



Winners and losers of school choice: Evidence from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Santiago, Chile



Fatima Alves^{a,b}, Gregory Elacqua^{c,*}, Mariane Koslinki^d, Matias Martinez^c, Humberto Santos^c, Daniela Urbina^e

^aMIDE UC, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

^bSchool of Education, Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

^cPublic Policy Institute, School of Business and Economics, Universidad Diego Portales, Chile

^dSchool of Education, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

^eDepartment of Sociology, New York University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Educational policy
Comparative education
School choice
Educational equity
Vouchers
Geospatial analysis

ABSTRACT

School choice is a controversial topic in the education debate. Proponents argue that choice would open up opportunities to disadvantaged families. Critics counter that choice may exacerbate inequities as advantaged parents are more likely to choose the best schools. Rio de Janeiro and Santiago provide unique institutional contexts in which to explore how choice may affect equity. We use datasets with information on home addresses to compare the choices of parents with different backgrounds. We find that disadvantaged parents in both cities are less likely to choose high achieving schools. The differences are more pronounced in Santiago than in Rio. These results suggest that choice policies will likely not reduce inequities and the design of the program influences behavior.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

School choice has been at the center of the education debate since the 1950s, when Milton Friedman published his seminal article on “The Role of Government in Education” (Friedman, 1955). From that moment onwards, a raging discussion began about the effects of choice on different educational outcomes. Perhaps one of the hottest topics within this debate has been the effect of school choice on social equity. This discussion has gained worldwide attention since over the last 25 years more than two-thirds of OECD countries have expanded school choice opportunities for parents (Musset, 2012).

Advocates have often maintained that the introduction of market mechanisms in education will expand the educational opportunities of the most disadvantaged students (Neal, 2002; Jencks, 1966). Since economically advantaged families have always had the opportunity to enroll their children in high performing schools through residential mobility or by choosing private schools (Viteritti, 2003), proponents have argued that enabling disadvantaged families to leave their low-performing neighborhood schools

for higher performing ones would enhance educational equity and reduce school segregation (Moe, 2001; Finn, 1990).

School choice opponents contend that choice increases the risk of increasing inequities (Fiske and Ladd, 2000; Levin, 1998). Skeptics argue that low-SES families will not have the information or the time to make informed decisions and choose a quality school for their children (Schneider et al., 2000; Ascher et al., 1996). They maintain that disadvantaged parents will tend to base their educational decisions on non-academic factors, such as the proximity of schools to their residence or the availability of extracurricular activities, and that they will be less likely than more advantaged families to use choice programs to find a higher performing school for their children (Bifulco and Ladd, 2007; Saporito, 2003; Henig, 1994). Critics are also concerned that schools will have incentives to skim-off high achieving students at the expense of disadvantaged and low-performing ones, who will remain at their low-performing and segregated neighborhood public schools (Epple and Romano, 1998).

Scholars can gain insight into this debate by studying parent behavior in schooling systems where choice programs have been implemented. In 1988, Rio de Janeiro adopted a public school open enrollment program. In 1981, Chile instituted a universal voucher program.

In this paper, we use unique and highly detailed datasets in each city, which include georeferenced information on schools and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +56 962065993.

E-mail address: gregory.elacqua@gmail.com (G. Elacqua).

students, to answer the following two questions about parental preferences for schools and the effects of their choices on equity. First, are more advantaged families more likely to choose a school outside of their neighborhoods than disadvantaged families? Second, among parents that exercise choice, are there differences by social class in the likelihood of choosing a high performing school? In addition to exploring the effects of school choice on social equity, by comparing the results in Rio de Janeiro and Santiago, we will be able to study the extent to which the effects of school choice are context specific, considering the differences in institutional design between both cities.

Consistent with previous research, we find that high-SES families in Santiago are more likely to choose schools outside of their neighborhoods. However, in Rio de Janeiro we did not find differences across socioeconomic groups. Moreover, in both cities high-SES families are more likely to select a high-quality school outside of their neighborhoods. Our hypothesis is that differences in school choice design might explain the wider socioeconomic gap between choosers and non-choosers in Santiago than in Rio.

This article is organized as follows. The next section reviews the literature on school choice and the determinants of choosing a school outside of the neighborhood. Section 3 describes Rio de Janeiro's and Santiago's educational systems and choice programs. Section 4 presents our theoretical model and empirical strategy. Section 5 describes the data used. Section 6 analyzes which parents choose schools outside of their neighborhoods and the performance of schools that parents choose in Santiago and Rio de Janeiro. The final section concludes and discusses some policy implications.

2. Literature review

Extensive research on diverse school systems has identified a set of determinants of parental choice, emphasizing the importance of family income, student ability, and distance, among other factors. Some studies compare the characteristics of “choosers” and “non-choosers” in different school choice programs¹ (e.g. Bifulco and Ladd, 2007), while others estimate the probability of choosing a different school other than the assigned school (e.g. Bifulco et al., 2009; Cullen et al., 2005). Overall, these studies find that higher-SES families are more likely to be active choosers (e.g. Riedel et al., 2010; Denessen et al., 2001; Martínez et al., 1996).

For instance, a relatively large body of empirical literature has concluded that parents with higher education levels are much more likely to take advantage of school choice. Evaluations of the Milwaukee voucher program consistently show that parents with higher levels of education and more involvement in their child's education are more likely to choose a private voucher school for their children (Chakrabarti, 2006; Witte, 2000). Studies of voucher and open enrollment programs in Cleveland; New York; Saint Louis; Washington, DC; and Scotland find similar results (Wells, 1996; Willms and Echols, 1992). Hsieh and Urquiola (2003), in one of the first attempts to evaluate the effects of Chile's universal voucher program, conclude that advantaged families are much more likely to send their children to private voucher schools than disadvantaged ones. Bifulco et al. (2009) analyze Durham, North Carolina's school choice program and find that, among students that live in low-achievement attendance zones, children of college-educated parents are significantly more likely to exit their assigned school than children of high school graduates, who are more likely to opt out of their neighborhood school than children of high school dropouts.

¹ Some forms of school choice are: open enrollment programs, vouchers, magnet and charter schools, and inter and intra district choice.

The social and racial composition of the assigned school is another factor that explains which parents are more likely to opt out of their assigned public school. Researchers have found that white parents are more likely to choose a school outside of their neighborhood if their attendance zone has high percentage of black students (Söderström and Uusitalo, 2005; Lankford and Wyckoff, 2001). Similarly, Riedel et al. (2010) find that German families that live in school districts with high proportions of minority students are more likely to opt out of their assigned neighborhood school. This behavior has been interpreted as a strategy of advantaged parents to maintain their status by distancing themselves from groups of a lower social standing (e.g. Saporito, 2003). However, parents may also use student demographics as a proxy for the academic quality of the school. Parents may assume (accurately or not) that schools with more advantaged students are able to attract more motivated students and families, raise more local private funds, recruit and retain higher-quality teachers and add greater value to their child's education (Fiske & Ladd, 2000). These findings are consistent with the literature on parental preferences, which demonstrates that parents prefer schools where students interact with individuals ethnically and socio-economically similar to themselves (Crozier et al., 2008; Bifulco and Ladd, 2007; Elacqua et al., 2006; Fiske and Ladd, 2000; McEwan and Carnoy, 2000; Willms and Echols, 1992).

Researchers have also found that parents with high performing children are more likely to opt out of the assigned neighborhood school. In Chicago's Public School System (CPS), Cullen et al. (2005) find that 74 percent of students in the top quartile on achievement tests opt out of their assigned school and 2/3 attend higher performing schools. In contrast, only 37 percent of the bottom quartile choose a school outside of their assignment area, and, unlike parents with high performing children, are more likely to enroll their children in public schools with below average results. Hastings et al. (2005) find that parents of high-achieving students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina are much more likely to choose high-performing schools and travel far from home compared to parents of low and moderate achievers.

Finally, numerous studies have identified a positive relationship between distance to the assigned school and the probability of choosing a school in a different attendance zone. Indeed, the closer the assigned school is, the less likely the student will choose a school outside of the assigned attendance zone (Bifulco and Ladd, 2007; Hastings et al., 2005; Cullen et al., 2005). For example, Riedel et al. (2010) find that increasing the distance to the assigned school by 100 m, increases the likelihood of choosing another school by 3 percent. Moreover, there is evidence that proximity to the school is more important for low-income families, as transportation costs are more taxing (Hastings et al., 2005). Similar findings were reported in Chumacero et al. (2011) analysis of Chile's educational voucher system, where greater household income and mother's education reduce the probability of choosing the closest neighborhood school.

Overall, the literature suggests that rather than creating more opportunities for disadvantaged students, school choice policies have mainly benefited more motivated and economically advantaged families. Our research contributes to this extensive literature by exploring the effects of school choice on equity in two choice programs with alternative designs in Latin America and with unique data sets with student address information. Rio de Janeiro has an open enrollment public school choice program and Santiago has a universal voucher program where parents can choose between public, for-profit, and non-profit private voucher schools.

3. School choice in comparative perspective

Rio de Janeiro and Santiago have historically had little in common beyond high levels of inequality. Rio de Janeiro and

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6841295>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6841295>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)