School of choice or schools' choice? Intersectional correspondence testing on ethnic and class discrimination in the enrolment procedure to Flemish kindergarten.

Abstract
Most research on intake focusses on the restrictions parents' capital cause on their abilities to choose. However, the steering effect of schools in the choice-process has been neglected. We chose the Flemish context to investigate ethnic- and class-discrimination in the enrolment to kindergarten (N=2243). The Flemish education system is known for its exceptional 'freedom of choice' allowing parents to enrol their children into their school of preference without restrictions. Simultaneously, the education system is highly decentralized due to the principle of 'freedom of education' that grants high levels of autonomy to schools in creating their school policies. Using correspondence testing, the results show that schools act as gatekeepers using subtle discriminatory strategies to keep students with an underprivileged background out.

Keywords: school choice, correspondence testing, discrimination, intersectionality, racism, Belgium.

Introduction

School segregation is described as "the degree to which two or more groups go to separate schools from one another, in different parts of the urban environment" (Massey and Denton 1993). When addressing the causes of school segregation three main causes arise. A first cause is the parental position in the decision-making process (Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz 1996). More specifically, parents go through a child-matching process in which they look for a school that would fit their child the best. Research shows how school climate and composition are a proxy to measure the quality of the school (Bifulco and Ladd 2006). More specifically, native parents and parents with a high socio-economic background prefer schools in which the majority of the students have a similar background. In contrast, other researchers find that it is mainly lower class and ethnic minority parents that look for schools with a high degree of ethnic minority pupils(Ball, Reay, and David 2010).

A second common explanation is that schooling segregation is caused by residential segregation, the unequal distribution of people over neighbourhoods and cities. As members of minority and majority groups are living separately from each other, it influences the school composition. In addition, parents often send their children to a school nearby which leads schools to reflect the social composition of the neighbourhoods in which they are situated. One reason behind residential segregation are the exclusionary practices performed by native middle class individuals to protect one's social status (Massey and Denton 1993). When neighbourhoods transform into ethnically and socially diverse areas, 'white flight' occurs. If financial constraints do not allow them to move out of mixed neighbourhoods, they will assure their higher social status by fleeing the increasingly diverse neighbourhood schools (Clotfelter 2001).

A third explanation is the role of enrolment policies. Intake policies organized by central governments pressure schools to enter an educational marketplace. Research,

especially in the US and UK, shows how schools are introducing new backdoors to bypass policies that try to regulate intake procedures in order to still control who gets in (Ball 2003). The behavior of schools acting as gatekeepers is often interpreted and explained through pressures of the accountability system and the quasi-market dynamics. They furthermore argue that these pressures lead to "cream-skimming", which is the dynamic in which schools try to attract students with the best chance of academic success (West, Hind, and Pennell 2004).

Inspired by the QuantCrit perspective (Gillborn, Warmington, and Demack 2018), we are aware of how data can be analyzed in such a way that is of interest for a particular societal group. Therefore, this paper places the concepts of racism at the center as we are interested in how the strategic behavior of principals can be racist and discriminatory. We follow Quillian's (2006, 301) conceptualization of racism as "practices and beliefs consistent with a system of racial oppression of one racial group by another". We are interested in the intersection of racism and classism, which can also be considered as inequality structures along the lines of class position. Discrimination can be described as a dimension of racism, which -on the individual-interactionist level- is defined as the differential treatment based on unjustifiable personal factors such as race, class or gender (Quillian 2006). Often, racism (including discrimination) are thought of as blatant practices and beliefs that people have towards others. While such expressions of racism were more likely to occur in the past, the nature of racism has changed since the seventies. The so-called 'old racism' has been transformed into contemporary forms of racism (Pettigrew 1979), which are more subtle, hidden and therefore more difficult to detect.

Sociologists of education have put considerable attention into studying racism in education. Generally five traditions of research can be identified: (1) the subjective experiences of ethnic/racial minority students at school (e.g. Stevens 2008; Stevens 2009); (2) measuring racism through the attitudes of majority pupils and teachers (Vervaet et al. 2016; Theodorou 2011); (3) classroom practices and the day-to-day life at schools through (often) ethnographic observations (Gillborn 1990); (4) the educational outcomes differences between minority and majority groups, usually through quantitative statistical analysis of large data-sets (Dworkin and Turley 2014); and (5) measuring discrimination through narratives and discourses of under- and/or stereotypical presentation of minority groups within policy and curriculum documents (Bromley 2011). In Flanders (the northern, Dutch speaking part of Belgium), research on discrimination and racism within schools follow similar research traditions (Van Praag, Stevens, and Van Houtte 2014). However, to the best of our knowledge, limited research exists on if and how discrimination occurs in the process of obtaining access to schools. This is remarkable because discrimination in terms of access, constitutes a key area of research in other life domains, such as the housing and labour market (Baert et al. 2013; Verhaeghe et al. 2017).

The goal of this study is to investigate whether parents from different social backgrounds are treated equally in the admission procedure of Flemish kindergarten schools. More specifically, we investigate school admission at the intersection of parents' ethnicity and class background. Flanders constitutes a theoretically interesting case due to the absence of a private education system and the freedom of choice that parents have in choosing a school for their child(ren). Furthermore, qualitative research in Flanders shows that ethnic minority

parents feel that schools do not always treat them fairly with regard to their desire to enrol their child(ren) into a particular school (Nouwen and Vandenbroucke 2011a).

Up until now, there has been a lack in investigating discrimination in the intake procedures of schools in more 'democratic' school enrolment systems. Most research on intake has a qualitative focus on how parents' social and cultural capital may restrict their abilities to choose. However, the steering effect of schools in the process of choice has been neglected (Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz 1996). As racism and discrimination have transformed into more subtle and hidden forms, we do not expect that parents will be bluntly turned away by school administrators. In fact, the equality policy of 2002 does not allow Flemish schools to deny the admission of children, with some exceptions (OECD 2017). Therefore, school principals who exclude underprivileged children need legitimate excuses to hide their discriminatory practices.

We are not only interested in whether or not equal admission is available. We are also interested in developing an understanding of how access is denied and which privileges native and middle-class parents receive during the enrolment procedure. In a quasi-market context, schools try to attract parents in different ways. For instance, schools often offer open evenings for parents to get to know the school. In addition, many schools also provide individual visits to the school, usually organized by the principal. This is an important indicator that will be considered in our research. These additional services have yet to be studied.

The Flemish educational landscape

Freedom of choice and freedom of education

Belgium has a unique system of enrolment. Since 2002, a decree on equal chances GOK *(Gelijke Onderwijskansen)* was developed to meet the transformations in terms of diversity and size of schools. Schools were confronted with the inflow of children from migrants with a non-European background. A main pillar of the GOK-policy is the right to enrol in a school of choice.

Belgium is different from other Western countries with regard to their exceptionally broad policy on freedom of choice in three ways. First of all, in many OECD countries children are – with the exception of a few open enrolment programs- assigned to schools based on certain criteria like the student's residence, their parents' income level, class size or simply through a lottery system (OECD 2017). This considerably differs from Belgium where children have the full right to enrol in a school of their preference. Secondly, in contrast to other OECD countries, Belgium does not allow schools to selectively enrol children based on study performances. On that account, schools are not allowed to impose pre-enrolment tests. Thirdly, students cannot be segregated based on their parents' income. Flemish schools are generally free of charge. Only two exceptions allow Flemish schools to refuse a child's enrolment. That is when the school has reached their full capacity or when the child is obliged to go to a special needs school. In these cases, however, schools have to offer a 'document of refusal' indicating the reason of refusal.

However, due to increasingly overcrowded schools in large cities, the principle of freedom of choice is jeopardized. To solve this, local platforms (LOP) support parents and children with an underprivileged background. In addition, the LOP system contains a local registry system which centralizes the subscriptions of children by their parents' top preferred schools. This centralized registry system is not mandatory, with exception for the major cities

Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels (Havermans, Wouters, and Groenez 2018). After the registration-period, parents still have the possibility to personally contact schools regarding enrolment. Likewise, in Flemish cities without LOP-systems, parents directly approach schools by mail or phone to express their interest of enrolment.

The local platforms are also held responsible for the protection of equal rights for all students by preventing discrimination, exclusion and segregation and promote social cohesion within schools. One tool to meet this aim is having a complaints office for parents who believe their child's enrolment was wrongfully denied. Filing a complaint is, however, only fruitful if they have enough evidence. Furthermore, avoiding segregation has been a major issue in the past years. PISA results show that inequality between Flemish schools with regard to study performances is one of the highest in comparison to other OECD countries and runs along the lines of class and ethnicity. This is the result of a difficult interaction between the principle of free school choice and freedom of education (OECD 2017).

The Belgian constitution established the principle of 'freedom of education' which means that schools have the freedom and autonomy to create their own vision regarding the quality of education. Therefore, Belgium is characterized by its decentralized education system where standardizing the quality and performances based on quantitative indicators and measures are not top priority. In fact, differences between school policies are supported. Still, the Flemish education system is somewhat in the grip of the accountability movement. Accountability is, however, only expected on school level rather than teachers or pupils, making Belgium not the typical high-stakes selection context. Up until today, we still do not have standardized national tests. Because of the lack of systematic evaluation of the quality and educational policy applied in schools, Flanders makes an interesting case in studying their admission procedure.

A report studying the progress of the GOK-policy shows that it has not been as effective as expected. Ethnic and social segregation did not lose ground. In fact, segregation is reinforced in major cities with a large population of underprivileged students (Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise 2012). In addition, the GOK-policy of 2002 was met with resistance from school principals as well as the extreme right wing party *Vlaams Blok* (today it has been renamed to Vlaams Belang) that considered the transformations to constrain free school choice. As a result, principals kept control by managing the choice process with new strategies. Some of these strategies that were discovered, are among others, being stuck in the waiting room while native parents were given priority or questions related to enrolment were completely ignored (Spruyt 2006). While research on principals' strategies are oftentimes explained by the accountability-literature and how schools are under pressure to pick out only high-performing students, we would like to shed a light on the discriminatory basis of these deceptive strategies.

Educational inequality in Flanders: Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan minorities

Based on PISA reports, Flanders is the region with the highest social inequality within and between schools. Compared to Wallonia, academic success is still strongly linked to social class and ethnicity. More specifically, native middle-class students score the highest in all categories of the PISA test (OECD 2014). In addition, Belgium is known for the early

differentiation in its education system where a specific curriculum is taught to a particular group of students. Students with a migration background and/or a disadvantaged socio-economic background end up in lower and vocational tracks while native and middle-class students are overrepresented in general academic tracks (Opdenakker and Hermans 2006). Two ethnic groups that are disproportionally disadvantaged in the education system are the Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan students. These groups will be the focus of our study.

In 2017 17.1% of the Flemish population were migrants of which 9.31% from non-EU countries (Statistiek Vlaanderen). The Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan group are both part of the large non-European migration streams during the Belgian post-war period.

The first was the influx from former colonies of Belgium, Rwanda, Burundi and Congo. The influx mainly consisted of students that mainly returned to their home country after their studies. Therefore, before 1990 the post-colonial migration from Sub-Saharan-countries was relatively small. It is only after 1990 that the post-colonial migration increased. 1990 was depicted for its political refugees. During that time many Rwandese flee from the Rwandese genocide. The post-colonial migration is, consequently, relatively young. Data shows that 70% of them is between the age of 18 and 29 years. Even though the Sub-Saharan community is characterized by its high education level compared to other non-European immigration groups, they are confronted the most with discrimination and racism. 90% of the Sub-Saharan immigrants feel discriminated against because of their ethnicity and skin colour. They are structurally discriminated against in the most important life domains, such as the labour market, the housing market, the education system, public transport and so forth (Demart et al. 2017).

The second stream originated from Turkey and the Maghreb countries mainly through channels of labour migration. After the Italian and Spanish governments terminated the labour-agreement with Belgium, Belgium sought for new labourers in the Maghreb. The initial goal was to have them work temporarily in Belgium. However, most migrants decided to settle. Therefore, the Belgian government introduced a migration stop in 1975 to put a halt to the labour migration. After this migration stop, many migrants brought their family over through family reunification and spouse migration. The increase of migrants from the Maghreb created tension with the native population leading to violent racist events, an increase in unemployment, unequal access to the housing market and other difficult life positions (Lemaître et al. 2007; Van der Bracht, Coenen, and Van de Putte 2015).

Parents' choice process and schools' strategies

The enrolment process is an interaction between parent and school in which both actors play a significant role in the choice outcome. If we look at parents, literature shows that picking a school is strongly related to their class and/or ethnic background. Ball et al. (Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz 1996) speak about the 'culture of the necessity' or possessing the right kind of capital -economic, cultural and social- in order to make the right choices for their children. They identify three groups of choosers: skilled/privileged, semi-skilled, and disconnected choosers. The skilled choosers are predominantly middle-class parents who have a high inclination to and capacity for choice, while disconnected choosers, mostly labour-class parents, possess the opposite. The inclination and capacity for choice are related to resources that facilitate the choice process. These resources are, among others, informal knowledge, social networks, financial resources, and insider-knowledge of the education system (Ball and Vincent 2006).

Based on these resources they look for a school that fits their child. This final step is the 'child matching' process.

According to Ball et al. (1996), one of the most important factors that parents consider during the child matching process are the school climate and composition. These factors are considered a proxy for the quality of the school. Native parents not only believe that less diverse schools are more prestigious, they also tend to believe that the quality of schools declines when more children with a migrant background enrol (Clotfelter 2001; Bifulco and Ladd 2006). Native parents worry about the influence of diversity on the study performances of their child as well as the contact with different cultures. Flemish research shows that overall, native parents find it important for children to get to know other cultures, but to a certain extent and constrained to certain cultures (Nouwen and Vandenbroucke 2011a). Consequently, 'child matching' can have unwelcome effects on the social mix of schools.

Schools seem to follow the same thought-process as parents. Even though parents have the legal right to enrol their child into their school of preference, schools often act as gatekeepers to keep their preferred school composition (Reay and Ball 1997). Not only middle-class native parents perceive less diverse schools as more superior, also schools prefer to enrol native middle-class students; in part because they believe it will uphold the school's reputation. To neutralize the effects of white flight, Flemish schools located in socially/ethnically mixed areas will try to avoid becoming a highly diverse school. In Flanders, especially white and mixed schools try to keep the school composition as stable as possible because they consider themselves to be 'at risk'. In addition, school principals are sometimes put under pressure by parents to preserve a reasonably white school composition. Therefore, they try to profile themselves as a school with a 'healthy mix' (Agirdag et al. 2012).

Schools make use of different communication-tools to attract parents. Firstly, schools communicate their vision through information. However, access to information is highly influenced by social class and ethnic background. As information is predominantly distributed in Dutch, access is challenging for non-Dutch speaking households or newcomers (Nouwen and Vandenbroucke 2011b). Research in three large Flemish cities show, based on survey data, that parents with a migrant or labour-class background have lower chances of admission. Possible explanations are either having limited knowledge about the enrolment procedure or schools acting as gatekeepers. While the first is only shown to be true for non-Dutch speaking households, the gatekeeping practices of schools require more in-depth research.

Secondly, because parents are interested in the affective and personal relationship their children may develop with school staff and pupils, schools commit to presenting a positive school climate. Therefore, schools give parents a first glimpse of the school by holding promotional events, usually 'open evenings', in which parents are invited to visit the school (Nouwen and Vandenbroucke 2011b). Next to open evenings, some schools provide future students with a personal tour around the school. This is often on the common request of parents to have a final look before making the decision to enrol. The question, however, remains whether schools are putting in the same effort for every parent.

Hypotheses

Due to the highly-held belief that every parent has the freedom to choose, there is very little research on exclusion in the enrolment procedure. Research on this matter is largely explained through accountability-literature. We, however, would like to study the exclusion-strategies by putting discrimination at the centre. Therefore, our first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: We expect that discrimination is present in the enrolment procedure of Flemish schools. More specifically, we expect that ethnic and class discrimination is present in the enrolment procedure. Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan parents will be disadvantaged in comparison to native Flemish parents. Furthermore, labour-class parents will be disadvantaged in comparison to middle-class parents.

In addition, we expect the enrolment procedure to be driven by the phenomenon of white flight. We can suggest that schools are worried and want to keep their white majority or at least avoid being labelled as a concentration school:

Hypothesis 2: In ethnically or socially diverse municipalities, we can expect that schools will be more selective and therefore, more discriminating in the enrolment procedure.
Thus,

Hypothesis 3: in less ethnically or socially diverse municipalities, we can expect that schools will not feel threatened, and be less discriminating in the enrolment procedure.

Next to the effect of the neighbourhood's composition, the school's composition can influence the gatekeeping-behaviour. Therefore, we construct the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: we can expect that schools 'at risk' will act more strongly as gatekeepers, than concentration schools. Schools at risk are defined as schools that are on the verge of becoming a highly diverse school in terms of ethnicity and class.

Methodology

In Flanders it is common practice to send an email to the school of interest regarding enrolment. Therefore, correspondence testing was the ideal tool to perform our research. This research conducted unmatched correspondence testing among 2243 Flemish-speaking primary schools in Flanders and Brussels in the third week of August 2018.

Correspondence testing refers to experiments in which matched pairs of written correspondence is send out to test discrimination in a certain field. They are frequently executed in the labour market to test hiring-discrimination (Riach and Rich 2002). The pair is only distinguished in the characteristic of interest. We conduct correspondence testing by sending out identical e-mails to schools regarding the enrolment procedure. These emails differ only by ethnicity and class.

Correspondence testing has many advantages (Riach and Rich 2002; Pager and Shepherd 2008). One of them is that the observation of objective behaviour in the real world is immune against the weaknesses of surveys such as social desirability. Secondly, it offers the possibility to investigate whether the unequal treatment is solely based on the difference in characteristics of the test and control persons, in this case ethnicity and socio-economic status. Third, coincidence is singled out due to the systematic method of correspondence testing. Another advantage correspondence testing has over other types of field experiments is the exclusion of the influence of behaviour from test and control persons. Heckman and Siegelman (Heckman and Siegelman 1993) criticize non-written experiments for their internal

validity. The personal contact makes it harder to control the circumstances. Even after intensive training test and control persons still show differences in their behaviour. This is not the case for correspondence testing.

We decided to use an unmatched instead of a matched design. Unmatched (correspondence) testing has become more popular through time due to its advantages (Vuolo, Uggen, and Lageson 2018). While a matched design sends out the matched pair of correspondence to the same recipient, the other design does the opposite. The crucial reason not to send out two identical emails to the same school within a short time span was to avoid suspicion. The short time span of conducting the experiments was necessary to avoid time to alter the outcomes. In addition, following Vuolo, Uggen and Lageson's advice (2018), the unmatched design appeared to be more efficient due to having different treatment levels.

Procedure

Mails were sent to all Flemish-speaking nursery schools in Flanders and Brussels. These schools are located in 789 different municipalities and municipal districts. In Belgium, each linguistic community has its own Department of Education and therefore, the school system is organized differently for each region. We, therefore, decided to exclude the French and German speaking schools. Most primary and secondary schools in Flanders are subsidized by the Flemish government. Our sample exists of all schools, except for private non-subsidized schools and this for the simple reason that we want to examine inequality in a site expected to be open for all. Private schools also have different admission procedures and schedules which would cause possible time-effects.

The experiment was fulfilled after the pre-registration period that takes place around March. This allowed us to include schools within LOP-systems. Schools were not informed about the experiment for credibility and desirability reasons. The experiment simulates a real-life situation in which a parent is looking for a school. The experiment does not harm the schools in any way as receiving emails from parents without further action is not uncommon. The non-response, including automatic replies, accounted for 15%. We excluded the non-response from the sample after testing the significance in terms of differential response across the intersecting categories.

Design of mails: content and indicators

The mails were sent out by six fictitious persons. The main indicators were ethnicity and class. Ethnicity was made visible by the father's name in the email-address (name.surname@gmail.com), at the end of the email, and the child's name. Using names to signal ethnicity is common strategy in housing and labour market research (Baert et al. 2013; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003).

We compared the Belgian ethnic group with the Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan ethnic group. The two groups are studied separately for three reasons. First of all, Sub-Saharan parents are known to have a high educational background, which may reduce the vigilance of schools for not letting diversity in. They are for that matter less deviant from the norm than Maghrebi parents. Secondly, Sub-Saharans have a darker skin colour than Maghrebi individuals. It is

relevant to understand the different processes skin colour can unfold with regard to treatment. Thirdly, the majority of Sub-Saharans have a Christian background, while Maghrebi people are often related to an Islamic background. We tried not to indicate any form of religious affiliation mainly by using typical cultural names for the Sub-Saharan parents, and not a Christian name which is very common. Still, we can expect that schools will link a certain ethnicity to a particular religious affiliation. Moreover, the past decennia Islamophobia has been on the rise and many Muslims have been at the centre of attention. This may have an influence on the gatekeeping behaviour of principals towards Maghrebi individuals.

Class consists of two categories: working class and middle-class. Class is defined by the name, occupation and education level. For each ethnicity group we have chosen two popular names within each class. Furthermore, occupation was explicitly mentioned in the mail. The middle-class parent mentioned a managerial function and the related flexibility to visit the school. In contrast, labour-class parents mention their manual labour function and work rotation. Finally, education level was expressed through spelling mistakes and language use. Middle-class emails are longer and contain formal language. Labour-class emails are informal, shorter, and include spelling mistakes. We did not consider indicators of gender or sexuality, because this would ask for a higher sample to consider all intersections. In addition, in Flanders single-sex schools are prohibited. The emails were signed off with a male name. Again, there is no substantial reason why there would be a different effect for a mother or father.

The content and structure of the mail was constructed based on the expertise of people on the education system. This allowed the mail to be as real as possible. Each email started with a heading, the explanation that they are looking for a school, information about the child, and two specific questions. The first question entailed to receive more information on the school's admission procedure. This implicitly refers to the capacity of the school and its availability as well as how and when the parents can enrol their child into that particular school. The parent provided information about the child, giving out the birth date and preferable time to enrol. The second question considered the possibility of receiving a personal tour by the school staff. While the first question allows the school to decide whether they are willing to be available to this student, the second question goes a step further as its focus is on the behaviour of the school, to invite the parent or not. The email ends with information about the occupation of the father. Finally, the email is signed off with a salutation and the name of the father. The email templates can be found in the supplementary files.

Dependent variables

After sending out the emails a database was created to process the response rates and the different outcomes. Recent research of Bergman and McFarlin (Bergman and McFarlin 2018) who looked at whether schools decide to provide less information to students who seem to be too costly, used similar outcomes. The outcomes that we are interested in are the following:

- *Reply*: We looked at whether the parents received an e-mail back from the contacted school.
- *Enrolment*: The answers to enrolment possibility were divided into two groups. The positive treatment included answers like 'enrolment', 'receiving information', or

'being asked to call/make an appointment'. The negative treatment consisted of 'enrolment on waiting list with a low/no chance of getting enrolled' and 'full capacity'.
- *Visitation:* Again, the most frequent answers were categorized. We categorized the answers into 'open class evening', 'individual visit' or 'no visit'. Positive treatment is defined as the combination of an individual visit and being invited to an open class evening. The negative treatment consists of no answer, no invitation, or only open class evening.

Independent variables

- *Ethnicity:* The ethnicity groups were Belgian, Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan.
- *Class:* the class positions were labour-class and middle-class.

Control variables

- *Proportion of individuals with a non-EU background per municipality:* We consider the ethnic diversity of municipalities in which the schools are located to test whether ethnic dense municipalities are more or less open to diversity (Statistiek Vlaanderen). Data on individuals with a migrant background in schools is unfortunately non-existent.
- *Class position of inhabitants per municipality:* we controlled for inhabitant's class position per municipality (Belfius 2007) via the following indicators: education level, income and (un)employment rate.
- *Total population per municipality:* 70 big municipalities introduced the LOP-system in order to prevent the problem of overcrowded schools. Smaller municipalities are usually not confronted with overcrowding. We, therefore, expect that the municipality size affects principal's behaviour (Statistiek Vlaanderen).
- *School size*: we consider the size of the school to test differences between small and large schools. It allows to control for differences between schools in terms of their structure and organization which influences the time and resources spend on potential parents (Vlaanderen 2018).
- *School composition*: we consider levels of ethnic diversity in schools through the GOK-indicator that measures the language spoken at home. A student is considered non-Dutch speaking if he does not speak the language of instruction at home with no family member in small households or only one family member in a three-plus household (AGODI).

Analysis

For this research, we executed a step-wise regression analysis with the variables of unfavourable treatment as dependent variables. Given that schools (level 1) are nested into municipalities (level 2) multilevel analyses are applied. Since our dependent variables are dichotomous, we apply multilevel logistic analyses. In line with previous quantitative intersectional research (Hunting 2014; LeVasseur, Kelvin, and Grosskopf 2013; Martin and Lippert 2012), the independent variables are the intersection between class and ethnicity. More specifically, we consider an inter-categorical approach, referring to examining discrimination between as well as within ethnicity groups (McCall 2005). Random intercept-models are constructed to estimate the relation between the different forms of discrimination and the intersectional categories. These intersectional categories are: labour-class Maghrebi parents, middle-class Maghrebi parents, labour-class Sub-Saharan parents, middle-class Sub-Saharan parents, labour-class Belgian parents, and middle-class Belgian

parents. Furthermore, the control variables are standardized to facilitate interpretation. For the reasons of guaranteeing a good model fit and no significant effects the variable controlling for the class position of inhabitants is excluded from the models (analyses available upon request).

Results

Multilevel logistic regression analysis for the odds on reply

(Insert table 1 here)

Table 1 shows the results on the odds of the dependent variable of receiving a reply. First, the null model shows that the odds on receiving a response is 1.77 ($p \leq 0.001$) or a percentage of 63.4%. In addition, the intra class correlation-coefficient shows that 3.90% of the variance can be explained on the level of the municipality in which the schools reside.

The intersectional categories are added into the first model. The middle-class Belgian parent is the reference category. Model 1 shows that the odds ratio to receive an answer for a Belgian middle-class parent is 7.30 ($p \leq 0.001$). After a first glance on the effects of the intersectional groups of class and ethnicity, we see that only middle-class Sub-Saharan parents are significantly less likely to receive a response compared to middle-class Belgian parents with an odds ratio of 0.65 ($p \leq 0.05$). Even though we do see an ethnic and class gradient, the effects are statistically non-significant.

In the second model, we consider the ethnic composition of municipalities considering the percentage of non-EU inhabitants. After including the control variable, we see that the effect of the middle-class Sub-Saharans becomes non-significant. The control variable has a strong significant effect. More specifically, the larger the percentage of non-EU inhabitants in a municipality, the lower the odds that a school within that municipality will answer, with an odds ratio of 0.63 ($p \leq 0.001$). This result is a first indication of the importance of contextual factors.

Adding the size of the municipality, no significant differences can be noticed between large and small municipalities. In addition, results show that the size of the school does not have a significant effect on the likelihood to receive a reply. This indicates that we cannot state that smaller schools have more time for time-consuming behaviour such as answering emails.

After including the school composition, we notice an increase in the intercept meaning that the odds for Belgian middle-class parents in low diverse municipalities increases in schools with a low diversity level. The odds for the other parent groups stay relatively the same. The final model includes the interaction between the school and municipality composition. Results show that schools with a medium-level of diversity are less likely to reply. This may indicate a certain vigilance of these types of schools that consider themselves at risk. The results are, however not generalizable.

Multilevel logistic regression analysis for the odds on enrolment

(Insert table 2 here)

In the second table, the results of the logistic regression analysis for the odds on enrolling are presented. The intraclass correlation-coefficient is relatively low in comparison to the previous independent variables.

In comparison to the first model, we see an increase of the intercept meaning that the odds to enrol is 2.58 or 72.07% for middle-class Belgians. A first difference with the previous

variable, is that there is no significant class difference within the Belgian ethnic group. Even though the odds of the labour-class Belgian parents are lower, they are not generalizable to the population. The sensitivity analysis (available upon request) shows the same pattern for Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan parents. However, we still see an ethnic gradient within the labour and middle-class groups. In the labour-class, the Maghrebi parent is the least favourably treated with an odds ratio of 0.60 ($p \leq 0.01$). While in the middle-class, the Sub-Saharan parent is the least likely to get his child enrolled (OR 0.49, $p \leq 0.001$). Again, the Belgian parent is privileged as they have more chances to be enrolled into their school of preference. In addition, the sensitivity analyses show that the difference between the Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan parents are significant in the middle-class (odds ratio: 1.394†) but not in the labour-class.

The second model again shows that the enrolment rates of schools in diverse municipalities are negatively influenced (OR 0.68, $p \leq 0.001$). In addition, the larger the municipality, the higher the odds to enrol. This is probably due to the higher presence of schools in big cities compared to small towns. Again, the school size does not have a significant effect on enrolment which means that bigger schools who are perceived to be much busier than small town schools do not necessarily have lower enrolment rates.

Similar to previous outcomes, the effects of school composition are non-significant. However, it is interesting to notice that the odds to enrol are the lowest for medium-diverse schools. It is plausible that these schools perceive themselves at risk and are inclined to restrict admissions. The interaction-effects show similar results. While the intercept increases, the effects of all ethnicity groups stay constant. In addition, we can say that medium-diverse schools act as gatekeepers to protect their reputation from becoming a concentration school (OR: 0.76†)

Multilevel logistic regression analysis for the odds on individual visitation

(Insert table 3 here)

Table 3 discusses the results for the odds on visiting the school. The intraclass correlation-coefficient shows that 2.80% of the variance can be explained on municipality level.

The first model includes the intersection between class and ethnicity and shows that class does play a significant role within the Belgian ethnicity group. Labour-class Belgian parents are less likely to receive a tour compared to the middle-class (0.61; $p \leq 0.001$). An ethnic gradient is also visible similar to the effects of enrolment. In both the middle and labour-class, Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan parents are less likely to be shown around the school compared to Belgian parents. Within the labour-class, Sub-Saharans have the lowest odds of 0.25 ($p \leq 0.001$). In the middle-class, the effects for Sub-Saharan and Maghrebi parents are equally low (0.47, $p \leq 0.001$). Sensitivity analysis also shows that class differences within the Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan ethnicity groups are existent. Middle-class Maghrebi parents have higher odds to be showed around by the principal in comparison to the labour-class Maghrebi (OR: 1.656, $p \leq 0.10$). Similar for Sub-Saharan parents, results show that middle-class Sub-Saharans are more likely to get a tour than their labour-class counterparts (OR: 1.395,†).

The second model shows how schools in diverse cities provide, similar to enrolment, less individual tours (OR: 0.59, $p \leq 0.001$). The size of the municipality has a positive effect similar to its effect on enrolment. We notice that bigger municipalities will provide more individual visits than smaller ones. The size of the school, however, does not have a statistically significant effect on the odds to visit the school. After including all control variables, a class and ethnic gradient is still present for the different groups.

Model 5 shows that medium-diverse schools will provide more individual visits (n.s.). The full model, however, suggests the opposite, that as soon as these medium-level school are situated in more diverse cities, they will arrange the least individual visits (OR:0.78, n.s.).

Conclusion and discussion

Free school choice in Flanders has been at the centre of attention since the second school war in 1879. In theory, every child regardless of their background has equal chances to enrol. However, based on this research we can conclude that the decision is not only made by pupils and their parents, on the contrary, schools have considerable power in steering the enrolment process into their favour.

We looked into the enrolment procedure of kindergarten schools for three major reasons. First, we decided to study kindergarten schools for the reason that children do not have much saying in the decision process. It is mainly the parents that decide to which kindergarten their child will go to. This contrasts from the decision process in secondary education where children often have a voice. Secondly, at this early stage choosing a school has a great impact on the child's life course trajectory as it will define their subsequent experiences in the education system. Thirdly, few research has looked into the enrolment procedure of schools quantitatively. The steering power of schools has been a blind spot for researchers whose key focus was the parents' cultural and social capital. Fourthly, Flemish education policies highly value freedom of choice which led scholars to neglect the fact that schools are led by human beings with their own attitudes and biases. In Flanders particularly, schools are highly autonomous compared to other OECD countries. They decide their use of resources, school policy, hiring practices and so forth. Due to this autonomy, selectivity on the basis of one's background can be easily introduced into the admission procedure. In addition, due to the subtle appearance of discrimination, many assume that it is not an issue. Therefore, it is important to dig deeper and research the hidden cues of discrimination. We used correspondence testing because of its accurate ability to measure the extent of discrimination.

Looking at the results, we first of all did not find any significant differences in the extent to which parents with a different social and ethnic background received a response. The differences mainly occurred with regard to the additional services that schools use to attract parents. An ethnic and class gradient was apparent in which Belgian middle-class parents are favourably treated compared to their lower-class counterparts and middle-class ethnic counterparts. While principals make time during the day to show middle-class parents around, labour-class parents are advised to visit open class evenings or in many cases their question is completely ignored. Based on these results we can suggest that principals find middle-class parents to fit their school the best. Especially because white middle-class schools are perceived as prestigious schools in comparison to mixed schools, they put more effort in attracting these type of parents and use their resources to satisfy their expectations. Still, ethnicity plays a significant role. Sensitivity analysis shows that schools seem to be more open to labour-class parents if they are Belgian.

Finally, we questioned whether freedom of choice is a privilege every parent enjoys. Parents asked for information on the enrolment procedure and the possibility to enrol their child. Similar to previous results, Belgian middle-class parents are most likely to enrol. These chances decrease when belonging to the lower class and another ethnic group. Schools are less willing to attract other ethnic groups and lower classes for different reasons (Ball 2003; Whitty, Power, and Halphin 1998). First of all, the results explicitly indicate how schools are

in favour of letting in white middle-class students to protect their image and to avoid becoming a concentration school. Secondly, white middle-class students are perceived to be the "model student". A model student immediately adapts to the school environment without having to invest too much resources on them. Thirdly, because middle-class Belgian pupils are seen as model students, other ethnicity groups are logically perceived as 'problematic'. Not only principals, but also teachers are less keen to teach a more diverse group. Flemish research shows that they have lower expectations and, consequently, will invest less of their energy into students with a non-Belgian background (Agirdag and Loobuyk 2011). This goes hand in hand with a fourth reason and that is the perception that students with a different socio-cultural background will ask for more investment and resources to help them through school. Remarkable is that middle-class Sub-Saharan parents do not significantly differ from Belgian middle-class parents. This shows that the stereotypically perceived education level and/or religious affiliation linked to Sub-Saharans works in their favour.

Our remaining hypotheses questioned the effect of contextual factors. More specifically, we looked at the effect of ethnic composition at the level of municipalities and schools. Contextual factors are of relevance as white flight in neighbourhoods and, subsequently, in schools might affect the gatekeeping behaviour of schools. As schools believe they can uphold their reputation by avoiding to become a highly-diverse school, they will tighten up their enrolment procedure. Especially schools who perceive themselves at risk, already being at a certain level of diversity, can be even more restrictive. Although these results are not generalizable, we need to acknowledge that schools 'at risk' are more likely to discriminate. A very remarkable result was regarding visitation. At first sight it seemed like these types of schools offered the most visits. Nonetheless, as soon as it was corrected for the effect of neighbourhood composition, medium-diverse schools were offering the least number of visits. This can be explained by their heightened fear of white flight and losing their good reputation.

One of the limitations of our research is the external validity in two ways. First, correspondence testing only allows to measure discrimination in the first steps of the procedure. We can expect that parents who are less "attractive" – who do not have favourable characteristics that a school looks for- will face more discrimination and racism when they go for an appointment with the principal. Quite a few of the emails parents got back did not reply to any of their questions, but only asked to call or to make an appointment. For this group, we do not know what the outcome would be. Secondly, we want to nuance that differential treatment in email communications does not necessarily mean differential enrolment patterns once parents apply for a spot in the school. Qualitative research shows that parents have been denied access to schools when they go for an appointment (Nouwen and Vandenbroucke 2011a). This means that parents who received a positive reply can still be discriminated in further steps due to additional factors such as appearance. This research was not able to study the further process of the enrolment procedure. Therefore, it is a limitation that correspondence testing only allows us to look at one particular moment in the overall admission procedure.

Nevertheless, this research has made visible that the gate-keeping behaviour of principals can lead to systemic ethnic and class discrimination in the enrolment procedure. It is of great importance for education policy to take this problematic at heart by making the enrolment procedure more transparent. Moreover, future research should look the possible consequences of principals' gatekeeping behaviour. It is necessary to focus on the how these

actions reinforce school segregation. In addition, the unequal availability of the principle of school choice has detrimental consequences for minority groups. It is crucial to maintain socially mixed schools as it provides the best environment to develop students into democratic and tolerant citizens. Socially mixed schools supply a positive environment where intergroup contacts are allowed to flourish (Van Praag, Stevens, and Van Houtte 2014). Furthermore, this research is an example for countries where the principle of freedom of choice prevails. Reproducing this experimental research makes the gaps within their education policy visible and contributes to providing equal chances for all. In addition, this research can be a stepping stone to studying access in other levels of education such as primary and secondary education. We can expect that similar trends appear on these levels. Furthermore, not only access to education should be tested, but also access to extracurricular activities are of great relevance. Research commonly takes on a Bourdieusian perspective relating the participation to extracurricular activities with parents' cultural, economic and social capital (DiMaggio 1982; Lareau 2003). Future research could build on these studies by focusing on the accessibility to extracurricular activities.

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