Global Policies and Local meanings: School choice without vouchers
School choice in the city of Buenos Aires

Expansion of private school choice: paradigmatic explanations*

i) Privatization as a result of the general improvement in household incomes

ii) Privatization as a result of teacher strikes in the public sector

iii) Privatization as a result of families increasingly seeking better educational outcomes

iv) Privatization as a consequence of socioeconomic segregation and self-segregation processes

v) Privatization as a consequence of the publication of private education

vi) Privatization as a quasi-spontaneous phenomenon

vii) Privatization as a result of neoliberal policies

viii) Privatization as a state policy

*Privatization refers to enrolment in private schools (Narodowski, Moschetti & Gottau, 2017)
Objectives

Compare and contrast the theoretical findings regarding the reasons for the growth of private school choice with empirical evidence and arguments for the parental choice of secondary schools for their children.
Structured Paternalism proposed Ben-Porath & Johanek (2019) to analyze how we collectively think about public and private affairs in education.
Methodology

Interviews to 30 parents with children in last year of primary schools with no secondary school in the city of Buenos Aires

Primary schools located in two school districts - High SES and low SES:

Social vulnerability Index

District 13: (0.000 - 0.162) two schools

District 4: (0.301-0.642) two schools

Source: Ministry of Education
Findings

Five diverse and divergent pathways for private school choice*:

(a) Upward mobility Pathway
(b) Anti-market Pathway
(c) Socialization Pathway
(d) Meritocracy Pathway
(e) Self-expression pathway

* These pathways tend to overlap and should not be taken as the only and main drivers.
Upward mobility Pathway

Parents: low SES and highest educational level: secondary school

Conception of 7th grade child: a little kid who needs protection and care.

Value discipline over creativity

Seek protection and security

Main drivers: distance to school, school fee, absence of strikes

Universe of school choice options: low fee private schools (Catholic schools)

Representation of school: upward social mobility

Schooling = betterment of family education
Anti-market Pathway

Parents: heterogeneous SES and highest educational level: secondary school and university

Conception of 7th grade child: not clearly stated

Value: the importance of State interference in education and strongly reject the introduction of market forces in the educational field

Seek: educate good citizens and take pride in choosing ‘against that grain’ by sending their children to public schools, reject market forces in education field

Main drivers: social, cultural and economic heterogeneity, diversity and pluralism.

Universe of school choice options: state schools

Representation of school: public schools are a political standpoint and political identity (socialist)

Schooling = State education
Socialization pathway

Parents: Mid-high SES, highest educational level: University and post-graduate

Conception of 7th grade child: not a kid any longer but still need some guidance and protection

Value: socioeconomic composition of the school

Seek: homogeneous socialization and reproduce their lifestyle

Main drivers: School prestige and social distinction

Universe of school choice options: private elite schools- secular or confessional.

Representation of school: a place where birds of a feather flock together

Schooling = social reproduction & distinction
Meritocracy Pathway

Parents: mid SES, highest educational level: secondary school/ University degree(mothers)

Conception of 7th grade child: old enough to know better and ready to face greater challenges

Value meritocracy and autonomy

Seek autonomy for their children

Main drivers: high academic achievement

Universe of school choice options: technical state schools or the schools of the University of Buenos Aires (elite)

Representation of school: a place to study and learn

Schooling= reproduction of lifestyle
Self-expression pathway

Parents: Mid-high SES, highest educational level: University and post-graduate

Conception of 7th grade child: not a kid any longer but still need some guidance and protection

Value: autonomy and self-expression

Seek: wellbeing of their children

Main drivers: not to expose their children to situations that they consider too demanding or uncomfortable

Universe of school choice options: private elite schools- secular or confessional.

Representation of school: a place for self-construction

Schooling = a place to find yourself
Conclusions

Parents’ preferences of school choice provide evidence to four out of the eight paradigmatic explanations:

- teacher strikes in the public sector;
- processes of socioeconomic segregation and self-segregation;
- the implementation of meritocracy
- structural and ideational factors position private school choice as a State policy.

New trends in educational policies have helped provide new meanings to settled traditions.

Conclusions

Thanks for your time!

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