

# **Bar-Ilan University**

## **The Relationships amongst Parental Choice, Satisfaction, Involvement, Expectations, and Schools Efficiency: The Case of Primary Schools for Arabic Speaking Students in Israel**

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's Degree in  
the School of Education, Bar-Ilan University**

**Ramat-Gan, Israel**

**2020**

## Abstract

**Background.** The possibility for parents to choose their children's school is meant to encourage their participation in their children's education and in the school life. This is based on the assumption that when a person can choose, he or she will be more satisfied with the outcome, regardless of whether or not they are actually good outcomes. The trend towards allowing some form of choice in education in many western countries, among them Israel, has five main objectives: (1) work towards the benefit of the child and his or her family; (2) develop school autonomy; (3) improve parents' involvement in the school; (4) increase school efficiency and improve its quality; and (5) promote social integration. Public education entails tension between two main values, freedom of choice and equality. On the one hand, public education can undermine the parents' freedom to choose education for their children that adheres to their viewpoint. On the other hand, public education may promote equality since all children in the certain age range are eligible for this education. This tension serves as the inspiration for this paper. The main questions arising from this tension are, among others, does choice in public education, meaning allowing more freedom to choose the school does indeed lead to efficiency in education? In addition, does choice harm equality?

In the professional literature there is a debate regarding the relationship between choice in education, efficiency and equality. While the relationship between choice and efficiency is described in the literature as positive, the relation between choice and equality is described as negative. There are theories that claim that government educational policy affects the school or the school system's ability to function effectively and efficiently, assuming that administrative freedom which is part of the freedom of choice are the reason behind the improved efficiency. Research shows that in the public schools, due to competition which is allowed by the choice policy, show an improvement in quality and they reduce the gap between them and private schools that are not funded by the government (Victor, 2010). throughout the world there are different models of free choice or limited choice (choosing from a limited number of choices), and it is unclear whether they can promote equality and prevent segregation (Goldring, 1994; Heiman & Shapira, 2003).

A survey of different choice programs throughout the world shows that the segregation is mainly dependent upon the scope of the authorities' involvement. Thus, for instance, when a local authority allows a limited choice or establishes quotas (such as vouchers for parents from lower socioeconomical backgrounds to pay for private schools or defining a percentage of students outside the school's district) the tension between the freedom of choice and equality is less dominant. On the

other hand, when the authority does not intervene and there is free choice, the tension grows (Goldring, 1994; Heiman & Shapira, 2003).

Thus, for instance, when the local authorities do not intervene at all, for example in Australia, one can see that the private schools isolate themselves. As a result of their high tuition, they increase social segregation (Dearden, Ryan & Sibieta, 2010). Meaning, the non-controlled choice in Australia deepens the inequality. Similarly, the non-controlled choice in Britain allowed the strong students to go to strong schools, thus making the weak schools even weaker (West & Yölnen, 2010). Thus it seems that choice without government intervention creates a situation that resembles a free market economy in which the strong get stronger and the weak become weaker, thus deepening the inequality.

Nevertheless, when the authorities intervene, in countries with controlled choice such as France and Qatar, one does not see the scope of social isolation and segregation one sees in countries in which the choice is not controlled (Qatari Ministry of Education websites, 2006; Karsten, Visscher & De Jong, 2001). In other words, in those countries the tension between freedom of choice and equality is moderate.

In Israel, each local authority has some form of maneuvering ability in regards to allowing parents to choose their children's school, as some local authorities do not allow any choice in order to encourage the integration of children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and from minority ethnicities into the mainstream schools, as well as create a heterogenic student body and promote pluralism. Other local authorities, on the other hand, allow some form of choice, whether complete or controlled. Many local authorities can be placed somewhere in the middle, as they allow choice from limited options. That being said, most choice options in Israel relate to Junior High School and High School, but not elementary schools which are mainly decided by the child's place of residence.

As aforementioned, many authorities in Israel allow choice, though it is controlled. In addition, most of the choice is for junior high school and high school, as only few allow choice in primary schools (Heiman, Shavit and Shapira, 1995; Ministry of Education experiments and initiatives, 2016). Thus, for instance, in Jerusalem there is controlled choice according to districts. There are some districts in which there is a choice of several schools, and other districts with no choice because there is only one school (Hoshen, 2004). In addition, there are schools that are not limited to a district, and parents are free to choose them as long as the school's entrance conditions are met. In Lod there is tendency to

allow controlled choice according to districts (Ministry of Education website, experiments and initiatives, 2016) and in Tel Aviv the choice is relatively open but with quotas and limitations in order to promote integration. All of the above is true mainly for the Jewish mainstream schools (Oplatka, 2000).

Unlike the scope of choice available in authorities in Israel in which the population is mainly Jewish, in authorities in which the population is mainly Arab even when choice is possible, it is far less. In most cases, even when there is choice it is limited because to begin with the number of Arabic speaking schools is lower, and therefore in many cases even if there is some choice in the local authority, it is less relevant for parents who want to send their child to an Arabic speaking school.

This research examines the relation between **parents' choice of their child's school, parental satisfaction, their expectations, their involvement and school efficiency in Arab local authorities.**

**The current research.** The research question and assumptions are as follows:

1. To what extent, if at all, there is a **difference in efficiency** (measured as the students' achievements) between Arab schools in mixed cities in which there is **choice** as opposed to ones with no choice?

The assumption is that there will be a difference in efficiency, measured through the achievements of students in the Arab schools in mixed cities, as schools with controlled choice will score higher. Since the parents choose the school that suits their child and their world view. When there is congruence between the child's world view (also in regards to culture and religion) and the school we expect to see higher achievements.

2. To what extent, if at all, there is a **difference in parents' satisfaction, involvement and expectations** from the school between schools with controlled **choice** and schools with no choice?

The research assumptions are that there will be differences in satisfaction, scope of involvement in the school and parents' expectations from the school, as schools with choice will score higher. Theories from social psychology and sociology claim that when a person has choice and control of a

certain variable, he tends to be more satisfied with the results of the choice even when “objectively” the results are not as good.

3. What is the magnitude of the **relationship** between **satisfaction, parent involvement and parent expectations** and **efficiency** (measured through students’ achievements)?

The research assumptions are that there will be positive relationships between parent satisfaction, involvement in the school and their expectations from the school and their children’s achievements in the Arab schools in the mixed cities.

4. What is the intensity of the **relations between satisfaction, parental involvement and parent expectations and efficiency** (measured through student achievements) when here is no parental choice?

The research assumptions are that there will be positive relationships between parent satisfaction, their involvement in the school and their expectations from the school and their children’s achievements in the Arab schools in the mixed cities when parental choice is statistically controlled.

250 parents from five schools filled the questionnaire regarding the choice of school, the child’s achievements, the parents’ satisfaction from the school and their involvement in the school during the school year of 2015-2016. The schools chosen for the research included three schools from Lod, a city where there is no choice and parents are obligated to districts, and two schools from Akko, a city with controlled choice. The schools’ diversity and their attractiveness to parents, as can be measured using the “Meitsav” scores was encompassed in two schools with a high average in the “Meitsav” (one in Akko and one in Lod), one school in Lod with a medium average and two schools with a low average (one in Akko and one in Lod).

During the research six questionnaires were given out to parents of sixth graders during different parent meetings. The first questionnaire included background information (for instance, number of children, place of residence, contribution to the school and children’s achievements). The second questionnaire referred to the parents’ choice of school. It examined the factors affecting the parents’ choice of school (for instance geographic distance, siblings in the school and achievements) (Selvy and Shortseid, 1985). The third questionnaire referred to the parents’ satisfaction with the school: in order to measure satisfaction, the respondent was asked to estimate his satisfaction with the school in

general as well as specific parameters such as the school's achievements, level of studies and more. In addition, the respondents answered questions such as would they move their child to another school or if they would recommend the school to friends in order to examine the reliability if the indicated satisfaction (Peres and Pasternek, 1993). The fourth questionnaire referred to parents' involvement in the school: the respondents were asked to indicate the level of their active involvement in the school activities as well as indicate their level of interest in what goes on in the school (Shapira and Goldring, 1990). The fifth questionnaire examined the parents' expectations from the school: respondents were asked to select the areas in which they have expectations from the school and define their scope (Smilansky and Baumgarten, 1981; Mineravi, 1994). Finally, the parents were asked about their child's achievements in order to check them against the results of the school "Meitsav" results in Arabic, English, Math and science.

The questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS. Respondents from each school were divided into those who have chosen the school and those who did not, and then the dependent variables of satisfaction, involvement, expectations and school efficiency were examined (efficiency was examined by looking at the students' achievements in the external national "Meitsav" test and the achievements were also examined according to parents' reports in order to compare these measures between the two cities Lod and Akko).

The research method included using T tests for independent samples, calculating Pearson correlations and 3 models of multiple regression. In order to examine the differences in efficiency between schools with choice and schools with no choice (the first research question) four t tests for independent samples were held in order to compare the scores in English, Arabic, math and science between children whose parents chose the school and children whose parents did not choose the school (see board number 8).

In order to examine the difference in satisfaction, involvement and parents' expectations from the school (second research question) between school with controlled choice and those without, three independent samples T tests were conducted in order to compare satisfaction, involvement and expectation between parents who have chosen the school and parents who have not (see board number 9).

In order to examine the intensity of the relationship between choice and parent involvement, satisfaction and expectations and the efficiency of the school three multiple regression tests were conducted (research questions 3 and 4). The first regression examined how well satisfaction, involvement and expectations for parents who have chosen the school can predict the efficiency when the background variables (such as place of residence) are statistically controlled (see board number

10). The second and third regression models examined how much satisfaction, involvement and expectations can explain the level of efficiency in schools with controlled choice and schools with no choice (see boards 11 and 12 respectively). In addition, in order to compare satisfaction, expectations and efficiency between the schools in Akko and the schools in Lod independent sample T tests were conducted (board number 14).

Statistically significant differences and relationships were found. **Specifically, it was found that efficiency, parent satisfaction, parent involvement and their expectations from the school were higher in schools with controlled choice** compared to schools with no choice. In addition, **the relationships between parent involvement, satisfaction and expectations and efficiency were only positive among parents who have chosen their child's school.**

The first research question was found true. **There was a statistically significant difference in efficiency (as measured through students' achievements) in favor of schools with controlled choice** in the four fields examined. Parents who have chosen their child's school reported statistically significant higher achievements compared to parents who did not choose their child's school. There was a statistically significant difference in achievements in language (Arabic) between the two groups:  $t(247) = 2.62, p < 0.05$ . achievements for children whose parents chose the school (mean 2.8, std. dev. 1.03) were higher in a statistically significant manner than the achievements of w=children whose parents did not choose the school (mean 2.34, std. dev. 0.99) (see board number 8). In addition, there were statistically significant differences in foreign language (English), math and science.

A possible explanation of the connection between choice and efficiency is the fact that parent who have chosen their child's school are more involved and therefore they have higher expectations from the school, which affects the child's motivation.

The second research assumption was found true. Statistically significant differences were found in **the level of parents' satisfaction from the school, their expectations from the school and the scope of their involvement in the school** in favor of **schools with controlled choice**. It was found that there is a statistically significant difference in parents; reports regarding their satisfaction with the school, the scope of their involvement and their expectation from the school between parents who have chosen their child' school and parent who did not choose. It seems that among the parents who have chosen the school there are higher rates of satisfaction, involvement and their expectations from the school are higher as well. It was found that there is a significant difference in **satisfaction** in favor of schools with choice (see board 9)  $t(245) = 10.89, p < 0.05$ . Parents who have chosen their child's

school indicated a higher satisfaction rate (mean 58.97, std. dev. 10.95) compared with parents who did not choose the school (mean 37.82, std. dev. 13.2).

In addition, there were statistically significant differences favoring schools with choice in regards to parents' **involvement** in the school (see board 9)  $t(248) = 8.19, p < 0.05$ . Parents who have chosen their child's school indicated higher involvement (mean 64.33, std. dev. 11.54) compared to parents who did not choose the school (mean 47.56, std. dev. 14.05).

There is a similar finding regarding parents' expectations from the school (see board 9)  $t(246) = 7.31, p < 0.05$ . Parents who have chosen their child's school indicated higher expectations (mean 58.56 std. dev. 10.97) compared to parents who did not choose the school (mean 43.43, std. dev. 16.73).

An explanation of these findings can be the element of choice which creates parents' satisfaction and involvement. Various decision-making theories indicate the effect of choice on satisfaction with the result. According to one theory, once a person makes a decision, he will want to convince himself that his decision was a good one, and therefore he will indicate to himself and to others that he is satisfied with the choice (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot & Pagani, 2009).

The third research assumption was found true. When examining if there is **a statistically significant positive relationship between parents' satisfaction, involvement and expectations and efficiency**. It was found that the three variables were able to predict 10.7% of the explained variance of efficiency  $R^2 = 0.107, F(3, 241) = 9.67, p < 0.01$ . In addition, **it was found that there is a statistically significant relationship between parent involvement and efficiency**  $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01$  when satisfaction and expectations are held constant (see board 10). Meaning, in schools with high involvement one can find higher efficiency at any given rate of satisfaction and expectations.

The fourth research assumption was partly found true. This assumption examined the relationship between parent involvement, satisfaction and expectations and efficiency in schools with and without choice. These relations were found to be positive when there is choice, but there were no statistically significant relations in schools with no choice. It was found that when there is choice, the three variables together (parent involvement, satisfaction and expectations) predicted 7% of the explained variance of efficiency  $R^2 = 0.07, F(3, 200) = 4.69, p < 0.01$ . In addition, the relation between parent involvement and efficiency was found to be statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.26^*$  see board 12) when the rest of the variables satisfaction and parent expectations were kept constant. On the other hand, there were no statistically significant relationships between satisfaction and parent expectation and



efficiency (see board 12). One possible explanation for this relationship can be found when referring to student motivation and the effect of external and internal factors on motivation for learning. Parent involvement, expectation and of course satisfaction are significant factors in raising student's motivation for learning which contributes to improved achievements. In addition, it was found that the relations between **satisfaction, involvement and efficiency are not statistically significant when there is no choice** (see board 11)  $R^2 = 0.115$ ,  $F(3, 37) = 1.60$ ,  $p > 0.05$ .

Parents' involvement in the school may be external motivation and perhaps even internal for success, therefore it is recommended that future research should try to isolate motivation and check how it sits with the other factors. Moreover, the mere choice creates higher expectations from the school also as an attempt to justify the choice and reinforce it. For the same reasons, the findings according to which expectations are higher when parents choose the school sit well with the theories. The research findings indicate a positive relationship between parents' choice of the school and the school's efficiency, and in the same way the findings indicate significant differences favoring schools with choice in satisfaction from the school, involvement in the school and expectations from the school. Therefore, parents' choice should be expanded as means to promote school efficiency in Israel.

Parental choice is at the heart of public and academic discourse. Central reforms in many educational systems in the western world such as England and the USA over the past few years involve parental choice, out of the assumption that is shared by all those who support choice in education that parental choice improves parents' satisfaction from the education their child is receiving, increases their involvement and responsibility towards their child's education, increases the parents' expectations from the school and encourages competition between the schools. Some say that choice leads the schools to become more efficient, improve themselves and become a system geared towards the clients' needs (Ben Ami, 2008, Bunar, 2010).

The findings of this paper reinforce those supporting choice. It was found that there are statistically significant differences favoring schools with (controlled) choice in regards to satisfaction, involvement and expectations. However, when one examines the nature of the relationships, one finds that the relationship between parental involvement and efficiency (when satisfaction and expectations are held constant) is positive and significant when there is choice. Nevertheless, this relationship is not significant when there is no choice. And on the other hand the findings moderate the tension in public education between the two main values of freedom of choice and equality. Controlled choice, the model of the city of Akko, was proven to be a model that gives a degree of freedom of choice for the parents while maintaining equal opportunities.

**Conclusion.** The current research aims to examine the effects of having a choice for the child's school on the parents' satisfaction from the school, the level of their involvement in school life and their expectations from the school, along with how well they feel their children are doing in the core curriculum subjects. The study focuses on the Arab Sector in Israel.

Two hundred and fifty parents whose children attend one of five schools filled out questionnaires about whether they chose the school (or would choose the school that their child is attending if they had a choice), their child's achievements in school, the parents' satisfaction with the school, their expectations of the school and their involvement in school life. The study included five Arab schools from two mixed cities: three schools from Lod, in which parents have no choice of school for their child, and two schools from Akko in which parents have some form of choice.

The results of the statistical analyses indicated several significant relations.

The first research hypothesis suggested that there will be a relationship between the parents' ability to choose a school and their children's achievements. Results indicated that achievements for students whose parents had chosen the school were significantly higher than those of children whose parents did not choose the school.

The second research hypothesis suggested that there will be a relationship between the parents' ability to choose the school and their satisfaction with the school, their involvement in the school and their expectations from the school. Results indicated that all three variables were higher among parents who chose their child's school.

The third research hypothesis proposed that the relationship between parents' involvement, satisfaction, expectations and the children's' achievements will be different for parents who chose the school and parents who did not. Results indicated that parent involvement was able to explain the variance in children's achievements for the group that had a choice, but not for the group that did not.

Thus, the results of the current study indicate distinct differences in satisfaction, involvement, expectations and achievements depending on the ability to choose the school. In addition, the most significant predictor of children's achievements was parental involvement in the school, but only for parents who have chosen the school. The results and their implications are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.