

Introduction

Since 597AD, private schools exist as an especially crucial factor in contributing to England's economy and society (Green et al 2010). Private schools differ from state schools in their funding and administration – the former being financially supported through students' tuition and independently administered, and the latter receiving public funding and is administered by the Government (School Advisor).

To justify the personal expenses private schools would produce, parents invest in private education so their children can benefit from high quality consumption services such as sports facilities, music, and cultural goods, academic (qualifications and grades), non-academic outcomes ('soft' skills such as better communication and leadership), as well as networking with elites ('old boys' or 'old girls' network) that private schools can offer to a higher satisfaction compared to state schools (Green et al 2010).

This obviously advantages private school students in future employment and career progression as they are much more likely to obtain high earning, with high social value jobs compared to state school students (Green et al 2010).

Additionally, private schools perpetuate the divide between classes and social mobility. It creates educational inequality as the wealthy pay for access to better educational quality, opportunities, and connections that the middle and low income simply cannot afford to do so. Educational inequality can be defined as the unequal distribution of educational resources such as teaching quality, technology, access to academic opportunities, funding etc. (School Advisor).

As such, given the importance private schools hold in society and in perpetuating and maintaining educational inequality, research into differences between private school and state schools holds merit. The comparison between private schools and selective elite state schools in particular should be compared because both types are similar in being selective and holding prestige in society while differing in the requirements to gain entry.

The role most important to the management of schools is with the School Head. They are responsible for strategic and budgetary planning, staffing, and the teaching programme (Trinity College Dublin). They are central to school improvement and are second in their influence on student outcomes. Though indirectly, school heads heavily influence student outcomes in the individual, organisational, policy contexts (Day et al 2014). They are integral in the construction of the school environment

Therefore, my research aims to explore the social network of school heads of private schools and elite state schools to identify differences and theorize with support of current literature how these differences can lead to educational inequality.

Research question

To what extent does the social network of School Heads of private schools contribute to educational inequality when compared to selective elite state schools in England?

Objectives

- 1) Create a database of school heads of private schools and elite state schools. This database can include information but is not limited to:
 - University attended
 - Academic career progression and history
 - If privately school
 - University degree (subject, whether it is a BSc/ BA/ LLB)
 - Extent of formal education (bachelors, masters, doctor, PhD)
 - If a Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and/or Initial Teacher Training (ITT) was obtained (mandatory in state schools but not in private schools)
 - Number of relevant career relationships
 - Nature of relevant career relationships (considering factors such as time known, depth of relationship, frequency of contact)
 - Time acting as school head
 - Vision for school

Information can be obtained through secondary sources (LinkedIn, school website) and primary sources such as through questionnaires and/or semi-structured interviews (online or physical). Semi-structured interviews amplify the strengths of qualitative data and allow the interviewer to fully explore the avenues the questions ask in an in-depth manner. Given the personal nature of the information, all data will be anonymous, and consent will be asked for. The database will be recorded on Excel.

- 2) Conduct social network analysis (SNA) on the database with project supervisor.

SNA is useful as it produces an objective, replicable representation of the community of school heads and allows comparisons to extract meaningful conclusions regarding the role of private schools in creating educational inequality.

- 3) Depending on time constraints, the application of the results of this research could be used to write a policy brief.

Summary

My research proposes that by investigating the social network of school heads, given their role forming and maintaining the school environment, by comparing the differences in private school heads and elite state school heads we can better facilitate knowledge and gain a novel perspective about the policies that form the basis of England's education systems and education in a wider context.

References (in order of appearance)

- <https://schooladvisor.my/articles/difference-public-schools-private-schools>
- <http://cee.lse.ac.uk/cee%20dps/ceedp115.pdf>
- <https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/EducationDevelopmentTrust/files/a3/a359e571-7033-41c7-8fe7-9ba60730082e.pdf>
- <https://www.tcd.ie/Secretary/academic-governance/head-of-school.php>

