School Choice in the Basque Country: Public, Government-Dependent and Private Schools with Different Languages of Instruction

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the determinants behind parents’ decision when choosing schools for their children in the Basque Country, Spain. This choice is studied both in terms of private versus public schooling and the main language of instruction, which can be either Basque, Spanish, or both; using data from the PISA 2012 questionnaires. We estimate the probability of a family choosing a certain type of school using a multinomial logit. The main results indicate that the biggest influence on the decision of the school type (public or private) and language model (Basque, Spanish, or Mixed) comes from the wealth level of the family as well as the language spoken at home. The remaining variables which we thought a priori would have an effect on the school choice like mother’s, father’s and student’s birthplace, immigration status, or the parents’ education level, only have the expected effect for families who speak Spanish or another (non-Basque) language at home, whilst the decision by families who speak Basque is not influenced by these variables. The most important finding is that the option of having Basque as the sole language of instruction mitigates the effect on the class stratification.

Keywords: school choice, multinomial logit, co-official languages

JEL: I20, I28, I29, C25

Highlights:

- We analyze determinants of school choice in the Basque Country, Spain.
- We use data from the PISA 2012 and apply a multinomial logit.
- The wealth level of the family and the language are the most important determinants.
- The language of instruction mitigates the effect on class stratification.
1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyze the determining factors behind parents’ decision when choosing schools for their children in the autonomous region of the Basque Country, Spain. This choice is studied both in terms of private versus public schooling and the main language of instruction, which can be either Basque, Spanish, or a mix of both; using data from the PISA 2012 (OECD, 2012) questionnaires on students and schools.

In the Basque country, two official languages coexist: Basque, which is a distinctive ancient (pre-Indo-European) language with roots different to any other language in the world, and Spanish. Of course, having multiple official languages in a single country or area is not unique, especially in Europe: Belgium, Finland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, or Switzerland are all examples of this and some have even more than two official languages. However, the situation in the Basque Country is quite rare, because –due to the completely different language roots– knowing one language does not help when attempting to learn the other. More importantly, Basque is only spoken in the Basque Country and nowhere else in the world; whereas for instance, speaking two or three out of the four official languages in Switzerland would be of use outside of said country as well.
Furthermore, there is a sense of pride and cultural identity in the Basque Country that can be a driving force behind the school choice decision made by parents. This cultural identity, which partly stems from the language, has already been shown in a different framework to impact the willingness to pay to protect natural resources in the area by Hoyos, Mariel and Fernández-Macho (2009). The sense of self-identity plays a central role in the Basque society, which is considered as matriarchal; as a pointed example, a female goddess represents “Mother Earth” or “amalurra”.

The linguistic polarization between Basque and Spanish has also been studied in the context of its relationship to the Basque terrorist conflict (Gardeazabal, 2011). As another example of how deeply ingrained the language issue is in the Basque society, the term *Euskaldun* (literally, *Euskera duenak*; i.e., “that who knows Basque”) is also used to refer to Basque people, suggesting that a Basque person is solely someone who actually knows how to speak the language.

Hence, though the analysis of school choice is not new, the Basque Country does offer unique insight into the decision due to the additional consideration of the language, besides the age-old debate of public versus private. In the USA, literature on the subject considers different choices that parents have besides the
traditional two: home-schooling, voucher programs, or charter schools, e.g. Beales and Wahl (1995); Heise, Colburn, and Lamberti (1995); Martinez, Godwin, and Kemerer (1995); Greene, Howell, and Peterson (1998); Teske and Schneider (2000); Belfield (2004); Bifulco and Ladd (2007); Bifulco, Ladd and Rose (2009), Davis and Raymond (2012); or Butler, Carr, Toma, and Zimmer (2013). The majority of the evidence in these studies points towards the fact that the parents who choose a certain school have different characteristics from parents who do not actually choose it.

More precisely, Belfield (2004) finds that home-schooled children come from families with similar characteristics to those who are not home-schooled, but the employment status of the mother (specifically, not being employed outside of the home) is critical in the decision making process. Regarding voucher programs, Greene et al. (1998) find that parents report academic quality and safety as the main reasons for participating in the voucher program; whereas Beales and Wahl (1995) in Milwaukee, Heise et al. (1995) in Indianapolis, and Martinez et al. (1995) in San Antonio find that educational quality is the most important reason. Allen and Burgess (2013), using data from schools in England, find additional evidence that using information on a school's quality is useful when choosing schools.
In a review of the US literature on the subject, Teske and Schneider (2000) suggest that expanded choice systems can aggravate stratification or segregation due to the fact that different types of parents make systematically different choices. This is corroborated by the findings of Bifulco and Ladd (2007), as well as Phillips, Larsen and Hausman (2015); regarding the racial segregation in the charter school program in North Carolina, and by the school choice model proposed by O’Shaughnessy (2007), which also takes peer effects into account. More examples of the school choice literature include the works of Glick and Sahn (2006) in Madagascar, and Müller, Tscharaktschiew, and Haase (2008) in Germany. The latter introduces the space component using location and geocoded data. In Burgess and Briggs (2010), they too consider location when analyzing school choice in England’s state schools. In line with the previously mentioned literature, they also find that school choice aggravates segregation, primarily because location -where parents choose to live- dictates much of the choice. Indeed, additional evidence from voucher programs in Chile (Chumacero, Gómez, and Paredes; 2011) confirms that location is of outmost importance in school choice, but that parents do consider the tradeoff between distance from home and school quality. However, these analyses still concern ownership or funding of the school and not an additional
parameter of consideration, like we do in the Basque Country with the co-official languages.

In Spain, where public education begins when children are three years old, the school choice is usually left to the parents (Calsamiglia and Güell, 2013; Green, Navarro-Paniagua, Ximénez-de-Embún, and Mancebón, 2014). The decision and assignation process normally works as follows: first, the families hand in a ranked list of schools to the administration managed by the Basque Government; which, in principle, should be according to order of preference. The schools and administration then assign the vacancies according to a set of rules and the stated preferences, in theory effectively matching students to schools. The issue is that, given the set of rules that are followed in the assignment process, this creates a strategic game in which the optimal move for the families rarely consists of stating their true preferences. There is a vast literature on the subject of matching students to schools (or medical students to hospitals, etc.), most of it stemming from Gale and Shapley (1962). However, for the purposes of this paper, we will focus on the socio-demographic determinants leading to the actual school choice.

We use data from the PISA 2012 questionnaires to estimate the probability of a family choosing a certain type of school using a multinomial logit. An
advantage of this method is that we are working with revealed preferences.

Schneider, Elacqua, and Buckley (2006) found evidence pointing towards the fact that, although parents usually cite only academic reasons for choosing a certain school, actual behavior suggests that they are indeed influenced by demographics, which supports the need to work with revealed preferences.

We find that the level of education of the parents, the family income, and household structure, are all significant factors in the decision-making process. Moreover, as one would expect, the probability of choosing a private school increases with the level of income and education. Speaking Basque at home increases the probability of choosing to study in Basque, and the opposite happens when the household language is Spanish. However, other variables which we thought a priori would have an effect on the school choice of public versus private (such as mother's, father's and student's birthplace, immigration status, or the parents' education level), only have the expected effect for families who speak Spanish or another non-Basque language at home, whereas the decision by families who speak Basque is not influenced by these characteristics. These findings seem to suggest that the class segregation typically observed when parental school choice is possible is mitigated in the Basque Country by the option of having Basque as the
sole language of instruction. Being able to reduce class stratification is unarguably a desirable trait and a side effect of the current educational system in the Basque Country.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 overviews the particularities of the educational system in the Basque Country. Section 3 describes the data used as well as the methodological framework. Section 4 discusses the empirical results derived from the analysis. Section 5 summarizes and concludes.

2. The Educational System in the Basque Country

The educational system in the Basque Country suffers from several peculiarities, mostly due to the existence of two co-official languages, Spanish and Basque. It is therefore important to place our analysis in the context of these particularities (see also Dávila Balsera, 2003, for a thorough review on the history of the system).

The dictatorship of Franco in the mid-twentieth century implied a return to centralization and the oppression of any cultural or linguistic expression different from the Spanish one. This resulted in the emergence of educational movements in Catalonia and the Basque Country, both expressions driven by the Catalan and
Basque languages respectively. The network of schools that derived from this movement of language and self-identity in the Basque Country was to be known as *ikastolak* ("schools" in Basque), which became the reference point for learning the Basque language.

After Franco’s death and the subsequent process of democratic transition, the need for a new territorial organization of the state became evident, which took shape in the form of the Spanish constitution of 1978 (still in effect) with the creation of the autonomous region. This new figure of the autonomous region ruptured the centralism that had reigned since the Franco era, and gave rise to a new type of nationalism, the “constitutional nationalism”.

The constitution of 1978 also resulted in the rupture of the centralized educational system. From then on, the different autonomous regions of the state could take on as many educational competences as expressed in their corresponding autonomous statute. Therefore, the educational movements that had formed in Catalonia and the Basque Country in the Franco era had to adapt to the position the different languages now had in the new legal framework (Dàvila Balsera, 2003).
The 1978 constitution indicated that “Spanish is the official language of the state; all Spanish citizens have the duty to know it and the right to use it. The remaining languages ... will also be official in their respective Autonomous Regions according to their statutes” (Spanish Government, 1978). Therefore, each autonomous region –and especially, Catalonia and the Basque Country– adapted its schools to the linguistic characteristics of the area.

In this context, the Basque Government published an educational law in 1982, still in effect, whose aim was the normalization of the use of the Basque language. This law recognized the right of Basque students to receive education in either one of the two co-official languages, Spanish and Basque, besides attempting to guarantee the practical knowledge of both. This law regulated the presence of Basque in the educational system, through the creation of language models, which differ in the language of instruction (Basque Government, 1982).

Depending on the main language of instruction, students are classified into three different language models: Spanish, Mixed, or Basque; known in the Basque Country as models A, B, or D. Model A corresponds to Spanish, i.e., all subjects are taught in Spanish except for other language subjects, such as Basque or English. Model D corresponds to Basque; that is, everything is taught in Basque except for
other languages. Model B is a mixture of the two; some subjects are taught in Basque, some in Spanish. The percentage of subjects that are taught in each language varies across schools, ranging from almost everything in Basque, except for Mathematics and other languages, to almost everything in Spanish.¹ A single school can offer instruction in more than one model. With these different language models, parents have in theory a certain degree of freedom when choosing schools.

Figure 1 shows the historical evolution of enrollment in each language model, since these models were implemented, up to the 2013/2014 school year. We can observe how there is a steep upward trend in enrollment in the Basque or Mixed language models, whereas enrollment in the Spanish model is decreasing. This is due to the fact that the Spanish model does not give students enough competences to use Basque in practice; hence preventing these students from applying for jobs in the public administration, for which knowledge of Basque must be demonstrated through a language test.

Currently, the percentage of civil servants in the three provinces of the Basque Country Alava, Guipuzcoa and Vizcaya is 16%, 10% and 11% of the

¹ A model X or Exempt also exists, reserved exclusively for those students who will have a transitory schooling period in the Basque Country, and through which they are exempt from having to learn Basque; but it is not applied in practice.
employed population respectively. These are high percentages, certainly taken into account by parents when choosing a school for their children; coupled with the fact that the Basque public sector encompasses many different jobs such as doctors, nurses, local administration, teachers, policemen, or firefighters. Moreover, although speaking Basque is not strictly required in the private sector, it is more often than not considered a plus.

Figure 1. Evolution of enrollment in each language model

Besides the peculiarities of the different models, which depend on the main language of instruction, the school network in the Basque Country has other particularities concerning ownership. In 1987, the Basque Government published another educational law, this time with the intention of “consolidating the distinct networks of public schools, private schools, and ikastolak, into a single network of Basque public schools”. The idea was to do so through so-called educational accords, which basically transformed most of the private schools and ikastolak into Government-dependent private schools (Basque Government, 1987).

Schools under the educational accords are of private ownership, but receive financial support from the Basque Government as part of their funding. Students enrolled in such schools also pay monthly fees (approximately 200 euros per student per month), which cover part of the school budget. The proportion of funding coming from the Government and from student fees for the schools under educational accords varies across schools, but typically, the Basque Government covers the salaries of the minimum number of teachers needed according to the number of enrolled students, and the student fees cover the remaining costs. This contrasts sharply with public schools, which are fully funded by the Government and of public ownership, and therefore completely free of charge for parents.
Hence, the school network in the Basque Country can be classified into three different types, depending on ownership: public schools, Government-dependent private schools (or the ones under the educational accords), and fully independent private schools, which are, of course, the most expensive ones for parents at around 600-800 euros per student and month. However, this last type accounts for less than two percent of the schools in the Basque Country.

3. Data and Methods

We have used data from the PISA 2012 students and schools questionnaires, and our analysis is limited to the Basque Country (OECD, 2012). Table 1 shows the number of surveyed schools and students in the PISA 2012 questionnaire, according to school ownership and language model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Models (language of instruction)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD PISA 2012.
The surveyed sample is indeed representative of the population, given that 128 schools are public (approximately 39 percent), and 201 schools are private (or 61 percent) according to the Basque Statistics Institute Eustat. The numbers also match their records on student enrollment data by language model. Table 2 reports the number of students surveyed, also according to school ownership and language model.

**Table 2. Number of surveyed students in the Basque Country, PISA 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Models (language of instruction)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>1069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>1281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD PISA 2012.

The sample size and the selection of sampled schools were chosen according to the sampling rules set by the Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education (ISEI-IVEI) and the PISA organization, basically, taking care that the strataums defined by the interaction between the school ownership (public/private) and the language models (Spanish/Mixed/Basque) are properly represented in the sample.
Therefore, the dependent variable considered for the analysis is school type/model, a categorical variable with six different outcomes: (1) Public school, Spanish; (2) Public school, Mixed; (3) Public school, Basque; (4) Private school, Spanish; (5) Private school, Mixed; and (6) Private school, Basque.

Table 3 shows a short description of the variables used for our analysis of school choice, together with the basic summary statistics. Note that for the dummy variables, the mean is the proportion of individuals in the sample with characteristics coded as one.

Families are classified into three mutually exclusive groups depending on the main language spoken at home: Basque (21%), Spanish (76%), or Other (neither Spanish nor Basque, which account for 3% of the sample). In this latter group, speakers of other official autonomous languages are included together with immigrants from other non-Spanish speaking countries. This is an important point of consideration, given that during the last two decades there has been a sizeable inflow of immigrants from Spanish speaking countries (Latin America) to the Basque Country. Their children therefore represent a considerable percentage of the total student body, mostly in public schools. This is the main reason why regarding the demographics of the family, there are dummy variables indicating whether the
The educational levels of both parents are defined according to the
International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) of 1997, which is a scale index ranging from 0 to 6, with 0 being non-education and 6 denoting second stage tertiary education (master and PhD). Family wealth is also an index variable, constructed by PISA 2012, which is based on students’ responses to whether they have certain assets or possessions at home, such as a room of their own, number of bathrooms, Internet access, TVs, etc. We have data on family structure as well, a dummy variable indicating whether the household consists of a traditional two-parent family or not. Family structure has already been shown to have an impact on school performance (e.g. Glick and White, 2004; Martin, 2012), so we expect it to be linked to school choice too.

Another index variable coded by PISA 2012 is home educational resources, which is constructed using answers to questions such as if students have a desk and a quiet place to study, a computer for schoolwork, and books; among other things. Lastly, we have a dummy variable indicating whether the student has any siblings or not.
4. Empirical Results

To measure the probability of parents choosing a certain type of school, we estimate a multinomial logit model, with the categorical variable school type/model as the dependent variable, and the set of explanatory variables from Table 3 as regressors. Testing for the statistical significance of individual variables across all category pairs shows that all the explanatory variables mentioned are significant at the ten percent level, except for another language spoken at home (relative to the base, Spanish spoken at home) and siblings. These results are shown in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Chi Sq.</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language spoken at home is:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basque (1=yes)</td>
<td>588.81</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, neither Spanish nor Basque (1=yes)</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of birth is the Basque Country for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student (1=yes)</td>
<td>19.11</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother (1=yes)</td>
<td>29.62</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father (1=yes)</td>
<td>14.73</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family is immigrant (1=yes)</td>
<td>14.92</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level of the:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>14.38</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>39.08</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wealth level of the family  
210.87  <0.01

Family structure consists of two parents (1=yes)  
10.97  0.05

Home educational resources  
17.18  <0.01

Does the student have any siblings (1=yes)  
8.77  0.12

In order to ensure that the categories defined in the outcome variable really are different from one another, we also test whether the alternatives can be combined (that is, we test whether all coefficients except intercepts associated with a given pair of alternatives are equal to zero). The result of this test yields p-values smaller than 0.01 for every pair; hence, we can determine at a 99% significance level that the six alternatives of school ownership and language model cannot be combined.

We will not show the estimated parameters and the marginal effects of the different explanatory variables due to the high number of them (5x12=60 marginal effects). Moreover, the value of the marginal effects depends on the value of the explanatory variables and on the coefficients for each school type/model. That is why the marginal effects do not necessarily have the same sign as the corresponding coefficient and their interpretation is not straightforward. Instead, we interpret our results using changes in the probability of choosing a specific school.
model or type depending on different explanatory variables. This offers insight similar to marginal effects, but the effects are measured with respect to a benchmark family and with a flexible choice regarding independent variable change.

Figure 2 shows the change in the probability of choosing a certain type of school and language model with respect to the probability of choosing that outcome with the following benchmark: language spoken at home is Spanish, birthplace of student, mother and father is the Basque Country, the family status is non-immigrant, the family structure consists of two parents, and the student has no siblings. The remaining variables, which are indices and therefore quantitative (educational level of the parents, wealth, and home educational resources), are set to their mean values as the benchmark. All changes presented in Figure 2 are calculated as a discrete change (0/1) for the dummy variables and as a standard deviation change for the index variables, all other variables remaining constant at the base (Long and Freese, 2006).

Therefore, in Figure 2 we can observe how, for example, a change from zero to one in the “Home language Basque”; that is, a change from speaking Spanish at home to speaking Basque at home, increases the probability of families choosing the Basque model in private schools (outcome 6) by about 0.27 and public schools
(outcome 3) by about 0.13. At the same time, it also decreases the probability of choosing the Spanish and Mixed language models; all other variables remaining constant at the specified benchmark family. Comparing all of the changes and taking into account that there are 0/1 changes and standard deviation ones in the mix, one can see how the biggest changes in probability come from the language spoken at home – Basque, Spanish, or other; as well as an increase in wealth.

**Figure 2. Effect of a change in probability with respect to the benchmark family.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home lang. Basque-0/1</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home lang. Other-0/1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family wealth-std</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Basque C. student-0/1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Basque C. mother-0/1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Basque C. father-0/1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-immigrant family-0/1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educ. level father-std</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educ. level mother-std</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-parent family-0/1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home educ. resources-std</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student has siblings-0/1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vertical line represents **benchmark family**: Home language Spanish; mean wealth; birthplace of student, mother, father is Basque Country; family is non-immigrant; mean educational level of parents; family consists of two parents; mean educational resources; student has no siblings.

1 Public Spanish 4 Private Spanish
2 Public Mixed 5 Private Mixed
3 Public Basque 6 Private Basque
Besides the language variables, the largest effect in terms of a change in probability comes from the variable wealth. Given the base, the probability of choosing private Spanish or private Mixed increases as the level of wealth increases. If we switch the base to Basque-speaking homes, as wealth increases so does the probability of choosing private Basque schools. This effect of wealth will be explored further later on.

There also appears to be an effect from being born in the Basque Country for all three –student, mother, and father– in favor of Basque language model schools, both public and private; though the size of the effect is much smaller than that of the language spoken at home and wealth.

Since the rest of the variables are not that important in terms of the size of the effect, for the remainder of the analysis we focus on the most important ones: language, wealth, immigration status, and birthplace. We also include one of the variables that did not appear to be important in Figure 2, educational level of the father, and show how the probability of choosing certain outcomes remains very much constant through changes in the educational level, but only for the Basque-speaking families.
Figure 3 plots the probability of choosing a certain outcome with respect to family wealth, for each of the three mutually exclusive home language groups: Basque, Spanish, and Other (neither). The remaining variables are fixed at the benchmark family specified in Figure 2. In all three cases, the probability of choosing public Basque decreases as wealth increases, though which outcomes are favored instead of public Basque depends on the language group. As one would expect, for the Basque-speaking group the probability of choosing public Basque decreases in favor of choosing private Basque. The probability of choosing language models Spanish or Mixed are near zero regardless of the wealth level.

For the Spanish-speaking group (Figure 3b), as wealth increases, the parents are divided between those who favor private Spanish and those who lean towards private Mixed, the latter having a higher probability. Many parents, even if they are Spanish-speaking, wish for their children to be educated at least partly in Basque, given the work environment and the need for speaking the Basque language if they continue to live in the Basque Country. Knowledge of the Basque language is nowadays compulsory at a C1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (i.e. at an advanced or proficient level) for almost all civil servants, including administrative staff, doctors, and teachers.
The group who speaks neither Basque nor Spanish at home (Figure 3c), however, appears to choose private schools with the Basque language model over Spanish and even Mixed. It seems other language speaking families are choosing to imitate Basque-speaking families instead of Spanish speaking families as one might have expected; perhaps in an attempt to better integrate their children into the workforce. This happens around mean levels of wealth, however. As the level of
wealth increases, Other-speaking families behave more like Spanish speaking families.

The underlying issue here is that, given a low wealth level –i.e. when the parents cannot afford to send their children to private school– they really do not have much of a choice: the vast majority of the public schools offer only the Basque language model, as shown in Table 1. However, when parents do have an income level that allows them to send their children to private school and therefore, to choose between the three language models, families will choose taking into consideration the language they speak at home. This is the typical situation of class stratification caused by parents having the possibility of choosing schools, which has already been widely described in the literature for different school settings and countries.

Figure 4 shows the effect the birthplace of the mother has on the probability of choosing a certain school type/language model, again, depending on the main language spoken at home, and considering the other variables at the base level previously specified. As seen in Figure 4a, for Basque-speaking families, whether the mother is born in the Basque Country or not does not affect the choice: they choose the Basque language model pretty consistently. For Spanish-speaking or
other language speaking families, however, the probability of choosing the Basque language model –either public or private– increases if the mother is born in the Basque Country.

**Figure 4. Effect of the mother's birthplace on the school choice.**

**Figure 4a. Home language**

- Basque

**Figure 4b. Home language**

- Spanish

**Figure 4c. Home language Other**

In a similar way to Figure 4, Figure 5 shows the effect being an immigrant family has on choosing a certain school type. This effect is basically non-significant for Basque-speaking families, as they tend to choose the Basque language model.
regardless of other characteristics. For the Spanish-speaking group, we observe how being a non-immigrant family results in an increased probability of choosing private Mixed, and a decrease in the probability of choosing public Basque. More than likely, the results can be explained because in this Figure 5b we are identifying Latin-American immigrants, who are the biggest foreign community in the Basque Country. Figure 5c shows, once again, how for a mean level of wealth Other-speaking families imitate to an extent what Basque-speaking families do.

In general, wealth seems to dictate much of the choice: for low levels of wealth, when they cannot afford private schools, parents send their children to public schools and by extension (given the vast majority of Basque public schools) to model Basque. That is, low-income families do not really have much of a choice.

There also appears to be an asymmetry in terms of the language: Basque-speaking families choose Basque model schools, but the other two language groups do not systematically choose the Spanish language model. They have a higher probability of choosing the Mixed language model instead, wishing for their children to learn at least some Basque so as not to reduce their options in the Basque Country workforce as they grow into adults.
This asymmetry is also present in terms of the determinant factors behind the school choice decision, since some of the family characteristics seem to have an effect on the probability of choosing a certain outcome for the Spanish-speaking group but not for the Basque-speaking one. As an example of these differences in determinants, in Figure 6 we show the effect of the father's educational level on the choice of school type and model. This variable has already been shown to be relevant for school choice, e.g. Butler et al. (2013). Although it does not result in a
change in probability for the Basque-speaking group, it does affect the school choice both for Spanish and Other-speaking families.

**Figure 6. Effect of the father's educational level on the school choice.**

**Figure 6a. Home language Basque**

**Figure 6b. Home language Spanish**

**Figure 6c. Home language Other**

**Legend**

In Figures 6b and 6c we observe how as the level of education of the father increases, so does the probability of choosing private Spanish or Mixed schools, and the probability of choosing language model Basque is reduced. The same results (not presented here) are observed when checking the mother’s educational levels.
This seems to suggest that the option of having Basque as the sole language of instruction mitigates the effect on the class stratification typically caused by parental school choice.

5. Conclusions

The present work analyzes the school choice in the Basque Country by means of a multinomial logit using data from PISA 2012. The main results indicate that the biggest influence on the decision of school type (public or private) and language model (Basque, Spanish, or Mixed) come from the wealth level of the family as well as the language spoken at home, respectively. The effect of wealth on the choice between public versus private is neither surprising nor new, and in line with previous findings in the literature.

Note however that although the schools under the educational accords are considered private in Spain, they share many similar characteristics to the (public) charter schools in the United States. Both school types are publicly funded but independent schools established by parents or other community groups. Therefore, and since 98% of the private schools in our sample are actually under the educational accords, our finding that a higher level of wealth increases the
probability of parents choosing a private school coincides with other findings in the literature regarding charter schools (Butler et al., 2013).

Other than the effect of wealth or the language spoken at home, the remaining variables which we thought a priori would have an effect on the school choice decision like mother’s, father’s and student’s birthplace, immigration status, or the parents’ education level, only have the expected effect for families who speak Spanish or another (non-Basque) language at home. The decision made by families who speak Basque is not influenced by these characteristics; that is, if a family speaks Basque at home it will choose the Basque language model, regardless of the other characteristics. This difference between non-Basque and Basque speaking families is probably due to their strong sense of cultural identity.

Our findings also show that the choices made regarding the language model do not appear to be in accordance to the linguistic polarization of the mother tongue existing in the Basque Country, which is around 48% (Gardeazabal, 2011). This percentage contrasts with the proportion of students enrolled in the Basque language model, which is over 60% of the total student body and increasing, plus an additional 20% enrolled in the Mixed language model as seen in Figure 1. The likely explanation behind this decision is the language policy for civil servants in the
Basque Country coupled with the high level of unemployment in the area, currently around 16% and even higher for young workers according to the National Statistics Institute in Spain.

Given these two factors, families who do not use Basque at home frequently still choose either the Basque or Mixed language models in order to ensure their children have more options in the future regarding the workforce. They make this choice even if it means having more difficulties to help children with their homework, and sometimes at the expense of not properly learning additional languages like English (Basque Government, 2011).

Another reason behind the high levels of enrollment in the Basque language model in recent years might be the fact that the Basque Government wanted students enrolled in said language model (or in the Mixed language model with at least half of the subjects in Basque) to be exempt from the Basque language certification test required for civil servants. However, there was consensus among the Euskaltzaindia (the official Basque language academy) that the mentioned requirement did not guarantee the knowledge level required to pass the test (C1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, i.e. advanced or proficient users). Eventually, the Basque Government decided to
change the decree draft, and now students from the language model Basque or in the Mixed language model with at least half of the subjects in Basque are exempt from the B2 level exam. For the C1 certification, a college degree with at least half of the credits in Basque is required (Basque Government, 2012). Still, many consider it easier to study in Basque in college so as to be exempt from the examination than to actually pass the certification test, given the high failure rates of the exam (more than fifty percent). Of course, in order to be able to study in Basque in college you more than likely had to have studied in either the Basque or the Mixed language model.

Giving parents an array of school choices has been and still is supported by many state administrations; nevertheless, this policy has not always been free of criticism. The most important one is probably the increased risk of stratification by race and class (Levin, 1998), since the choice is usually linked to the socioeconomic status of the family (Smith and Meier, 1995; Buddin et al., 1998, Lankford & Wyckoff, 2001). This can also be said of the educational system in the Basque Country; as shown in the previous section, the probability of choosing private schools increases with family wealth. However, the class stratification is moderated by the choice of the language of instruction, given that the results show that the probability of
choosing a public school for Basque-speaking families is not affected by typical variables like parents’ educational level, birthplace, or immigration status.

Many parents in the Basque Country recognize that a correct knowledge of Basque is an unavoidable part of their children’s education and as such, they consider public schools with Basque as the language of instruction the appropriate way to achieve this goal. It is true, however, that this attenuating effect is probably enforced by the strong cultural identity of part of the Basque population, as previously mentioned; and by an area-specific labor market with a high percentage of civil servants requiring knowledge of the language. It is, nevertheless, an interesting and quite unique situation of reduction of class stratification in an educational system obtained through a rare official language.
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