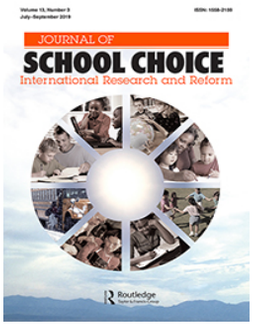

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Journal of School Choice
International Research and Reform

ISSN: 1558-2159 (Print) 1558-2167 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wjsc20

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To cite this article: Luis Augusto Rohde, Fausto Campani, José Renato Gonçalves Oliveira, Catarina W. Rohde, Thiago Rocha & Andrea Ramal (2019) Parental Reasons for School Choice in Elementary School: A Systematic Review, Journal of School Choice, 13:3, 287-304, DOI: 10.1080/15582159.2019.1643970

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2019.1643970

JOURNAL OF SCHOOL CHOICE
2019, VOL. 13, NO. 3, 287–304
https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2019.1643970

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Parental Reasons for School Choice in Elementary School: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

The quantitative literature on parental reasons of school choice for their elementary school children was systematically reviewed using all major databases. The quality of the studies was assessed through a modified version of the Newcastle-Ottawa scale. Among 3982 references reviewed, 26 studies were included from 14 countries. Although large heterogeneity in the data precluded a formal meta-analysis, our findings document that school academic quality was the only reason reported in more than 50% of the studies. In studies from low-income countries or composed predominantly of families from low SES, logistic reasons assume relevance aside teacher quality. The methodological quality of the literature in this area is poor. Although the literature is not of enough quality to confidently define what the most important factors are, our findings provide an overview of the reasons parents gave for selecting elementary schools for their children worldwide. In addition, we present the needed data for constructing an instrument to assess parent reasons for elementary school choice, something not yet available in the literature.

KEYWORDS

School choice; parent; education; elementary school

Parental reasons for school choice in elementary school: a systematic review

The possibility of school choice varies enormously in different countries worldwide (Dronkers, Felouzis, & van Zanten, 2010). In nations like the Netherlands, parents can freely choose a school for their children from whichever they want (Borghans, Golsteyn, & Zölitz, 2015). This option is mostly available for a small part of the population in other high and upper-middle income countries like the US and Brazil (Erickson, 2017; Resende, Nogueira, & Nogueira, 2011).

Additionally, mechanisms for school choice also vary hugely worldwide. For instance, at least three different mechanisms can be available for middle to low-income families in the US – school vouchers, tax credit

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Supplemental data for this article can be accessed here.

scholarship, and education saving accounts (Egalite & Wolf, 2016). The creation of magnet and charter schools in the US also envisioned, among other objectives, making school choice available for more families. In 2017, almost 3 million students were enrolled in charter schools in the US (Marshall, 2017). On the other hand, school choice is only available through private school enrollment in most low-income countries. This scenario makes school choice only accessible for high-income families or a small fraction of families receiving scholarships from these private schools (Humble & Dixon, 2017; Resende et al., 2011). Thus, it is not surprising that controversies surround the literature on school choice (Wolf, 2017).

Advocates of the so-called rational choice theory and those from a more liberal perspective propose that parents will conduct cost-benefit analyses whenever provided with options, choosing the best school for their children. In their views, this mechanism will, by competition, improve education (i.e., only good schools will survive in the market) (Marshall, 2017). However, some authors doubt if ordinary parents might have the needed opportunities, information, and skills to make this choice, especially those from lower social-economic strata (SES) or those living in developing countries (for a discussion on this topic, see Bast & Walberg, 2004; Cantillon, 2018; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Besides, if educational quality relative to other school characteristics is not the main reason for a parental decision in favor of a school, there would be a lower probability that competition improves quality. In this case, free choice may stimulate schools to specialize by offering specific features instead of improving the quality of their program (Borghans et al., 2015).

Claims that universal school choice would improve the quality of education are counterbalanced with arguments that this is a potent mechanism for school segregation. It is not difficult to perceive that most privileged families will be more informed, connected and resourced to choose schools. Consistent findings suggest that these families tend to make their choices for environments where families with similar economic, ethnic and cultural background are found (Resende et al., 2011; Waslander, Pater, & van der Weide, 2010). However, the most common mode of school choice in the US – choosing where to live partially based on the schools available in the neighborhood – is also a clear mechanism leading to segregation (Egalite & Wolf, 2016).

Another area of debate is how efficient school choice might be to improve school performance assessed by test scores. Although findings from methodological sound studies are controversial, the overall picture tends to favor positive findings at least for subgroups of students Indeed, results on school attainment are more impressively positive showing that students taking part in school choice mechanisms have higher rates of finishing high school (see Egalite & Wolf, 2016).

Finally, controversies on which are the more relevant reasons for parental school choice (e.g., those reflecting school quality or just logistic ones) characterize the scientific literature in the area (see Bast & Walberg, 2004). Findings tend to document that low-income families put more emphasis on logistic issues such as the location of the school, transportation, safety, and extracurricular activities, ensuring that children would spend more time at school while parents need to work. High-income families tend to value more test scores and other dimensions associated with school quality/atmosphere or even the match between child and school characteristics (Resende et al., 2011; Schneider & Buckley, 2002).

It is important to note that very few systematic reviews were conducted trying to disentangle parents' reasons for school choice. Erickson (2017) conducted an extensive review of the literature on how parents choose private schools in the US using both network and computer searches. The main findings reported were: (1) academic quality (e.g., curriculum, test scores, individual attention/better learning environment); (2) Safety; (3) Religious/moral environment; (4) Extracurricular activities like sport programs; (5) Logistic reasons (e.g., location, prior attendance of a family member); (6) school reputation; (7) child's preference. This excellent review is limited since it included studies from just one country, analyzed only one type of school (private) and did not use standard procedures for systematic reviews like those described in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA; Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009) or by the Meta-analysis of Observational Studies in Epidemiology Group (MOOSE; Stroup et al., 2000).

As stated by Dronkers et al. (2010), although scholars and policymakers tend to address school choice issues confined to their national borders, a more comprehensive and worldwide perspective might be valuable to check whether different aspects are associated with parent reasons of school in different countries.

Considering the relevance of the subject for education, how do we understand the scarcity of well-conducted systematic reviews? One hypothesis is related to the large heterogeneity and low quality of the studies available. Regarding heterogeneity, it is important to initially recognize the huge differences among school systems across the globe (Dronkers et al., 2010), making reasons for school selection necessarily different in most countries. Second, there are at least three different types of studies in the school choice literature: qualitative studies, quantitative studies using stated preferences, and quantitative studies using actual behavior. Each one of them has its advantages and disadvantages. Although qualitative studies frequently conducted with focus groups allow a more in-depth analysis of the individual reasons of school choice, they lack adequate representativeness of the samples and are more prone to social desirability bias (Yang & Yoo, 2018). Quantitative studies using stated preferences

frequently rely on questionnaires applied to parents/caregivers. Although providing more objective data, they are also more prone to social desirability bias (Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Quantitative studies based on actual/revealed behavior frequently use huge administrative datasets and employ complex statistical models. Their cross-sectional nature and multivariate analyses cannot disentangle the exact reason for selecting a school (Erickson, 2017). Thus, an integration of the literature becomes a real challenge.

Considering methodological problems that transcend all types of studies, both focus groups and surveys generally do not present parents with realistic choices that require them to make tradeoffs between specific characteristics, as it is the case for almost all real choices (Jacob & Lefgren, 2005). Also, most studies into the exercise of choice focus on positive motives. Few ask about reasons parents have for not choosing a school (Bagley, Woods, & Glatter, 2001). Moreover, there is no precision on the definition of the variables assessed. Although several studies indicate small class size as an extremely relevant reason for parents choosing a school, there is no consensus in the literature of what a small class is (Alsauidi, 2016). In this regards, analyses available among all countries that take part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicate that the average class size at the lower secondary level varies from 20 students or fewer in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Switzerland (public institutions) and the United Kingdom, to more than 34 students in Korea. The contrast is even greater when other G20 countries (i.e. Argentina, Brazil, China, Indonesia, and the Russian Federation) are considered. In China, for instance, the average class size is 50 students (OECD, 2012).

In this context, our main objective was to conduct a systematic review of the worldwide quantitative literature on reasons parents and caregivers provided for school choice for their elementary school children according to MOOSE guidelines (Stroup et al., 2000). Our main hypothesis was that issues related to academic quality would be the most critical factors reported worldwide by parents for elementary school choice. Our secondary hypothesis was that logistic factors would be more prominent in samples from low-middle income countries and/or those with an overrepresentation of low-income families.

Method

Data sources and search strategy

This systematic review follows recommendations from the MOOSE guidelines (Stroup et al., 2000). An experienced librarian in systematic reviews searched the following electronic databases from inception through December 18th, 2017: ERIC (ProQuest), Scopus, Embase, PsycINFO, SciELO, Sociological Abstracts, and PubMed. The search terms used, as

well as the number of abstracts retrieved in each electronic database, can be found in Supplementary Table 1. Electronic searches were supplemented by hand searching the reference lists of studies selected for full-text review.

Study selection

Two authors independently reviewed the abstracts and selected articles for full-text review. Discrepancies were discussed with a third author. Eligibility criteria for inclusion in the systematic review were: (a) quantitative cross-sectional studies relying either on parents or caregivers' stated reasons for school choice or actual/revealed school choice; (b) sample size ≥ 30 subjects; (c) sample including children in elementary school or equivalent depending on the country (e.g., primary and junior school). Whenever sample included students from other grades (e.g., kindergarten or middle school), studies were only included if there is evidence that ≥ 50% of the sample was composed of students at elementary school (grades 1 to 5). Authors of studies including samples formed by K-12 students were contacted to check if students at elementary school composed of ≥ 50% of the sample and/or to provide findings restricted for grades 1 to 5. Studies that only provided students mean/median grade were just included if the mean/median grade was ≤ 6 (one study). Studies that did not provide students' grade but provided mean/median students' age were only included if the mean/median age was ≤ 12 (one study); (d) samples including typically developing students from regular schools. Studies with samples assessing reasons for choosing homeschooling, or with samples composed either by schools for children with special needs or specifically by international schools or two-way immersion (bilingual) schools were excluded. In addition, studies only assessing the effects of sociodemographic characteristics of parents on rates of school enrollment were excluded.

Data extraction

Two authors independently extracted data from eligible studies using a previously constructed standardized form. They extracted authors, year of publication, country of the study, sample size, age/grade range, sampling procedures including response rate, study type (list of stated reasons, factors derived by factor analyses and composed of stated reasons, and actual behavior), instrument used for collecting parent school choice reasons including data on reliability and validity of the instruments, information source and main findings (e.g., list of all cited reasons and their rank). Discrepancies were discussed with a third author.

Contact with authors and review of citations

During the extraction process, whenever data was lacking (e.g., percentage of students from elementary school and parental reasons for school choice restricted to grade 1 to 5) or it was not clear, authors were contacted by email three times ensuring at least seven days of interval between each contact. When the pre-final list of included studies was obtained, we search in electronic databases all articles that cited these studies up to August 20th, 2018 looking for potential studies not found in the first electronic search. Figure 1 provides the flow chart of the data collection process.

Bias and quality assessment

We evaluated the quality of the studies with a modified version of the Newcastle-Ottawa scale (Wells et al., 2004), as done by other investigators (Rotenstein et al., 2016). Three authors independently rated the items of the quality scale for the included studies, and discrepancies were discussed with a third author. The five items assessed were: (a) sample representativeness. In some papers, a mixture of schools composed the samples, including those that allow and not allow choice. The assessment of representativeness for each specific study in our manuscript refers only to the number of schools that allow choice assessed in the study divided by the totality of schools that allow choice available in the area defined for the study; (b) sample size; (c) non-respondents; (d) ascertainment of reasons of parent school choice; (e) quality of descriptive statistical reporting. Total scores range from 0 to 5. For the total score grouping, studies were judged to be of low risk of bias (≥ 3 points) or high risk of bias (< 3 points). The Supplementary Figure 1 provides the modified Newcastle-Ottawa scale.

Statistical analysis

The large heterogeneity of the data in the literature precluded our initial intention to perform a meta-analysis of parental reasons for school choice. Thus, data was aggregated using basic descriptive statistics in tables providing the following data: the number of times reasons were mentioned, the number of times they were reported as the top 3 reasons and the median position in the articles that assessed the reason (for list of stated reasons). For factors derived from factor analyses, we used the same rationale. For actual behavior/revealed reasons, we presented all reasons included in the models and if they are significant or not. When a study only showed data stratified according to a variable (e.g., reasons stratified by age/religion), data was aggregately adjusted by the frequency of the variable used for stratification in the sample. When two or more factors received the same rank, the median rank was calculated. When different factors seem to

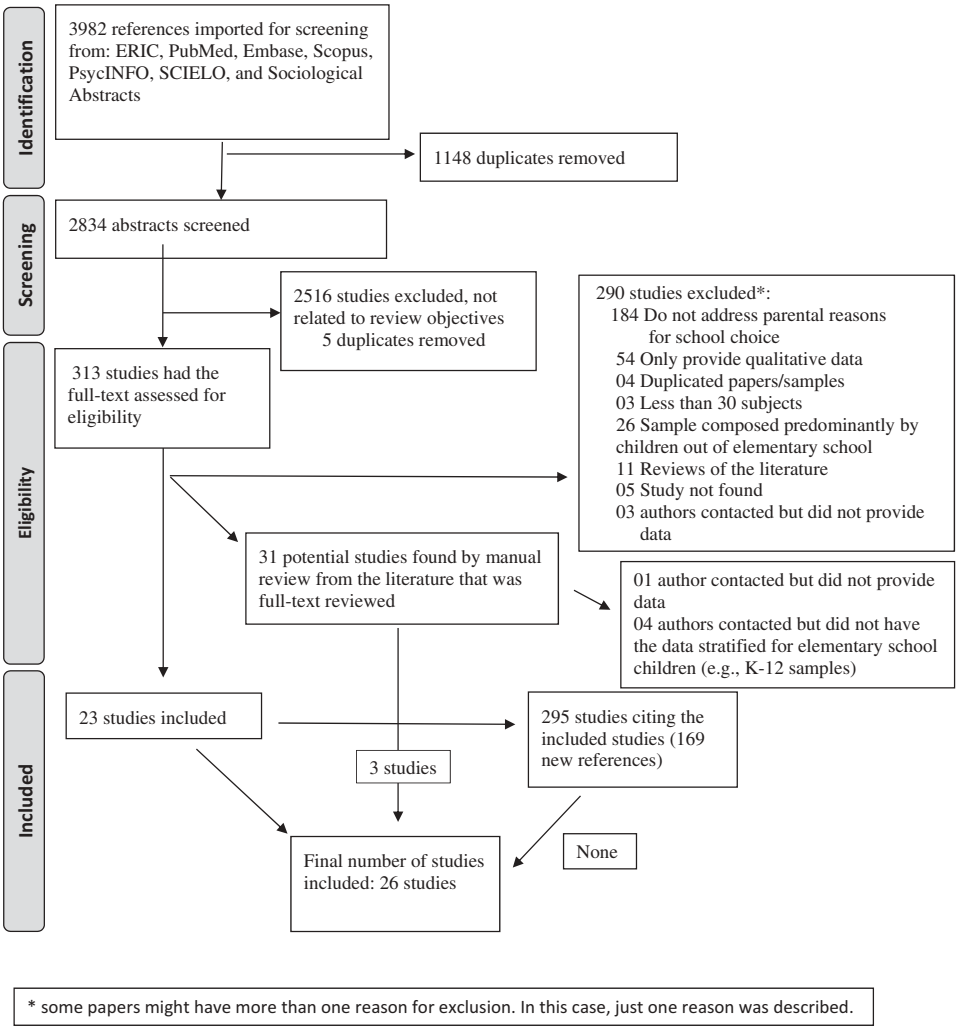

Figure 1. Flow chart of the data collection.

assess the same construct (e.g., recommendation vs. other parents' recommendation), only the one with higher rank was computed. We did not compute reasons not reflecting choice (e.g., no other option in the community).

Results

Included studies

We included 26 studies in this review (see Figure 1). The publication years range from 1998–2017. Samples from 6 continents and 14 countries were included. The country contributing the highest number of studies was the US (7 studies). For a full description of the studies, see Supplementary Table 2. Most studies assessed parent reasons for selecting a specific school (23 studies).

Three studies (Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Resende et al., 2011; Zuilkowski, Piper, Ong'ele, & Onesmus, 2018) assessed reasons for opting between different types of school (e.g., public versus private or magnet, non-magnet integrated and non-magnet non-integrated schools).

Figure 1 describes the reasons for not including a study after a full-text review. The list of all excluded studies and their reasons for exclusion are available upon request. The main reason for exclusion was the lack of data on the parent's reason for school choice (63.4%). We only did not find five papers (1.7%) of those selected by the search of electronic databases.

We contacted 13 authors about additional data from 14 studies; however, four authors did not reply to our e-mails. Although we did not conduct an extensive grey literature review, our review of the reference list of studies included for full-text review discovered three new studies fulfilling our inclusion criteria (12%).

Quality assessment of the literature

Supplementary Table 3 describes the agreed scores among the three evaluators for each of the five items of the modified Newcastle-Ottawa scale. In summary, a substantial proportion of the studies included were of a high risk of bias (39%). For instance, only one among the 26 included studies provided a comparison between respondents and non-respondents or compared socio-demographic characteristics of the included subjects against the population to check for potential selection bias. Also, very few studies (31%) tried to assess the validity or reliability of the instruments used to collect data on parental reasons for school choice.

Reasons for parent school choice

Table 1 provides parents' reasons for school choice reported in questionnaires as individual variables (stated reasons). From the first column, only one reason was reported in more than 50% of the studies (school academic quality). Six other reasons were reported in more than 30% of the studies (localization, price, reputation/recommendation of the school, teacher quality, discipline, and class size). From the second column in Table 1, the four reasons most frequently cited as the top 3 reasons for school choice were: school academic quality (cited in 12 studies), teacher quality (mentioned in 9 studies), and localization and safety tied in third place (cited in 6 investigations each). Due to the enormous heterogeneity on both the investigated reasons and their frequency among studies, another way to aggregate findings is to present the median rank for each reason considering just the studies that assessed the specific reason (see Table 1).

Table 1. Parents' reasons for school choice reported in questionnaires as individual variables.

Reasons Reported	*N* of Studies Reporting this Variable	*N* Times Reported as one of the 3 Main Reasons	Median Rank in the Reported Studies
School academic quality (e.g., measured by score in standard tests)	17	12	2/17
Localization	13	6	4/13
School shift	1		5/1
Price	9	2	6/9
Religious denomination of the school	6	2	4.5/6
Reputation/recommendation	11	3	5/11
Teachers quality	12	9	2/12
Discipline	10	2	4/10
Safety	7	6	2/7
School leadership	3		6/3
Class Size	11	3	6/11
School facilities	5	1	7/5
Special Programs offered by school	2		8/2
Extracurricular activities	5		12/5
Ethnic Diversity, contact with other cultures	5		10/5
Other children in the family attending the same school	3	1	4/3
School with a special theme	1	1	3/1
Attention/care to the child	3	1	5/3
School Values	5	2	4/5
Preparation for work	1		6/1
Cleanness	1		2/1
Staff attitudes with the family	1		4/1
Child opinion	1		9/1
Appearance of the school	2		9.25/2
Extended half-day (inverted shift) activities	1		10.5/1
Availability or success of the school in arts and sports	2		11/2
School is a national or international franchise	1		15/1
Believe child will be happy	2	2	1.25/2
Suit children's need	2	2	3/2
Atmosphere	4	1	4/4
Pupil stretched	1		6/1
School prepare for transfer	1		9/1
Composition of the students (high proportion of able children; SES of the pupils)	3		11/3
Attention to students with special needs	1		12/1
Pupils in the school go ahead in society	1		9/1
Other parents are our kind of people	1		13/1
Same Race	1		11/1
Academic program or curriculum	2	2	2/2
Transportation	3		7/3
English for instruction	1		6/1
Cultural opportunities	1		11/1
Use of the mother tongue in the school	1		14/1
School start time	1		7/1

In Table 2, we present stated parents' reasons for school choice reported in questionnaires as factors derived from factor analyses. Only two of the included studies used this approach. Academic quality/reputation was the only factor assessed in both studies, and it was ranked as the first factor in the two investigations.

Table 3 presents parents' reasons for school choice derived from the four studies using multivariate statistical models assessing actual/revealed behavior (i.e., the outcome was the real school selected, and reasons are investigated by the school or administrative data). As can be seen, few investigated reasons were not significant in the models.

Reasons stratified by country and/or family income

For these analyses, we initially divided countries into three categories according to the World Bank (2018) classification of countries. The first category included studies from high-income countries (USA, UK, Canada, Chile, and the Netherlands). The three reasons most cited as the top 3 in studies assessing the stated reasons were: school academic quality (7 times), teacher quality (4 times), and school reputation (4 times). The second category included studies from middle-income countries – from lower-middle to upper-middle (Brazil, Kenya, Nigeria, Malaysia, Turkey, South Africa): The three reasons most cited as the top 3 in studies assessing stated reasons were: school academic quality (4 times), location of the school (4 times) and teacher quality (3 times). The third category included low-income countries (Sierra Leone and Liberia). The three reasons most cited as the top 3 in studies assessing the stated reasons were: teacher quality (2 times), safety (2 times), and discipline (2 times).

For the second set of analyses, we divided studies into those assessing predominantly samples composed of families from low SES and those assessing samples from middle to high SES. Five studies relied on samples of

Table 2. Parents' reasons for school choice reported in questionnaires as factors.

Factors Reported	N of Studies Reporting this Factor	N Times Reported as one of the 3 Main Factors	Median Rank in the Reported Studies
Academic quality/ Reputation	2	2	1/2
Religious and cultural aspects of the school	1		4/1
Attention to students with special needs	1	1	2/1
Curriculum and facilities	1		5/1
Distance	1	1	3/1
Discipline/Safety	1		3/1
Community value	1		2/1
Convenience	1		4/1

Table 3. Parents' reasons for school choice derived from multivariate statistical models assessing actual behavior.

Factors Assessed	N of Studies Reporting this Variable in the Models	Significance in Multivariate Models
Distance	4	significant
School academic quality (e.g., measured by score in standard tests)	3	significant
Religious affiliation	3	significant
Educational philosophy	1	significant
Free meals at school	1	significant
% of students not from the country	2	1 significant; 1 non-significant
Students with any special educational need	1	significant
Cost	1	significant
Extracurricular activities	2	1 significant; 1 non-significant
Bilingual	1	significant
Recommendation	1	significant
Continuity (schooling up to high school)	1	non-significant
Siblings at school	1	significant
Extended day	1	significant
After care	1	significant
Weekend classes	1	non-significant
Extended year calendar	1	significant
Traditional School	1	non-significant
School in "flux" (potential change in address)	1	significant
Building	1	non-significant
Parent group	1	non-significant
Sports	1	significant
Band/football	1	significant
Music (non-band)	1	non-significant

Actual behavior = dependent variable is the school where the student is registered.

families with mainly low SES. The three reasons most cited as the top 3 in these studies assessing stated reasons were: school academic quality (3 times), teacher quality (3 times), and safety (3 times).

Discussion

This systematic review highlights some relevant findings regarding the worldwide literature on parent reasons for elementary school choice. First, the quality of the literature is considerably low. For instance, we did not find systematic reviews according to international standards in this field. All previous reviews are narrative reviews. Thus far, the most reported reason in studies worldwide was the school academic quality. Localization, price and reputation/recommendation of the school, teacher quality, discipline, and class size are also frequently reported. When country income was considered, there is a tendency to move from reasons centered on academic quality in high-income countries to those also including logistic reasons (e.g., safety and discipline) in low-income nations. This tendency, although present, is not so marked when family income is considered.

Even when using very flexible criteria, like those included in our modified version of the Newcastle-Ottawa scale, the quality of the literature was surprisingly low. Almost 40% of the studies were considered as high risk of bias. Surveys and questionnaires are the most commonly used descriptive methods in educational research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). When using quantitative instead of qualitative approaches, methodological care with the representativeness of the findings is expected. More than 50% of the included studies relied on samples without any representativeness of the population assessed.

Moreover, there are no two studies that used the same list of reasons to evaluate parental school choice. Indeed, this area of research suffers from the lack of any instrument for assessing parental reasons for school choice with formal and adequate reliability and validity testing. Additionally, different approaches for listing the variables of interest are found in the literature, from listing the most crucial reason for school choice, the top three or five most important reasons or different numbers of reasons up to almost twenty reasons. This heterogeneity in the method of collecting and reporting data prevented us from conducting any formal meta-analysis of the literature. Studies using factor analyses to aggregate reasons of school choice determined both different factor solutions and different variables included in each factor (Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Karsten, Ledoux, Roeleveld, Felix, & Elshof, 2003).

Finally, besides low response rates and lack of assessment of selection bias, there is one additional big flaw in the literature reviewed. Very few papers provided operational or standard definitions of the variables assessed, including those variables that are key, such as academic quality. Most of the investigations presented only a list of reasons for school choice to be ranked by parents. Moreover, most studies only described the variable but not the direction of the effect. In other words, they did not consider that the same reason might be related to parent school choice in opposite directions (e.g., the religious bias of the school). Some parents value a specific religious environment, whereas others prefer laic schools.

In a review of the literature on private school choice in the US, Egalite and Wolf (2016) suggested that more research is needed on strategies to help parents become better school shoppers for their children. Promoting these strategies is fundamental to understand the reasons parents gave for choosing an elementary school for their children. Previous literature comes mainly from individual high-income countries. These investigations suggest that a miscellaneous of reasons are reported including academic and/or teacher quality, safety, localization, extracurricular program, religious or moral instruction, class size, sport programs, and overall match between school values and child characteristics (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; DeAngelis & Erickson, 2017; DiPerna, 2013; Erickson, 2017; Kelly & Scafidi, 2013; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2002; Teske, Fitzpatrick, & Kaplan, 2007).

Our findings, extending the focus to a broader worldwide vision, basically confirm previous results expanding the list to more than 40 reasons reported. In this context, it is important to highlight that academic quality of the school is by far the most stated reason, mentioned in 65% of the included studies and in more than 70% of the time as a Top 3 reason, when cited. Interestingly, the lack of operational or standard definitions on academic quality is not specific for the investigations included in this review. For instance, searching ERIC database with the words academic quality and definition, 459 papers emerged. Only 5% of the papers were on elementary education, and none discuss a more objective definition of the term. Trying to define academic quality, Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, and Crawford (2015) provide a synthesis of the available literature, although more focused on higher education. They documented that an acceptable universal definition of academic quality is unfeasible. The definition heavily depends on cultural aspects, and the vision of the stakeholders considered. Also, academic quality is a multidimensional and dynamic concept. This review indicates that are four broad conceptualizations of academic quality (quality as purposeful, transformative, exceptional, and accountable) and a set of quality indicators used to assess each of the broad conceptualizations. These indicators can be summarized in four distinct categories: administrative, student support, instructional, and student performance indicators.

The second most frequently cited reason as a Top 3 reason in the studies was teacher quality. Although most of the quantitative literature on stated reasons for elementary school choice citing school and teacher quality do not clarify what parents understand and/or how they assess these two variables, some studies relied on findings coming from standardized tests scores and on the academic background of the teachers. This finding suggests that parents across the globe when acting as school shoppers tend to value relevant educational aspects. Data from the few studies relying on revealed preferences confirm these results (Borghans et al., 2015; Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson, 2015; Harris & Larsen, 2015).

Previous literature suggests that parents from low SES need to give substantial weight to logistic issues in their equation for choosing a school for their children, besides reasons related to school and teacher quality (Denessen, Driessen, & Sleegers, 2005). The general appraisal of our findings supports this notion. Studies relying on samples including predominantly families from low SES prioritize the top 3 reasons at the same frequency; academic quality of the school, quality of the teachers, and a logistic reason (safety; Dixon, Humble, & Tooley, 2017; Fleming, Cowen, Witte, & Wolf, 2015; Humble & Dixon, 2017; Resende et al., 2011). More interestingly, considering the worldwide coverage of our literature review, there is a clear tendency toward a smooth movement from a priority for reasons related to school quality in high-income countries to more prominence for logistic reasons in low-income countries.

Several limitations of this review are important to be acknowledged. First, we focus only on parental reasons for elementary school choice. Thus, our findings cannot be generalized to other school years. It is important to note that previous findings have suggested that reasons for school choice modify across the life cycle. Although parents of infants and toddlers are more likely to prioritize "caregiver warmth" and family-based care, parents of elementary school children give more emphasis to formal approaches as preparation for school and parents of high school youths are more worried about factors related to the entrance in college (Teszenyi & Hevey, 2015). Thus, a review focused on a specific school phase might make sense. Second, our literature review did not allow comparisons between fathers and mothers' reasons for school choice. In fact, there are very few papers that address this issue in the literature (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). Third, we focused on quantitative literature. As suggested by advocates of qualitative investigations, quantitative approaches ignore parents' personal histories and their class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds by consolidating parental preferences into "aggregate variables", and the so-called criteria for choice – such as academic quality, school atmosphere, and discipline – are treated as concrete, measurable things, losing its broader social context (Holme, 2002). Fourth, we did not perform a systematic review of the grey literature (e.g., sites, dissertations, and thesis). However, our manual search of the papers selected for full-text review and contact with authors provided us some relevant studies coming from grey literature. In addition, recent investigations have shown a small effect of the lack of grey literature review on systematic reviews (Hartling et al., 2017; Schmucker et al., 2017). It is also important to highlight that the great majority of the authors contacted answered our emails. Although there is no clear data in the literature of what is considered an adequate response rate (Mullan et al., 2009), only four authors did not reply to our request for more data.

In conclusion, our findings provided the most extensive overview up to now on parents' reasons for selecting elementary schools for their children worldwide. In this scenario, academic quality is the most frequent reason cited in studies across the globe. Also, taking into consideration the lack of any adequately validated scale to assess parent reasons for school choice, our review provides, for the first time, the needed data for constructing an instrument to evaluate parent reasons for elementary school choice. Finally, it is essential to highlight that the literature is not of enough quality to confidently define what the most important factors that motivate parents for selecting an elementary school for their children are. Thus, more quantitative studies relying on representative samples and employing modern psychometric approaches to construct instruments should be conducted to allow a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons motivating parents to make one of their most important choices in life.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the following authors that answered our request for additional data on their studies: Dr. Drew Catt, Dr. Paul Di Perna, Prof. Rinelle Evans, Prof. David Fleming, Prof. Ellen Goldring, Prof. Cornelia Kristen, Prof. Maria Alice Nogueira, Prof. Benjamin Scafidi, and Prof. Paul Teske.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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