio este año que lo/la conozca bien?

Cierre de la entrevista

- **Resumen**: ¿Hay algo más que quisiera contarme?

- **Firma de carta de consentimiento**: Ahora que hemos terminado con la entrevista, vamos a firmar la carta de consentimiento que habíamos revisado al inicio. Podría leer de nuevo la carta si desea. Hágamelo saber si tiene alguna pregunta o duda más.

- **Entrega de carta**: Le tengo una copia de la carta para su registro. En caso de tener preguntas, dudas o quejas, favor póngase en contacto conmigo o mi supervisor.

- **Reflexiones finales y agradecimiento**: Gracias por compartir sus experiencias. Sus aportes son muy valiosos para comprender el impacto del programa Avancemos. Muchísimas gracias de nuevo por su tiempo y participación.

Appendix B

Interview schedule for parent/guardian interviewees

Entrevista para <u>padres o tutores</u> de estudiantes secundarios a quienes les han quitado el beneficio de la TMC Avancemos

Investigador: Luke Duceman

<u>Guion – Introducción</u>

Gracias por tomarse el tiempo para reunirse conmigo hoy. Mi nombre es Luke Duceman y soy estudiante de maestría en Política educativa para el desarrollo global (también conocido como el programa GLOBED) en la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. Estoy realizando una investigación para comprender mejor cómo la pérdida de la beca Avancemos afecta la educación de los/las estudiantes, sus planes de carrera y su trayectoria de vida en general.

Permítame explicarle el proceso de hoy: voy a hacerle varias preguntas y me gustaría que respondiera lo mejor que pueda. Por favor, sepa que esto no es un examen y no hay respuestas incorrectas. Me gustaría que fuera lo más honesto posible; este es un espacio seguro, sin juicios y nuestra conversación se mantendrá confidencial. Por favor, sepa que si hay alguna pregunta con la que no se sienta cómodo respondiendo, no está obligado a hacerlo. ¿Tiene alguna pregunta hasta ahora?

Me gustaría llevar un registro de nuestra conversación mientras hablamos. ¿Le parece bien si tomo notas durante nuestra conversación? También quiero asegurarme de captar sus ideas lo mejor posible y no perder ninguna información que me comparta hoy. ¿Me da su consentimiento para ser grabado/a?

He preparado esta carta de consentimiento para que usted la revise. Por favor, tómese un momento para leerla y pregúnteme cualquier duda que tenga. Al final de la entrevista, usted y yo firmaremos la carta.

Si en algún momento desea tomar un descanso o necesita algo, por favor hágamelo saber.

¿Tiene alguna otra pregunta antes de comenzar?

Listo, comencemos.

(GRABAR)

Preguntas introductorias: (5-7 minutos)

- Cuénteme un poco sobre su hijo/a.
- Según usted, ¿cómo ha sido la experiencia educativa de su hijo/a hasta ahora?
- ¿Cómo describiría la relación de su hijo/a con la secundaria y el aprendizaje en general?

Sección 1: Relación con la secundaria y los docentes (5-7 minutos)

- ¿Cómo ha sido la comunicación con los docentes y el colegio respecto a la educación de su hijo/a?
- ¿Ha sentido usted algún cambio en el apoyo que el colegio brinda a su hijo/a desde que le quitaron la beca?

Sección 2: Perspectiva general sobre la educación (5-7 minutos)

- En general, ¿qué importancia cree que tiene la educación para el futuro de su hijo/a?
- ¿Cómo ve usted la educación de su hijo/a en este momento? ¿Cree que ha cambiado después de la pérdida de la beca?

Sección 3: Impacto de la pérdida del beneficio (10 minutos)

- ¿En qué momento supo que les suspendieron la beca?
- ¿Sabe por qué se la quitaron?
- ¿Les han devuelto la beca o aún no?
- ¿Cómo cree que la pérdida de la beca ha afectado la educación de su hijo/a?
- ¿Ha notado algún cambio en el comportamiento de su hijo/a desde que le quitaron la beca?
    - ¿Ha notado algún cambio en el rendimiento académico?

- ¿Qué dificultades ha encontrado como familia para continuar apoyando la educación de su hijo/a?

Sección 4: Apoyo educativo y material (10 minutos)

- ¿De qué manera cree usted que los recursos materiales o económicos han influido en la educación de su hijo/a?
- ¿Ha cambiado la manera en que el colegio ofrece apoyo a su hijo/a después de la pérdida de la beca?
- ¿Qué tipos de apoyo educativo o económico cree que serían más útiles para su hijo/a en este momento?

Sección 5: Devolución de la beca (10 minutos)

- El 11 de septiembre de este año, los de Avancemos anunciaron que, a partir de octubre, cubrirán todos los estudiantes de secundaria menor de 18 años que estén registrados en condición de pobreza en su sistema. Al escuchar esta noticia, ¿qué piensa?
    - ¿Cree que les van a devolver la beca? ¿Por qué?
    - ¿Si ustedes vuelven a recibir la beca, ¿cómo cree que va a influir o cambiar la experiencia educativa de su hijo/a? ¿Su vida en general?
        - ¿Cómo cree que la devolución de la beca les afectaría a usted y a toda su familia?

Sección 6: Preguntas demográficas (7-10 minutos)

- ¿Cuántos años tiene?
- ¿Nació en esta zona? Si no, ¿de dónde es?
- ¿Cuántos hijos tiene y cuáles son sus edades?
- ¿Hay alguien más que vive en la casa?
- ¿Cuál es su estado civil?
- ¿Está trabajando actualmente? ¿Cuál es su ocupación?
- ¿Cuál es el nivel más alto de estudios que ha completado?

- ¿Podría describir el rango de ingresos de su hogar?
- ¿Tiene acceso regular a servicios básicos como agua potable, electricidad e internet?

Cierre de la entrevista

- **Resumen**: ¿Hay algo más que le gustaría compartir sobre cómo ha sido esta experiencia para su hijo/a o para su familia?

- **Firma de carta de consentimiento**: Ahora que hemos terminado con la entrevista, vamos a firmar la carta de consentimiento que habíamos revisado al inicio. Podría leer de nuevo la carta si desea. Hágamelo saber si tiene alguna pregunta o duda más.

- **Entrega de carta**: Le tengo una copia de la carta para su registro. En caso de tener preguntas, dudas o quejas, favor póngase en contacto conmigo o mi supervisor.

- **Reflexiones finales y agradecimiento**: Gracias por compartir sus experiencias. Sus aportes son muy valiosos para comprender el impacto del programa Avancemos. Muchísimas gracias de nuevo por su tiempo y participación

Appendix C

Informed consent letter for student interviewees

CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO – ESTUDIANTE

1. **Propósito**
    a. Mi nombre es Luke Duceman y soy estudiante de maestría en la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. El objetivo de esta investigación es comprender mejor cómo la pérdida de la beca Avancemos afecta la educación, los planes de carrera y la vida de los estudiantes adolescentes. Usted ha sido seleccionado/a para participar porque es un/a estudiante actual o reciente de secundaria y ha pasado por la pérdida de este beneficio en algún momento.

2. **Qué se espera del/la participante**
    a. Se le hará una entrevista con preguntas que incluyen, pero no se limitan a: su entorno social, familia, experiencias educativas, metas educativas y profesionales, y situación económica.

    b. La entrevista durará aproximadamente 30-45 minutos.

    c. La entrevista se realizará en su casa, en un horario acordado entre usted y el investigador. Si prefiere otro lugar, se puede elegir uno que sea seguro y garantice confidencialidad.

    d. Como parte de la entrevista y de la investigación general, se pide al/la participante el nombre y la información de contacto de un/a docente u otro/a profesional educativo/a de su elección.

3. **Riesgos**

a. Al participar, usted entiende que puede haber una posible pérdida de privacidad. El investigador usará nombres falsos (seudónimos) para proteger su identidad.

b. Algunas preguntas pueden ser incómodas o sensibles. Usted puede decidir si quiere responder o no. También puede pausar o terminar la entrevista en cualquier momento, sin necesidad de dar razones y sin ninguna penalización.

4. Anonimato

a. Como parte de la entrevista y de la investigación general, se pide al/la participante el nombre y la información de contacto de un/a docente u otro/a profesional educativo/a de su elección. A continuación, se entrevistará al/la profesional educativo/a elegido/a, durante la cual podrá revelarse la identidad del/la estudiante.

b. Aparte de lo anterior, su participación será completamente anónima. No se usarán nombres reales y se utilizarán seudónimos (nombres falsos) en cualquier registro escrito. Además, cualquier otra información que sea personalmente identificable (por ejemplo, nombre del barrio, nombre de la institución académica, etc.) será sustituida u omitida por completo.

5. Confidencialidad

a. Toda la información será tratada de manera confidencial. Aunque los datos serán accesibles principalmente para el investigador, su supervisor, Dr. F. Xàvier Rambla Marigot (véase también información de contacto más abajo), y otras personas del consorcio GLOBED también podrían tener acceso a los datos.

b. Los resultados del estudio se publicarán sin detalles que lo/la identifiquen. Estos resultados también podrían aparecer en revistas académicas bajo las mismas condiciones de anonimato.

6. Protección de datos

a. Los datos se guardarán en una computadora protegida por contraseña durante 5 años, luego serán eliminados.

7. Derechos del/la participante

a. Su participación es voluntaria, y puede negarse a participar o retirarse en cualquier momento sin penalización. También puede pedir que se retiren sus datos del estudio.

8. Reconocimiento de no afiliación con instituciones gubernamentales costarricenses

a. Esta es una investigación académica independiente la cual no tiene ninguna conexión o afiliación con instituciones gubernamentales costarricenses tales como el IMAS, MEP, FODESAF, INEC, ni otras.

b. Dicho lo anterior, aunque este estudio pretende comprender las repercusiones de la pérdida de la beca Avancemos, **el investigador no tiene autoridad ni influencia para restablecer o afectar a ninguna decisión relacionada con la beca. Tampoco puede brindar asistencia sobre el proceso de recuperar la beca.** Este estudio es puramente académico, y los hallazgos no cambiarán directamente los resultados individuales de la beca.

9. Beneficios y compensación

a. Aunque no recibirá un beneficio directo, su participación podría ayudar a futuros estudiantes y familias del programa Avancemos.

b. No recibirá ninguna compensación financiera ni de otro tipo por participar.

10. Información de contacto

a. Luke Duceman (investigador; se habla español)
   i. WhatsApp, teléfono: +1 570 933 0236
   ii. Correo electrónico: lukeduceman@gmail.com

b. Dr. F. Xàvier Rambla Marigot (supervisor de tesis; se habla español)
    i. Correo electrónico: xavier.rambla@uab.cat

CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO – ESTUDIANTE

Al firmar este documento, usted(es) confirma(n) que ha(n) leído y comprendido la información proporcionada y acepta(n) participar en esta investigación bajo las condiciones descritas.

Nombre completo del investigador
(en letra de imprenta)

Nombre completo del entrevistado/a
(en letra de imprenta)

_____ _____

Firma del investigador

Firma del entrevistado/a

_____ _____

Fecha

Fecha

_____ _____

En caso de ser menor de edad (menos de 18 años):

Nombre completo del padre/ madre/ tutor legal del entrevistado/a:
(en letra de imprenta)

_____

Firma del padre/ madre/ tutor legal del entrevistado/a:

_____

Fecha

_____

Appendix D

Informed consent letter for parent/guardian interviewees

CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO – PADRE/MADRE/TUTOR

1. **Antecedentes y propósito**
    - **a.** Mi nombre es Luke Duceman y soy estudiante de maestría en la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. El propósito de esta investigación es comprender mejor cómo la pérdida de la beca Avancemos afecta la educación de los/las estudiantes adolescentes, sus planes de carrera y su trayectoria de vida en general. Usted ha sido identificado/a y seleccionado/a para participar en esta investigación dado que es el/la padre/madre/tutor de un/a estudiante actual o reciente de secundaria o colegio y ha experimentado la pérdida de este beneficio en algún momento.

2. **Expectativas y procedimientos del/la participante**
    a. Se entrevistará al/la participante y se le harán preguntas que incluyen, pero no se limitan a: entorno social, familia, experiencias educativas del/la estudiante, opiniones del/la entrevistado/a sobre la educación, experiencias personales del entrevistado/a con la institución académica del hijo/a, y su situación económica.

    b. El/la participante será entrevistado/a una vez por aproximadamente 45-60 minutos.

    c. La entrevista se llevará a cabo en el domicilio del/la participante en un momento previamente acordado entre el investigador y el/la participante. Si el/la participante y/u otras partes no están de acuerdo en realizar la entrevista en el domicilio, entonces se podrá utilizar otro lugar a elección del/la participante, siempre que el lugar sea seguro y pueda proporcionar los medios suficientes de confidencialidad.

3. **Riesgos**
    a. Al participar en este estudio de investigación, usted entiende la posibilidad de pérdida de privacidad. El investigador mitigará este riesgo mediante el uso de seudónimos

(nombres falsos) para cualquier registro escrito que involucre al/la participante.

b. Al participar en este estudio de investigación, usted asume el riesgo de ser preguntado/a sobre temas posiblemente incómodos y/o sensibles. Usted tiene el derecho de responder o no responder a las preguntas según lo desee. Además, puede pausar o detener la entrevista en cualquier momento si se siente incómodo/a, sin tener que proporcionar una razón y sin ninguna penalización.

4. Anonimato

a. La participación en esta investigación será completamente anónima. El nombre del/la participante no será registrado en ninguna parte del estudio, y se utilizarán seudónimos (nombres falsos) para proteger la identidad del/la participante. Además, cualquier otra información que sea personalmente identificable (por ejemplo, nombre del barrio, nombre de la institución académica del hijo/a, etc.) será sustituida u omitida por completo.

5. Confidencialidad

a. Toda la información proporcionada por el/la participante será tratada de manera confidencial. Aunque los datos recolectados serán principalmente accesibles para el investigador, es posible que otras personas, como el supervisor del investigador, Dr. F. Xàvier Rambla Marigot (véase información de contacto más abajo), y otras personas del consorcio académico GLOBED, también tengan acceso a estos datos recolectados.

b. Los resultados del estudio se publicarán de forma generalizada, sin mencionar detalles que puedan vincular a los/las participantes de manera individual. Asimismo, es posible que los resultados y hallazgos de este estudio se publiquen en revistas académicas bajo las mismas condiciones de anonimato.

6. Protección de datos

a. Los datos recolectados durante este estudio se guardarán en una computadora protegida por contraseña durante 5 años, después de lo cual serán destruidos.

7. Derechos del/la participante

a. La participación en este estudio de investigación es voluntaria; usted es libre de negarse a participar en este estudio de investigación. Tiene el derecho en cualquier momento durante el proceso de investigación de retirar su participación sin penalización. Tiene el derecho de solicitar que cualquier dato o información proporcionada por usted sea retirada del estudio de investigación en cualquier momento.

8. **Reconocimiento de no afiliación con instituciones gubernamentales costarricenses**

a. Esta es una investigación académica independiente la cual no tiene ninguna conexión o afiliación con instituciones gubernamentales costarricenses tales como el IMAS, MEP, FODESAF, INEC, ni otras.

b. Dicho lo anterior, aunque este estudio pretende comprender las repercusiones de la pérdida de la beca Avancemos, **el investigador no tiene autoridad ni influencia para restablecer o afectar a ninguna decisión relacionada con la beca. Tampoco puede brindar asistencia sobre el proceso de recuperar la beca.** Este estudio es puramente académico, y los hallazgos no cambiarán directamente los resultados individuales de la beca.

9. Beneficios y compensación

a. Es posible que usted no se beneficie directamente de este estudio; sin embargo, la investigación realizada podría beneficiar a futuros estudiantes y familias involucrados en el programa Avancemos.

b. Usted no recibirá ninguna compensación, financiera o de otro tipo, por participar en esta investigación.

10. Información de contacto del investigador y del supervisor

a. Luke Duceman (investigador; se habla español)
    i. Teléfono, WhatsApp: +1 570 933 0236
    ii. Correo electrónico: lukeduceman@gmail.com

b. Dr. F. Xàvier Rambla Marigot (profesor y supervisor de tesis; se habla español)
    i. Correo electrónico: xavier.rambla@uab.cat

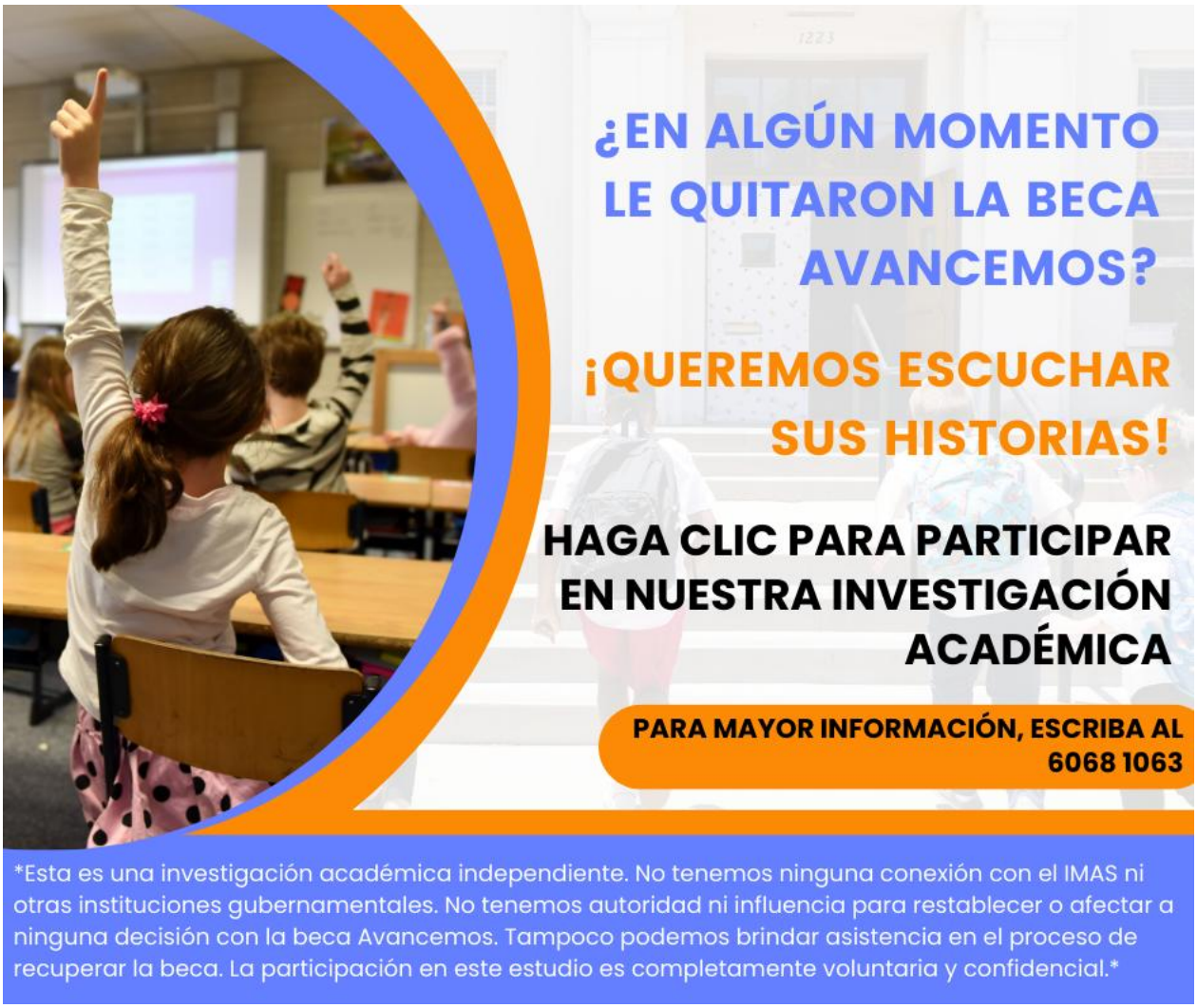
CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO – PADRE/MADRE/TUTOR

Al firmar este documento, usted confirma que ha leído y comprendido la información proporcionada y acepta participar en esta investigación bajo las condiciones descritas.

Nombre completo del investigador *(en letra de imprenta)*	**Nombre completo del entrevistado/a** *(en letra de imprenta)*
_____	_____
Firma del investigador	**Firma del entrevistado/a**
_____	_____
Fecha	**Fecha**
_____	_____

Appendix E

Social media publication seeking participants



Appendix F

Interest form for participation in research (via Google Forms)

Formulario de interés: Participación en estudio sobre impactos a estudiantes a quienes les han quitado la beca Avancemos

⚠️ **ESTA ES UNA INVESTIGACIÓN ACADÉMICA. NO TENEMOS PODER PARA QUE LE DEVUELVAN LA BECA. PARTICIPAR NO GARANTIZA CAMBIOS EN SU AYUDA ECONÓMICA. SIN EMBARGO, ES POSIBLE QUE SU PARTICIPACIÓN EN ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN AYUDE A FUTUROS ESTUDIANTES Y FAMILIAS DEL PROGRAMA AVANCEMOS.** ⚠️

Gracias por su interés en participar en este estudio. Por favor lea toda la información a continuación antes de completar el formulario.

Este estudio busca entender mejor cómo la pérdida de la beca Avancemos, en cualquier momento, afecta la educación de los estudiantes, sus planes de carrera y su trayectoria de vida en general.

Este es un estudio independiente y no está afiliado a instituciones costarricenses como el IMAS, MEP, FODESAF, INEC, u otras.

Es importante aclarar que, aunque el objetivo de la investigación es comprender el impacto de la pérdida de la beca Avancemos, ***NO TENEMOS PODER NI INFLUENCIA PARA RESTABLECER O MODIFICAR DECISIONES SOBRE LA BECA. TAMPOCO PODEMOS BRINDAR ASISTENCIA SOBRE EL PROCESO DE RECUPERAR LA BECA.*** Valoramos mucho sus experiencias y opiniones, pero **este estudio es puramente académico, y los resultados no afectarán directamente su situación con la beca.**

Es posible que los participantes de la investigación no reciban un beneficio directo, ***pero esta investigación podría ayudar a futuros estudiantes y familias del programa Avancemos.***

a investigacionavancemos@gmail.com. No habrá ninguna penalización por retirarse del estudio o por retirar los datos que ha entregado.

Este estudio incluye entrevistas con estudiantes afectados, sus encargados legales y sus profesores. **La participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. Las identidades de los participantes no se revelarán y su información personal será confidencial. Usted tiene el derecho de retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento.**

Si usted desea retirar los datos que ha entregado por este formulario, puede volver a cambiar las respuestas que ya ha entregado (por ejemplo, puede escribir 00000000 en los campos y entregar el formulario de nuevo). También pueder avisarnos por correo electrónico

Si es seleccionado/a para participar, nos comunicaremos con usted por WhatsApp. **Toda comunicación vendrá del número 6068 1063.**

Para más detalles sobre las expectativas, riesgos y derechos de los estudiantes, revise la carta de consentimiento aquí. (Link se dirige a un archivo PDF.)

Para más detalles sobre las expectativas, riesgos y derechos de los encargados legales, revise la carta de consentimiento aquí. (Link se dirige a un archivo PDF.)

Para mayor información sobre el investigador, haga clic aquí. (Link se dirige a un post público en la página de Investigación Avancemos en Facebook.)

Si tiene más preguntas o dudas, por favor escríbanos por WhatsApp a 6068 1063, por mensaje privado a nuestra página de Facebook aquí o por correo electrónico a: investigacionavancemos@gmail.com

* Indicates required question

1. **Año académico del estudiante**

Si hay más de un estudiante afectado, por favor proporcione más información en la sección de comentarios adicionales.

Si el/la estudiante ha abandonado sus estudios, indique el año académico más alto que ha logrado.

Dropdown

Los jóvenes adultos que ya se han graduado también pueden participar si en algún momento se les quitó la beca mientras eran estudiantes.

Mark only one oval.

- Kinder
- 1 (escuela)
- 2 (escuela)
- 3 (escuela)
- 4 (escuela)
- 5 (escuela)
- 6 (escuela)
- 7 (colegio)
- 8 (colegio)
- 9 (colegio)
- 10 (colegio)
- 11 (colegio)
- 12 (colegio)
- Graduado/a

2. **Nombre de la persona encargada** *

3. **Número de WhatsApp de la persona encargada** *
   Toda comunicación vendrá del número 6068 1063.

4. **Provincia, Cantón y Ciudad** *

5. **(OPCIONAL) Comentarios adicionales**

6. **Entiendo que es posible que mi participación en esta investigación pueda ayudar a futuros estudiantes y familias del programa Avancemos. También entiendo que esta es una investigación académica que no tiene ninguna conexión con el IMAS ni otras instituciones gubernamentales. Por último, entiendo que el equipo de investigación no tiene el poder de devolverme la beca ni puede brindar asistencia relacionada con la beca.** *

Check all that apply.

☐ Sí, he leído y comprendido lo anterior.