

New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences



Volume 6, Issue 1 (2019) 213-223

www.prosoc.eu

Selected Paper of 11th World Conference on Educational Sciences (WCES-2019) 07-10 February 2019, Milano Novotel Milano Nord Ca' Granda Convention Center, Italy

School choice and private schooling: a comparative case-study between Greece and Sweden

Alexandra Farazouli*, OpenLab, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, 114 28 Stockholm, Sweden

Suggested Citation:

Farazouli, A. (2019). School choice and private schooling: a comparative case-study between Greece and Sweden. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 6(1), pp 213–223. Available from: www.prosoc.eu

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Jesus Garcia Laborda, University of Alcala, Spain.
©2019. All rights reserved.

Abstract

Over the past three decades, privatisation and school choice have been introduced and embodied in the vocabulary of several national education policies. This study aiming to examine the phenomenon of private schooling and the factors that affect parental school choice outlined a comprehensive framework of the national policies about private schools and school choice in Greece and Sweden. The case study design of the research provided an in-depth exploration of the two national contexts, enriching the study with empirical data. Twenty semi-structured interviews with education professionals and parents from both countries shed light on the reasons behind the school choice towards private schools. Regarding the findings of the research, several kinds of educational inequalities and social segregation were identified because of the fact that not all parents have access to school choice under equal terms.

Keywords: School choice, private education, human capital theory, human rights theory, capability approach.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Alexandra Farazouli, OpenLab, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, 114 28 Stockholm, Sweden. E-mail address: a.farazouli@gmail.com / Tel.: + 46 76-313-0289

1. Introduction

Every child in the world should have access to free, equitable and quality education, directed to the full development of human capabilities. This has been constituted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and actively supported and promoted by the United Nations (UN). UN discourse stands for universal education around the globe by setting development goals since 2002, aiming to inspire people from around the world to take action. Sustainable development goal 4 in the current global development agenda encourages all countries to 'ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning' (UN, 2015). Education is a prerequisite for democracy and therefore its provision is the primary responsibility of the state which should ensure free access, equity and equality in schools (Dewey, 2006). It could also be stated that schools are the central social institutions and civil mechanisms that cultivate the ethos of upcoming citizens. Nevertheless, the state is often not wholly able to fund or provide education based only on its public-sector capacity, and subsequently, the private sector complements the state's inadequacy in several ways, such as running private schools. This situation is associated with the notion of privatisation of education and makes the boundaries between the public and the private sectors less distinct.

Sweden and Greece provide free access to education across all education levels, starting from early childhood to tertiary education. Although free education has been constituted, private schooling has been steadily growing its presence over the last years in both countries. Parents opt for private schools' alternatives existed, aiming to provide the best education possible to their children. These alternatives often include attractive programmes, additional resources and extra facilities, which often public schools are not able to afford. Therefore, school choice is firmly applied and supported in both countries leading to the establishment of various kinds of schools run by the state or individuals and companies. Privatisation of education and school choice have caused a broad political and philosophical debate over the last years. The privatisation of education challenges the notion of education as a human right and public good, due to the diversity in ways of schooling, while school choice as an option allows parents to choose and have a voice on what 'fits them best'. This phenomenon often leads to the implementation of market-like policies, which are opposed to the concept of education regarding equality and accessibility.

In this research study, the concept of private schooling will be presented and critically examined, by using the theoretical lenses of the human capital, human rights and capability approaches applied in the Swedish and Greek contexts. What attracted the interest of the researcher to examine these two countries is the fact that there is an increasing number of parents who opt for private primary schools in Sweden, while at the same time a steady preference for private schools in Greece is noticed, despite the country's severe economic restraints. Equality, accessibility and equity in education constitute the three pillars of the research analysis, which examine how these are realised in each country. Another focus point of the study is to describe the concept of school choice and how education professionals and parents perceive this.

1.1. Aims and objectives

The main aims of the study are to examine the phenomenon of private schooling and explore the factors that affect school choice towards private schools, in primary education level. The whole study will refer to the Greek and Swedish educational contexts and will focus on the 'extras' that private schools provide to their students compared to the public ones. The study will be exploratory, aiming to gain a deep understanding of the reasons why private schools seem to attract more and more students with the passage of time. More specifically, these aims may be reached through the following objectives: to create a comprehensive framework of the national policies about private schools and school choice in both countries; to conduct interviews with various education stakeholders in both countries in order to explore their perceptions of private schooling; and to analyse the findings and compare the two national contexts.

The research questions formulating the study have been set in order to describe the reasons behind the school choice towards private schools and to discover the similarities and differences in private schooling between the two countries as: What are the socio-political factors behind the increased participation in private schools throughout the years? What are the reasons behind the school choice towards private schooling? What are the main similarities and differences in private schooling between the two countries?

1.2. Limitations and delimitations of the study

Regarding the case-study approach of the thesis, its findings could not be generalised to a larger scale but could further contribute to the theoretical discussion around private schooling and school choice. The sample was not meant to be representative of the Swedish and the Greek contexts but was used as a means to further understand and question the reasons behind private school choice. Furthermore, the author's interpretation of reality, in combination with the selection of specific theoretical approaches used for the topic's critical examination, could set boundaries to the analysis provided. As Bryman (2012) states, qualitative research accepts critics due to issues related to subjectivity, replication, transparency and generalisation. Furthermore, the focus on primary schools could also be considered as a limitation. Since much research on privatisation and school choice has been conducted concerning tertiary and upper-secondary education, while there is less extensive research regarding compulsory education, the author decided to narrow the analysis of the topic down to primary education.

1.3. Ethical considerations

The researcher ensured that no participant will be harmed since all the data collected from the interviews, the identities of participants and the names of the schools will remain confidential and secured. Regarding the informed consent and the deception avoidance, the researcher gave the participants a description of the study and the terms of the interview. Each participant received as much information needed before the interview and a detailed consent form in order to be able to take an informed decision, while the researcher did not use any covert methods and totally respected the rights of the participants. In addition, code names are carefully used in the study in the presentation and analysis of the findings, when referring to specific participants in the research report.

2. Methodology

Regarding the sampling of the cases selected in each country, the researcher chose one private school situated in the centre of each capital as an attempt to identify critical cases. Although the researcher has not accumulated a hypothesis driving this study, this type of cases permitted her to pose her research questions. These schools allowed the research to reach a deeper understanding of private schooling in both countries and further enriched the knowledge of the researcher regarding the variables that influence school choice. The researcher conducted and audio-recorded 20 semi-structured interviews, 10 in each country, in order to develop awareness regarding the reasons that affect school choice towards private education. The semi-structured interviews gave the flexibility to the discussion with participants needed, so as not to limit the interviewees' will to further elaborate on the questions asked and just to frame the interview according to the research aims. The sampling of the participants was purposive and strategic since the goal of the researcher was to interview people who were relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). More specifically, and according to Palys (2008) and Patton (1990), the type of the purposive sampling was 'criterion' sampling, since the education professionals should work in primary school and the parents should have children at the same education level, and 'snowball' sampling since each participant led to the next, covering in that way a significant variety of people involved in the study (cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 419). Furthermore, the researcher had decided to interview teachers, programme coordinators,

school directors and parents in order to achieve a high level of the different stakeholders' understandings of school choice and the role of private schools.

Regarding the analytical procedure followed by the author in order to interpret and analyse her interviews' data, thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012) was used. More specifically, the researcher, after having thoroughly reviewed the interviews' transcriptions created a large collection of themes. These themes were based on several codes which appeared repeatedly in the transcriptions. At this point, it is essential to mention that since the character of the study is exploratory, the interviews aimed to help the researcher to extend her understanding of private schooling and school choice in both countries. Therefore, thematic analysis occurred separately in each country's transcriptions of interviews. This resulted in the creation of several different codes and themes for each case. The author decided to follow this analytic strategy in an attempt not to limit the analysis of both national contexts to the exact same themes which could lead to data fragmentations. In contrary, after having thematically analysed each case study separately, the comparison occurred by focusing on the common and different themes that appeared in both cases.

3. Analysis of RQs

3.1. RQ1: what are the socio-political factors behind the increased participation in private schools throughout the years?

The examination of the education context in both countries, along with the analysis of the interviews, initiated three significant factors that led to the increased participation in private schools throughout the years, which are: the dissatisfaction from the national educational policies, the rise of migration and the social stratification of neighborhoods. Each factor is determined by several variables and applies in both countries. Furthermore, some additional factors, which concern the Greek case, and did not apply to the Swedish context are indicated. These are the Greek tradition of education and the increasing intention of Greeks to migrate to other countries due to the economic crisis.

First, the high levels of dissatisfaction caused by the national educational policies seem to affect parents who opt for choosing private schools. As private schools appear to be more independent and flexible than public schools, they are allowed to go further than the governments' compulsory regulations. In that way, private schools following their own educational agendas are not affected by national education reforms to the same extent as public schools are. This was mentioned as a positive aspect of private schooling for students, as parents can choose a private school in order to avoid public schools' inefficiency. As a consequence, loss of trust to the public sector has been observed by parents who prefer private schooling for their children. According to the findings of the Greek case, there are several reasons which led to parents' private school preference. Political instability and continuous education reforms seem to negatively affect the quality of education. Education professionals and parents argued that there is no uniform government plan for education while politicians make institutional changes for canvassing reasons and as signs of power. Erratic actions and short-term planning take place with regards to national education policy. Furthermore, national economic restrains having an impact on the national budget for education have resulted in lack of adequate teaching staff in public schools and provoked several demonstrations throughout the school year. Hence, it is a common phenomenon that students miss classes in public schools which are not replaced. In addition, aging teaching staff caused by the state's financial inability to hire new teachers, along with the lack of efficient teachers' evaluation decreases the quality of teaching in public schools. The findings from the Swedish context regard parents' expectations from the school concerning the set of high academic expectations for their children and behavioural issues in the classroom. Interviewees referred to the 'loosen' policy of public schools as a disadvantage regarding academic expectations and student's behaviour. More specifically, participants mentioned that private schools tend to set higher targets for students' achievement than public schools which often have a looser teaching rhythm. In addition, students' disrespect for their educators has been noticed in public school classes

resulting in a chaotic classroom environment. Consequently, it seems that parents who choose private schools tend to focus further on discipline and the establishment of educational goals for students.

Second, the rise of immigrants in both countries has been observed as one of the most significant factors that affect parents' choice for private schools. This finding seems to be out of special research interest since this rise affected parents' choice in contradicting ways. One of this phenomenon's aspects is expressed through parents' belief that students with a foreign background lower the quality of education while another aspect of the same phenomenon is that parents with a foreign background tend to prefer private schools, as they think that they are more comprehensive than public schools. This contradiction could be further explained as the cause of the national gaps in immigrants' integration to public education and society, in both national contexts. On the one hand, it was argued that immigrant students are not efficiently integrated into Greek and Swedish classrooms, and that caused a rise of local students' participation in private schools. Children with immigrant background tend to need more time to achieve a high level of understanding the local language causing either learning gaps or adopting a slower learning rhythm than the other children. As a result, parents are negatively biased towards public schools, having the impression that their children will receive lower quality education. On the other hand, in the case of Sweden, foreigners also tend to choose private schools, and that resulted in a rise of immigrant students' participation in private schools. Parents with a foreign background prefer private schools with an international orientation, as they believe that this would be a more comprehensive way for their children to integrate into the local education system.

Third, another factor noticed that influences parents' decisions for schooling regards their residential areas. Various regions in the capitals of both countries seem to be socially and culturally stratified, while foreign populations tend to get concentrated in specific regions. This phenomenon results in social segregation and polarisation nurturing in that way the creation of a dysfunctional social reality, where locals try to avoid the newcomers. While public schools in wealthy municipalities may seem to be of decent quality, public schools in degraded areas or in areas where mainly immigrant people have accommodation seem to be of inferior quality in terms of infrastructure and teaching staff. Furthermore, in such areas, safety tends to become an issue that concerns parents reporting cases of delinquent behaviour.

Some additional factors appeared to have an impact on parents who opt for private schools, only in the Greek context. Almost all of the participants referred to the long Greek tradition in education. Education professionals and parents reported that education for Greek culture is one of the highest priorities for Greek citizens, who try to ensure that their children receive high-quality education. Parents tend to feel reassured that they provide the best they can to their children by choosing a private school and paying for their schooling fees. In that way, they hope that their children will experience a calm and fruitful school life since private schools provide school environments to their students which are usually protected from the external sociopolitical factors that may affect public schools. Furthermore, the participants reported the high interest of Greek citizens who intend to migrate from the country for financial reasons, and therefore choose private schools which focus on English and other foreign languages.

3.2. RQ2: what are the reasons behind school choice towards private schooling?

Assessing the findings of the study, various reasons behind school choice for private schools became apparent. One of the most important reasons, which appeared in every interview conducted, was about parents' belief that a private school outweighs a public school in terms of quality of education. Furthermore, some of the special characteristic of private schools also seemed to attract student population such as their structure and organisation, the attention given to educational results of the students, the extension of the national curriculum by including additional subjects and activities, the professional status of the teaching staff and the international orientation that most of the private schools have adopted. In addition, in the case of Greece, more arguments from the participants were reported regarding parents' preference for private schools. These arguments concern Greeks'

mentality of perceiving education as the means for a successful upcoming career, the public schools' disadvantages and the extended daily schoolschedule.

Both education professionals and parents argued that private schools tend to be better structured and organised. The interviewed parents reported that these schools provide a safe and controlled educational environment for their children, and this is one of the main reasons why they prefer them. The smaller size of a private school along with the adequate school staff are the fundamental factors that create this setting. In addition, private schools run by private companies can act in a more independent way than public schools. This fact makes them more flexible for creating their own structures of administration and operation.

Intensive focus on education outcomes was also referred as the advantage of private schools, since the participants mentioned that they appreciate the fact that private schools pay more attention to monitoring students' educational outcomes. Private schools tend to annually advertise their students' academic results which are used as the proof of their success. Parents also tend to prefer private schools since they are stricter than public schools, in terms of behavioural codes and social ethics. It can be argued that private schools have their own in-school behavioural regulations according to each school's principles and values, which enhance the social role of school in cultivating characters and social attitudes.

Another reason why parents choose private schools is the opportunity they have to set their own education criteria and choose between several educational alternatives. Although in both countries all schools are centrally supervised, private schools are affected by education reforms to a more limited extent than public schools, since they are free enough to have their own additional educational plans. National educational guidelines should be followed by all types of schools, but each private school can have its own educational signature in terms of educational style and teaching methods. Curriculum extension is a common tactic of private schools which include more teaching subjects and extracurricular activities in their daily schedule. International orientation is another aspect of private schools, which seems to magnetise parents' choice. Focus on teaching English and other foreign languages along with the overall intercultural profile that private schools usually have are the attractive primary features that were mentioned in the interviews. Parents seem to consider these characteristics as crucial since they highlighted the necessity that schools should include global citizenship values.

Furthermore, parents mentioned that one of the reasons why they chose a private school for their children regards the teaching staff which seems to abide by high quality standards. Private schools hire teachers according to a selection process through interviews, followed by frequent evaluations throughout the school year. As a consequence, teachers working in private schools tend to have strong academic and professional background. In addition, since teachers have to report their educational goals and students' achievements periodically, schools' administration and parents can easily monitor students' progress.

Some additional reasons have been concluded regarding the Greek context only. The vast majority of the interviewees expressed that there is connection between education and professional career. Success in education could possibly set the ground for a successful career path, and this is one of the main reasons why Greek parents choose private schools, because they perceive private schooling as an investment for the employment future of their children. Furthermore, public schools' infrastructure may be inappropriate in some cases, reporting no-heated classes in the winter and very old buildings, and therefore parents choose private schools in order to avoid this kind of cases. Finally, the extended daily school schedule was reported as a significant determinant for parental school choice, since private schools give the opportunity to children to stay longer at school, benefiting in that way their working parents.

3.3. RQ3: what are the main similarities and differences in private schooling between the two countries?

Through the comparison of the two countries, by using the descriptions of their national contexts and the findings from the interviews, several similarities and differences were shown about the participants' perception of the concept of school choice. Starting from the similarities, in both countries the interviewees mentioned that they understand school choice as one of their human rights. Education professionals and parents expressed that having the option to choose schools for their children is part of their freedoms as human beings.

Another similarity between the two countries was found in participants' opinions about competition among schools. Since school choice was introduced in both national contexts, private schools are financially dependent on parents' preference. Low participation in a private school could threaten its operation, and therefore they should compete with other schools to attract more customers. As interviewees argued, the notion of competition, initiated through the creation of private schools, seems to be a positive aspect of school choice, leading to better and more diverse schools, since it forces them to improve their facilities.

Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews has shown that parents who choose private schools seem to get engaged with their children education to a vast extent. Parents have to do their own research before choosing a school, and as a consequence, they get more involved regarding the quality of education provided to their children. In addition, in the case of Greece where parents have to pay certain fees for private schools, they admitted that they tend to be more responsible and engaged regarding the teaching material, while they also claim to have a closer communication with the teachers. It has been observed that parents who opt for private schools are significantly focused on academic outcomes, which also act as a criterion for them in choosing between schools.

Similarly, parents from both Greece and Sweden mentioned that in some cases they do not feel that they actually have the option of choosing. This argument derived from parents stating that the quality of local schools is of inferior standards, so they do not even consider enrolling their children to these schools. Furthermore, parents' availability of time and access to information are crucial determinants regarding their ability to choose schools. Parents with limited available time are excluded from school choice, since, as some of the parents stated, they did not have enough time to do their research. Critical thinking and a certain level of education were mentioned as the prerequisites a parent should have in order to be able to choose between schools. In addition, access to information seemed to be the most critical factor that determines the ability of parents to make a choice, since limited language and research skills could exclude parents from taking an informed school choice.

Moving to the differences, several observations and conclusions were drawn regarding each country. One of the main contrasting characteristics between Greece and Sweden regards participants' opinion on private schooling and school choice introduction as a policy. In the case of the Greek participants, all of them stated that they are totally positive towards private schooling and the option that parents have in choosing the school they want according to their preferences. In contrast, the Swedish participants mentioned several concerns regarding school choice and the way private schools work. According to the interviewees from Sweden, private schools are run by private companies while their only target is to maximise their profits. For this reason, both education professionals and parents questioned the quality of education provided in such schools, while they also referred to the use of private schools' advertisements which could often be misleading.

4. Discussion

Children's education seems to occur as the means for a successful career path, according to the participants' views. One of the main reasons why parents tend to prefer to choose among different kinds of schools, supporting in that way private schooling, is because they want to provide the best they can to their children, in order to get well prepared for their academic or professional future.

Hence, parents face education as a means to an end while their choice for a private school is purposeful and goal oriented (Olssen, Codd & O'Neil, 2004). It could be argued that this interpretation by parents of education as an investment for the future is in accordance with the Human Capital Theory, which expresses an economic approach to human behaviour.

The extension of the curriculum and the international focus that private schools may offer appear to be significant determinants of the rise in the number of enrolments in private schools, since they aim to increase children's knowledge capacity. Additional school subjects further focus on foreign languages' instruction and high levels of in-school discipline have been presented by the interviewees as the critical characteristics for defining the quality of a school, since they consist essential tools for an upcoming successful career. Especially in the case of Greece, where parents should pay certain schooling fees to private schools, education is compared to other kinds of financial investments (Gillis, Perkins, Roemer & Snodgrass, 1992), and as a result, it seems that parents perceive schooling as an investment with the prospect of return.

Considering the reasons why Greek and Swedish parents tend to choose private schools, another finding of the study regards the creation of social segregation between schools, which is associated with the 'reputation' of private schools. The academic results' history of schools appeared to be a crucial determinant of parental school choice. Private schools tend to advertise the high academic achievements of their students in order to attract more customers. As a consequence, this phenomenon leads to further segregation, since the private schools which already include high achievers tend to attract more high achievers.

Moreover, one of the most critical topics for further discussion, which was raised through the analysis of the findings, regards the creation of several inequality issues due to private schooling and school choice policy implementation in both Greece and Sweden. Although human rights discourse posits that all persons should participate in societal decision making, primarily when they are affected by these decisions (Gabel, 2016), this is not the reality in both Greece and Sweden. First, not all parents are able to choose between schools, resulting in the exclusion of a share of children from private schools. As it was argued in the interviews, not everyone has access to private education due to parents' limited financial capacity in the case of Greece, and to the restricted access to information about schools in the case of Sweden. Since the Greek private schools do not receive any financial support from the state and they charge parents for schooling fees, a significant share of Greek parents is unable to pay this kind of fees, and as a consequence, they are totally excluded from choosing private education.

Furthermore, Swedish language skills are required from parents in order to be able to make an informed choice, and therefore most of the immigrants in Sweden are incapable of obtaining information about schools and making a choice. Limited language skills are not the only barrier that immigrants face when they have to choose schools, but also the long waiting queues (Bohlmark, Holmlund & Lindahl, 2015). Private schools have students listed in their queues from the day they are born, making in that way almost impossible for immigrants or not early-informed parents to choose these schools. Also, as Bohlmark et al. (2015) have pointed out, 'school choice and segregation by immigrant background is largely driven by residential sorting patterns' (p. 27), meaning that large groups of immigrants live in specific residential areas, where usually there are no private schools. As a result, if an immigrant parent manages to reach information about private schools and finds a spot in a shortlist queue of a private school, the student will have to travel on a daily basis long distances to attend school, which is costly and discouraging for parents.

As the participants stated, there are also parents who have difficulties to choose a school, and in some cases, they are not able to make a school choice. Parents' limited available time and lack of a certain level of education are often some additional structural barriers (Offenheiser & Holombe, 2003) that prevent parents from exercising their right to choose schools. Furthermore, as the interviewees mentioned, parents should have a certain socioeconomic level in order to be able to choose a school critically, while Bohlmark et al. (2015) have also found that there has also been a significant

association between school choice towards private schools and parents' socioeconomic background. In accordance to what Robeyn has noticed, the author argues that several inequality issues are created regarding the education of different groups of people through the theoretical lenses of Human Capital theory since not all parents seem to invest the same in their children education and not everyone has the same rate of return.

It could also be argued that although both countries emphasise that every child has the right to education, issues of quality and equity in education vary among different schools. As stated by the interviewees, having the option to choose among different schools could mean that there are some schools of high-quality and some of lower quality. Parents, looking for a high-quality school for their children, conclude to choose private schools which often offer additional services or have a specific teaching style. In addition, private schools, as presented in this study, usually own attractive infrastructure and employ highly educated professionals. These characteristics could upgrade the quality of education provided in such schools, compared to a local public school. This fact is opposed to the human rights- based approach to education according to which, quality education should be provided to all children regardless of their families' available funds or time for research on education.

Taking into account the observations mentioned above, it can be argued that the introduction of school choice in both countries has had a particularly harsh impact on educational inequalities and social segregation among schools. As Reay (2006) has also mentioned, one consequence of choice-based education systems is that those who do not choose schools end up with the left 'choices' that the ones in private schools do not want to make. Consequently, social polarisation and segregation could be created among different schools because equal opportunities are not provided to all parents. At this point, it has to be mentioned that although this school choice consequence was concluded from the analysis of the context and the interviews, the participants seemed not to realise the adverse effects of school choice, especially in the Greek case. This observation could be explained by the long tradition of the Swedish model, promoting social equality, which was started being threatened since the 1990s, while Greece always had private schools incorporated in its education system.

School choice as a policy has introduced the application of logic and rules of market competition among schools. Private schools use various marketing tools to attract more students, which are their customers since the number of enrolled students defines the amount of profit the school could make. This logic of creating and operating schools has raised serious concerns about the quality and the purposes of private schools' principals. According to the analysis of the findings and as Broucker, De Wit and Verhoeven (2017) have argued, private schools, operating as companies primarily focus on their economic performance while they could overlook the value of providing quality education. The participants of Sweden discussed thoroughly this phenomenon of business-like operating schools, noticing that it is 'strange' to make a profit out of running schools.

An equally significant aspect of private schooling and school choice analysis, which needs to be further discussed, regards the notion of education as a public good. By the introduction of school choice policy, parents claim quality education for their children's personal benefit and face education as a form of capital (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011). Parents who choose private schools are seen as individuals who want to maximise their children's social and economic advantage for a better future. In that way, the notion of education as a public good is widely threatened by the Human Capital approach to education. Evidently, education does not seem to be a public good which is equally offered to all and the states seem to share the responsibility with the parents, who are entitled to research and find a school which is of high quality. The author argues that parents' individualistic perceptions of schooling could be explained by the loss of trust to governments' policies which has been reported by several interviewees. Political instability and recent educational reforms that have allowed market-like policies to enter the schools' borders have significantly dissatisfied a share of parents who avoid public schools.

Given the 'extras' that the private schools may include, their students might have more opportunities to develop and expand their capabilities, while other students in public schools might not. The provision of additional educational activities and the adoption of certain pedagogical styles

could benefit students to explore their inclinations and talents rather than pushing them to particular functionings. Specific educational goals are set from both countries, regarding compulsory education, focusing majorly on the development of students' knowledge skills on literacy and numeracy. Private schools being more flexible in the educational planning and use of different pedagogical approaches may give more emphasis to other subjects outside the curriculum, such as art. Evidently, further inequalities seem to exist from the capability approach to education, since the analysis of the findings suggested that private schools' students are more privileged than public schools' students in having the opportunity to flourish themselves through education.

5. Concluding remarks

Private schools are incorporated into the education realities as schooling alternatives to the public sector, in both Greece and Sweden. As it has been observed, Greek parents continue to choose private schools despite the severe financial crisis that the state faces, while in the past years Swedish parents also tend to prefer private schools increasingly. These observations inspired the author to compare these two countries, in order to understand holistically the phenomenon of private schooling and investigate the factors that affect school choice towards private schools. As shown in the study, school choice requires from parents to be able to conduct a certain research about the school option they have in order to find the school they prefer the most. This requires a particular level of education, available time and available information about the school alternatives, while in some cases parents' financial capacity could also be a crucial determinant when choosing a school. Hence, not all parents have access to school choice towards private schools under the same terms. The study revealed that the school choice policy has led to several inequalities and social segregation among schools. Private schools, run by companies and individuals, tend to be more flexible than public schools in terms of enriching their educational programmes with additional activities or adopting certain pedagogical approaches to teaching. This flexibility that private schools have allows them to be more innovative and modernised than public schools. Furthermore, private school choice seems to be faced as an investment for the future, since parents mainly perceive education as the means for increasing their children's human capital. As a consequence, the school choice policy creates an individualistic environment, where only some parents manage to make choices, according to their criteria.

This research aimed to provide a comprehensive examination of private school choice in these two countries as an attempt to contribute and inspire further research on this area. Some of the main conclusions of the study highlight the need for both national governments to design new policies. Some policy recommendations could entail policies which would: (a) enhance the democratic and social role of education, providing quality education for all; (b) upgrade the quality of public schools and (c) develop further regulations regarding private schools in order to combat social inequalities between them.

References

- Bohlmark, A., Holmlund, H. & Lindahl, M. (2015). *School choice and segregation: evidence from Sweden*. Uppsala, Sweden: IFAU. Retrieved from <http://www.ifau.se/globalassets/pdf/se/2015/wp2015-08-School-choice-and-segregation.pdf>
- Broucker, B., De Wit, K. & Verhoeven, J. C. (2017). Higher education for public value: taking the debate beyond new public management. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 37(2), 1–14. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1370441>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Dewey, J. (2006). The democratic conception of education. In H. Lauder, P. Brown, J.-A. Dillabough & A. H. Hasley (Eds.), *Education, globalization, and social change* (pp. 91–100). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Gabel, S. G., (2016). *A rights-based approach to social policy analysis*. New York, NY: Springer.

Farazouli, A. (2019). School choice and private schooling: a comparative case-study between Greece and Sweden. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 6(1), pp 213-223. Available from: www.prosoc.eu

- Gillis, M., Perkins, D. H., Roemer, M. & Snodgrass, D. R. (1992). *Economics of development*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Offenheiser, R. C. & Holcombe, S. H. (2003). *Challenges and opportunities in implementing a rights-based approach to development: an oxfam America perspective*. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 32(2), 268–301. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764003032002006>
- Olssen, M., Codd, J. A. & O'Neill, A. -M. (2004). *Education policy: globalization, citizenship and democracy*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Palys, T. (2008). Purposive sampling. In L. M. Given (ed.), *The sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (vol. 2). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Reay, D. (2006). The Zombie stalking English schools: social class and educational inequality. *British Journal of Educational Studies Special issue on Social Justice*, 54(3), 288–307.
- Rizvi, F. & Lingard, B. (2011). Social equity and the assemblage of values in Australian higher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41(1), 5–22.
- UN, (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development*.