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# Educational providers in the marketplace: Schools' marketing responses in Chile<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a framework for analysing the responses of educational providers in competitive contexts. The evidence presented is based on empirical research carried out in one Chilean municipality. The objective of the paper is to analyse the responses developed by the schools with which to position themselves in the Chilean education market. The results show how the schools' external communication is related to a range of factors such as their perception of competition, their position in the local hierarchy and the characteristics of the local market, as well as the symbolic attributes oriented toward positioning themselves within the market. Different schools' typologies were identified with regard to marketing strategies in terms of the form and intensity they took on.

## 1. Introduction

Education market policies have dramatically changed the management processes of schools, and how schools engage with their nearby external environment (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowen, 1995; Jabbar, 2015; van Zanten, 2009; Woods, Bagley, & Glatter, 1998). However, research that addresses how schools respond to the incentives provided by the market remains scarce, particularly in terms of the strategies that schools use to position themselves within the education market (Waslander, Pater, & van der Weide, 2010). In this context, marketing strategies are becoming an ever more important way to attract students. Nonetheless, the field of educational marketing in primary and secondary education remains under-analysed. Although the emergence of charter schools in the USA has increased interest in the marketing strategies developed by this typology of schools, schools' marketing has been little analysed and un-theorized in the context of research into pro-market educational reforms research (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004; Olson Beal, Stewart, & Lubienski, 2016), particularly in comparison with other dimensions of these reforms, such as their impact in terms of effectiveness and equity or families' school choice strategies.

For several reasons, the Chilean education system is particularly appropriate for analysing the strategies developed by schools in order to communicate with their external environment. First, the Chilean education system is one of the most marketized in the world (Bellei & Vanni, 2015). The introduction of a universal voucher system, as well as a high level of freedom of school choice, have fostered school competition to attract students. Secondly, the strong knowledge of both the demand and supply sides of the education market rules, after more than 35 years of a market-oriented education system, enables an in-depth analysis of the behaviour and rationalities of the different actors that are part of the system, in both the offer and the demand sides. Although Chile is one of the

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most emblematic cases of the adoption of education market and privatization policies, the evidence for marketing strategies developed by educational providers is scarce. The objective of this paper is to identify the marketing strategies developed by schools in the context of the Chilean education market, as well as the factors (endogenous and exogenous) influencing these strategies. The results presented in this article are based on an empirical research conducted in one municipality of the Santiago conurbation. The fieldwork for this research consisted of in-depth interviews with 14 principals from a sample of schools, selected based on their institutional and socioeconomic characteristics, as well as the analysis of the promotional materials and schools' webpages.

The paper is organized as follows. The first section reviews the evidence concerning the responses of schools to the market environment and synthesizes the main results of the research. The second section presents and describes the analytical framework proposed for the analysis of the marketing processes developed by schools and described. In the third section, the case study approach and the methods used therein are presented. In the fourth section the key mediating factors and the different dimensions involved in educational marketing processes are analysed. In the fifth section, as a way to synthesize the main results obtained, marketing strategies' typologies are presented. Finally, the paper outlines the main conclusions and proposes future research directions concerning school marketing.

## 2. Schools' responses to marketized environments

Schools' marketing strategies must be understood not as an isolated response, but as part of schools' complex behaviour in competitive environments. In this sense, educational reforms that introduce choice and competition between schools imply the need for important changes in the management strategies adopted by these institutions. In recent decades, many educational systems have adopted this reform approach. Some of the most well-known and emblematic examples are United Kingdom, New Zealand and Chile (Lubienski, 2001). Market theory in education<sup>1</sup> (Lubienski, 2006) expects that, as a result of the incentives imposed by the market, schools will become more responsive organizations, particularly in order to satisfy the demands and preferences of families (Chubb & Moe, 1990)

It is the centrality of schools' expected behaviour as a result of competition and choice policies that make it essential to understand how schools respond, and what kind of strategies they develop within a competitive environment. In fact, the educational improvement expected by the adoption of pro-market policies depends primarily on the capacity of schools to respond as the theory expects. Most of the existing studies on education markets focus on the impact of these reforms according to dimensions such as effectiveness, equity and efficiency (Alegre & Ferrer, 2010; Chakrabati & Peterson, 2009; Rouse & Barrow, 2009; Saporito, 2003), or on how school choice policies have influenced the behaviour of families and specific social groups (Ball, 2003; Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1995; Karsten, Visscher, & de Jong, 2001). In contrast, evidence regarding how schools respond to competitive environments as a result of these reforms remains relatively limited (Waslander et al., 2010).

It is, however, possible to identify some studies, which, at least partially, describe and analyse the strategies and responses of educational providers in relation to the market. Since educational reforms have been introduced already in the 1980s, some studies published in the 1990s have analysed how schools responded to a newly competitive environment in the case of England (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Woods et al., 1998) and New Zealand (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Lauder & Hughes, 1999). Scholars focusing on charter schools' programmes have analysed how schools have responded to competitive environments in the USA (Jabbar, 2016; Jennings, 2010; Lubienski, 2006) and Colombia (Termes, Bonal, Verger, & Zancajo, 2015). In the case of Chile, some studies (Contreras, Bustos, & Sepúlveda, 2007; Gauri, 1998; Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006) have identified the main strategies developed by schools for competing in a market environment, particularly as it relates to 'cream skimming'.

Despite the different contexts analysed, the studies presented above show a number of common results regarding the responses of educational providers to the market, which can be synthesized. Firstly, policies oriented towards increasing the level of school choice for families, as well as the competition between schools, deeply affect the management practices of affected schools. Secondly, the responses of schools to the competitive environment are influenced by their characteristics, the socioeconomic and educational characteristics of the local context, and their position in the local hierarchy of schools. Thirdly, to some extent, the main objective of schools – under this market-oriented regulatory framework – is the creation of specific niches of demand through the diversification of their educational product, trying to reduce the level of competition that they are exposed to. Schools' diversification strategies can be based on substantive changes that affect their daily practices, or on symbolic representations designed to shape the image of a school and how families perceive the institution. Fourthly, as a result of these differentiation strategies, the Local Education Market (LEM) has become segmented according to the different typologies of schools. Finally, the need for schools to communicate with their external environment increases in order to positioning themselves in the education market, as well as to attracting students in a context of increasing competition between schools. In this context and as a result of these responses, educational marketing adopts a key role in not only designing a diversification strategy, but also facilitating effective communications with their closest external environment.

## 3. The role of marketing for schools

As shown above, marketing is one of schools' responses identified in the literature concerning the behaviour of educational providers in competitive environments. However, the field of educational marketing in basic education (primary and secondary level)

<sup>1</sup> Market theory refers to the application of public choice theory principles and prescriptions to the field of education.

remains under-analysed (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004). In fact, from a theoretical perspective there is a lack of a clear definition about what educational marketing entails and the specific activities, which make up or can be classified as a process of school marketing at primary and secondary education levels. Beyond the normative definitions included in some educational marketing manuals, Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) have developed one of the most comprehensive definitions in this regard.

It follows that educational marketing is an indispensable managerial function without which the school could not survive in its current competitive environment [...] Marketing is considered to be a holistic management process (Foskett, 2002) aimed at improving effectiveness through the satisfaction of parents' needs and desires rather than mere selling of products and services or persuasion of clients to buy a specific educational program (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004: 377).

Similarly, Foskett (2002) defines educational marketing as “an umbrella term for the management of a wide and dynamic range of external relationships for schools and colleges” (Foskett, 2002: 243), including promotion, sales and public relations. In terms of the goals of marketing, the ‘triad model’ proposed by Foskett (2002) includes objectives related to student recruitment, communication and responsiveness with the community, as well as the management of the quality of educational provision.

From a different but nonetheless complementary approach, Lubienski (2006) considers marketing strategies developed by schools as an expected response to the monopolistic competition that characterizes education markets. Monopolistic competition, an economic concept initially defined by Chamberlin (1933) and Robinson (1933), refers to a situation in which the market is characterized by the presence of many producers, which sell products that are differentiated by different aspects, not by price. For Lubienski (2006), education markets tend to adopt the characteristics of monopolistic competition, since many educational providers offer a similar product (basic education), but differentiate their product according to substantive or symbolic attributes. In these conditions of monopolistic competition, educational institutions need to control specific niches of the market through symbolic representations and marketing management. Based on this approach, the main objective of educational marketing developed on the part of schools is highly related to diversification strategies.

Other scholars have highlighted that marketing strategies may also act as a way to exclude students or attract specific profiles. As Lubienski (2007) notes, “marketing may instead be targeted more toward particular audiences, suggesting a degree of selectiveness on the part of schools in competitive environments” (Lubienski, 2007: 119). Sometimes, promotional materials use signals and images that allow schools to communicate with those families that fit in with the profile sought by the school.

#### 4. School marketing analytical framework

On the basis of the literature analysed and the theoretical assumptions about the rationalities and objectives of educational marketing presented in the previous section, Fig. 1 illustrates the primary elements or dimensions that can be included in educational marketing processes, as well as the sequence and relationships between them. The diagram shows that educational marketing is composed of a number of activities developed by schools. At the same time, it is important to highlight that educational marketing is conceptualized as a context-sensitive and dynamic process, which schools develop depending on the characteristics of the LEM and its evolution.

The process of marketing that schools develop is divided into four different phases: (1) market position assessment; (2) market scanning; (3) diversification strategies; and (4) promotional activities and materials. In the figure above, the interaction with the demand side is represented in two different moments, i.e., during the market scanning process and at the end of this process. This interaction permits schools to obtain information about families' preferences, as well as provide feedback about the results obtained by their marketing strategy.

Market position assessment is understood as a process of dynamic reflexion by educational institutions on their own situation, as well as their expectations and potential within the market. A large number of factors that influence this market situation assessment have been reported in the literature, two of which can be highlighted as particularly significant and specifically related to marketing strategies. On the one hand, there is the perception of competition, in contrast to objective or ‘structural’ competition. In this sense, Levacic (2004) notes that perceived competition by schools, and particularly by school principals, is usually lower than the structural competition. This perception is related to the strategic responses of schools being to a greater extent than other measures of ‘structural’ competition, such as the measure of providers available in the local market or the distribution of market shares among

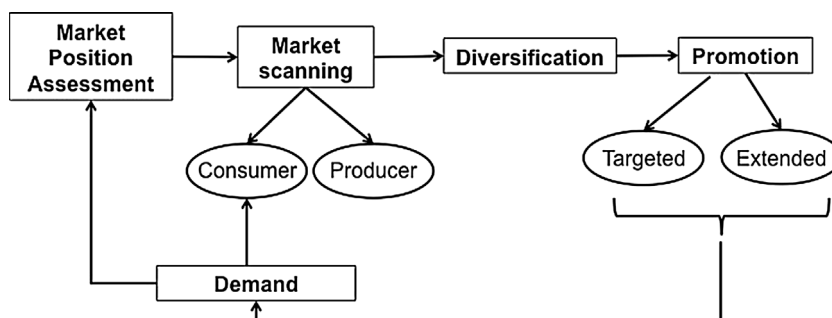


Fig. 1. Marketing process: analytical framework.

these providers. On the other hand, the school's position in the local hierarchy of schools is another factor that influences the market assessments carried out by schools. Position in the local hierarchy is defined by the status and the perceptions of families about a particular school, as well as the extent to which the school is viewed as a competitor by other educational institutions (Jabbar, 2015). The position in the market hierarchy influences all management decisions (van Zanten, 2009), but specifically promotional strategies and their content (Lubienski, 2007).

Following the assessment of the market position, some schools develop market scanning or market research as a way to obtain information about their immediate environment. Woods et al. (1998) distinguish between producer and consumer scanning. The former refers to the knowledge of market strategies developed by other schools in the LEM, while the latter aims to capture the preferences expressed by families in order to make decisions at the school level. Bagley et al. (1996) identify two different ways in which to 'scan and interpret' the market: systematic or planned feedback and ad hoc feedback. Systematic market scanning refers to a planned analysis of the market situation by using specific techniques and instruments, while ad hoc market scanning is defined by "informal feedback they [schools] obtained from parents and other people in the school's community" (Bagley, Woods, & Glatter, 1996: 130).

After the positioning assessment and market scanning steps, the next step is to develop a diversification strategy in an attempt to generate a specific market niche (Jabbar, 2015). In this case, the school tries to differentiate itself from other schools by offering a specific educational 'product' (Betts & Loveless, 2005). The dimensions of differentiation are multiple and depend on the specific features of the education system, particularly the LEM. In order to respond to families' preferences, schools can differentiate their attributes according to different dimensions, such as the curriculum, teaching style or religious/philosophical approaches (Woods et al., 1998). At the same time, diversification strategies can be of a substantive or symbolic nature. According to Lubienski (2003), frequently schools' marketing efforts are more frequently related to the use of symbols and image management, which has no a real effect on the daily pedagogical practices of the schools.

Finally, the promotional strategies of schools aim to communicate their diversification strategy to the external environment. Different types of promotional materials used by schools have been identified in this process, such as advertising and creating public relations brochures (Kotler & Armstrong, 1999). The main objective of promotional activities is 'glossification' (Gewirtz et al., 1995), that is, the generation and transmission of a specific image of the school. This process is often oriented and adapted to attract specific population groups, such as the middle-class, using symbols related to the linguistic codes and features valued by that group. Other studies have shown how the type and the intensity of promotional strategies developed by schools are influenced by the school context and its position in the local hierarchy of schools (DiMartino & Jessen, 2016;; Jabbar, 2016). An analysis of different schools' promotional materials in Michigan, as carried out by Lubienski (2007), shows how public, charter and private schools tend to emphasize different attributes in their promotional materials. For example, public schools more actively promote students' characteristics or organisational issues, while private schools highlight emotional symbols, such as religious values. Regarding the importance of linguistics and visual codes, Hernández (2016) has analysed the promotional materials and webpages of two of the most important charter management organizations in the USA. The findings show that these management organizations use images and indirect references to the racial composition of their schools in their promotional materials in order to construct a negative discourse about the communities they serve and to emphasize their positive role and effect on these communities.

## 5. The Chilean education market

During the 1980s, and in the context of neoliberal reforms carried out in multiple sectors, Chile implemented an educational reform program based on school choice and competition between schools. These reforms are characterized by the creation of a single system of public financing (a voucher system), in which the government contributes a fixed amount for each student enrolled in public or subsidized private schools. Roughly 90% of Chilean students in primary and secondary schooling have their education funded through this voucher system (Paredes & Ugarte, 2011). At the same time, families have total freedom in terms of choosing the school they wish their children to attend.

Although some reforms have been implemented over the past two decades, in order to increase the resources of the lowest performing schools and aid the most vulnerable students, the essential characteristics of the Chilean education system as established in the early 1980s have remained intact (Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006; OECD, 2004). The Shared Financing Law, approved in 1993, authorized subsidized private schools in Chile to collect a compulsory fee from families in exchange for a discount, based on the amount charged in funding received through the public voucher system (Elacqua, Montt, & Santos, 2013). Regarding the information made available to families, the results of the national evaluation of schools in Chile are published annually and made available to families, so that they are aware of the average performance level of all schools.

Finally, Chile is one of the most socioeconomically segregated education systems among OECD countries. The evidence has shown that students' selection practices (explicit and implicit) are common, especially among private subsidized and private schools (Gauri, 1998; Contreras et al., 2007). In this sense, Valenzuela, Bellei, and Ríos, 2014 demonstrate that the proportion of private providers and market dynamics explains a relevant part of school segregation at the local level.

## 6. Case study: data and methods

The results presented in this paper are based on a case study developed in one of the municipalities of Santiago (the Chilean capital). Several authors have highlighted that the dynamics and interactions of any education market should be analysed from a local perspective (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Lubienski, 2007; Woods et al., 1998). In this sense, LEMs represent a heuristic device, which is

**Table 1**

Schools and enrolment distribution by type of school in the case study municipality. Primary education, 2014.  
Source: Author from the Chilean Ministry of Education statistics.

	Schools		Students	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Public <sup>a</sup>	21	16.1	8.596	18.7
Private subsidized	98	75.4	34.139	74.1
Private non-subsidized	11	8.5	3.328	7.2
Total	130	100	46.063	100

<sup>a</sup> In Chile, public schools are also denominated municipal schools because after the educational reform implemented during the eighties they are managed and administered by local authorities (municipalities).

useful when analysing how schools and families respond to competition and choice, and how these responses are mediated by the social, political and economic characteristics of the local space (Taylor, 2001).

The municipality was selected because it can be considered as a delimited LEM. Despite there being no administrative limitations between the different municipalities of the conurbation of Santiago in terms of school choice, this municipality shows a low level of student mobility compared to others in Chile. The analysis of the Chilean household survey (CASEN-2013) shows that the percentage of primary education students within this municipality's schools, who live in the same municipality, is high (86.9%); furthermore, the percentage of children living in the municipality, who are enrolled in any of the schools in the same geographical area, is also high (90.7%). At the same time, the heterogeneity of the education market supply (see Table 1) guarantees a range of choices for families and the competition among schools to attract students.

For fieldwork purposes, a representative sample of 14 schools, which offer at least primary education, was selected, based on the information available from different databases of the Chilean Ministry of Education. The criteria used to construct the sample were based on four different school characteristics: type (public, private subsidized and private), school fee (free, low, medium and high), the presence of selection processes reported by parents, and the main criterion of choice expressed by families (distance/other). The final sample comprised three public schools (21.4%), nine private subsidized schools (64.3%) and two private schools (14.3%). In terms of the socioeconomic status of their students, five schools enrol students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (35.7%), six students from middle socioeconomic backgrounds (42.9%) and three students from high socioeconomic backgrounds (21.4%) (see the Annex for details about schools' sample characteristics). In this sense, the schools under analysis constitute a representative sample of the heterogeneity in terms of ownership and school population within the Chilean education system.

Principals from the schools included in the sample were interviewed on a single occasion (for around 1.5 h). Interviews with school principals were transcribed and coded using the dimensions and categories of the proposed analytical framework (Fig. 1). Furthermore, schools' promotional materials and webpages were analysed based on a list of possible dimensions as highlighted by the schools.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the information was analysed in relation to the characteristics of the schools in order to identify the patterns between marketing strategies developed by the schools in the sample and their socioeconomic and institutional characteristics.

## 7. Marketing process and schools' logics of action

This section analyses the points of view and rationalities expressed by school principals regarding three main dimensions of the marketing process: assessment of market position, market scanning and diversification, and promotional activities.

### 7.1. Assessment of market position

The analysis of interviews conducted with school principals shows a wide range of mediating factors, both exogenous and endogenous, which affect a school's market position assessment and, therefore, how it develops its marketing strategies. Among these mediating factors, the level of perceived competition is one of the most important in terms of influencing the strategies developed by a school. Despite the high level of structural competition of the LEM, the perception of competition varied significantly among principals of the schools included in the sample. Of the 14 principals interviewed, the level of perceived competition reported<sup>3</sup> was as follows: null 14.3% (n = 2); low 42.9% (n = 6); medium 14.3% (n = 2); and high 28.6% (n = 4). Other mediating factors that influence the strategies developed by schools include the position in the local hierarchy of schools and the school enrolment situation.<sup>4</sup> As previous studies have shown (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Jabbar, 2015), the perception of competition and the position within the local hierarchy of schools are factors that appear to be correlated. Generally, schools with high levels of perceived competition are found in the lower positions in the local hierarchy and vice versa. In the case of the schools analysed, it is also possible to observe a

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Lubienski's (2007) methodology the possible contents topics identified were: admission and selection process, symbols and lemmas, school activities developed, costs, pedagogical or curricular issues, results in standardized tests and facilities.

<sup>3</sup> Applying a similar method to that used by Levacic (2004), the level of perceived competition in each school was classified depending on the number of schools that were identified by the principals as direct competitors: null (any school); low (one school); medium (between two and four schools); high (five or more schools).

<sup>4</sup> 'Enrolment situation' refers to the school principal's perception of the demand for the school and its strategic objective.



direct relation between the position in the local hierarchy, the enrolment situation and the level of perceived competition. Usually, schools situated in a high position in the local hierarchy are in a good situation in terms of enrolment, which means that the level of perceived competition is null or low, which in some cases indicates that the school “does not need to compete” (principal, private subsidized school). These schools regard their favourable enrolment situation or the high status among parents as factors that explain the null or low level of perceived competition.

An intermediate situation is represented by schools situated in a medium position in the local hierarchy and with a balanced situation in terms of enrolment. Principals from these schools expressed the view that, as they only compete with specific schools in the same LEM, the level of perceived competition is usually low or medium. This type of focused competition occurs only for schools with similar educational projects, which base their diversification strategy on similar dimensions. In this context, principals identify only a few other schools as competitors. A principal from a school of this type only identifies schools with a high level of academic performance as direct competitors.

We only compete in terms of external [performance] results [...] We have schools that are prestigious, that are very similar to us, for example, the [private subsidized school] that is here on the main avenue [...] There are two or three schools on the main avenue, [but] the [private subsidized school] is at the same level [...] as us in terms of results. We just compete with these schools. (Principal, private subsidized school)

Schools with a low or medium level of perceived competition and enjoy a balanced situation in terms of enrolment are able to develop strategies oriented towards improving their situation in the market. These schools expect to raise their position in the local hierarchy, which can be achieved by attracting students from a higher social status or students with a high level of performance ability. This entails these schools developing a diversification strategy based on attributes that are valued by medium and high social class families, as well as promotional materials to attract these types of families, while also excluding families that do not fit into their strategic vision.<sup>5</sup> This behaviour is explained by the fact that social composition is one of the most important attributes that is particularly valued by medium or high social class families (Elacqua & Fábrega, 2006). As the next principal explains, this means that becoming a ‘good’ school usually means having a socially advantaged school population.

In any large municipality, there is a high demand for enrolment at good schools. We also want to have good schools. That means good students in this school and all the activities that we do. (Principal, private subsidized school)

The above quote from the principal of a private subsidized school indicates how some schools compete in order to attract specific students, generally those with a good level of academic performance or from advantaged social classes. This focused recruitment practice is what van Zanten (2009) refers to as “second-order competition”. As a result of the market incentives structure, some schools compete for students with a specific profile, as opposed to individuals from the total pool of students. Regarding the Chilean case, Bellei (2007) states that, in this way, “schools can improve their market position without improving the quality of their educational service” (p. 28).

In a very different situation are those schools that are situated at the bottom of the local hierarchy and in weak position in terms of enrolment. Schools with these characteristics frequently report a high level of perceived competition, meaning that they must attract the maximum number of new students in order to guarantee their economic viability. This situation requires these schools to identify all nearby schools as direct competitors.

This is a municipal [school] and up there is another municipal school, and over there is another municipal [school]. But, if you look here, we have a [subsidized private school], while across the street on the corner [is a subsidized private school], a little further up [is a subsidized private school], and then there is us [a private subsidized school]. Some blocks beyond here [is a subsidized private school], and a little further still is a subsidized private school. There are too many schools in the same sector. (Principal, private subsidized school)

Finally, it is important to note the dynamic nature of LEMs (Gorard, 1997) and how the outcomes of market assessment processes can differ over time. These changes in market assessment can be explained by changes in the characteristics of the LEM (socio-demographic characteristics of the population or the behaviour and evolution of other schools), as well as by changes in the characteristics of schools in terms of resources, academic performance or social composition. Some principals reported that changes within the mediating factors and in their market assessment position influenced the use and intensity of educational marketing strategies.

**Interviewer:** Do you develop marketing strategies?

**Principal:** I think that was the case in the beginning. We carried out a considerable amount of marketing to recruit students, but once we accomplished certain stages and the school was achieving results, we really think that we started to look down on other schools. (Principal, private subsidized school)

In summary, not all schools engage with education market and its incentives in the same manner, which explains the diversity of marketing strategies identified in the case study under analysis. Therefore, the role of mediating factors (the level of perceived

<sup>5</sup> During the fieldwork, such explicit student selection practices were identified. However, as this type of strategy is not directly related to marketing practices, it has been excluded for consideration in this paper. For previous studies on the selection practices in the Chilean education system, see Contreras et al. (2007) or Carrasco, Bogolasky, Flores, Gutiérrez, and San Martín (2014).

competition, a school's position in the local hierarchy of schools or its situation in terms of enrolment) can help, as will be shown later, to explain differences in the marketing strategies developed by schools.

## 7.2. Market scanning and diversification strategies

Market scanning represents the second step in the marketing process after the assessment of market position. Although this sequencing is useful for analytical purposes, these two processes are embedded and they provide feedback to each other. Generally, schools with a medium or high level of perceived competition develop market scanning practices more frequently than schools with perceived low levels of competence. The main objective of market scanning is to provide schools with information about their most direct competitors; this includes information about the specific school characteristics valued by parents, which will help a school to establish an effective diversification strategy for attracting the greatest number of students or, in other cases, students with specific profiles (e.g., high performance or medium and high social class students). The most common approach to market scanning, as identified in the interviews with principals, focuses on the producer domain, namely, other schools situated in the LEM. In this case, schools attempt to identify the main features and differences of their closest competitors. The main objective of marketing scanning focused on other schools is to analyse which practices and strategies they develop in order to attract new demand, as well as adapt the strategy of the respective school to the behaviour of direct competitors.

Market scanning that focuses on the producer domain can be informal or systematic. Schools with a less favourable position in the LEM, mainly in terms of enrolment, report the most systematic and sophisticated analysis about schools that are considered to be direct competitors. Systematic marketing scanning is characterized by the use of specific instruments and methods. The systematic approach to market scanning is also used for the consumer domain, in this case by schools situated in both the bottom and medium positions of the local hierarchy. Schools try to obtain systematic information about preferences and attributes valued by families, mainly by administering surveys among the families whose children are already enrolled in the school. The information collected by this method is usually used to reinforce the attributes identified through a school's diversification and promotional strategies.

Look, we have just conducted a survey among the parents, where one of the questions we asked them was about their identification with the school, and here are two or three things that stand out in the survey, which we did not expect. For example, and people are very clear that this is a Christian school. This is a school which cares about the students it has, that's this school. (Principal, private subsidized school)

Informal or ad hoc market scanning practices usually involve interviews and informal chats with families. These informal methods usually have a twofold objective: on the one hand, they seek to obtain information about the consumer domain; on the other hand, they seek to obtain information about other schools situated in the LEM from families whose children were previously enrolled in these schools. Principals also reported using interviews with families during the enrolment process to obtain information about the preferences relating to the demand side of the market, as well as about other schools.

Regarding diversification strategies, the analysis shows that schools try to distinguish their education offer based on different dimensions (pedagogical projects, education levels offered, relationship with families, religious orientation). In the case of the schools included in this analysis, four main dimensions were identified. First, schools try to distinguish their educational offer, which is based on a specific pedagogical approach, from traditional pedagogic methodologies in the Chilean education market. These schools usually frame their pedagogy as 'alternative', by focusing on constructivist approaches and more horizontal relationships between teachers and students or by promoting the active involvement of families in the daily activity of the school. Second, diversification strategies are developed based on the high level of academic performance at a school in terms of external assessments or entrance examinations for prestigious universities. These two diversification strategies are most frequently identified in schools situated in the highest or medium positions of the local hierarchy. They try to develop diversification strategies based on the attributes valued by families from high and middle socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, the principal of a school with an 'alternative' pedagogical approach confirms that some middle-class families look for schools with educational projects that not found in a traditional academic education.

Our potential demand is from progressive young professionals. They represent a rising middle-class that was promoted by neo-liberal policies and which also take a critical look at what reality is [...] I believe in the search for a different project, which is more innovative in these areas, compared to the authoritarianism that is fundamentally present in Chilean schools. (Principal, private school)

The other two diversification strategies identified are most commonly present in schools that are situated in the middle or bottom positions of the local hierarchy of schools. On the one hand, there are schools that base their diversification strategies upon a religious orientation and the transmission of values. The religious orientation of the school is frequently associated by some families with high levels of security or a good school environment. On the other hand, diversification strategies that are based on the management style of the school reflect a close relationship with families and an individualized attention to the students. Interviews with principals from these schools reveal that it is possible to confirm that these schools try to develop diversification strategies aligned with the attributes or criteria of choice of working class and poor families. For example, security or individualized attention appears to be the criterion of choice among families from more socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The following principal confirms that the school offer is based on its level of security, which is particularly important for families who live in an unsafe environment.

The diversification strategies of a school are the result of its market assessment position and the information it obtains through market scanning, as well as being adapted to the specific situation in the school, its resources and the typology of potential demand.

These diversification strategies are mainly communicated to the external environment of the school through promotional activities and materials, which are analysed in the next section.

### 7.3. Promotional activities

The main objective of promotional activities is to translate the orientations of a school into communicational materials in order to transmit the main attributes of its diversification strategy attributes, as well as focus on the types of families that it aims to attract. The promotional activities carried out by schools in the sample were diverse in terms of content and intensity. Schools situated in the bottom position of the local hierarchy and with a high level of perceived competition tend to use more traditional approaches for promoting themselves, such as advertisements, flyers and posters. The main characteristic of this promotional strategy is that it involves general promotion; it is not focused on specific geographical areas or oriented towards attracting a specific student profile. For principals, these promotional activities are a means of publicizing their school in a local context, where there may be a large number of schools. The most common promotional practices and materials identified for this type of school are the use of posters, flyers or even “a van with a poster advertising the school” (principal, private subsidized school). Two more promotional practices have been identified specifically with regard to public schools: first, door-to-door diffusion activities carried out by the staff of the school, without any previous information about the specific location of its potential demand; second, the delivery of gifts, such as school materials or clothes, if a student is enrolled in the school. As one of the principals states, these gifts are oriented towards entice families: “The clothes that we deliver are also an investment in order to attract new students” (principal, public school).

In contrast, schools with the most advantage position in the local hierarchy, and with a balanced or favourable enrolment situation, develop targeted promotional practices oriented towards communicating with specific types of families, usually from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, a common promotional strategy is for a school to promote itself in specific neighbourhoods with a social composition, which is closer to its targeted student profile. Some of the principals interviewed confirm that this is an emerging practice because the LEM has experienced a significant population increase, particularly of middle-class families from other municipalities. In this sense, this type of promotional activity is carried out in new neighbourhoods to where middle-class families are moving.

We have conducted campaigns that distributed flyers to new houses. [...] During the enrolment period, we hire alumni to distribute flyers [but] we currently have no more new houses. [Some new] houses are being built [...] and we will do the same once they are completed. (Principal, private school)

Another common strategy identified is realized through partnerships with kindergartens. This strategy has a double objective. Firstly, it is a way to establish a stable partnership, which will guarantee the recruitment of students. Secondly, it allows schools to recruit students from specific backgrounds, thereby conducting an implicit selection of students based on their socioeconomic status.

I make an effort to visit the kindergartens that are near to us [...] I go with the admissions manager and I meet with the principal of the kindergartens [...] I tell them a little about our school life and we deliver talks where we invite parents with children in the kindergartens to our school. (Principal, private school)

Finally, school websites represent an emerging platform for promoting schools, particularly those that enrol students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds. Principals from schools situated in the middle or high position of the local hierarchy report that they are aware of the emerging role of school websites in terms of how middle- and upper-class families select a school. In fact, in the case of the LEM analysed, eight out of 14 schools included in the sample had a website. For principals, the school website is a space in which to publicize and position their school within the wider range of existing schools:

**Interviewer:** What are the main objectives of the website?

**Principal:** First, to publicize the school and present its educational project, the names of the people managing the school, the phone numbers and the email address of every single person, so that, to some extent, people who do not know the school can see what it is like. What is more important is that they can view the entire educational project, you can download it, there are 70 pages, and you can find out what the school is about. There is also information for our internal customers. (Principal, private subsidized school)

An additional objective of the website, according to some principals, is the recruitment of specific profiles of families and students, who fit in with the strategic objectives of a school in terms of recruitment. This self-selection is facilitated through the content published on school websites. For example, one principal confirms that the content of a website is directly linked to the identity of the school (alternative pedagogic approach), while recognizing that this content not only informs families about the school, but also filters out families who do not fit in with the profile sought by the school.

**Interviewer:** Have any families talked to you about the website?

**Principal:** Yes, some families have told us that the content of the website made the difference, which is fine by me because I agree. (Principal, private school)

In fact, this selection or self-selection function of a website is also identified in the semiotic analysis of the schools. The analysis of the content highlighted on a website's homepage shows how information related to the selective orientation of the school (such as admission and selection procedures or costs) prevail over content related to the school offer such as pedagogical projects, activities or



**Table 2**  
Marketing strategies typologies.

		Latent	Focused	Extensive
Mediating factors	Perception of competence	Low	Medium	Medium or high
	Position in the local hierarchy	High or medium	Medium	Low
	Enrolment situation	High or balanced	Balanced	Balanced or low
Practices and strategies	Market scanning strategies	Absent	Ad hoc	Systematic
	Differentiation dimensions	Pedagogical approach, performance	Performance, religion and values	Management style
	Promotional activities	Target	Target	Large
	Main objective	Promote school image	Attract specific student profiles	Increase enrolment

facilities.

## 8. Marketing strategies typologies

From the analysis of the interviews with principals, and taking into account the main dimensions of education marketing processes, three different school typologies of school marketing can be identified (Table 2). These typologies are 'ideal' types (Priyadarshini, 2017) and presented as constructs or methodological tools for systematizing the evidence collected, as well as for facilitating an analysis of the phenomena of educational marketing. In Table 2, the different characteristics of each marketing strategy typology are presented: that is, latent, focused and extensive. The perception of competition, the position in the local hierarchy and the enrolment situation of the school can be considered as factors that mediate and influence the market assessment process. The other dimensions included in the table refer to the characteristics of the main dimension of school marketing. Finally, the table indicates those aspects that may be considered as the main objective of each typology.

Schools with latent marketing strategies represent the first typology. In these schools, the perception of competence is low, while the enrolment situation is high or balanced. This type of school does not develop a systematic marketing strategy, but is aware of the role played by public relations and communication with its external environment in order to maintain and reinforce its market image and position. This situation is characteristic of schools that are situated at the top of the local hierarchy and generally enrol students from the most advantaged social groups. Principals in these schools do not report any market scanning strategy, be it systematic or ad hoc. The types of diversification dimensions developed by these schools are uncommon in the LEM and reinforce the low level of competition perceived by these schools.

The second typology makes reference to schools with a marketing strategy whose aim is to attract a specific profile of students, in order to maintain or change the social composition of the school, as well as to ensure the stability of their enrolment situation. In relation to factors influencing the market position assessment, these schools' perceived competition at a medium level, with principals reporting that they compete with either all or only a few schools in the LEM that have similar characteristics to their own or are oriented towards specific student profiles. The majority of these schools had a balanced level of enrolment in relation to the number of students that schools were able to enrol. At the same time, principals expressed the need to develop strategies in order to maintain this situation and increase the demand for their school. The majority of schools included in this typology report some type of market scanning process, mainly based on informal or ad hoc feedback obtained from families, or via comparative analysis of other schools' characteristics, again not in a systematic way. The primary differentiation dimensions identified for this typology were based on students' performance or religious and values approaches.

The final typology refers to schools with an extensive marketing strategy. In this case, the perception of competition reported by principals is medium or high, with the enrolment situation balanced or low. Generally, these schools are situated in the low positions of the local hierarchy, with principals expressing the view that marketing strategies may be key to their school increasing enrolment and improving its position in the local hierarchy. In the case of market scanning processes, principals reported systematic and planned feedback from the market, such as family surveys or specific comparative analyses of other schools. The most common differentiation dimension was management style, which has a close relationship with families, class size and security issues.

## 9. Conclusions and discussion

Educational marketing is a strategic and management response from schools to the introduction of market-oriented policies and competitive environments. However, as marketing responses are not expected by education market theory, this field remains under-analysed in primary and secondary education by the academic literature. Overall, educational research has not sufficiently dealt with what educational marketing entails, what are the different processes that educational marketing involves, and what are the logistical and organisational implications of marketing strategies for schools. Educational marketing strategies cannot be analysed in isolation without taking into account the mediating factors and its relationship with other schools' responses to the market, such as diversification and student selection strategies.

The results obtained in the Chilean case study show that the way in which each school interacts with the market is key to any understanding of the form and intensity of their marketing strategies. Furthermore, beyond the general regulatory framework, the characteristics of each local space determine the way in which schools follow the market and adopt marketing strategies. Three different school typologies – latent, focused and extensive – were identified according to their marketing strategies. Despite the case

study approach presented in this paper, these typologies can be extrapolated to analyse the different forms and intensities of school marketing in other local market contexts, depending on the market situation of each school. In this respect, mediating factors, such as the perception of competition or the school position in the local hierarchy, are crucial when determining the need to compete in order to attract students. These mediating factors also condition the content of the marketing strategies developed by schools. However, it is important to consider the dynamic nature of the LEM and the specific situation of each school.

Market segmentation, as a consequence of schools' diversification strategies and the hierarchization of schools, is a process closely related to marketing. Schools use marketing as a tool for communicating and reinforcing their diversification strategies, as well as for establishing and maintaining their market niches (Jabbar, 2016). As other studies on education markets have shown, segmentation through diversification is one of the most common practices used by schools to reduce the level of competition they are exposed to. The creation of niches allows schools to compete only with a limited number of other schools offering a similar product. Consequently, the increasing use of marketing by schools is reducing the level of competition that schools are exposed to, thereby mitigating one of the key drivers expected by education market theory, i.e., competition as a way to foster education quality. Furthermore, as has been sometimes shown, promotional strategies act as a form of selecting 'preferred' families, while excluding others. This secondary role of marketing strategies has been identified in previous studies (Jabbar, 2016; Jennings, 2010; Lubienski, 2007) and has important implications in terms of equity.

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## Appendix A

See Table A1

**Table A1**  
Schools sample main characteristics.

School	School type	Preferential School Subsidy <sup>a</sup>	Education levels	Socioeconomic status <sup>b</sup>
School 1	Municipal	Yes	Primary	B
School 2	Municipal	Yes	Primary	B
School 3	Municipal	Yes	Primary	A
School 4	Private subsidized	Yes	Primary	A
School 5	Private subsidized	Yes	Primary	B
School 6	Private subsidized	Yes	Primary	C
School 7	Private subsidized	Yes	Primary and secondary	D
School 8	Private subsidized	No	Primary	D
School 9	Private subsidized	No	Primary and secondary	E
School 10	Private subsidized	No	Primary and secondary	D
School 11	Private subsidized	No	Primary and secondary	D
School 12	Private subsidized	No	Primary and secondary	D
School 13	Private non-subsidized	No	Primary and secondary	E
School 14	Private non-subsidized	No	Primary and secondary	E

<sup>a</sup> The Preferential School Subsidy (*Subvención Escolar Preferencial* in Spanish) is a voluntary program which allocates additional funds in schools based on the number of socioeconomic disadvantage students enrolled.

<sup>b</sup> The socioeconomic status of the school is determined by the Chilean Ministry of Education based on the education level of parents, the level of households income and the percentage of families beneficiaries of government subsidies.

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