Systematic review

Low-fee private schools in Latin America: a systematic map

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Abstract

In the recent years, both education privatisation policies and private enrolment have risen significantly in developing countries, particularly among low-SES population. This has triggered debates around quality and equity and, consistently, further research interest on private education in different contexts. However, most of the studies are spread out and the only systematic effort left out the Latin American region.

Through a systematic map, this study analysed the nature and scope of the research carried out on low-fee private schools in Latin America. To that end, four inclusion criteria were defined (geography, publication date, language and type of study) and systematic searches were conducted in eight electronic databases and two websites. In addition, the reference lists of included studies were examined. Potentially relevant studies were screened on two stages (title and abstract, and full text). A total of 75 studies in 79 reports were identified and data on general characteristics, sample, focus and methods was extracted.

The results of aims, method and countries were organised around an adapted version of the initially proposed thematic areas: (TA1) Private education growth in Latin America: trends and explanations; (TA2) Characteristics and composition of private schools in Latin America; (TA3) Decision-making processes and determinants of school choice in Latin America; (TA4) Relationships between private education and student and system-wide outcomes in Latin America.

TA4 was the largest in terms of number of studies, followed by TA3. Both of them included a large number of studies from Chile, whereas in TA1 most studies focused on Argentina. This is coherent with the types of privatisation each of these countries have. Research gaps and future studies include characteristics of private schools, the process dimension of education quality and more sound evaluations of policies and interventions. Systematic reviews are suggested as future research for TA4 and TA3.

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List of abbreviations

CEC	Colegios en Concesión [Concession Schools]
CEPAL	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EFA	Education for All
ICFES	Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación [Colombian Institute for Educational Assessment]
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LFPS	Low fee private schools
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Co-operation and Development
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares
PACES	Programa de Ampliación de Cobertura de la Educación Secundaria [High School Coverage Extension Programme]
PAA	Prueba de Aptitud Académica [Academic Aptitude Test] (Colombia)
PERI	Privatisation in Education Research Initiative
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPPs	Public-private partnerships
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
SEP	Subvención Escolar Preferencial [Preferential School Subsidy]
SERCE	Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study
SES	Socio economic status
SIMCE	Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación [Education Quality Measurement System]
TA	Thematic Area
TSLS	Two-Stage Least Square Method
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

I. Introduction

1.1. Rationale for the review

In the last decades, private education has been at the centre of many debates. For instance, while some portray it as a legitimate – and even desirable – option for reaching Education for All (EFA) goals in developing countries, others have raised concerns in terms of quality and equity (Bellei & Orellana, 2014, Day-Ashley et al., 2014). Despite this, many governments have been adopting a variety of privatisation policies with – and often led by – the support of other actors such as intergovernmental organisations (Verger, 2016). Private education is not a recent phenomenon, since religious and philanthropic organisations have long played a role as funders and providers (Verger, 2016). However, there has been a clear shift in its characteristics, nature and role.

For instance, whereas in many contexts private schools were expected to be for the elites, nowadays there are numerous services catering for low-income populations. Consistently, private enrolment has grown substantially among this group. This variety of options can relate to the no longer mutually exclusive categories of public and private, which have led to a fuzzy policy area where public and private can blend (Power & Taylor 2013; Robertson et al. 2012). As a result of this, along with contextual factors, multiple manifestations of privatisation in education have emerged. These include, for example, market systems of choice, public-private partnerships, and – more recently – low-fee private schools.

A central issue to consider is that the discourses around these and other forms of privatisation tend to be ideological and not necessarily based on evidence. As Ball and Youdell (2008) state, “the degree of penetration of privatisation processes is not fully understood and the consequences are often poorly researched” (p.15). Even if not poorly researched, evidence on the different manifestations and effects of privatisation is spread out and generally ambiguous. Day-Ashley et al. (2014) conducted a rigorous review that aimed to draw conclusions on these issues. However, it left out the Latin American region which, to this day, has had only non-systematic reviews on the topic of private education (e.g. Bellei & Orellana, 2014; Wolff, Navarro & Gonzáles, 2005). Given that the logic, drivers and forms that privatisation takes are context specific (Verger, Zancajo & Fontdevilla, 2016), this

dissertation will examine the nature and extent of the research conducted on private education – and particularly, low-fee private schools – in Latin America.

1.2. Review questions

Due to the need to find out what research already exists in this area, this review was set to explore the extent to which the phenomenon of low-fee private schools has been investigated in the region of Latin America, paying particular attention to the chosen research topics, population and methods. In order to do so, the study was guided by the following question:

What is the nature and scope of the research literature on low-fee private schools in the Latin American region?

1.3. Thematic areas

Given the variety of issues that the topic of low-fee private schools entails, and taking into account the research conducted in other countries, four thematic areas were defined to guide the review. It was acknowledged at the start of the research that these may be revised, and/or other themes may emerge as the review progressed.

(1) Barriers and facilitators for the proliferation and upsurge of enrolment in low-fee private schools in Latin America (e.g. free market policies, financial support through PPP/voucher schemes)
(2) Characteristics of low-fee private schools in Latin America (e.g. location, management, composition, teaching quality, accountability, affordability).
(3) Decision-making process and determinants of choice of low-fee private schools in Latin America (e.g. perception of quality, fees, distance, language).
(4) Impact of low-fee private schools on access, pupil achievement, education quality and equity in Latin America (e.g. increase/decrease inequalities in access, or segregation, improvement of overall educational quality).

1.4. Definitional and conceptual issues

Additionally, due to the lack of consensus around the considered issues, some definitions were drafted to clarify how these were understood in the review. The definitions have been divided in two categories, depending on the stage of the process where they can be located: interventions (process) and outcomes.

Interventions

Private schools: Although there are different ways to portray them, in this review, private schools are defined as schools with the following characteristics – which can appear either independently or simultaneously.

- Depend on user fees to cover part or all their development and operational costs.
- Are owned and/or subsidised independently of the state.
- Are mostly managed independently of the state.

(Adapted from Day et al., 2014)

Low-fee private schools: Although there are a variety of definitions available (for example, Heyneman & Stern, 2014; Srivastava, 2015), this review defined low-fee private schools (LFPS) as schools that cater to mid-low or low-income population and/or are located in a low-income area. These are also referred to as non-elite private schools.

Outcomes

Access: In this review, access is defined in terms of:

- Enrolment: number or percentage of students registered for primary or secondary education or in a given grade.
- Attendance: proportion of the total schools days in which enrolled students are in school.
- Drop-out: number of enrolled students that ceased to attend at some point in the school year.
- Completion: number or percentage of students completing primary or secondary education, or a specific grade.

(Based on Snilstveit, 2015).

Equity: This concept is understood in the review mainly in terms of its *fairness* dimension, which entails that social or personal circumstances – such as family background – do not hinder the achievement of educational potential (OECD, 2012). Equity is measured as the difference in access or achievement between different groups of pupils. When this difference exists, it is usually referred to as school segregation.

Education quality: This review includes considers various definitions of quality in education, categorised in terms of the emphasis placed on each of the analytical facets in the educational systems model (inputs, process, outputs).

Inputs: These have to do both with material and human resources, which enable and support teaching and learning processes. Common ways to measure them include of per-pupil expenditure, teacher-pupil ratio and teacher qualifications (for example, in terms of degrees and training).

Process: Teaching and learning processes in the classroom involve learning time, teaching styles or performance (measured through written examinations or classroom observation), student assessment and monitoring and classroom organisation strategies. At a school level, common measures include educational leadership and management, structure and content of the curriculum covered and cooperation between teachers.

Pupil achievement/learning: This concept corresponds to the output in the productive system and is defined as standardised test results in one or more knowledge areas (Math, Language, Science) at a local, national or international level (e.g. PISA, SERCE) (Krowka et al., 2016). It can also be defined in terms of cognitive and problem-solving skills (Snilstveit et al., 2015).
(Adapted from Scheerens, Luyten & van Ravens, 2011).

II. Background

Even though this study is a literature review in itself, it is fundamental to present the research and policy background in which the review can be framed. Thus, three broad types of literature will be portrayed. The first section will discuss privatisation in education, paying special attention to the issues around its conceptualisation and its multiple manifestations. Given the focus of this review, the second section will go on to examine the topic of low-fee private schools, focusing briefly on their characterisation, the ongoing debate around them, and the existing evidence from other countries. Finally, the third section will present a brief policy background of Latin America, including some examples of policies and interventions related to education privatisation.

2.1. Privatisation in education

2.1.1. Conceptualisation and characteristics

The neoliberal system of thought entails a range of meanings, discourses, policies and practices. Neoliberalism has redefined the discourse of governance and the relationships between the state and its institutions and individuals, sifting them through the market logic (Ritzvi, 2016). It assumes individuals are motivated mainly by economic interests and competitive positioning within markets, and views them mainly – and across all areas of their lives – as human capital. As Brown (2015) states, this economisation of individuals underlies the neoliberal rationality. This perspective has been articulated in policies of deregulation, reduction of welfare state supplies and public services' outsourcing, all of which are based in the principle of free markets (Ritzvi, 2016). Neoliberal logic, thus, underlies the contemporary privatisation discourse.

In education, this involves defining educational reforms through market logic (i.e. led by commercial concerns), establishing its aims mainly in human capital terms, and mirroring practices from other market-driven businesses (Ball, 2014; Ritzvi, 2016). The neoliberal approach in education promotes the use of standards, assessments and accountability, which limits education to a type of thinking that aims to create economically productive beings rather than citizens (Hursh, 2001). In this context, outcomes are emphasised over input and process and success is measured almost entirely through quantitative methods (Blackmore, in Fischman, Ball & Gvirtz, 2003). On a philosophical level, authors such as Ball and Youdell

(2008) state that these privatisation tendencies are central to the viewpoint of education as a private good – i.e., serving the interest of the individual, the economy and the employer – rather than a public good – i.e., serving all the society. Bellei & Orellana (2014) explain this issue in terms of social (public) and private objectives, arguing that social objectives are not spontaneously achieved when private education agents pursue their own aims. Likewise, it is particularly important to distinguish between for-profit and not-for-profit organisations, as the latter supposedly seek the common good, whereas the former prioritise their owners' interests (Power & Taylor, 2013). This does not mean that private or for-profit actors cannot contribute to society but it must remain clear that this is not their direct or only goal.

On a theoretical level, there is no consensus regarding what privatisation in education means or entails. For Tilak (2009), there is an important ambiguity in the term 'privatisation' because of its various possibilities in terms of the roles that public and private sectors play within the same country's system. Education privatisation then is not a specific policy; it has different policy manifestations that can relate to various aspects of education (Bellei & Orellana, 2014). Belfield and Levin (2002) present a wide definition of the concept, portraying it as "the transfer of activities, assets and responsibilities from government/public institutions and organisations to private individuals and agencies" (p.19). Likewise, Bellei and Orellana (2014) identify three dimensions in education privatisation: the substitution of public actors by private ones in the education system functioning, the rising influence of parents and carers over formal education, and the substitution of public schools by private ones. The last facet is the most evident type of education privatisation, underlying the debate and comparisons between private and public education (Bellei & Orellana, 2014).

Nevertheless, a number of authors have developed various categorisations around the types of privatisation in education. One of the most recognised was developed by Ball and Youdell (2008), who distinguish between privatisation *of* and *in* public education. On the one hand, privatisation *of* public education, also called exogenous privatisation, involves the opening up of services of public education to the participation of the private sector – on a for-profit basis – to design, run or deliver certain dimensions of public education. On another hand, privatisation in public education (endogenous privatisation) refers to the importing of ideas,

methods and management techniques from the private sector to make the public sector more like a business. This includes policy measures such as the decentralisation of managerial tasks at the school level, allowing further choice and exit for the users, and introducing management practises based on outcomes (Verger et al., 2016).

Some authors, however, do not agree with this categorisation, as they do not acknowledge endogenous privatisation as an actual form of privatisation. For instance, Bellei & Orellana (2014) suggest that the importing of ideas, practices and techniques from the private sector is not necessarily a form of privatisation as these can also be incorporated in the functioning of public education. Instead, these authors differentiate between internal and open privatisation of education. The former refers to the type privatisation within the public education sector, which can occur through different dimensions of education that may be privatised (inputs and services, school management, and the relationship with families). Also, within each of these aspects “there may be privatisation processes of different natures and with very different political implications” (Bellei & Orellana, 2014, p. 7). Conversely, open privatisation of education conveys the spreading out of private provision of education, for instance, by increasing the percentage of students attending private schools. This has been done by certain governments through educational policies, which work as an agreement in which the government transfers resources to private agents and makes specific demands in return.

On another hand, Savas (2000) developed a classification of privatisation techniques, grouping them in three broad categories. In the first one, delegation, the state remains entirely responsible for a function, but transfers the actual task to private agents. This can occur, for example, by contracting out a service from a private entity, or by providing them with grants to do certain work. Vouchers or user subsidies also fall under this category, as recipients use them to acquire service from private agents provided by the state. The second category, divestment, implies the detaching itself from its responsibility and conveying it to a private agent. This can occur when the government sells or transfers functions, enterprises or assets; or liquidates a government enterprise with poor results. The third category, displacement, refers to a more indirect process in which the government gets gradually withered away and the private sector starts to play a

more active role. This can occur by default, as users no longer rely on the service provided by the state and choose to acquire services from the private sector. This process is known in the wider literature as default privatisation (Caddell & Ashley, 2006), *de facto* privatization (Tooley & Dixon, 2005) or grassroots privatisation (Walford, 2011). Recently, deregulation has been a common form of displacement by which the state forsakes its control and allows private agents to compete among themselves. This approach is underpinned by a neoliberal perspective, as it is based on the idea that competition and market-driven measures are more efficient and effective for satisfying people's needs.

2.1.2. Manifestations of education privatisation

As mentioned earlier, education privatisation does not refer to a specific policy; instead, it encompasses a wide range of policies, programmes and interventions. Although their logic and design tend to depend significantly on the context (Verger, Zancajo & Fontdevilla, 2016), some common manifestations and policy instruments will be examined next.

Basic regulations

Although these do not involve a specific privatisation intervention, they can open the path for the proliferation of private schools or the rise in their enrolment rates. Thus, according to Bellei & Orellana (2014), these are situated right on the boundary between acceptance and promotion of private education. The authors define basic regulations as the legal framework that acknowledges and validates private schools, and provides tax benefits for donors and – in most cases non-profit – providers. When this is the case, the state focuses mainly on expanding and improving the public education system, so its degree of privatisation is contingent on the state's role as an education provider (Bellei & Orellana, 2014).

Public-private partnerships (PPPs)

PPPs are gaining increasing popularity and becoming dominant in many education systems. As Ball & Youdell (2008) suggest, they are part of a renewed setting of state provision that addresses social problems in a different way, establishes new relationships and reallocates decision-making, functioning as a privatisation policy device on the public sector. PPPs can be defined as relatively stable agreements between the public and the private sectors, by which the state contracts a service

from private providers for a fixed price period of time and is usually tied to results (Verger et al., 2016).

Given the scarcity of impact evaluations, there is no clarity on the actual impact of PPPs on education outcomes (Thapa & Mahendra, 2010; Day-Ashley et al., 2014). However, their effectiveness appears to be linked, on the one hand, to their design and, on another hand, to the presence of strong regulatory frameworks and government with will and capacity to form partnerships (LaRocque, 2010). PPPs take various forms, including – but not limited to – the following:

- Contracting of services

This refers to negotiated agreements for the incorporation of private agents in different dimensions and services of public education functioning (Bellei & Orellana, 2014; Rizvi, 2016). Educational services, however, remain responsibility of public schools. While contracting-out has always existed (mainly for support services such as schools maintenance), it has intensified in the recent years, particularly in substantial aspects of education (e.g. student assessment, school improvement).

- Concession contracts/charter schools

Among the different kinds of contracts, the most radical version is the transference of the entire management of a public school – or group of schools – to a private provider, which in extreme cases may be a for-profit firm (Ball & Youdell, 2008; Bellei & Orellana, 2014). Agreements for school concessions – or charter schools – have specific timeframes and goals, control of capital and funds, a business-like management structure, and significant autonomy over pedagogical and managerial aspects. Also, they go through supervision and evaluation by the government in exchange for being held accountable for student outcomes (Bellei & Orellana, 2014; Rizvi, 2016). Arguments in favour of concession schools revolve around the contracts as a mean of fostering decentralisation and unwinding management in public education (Bellei & Orellana, 2014). However, what underlies this privatisation technique is the idea that private providers can deliver higher education quality or better cost-effectiveness than public providers (Ball & Youdell, 2008).

Quasi-markets

Quasi-markets are built over school-choice initiatives at the system level, which refer to parents' right to select among schools (Ball & Youdell, 2008). Choice is simplified and promoted by diversification strategies for education provision along with other devices such as "the removal or weakening of bureaucratic controls over school recruitment, school funding tied to this recruitment, and support for and encouragement for choice and movement around the system" (Ball & Youdell, 2008, p. 18). Regarding the underpinnings of this manifestation, open promotion of school choice implies a positive perception of the adjustment between school supply and parents' choice processes for the educational system (Ladd, 2003), particularly for introducing competition between schools and triggering market-led dynamics.

Despite not being the only ones, two initiatives related to quasi-markets stand out:

- Subsidies

This technique promotes private education through the allocation of resources to private – usually non-profit – schools. Participating private schools are selected according to policy priorities (such as low-income student population) and often perceive fewer resources than public schools (Bellei & Orellana, 2014). These resources can be free of expenditure restrictions, but the state may also link them to specific budget areas in which they should be spent (such as teacher salaries). These policies portray a support to private education; however, it remains secondary to the supremacy of public education (Bellei & Orellana, 2014).

- Vouchers

Vouchers are demand-side funding schemes by which parents receive a government-issued credit to cover part or the total fees of the school of their choice (Bellei & Orellana, 2014; Menashy, 2013). In another form, the subsidy is given directly to the school based on students' enrolment. Like other privatisation manifestations, voucher plans are based on the assumption that private schools are more effective than public schools for improving students' performance (Sommer, McEwan & Willms, 2004). Furthermore, vouchers can be a rather aggressive education privatisation policy if governments do not have many or strict eligibility rules for private schools (for instance, they allow for-profit providers),

fund public schools through the same vouchers and allow additional tuition payments (Witte, 2009).

A systematic review conducted by Morgan, Petrosino and Fronius (2013) aimed to assess the impact of school vouchers on student outcomes in developing countries. Given the rigorous methodological inclusion criteria (randomised control trial or quasi-experimental design), only two studies were included (one from Colombia and one from Pakistan). Four studies from Chile's voucher programme were also used to obtain contextual information. The review hints that to achieve equity, voucher programmes ought to be focused on low-SES students and provide larger to the less advantaged, cover all fees and not allow additional payments, provide information to parents or carers, and monitor enrolments to avoid misrepresentations or cream-skimming of children of higher SES. Another analysis of voucher programmes (Gauri & Vawda, 2004) suggests that the impact of vouchers in developing country contexts appears to be related to specific circumstances, institutional variables and programme design.

2.2. Low-fee private schools (LFPS)

2.2.1. Characterisation

Low-fee private schools (LFPS) seem to be a rather recent privatisation-related phenomenon in developing countries, as evidence on their proliferation started emerging around the late 1990s (Day-Ashley et al., 2014). This feature, along with contextual differences, might help explain the lack of consensus around its definition and characteristics. Although it is clear that LFPS are schools with some degree of independence from the state and cater for low-SES population, there are a variety of interpretations of what this entails. For instance, low-fee private schools are often defined in relation to the percentage of monthly salary or income (Srivastava, 2015) or the minimum wage (Heyneman & Stern, 2014) that parents pay. Other characterisations are based on the idea that LFPS depend on user fees to cover part or the total of their running costs and are for profit (Mcloughlin, 2013). However, it is not always clear that this is the case, as combined motives can be present (such as business interest, corporate responsibility, religion and philanthropy) and they can function at different scales (from individual education entrepreneurs to large national or international chains) (Ball, 2007; Mcloughlin, 2013; Srivastava, 2013).

It is often difficult to find reliable data regarding the reach and geographical scope of LFPS, as a large number appear to be unregistered or functioning under the radar (Balarin, 2015; Lewin, 2007; Tooley et al., 2011). Hence, the figures that the governments are able to provide are often a misrepresentation (Mcloughlin, 2013) and the data offered by non-governmental actors is usually based on isolated cross-sectional surveys not able to provide adequate aggregates (Dixon, 2013).

Heyneman and Stern (2014) attribute the widespread growth of LFPS in developing countries to two main reasons: i) the governments' failure to meet demand through sufficient public schooling, and ii) the – generally – poor quality or failing education systems. Phillipson (2008) suggests that this phenomenon has occurred due to the combination of two factors: a general perception of low quality of public schools and the entrepreneurs' response once this market niche was identified. In turn, the rise of this market opportunity was influenced by context factors, such as a surplus of teachers, hidden costs in public schools, private tutoring costs, language of instruction and low quality of public schools (Phillipson, 2008).

2.2.2. Debate around LFPS

The debate about LFPS can be represented as a confrontation between two well-established postures. One central topic of polarisation and ideology is the contribution, relevance and appropriateness of LFPS to achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals. On the one hand, proponents and advocates of LFPS (e.g. Dixon, 2012; Dixon, Tooley & Schagen, 2013; Tooley, 2015; Tooley et al., 2011) argue that they have been able to expand access, choice and quality of education for low-SES population where the state has not provided education or there is an excess of demand. Furthermore, they perceive accountability and lower costs as advantages of private over public schools (Tooley, 2015). As with other privatisation techniques, what underlies this perspective is the idea private schools provide can offer better quality and that, at the same time, competition enhances quality at the system level.

On the other hand, there are a wide variety of arguments from the opposing standpoint. Some critics are against in principle to the delivery of education

through a private market, given its nature of 'imperfect public good' (i.e. producing both individual and social benefits) (Oketch et al., 2010). Others argue, from a rights perspective, that school fees go against the right to a universal and free education (Mcloughlin, 2013). Further arguments are related to equity concerns. For instance, Menashy (2013) states that, regardless of the amount, fees become a barrier for families that cannot afford them, generating unequal access. Hence, despite the value that many attribute to school choice, choice ends up being unequally distributed, as LFPS can provide access opportunities for some low-SES children but probably not for the most marginalised. Finally, Balarin (2015) argues that the lack of capacity in developing countries for dealing with supervision and regulation of the private sector makes privatisation an opportunity for corruption and fraud. According to the author, this can also have the effect of weakening public education systems.

2.2.3. Evidence from other countries

Having examined the debate around LFPS, it is fundamental to analyse the evidence on whether LFPS "are providing quality education, reaching the disadvantaged, supporting or undermining equality […], affordable for the poor and financially sustainable" (Mcloughlin, 2013, p. 5). The evidence has been extracted from individual studies, as well as from a rigorous review of the role and impact of LFPS in developing countries (Day-Ashley et al., 2014). It is noteworthy that this review focused on DFID priority countries, and found studies mainly from South Asia and Africa.

In terms of quality, Day-Ashley et al. (2014) found strong evidence on better teaching in private schools, specifically regarding higher levels of teacher presence and activity, and teaching approaches leading to better learning outcomes. This last finding was corroborated by another study (Singh & Sarkar, 2012). Additional studies also found evidence on teaching time (Kingdon & Banerji's, 2009), contact time (Kremer & Muralidharan, 2008; Maitra et al., 2011), facilities (such as toilets and drinking water) (Dixon, Tooley & Schagen 2013), lower pupil-teacher ratios (Hartwig, 2013), and teacher absence (Kremer & Muralidharan, 2008; Tooley et al., 2011), all in favour of private schools. However, it has been found that private schools hire less experienced and less trained teachers with low wages (Aslam & Kingdon, 2011; Day-Ashley et al., 2014).

Although the review found better learning outcomes in private schools, this evidence was only moderate, and ambiguity remains about the size of the private-school effect (Day-Ashley et al., 2014).

A wide range of studies address the issue of school choice; however, according to Day-Ashley et al. (2014), the evidence about it is only moderate. The review found that users prioritise quality of education when choosing private schools, and make informed choices about education quality, which is dependent on the context and the information that users collect about schools. This information, particularly when related to the quality of private schools, is often gathered through informal sources (such as networks). Additional studies have found that other factors affect the choice of LFPS, such as excess demand (Oketch et al., 2010); household-level factors (number of children, birth order and parental education) (Härmä, 2011b); and parents' beliefs that their children will be able to access job opportunities requiring higher levels of education (Ahmed et al., 2013). Other factors restrain the choice of LFPS, such as the number of private schools in rural areas (Härmä, 2011a); and household wealth and school affordability (Ahmed et al., 2013; Härmä, 2011b).

Regarding other characteristics, the cost of education delivery was found to be inferior in private schools, mainly due to teachers' lower salaries (Day-Ashley et al., 2014). Although there is evidence that private schools are expanding from urban to rural areas, the evidence about whether they are geographically reaching the poor, whether low SES families are actually able to pay the fees, and whether LFPS are financially sustainable is still inconclusive (Day-Ashley et al., 2014). Evidence is scarce on whether private schools are actually held accountable by parents and non-existing on the assumption that parents switch private schools due to their low quality (Day-Ashley et al., 2014). There is also insufficient support to the ideas that state subsidies or donors enhance the quality, equity and sustainability of private schools; that private schools complement state provision of education; and that private education, through market competition, improves quality or has system-wide effects (Day-Ashley et al., 2014).

By mapping the literature on the topic, the review found that there is a significant lack of data on the actual extent and nature of private schools, the effect of

international chains of private schools, and a lack of focus on middle, secondary schools or private schools functioning in peri-urban areas. In terms of methods, longitudinal research that analyses trends over time is scarce, limiting the possibilities to work out the long-term effects of government interventions on the quality of private education provision. Finally, there are not many comparative studies across and within contexts.

2.3. Private education in Latin America

Given that privatisation patterns are strongly influenced by contextual (social and political) aspects (Ball & Youdell, 2008; Bellei & Orellana, 2014), it is relevant to briefly present the shared background and context in Latin America (section 2.3.1). Afterwards, section 2.3.2 will provide concrete examples from some countries.

2.3.1. Regional trends and background

Despite their particular characteristics, Latin American countries share a common background and context, both of which are related to the privatisation tendencies in the region. Thus, it is possible to identify four relevant aspects: historical context, educational reforms, role of international actors and role of religious organisations.

As Bellei & Orellana (2014) mention, the 1980s in Latin America were filled with economic crises and, in some countries, dictatorships. Later on, the 1990s were a decade of change, as democratic governments witnessed a shift in the social and economic development models, and attempted to restructure their education systems through neoliberal approaches (Fischman, Ball & Gvirtz, 2003; Reimers, 2000). Two issues are central in this period. On the one hand, improving student performance was at the core of all reforms, including the development of student assessment and school accountability systems, the modernisation of management, and the decentralisation of public education (Bellei & Orellana, 2014; Fischman, et al., 2003).

On the other hand, there were important influences from international organisations (UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, CEPAL, IMF, OECD) on reform agendas through conditional loan requirements or governments' commitment to international development normative (Bellei & Orellana, 2014; Fischman, et al.,

2003). Said reforms were implemented from the mid-1990s. By the beginning of the 21st century, the educational debate was still "dominated by polemics about standards, testing, school autonomy, decentralisation, accountability of the public sector, privatisation, and vouchers, indicating that the centre of the debate is how to best accommodate educational institutions to the demands of the market" (Fischman, Ball & Gvirtz, 2003, p. 7).

An important feature of most Latin American countries is the historical presence of the Catholic Church and other non-profits (community and philanthropic organisations and NGOs) in the education system. These have a tradition of promoting religious values, cultural traditions and/or pedagogical approaches, and have received different levels of recognition and support from Latin American governments (Bellei & Orellana, 2014). In Venezuela and Peru – and to a certain extent in Colombia and Argentina – there is a longstanding tradition of predominance of public-private partnership schemes with Catholic schools (Navarro, 2005). Among these, "Fe y Alegria" stands out as an example of PPP that caters for disadvantaged population, given its strong presence in most Latin American countries (Bellei & Orellana, 2014; Wolff & de Moura, 2008). State-church relationships, then, have definitely influenced private education policies in these countries (Navarro, 2005).

Lastly, regarding the current context, it is important to note that whereas most Latin American countries have had significant accomplishments in the expansion of coverage, education systems are still struggling with educational quality, inequality, funding, and resource management (Fischman, Ball & Gvirtz, 2003; Navarro, 2005). There is also a significant growth in private education (including undocumented LFPS) which has occurred in response to a shift in social and economic needs; insufficient expansion of public education; lack of government flexibility for responding to needs; and, in certain cases, policies encouraging promoting private sector education (Wolff, 2005). Thus, nowadays "non-government education [in Latin America] accounts for 26 percent of preschool, 16 percent of primary and 25 percent of secondary enrollments" (Heyneman & Stern, 2014, p.6).

2.3.2. Types and examples

Two publications provide significant information on education privatisation in the Latin American context. First, Bellei and Orellana (2014) review and analyse the relationships and policies related to private education in the region. It is a cross-country review drawing on information from six countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Peru, and Venezuela). Second, Wolff, Navarro and Gonzáles (2005) present case studies of cooperation between the public and private sectors in an attempt to analyse the institutional dimension of problems in Latin American education. Despite not being systematic reviews or empirical studies, both publications provide valuable background information for the presentation of individual countries' privatisation policies.

The case studies suggest that Latin America has experienced different types of privatisation, from one side of the spectrum to the other (Bellei & Orellana, 2014). Examples from three representative countries will be presented next.

Chile

Chile is regarded as one of the most radical and extreme cases of market-based reforms in education, which have nearly replaced the public education system (Bellei & Orellana, 2014). The education market reform was developed in early 1980s, under Pinochet's dictatorship and as part of a neoliberal strategy. This reform included the transfer of public schools' management to the municipalities and a universal voucher programme (per-pupil subsidy) as the single funding mechanism for schools (Peirano & Vargas, 2005). Public and private – both for-profit and not-for-profit – schools can participate of the voucher programme, generating three main school categories: private, private subsidised and public (Elacqua, 2012). Since 1994, a targeted "adjusted voucher programme" (SEP law) increased the amount of the voucher for vulnerable children (Elacqua, 2012). However, it also allowed private schools to charge monthly tuition fees on top of the voucher (Elacqua, 2012). As Peirano and Vargas (2005) mention, the government established a scholarship programme to help families unable to cover the shared financing (Peirano & Vargas, 2005). Regarding student assessment, the Chilean system has a national evaluation system (SIMCE) since 1988. SIMCE assesses students from all schools in Spanish, Math, History and Science every year, alternating between fourth and eighth grade.

Colombia

Since the late 1980s, Colombia's educational reform process has focused on decentralisation and State modernisation. Between 1986 and 1994, a number of policy instruments provided the state with the functions of a coordinating entity and transferred the management of public education to departments and municipalities. Additionally, they introduced instruments for quality assurance, such as standardised tests (Bellei & Orellana, 2014).

In this context, voucher programmes and public-private partnerships aiming to increase access and reduce dropout rates were developed and implemented in some regions, expanding subsidised private education (Bellei & Orellana, 2014). The plan for increasing coverage in secondary education (PACES) is perhaps the most popular example of the Colombian voucher programmes. It was supported by the World Bank and ran from 1991 until the end of the decade, providing vouchers to around 125,000 low-income secondary students, selected by lottery when demand exceeded supply (Bellei & Orellana, 2014). At the beginning, the programme allowed the participation of for-profit providers but, from 1996, the government impeded it.

Finally, "Colegios en Concesión" (Concession Schools) was the prototype of public-private partnerships. The programme started in 2000 and consisted of contracts by which the state built schools and transferred the management of schools to private providers for 15 years. In turn, private managers were committed to specific goals and agreed to be regularly audited by the state (for expenditures and performance) (Bellei & Orellana, 2014; Wolff, 2005). Concession schools could not select students on any other criterion than living near the school and belonging to the lowest SES (Villa & Duarte, 2005).

Argentina

After the acute economic crisis in the 1980s, the educational reforms implemented in the 1990s focused on modernisation and decentralisation of the public education system (Bellei & Orellana, 2014). Later reforms focused on increasing education resources, creating quality measurement and accountability and expanding the central state's role in education policy (Wolff et al., 2005).

On another hand, the state currently subsidises the majority of private schools, which get nearly half of their funding in this way. This funding schemes are not built on “a coherent strategy of encouraging equity and quality, but instead are based on outdated historical considerations and individual negotiations. In many cases, schools with children from privileged economic classes receive public subsidies” (Wolff et al., 2005, p. 3). These negotiations and political pressures have had a more prominent in shaping the relationship between schools, provinces and the central state than market dynamics policies or plans (Bellei & Orellana, 2014).

Thus, privatisation in Argentina does not involve most of the traditional privatisation policies. Instead, it is closer to a spontaneous privatisation process – i.e. guided by demand. It is not possible to know if preference changes were induced or promoted, thus, the process is better defined as quasi-spontaneous – i.e. that occurred from a combination of demand, subsidies policies and deregulation (Morduchowicz, 2005).

III. Research methodology

This study was guided by the following question: What is the nature and scope of the research literature on low-fee private schools in the Latin American region?

3.1. Type of review

A systematic review can be defined as “a review of research literature using systematic and explicit, accountable methods” (Gough, Oliver & Thomas, 2017, p.2). Methods used, thus, need to be stated, justified and explained, as this allows assessing the pertinence of the decisions taken, the accuracy in their application and the adequate interpretation of the results (Gough et al., 2017). Reviews vary in the nature of questions they are trying to address and the aims they pursue. As Voils, Sandelowski, Barroso and Hasselblad (2008) note, there is a variety of methods that range from reviews that seek to *aggregate* findings from similar studies to those that *configure* or organise findings regarding experiences and meaning. The former use a pre-determined quantitative method and a deductive approach, while the latter use iterative inductive methods, aiming to explore and generate theory. Some reviews include both of these approaches.

Generally, systematic reviews involve three main steps: mapping the research (i.e., identifying and describing pertinent studies), critically and systematically assessing reports, and synthesising the findings (Gough et al., 2017). However, they can vary in terms of their scope. The first stage can also be a product on its own, as, systematic maps aim to spell out the nature of the research activity of a specific field (Gough et al., 2017). Through a systematic map, this study analysed the nature and scope of the research carried out on low-fee private schools in Latin America up to now, which, in turn, will allow to identify research foci and gaps in the literature to draft recommendations of topics and questions to be undertaken in future studies.

3.2. Selection criteria

As mentioned above, systematic reviews need to be clear and straightforward about the conditions that need to be met in order to add studies in. Table 3.1 presents the criteria used in this review to make decisions about the inclusion and exclusion of studies.

Table 3.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Characteristic	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Topic	Studies that focus on or include non-elite primary and/or secondary private schools, or mention LFPS as their focus.	Studies that focus exclusively on public schools, elite private schools, higher education or preschool.
Geography	Studies that focus on or include data from Latin American countries where Spanish or Portuguese are spoken. This definition of Latin America includes the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.	Studies that do not include data from Latin American countries or focus exclusively on Cuba. This country has been excluded due to the lack of participation of the private sector in education.
Publication date	Studies published 1 January 2000 to 31 May 2017.	Studies published before 2000 or after May 2017.
Language	Studies published in English or Spanish.	Studies published in languages different from English or Spanish.
Type of study	Studies that focus on thematic areas (1) and (2) can be either empirical (i.e. drawing on primary or secondary quantitative or qualitative data) or other types of research studies. Studies that focus on thematic areas (3) and (4) must be empirical, i.e., they need to draw on primary or secondary quantitative or qualitative data. In the case of thematic area (3), studies can be either qualitative (focusing on the perceptions of stakeholders about the reasons why parents choose LFPS) or quantitative (using methods such as regressions to model the parents decision-making process).	Systematic reviews that focus in any of the four thematic areas. Reports that focus on thematic areas (1) and (2) but are not research studies (e.g. opinion pieces or book reviews). Studies that focus on thematic areas (3) and (4) but are not empirical.

As private schools can be independently run but subsidised by the State, this type of public-private partnerships will be considered in this review. Likewise, the review will include non-elite schools managed by NGOs or religious organisations. Although previous reviews (for example, Ashley et al., 2014) do not consider these types of schools, Walford (2011) argues that excluding LFPS run by religious organisations or NGOs can cause to overlook this novel trend of privatisation that differs from traditional models. Furthermore, considering them allows having a broader perspective of the situation of school privatisation research in Latin America, which is also a reason for using a broad definition of low-fee private schools. Likewise, an initial literature review on private education in Latin America suggests the existence of other privatisation trends closely related to the topic that it would be worth considering.

Thus, the review was set to look for four types of literature, which correspond to the thematic areas presented in section 1.3. The included studies should fall on one or more of the four prioritised thematic areas. However, other studies may be included, provided they meet all the inclusion criteria. This decision was made in order to capture other potentially relevant literature not included in the prioritised thematic areas.

3.3. Search methods for identification of studies

3.3.1. Search strategy

The search strategy was meant to be as comprehensive and in-depth as possible, however, researcher's restricted resources limited its extensiveness somewhat. To capture a wide range of published research on the topic, the search was conducted in three different ways:

Electronic searches

Standardised searches were conducted on the following social science and education databases:

- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)
- PsycInfo
- JSTOR
- UNESDOC (UNESCO)
- Redalyc

- SciELO
- Dialnet
- World Bank e-library

Websites

- Privatisation in Education Research Initiative (PERI) http://www.periglobal.org/
  Given the relevance of this initiative, their publications were hand searched for relevant studies considering the abovementioned criteria.
- World Bank – Education
  http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/research/all
  All education publications about the region were hand searched for relevant studies.

Reference lists

The reference lists of the included articles were examined and potentially relevant articles were retrieved in order to apply the inclusion criteria. These included reports that referred to any aspect of private education and to Latin America or one of the considered countries.

Search terms used in the electronic database search

The terms and combinations used for the electronic search are presented in Table 3.2. Given the different characteristics of databases, in some cases the terms and/or combinations had to be adapted or limited. For instance, in certain databases (ERIC, ProQuest, UNESDOC) instead of searching for the terms "private" and "education" separately, the search included the controlled term "private education" (and/or "private school").

Table 3.2: Search terms

Private
Privat*
Market
Non-state
AND
Education
Educat*

School*
Provider
Provision
Instruct*
Learn*
AND
Low- fee
Low fee
Low-cost
Fee
Affordable
Low-income
Non-elite
NOT
“Higher education”
Universit*

*For these terms, truncation was used when available.

The search terms used in the electronic database search were tried out twice on ERIC and adjusted accordingly. Thus, in spite of the possibility of introducing bias (e.g., by excluding studies that focus both on basic and private education), the Boolean operator “NOT” was used in two databases (ERIC and PsycInfo). This decision was made to reduce the numbers in the searches, given the large amount of irrelevant studies focused on higher education that came up.

3.3.2. Information management

Internet-based software EPPI-Reviewer 4 was used in the review for data management and analysis (Thomas, Brunton & Graziosi, 2010). The use of automated software carries with it many benefits, both related to the better organisation and simplification of the process, and the availability of consistently coded data throughout a number of reviews (Brunton & Graziosi, 2010). In this review, results from database searches were imported into the software, except in the case of DialNet, where this feature was not available. Results from DialNet, websites, and reports identified through searching reference lists were inputted into the software manually, creating individual records.

Study selection process

All studies were screened based on title and abstract and the included ones were also screened based on the full report.

The screening method involved applying a set of exclusion codes in a certain order. If none of the exclusion codes could be applied, then the study was coded as “Include”. Only one code needed to be applied to exclude the study, the one that was most relevant. For instance, if a study was excluded for publication date (exclusion code 3), this meant that it was on topic (exclusion code 1) and focused in Latin America (exclusion code 3). Thus, the screening strategy functioned, to some extent, as a keywording procedure (Gough, Kiwan, Suttcliffe, Simpson, & Houghton, 2003).

3.4. Data collection

All full reports from the included studies were coded using a questionnaire developed specially for this review’s data collection process. This tool included (and, in some cases, adapted) keywords from the EPPI-Centre Educational Keywording System V0.9.7, and designed others for the specific purposes of the review. The structure of the coding tool is as follows: the first section picks up some general details about the studies, including source (electronic database, citation, etc.), and the year, language, and type of publication (journal article, book chapter, etc.). The second section asks questions about the population and sample, such as its composition, size, socio-economic status, and the educational stage in which the study focuses. The third section focuses on the study design, asking about the purpose of the study, its research approach, timing, and data collection methods. Additionally, it has a free-text category to include a short summary of the study design. Finally, the fourth section includes queries regarding the study focus: including aims, variables, research questions (all as free-text categories), level of analysis and countries. This tool was tried out in two studies, after which the necessary adjustments were made. The final version of the full coding tool can be found in Appendix 1.

3.5. Assessing the quality of studies

Given the nature and scope of the review, quality assessment of the included studies could not be conducted. However, the list of included studies is available in a section of the references to allow carrying out this task in a future study.

3.6. Data analysis

Once all the reports were coded in the four categories, the data was checked for inconsistencies and amended if necessary. Since most of the questions implied assigning closed categories, EPPI-Reviewer 4 was used to obtain frequency tables and cross-tabulations. These were imported into Excel in order to build graphs or charts when relevant. For the analysis of the free-text categories, a report of the answers was drawn from EPPI Reviewer, imported into Atlas.Ti 7 (a qualitative coding and analysis tool), and text-coded to develop categories.

3.7. Ethics

This study was approved by the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee on 5 April 2017.

IV. Results of the search

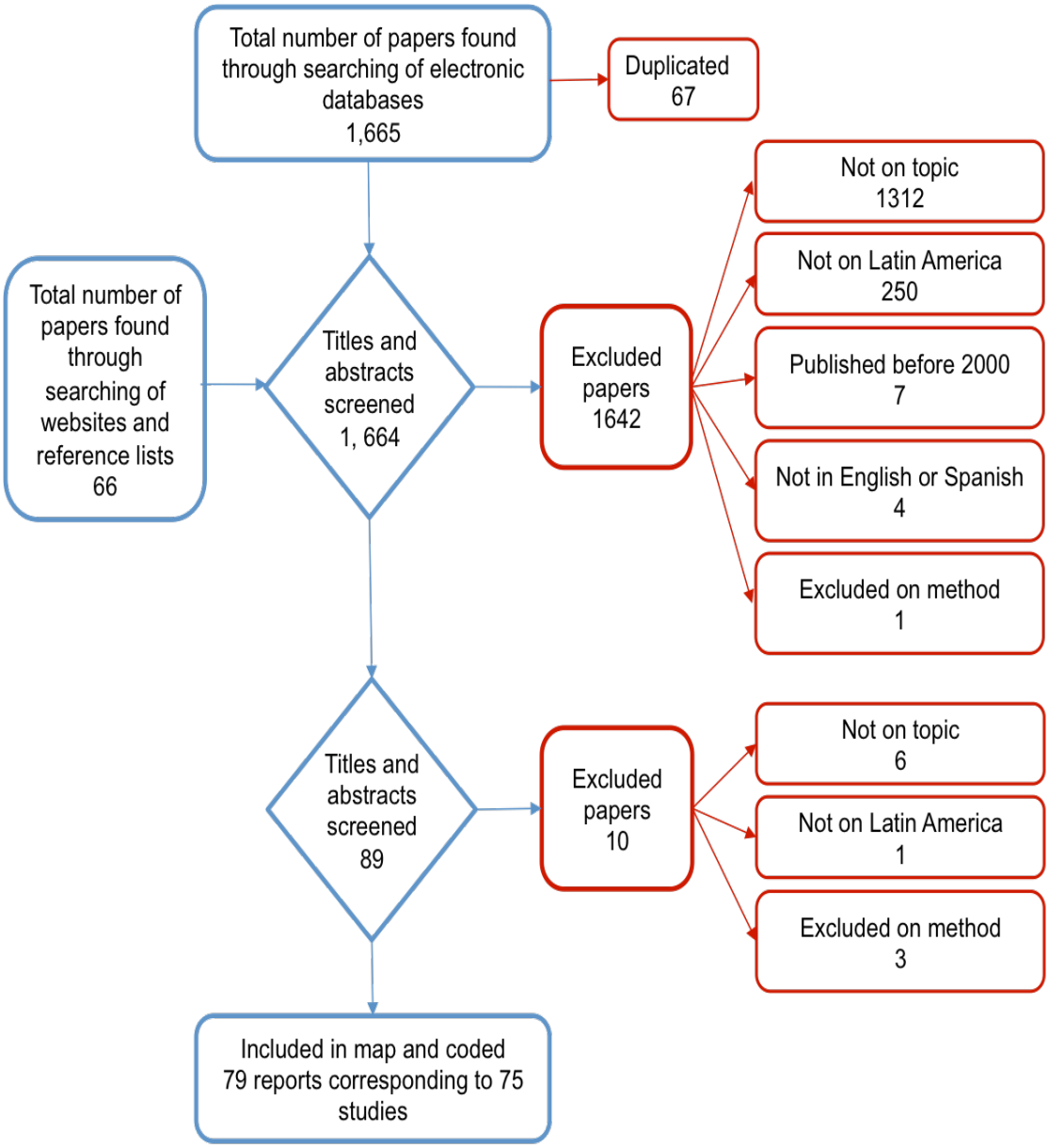
This study mapped the research about low-fee private schools in Latin America, which were broadly defined as primary or secondary non-state schools that cater for non-elite population.

In total, 1665 potentially relevant studies were found via electronic database and website searching, while 39 were identified by reference list checking. After 67 duplicates were removed, 1664 studies were left for title and abstract screening. In the first screening phase, 1642 studies were further excluded. The most common reason for excluding items at this stage was topic relevance (1312 excluded studies), followed by geography (250 studies not focused on Latin America). A further seven items were excluded as they were published before 2000 and four for being published neither in English nor in Spanish. Only one study was excluded due to its methodology. After titles and abstracts were screened, there were 89 studies left. These were examined using the full text report. At this stage, six items were excluded for not being on topic, one for the geographical criterion and three because of the method used.

A total of 75 relevant studies (in 79 reports) were identified as answering the review question and included for further analysis. In terms of the source, 30 were found on electronic databases, eight were found on websites, and 39 reports were found by hand searching reference lists of included studies.

The flow of reports is presented on Figure 4.1, and the list of included studies can be found on Appendix 2. The descriptive analysis of the included research literature will be presented in Chapter 5. Sections 5.1 to 5.3 present the findings in terms of reports (N=79), whereas the remaining sections present them according to the studies (N=75).

Figure 4.1: Flowchart of study search and selection process



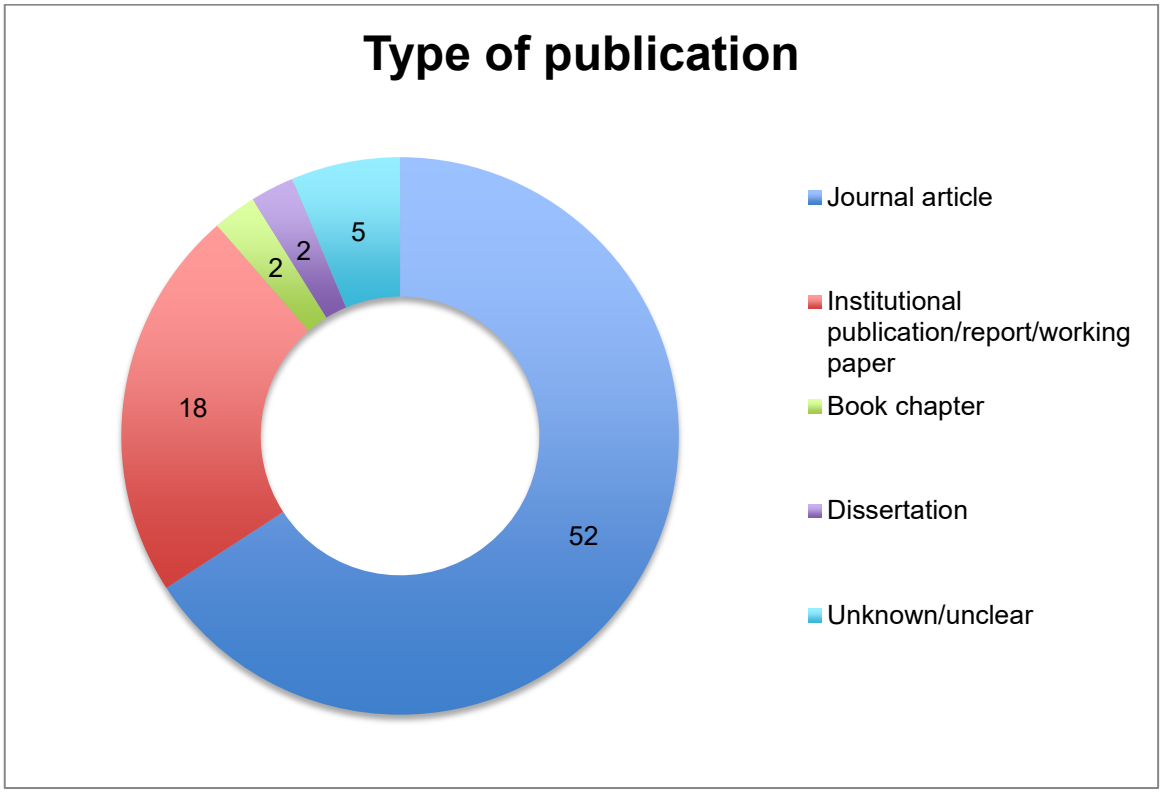
V. Descriptive analysis

In total, 75 studies in 79 reports were identified as answering the review question and were included for further analysis. This section presents a descriptive analysis of the included studies, comprehending general information, population, study focus and used methods.

5.1. Type of publication

As Figure 5.1 shows, the most common type of publication were journal articles (52 reports), followed by institutional publications, reports or working papers (18 reports). Only four reports corresponded to book chapters and dissertations, and for the last five reports, the type of publication was unclear.

Figure 5.1: Type of publication



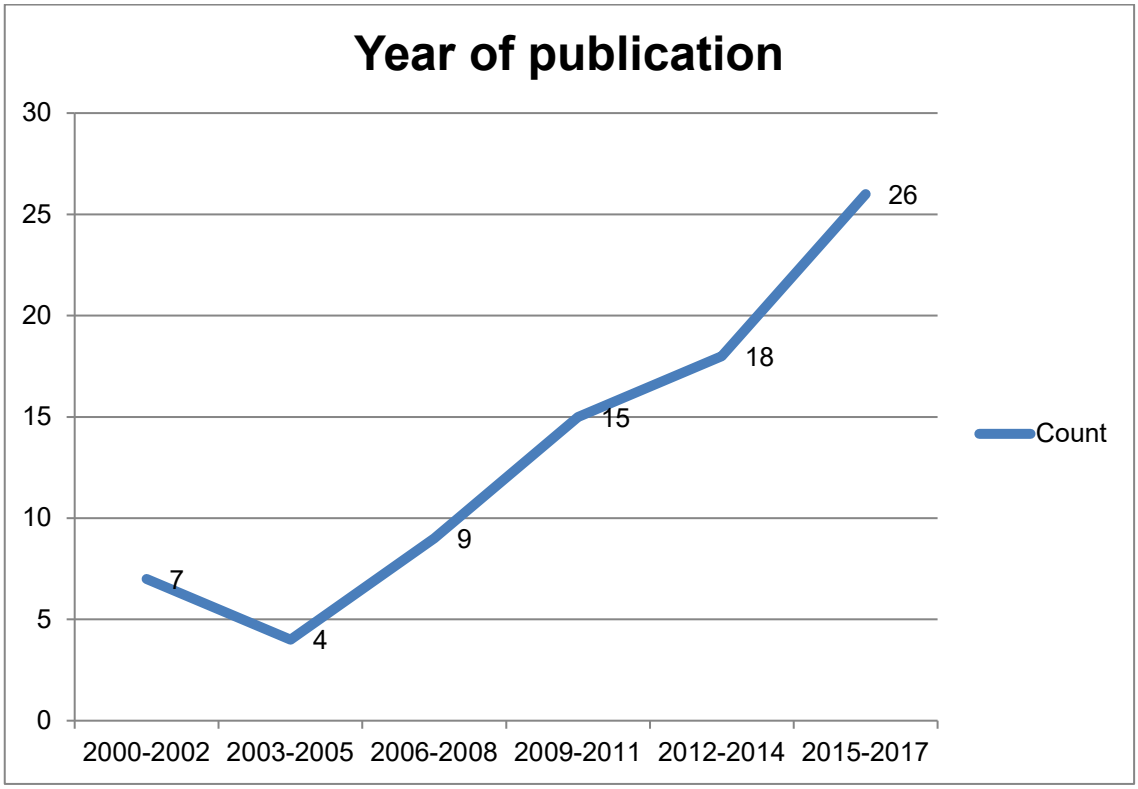
Note: Categories are mutually exclusive

5.2. Year of publication

As presented in Figure 5.2, from 2003, there was sharp increase in the number of publications on the topic. One third of the reports were published between 2015 and 2017 (26 reports), 18 reports were published between 2012 and 2014, and 15

reports between 2009 and 2011. Only 20 reports were published in the period between 2000 and 2008.

Figure 5.2: Year of publication



5.3. Language

Regarding the language of publication, 43 reports were published in English, while 34 were published in Spanish.

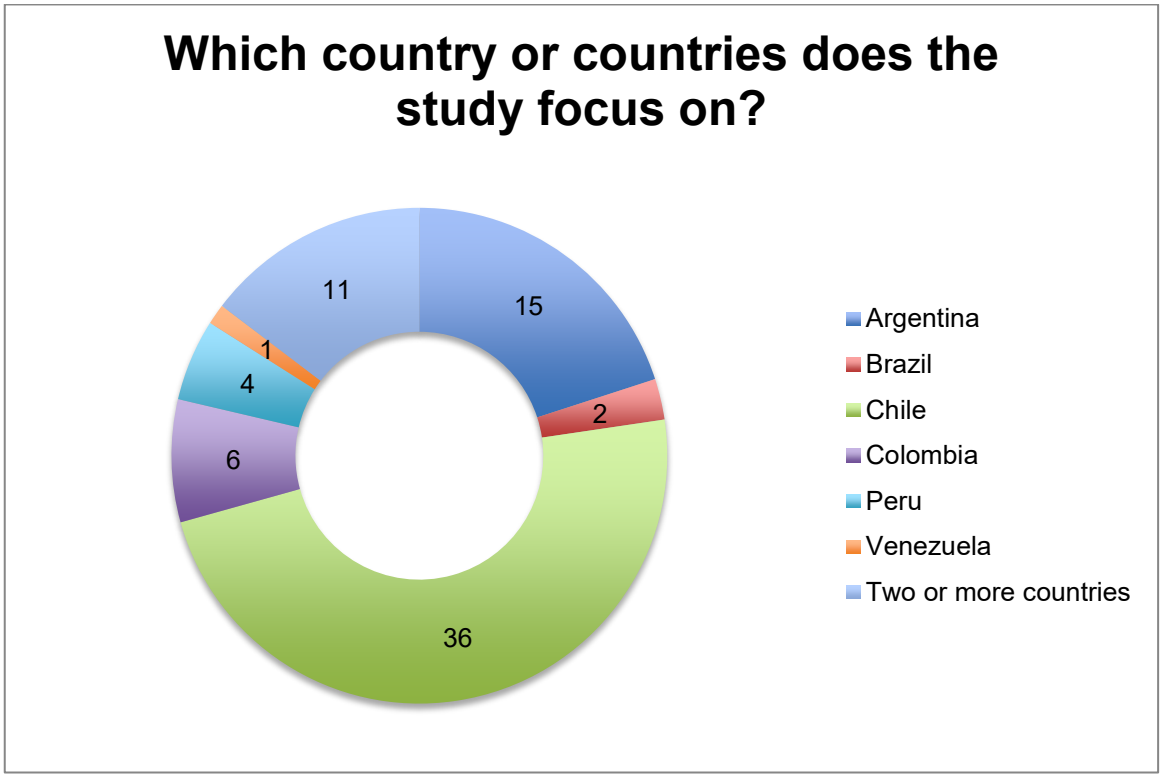
5.4. Type of research

In terms of the type of study, only one was categorised as not empirical, whereas the remaining 74 were empirical. From these, 59 were quantitative, 11 qualitative and four used mixed methods.

5.5. Geographical location

As Figure 5.6 shows, over half (36) of the studies that focus on a single country are about Chile, and over one fifth (15) about Argentina. The remaining single-country studies are divided between Colombia (6), Peru (4), Brazil (2) and Venezuela (1). Eleven studies focused on two or more countries.

Figure 5.3: Countries



Note: Categories are mutually exclusive

None of the included studies were focused exclusively on Bolivia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay or Uruguay. However, all countries were included in at least one multi-country study. Table 5.2 presents the number of multi-country studies in which each country was included.

Table 5.2: Frequency of inclusion in multi-country studies

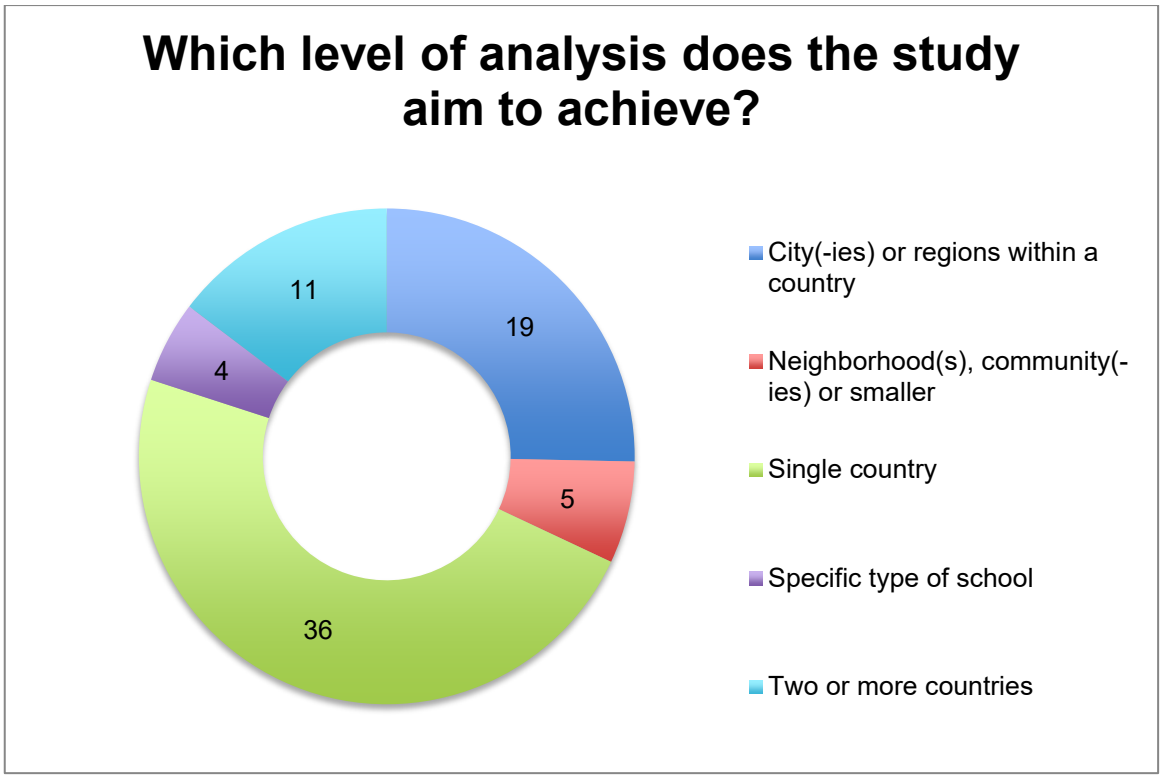
Country	*f*
Chile	11
Argentina Brazil	9
Colombia	8
Mexico Peru	7
Uruguay	6
Paraguay	5
Costa Rica Dominican Republic Ecuador Honduras	4

Nicaragua Panama	
El Salvador Guatemala	3
Bolivia	2
Venezuela	1

5.6. Level of analysis

A number of codes were created to examine the level of analysis that the studies aimed to achieve. As Figure 5.4 shows, 36 studies focused on a single country, whereas 19 concentrated on specific cities or regions. The most common among these were capital cities, particularly Santiago's metropolitan area. Five studies targeted neighbourhoods or communities. These studies were usually qualitative and had a narrow focus. The scope of 11 studies included two or more countries, at least one of which was Latin American. Four studies were concerned with a specific type of school, such as "Fe y Alegria" (Colombia, Peru, Venezuela) or "Colegios en Concesion" (Colombia).

Figure 5.4: Level of analysis

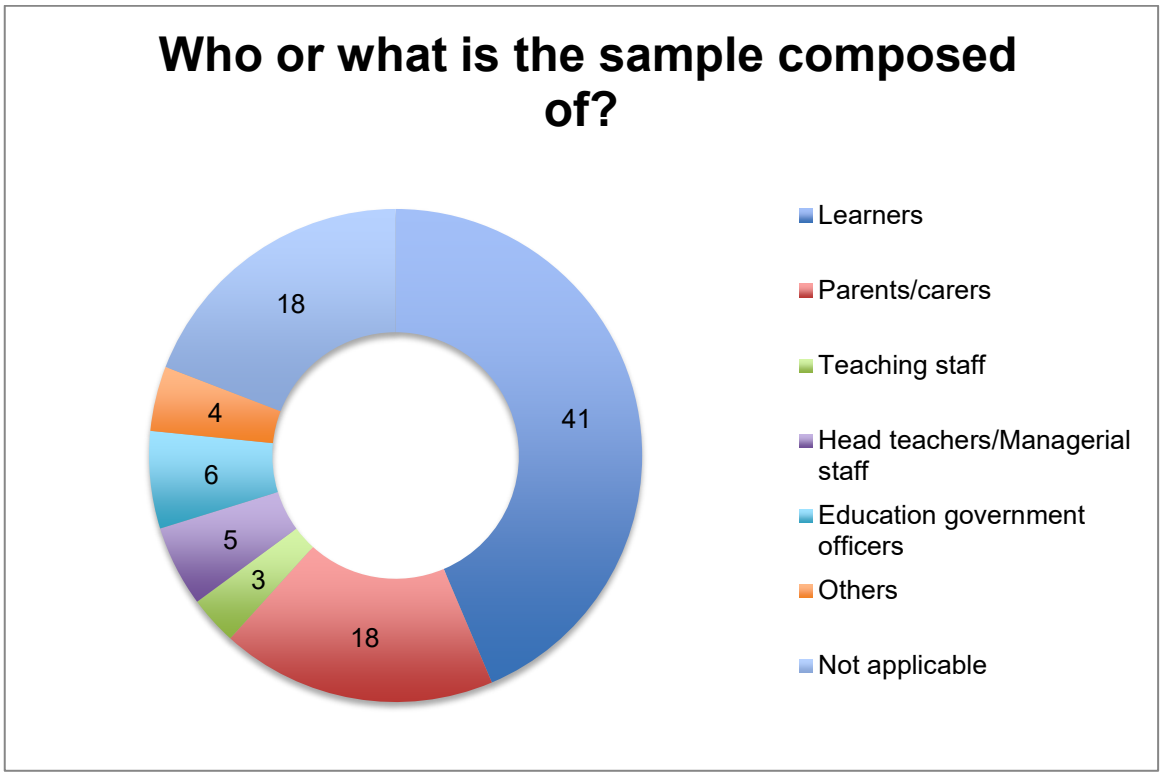


Note: Categories are mutually exclusive

5.7. Study sample characteristics

As shown in figure 5.5, learners were the most common type of participants, with 38 studies focused exclusively on them. Nine studies had samples composed only of parents, while 14 studies included more than one type of actor in their sample. The category 'others', which included education experts and officers from external organisations (such as NGOs), was coded in four studies and always alongside other categories. Lastly, the category "not applicable" was used for 17 studies that used only school- or household-level data, as well as for the non-empirical study.

Figure 5.5: Composition of the sample



Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive. Figures in the chart refer to number of studies.

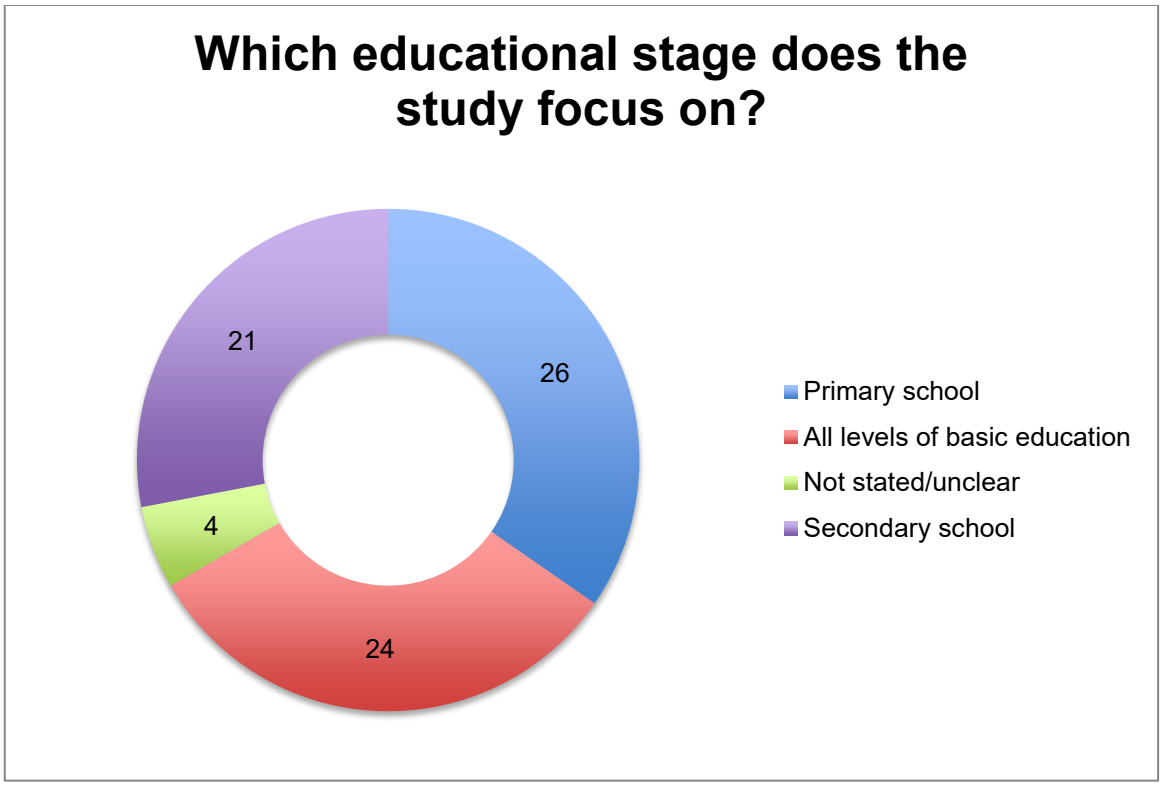
Out of the 55 studies that involved human participants, 39 explicitly provided information about their sample size, whereas 18 did not report it. The sample sizes ranged between 15 and 143 for qualitative studies, between 236 and 1 600 for quantitative studies that used primary data, and between 1 369 and 493 112 for quantitative studies that drew on secondary data. Nineteen studies also explicitly reported the socioeconomic status (SES) of the participants, and in 32 studies, it was possible to infer it. Out of these 51 studies, 33 included participants of all SES, seven included only low SES participants and one only middle SES

participants. 8 studies considered both low and middle SES participants, and only two considered high SES participants (one along low SES and one along mid SES participants). Six studies did not provide any information on socioeconomic status.

5.8. Educational stage

As figure 5.6 shows, almost one third of the studies focused on all levels of basic education[1] (24 studies), whereas over one third focused exclusively on primary school (26 studies). Of the remaining 25 studies, 21 concentrated on secondary school and on four studies, the educational stage was not clear.

Figure 5.6: Educational stage



Note: Categories are mutually exclusive

5.9. Study aims, focus and thematic areas

Most of the studies explicitly reported their aims (70) and their variables (62). Furthermore, it was possible for the reviewer to infer the aims of five and the most important variables from 11 studies. The variables from the remaining two studies remained unclear. Research questions and/or hypothesis were only explicitly stated in 22 studies.

[1] In this review, "all levels of basic education" refers to primary and secondary school.

This review set out to identify four broad types of literature, corresponding to the thematic areas presented in section 1.3. However, as the review was open to the inclusion of other types of literature (provided the study met all the eligibility criteria) the initial thematic areas were revised and modified as follows:

Box 1: Revised thematic areas

Thematic area 1 (TA1) Private education growth in Latin America: trends and explanations
Thematic area 2 (TA2) Characteristics and composition of private schools in Latin America
Thematic area 3 (TA3) Decision-making process and determinants of school choice in Latin America
Thematic area 4 (TA4) Relationship between private education and student and system-wide outcomes in Latin America

The studies included in each of the new thematic areas are presented next. Within some of the thematic areas, there was a rather clear distinction in the aims pursued by the studies; thus, this characteristic was used to categorise them. Given that some of the studies had more than one aim, they have been considered in more than one thematic area.

5.9.1. TA1: Private education growth in Latin America: trends and explanations
The first thematic area includes 12 studies that focused on describing and/or analysing uprising trends in access to private schools, usually while comparing them to public education trends. These studies usually considered private-school enrolments over the last decades, paying particular attention to the inclusion or exclusion of low-income population and linking it to issues such as neoliberal policies, economic trends and socio-demographic changes. Additionally, four studies (1.8 to 1.11), all from Argentina, aimed to find explanations for the expansion of private enrolment, one of them specifically exploring the relationship between this shift and teacher strikes. The list of studies included in this thematic area is presented on table 5.3. Two thirds of the studies in thematic area 1 focus on Argentina (8 studies), whereas only two studies focus on Chile, one on Peru and one on Latin America.

Table 5.3: Studies included in thematic area 1

ID	Authors and year of publication	Countries
1.1	Almonacid (2004)	Chile
1.2	Elacqua (2006)	
1.3	Cuenca (2013)	Peru
1.4	Pereyra (2008)	Latin America
1.5	Donaire (2014)	Argentina
1.6	Gamallo (2011)	
1.7	Judzik & Moschetti (2016)	
1.8	Nadorowski et al. (2016)	
1.9	Narodowski & Moschetti (2015a)	
1.10	Narodowski & Moschetti (2015b)	
1.11	Narodowski et al (2017)	

5.9.2. TA 2: Characteristics and composition of private schools in Latin America

The six studies included in the second thematic area focused on the composition (through the variable of school segregation) and characteristics of Latin American private schools. Four of the studies aimed to describe or analyse situations of school segregation. Two of them (2.2 and 2.3) focused on Latin America, and analysed SES school segregation in terms of public and private education. The two remaining studies focused on Chile (2.4 and 2.5). One of them analysed the distribution of achievement within and between public and private voucher schools, whereas the other estimated the magnitude and evolution of SES school segregation. The latter also considered the effects of educational stage, type of school, school choice and fee-paying on segregation.

The remaining two studies are a description of Fe y Alegría's management at the institutional and school level in Peru (2.1), which analyses the factors behind its success; and a description of characteristics and role of low-fee private schools in Buenos Aires (Argentina) (2.6). The list of studies included in this group is presented on table 5.7.

Table 5.4 Studies included in thematic area 2

ID	Authors and year of publication	Countries
2.1	Alcázar & Valdivia (2014)	Peru
2.2	Murillo & Martínez (2017)	Latin America
2.3	Arcidiácono et al. (2014)	
2.4	Mizala & Torche (2012)	Chile
2.5	Valenzuela et al. (2014)	
2.6	Moschetti (2015)	Argentina

5.9.3. TA 3: Decision-making process and determinants of school choice in Latin America

Thematic area 3 was prominently featured in the review, with 21 studies that analysed this process. All the studies had similar aims, related to the exploration of the process of parents' school choice. This issue was often related to other variables, such as free market and competition policies in education, which provide the opportunity to choose subsidised schools. In this sense, the studies often focused specifically on parents from low or middle-income areas or socioeconomic status, in order to see whether the process is different in this population or to explore its relationship with educational segregation. Other studies sought to relate the decision-making process with a specific variable, which could be at the household (migrant status, differentiation from lower socioeconomic levels) or school level (extracurricular activities, reputation, scores in national status). Three quarters of the studies in this group (16) are focused on Chile, with only three focused on Latin America, one on Argentina and one on Peru. The studies included in the third thematic area are presented in table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Studies included in thematic area 3

ID	Authors and year of publication	Countries
3.1	Ayala (2010)	Chile
3.2	Canales et al. (2016)	
3.3	Carrasco & San Martin (2012)	
3.4	Chumacero & Paredes (2008)	
3.5	Córdoba (2014)	

3.6	Elacqua & Fabrega (2004)	
3.7	Elacqua et al. (2006)	
3.8	Flores & Carrasco (2013)	
3.9	Gallego & Hernando (2009)	
3.10	Hernández & Raczynski (2015)	
3.11	Joiko & Vásquez (2016)	
3.12	Kosunen & Carrasco (2016)	
3.13	Raczynski & Hernández (2011)	
3.14	Rojas et al. (2016)	
3.15	Stillerman (2016)	
3.16	Thieme & Treviño (2011)	
3.17	Baum (2013)	Latin America
3.18	Cámara et al. (2013)	
3.19	Gertel et al. (2013)	
3.20*	Balarin (2015)	Peru
	Balarin (2016)	
3.21	Gamallo (2011)	Argentina

*This pair of reports (Balarin, 2015; Balarin, 2016) refers to the same study.

5.9.4. TA 4: Relationship between private education and student and system-wide outcomes in Latin America

The largest number of studies (37) was included in thematic area 4. These, however, can be divided in two groups according to their aims. Around two thirds of the studies (24) aimed to explore the relationship between academic performance and type of school. In the most general form, the studies compared public and private schools, trying to control for student, household and/or school-level variables that could influence the results. However, several much more complex typologies of schools were identified in the studies, more so for the Chilean context. These included categories about type of funding and participation in voucher programmes (public, subsidised private, not subsidised private), charging of fees (no fees, fee-charging), for-profit status (vs. not-for-profit), religious affiliation (catholic, protestant, non-religious), and franchise status (franchised, independent schools). Additionally, in some of the studies these categories were combined, seeking to explore, for instance, the effect of attending

a Catholic voucher school. In terms of outcomes, all studies focused on academic performance. Most of them used national (such as the Chilean SIMCE) or international examinations (such as PISA and SERCE). Two studies used academic aptitude tests taken by students in the last year or when graduating high school (PAA, ICFES), and one study used academic results from a compulsory first-year university module. Only two studies included non-cognitive outcomes (aspiration, self-efficacy and self-prediction of success). The list of studies included in this first group can be found on table 5.6. Regarding the countries, 14 of this group's studies focused on Chile, six on Argentina, three on more than one Latin American country, two on Brazil, one on Peru and one on Colombia.

Table 5.6: Studies included in thematic area 4 that explored the relationship between academic performance and type of school

ID	Authors and year of publication	Countries
4.1*	Anand et al. (2008)	Chile
	Anand et al. (2009)	
4.2*	Bellei (2007)	
	Bellei (2009)	
4.3	Chumacero et al. (2011)	
4.4	Contreras (2001)	
4.5*	Elacqua (2011)	
	Elacqua (2015)	
4.6	Elacqua et al. (2011)	
4.7	Lara et al. (2011)	
4.8	Matear (2007)	
4.9	McEwan & Carnoy (2000)	
4.10	McEwan (2001)	
4.11	Mizala & Romaguera (2000)	
4.12	Albornoz et al. (2015)	Argentina
4.13	Cervini (2003)	
4.14	Formichella (2011)	
4.15	Krüger & Formichella (2012)	
4.16	Montoya & Frugoni (2016)	

4.17	Vinacur (2016)	
4.18	Castro Aristizabal et al. (2016)	Latin America
4.19	Duarte et al. (2010)	
4.20	Somers et al. (2004)	
4.21	Rodrigues de Olivera et al. (2013)	Brazil
4.22	Stern (2015)	
4.23	López (2012)	Colombia
4.24	Sparrow & Ponce de León (2015)	Peru

*These pairs of reports (Anand et al., 2008, 2009; Bellei 2007, 2009 and Elacqua 2011, 2015) refer to the same studies.

The second group of studies (13) included in thematic area 4 are evaluations of specific interventions, programmes or policies. From these, four studies focus on voucher programmes, two in the Chilean experience (4.32 and 4.34) and two in the Colombian voucher programme (PACES) (4.25 and 4.26). All four had student performance as an outcome variable (measured through standardised tests) and two of them considered additional outcome measures (sorting and high school graduation status seven years later). Another four studies (4.30, 4.31, 4.33 and 4.35) explored the effects of choice and competition policies on different outcomes, such as student performance, school enrolment at the municipal level, segregation and equity. Three of them focused exclusively on Chile, and one on Chile (Santiago) and Brazil (Rio de Janeiro). One study analysed the effect of public-private partnerships on student performance across Latin America (4.37), whereas two focused on a specific type of these: the “Colegios en Concesion” intervention in Colombia (4.27 and 4.29). These two studies explored whether the programme’s theory of change functioned in practice. Two studies focused on “Fe y Alegria” schools (in Colombia and Venezuela), both using student performance in standardised tests as the outcome measure. The studies included in this group are presented in table 5.7.

Table 5.7: Studies included in thematic area 4 that evaluated interventions

ID	Authors and year of publication	Countries
4.25	Angrist et al. (2002)	Colombia
4.26	Angrist et al. (2006)	

4.27	Edwards & Hartley (2015)	
4.28	Parra & Wodon (2010)	
4.29	Termes et al. (2015)	
4.30	Elacqua (2012)	Chile
4.31	Gallego (2002)	
4.32	Hsieh & Urquiola (2006)	
4.33	Portales & Heilig (2014)	
4.34	Sapelli & Vial (2002)	
4.35	Allcott & Ortega (2009)	Venezuela
4.36	Alves et al. (2015)	Chile/Brazil
4.37	Baum (2013)	Latin America

One study did not fit into any of the thematic areas. Elacqua & Santos (2013) aimed to conduct a decision-making analysis of the probability of a private subsidized school to enter the Chilean voucher scheme.

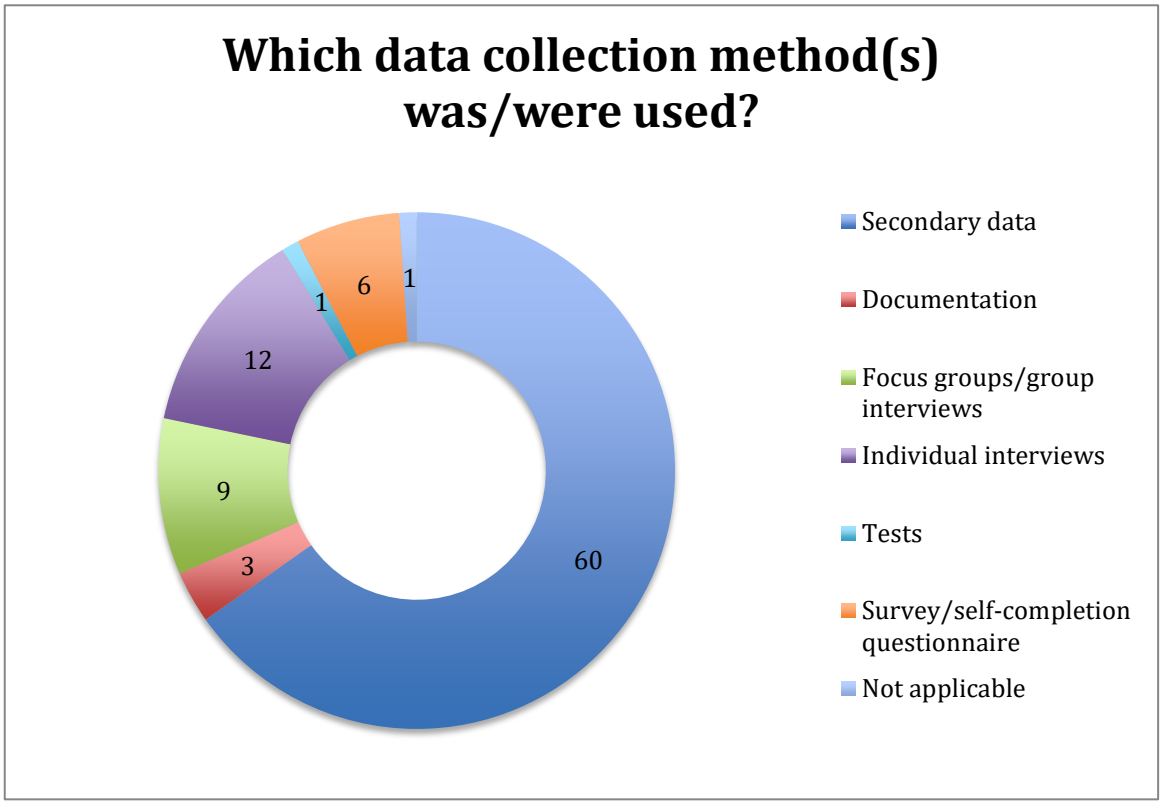
5.10. Research designs and methods

In terms of the purpose of the studies, the most frequent one was *exploration of relationships* (53 studies). From these 53 studies, 40 were quantitative, 8 qualitative, 4 had a mixed approach and one was not empirical. *Evaluation* and *description* purposes were found on 12 studies each. Descriptive studies included eight quantitative, two qualitative and two with a mixed approach, whereas almost all evaluation studies were quantitative (11), with only one qualitative. On another hand, 55 studies were coded as cross-sectional and 18 as prospective.

About the data collection methods, an overwhelming majority of studies (58) used secondary data. The main types of data used in the studies include international and national-level assessments, such as PISA or SIMCE (Chile); national education statistics (at the school and/or student level); and household-survey data. In 54 of the studies that used secondary data, this was the only source of information, while four used it along with other methods (questionnaires/surveys, interviews, focus groups and documents). Six studies used only one qualitative data collection method; five of these used interviews and one study used focus groups. Five studies combined both of these methods, while one used them along

with document analysis. Finally, two studies collected data through surveys and one used surveys plus a test. Figure 4.7 shows the total number of times each method was used.

Figure 5.7: Data collection methods



Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive

5.11. Research designs and thematic areas

Although the previous section aimed to categorise the studies according to their approach (quantitative, qualitative or mixed) and their data collection methods, these did not grasp the detail of their research designs. Hence, the study design summaries were coded and analysed to get further information on this matter. This section will present an overview of the types of research design identified for each thematic area and, when possible, in each group of aims within them.

The 12 studies included in the first thematic area aimed to explore trends in access to private education. This group includes the only non-empirical study in the sample, which used academic literature to discuss the main explanations for the Argentinian privatisation process (1.11). The remaining 11 studies used

quantitative data[2] to analyse private schools' numbers, enrolment, performance and SES composition, as well as reasons for private enrolment growth. Ten of them used descriptive statistics, one study (1.8) used also correlation analysis, and two studies (1.2 and 1.3) used regression analysis to explore relationships between school type and student characteristics (such as SES).

Four of the studies included in the second thematic area explored school segregation, all of them using quantitative data. Two studies analysed school segregation by SES in public and private schools in Latin America, one of them (2.3) using only descriptive statistics and the other (2.2) combining them with correlation analysis (between private school enrolment and segregation). The other two studies focused on Chile and used regression analysis. These, however, had different purposes. While one of them (2.5) focused on the relationship between educational market dynamics and the observed magnitude of SES school segregation at the municipal level, the other one (2.4) examined the socioeconomic distribution of achievement within and between public and private-voucher schools. From the remaining studies, one (2.1) used qualitative data – gathered through documentary analysis, interviews and focus groups with different stakeholders – to analyse the characteristics of Peruvian Fe y Alegria schools institutional and pedagogical management, and particularly the reasons for its success. The other study (2.6) used descriptive statistics to explore and describe the structure of private education supply in areas of low socio-economic status in Buenos Aires.

The studies included in the third thematic area aimed to explore parents' school choice using two types of study designs. Ten studies had a quantitative approach, however, there is still variability in the methods used within this group. Most studies (8) modelled school choice as a decision-making process between different types of schools (e.g., public and private or public, private subsidised and fee-paying private subsidised), either using reported or revealed preferences. Other methods include correlating the stated reasons for choosing a school with value-added indicators of effectiveness (3.3) and estimating a logit model for each

[2] One study has a mixed methods design, however, it has been counted among the quantitative studies as it used qualitative methods for a different aim.

one of the five dependent variables reflecting the choice process (3.7). Among the variables considered by the models, there are quality (measured through examination scores), distance, price, parental characteristics, migrant status of families and extracurricular activities. From all quantitative studies, nine used secondary data, whereas only two used primary data collected through surveys.

Meanwhile, the qualitative designs of ten studies included interviews and/or focus groups with parents or carers and, in five of these, with other actors (school officials, education stakeholders, learners and/or NGO representatives). Regarding the selection of interviewees, most studies considered families from low or mid SES with children in private or subsidised private schools, and one study focused on migrant families. The specific topics explored in the studies include reasons for choosing a private school, criteria and information sources used when selecting a school, their expectations and experiences with private schooling, their perception about public education, and so on. Finally, one study (3.16) used a mixed methods design[3], which included an exploratory qualitative phase with parents to build a questionnaire of attributes and levels relevant for school selection. Then, it conducted an adaptive conjoint analysis (ACA) to calculate the utility, level and relative importance of the attributes.

The studies included in the fourth thematic area were divided into two groups according to their aims. The first group of studies explored the relationships between academic performance and type of school. Out of the 25 studies, 24 had a quantitative approach, while the remaining study had a mixed design. All studies used secondary data and measures of student performance as an outcome (including Math, Language and Science test scores), which were mostly drawn from large-scale international (PISA, SERCE) or national (SIMCE, ICFES, ENEM) assessments. One study used verbal test scores from the Young Lives study (4.24) and one the final grade and completion time of a first-year university compulsory class (4.17). This group of studies estimated achievement gaps between different types of schools, generally using regression models. Thus, the most commonly used methods were multi-level regression models, Ordinary Least

[3] Although two studies reported using mixed methods, one of them was counted among the ones with a qualitative design, as it used quantitative methods to pursue a different aim.

Squares (OLS), and Two-Stage Least Square Method (TSLS). Furthermore, some studies used evaluation methods such as Propensity Score Matching (PSM) techniques or Instrumental Variables (IV). Less common methods include analysis of technical efficiency and changes in changes. The most common control variables consider three levels: student (e.g. gender, age, previous attainment), household (parents' education, family income), and school characteristics (e.g. educational resources, SES, size of the school and/or the class, location).

The second group of studies from thematic area 4 aimed to evaluate interventions, programmes or policies. Most of them (11) used a quantitative approach and several (10) quasi-experimental designs. Common modelling methods used by these studies include one or more of the following: OLS, TSLS, probit regressions and/or instrumental variables. Three studies (4.25, 4.26 and 4.35) reported using natural experiments along with different types of regressions. Two studies also used matching methods, specifically coarse exact matching and propensity score matching (PSM) (4.28 and 4.37). One study (4.30) presents enrolment data and segregation indexes from before and after the policy was implemented. The remaining two studies (4.27 and 4.29) present realist evaluations of the Colombian Concession Schools programme (CEC), one using a qualitative approach and the other with a mixed methods design. The former used documentary analysis to identify the programme's theory of action and analysed interviews with relevant actors to systematically trace the causal links in the process. The latter used interviews and focus groups with education stakeholders, as well as a multiple linear regression analysis to compare CEC and public schools on academic outcomes and internal efficiency.

The study not included in any of the thematic areas (Elacqua & Santos, 2013) performed probit regressions to explain the probability of a private subsidised school to enter the Chilean preferential school funding (SEP) system (which provides larger subsidies for low-income students), considering its cost-benefit structure.

VI. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the extent and scope of the research about low-fee private schools in the Latin American context, defined by the review as non-state schools catering for non-elite population. In this chapter, the findings will be discussed in the light of both theoretical and contextual issues. The discussion will be divided as follows: section 5.1 will present a brief summary of the most relevant findings, including search results, general features, and thematic areas, focus and methods. The next section (5.2) will discuss the review findings, paying particular attention to issues related to the topic and research field, as well as the context. Section 5.3 will analyse the process of the review, including the strengths and limitations that were identified, as well as the lessons learnt. Finally, the last section (5.4) will present the research gaps and the implications for future research on the topic.

6.1. Summary of findings

6.1.1. Search results

- From the 1704 potential studies found through electronic and website searches, 67 were excluded for being duplicates and 1664 were screened. 1642 studies were excluded after screening their titles and abstracts, whereas eight were excluded after full report screening. At both stages, the most common reasons for excluding studies were relevance (studies not on topic) and geography (studies not focused on Latin America).
- A total of **75 studies** (in 79 reports) were **included** for analysis. Of the total number of reports, 30 were found by searching electronic databases, eight were found by searching websites, and 39 reports were identified by hand searching the reference lists of included studies.

6.1.2. General features

- Regarding the **type of publication**, 52 corresponded to journal articles and 18 to institutional publications or reports. The remaining nine corresponded to unclear type (5), book chapters (2) and dissertations (2).
- In terms of the **language**, 43 of the reports were published in English and 34 in Spanish.

- Concerning the **year of publication**, most reports (59) were published between 2009 and 2017, whereas only 20 are from the period between 2000 and 2008.
- About the studies' **level of analysis**, most studies focused either on a single country (36) or specific cities or regions (19). The remaining studies focused on two or more countries (11), neighbourhoods or communities (5), or specific types of schools (4).
- The studies' **samples** were composed mainly of learners (38), parents (9), and multiple actors (14), which included parents, schools' managerial and teaching staff and education officers, among others. Sixteen studies used school or household data and one study was not empirical. Most samples were composed either of all **SES** (33) or middle and/or low SES.
- Finally, in terms of **educational stage** focus, the studies were distributed almost evenly between all levels of basic education (24), only primary (26) and only secondary (21). In four studies, the focus was not clear.

6.1.3. Thematic areas, aims and methods

A summary of the aims, variables and methods used in the studies from each thematic area is presented next[4].

TA1: Private education growth in Latin America: trends and explanations

The first thematic area included 12 studies that described or analysed rising trends in access to private education in Argentina (8), Chile (2), Peru (1) and Latin America (1). Most studies considered characteristics related to students' or schools SES or type (e.g. private subsidised). Four of the studies specifically aimed to find explanations for these trends in the Argentinian context. One of these was not empirical, as the explanations were grounded on what the author found in the literature. The rest of the studies (11) used quantitative data (including enrolment numbers and rates, SES estimations, etc.) to perform descriptive analyses (10), correlations (1) and regression analyses (2).

[4] One study (Elacqua & Santos, 2013) was not included in any of the thematic areas. This study aimed to explain the probability of a private subsidised school to enter the Chilean preferential funding system given its costs and benefits. To this end, probit regressions were performed.

TA2: Characteristics and composition of private schools in Latin America

Four studies described or analysed the distribution of different types of schools through the variable of school segregation, two in Latin America and two in Chile. All four used quantitative data, however, they analysed this variable on different levels. One of the Latin American studies only used descriptive statistics, whereas the other combined it with correlation analysis. The two Chilean studies used regression analysis.

Two additional studies analysed certain characteristics of specific kinds of private schools. One of them used a qualitative design to analyse the institutional and pedagogical management of Fe y Alegria schools in Peru. The other study described the characteristics and role of LFPS in Buenos Aires using descriptive statistics.

TA3: Decision-making process and determinants of school choice in Latin America

All 21 studies included in Thematic Area 3 aimed to explore parents' school choice process, particularly when selecting private schools. Studies often focused on specific variables related to school choice, either at the household or school level. Moreover, many studies were concerned with the particularities of school choice for low or middle SES families. The majority of studies (16) were focused on Chile, with the remaining divided between Latin America (2), Argentina (1) and Peru (1). Studies in this thematic area were equally divided between quantitative (10) and qualitative (10), with one additional study using mixed methods. Most quantitative studies (8) developed a decision-making model between different types of schools, considering variables such as quality, distance and parental characteristics. All qualitative studies collected data through interviews and/or focus groups with parents and carers, and five of them included other actors. These studies explored topics such as reasons, criteria and information sources for choosing private schools.

TA4: Relationship between private education and student and system-wide outcomes in Latin America

Thematic Area 4 was the largest in composition, including 37 studies. Among these, 24 studies aimed to analyse the relationship between type of school (from

multiple categorisations) and academic performance, using regression methods and controlling for student, household, and/or school variables. All studies drew on secondary data and most of them used scores in national or international standardised examinations as the outcome variable. Only two studies included also non-cognitive outcomes. Over half the studies (14) focused on Chile and one quarter (6) on Argentina. The remaining studies focused on Latin America (3), Brazil (2), Colombia (1) and Peru (1).

The second group of studies aimed to evaluate specific interventions, programmes or policies related to privatisation. These included voucher programmes in Chile (2) and Colombia (2), choice and competition policies in Chile (3), and Chile and Brazil (1), public-private partnerships in Latin America (1), concession schools in Colombia (2), and Fe y Alegria schools in Venezuela (1) and Colombia (1). Most evaluations were quantitative (11) and used quasi-experimental designs, however, the realist evaluations of Colombian concession schools used qualitative and mixed designs.

6.2. The review findings: topic and context

The number of studies identified and the rise in publications over the recent years seem coherent with the ideas put forward by Day-Ashley et al. (2014) about the increasing policy interest and research on the role of private schools in educating underprivileged children from developing countries. The authors attribute this trend partly to the increasingly public and polarised privatisation debates. Nevertheless, historic and background factors of the Latin American region can provide complementary explanations for these findings. In terms of the **topic**, it draws attention that only a small number of studies mention LFPS as their focus, particularly given the vast literature from other countries do so. While this could suggest the lack of relevance of LFPS for the Latin American context, two alternative explanations are proposed for this finding. On the one hand, one of the characteristics of schools catering for low-SES groups is the lack of recognition or official register (Balarin, 2015; Moschetti, 2015; Tooley et al., 2011), which may account for the lack of awareness or attention from the state and academia on the topic.

On another hand, there seems to be an over-simplification of the term LFPS. Even though the LFPS model started as a process of default privatisation (Moschetti, 2015), nowadays it takes complex forms that involve states and international organisations shaping PPPs. This may have led to the lack of explicit use of the term LFPS. As Moschetti explains, certain definitions of this term[5] leave out "a whole range of undertakings form the social economy sphere such as NGOs, community-run schools or even faith-based organisations that seek to increase access for disadvantaged children" (2015, p. 17). This issue is particularly relevant for the Latin American countries, as most of their privatisation schemes include all these manifestations.

These concerns are coherent with the view that LFPS are part of the much broader issue of private education provision (Balarin, 2015), particularly for underprivileged population. Thus, this comprehensive perspective became the rationale for two choices made at different stages of the review. First, it was decided to include studies that do not fit into any of the four thematic areas, as long as they were thought to be relevant and met all the other inclusion criteria. Second, the original thematic areas were modified to broaden their focus. The four revised thematic areas, although not perfect, better match the evidence body identified through the searches and provide a sounder framework for understanding the results. Given that there are potential explanations for findings that transcend the thematic areas, these will be presented first. Afterwards, specific issues of each thematic area will be discussed.

The majority of papers refer to large-scale quantitative studies that use secondary data, use samples composed of learners, focus in a single country, and include student performance as an outcome variable. This may be related to the neoliberal system of thought –and its influence on educational reforms – in which outcomes are emphasised and often measured solely through quantitative methods (Blackmore, 2001). It is also coherent with the Latin American education context as, despite its improvement in access, still struggles greatly with issues of quality (Fischman et al., 2003; Navarro, 2005) – which is often reduced to academic

[5] See, for example, the definition put forward by Phillipson et al. (2008) emphasising their for-profit nature.

performance. A more practical explanation for this finding is related to the availability of large-scale quantitative data and the amount of resources and logistics that other types of studies demand (e.g. studies using primary data).

Regarding the **countries**, it is reasonable that a large majority of studies focused on Chile, as this country shows the clearest and most radical market-based education reform in Latin America (Bellei & Orellana, 2014). Although Argentina has gone through an entirely different process of default or quasi-spontaneous privatisation (Morduchowicz, 2005), this is still very significant. Thus, it is not surprising that a fifth of the studies is focused on this country. On another hand, the finding of 11 studies including or comparing more than one Latin American country has been interesting, considering that the review by Day-Ashley et al. (2014) found comparative research scarce. This might be explained by the regional context and the nature of literature included in this review (e.g. descriptive studies with a general focus on private education). Some notions about the types of research conducted in each country will be further examined in the individual discussions of the thematic areas.

The most prominent thematic area, in terms of number, was **thematic area 4**, which included studies that explored the relationship between private education and different student and system-level outcomes. These were divided in two groups based on their aims. The first and largest one compared academic performance in different types of school. According to Bellei & Orellana (2014), the substitution of public schools with private ones is the most evident dimension in education privatisation, and the one underlying the comparisons between public and private schools. Moreover, Navarro (2005) portrays comparisons of performance between public (municipal) and private subsidised schools as a constant educational research theme in the recent years. Thus, this finding was to be expected. The second group was comprised of evaluations of privatisation-related programmes or policies. Among the assessed interventions, it made sense to come across the most common manifestations (voucher programmes, PPPs, free-market policies) and prototypical interventions (Chile's voucher programme, Colombian Concession Schools and PACES voucher programme, Fe y Alegria). One interesting finding on this thematic area was the larger number of studies aiming to compare student performance in different types of Chilean schools than

the ones seeking to evaluate the impact of the country's voucher programme. This may occur due to the difficulty of evaluating long-term universal programmes. Lastly, it is worth noting that there were only two evaluations aiming to unpack mechanisms and theory of change, both about the Colombian Concession Schools.

The salience and content of the **third thematic area** (parents' decision-making process and choice) can be understood from the free-markets rationale and assumptions. On one side, there are expectations related to the positive outcome that choice and competition can have on standards of school quality, given that choices are assumed to be made by rational decision-makers (Ball & Youdell, 2008). On the other, there is the belief that low-SES parents' choice process is different from the process of their higher-SES peers, which puts them in disadvantage (Hernandez & Raczynski, 2015). Regarding the methods used, only two of the former used primary data collected through surveys, which is surprisingly low given the nature of the data needed. Furthermore, this is the only thematic area where an equal number of quantitative and qualitative studies was found. This validation of qualitative methods might be related both to the demand-side nature of choice and to the assumptions mentioned earlier. Some of the specific topics and variables analysed by the studies are similar to what wider literature from other contexts (Day-Ashley et al., 2014; Härmä, 2011b) have found to be relevant in the decision making process (informal information sources, quality of schools and household characteristics). As in thematic area 4, the majority of the studies in thematic area 3 focused on Chile. This finding is coherent with the core questions for the analysis of Chile's market mechanisms put forward by Carrasco and San Martin (2012), which included the differences in school performance between public and private schools (TA4, group 1), the impact of vouchers on system efficiency (TA4, group 2), and the factors influencing parents' choice (TA3).

Studies included in **thematic area 1** focused on describing or analysing the trends and explanations of private education growth. These studies were predominantly descriptive and suggested growing trends of private enrolment growth, particularly among low-SES population. Four of the studies from this thematic area had a particular interest on finding explanations for private enrolment growth. The

exclusive focus on Argentina stands out, however, it can be explained by the characterisation of the country's privatisation as a quasi-spontaneous process (Morduchowicz, 2005). Following this logic, it is sensible that these studies seek to find out which supply-side interventions or factors led to the current privatisation context.

Finally, **thematic area 2** was the smallest one in number, and included studies that explored the characteristics and composition of private schools. However, studies focusing on characteristics were scarce, with only one describing LFPS (only in Buenos Aires) and one describing management and pedagogical features of Fe y Alegria Schools in Peru. To have identified studies exploring school segregation makes sense given the profoundly unequal nature of the Latin American region (Fischman, Ball & Gvirtz, 2003; Navarro, 2005) and the concerns privatisation brings in terms of inequality (Bellei & Orellana, Day-Ashley et al., 2014). Still, the studies that explore segregation or equity (either as characteristics or outcomes) are significantly less than those that include students' performance as an outcome variable. This fact can be taken as evidence for the strong emphasis on academic results.

6.3. The process: strengths, lessons learned and limitations

Having discussed the most relevant findings, this section aims to present a reflexive appraisal of the review process. Thus, it will explore some challenges faced during its development, as well as the strengths and lessons derived from them. This section will be presented following the different stages of the review. Afterwards, the limitations will be exposed.

The **planning phase** proved to be fundamental for the later development and outcome of the review. First, the identification of a previous systematic review on LFPS (Day-Ashley et al., 2014) and the search for additional studies on the topic were central for the reviewer's understanding of its different facets and issues. However, most of the findings corresponded to significantly different contexts, which influenced the thematic areas that were initially proposed (and had to be modified at a later stage). This led to understand the importance of conducting a thorough pre-pilot review (Daigneault, Jacob & Ouimet, 2014), which, in spite of the limited time and resources, would have been useful to better sort out the issue

in the context of interest. On another hand, the process of designing the inclusion and exclusion criteria made clear the importance of operationalizing. Both in the experience of Daigneault et al. (2014) and in this review, the definition of what 'empirical study' implies, had to be improved after the initial piloting.

The **search stage** evidenced both strengths and limitations in the review. First, given the balance of studies published in English and Spanish, conducting searches in both languages and in Hispanic databases (such as Redalyc) was an important strength. Another one was related to the searching in reference lists of included papers, as it allowed to identify an important number of studies. However, this also hints at the need to expand the search to include, for instance, websites from regional research centres, literature recommendations of experts on the topic, and hand searches of potentially relevant regional journals. Another limitation refers to the existence of report titles and abstracts that did not mention, for instance, private education but referred to specific interventions (e.g. vouchers, PPP, Concession Schools). This was overcome, at least partially, by using controlled terms and topic searches when available. Nonetheless, it's worth was conditional on adequate labelling and, still, it would have been appropriate to include terms such as 'vouchers' in the search.

The **screening** and **data extraction** stages were notably simplified and better organised by EPPI Reviewer 4. However, the limited previous experience with the software slowed hindered the process somewhat and limited the functions used. Data extraction was made more complex by the multiple types of literature, methods and its multidisciplinary nature. Daigneault et al. (2014) presents this as a characteristic of social science research fields, which tend to be fragmented. Also, the variability and in some cases, the lack of criteria for reporting, led to some poorly presented reports.

The following limitations of the review should be taken into consideration:

- The fact that the review was conducted in the context of a dissertation meant that there were limited resources (both time and financial resources), which did not allow to perform double coding of the studies to ensure its consistency.
- Similarly, in spite of the broad scope of the map, the restricted time and human resources limited the comprehensiveness of its search strategy, which did not

include hand searching of potentially relevant regional journals, websites from pertinent research centres and literature recommendations of experts on the topic.

- The nature of the review did not allow conducting any form of quality appraisal of the studies. As this is a literature map, not excluding studies on this criterion makes it possible to have the full picture of the evidence base. However, any potential review based on this map is strongly advised to perform it to ensure the validity of its conclusions.
- Although studies about Brazil were included in the review, reports published in Portuguese were excluded. This is a potential reason for the unbalance in the number of studies focusing on said country.
- Finally, the Boolean operator NEAR was not included in the searches; yet, it might have helped reduce the large numbers of irrelevant literature.

6.4. Research gaps and future research

6.4.1. Research gaps

Despite its limitations, this systematic map allowed to identify a number of gaps in the topic's evidence base:

- A very limited number of studies – with a narrow scope – focused on the characteristics of private schools catering for low-income population. Potentially relevant characteristics that should be investigated include location (e.g. urban, rural, peri-urban), population, management, funding and accountability. Furthermore, studies need to take into consideration the variety of private provision for low-SES groups.
- A large number of studies included outcome measures of education quality (student performance) and measured quality of private schools through comparisons with public schools. However, no studies focused on the process dimension of quality, which is necessary to have clarity on whether private schools actually provide high-quality education. Measures focused on the process would include, for example, teaching practices and pedagogical leadership.
- In spite of the variety of education privatisation policy instruments and interventions, there are a very limited number of studies that conduct evaluations. These should encompass impact evaluations of interventions and policies (with outcome measures at the student and system levels) to

understand if they are achieving the desired results. However, it would be equally important to have studies that assess whether these policy instruments are following the expected mechanisms of change and discern the factors that are playing a role in it.

- Besides the studies from the Argentinian context, no studies aimed to unveil the reasons for private school mushrooming and enrolment upsurge.

6.4.2. Future research

Based on the findings and evidence gaps, some ideas for future studies are proposed next.

- A meta-analysis of the difference in academic performance between different types of school in Chile. This study would need to take into consideration the methods used, the quality of studies and reports, the outcome measures, the type of controls used and the type of schools analysed. This would allow having a more sound idea of the strength of the private-school effect. Additionally, given the ideological nature of the private education debate (Peirano & Vargas, 2005), this research should extract, as a type of 'control', the theoretical frameworks underlying the included studies.
- A configurative review of studies exploring school choice processes in Latin America. This study should assess the possibility of including different types of methodologies in order to avoid information loss. It should also conduct a quality appraisal of the studies to ensure the validity of the conclusions drawn.
- Studies that aim to understand the variety and characteristics of private education provision for low-SES population in each country, and in the future a comparative study. A mixed method design would allow to comprehend both the breadth and depth of this phenomenon, as well as different perspectives.
- Studies that use primary data (collected for example through classroom observations and interviews) to assess the process dimension of education quality in private schools. Later on, this data could be used to explore the relationship between process quality and student performance.

VII. Conclusions

This review aimed to analyse the nature and scope of the research literature on low-fee private schools in the Latin American region. Although not comprehensive, it has shed light on the complexities of the topic and the setting, as well as the way these elements intertwine. It seems clear, for example, that the phenomenon of LFPS is part of a broader issue of private provision of education for low-SES populations. In this sense, a wide variety of providers and manifestations need to be acknowledged in order to gain a wider perspective. One of these is the Church, which has had a prominent role in PPPs. Accordingly, a few studies included in the review focus on one of the most iconic: Fe y Alegria.

Both the findings and the background literature coincide in the idea that the context is a major determinant of which and how privatisation policy instruments are implemented. In Latin America, the countries' shared background allows to identify some common trends, such as the neoliberal rationale present in certain reforms or policies (e.g. school choice). However, the context's particularities are what ultimately seem to shape the form of education privatisation that occurs. In Latin America, it is possible to identify a range of privatisation policies and manifestations, which, as the findings of this map suggest, are reflected in the research landscape. Due to the small number of studies in some countries, it is not possible to identify trends for all of them. Nevertheless, three countries stand out in terms of alignment between policy and research.

Chile is recognised as the Latin American country with the most radical open privatisation process, which includes a universal voucher programme. Although other types of research could, and should, be conducted in this context, the focus on student performance differences by type of school and parents' school choice processes adds up. Conversely, Argentina has gone through a process referred to as quasi-spontaneous participation (i.e. led both by supply and demand) that is unclear in terms of drivers. Thus, researchers in this country have focused mainly on analysing trends and finding explanations for such process. To a lesser extent, it has also attempted to analyse performance differences between students from public and private schools. Finally, Colombia has attempted a number of privatisation-related programmes (PACES, CEC), which, as the results of the map show, have gone through several evaluation processes.

Despite finding studies for each of the revised thematic areas, not all topics were covered. Thus, a number of research gaps and possibilities for future studies were identified by the review. For instance, the importance of understanding the characteristics of education provision was not reflected in the review, as only a few studies focused on this description and usually with a narrow focus. Future studies should address this issue and explore variables such as location, population, management and accountability. On another hand, most studies analysed quality only in terms of outcomes (student performance), whereas none of them focused on the process (e.g. teaching quality). This issue is fundamental to draw conclusions on the allegedly superior quality of private schools. Two systematic reviews are also suggested as future research, a meta-analysis of the private-school effect in Chile, and a configurative review of school choice process in Latin America.

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Note: Included studies are listed in Appendix 2.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Data extraction tool

A. General details

A.1	Author(s)	A.1.1	Details
A.2	Report title	A.2.1	Details
A.3	Unique identifier	A.3.1	Available (*please specify*)
		A.3.2	N/A
A.4	Source / How was the study identified?	A.4.1	Electronic database (*Please use this code if the report was found through an electronic bibliographic database search*).
		A.4.2	Website (*please use this code if the report was found by handsearching a website*).
		A.4.3	Citation (*please use this code if the report was identified from the reference list of another report*).
		A.4.4	Unknown (*please use this code if it is unclear how the report was found*).
A.5	Year of publication	A.5.1	Details
A.6	Language of publication	A.6.1	English
		A.6.2	Spanish
A.7	Type of publication	A.7.1	Journal article
		A.7.2	Working paper
		A.7.3	Book chapter
		A.7.4	Institutional publication/report
		A.7.5	Dissertation
		A.7.6	Unknown/unclear

B. Description of the population/sample

B.1	Who or what is the study sample composed of? *Please use all the codes that apply.*	B.1.1	Learners
		B.1.2	Parents/carers
		B.1.3	Teaching staff
		B.1.4	Head teachers/Managerial staff
		B.1.5	Education government officers
		B.1.6	Others (*please specify*)
		B.1.7	Not applicable (*please use this code if the study did not include human participants*)
B.2	If the study focuses on learners, what is/are their age group(s)?	B.1.1	5-7
		B.1.2	8-10
		B.1.3	11-13
		B.1.4	14-16
		B.1.5	17-18

	Please use all the codes that apply. This question is concerned with the population focus (i.e. the learners the aimed to make conclusions about). Consider that his may not necessarily be the same as the actual sample of participants.	B.1.6 Non applicable (*study does not focus on learners*) B.1.7 Not stated/unclear
B.3	Which educational stage does the study focus on? *Please use all the codes that apply.*	B.3.1 Primary school B.3.2 Middle school B.3.3 Secondary school B.3.4 All levels of basic education B.3.5 Not applicable (*please specify*) B.3.6 Not stated/unclear
B.4	What was the total number of participants in the study sample? *If the study considers more than one group, please provide details for each one.*	B.4.1 Explicitly stated (*please specify*) B.4.2 Not stated/unclear B.4.3 Not applicable (p*lease use this code if the study did not include human participants*)
B.5	What is the socio-economic status of the study participants? *If the study considers more than one group, please provide details for each one.*	B.5.1 Explicitly stated (*please specify*) B.5.2 Implicit/inferred by the reviewer (*please specify*) B.5.3 Not stated/unclear (*please specify*) B.5.4 Not applicable (p*lease use this code if the study did not include human participants*)

C. Description of the study design

C.1	Which was the purpose of the study?	C.1.1	Description (*please use this code for studies in which the aim is to produce a description of a state of affairs or a particular phenomenon, and/or to document its characteristics).*
		C.1.2	Exploration of relationships (p*lease use this code for studies that examine relationships and/or statistical associations between variables in order to build theories and develop hypotheses. These studies may describe a process or processes (what goes on) in order to explore how a particular state of affairs might be produced, maintained and changed).*
		C.1.3	Evaluation (p*lease use this code for studies that measure effectiveness, i.e. the impact of a specific programme or intervention on the target population).*
C.2	What research approach was used in the study?	C.2.1	Quantitative
		C.2.2	Qualitative
		C.2.3	Mixed
		C.2.4	Not applicable (*please use this code if the report does not refer to an empirical study)*
C.3	Study timing	C.3.1	Cross-sectional (*i.e. the study examines the sample at only one point in time*).
		C.3.2	Retrospective (*i.e. the study examines how the same samples have changed, but it starts at one timepoint and looks backwards over time*).
		C.3.3	Prospective (*i.e. the study examines how the same samples have changed, but it starts at one timepoint and looks forward in time*).
		C.3.4	Not applicable (*report does not refer to an empirical study*).
C.4	Which data collection methods were used? *Please use all the codes that apply, considering the focus of the*	C.4.1	Secondary data (*e.g. publicly available statistics; results from national/international student assessments*).
		C.4.2	
		C.4.3	Individual interviews
		C.4.4	Focus groups/group interviews
		C.4.5	Survey/self-completion questionnaire

	review. Provide further detail when possible.	C.4.6 Observation C.4.7 Documentation (*e.g. legislation, policies, etc.*) C.4.8 Not stated/unclear C.4.9 Not applicable (please use this code if the *report does not refer to an empirical study)* *Other* (*please specify*)
C.5	When was the study carried out? If available, state the year/range of years reported by the authors. If not, give a 'not later than' date by looking for a date of first submission to the journal, or for clues like the latest publication dates of the reports referenced by the study.	C.5.1 Explicit (*please specify*) C.5.2 Implicit/inferred by the reviewer (*please specify*) C.5.3 Not stated/unclear (*please specify*) C.4.4 Non applicable (please use this code if the *report does not refer to an empirical study)*
C.7	Study design summary *Using the answers provided earlier, describe the study design in your own words.*	C.7.1 Details

D. Description of the study focus

D.1	What are the broad aims of the study?	D.1.1 Explicitly stated (please specify) D.1.2 Implicit (please specify) D.1.3 Not stated/unclear (please specify)
D.2	What variables/concepts does the study aim to examine and/or measure? *If the study is an evaluation, please*	D.2.1 Explicitly stated (please specify) D.2.2 Implicit/inferred (please specify) D.2.3 Not stated/unclear (please specify)

	state the outcome measures.		
D.3	What are the study research questions/ hypotheses? *Research questions or hypotheses operationalise the aims of the study. If available, please transcribe from the report.*	D.3.1 D.3.2 D.3.3	Explicitly stated (please specify) Implicit/inferred by the reviewer (please specify) Not stated/unclear (please specify)
D.4	Which level of analysis does the study aim to achieve?	D.4.1 D.4.2 D.4.3 D.4.4 D.4.5 D.4.6	Neighborhood(s), community(-ies) or smaller (please specify) City(-ies) or region(s) within a country (please specify) Single country Two or more countries (State if the countries are within the review focus and/or if the study focuses on specific cities within the countries) Other (please specify) Not stated/unclear
D.5	Which country or countries does the study focus on?	D.5.1 D.5.2	Details Not stated/unclear
D.6	Please provide further details about the specific phenomena, factor or intervention with on which the study is concerned.	D.6.1	Details
D.7	In which thematic area is the study circumscribed?	D.7.1 D.7.2 D.7.3 D.7.4 D.7.5	(1) Barriers and facilitators for the expansion of low-fee private schools in Latin America (2) Characteristics of low-fee private schools in Latin America (3) Decision-making process and determinants of choice of low-fee private schools in Latin America

		(4) Impact of low-fee private schools on access, pupil achievement, education quality and equity in Latin America. Unclear

Appendix 2. List of included studies

Albornoz, F., Furman, M., Podestá, M.E., Razquin, P. & Warnes P.E. (2015). *Diferencias Educativas entre Escuelas Privadas y Públicas en Argentina*. Universidad de San Andrés, Documento de Trabajo No. 123.

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