ABSTRACT

URUGUAYAN PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT EDUCATIONAL SEGREGATION IN
URUGUAYAN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY

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Educational segregation has been increasing across public elementary schools in Uruguay producing negative effects on students' outcomes, performance, and opportunities. It also affects social cohesion. Previous studies detect the presence of educational segregation in Uruguay, identify the predominance of socioeconomic segregation in education in the country, and study the relationships between public and private institutions. A review of the extant literature demonstrates there is a gap in the exploration of the possible factors that contribute to the phenomenon. Moreover, there is a need to know the perceptions and experiences of Uruguayan families about the influence of these factors in their decision-making process of school selection in the interior of the country.

This qualitative case study explores Uruguayan public urban elementary school parents' perceptions and experiences about the influence of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in the decision-making process of first grade students' school registration in Uruguayan public elementary schools. Six online focus groups which included 27 participants and two unstructured interviews with three of those same participants were conducted. Nine themes emerged from the findings which were classified in contextual, sociocultural and institutional factors. Among the contextual factors the findings refer to the role of the school neighborhood in school selection and the self-definition of the neighborhood families and the relation to education.

Regarding sociocultural factors the themes were the proximity between school and home as a priority, the influence of familiar traditions when choosing a school, the role of staff performance and school conception when choosing a school, peer effect: the relevance of classmates, and type of school: the avoidance of full-time schools. Finally, in terms of institutional factors were institutional requirements for students' enrollment and the parents´ preferences, priorities and requirements about the school building.

Based on the themes identified and analyzed, it was possible to conclude that the mechanisms that the participants used to register their children in Uruguayan public schools were apparently flexible and therefore the participants perceived that they were choosing the school of their preference. However, it was detected that there were contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors linked to the socioeconomic status of the participating families that limited and partly determined this choice. It is also considered that these factors contribute to the consolidation and increase of educational segregation in Uruguayan public schools. This thesis proposes a discussion and analysis of these three factors from the perspectives of the participants.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Educational or school segregation is defined as the unequal distribution of students in schools according to their personal, sociocultural, and socioeconomic characteristics (Allen & Vignoles, 2007; Dupriez, 2010; Frankel & Volij, 2011; Johnston et al., 2004; Murillo, 2016). Studies show that school segregation has diverse negative effects on the most disadvantaged students (Bonal & Bellei, 2018; Dupirez et al., 2008; Thrupp et al, 2002) and society in general because social groups become homogeneous and people circulation and interaction diminishes, promoting the ignorance about who "the others," are increasing stereotypes, sociocultural and socioeconomic gaps, and social fragmentation (López, 2013; Rossetti, 2014). This thesis focused on socioeconomic segregation in Uruguayan education because is the most aligned to social inequity (Murillo & Martínez-Garrido, 2017b). According to Murillo & Martínez-Garrido (2017b), socioeconomic segregation in schools means that children with less resources or low socioeconomic resources have been clustered in some schools, whereas children from high socioeconomic levels are grouped together in schools. Research has revealed that clustering students in schools based on their socioeconomic background negatively affects students' educational performance, the development of social capital and intercultural friendship networks, the reduction of prejudice and violence, and the sense of democracy (Bonal & Bellei, 2018; Huges et al., 2013; Tropp & Prenovost, 2008).

The study of students' distribution in schools by socioeconomic level is crucial and must include the analysis of the influence and effects of parents' decisions in the school selection, especially in societies where socioeconomic, cultural, and symbolic fragmentation is present (Krüger, 2019). Many countries, including Uruguay, have increased the possibilities of school choice by parents and the flexibilization on the demand for certain requirements for students' registration (INEEd, 2022a; Musset, 2012). Hence, studying educational segregation by students' socioeconomic background requires the consideration of parents' school choice possibility to understand the educational inequities in the educational setting (Bonal & Bellei, 2018).

To appreciate the phenomenon of educational segregation it is also necessary to explore the interaction among contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors that can influence parents' school decisions about school selection (Bellei, 2013; Bonal & Bellei, 2018; Córdoba et al., 2020). According to the authors, the contextual factors refer to the scenarios in which educational institutions are located, including residential segregation, pockets of poverty, migratory movements, and other demographic trends. Similarly, the sociocultural factors include the appreciations, preferences, perceptions, and strategies that families use to enroll their children in certain schools of their preference. Finally, the institutional factors describe the educational policies that regulate the functioning of educational institutions, favoring or not a diverse and equitable formation of schools (Bellei, 2013; Carrasco et al., 2015; Córdoba et al., 2020). The equitable distribution of students can be measured assessing the imbalance with which the students from diverse socioeconomic status (SES) are distributed into the schools (evenness) and the probability of interacting with students of different social categories within a

given school (exposure) (Bellei, 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2009). These dimensions and the interaction of the presented factors produce unique scenarios of school segregation by students' socioeconomic background depending on the structural elements that characterize the diverse contexts (Bonal & Bellei, 2018). Hence, research on educational segregation should focus on particular historical, social, and institutional educational contexts to understand the complex factors that lead to the unequitable distribution of students (Bonal & Bellei, 2018).

The study of educational segregation in Latin America has been a priority in the last decade mainly due to the increase in socioeconomic inequities, migratory movements, residential segregation, and the implementation of new educational policies that have favored the differentiation of social groups in which low-income populations have less opportunities of academic success (Bonal & Bellei, 2018). The rate of unequal distribution of students in Latin America varies across countries in the region (OECD, 2019). Additionally, research suggests that Latin American schools have higher rates of segregation compared to other regions in the world (Arcidiácono et al., 2014; Krüger, 2019, 2020; Murillo, 2016). Vázquez (2012) explains that the dissimilarity rate to measure socioeconomic segregation in schools in Latin American countries varies between 0.53 and 0.26, being the most segregated Perú (0.53), Chile (0.52), Mexico (0.49), Argentina (0.46), Colombia (0.46), Uruguay (0.44) and Brazil (0.42). According to Carrillo (2020), 80% of the studies conducted in the last two decades examining school segregation in Latin America identified the socioeconomic status as the main element of segregation in the region.

There is no doubt about the existence of a strong educational segregation in Latin America (Bellei, 2013; Rossetti, 2014) and especially in Uruguay where increasing rates of

socioeconomic segregation in education is evidenced (Murillo & Graña, 2020; INEEd, 2021). According to the National Institute of Statistics (INE) (2021), 42% of poor people in Uruguay are children under the age of 12. Uruguay provides free elementary education for all students through public schools distributed all around the territory. Uruguayan public schools are conceived as a place where students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds work together and learn from each other (Gasparini et al., 2011; Jaramillo et al., 2020; Rebolledo, 1995). However, current research shows that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds attend different educational institutions than students from high socioeconomic contexts (INEEd, 2021; Krüger, 2020). This trend of unequal distribution broadenstudents' disadvantages as it hinders the possibility to be enriched by others' sociocultural knowledge and experience (INEEd, 2021). Unequal distribution of students reproduces inequalities, constitutes an obstacle to the growth of cohesive societies, and reinforces social segmentation (Bonall & Bellei, 2018; Rossetti, 2014). According to Strauss (1984) social life implies the existence of social worlds or sets of common activities or interests constrained together by a network of communication. These social worlds differentiate into subworlds in a process called social segmentation that becomes problematic when some subworlds have less resources, organization, membership, general influence, and are in opposition to the other ones (Strauss, 1984).

Uruguay is an interesting case of study as it has been one of the countries in Latin America that has experienced a steady increase in school segregation in the last 30 years (Arcidiácono et al., 2014; Ramírez & Vázquez, 2020). Recent Uruguayan studies provide a limited overview of the high rates of school segregation by socioeconomic level. Some studies have investigated school segregation in the different regions of Uruguay while other studies have

focused on educational segregation in the capital city, Montevideo (Bogliaccini & Rodríguez, 2015; Carrillo, 2020; Giambruno, 2020). Other studies examined segregationist relationships between public and private institutions and found a connection between educational segregation and residential segregation (Bogliaccini & Rodríguez, 2015; Kaztman & Retamoso, 2007; Malmberg et al., 2014; Ramírez, 2021). In all cases, the findings contribute to the understanding of socioeconomic segregation in education in Uruguay but are limited in the exploration of the possible factors that contribute to the phenomenon (INEEd, 2021). Furthermore, the literature reviewed on school segregation in Uruguay is scarce and mainly focused on higher education (Bogliaccini & Rodríguez, 2015). Additionally, no specific studies on the perception that Uruguayan families about students' distribution in schools were found. Students' distribution among schools and the possibility for parents to choose a school is a multifaceted and controversial sociocultural phenomenon that combines the parents' management of information about the educational system, their evaluation criteria of schools, and the values that they share in relation to educational institutions (Carrasco et al., 2015; Córdoba et al., 2020; Musset, 2012). School choice and students' distribution among schools, influences school segregation since families do not approach this process under the same conditions (Bunar, 2010; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016; Van Zanten, 2015). Therefore, more research is needed to promote a deeper understanding of the processes that lead to socioeconomic segregation in education in Uruguayan elementary public schools (INEEd, 2021).

Background of the Study

The Uruguayan educational system is centrally managed by the National Administration of Public Education (ANEP) regulated under the state General Education law (Ley General de

Educación No. 18437, 2008) (Bogliaccini & Rodríguez, 2015; Radinger & Boeskens, 2021). The

ANEP and its central governing council (CODICEN) elaborate, implement, and develop

educational policies at different educational levels (Santiago et al., 2016). The education system

is based on four subsystems that depend on the CODICEN. The first is the General Directorate

of Initial and Primary Education (DGEIP) which deals with education at the initial and

elementary level. The second is the General Directorate of Secondary Education (DGES) in

charge of basic secondary and upper secondary education. In third place is the General

Directorate of Higher Technical Education (DGETP) in charge of technical education. Finally,

there is the General Directorate of Teacher Training (DGFD) that deals with the training of

teachers in the national territory. This study focuses on the first subsystem or DGEIP, that

guarantees access to secular, free of charge and compulsory elementary public education

(Kindergarten through 6th grade) (Radinger & Boeskens, 2021) but especially focuses on public

elementary schools that encompass children between 6 and 12 years of age.

In 2020, 244,303 children attended elementary public schools in Uruguay distributed in

an average of 22.7 students per classroom (ANEP, 2021). Public elementary schools' principals

and teachers have little autonomy to modify curriculums and programs or to make organizational

and administrative decisions (Fernández, 2020; Radinger & Boeskens, 2021). Educational

principals lead the organizational, pedagogical, and community work in coordination with

superintendents and a school leadership team. Teachers are in charge of a group of students and

have autonomy to select the approach to implement the assigned curriculum. Parents, students,

and the community are allowed to participate in the organization of sociocultural activities,

school councils (not yet developed in all schools), and parent-led parent associations whose main aim is to raise school funds (Radinger & Boeskens, 2021; Santiago et al., 2016).

According to ANEP-DGEIP (2021), urban public elementary schools are classified according to the socioeconomic context of the students who attend it. The sociocultural context is divided into five groups or quintiles. Each quintile groups 20% of the schools in such a way that quintile 1 (Q1) is composed of 20% of schools from the most vulnerable socioeconomic context and quintile 5 (Q5) involves 20% of schools from the highest socioeconomic context. This information appears more expanded in Chapter II.

The criteria for the distribution of students by school are unclear and even contradictory (Giambruno, 2020). According to Article 68 in the Uruguayan Constitution (1967), parents have the right to choose teachers and educational institution they wish for their children. However, there are three regulations of the General Directorate of Initial and Primary Education that regulate the distribution of students by school radio according to the proximity of their home to the school (ANEP-CEP, 1992a; ANEP-CEP, 1992b; ANEP-CEP, 1999). Therefore, the criterion of student distribution has been made more flexible and negotiable between parents and principals who discuss and study each situation to ensure attendance (Giambruno, 2020). Similarly, Bartholo (2013) argues that the lack of a clear and transparent criterion in the distribution of students can favor both the selection of students by schools as well as the strategies of parents to select the most prestigious schools for their children.

Statement of the Problem

Educational or school segregation is defined as the unequal distribution of students in schools according to their personal or social characteristics (Allen & Vignoles, 2007; Dupriez, 2010). The unequal distribution of students affects students' learning opportunities, academic achievement, and social cohesion (Bellei, 2013; INEEd, 2021; Murillo & Martínez-Garrido, 2020; Rossetti, 2014). According to Ramírez and Vázquez (2020) Uruguay is one of the countries in Latin America that has experienced a greater increase in educational segregation in the last decades. In Uruguay, research studies show that the rates of educational segregation reinforce inequalities by students' socioeconomic background and contribute to social segmentation (Bracco, 2019; Coll et al., 2014; INEEd, 2021; Kaztman, 2001; Rossetti, 2014).

The literature suggests that educational segregation is a complex and collective phenomenon that involves contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors (Córdoba et al., 2020). However, there is limited research on the perceptions of the parents that are involved in the decision-making process of students' distribution in schools (Bellei, 2013; INEEd, 2021). Therefore, this study aimed to explore Uruguayan elementary parents' perceptions on the influence of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in the decision-making process of first grade students' distribution in public elementary schools in Uruguay. The exploration of the perceptions about the influence on school segregation of these three factors requires a qualitative research approach to obtain rich and meaningful data. Thus, the use of a case study design optimized the understanding of the phenomenon.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore Uruguayan public urban elementary school parents' perceptions and experiences about the influence of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in the decision-making process of first grade students' school registration in Uruguayan public elementary schools.

Research Questions

The following research question and sub questions will guide this study:

- According to Uruguayan elementary school parents, what are their perceptions and experiences about the decision-making process of registering in public elementary schools?

  - According to parents, how do contextual factors influence their decision-making process of school selection?

  - According to parents, how do sociocultural factors influence their decision-making process of school selection?

  - According to parents, how do institutional factors influence their decision-making process of school selection?

Method

The proposed research study utilized a qualitative case study design to allow for a deeper understanding of the perceptions and lived experiences related to a specific phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017; Stake, 1995). According to Stake (1995), a qualitative approach

assumes that knowledge is constructed by people making meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon. The use of a qualitative case study design seeks for deep descriptions of a specific phenomenon from multiple bounded systems and a comparative analysis to study the trend with greater detail. The data collected was analyzed looking for patterns and themes through thematic and narrative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Riessman, 2002).

Significance of the Study

Educational segmentation negatively affects students' academic outcomes, promotes educational inequity, and hinders social cohesion and integration (Giambruno, 2020). Unequal distribution of students leads to the formation of distant social groups causing a loss of common socialization and a fracture in social networking (Dussel, 2013; Rossetti, 2014). Additionally, Katzman and Retamoso (2006, 2007) argue that social integration and equitable distribution of students in schools supports achievement expectations shaped by diverse classroom peers and the development of cognitive and social skills that can only be learned in a heterogeneous group of students. The authors agree that equitable distribution of students generates dealings with students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, that enhances their networking opportunities, information access, belongingness, and citizenry skills.

It is necessary to know and understand the phenomenon of educational segregation in Uruguayan public schools to design public policies that aim to promote a more equitable educational system (INEEd, 2021; Valenzuela et al., 2014). Uruguayan policy makers and board administrators will benefit from the findings of the study by broadening their understanding of the role of underlying contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in the school selection that promote educational segregation in Uruguay (Bellei, 2013; Córdoba et al., 2020).

Furthermore, teachers and families would benefit from the findings of the study as it provided them with a better understanding of the role of the three factors in school selection. Furthermore, this study will serve as literature for future research exploring educational segregation in Uruguay and other educational contexts.

Summary

This research study aimed to explore Uruguayan elementary school parents' perceptions and experiences about the influence of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in the decision-making process of first grade students' school registration in public elementary schools in Uruguay. Chapter I outlined the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, proposed methodology, and significance of the study. Chapter II will provide an overview of existing and current research on educational segregation and the Uruguayan context. Chapter III will explain the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis approach. Chapter IV will include the findings obtained during the data analysis, and Chapter V will show the discussion, implications, recommendations, and conclusions obtained.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section addresses the theoretical framework of the study and provides an overview of current research on the definition of educational segregation, the types and dimensions of educational segregation, the peer effect, possible causes of educational segregation, and the situation in Uruguay. This literature review also discusses the gap in the literature that supports the proposed research study.

Theoretical Framework

This study used Bourdieu's (1977) social and cultural reproduction theory as the main theoretical framework. This theory is recognized as one of the most outstanding explanations about the persistence of social inequalities through successive generations and in diverse fields (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). In the construction of this theory, Bourdieu (1997) incorporates some compelling concepts such as economic capital, social capital, and the most salient concept of cultural capital, that are mutually constitutive and shape the path of social reproduction. Lareau and Weininger (2003) define cultural capital as the competencies, processes, expectations, intellectual and social skills, and agency that allow a subject to adapt to relevant institutional contexts. Additionally, cultural capital includes skills or abilities developed in academic and technical settings (Lareau and Weininger, 2003). Similarly, Swidler (1986) states

that culture should be understood as a tool kit of strategies that people use for action. Furthermore, the concept of cultural capital shows culture as a resource that

provides access to certain social conditions and may be transmitted through generations (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). It is necessary to recognize that all social groups possess cultural capital. However, dominant institutions such as schools (educational field) value some forms of this capital more than others, relativizing and monopolizing some cultural skills and competences that can generate benefits (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Hence, according to Bourdieu & Passeron (1977), class position and class culture are a form of cultural capital in the educational setting.

Bourdieu's (1997) theory also includes the concept of habitus as the preferences or dispositions learned that oriented the subject to think, act and feel in determinant ways in the social world. This durable and exchangeable schema of actions, perceptions, and beliefs are built within family socialization and conditioned by the position in the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 2002; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). It is necessary to recognize that habitus is not static or immutable; it can evolve in response to changing experiences and new circumstances (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014).

Finally, Bourdieu (1997) explored the concept of field related to the formal or informal norms that regulate a particular setting or activity. Fields are understood as structured spaces of circulation, production, and appropriation of diverse types of human capital (Swartz, 2020). For example, family and education are two relational fields that overlap and are subject to power struggles in order to establish who controls the capital and how this capital can be distributed in the field (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014).

In a broader sense, merging the concepts provided, and applying them in the educational setting, the cognitive and behavioral repertoires of middle or upper-class families become as dominant ideologies and has greater prevalence and acceptance within formal educational institutions than the working-class cultural capital, resulting in unequal educational and sociocultural outcomes that perpetuate imbalance among society and time (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Thus, dominant ideologies tend to impose their mastered skills as the necessary and required to succeed and govern society (Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

Another theory considered in this thesis is Freire's (1979) theory of oppression. Freire (1979) understands education as the continuous construction of a common world to people, where knowledge is built and not simply transmitted. According to Freire (1979), education is a tool that helps individuals transform their reality and free themselves from the oppressions of dominant and privileged groups. The author explains that the school has a transformative potential through an emphasis on reflection and critical thinking to create consciousness of power dynamics, making individuals cognizant of their situation as either oppressed or oppressors, and thus enable action to free themselves from oppression (Freire, 1979).

Oppression involves the prejudice and discrimination of one dominant social group against another minoritized group, reinforced by legal authority and institutional power (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). According to Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017), the imbalance between dominant and minoritized groups that conform society is usually perceived as normal and accepted by both groups. For example, dominant groups have no need to understand the experiences of the oppressed since they are the ones who impose their culture and have discourses to legitimize and internalize the dominance. Moreover, in the educational setting, dominant discourses are

disseminated segregating and marginalizing minority groups (Murillo & Martínez-Garrido, 2020).

Educational segregation is a complex term, commonly understood as a deliberate act of oppression (Young, 2011), hindering quality education as a human right, and legitimizing social inequities (Murillo & Martínez-Garrido, 2020). Educational segregation exists when the distribution of students by school is carried out according to social hierarchies that force a minority group of students to concentrate in certain educational institutions (Castells, 1999). These minority groups are composed of children and adolescents held in educational institutions because of their socioeconomic status, their immigrant position, ethnicity, learning difficulties, and learning disabilities (Murillo & Martinez-Garrido, 2020).

Definition of Educational Segregation

There is not a single and simple definition of educational segregation (Massey & Denton, 1988; Murillo & Graña, 2020). According to the authors there are three main conceptions of school or educational segregation proposed by diverse authors. First, they pose it as the unequal distribution of students in schools based on their personal characteristics or social conditions. This definition is related to the dimension of evenness (Murillo & Graña, 2020). Second, Croxford and Raffe (2013) explain that educational segregation can be defined as the degree of isolation or exposure of a student with respect to his or her minority group and is related to the exposure dimension. Finally, educational segregation can be understood as the percentage of variance of inequality within the school with respect to the total number of students (Benito & González-Baetbó, 2007; Murillo, 2016, OECD, 2010). In this study, educational segregation refers to the unequal distribution of students in schools based on their personal characteristics

(gender, ethnicity, capacity, academic performance) or social conditions (socioeconomic status, immigrant status) (Carrillo, 2020; Dupirez, 2010; Massey & Denton, 1988; Vázquez, 2016).

Murillo (2016) identifies three main types of school segregation. First, ethnocultural segregation is associated with ethnic-racial minorities and immigrant populations. Second, academic segregation refers to the distribution of students based on their academic results. Finally, socioeconomic segregation is considered as the unequal distribution of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds among schools (Rossetti, 2014) and is the type of school segregation addressed in this study.

As it was previously stated, a recent study developed by Carrillo (2020) reviews articles from 2006 to 2020 on the topic of educational segregation in Latin America and argues that 80% of the articles reviewed respond to socioeconomic segregation. An educational system is segregated by socioeconomic level when students are clustered in schools with peers of a similar socioeconomic status (Jenkins et al., 2008). Socioeconomic educational segregation involves power relationships between socioeconomic groups where some have the power to exclude others from certain spaces or the advantage to maintain privileged access to education (Dupirez et al., 2018).

Evenness and Exposure in Socioeconomic Segregation

Various researchers explain educational segregation from the dimensions of evenness and exposure (Hogrebe & Tate, 2019; Massey & Denton, 1989; Oka & Wong, 2014; Valenzuela et al., 2009) and both dimensions could be employed to explain educational segregation based on socioeconomic background (Bellei, 2013). Evenness is defined as the degree of imbalance with which the members of a group are distributed into different educational institutions (Valenzuela

et al., 2009) while exposure refers to the probability of interacting with members of different groups or social categories within a given educational institution (Bellei, 2013). The use of both dimensions to explore educational segregation provides a robust and comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon (Oka & Wong, 2014). Educational institutions should promote evenness and exposure to reduce educational segregation. Figure 1 below shows the explanation and representations of the different intersections between evenness-clustering and exposure-isolation dimensions in an educational setting.
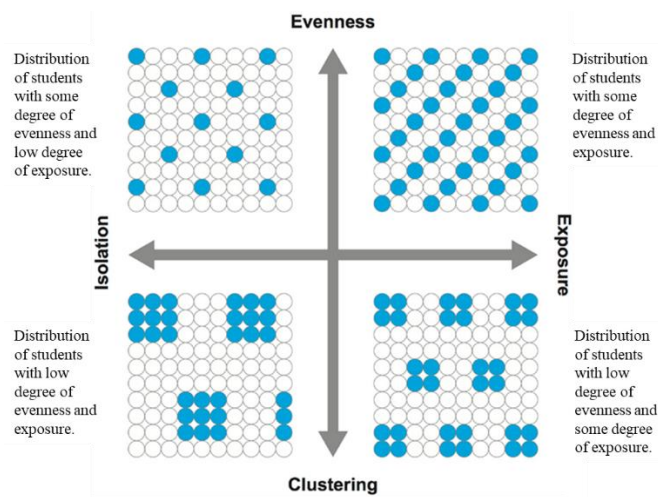
Figure 1: Intersection between evenness (evenness vs. clustering) and exposure (exposure vs. isolation) (adapted from Oka & Wong, 2014; Hogrebe & Tate, 2019).

Measuring segregation by the combination of evenness-clustering and exposure-isolation may allow to make the assumptions that in a socioeconomic segregation context, evenness measures describe the difference in average socioeconomic composition of schools among students with different socioeconomic status (Reardon, 2016). Following Reardon, (2016), exposure measures represent the isolation of minoritized socioeconomic disadvantaged students in a school and how they interact with the majority group or with each other (Gorard & Taylor, 2002). To better understand socioeconomic segregation, Gorard and Taylor (2002) provide a

simulation that considers two schools with the same number of students (n=100). If one school contains all the socioeconomic disadvantaged students and the other contains all the socioeconomic advantaged students, it could be said that the school system is totally segregated in terms of socioeconomic student status, being rates of evenness and exposure null, and locating the situation on the inferior left corner of the figure above (Figure 1). On the other hand, the situation of no segregation by students' socioeconomic status is located in the superior right corner of the figure 1 and occurs when both schools contain 50 socioeconomic disadvantaged students and 50 socioeconomic advantaged students. It is necessary to notice that in real life both situations are unlikely but are helpful to understand the definition of socioeconomic segregation.

Socioeconomic Status, Class, and Classism

The socioeconomic status of people is one of the many forms of social division that depends on the class to which they belong (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), class depends not only on economic income but rather on political power or the ability to influence decision-making and shape social institutions. Hence, class can be defined as a human construct that is part of a ranking measured according to income, wealth, social status, and power (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). When the class system becomes an oppressive system assigning different value to people according to their socioeconomic status (SES) and promoting inequities between classes, classism is present (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

According to Marx and Engels (1997), class division began during the agro-industrial revolution in which society was divided between those who owned the land and those who worked it. That old binary definition remains to this day although with some nuances including the owning class who inherit wealth, do not depend on income, and owns political power; the

middle class who work for income and have advanced education; the working class who work in more physical jobs for income and do not have high levels of education; and the poor who rely on governmental assistance to cover some basic needs (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). All these different class groups have different cultures and ideologies that are reproduced through school and media messages to perpetuate divisions (Apple, 1993; Leistyna, 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Educational Segregation and Socialization

Education creates opportunities for achieving a more just and inclusive society through students' socialization (Vázquez, 2012) which involves interacting and building relationships with students from different backgrounds (Wentzel, 2015). Socialization is the foundation of identity, and it is a practice that people cannot choose or avoid (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Bellei (2013) explains that true socialization occurs when students have the opportunity to be in contact with diverse peers. This kind of contact strengthens trust and social cohesion among students (Komatsu, 2019). According to Bellei (2013), contact with peers can have a direct (over the individual) and indirect (mediated by others) effect on students' educational context (environmental) and learning experiences (process). Peer effect is a complex phenomenon that involves classroom or school composition, the consideration of individual characteristics, teacher expectations and behavior, and school success related to educational achievements and academic results (Canales & Webb, 2018), impacting students' socialization as it is associated with how students' aspirations, motivations, and attitudes within a classroom or school can affect their peers' educational experiences, engagement, and outcomes (Bellei, 2013; Canales & Webb,

2018). Table 1 below exemplifies how the different kinds of peer effects interact affecting the individual and the educational environment.

Table 1.

Peer Effect Typology and Interactions (adapted from Bellei, 2013)

	Environmental	**Process**
Direct	Classroom/School climate	Teamwork
	Discipline	Peer tutoring
Indirect	Available resources for learning	Teacher expectations
	Community support	Class difficulty level

Research indicates that peer effect is a phenomenon to be analyzed to better understand educational segregation; however, there needs to be a consideration of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors that leads to educational segregation (Gasparini et al., 2011).

Factors in Educational Segregation

Current research identifies contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors as the main variables on educational segregation (Bellei, 2013; Córdoba et al., 2020; Rossetti, 2014). Each of these factors respond to the specificities of each country and each educational system (Bellei, 2013; INEEd, 2021). The contextual factors are related to characteristics of the setting in which educational institutions are immersed (Córdoba et al., 2020) such as residential segregation in the school neighborhood, location of poverty, settlement of immigrants, and other demographic trends (Bonal & Bellei, 2018). For example, when students from highly homogeneous

neighborhoods attend a school based on the proximity to their neighborhood the student population of the school becomes homogenous (Bellei, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2008; Kaztman & Retamoso, 2006; Rossetti, 2014). Contextual factors affect to a greater extent the most socioeconomically disadvantaged students as they lack resources to move to schools in other areas (INEEd, 2021). However, Córdoba et al. (2017) argues that contextual factors are not decisive because some families with the same socioeconomic level can travel different distances depending on the access, educational offer, and parents' preferences.

Sociocultural factors lead to educational segregation as they relate to school choice based on parents' religious affiliation, academic background, race, ethnicity, and social class (Carrasco et al., 2015; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016; Rossetti, 2014). The debates about school choice face two political positions (Musset, 2012). On one side, supporters of school choice argue that the possibility to choose a school reinforces the quality and equity of educational systems by promoting the competition among schools (Bonal & Zancajo, 2020; Chubb & Moe, 1990). On the other side, critics to school choice explain that these policies promote the selection of students by schools to obtain a better academic reputation and to increase their capacity of attraction in the educational market (Ball, 1998; Bonal & Zancajo, 2020; Van Zanten, 1996; West et al., 2004). Furthermore, authors explain that school choice enhances students' socioeconomic educational segregation because families do not select a school in the same financial and informational conditions being the less socioeconomic vulnerable families the most benefited (Boterman, 2013; Butler & Robson, 2003; Elaqua et al., 2013; Kye, 2018; van Zanten, 2003, 2015).

Despite the literature about school choice policies mainly focus on negative effects, it is necessary to recognize that many countries are experiencing a flexibilization of the students'

assignment process to schools while combining a geographical distribution considering students' residence with a variety of choice mechanisms that involve parents' right of selection (Musset, 2012; OECD, 2019; Waslander et al., 2010).

Finally, institutional factors relate to how educational systems are regulated to select students by schools (Bellei, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2008; Krichesky & Murillo, 2018; Rossetti, 2014). These factors involve exploring the extent to which educational policies favor educational segregation by assigning students in a homogeneous or heterogeneous way (Córdoba et al., 2020; INEEd, 2021). Additionally, the school selection of students affects students' learning because it contributes to define resources directed to institutions and teacher stability (Rossetti, 2014; Treviño et al., 2014; INEEd, 2021).

Effects of Educational Segregation

It has been shown that educational segregation affects students' educational opportunities shaping students' outcomes because of school composition (Benito et al., 2014). School composition is a multifactorial phenomenon that is related to educational segregation and depends on contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors (Córdoba et al., 2020). To better understand the effects of educational segregation by students' socioeconomic background it is necessary to analyze the effects in each kind of dimension.

Effects on Socialization

The effects of educational segregation in the contextual dimension impoverishes the cohesive role of the school as a space for socialization, contributing to exclusion and social disintegration (Jaume, 2013). Students of more disadvantaged socioeconomic context, known as

socioeconomic vulnerable students, usually attend local public schools whose students are in similar conditions, enhancing educational segregation (Krüger, 2020). Likewise, vulnerable students are the most affected by educational segregation since the chances of being benefited by the positive effects of the context could have implications in their immediate academic performance and future academic results (Alegre & Ferrer, 2010; Giambruno, 2020; Gorard & Smith, 2010).

Effects on Academic Achievements

In the sociocultural dimension the effects of educational segregation are related to the socioeconomic homogeneous composition of schools (Benito et al., 2014). Many studies have documented the importance of school composition and peer interactions on educational outcomes and equity (Coleman et al., 1996; Hattie, 2002; Perini, 2012). Homogeneous distribution of students based on socioeconomic background can promote discrimination in the educational institutions and hinder academic achievement and engagement among students (Benito et al., 2014; Caldas & Bankston, 1997; Canales & Webb, 2018; Duarte et al., 2009; Harris, 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2013; Van Laar & Sidanius, 2001). According to the authors, attending schools with high socioeconomic background classmates tends to impact positively on individual academic achievement independently on one's own socioeconomic status. The effect of socioeconomic background of peers on education predominates in the literature and can also affect the behavior, attitudes, and motivation of each student by contributing to generate a context more or less conducive to schoolwork (Krüger, 2020; Rumberger & Palardy; 2005; Sacerdote, 2011). Additionally, classroom composition influences the teaching methodology,

classroom management strategies, curriculum development, educational resources, and parental involvement (Bellei, 2013; Krüger, 2020; Palardy, 2013; Willms, 2006).

Effects on Equity

The effects of educational segregation in the educational institutional setting relate to discrimination and inequities because families that are more prepared to access to institutional information or have more power to pressure their local public school to reduce disadvantages to their children are the most benefited (Quillian, 2014). Some authors argue that providing institutional information and creating ranks of schools can improve school quality (Figlio & Ladd, 2008; Figlio & Loeb, 2011). However, access to information is not equal for all families and can enhance stratification (Hart & Figlio, 2015).

Socioeconomic Segregation in Uruguayan Education

Uruguay was traditionally characterized by high levels of social integration (Rossetti, 2014). Public educational institutions were for years the proof of that integration where children from different socioeconomic contexts meet in a classroom to receive quality education (Rosetti, 2014). According to the author, three main phenomena contributed to diminish social integration and laid the foundations for socioeconomic segregation. First, economic inactivity of the country in the 60's produced a considerable decline in the public investment in education (Kaztman & Retamoso, 2006). The second factor, during the 80's private institutions appeared in the educational market to offer new options for the ones who can afford a paid education and many students from middle class started to migrate to private institutions leaving public schools for students from low socioeconomic strata. Third, the infantilization of poverty was installed in

Uruguayan society as a permanent characteristic, where at least half of poor people are children (INE, 2021). Those children face a greater weight in the social reproduction of inequities (Kaztman & Retamoso, 2006). To these three phenomena must be added a complex population movement that involved the formation of new neighborhoods at both extremes of the social strata, from private neighborhoods to settlements, which generates remote and sometimes opposed microcultures that then favor socioeconomic segregation in schools.

Recent studies show that Uruguay has high and increasing rates in school segregation in the region, especially in elementary education (Haretche, 2019; INEEd, 2021; Krüger, 2019; Murillo & Martínez-Garrido, 2017a). Research shows that educational segregation relates principally to school choice based on the home-school proximity and the economic and social capital of students' families (Bogliaccini & Rodríguez, 2015; Rossetti, 2014). The Uruguayan Constitution mandates free school choice by stating "Every parent or guardian has the right to choose the teachers or schools desired for his/her children on wards" (Constitution of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, 1967, Art. 68). However, in practice, this principle is only applicable to parents who can select and pay a private school (ANEP-CEP, 1992a, 1992b, 1999; Landoni, 2012). According to Landoni (2012), freedom of choice is limited in public schools because parents should send their children according to the geographical attendance zone determined by the place of residence. To avoid the rigidity of the system, parents use diverse mechanisms such as lying about their residence to select better schools for their children. Thus, the home-school proximity criteria for student distribution in elementary Uruguayan schools is not entirely clear and seems to be flexible (Giambruno, 2020). The behaviors and perceptions of families pertaining to their school choice need to be considered to identify practices that reproduce

inequality and promote educational segregation in Uruguayan elementary schools (Robert, 2007; Rossetti, 2014).

The literature reviewed suggests that the mechanisms that lead to educational segregation in Uruguayan elementary schools are not yet clear (INEEd, 2021); thus, further research is needed. Furthermore, to understand educational segregation it is necessary to consider the phenomenon of school choice from the perspective of parents as a crucial decision that can deepen the levels of segregation in socioeconomically, culturally, and symbolically fragmented societies (Krüger, 2019; Krüger, 2020; Ramírez & Vázquez, 2020). Current research also indicates that contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors that leads to educational segregation must be included in the analysis (Bellei, 2013; Bonal & Bellei, 2018; Córdoba et al., 2020). A deeper understanding of the mechanisms that lead to educational segregation by socioeconomic background in Uruguayan elementary schools will contribute to the discussion of current practices that support educational inequalities and serve as literature for policy makers make informed decisions that will help decrease the high and increasing educational segregation rates in Uruguay.

Context of the Study

Uruguay shows high levels of educational segregation in public educational institutions impacting students' educational outcomes from low socioeconomic levels with a diverse cultural background in Latin America (Duarte et al., 2009; Haretche, 2019; Murillo & Martínez-Garrido, 2017a; OREALC/UNESCO-LLECE, 2008). Figure 2 shows the 2019 rates of dissimilarity (left) and square root (right) of socioeconomic segregation in public elementary schools by state exposed throughout the country. As explained in Chapter II, the rate of dissimilarity indicates the

degree to which a group of students is underrepresented in some schools and overrepresented in other schools (Duncan & Duncan, 1955) and the square root represents the presence or absence of segregation considering the proportion of vulnerable students in all the educational institutions in a sample (Jenkins et al., 2008). The map below classifies the rates of segregation by color value per rate.
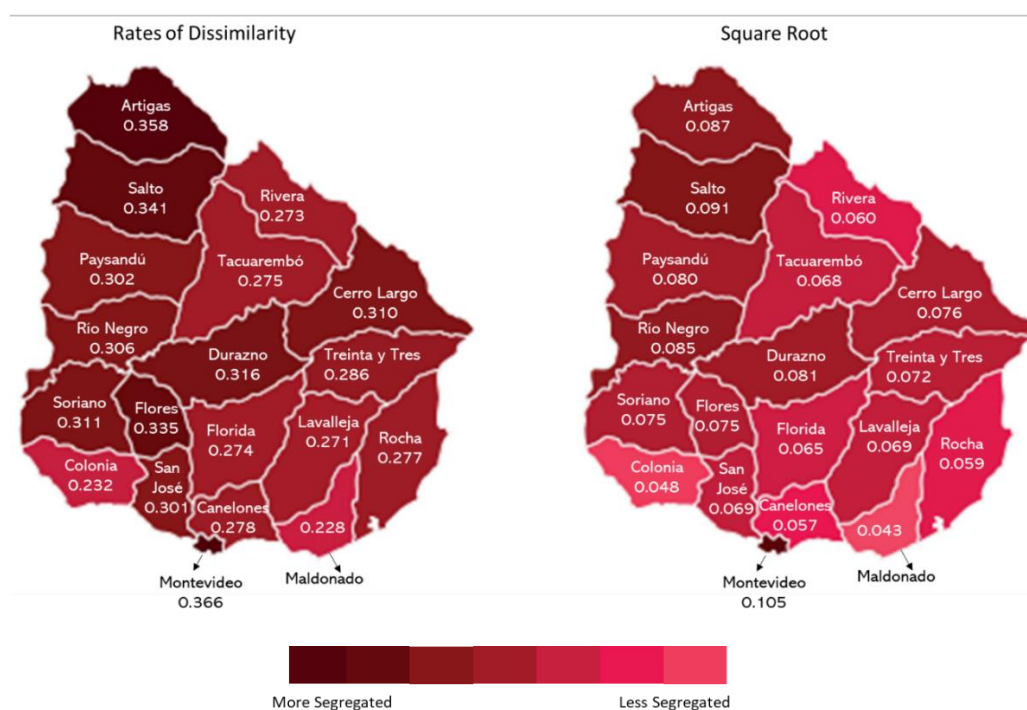
Figure 2: 2019 Rates of dissimilarity (left) and square root (right) of socioeconomic segregation in public elementary education by state in Uruguay (INEEd, 2021).

According to INEEd (2021), Montevideo has the highest rates of socioeconomic segregation in education (dissimilarity 0.366, square root 0.105), followed by Artigas (dissimilarity 0.358 and square root 0.087) and Salto (dissimilarity 0.341 and square root 0.091) with very similar rates but with very different population characteristics.

Socioeconomic segregation in Uruguayan elementary schools has mostly been investigated considering Montevideo as the context of the study (Boggliaccini & Rodríguez, 2015; Giambruno, 2020; Kaztman & Retamoso, 2007; Murillo & Graña, 2020). However, little attention has been given to the interior of the country. Therefore, to better understand educational segregation in Uruguay, there was a need to explore the phenomenon in the states of the interior of the country that also present high rates of socioeconomic segregation in elementary schools. Both Artigas and Salto have the second and third highest rates of socioeconomic segregation.

Since this study focused on the incidence of the socioeconomic level of families in educational segregation, measures of poverty rates are considered as an indicator for selection. Current data (INE, 2021) shows that both Artigas and Salto have high rates of poverty (Artigas between 6% and 7.9%; Salto between 4% and 5.9%) in Uruguay. Figure 3 shows the territorial distribution of households that are below the poverty line in Uruguay.
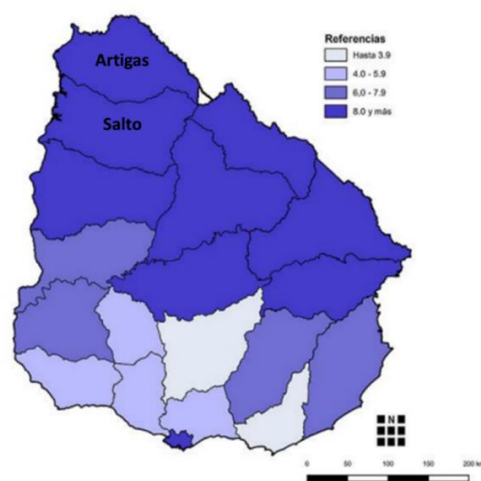
Figure 3: Percentage of households below the poverty line by state (INE, 2021).

The analysis of socioeconomic segregation in education also requires the consideration of the rates of inequality associated to the severity of poverty (INE, 2021). The rates of inequality provide indications about the homogeneity or heterogeneity of those who are in this socioeconomic situation. In Uruguay, INE (2021) used the Gini rate that varies between 0 (low levels inequalities) and 1 (high levels of inequality). Figure 4 shows the distribution of inequality by state in Uruguay, indicating that Salto has one of the highest rates of inequality (0.356 and more in the Gini rate) in the interior of the country.
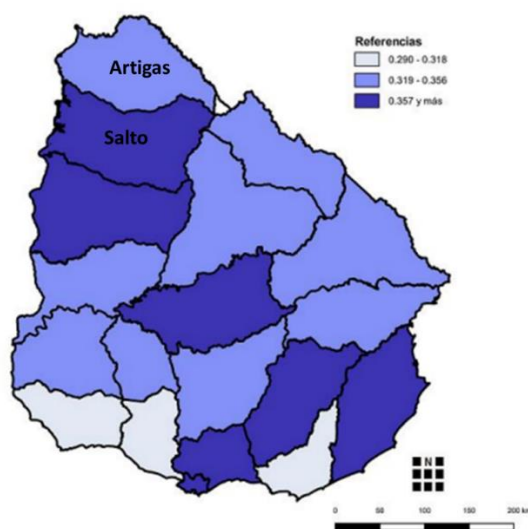
Figure 4: Gini rate by state (INE, 2021).

Since Salto combines the highest rates of poverty and inequality in the population with respect to the rest of the interior of the country, it becomes the target state to develop the study.

The Socioeconomic Context of Uruguayan Schools

Diverse studies evidenced that students' socioeconomic status directly affects evaluation scores in Uruguayan elementary schools (Bellei, 2013; Bogliaccini & Rodríguez, 2015; INEEd,

2021; Kaztman & Retamoso, 2007; Murillo & Graña, 2020; Rossetti, 2014). Uruguayan elementary schools are categorized by quintiles (from quintile 1 (Q1) recognized as the most socioeconomic disadvantaged, to quintile 5 (Q5) known as the less disadvantaged) (ANEP-CODICEN DIEE, 2007). To divide the quintiles, ANEP considered some criteria such as the mother's educational level, socioeconomic level of the family, and the home social integration. The mother's educational level is measured considering the last year of education approved. Once the highest educational level reached by the mothers of the students in a school has been defined, the percentage of mothers with complete elementary school or less is subtracted from the percentage of mothers with complete secondary education or higher educational levels. Therefore, the value called the educational balance of the school (SE in Spanish) is defined. In households where mothers are not present, the educational level of the person in charge of the student is considered.

The socioeconomic level tries to approximate the levels of poverty experienced by the students. To do this, it studies the levels of satisfaction of a set of basic needs related to housing. The basic needs considered are overcrowding, housing materials, origin of water, and sanitary service. Unsatisfaction is identified if there are more than two people per room (except kitchen and bathroom) in the students' house, the exterior walls of the house are built of can, cardboard, waste, adobe or mud, the water comes from a cistern, stream, or river, and the students do not have a bathroom, they have a bathroom without discharge or with evacuation to the surface or they share it with other families. The students can have 1, 2, 3 or the four basic needs unmet. Depending on the number of unmet needs the percentage of students is calculated per school.

Finally, the home social integration is measured by the integration to the territory, especially if the house is located in a settlement. This dimension is also measured by the

integration to the educational system considering the children from 5 to 15 years old that live in the student house and do not attend any formal education institution.

The next table (Table 2) shows the criteria presented above and considered by the ANEP-CODICEN DIEE (2007) to classify elementary schools by quintiles.

Table 2.

Criteria for Elementary Schools' Classification by Quintiles (own elaboration with data from ANEP-CODICEN DIEE, 2007)

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	OPERATIONAL DEFINITION
HOME EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	Mother's Educational Level	School educational balance (EB) EB= % of mothers with complete secondary education or more - percentage of mothers with complete elementary education or less
SOCIOECONOMIC LEVEL	Weighted Rate of Unmet Basic Needs (UBN) BN: • overcrowding • housing materials • origin of water, • sanitary service	Weighted Rate of Unmet Basic Needs by School UBN (weighted)= (UBN 1+UBN2(2) +UBN3(3) +UBN4(4)) / 4 Being: UBN 1= % of students with 1 UBN UBN 2= % of students with 2 UBN UBN 3= % of students with 3 UBN UBN 4= % of students with 4 UBN
HOME SOCIAL INTEGRATION	1. Territorial Integration 2. Integration to the Educational System	1.Integration to the territory= % of students with houses located in settlements. 2.Integration to the educational System= % of students who live with children between 5 and 15 that are out of the educational system.

The information obtained was reduced by a factorial technique assigning each school a summary value. Therefore, four factorial scores called as Rates of Sociocultural Characteristics (*ICSC* in Spanish) were constructed by the ANEP. From these rates, schools were grouped into

five quintiles from quintile 1 (Q1) as a very disadvantaged school context to quintile 5 (Q5) as a

very advantaged school context. The next figure (Figure 4) exemplifies the distribution of

elementary schools by students' SES.
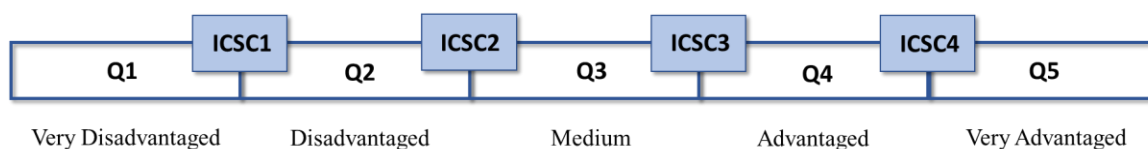
Figure 5: Distribution of schools by quintile (own elaboration with data from ANEP-CODICEN DIEE, 2007).

Hence, quintile 1 (Q1) is composed of the 20% of schools with the highest rates of

deprivation, quintile 2 (Q2) is composed of the next 20% of schools, and so on until the last

quintile (Q5) that groups the 20% of schools attended by children with the best socioeconomic

and cultural context.

Types of Uruguayan Schools

This study focuses on public elementary schools that encompass children between 6 and

12 years of age. These schools may have several categories that are described in the table (Table

3) below.

Table 3.

Types of Elementary Schools in Uruguay (ANEP, 2021)

School Category	Hours of Class	Main Characteristics
Common Urban (UC)	4	Urban. Common education. Oldest and most traditional educational offer. Does not focus in one socioeconomic (SES) group.
APRENDER	4	Urban. Focused on the educational inclusion of students with low SES.
Full-time (TC)	7:30	Urban. Time extension without focusing on a particular socioeconomic context.
Extended-time (TE)	7	Urban Time extension without focusing on a particular socioeconomic context.
Practice and Practice Enabled (PR-HPR)	4	Urban. Common Education. Includes training of teaching students.
Special (ESP)	4	Urban. Focused on students with physical and intellectual disabilities.
Rural (R)	5	Focused on rural students.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The following section provides a description of the method utilized for this research study. It includes a discussion of the philosophical assumptions, research design, study purpose, research questions, data collection, selection process, procedures, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness, challenges, and reflexivity for the proposed study.

Philosophical Assumptions

The notion of paradigm was born with Kuhn (1962) who defines it as a universally noticeable scientific achievement that provides model explanations to a scientific community. Kuhn (1962) exposes the basic beliefs that guide scientific work and how those principles could change to create a paradigm shift. More recently, Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) define paradigms as the set of beliefs and assumptions that guide inquiries and influence how research is conducted. Mertens (2005), building on Guba and Lincoln (2005), proposed the transformative worldview as an appropriate paradigm related to social justice. The transformative paradigm was selected as the framework for this qualitative study in response to individuals who were marginalized throughout history and can bring their voices into the research's world (Mertens, 2009). According to Moran-Jackson et al. (2018) a transformative worldview provides unique knowledge originated in relationships of trust and collaboration with participants. This framework places a priority in social justice and human rights addressing issues of power and

social relationships (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Mertens, 2010; Sweetman et al., 2010). This study is based on this framework because the focus is on the unequal and inequitable distribution of students according to their socioeconomic status in public elementary schools in Uruguay. In addition, the perspective of the students' parents in relation to educational segregation is considered. This is a point of view and a voice that has not been widely explored in other studies on the subject. Moreover, Creswell & Creswell (2017) argue that qualitative approach is a convenient choice in the transformative paradigm because it allows the researcher to integrate community perspectives into the inquiry process and access to unexplored worldviews. Therefore, this qualitative study explored the perspectives of elementary school parents about the contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors that lead to educational segregation in elementary schools in Uruguay.

Research Design

A qualitative case study research was used to collect detailed and in-depth information about the study problem (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Maietta, 2002, Yin, 2014). A qualitative approach to research was selected to explore the meaning that families from Salto that send their children to Uruguayan public schools give to a social problem such as educational segregation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as a "situated activity" (p. 3) that requires interpretive practices to make the participants' world more visible. Similarly, Saldaña and Omasta (2018), explain that qualitative inquiry intends to explore participants' experiences in a naturalistic context. Naturalistic data and inherent interpretations describe specific phenomena by telling personal and varied stories and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002).

This research utilized a case study design because the purpose of the inquiry required the insight, discovery, and interpretation of a complex and unique phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). In a broad sense, a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system delimitated by time and space (Merriam 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Qualitative case studies gather data from a small number of participants and use diverse methods of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this thesis, focus groups and interviews were conducted.

Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) agree that qualitative case studies are a method of inquiry. Their argument is based on some main characteristics that collaborate on the definition of qualitative case studies. Stake (1995) underlines four main characteristics: holistic, empirical, interpretive, and emphatic. First, holistic case studies involve the consideration of relationships between the phenomenon and the context. For this thesis, for example, the relationships between educational segregation and the perspectives and experiences of parents who send their children to public schools in Salto, Uruguay, were considered. Second, empirical case studies refer to the necessity of observing and understanding what is happening in the delimited field. In this regard, this thesis explores what happens in relation to segregation in the field of public education in Salto, Uruguay. Third, interpretive means that the researcher follows the intuition while interacting with subjects. This thesis was developed considering the researcher experience in the education field to capture, interpret and communicate the vision of the participants in the most faithful and appropriate way possible. Finally, emphatic is associated with the construction of an emic researcher's perspective. During the development of this thesis, priority was placed on putting in the place of the participants to better understand their perspectives and experiences.

Similarly, Merriam (1998) identifies three main features of qualitative case study. According to her perspective, case studies are particularistic, focusing on particular situations, events, people; descriptive, yielding a rich and in-depth description of the phenomenon; and heuristic, focusing on the understanding of the object of study.

Yin (2014), propose three types of case study: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. For this particular study, exploratory case study research was used because there was a lack of detailed preliminary research and outcomes about the issue (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), the main aim of an exploratory case study is to gain an in-depth understanding and explore complex causal links of the social phenomenon. That was the case of this thesis where there was limited previous exploration of parents' perceptions and experiences about the decision-making process of school selection, and there was a real need for an extensive and in-depth exploration of how contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors influence this decision-making process.

The case study involved in this thesis focused on the unit of analysis concerning the lived experiences, interactions with the context, behaviors, beliefs, ideas, opinions, and perceptions of their own world, and how these affect participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2000; Yin, 2003). According to Merriam (1998), a case study requires the delimitation of the case as an integrated system. The author sees "the case as a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). In this thesis, the unit of analysis corresponded to parents' perspectives and experiences when selecting the school for their children. Its focus was posed in how contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors shaped those perceptions and experiences and how parents managed those considerations. The boundaries that delimitated the case involved

subjective and geographical elements. Only parents from Salto (Uruguay) who had to select a school for their first-grade children, were invited to participate and included in the inquiry.

Therefore, a qualitative exploratory case was used to explore Uruguayan parents' perceptions and experiences about the influence of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in first grade students' distribution in Uruguayan public elementary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore Uruguayan public urban elementary school parents' perceptions and experiences about the influence of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in the decision-making process of first grade students' school registration in Uruguayan public elementary schools.

Research Questions

The following research question and sub questions guided this study:

- According to Uruguayan elementary school parents, what are their perceptions and experiences about the decision-making process of registering in public elementary schools?

    o According to parents, how do contextual factors influence their decision-making process of school selection?

    o According to parents, how do sociocultural factors influence their decision-making process of school selection?

o   According to parents, how do institutional factors influence their decision-

making process of school selection?

Data Collection

This research study involved six online focus groups with 27 participants and two in-

depth unstructured interviews with some of the focus group participants who expressed their

availability to provide more exhaustive information and tell their experiences related to school

selection and student's registration

The Focus Groups

The focus groups utilized WhatsApp and included 4-5 Uruguayan public first-grade

students' parents in each focus group to explore their perceptions about the factors that influence

the decision-making process of students' distribution in Uruguayan elementary schools. Focus

groups were formed utilizing the selection protocols indicated later in this chapter. The in-depth

interviews were conducted as a second form of data collection to enhance trustworthiness.

Morgan (1996) explains that focus groups are a research technique which main purpose is

to collect data through group interaction on a common topic determined by the researcher.

Additionally, focus groups are popularly recognized by researchers because the produced results

use to be unequal contributions in a field of study (Morgan, 1996). This uniqueness is due to the

interaction or group effect (Carey, 1994; Carey & Smith, 1994). According to Carey (1994) and

Carey and Smith (1994), the richness of the focus groups outcomes lies more in the synergy of

the interactions where participants interrogate each other and give explanations to each other

more than the sum of individual responses on a topic. Similarly, Morgan & Krueger (1993)

explain that such interaction provides valuable data based on consensus or diversity of responses

within the group. Hence, agreements and disagreements that can occur during interactions in the

focus groups are one of the main strengths of this qualitative data collection method (Morgan,

1996). This strength depends on the researcher's ability to promote fruitful interactions and

comparisons among participants' views, beliefs, and experiences, and could be a weakness if the

researcher is not capable to moderate adequately the interventions or fail to trait sensitive topics

(Morgan, 1996).

The expansion of access and use of Internet all around the world in the lasts decades has

affected research and especially the traditional data collection techniques such as the focus

groups (Tates et al., 2009). According to Tates et al. (2009), online focus groups started to be

conducted to avoid recruitment issues, declining responses rates, and raising costs in traditional

experiences. Tates et al. (2009) define online focus groups as the qualitative data collection

technique that utilizes Internet to join spatially and possibly temporally diverse participants in a

group discussion monitored by the researcher. There are three main possibilities to conduct

online focus groups: synchronously (in real time), asynchronously (not real time), or the

combination of both. The synchronous option was selected for this thesis and involved the

simultaneous online participation of participants at a prearranged time. Participants were

encouraged to respond to the questions and to react to other's responses as soon as they were

received.

Online focus groups present some benefits for participants such as the access to

populations that are hard to include because of distance, disabilities, time constrictions; facilitate

dialogue between participants; and provides a convenient and comfortable option to participate in a discussion (Fox et al., 2007; Guise et al., 2007; Kenny, 2005; O'Connor & Madge, 2003; Rhodes et al., 2003). This was the case for this thesis in which geographical distances between the researcher and participants made face-to-face interactions impossible. Similarly, online focus groups present benefits for researchers such as cost and time-savings, lower recruitment costs, the possibility to collect and transfer data directly on a software, and the diminish in transcriber bias (Duffy, 2002; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Rezabek, 2000; Rhodes et al., 2003). Additionally, evidence from diverse studies state that quantity and quality of data obtained during online focus groups is comparable to data obtained in traditional focus groups, so its use is highly recommended (Campbell et al., 2001; Franklin & Lowry, 2001; Reid & Reid, 2005; Schneider et al., 2002). To complement the thematic approach derived from the focus groups, narrative portraiture methodology was developed and explained in more detail in the data collection section.

Sampling Method

A purposive sampling was implemented in this study, which is a non-probability sampling technique. This non-representative sample is constructed to serve a very specific need or purpose as it yields the best understanding of the issue (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), the main goal of purposive sample is to focus on particular characteristics of a group that enable the researcher to answer the research questions. This thesis, for example, focused on parents from Salto, Uruguay, who had children attending a public school and were in first grade.

A typical case sampling method was selected for this study (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). . According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a typical sample reflects the average person, situation, or instance involved in the issue. This kind of strategy allows the researcher to identify typical or average people and avoid any extreme, deviant, or unusual condition to better understand the phenomenon (Patton, 2015).

The purposive sampling of this study required first-grade students' parents who were from Salto and sent their children to the public urban elementary schools previously selected. For this study all parents of first-grade students that attended the selected schools were invited to be part of the study. In Uruguay it is extremely difficult to get parents phone numbers and addresses to be contacted and schools are not authorized to provide this kind of information. Therefore, it is necessary to appeal in hierarchical order to the authorities of the institutions so that they act as a link between the families and the researcher.

First, principals of the school selected were contacted and informed about the study. The principals of the 22 previously identified schools were contacted. Only 6 accepted to participate. Then, the ones who accepted voluntarily to give support provided the researcher with first grade teachers' contact. The six teachers who accepted to be contacted were asked to invite their students' parents to participate in the study. From all the parents invited, only 27 accepted to participate. All parents who wanted to participate voluntarily were included in the online focus groups.

After conducting the focus groups, parents who already participated in the focus group sessions were invited to take part in an unstructured interview to collaborate narrating their particular stories. From the total of parents that agreed to be considered for the interviews, only

two were self selected. To proceeded with the selection, it was necessary to consider that the parents must be willing to talk, and most importantly, they must be knowledgeable enough to illustrate personal and cultural aspects during narration (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The participation in the interviews was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.

Selection Process

This study involved the selection of schools located in Salto, Uruguay and all first-grade students' parents in each school were considered.

School Selection

The process of school selection started with the identification of public elementary schools in the urban context. Rural schools were not considered for this study because parents in rural areas do not have diverse options to select schools. Instead, schools are selected by proximity to their homes. However, in the urban scenario there were more possibilities for school selection and for the interaction of the considered factors that lead to educational segregation.

Other urban schools such as Special and APRENDER were not included in the selection process because of their particular students' characteristics. Special schools, for example, only include students with physical, mental, and learning disabilities and the students should follow a particular process to be incorporated in these schools. APRENDER schools only enroll socioeconomic vulnerable students and offer special programs to accompany students and their families during the educational process.

The Common Urban, Full Time, Time Extended, Practice, and Practice Enabled schools were considered as potential options to locate and contact parents for this study and were invited to participate in the research process. Despite some of these schools have special programs, they are open to all kind of students independently on their personal characteristics or socioeconomic status.

In the first step of the selection process, the *Monitor Educativo* (ANEP-DGEIP, 2021) website was consulted. This is an official website that shows the educational offer in initial and primary education while providing diverse classifications of schools. The next table (Table 4) enumerates the schools that were invited for the study and provides some main characteristics such as school category, school quintile, number of students in the institution, in first grade, and average per class. From the 22 schools invited only 6 accepted to participate. Around 4 to 5 parents from the 6 institutions that accepted to be part of the study were included in each of the 6 focus groups conducted. To avoid any kind of identification a number was assigned to name each institution.

Table 4.

Schools Selected for the Study. Socioeconomic Context and Main Characteristics (ANEP-DGEIP, 2021)

Number	School Category	School SE Context	Students in the School	Students in 1st grade	Students Class Average
1	UC	Q4	134	24	15.0
2	UC	Q3	444	59	24.4
3	UC	Q3	651	114	23.4
4	TC	Q4	419	56	26.4
5	TC	Q3	187	24	23.8
6	TC	Q3	253	31	28.8
7	TC	Q2	238	31	29.8
8	TC	Q3	266	39	20.8
9	TC	Q3	215	28	26.3
10	TC	Q1	172	27	22.2
11	TC	Q2	222	29	26.8
12	TC	Q2	458	57	28.7
13	TC	Q2	349	70	24.9
14	TC	Q1	162	22	21.0
15	PRHPR	Q5	334	55	25.9
16	PRHPR	Q5	832	104	27.4
17	PRHPR	Q5	624	114	25.8
18	PRHPR	Q2	499	83	22.6
19	PRHPR	Q4	453	68	24.8
20	PRHPR	Q5	388	58	24.6
21	PRHPR	Q5	464	74	26.2
22	PRHPR	Q5	301	45	22.5

UC = Urbana Común/ Common Urban; TC = Tiempo Completo/Full Time; PRHPR = Práctica o Habilitadas de Práctica/ Practice and Practice Enabled

Participant Selection

This qualitative case study invited principals from twenty-two public elementary schools located in Salto, Uruguay. Given that education in the Uruguayan school system is characterized by respect for hierarchies, these same principals were who decided to share or not the contacts of

the teachers who wished to participate voluntarily. Only six principals accepted to participate and consulted their first-grade teachers if they wish to be contacted by the researcher. I requested those teachers who accepted to help with the recruitment of participants who were men and women older than 18 years old. A self-selection process occurred when the parents agreed or not to be contacted by the researcher in order to participate in the study. Once they agreed, the teachers provided the potential participants' contact to form the focus groups and answer the focus group questions (Appendix A). Parents were asked to complete a survey in Qualtrics to collect demographic data (Appendix B) and signed a digital consent form with information about the study, the procedures, the risks, and responsibilities. A date and a time to start data collection was suggested and established by group consensus.

The first step was to contact the principals of the school selected by phone or email to explain what the study was about and to answer all the necessary questions about it. Six school principals accepted voluntarily to give support by contacting first grade teachers and teachers accepted to be contacted by the researcher. The teachers who accepted to be contacted were asked to invite their students' parents to participate in the study. They were asked to collaborate contacting parents personally and by providing with necessary information about the study. All parents who wanted to participate could contact the researcher or suggested a way to be contacted to voluntarily be included in the focus groups.

At the end of the recruitment process participants were parents from Salto (Uruguay) who had to select a school for their first-grade child. There was a total of 27 participants grouped in 6 focus groups according to the school they selected. From the total, 22 were women and 5 were men. According to the demographics collected, 13% were between 18 and 25 years old, 57%

were between 26 and 35 years old, and 30% were between 36 to 45 years old. Additionally, 78% of the participants had 1 or 2 children, 17% had 3 or 4 children, and 5% had 5 or more kids. In relation to the level of education 13% reported elementary school completed, 22% had secondary education incomplete, 25% had secondary education complete, 22% had tertiary education incomplete, 9% completed tertiary studies, and 9% went to university. Finally, 70% informed that they live 1 to 10 blocks away from school, 13% lived 11 to 20 blocks from school, and 17% lived more than 20 blocks away. From the 6 focus groups conducted and considering participants' perceptions, two focus groups were composed by medium-high SES participants, two focus groups involved the participation of medium-low SES parents, and the two remaining focus groups included parents from low SES. It is necessary to clarify that all the names used are pseudonyms. The next table (Table 5) provides demographic information to better understand and contextualize the exposed findings.

Table 5.

Participants Demographics

Code	Pseudonym	Focus Group	School selected	Gender	Perceived SES
M1FG1	Ana	1	1	F	Low
M2FG1	Mari	1	1	F	Low
M4FG1	Sonia	1	1	F	Low
MP6FG1	Juan	1	1	M	Low
M1FG2	Carla	2	2	F	Low
M2FG2	Noelia	2	2	F	Low
M5FG2	Lorena	2	2	F	Low
MP6FG2	Franc	2	2	M	Low

(Continued on following page)

(Table 5 continued)

M1FG3	Rosa	3	3	F	Medium-high
M2FG3	Julia	3	3	F	Medium-high
M3FG3	Sofi	3	3	F	Medium-high
M4FG3	Karina	3	3	F	Medium-high
M5FG3	Flor	3	3	F	Medium-high
M1FG4	Cata	4	4	F	Medium-high
MP2FG4	Bruno	4	4	M	Medium-high
MP3FG4	Julio	4	4	M	Medium-high
M4FG4	Carmen	4	4	F	Medium-high
MP5FG4	Pedro	4	4	M	Medium-high
M1FG5	Rosana	5	5	F	Medium-low
M2FG5	Estela	5	5	F	Medium-low
M3FG5	Laura	5	5	F	Medium-low
M5FG5	Magela	5	5	F	Medium-low
M1FG6	Celia	6	6	F	Medium-low
M2FG6	Elsa	6	6	F	Medium-low
M3FG6	Eva	6	6	F	Medium-low
M4FG6	Sara	6	6	F	Medium-low
M5FG6	Abril	6	6	F	Medium-low

By including participants from different ages, levels of education, geographical areas in Salto, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds, multiple perspectives were captured as they pertain to parent perceptions and experiences in school selection.

Permissions and Ethical Considerations

Necessary permissions were obtained prior to starting any phase of this study. The researcher has approved the CITI training recently as a requirement for Northern Illinois University. An IRB approval was required and awarded since human subjects were involved. An online application with a detailed explanation of research procedures, copies of recruitment and consent forms, and copies of instruments and protocols was submitted to the IRB site. Participants were asked to electronically sign a consent form allowing the researcher to use the data generated during this study. The consent form informed the participants about the purpose and what was required for them to do and was signed before each phase of data collection. It will also enlighten that data was audio recorded, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were informed that confidentiality and anonymity cannot be ensured when participating in focus groups. All the participants were adults, and all the data collection was developed outside educational institutions. No other consents or permissions were required to develop the data collection.

Focus Group Data Collection Process

Before starting the parents' recruitment and to provide clear information about the process to the participants, a pilot focus group involving five Uruguayan parents who already

had children at elementary schools was conducted. The pilot focus group lasted for two hours

and made it possible to estimate the duration of future and similar data collection procedures.

Additionally, after the focus group was held, participants were consulted about the type and

number of questions presented and discussed about how easy was to understand the questions,

the need to include more or different information, and the meaning of each query. Moreover, the

testing procedure enabled to consider diverse ways of organizing the information for analysis.

Finally, participants' perceptions and feelings experienced when answering the questions were

considered and discussed to prepare and organize the six focus groups that would be part of the

data collection procedures.

The six focus groups lasted between two and three hours and were conducted online

because the researcher was out of Uruguay. It was considered that the best option to develop the

online focus groups was using the WhatsApp application (Colom, 2021). WhatsApp is an

application that was launched in 2009 and became one of the most used in the world (El País,

2021). It is also available on diverse smartphones including Android, iOS, and KaiOS systems

used by one billion people across 180 countries (Colom, 2021). According to Colom (2021), the

instant messaging app allows one-to-one or face-to-face group sharing of written or voice

messages, images, videos, and other kind of files. It also gives the possibility to do voice or

video calls and to use the application in a computer by a desktop version called WhatsApp Web

which access requires to pair devices by scanning a QR code.

In Uruguay the application became popular immediately and especially during the

COVID-19 pandemic when teachers found it as the most useful way to communicate with

parents (Failache et al., 2020). Additionally, the Uruguayan government established WhatsApp

as a free application in the country (El País, 2018) so currently, Uruguayans have free access to communicate using this familiar application.

The first step in the procedure to develop the focus group was to contact each participant separately to let him or her know the researcher, to know the participants' personality, needs, and availability to participate, and to explain the dynamics of the focus group. Diverse studies recommend developing WhatsApp groups when research requires to do online focus groups as the ubiquitous technological and appropriate tool (Colom, 2021; Gibson, 2020; Mare, 2017). To enable communication among the focus group participants the researcher created six WhatsApp groups with four to five participants each one and the researcher. The Focus Group questions (Appendix A) were proposed in each WhatsApp group designed to last for no more than twelve hours to enhance ubiquity and lower the burden of participating. Participants were informed that the group was going to be closed after twelve hours from the beginning of the discussion, but the idea was that they reflect, post, and interact during the discussion to follow the conversation and to not extend the dynamic inappropriately. The discussion guided included seven main blocks of questions which the researcher proposed throughout the agreed time to give enough space for each participant to reflect and give an opinion and without excluding the ones who were busy when the question was posted. Each topic was presented numbered and in bold to avoid confusion.

Some essential considerations suggested by Colom (2021) were explained before, during, and after the discussion about (1) duration and set-up process, (2) the researcher responsibilities about participants' privacy and data collection, (3) participants' responsibility on privacy and data protection, and (4) stress on the risks related to the use of the application. Despite

WhatsApp conversations are end-to-end encrypted, the researcher cannot control the participants behavior about the conversations that are being developed in their phones. It is also necessary to consider that during the conversations, phone numbers are identifiable. Therefore, it is important to emphasize during all the process the collective responsibility on privacy and protection despite all responsibilities and risks were included in the consent form.

Synchronous Discussion

Fox et al. (2007) found that synchronous online focus groups allowed for a dynamic and engaging conversation. However, they found that real time written interactions are complex and can be a challenge for the researcher's transcription. To solve this issue, WhatsApp offers some functions that allow the researcher to follow the conversation without difficulties. The app allows to click on the comment one is responding to before giving their response, so the threading is visible when the response is given. Additionally, screenshots of the conversations can be taken to support the interpretation and transcript writing without inconvenient.

Perez-Sabater (2015) also found that WhatsApp conversations use a particular use of language. Synchronous online chats have unique characteristics that participants use to adapt to the digital environment and must be incorporated and considered in qualitative research development to enrich the analysis (Fox et al., 2007). This kind of language includes the use of emojis, stickers, punctuation, and misspelling as ways of non-verbal communication (Abrams & Gaiser, 2016; Jowett et al., 2011). In online focus groups the final transcripts could be shorter than the traditional ones, however, their quality is comparable to traditional focus groups (Boydell et al., 2014; Gibson, 2020).

Interviews

While focus groups encourage abstract relationships across people's lives, they may lose interest in individual stories that can collaborate in the comprehension of the phenomenon (Rodriguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020). According to Reissman (2008), narrative approaches may help to explore the meaning that people give to their experiences. Moreover, in narrative methodologies stories become powerful because are embedded in a deep contextual, organizational, cultural, and historical background (Erickson, 1977; Mitchell & Egudo, 2003; Plummer, 1995).

This kind of narrative studies bring participants back to the center of the inquiry, allowing them to explore personal, familiar, national, cultural, social, and historic realms by telling their story (Brunner, 1986; McAdams, 1997). A story (traditionally with a beginning, middle, and end), enable the researcher to shape narrative portraitures combining personal, cultural, and social participant stories (Rodriguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020). According to the authors, narrative portraitures become a decolonial methodology because, instead of giving privilege to the researcher's interpretation, they reflect the viewpoint of the inquirer, as soon as makes it visible and cognizable. Therefore, this technique improves and gives credibility to the findings while honoring participants' life sense (Rodriguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020). Its main goal is to reflect, communicate, and interpret narrations respecting the participants' voices by a constant negotiation between participants' identities (how they see themselves) and relational identities (how they tell the story to be projected on the researcher) (Anderson, 2012; McAdams, 1997).

In this study, narrative portraitures were conducted as a complementary methodology to gather background information and detailed descriptions about parents' life experiences and perceptions according to the influence of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in the process of school selection. Additionally, the narrative data collection and analysis improved the credibility of the focus groups findings because implied finding overlapping themes that were consistent and derived in the main insights founded in this thesis

Two unstructured interviews , one considering a low SES mother and another considering a Medium-high SES couple (Appendix C) were conducted seeing the illustration of the situation and context related to school segregation (the how), and the explanation of the reasons and influences that motivate the school choice (the why). The first interview mentioned lasted one hour and the second interview took one hour and a half to be conducted.

Minichiello et al. (1990) define unstructured interviews as a technique that relies on social interactions and in which questions and answers categories are not predetermined. These kinds of interviews are conducted when the researcher needs to understand people's complex behavior without previously establishing field limitations (Punch, 1998). Similarly, Patton (2002) added that the main characteristic of the interaction is the natural flow of spontaneous questions. Though, focusing on participant narration does not mean that questions are random or non-directive; they need knowledge about the topic and preparation (Patton, 2002). It is necessary to keep in mind the purpose of the study to encourage participants to narrate experiences and include perspectives relevant to the problem of interest (Burgess, 1984; Fife, 1995).

Data Analysis

A systematic and sophisticated way to develop a qualitative analysis is Thematic

Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Howitt & Cramer, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2006)

defined it as a unique, valuable, accessible, flexible, and widely recognized method of qualitative

data analysis. This method aims to systematically identify, organize and offer insight into

patterns or themes and allow the researcher to interpret shared meanings and experiences (Braun

& Clarke, 2006). The authors state that patterns are not always meaningful, but the

commonalities must be significant in relation to the topic and research questions.

A six-phase approach to TA is provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) and it is going to be

followed to obtain deeper inside into the data, be able to code at a more conceptual level, and

develop confident themes. Previously to implement each of the proposed phases, all the

discussions from the focus groups were transcribed in Spanish, reproducing all written or spoken

words, sounds, including hesitations, laugher, emphasis, punctuation, and all stickers and emojis

included in the conversation. Details can be revealing, and this study included full transcripts

during the analysis. The analysis combined inductive and deductive TA. Inductive analysis let

the researcher to find codes from the data and deductive analysis allowed to find codes based on

theoretical constructs to visualize issues that participants do not tell explicitly.

The first step of this TA proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012) involved familiarization

with data by reading and rereading transcripts. Making notes on the data was also useful to

identify potential elements of interest. The second phase required generating initial codes.

According to the authors, codes are understood as blocks of analysis that provide labels for

relevant data guided by research questions. Coding was developed at the semantic and latent

levels of meaning but the focus was always posted on research questions. After identifying initial

codes, they were cleaned and recoded in successive instances of analysis during this phase. In a

third phase, themes started being developed from codes. Themes represent some level of

patterned response to research questions or meaning, and they were constructed, not discovered.

That phase involved reviewing codes to identify patterns or overlapping blocks and it required to

start connecting themes and started thinking about how all themes together can tell a story about

data (Broun & Clarke, 2012). At the end of that phase the authors suggest developing a visual

diagram to outline all themes and subthemes identified following an initial categorization. The

fourth step in TA involved the recursive process of reviewing themes according to codes and

considering the entire data set. An evaluation of the quality of the process is central and it was

done by checking each theme against each collated extract of data to explore if they both fit or

not. After distinctive and coherent themes were identified, they were reviewed considering all

the data set by doing a final reread and determined if themes were meaningful or something

should be modified. Phase number 5 required summing up the essence of each theme. The

summing up procedure considered that themes did not include too much information, were

related but did not overlap, and addressed a research question. Themes should have a clear focus,

scope, purpose, and together provide a clear and coherent story (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Authors

also suggest selecting extracts that provide vivid, compelling examples to start providing an

analytical structure and connect analysis with research questions. These themes were compared

and contrasted with the literature review to provide a deep understanding of the issue. Finally, it

was necessary to write a report to provide a powerful, convincing, clear yet complex story that

included logical and meaningful themes interconnected and related to the topic.

Narrative Analysis

Rodriguez-Dorans and Jacobs (2020) suggest involving coding for characters, time, space

and circumstances, key events, and intersection of phenomena of interest. The next table (Table

6) proposed by the authors was utilized in this study to guide the analytic process.

Table 6.

Analytic Tools to Make Narrative Portraits (Rodriguez-Dorans and Jacobs, 2020, p.7)

CODES	RESEARCH QUESTION (Helps to illustrate)	KEY WORDS (What to look for)
Characters	WHO – Important characters. Relationships between characters.	Names, pronouns, the first person "I", experiences or events involving other people.
Time	WHEN – Historic context. Sequence of story, experience of time.	Dates, years, conjunctions of time (after, before, when…), time periods (weeks, months, days).
Space	Space WHERE – Geography; Political, cultural, social, economic context.	Macro-geography (cities, countries, continents), Micro-space (across the road, in the kitchen, at the hospital), virtual spaces (Online, state of mind, an emotional space).
Key-events	HOW/WHY – Connections and relations; interactions; turning points; wider influences.	Strong emotions surrounding event, link to important decision that is made, change in narrative after event.
Phenomena of interest	HOW/WHY – How is phenomena of interest narrated, conceptualized, experienced. Where are phenomena of interest located, intersection of concepts and context.	Pre-identified themes of interest (e.g. ecological perspective, identity, disability).

This table can be interpreted as much descriptive as explicative. However, Yin (2014)

argues that at the beginning of any narrative process it is necessary to provide a holistic

description of the situation that will subsequently derive in a deeper exploration of the hidden reasons and motivations (why questions).

All the narrative portraits written employing the narrative analysis were translated from Spanish to English. According to Werner (2003), part of the work of the researchers is to translate narratives from native to required language, considering research purposes, and maintaining the representation of subjective contexts as reliable as possible.

<p align="center">Trustworthiness</p>

In naturalistic work, validity and reliability cannot be addressed in a positivist manner (Shenton, 2004). This does not mean that it should not be conducted in a thorough and systematic manner, and addressing trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017; Shenton, 2004). Guba (1981) states four constructs derived from positivist inquires and adapted to qualitative research that can guide studies to ensure trustworthiness. They are: (a) credibility (instead of internal validity); (b) transferability (instead of external validity); (c) dependability (instead of reliability); and (d) confirmability (instead of objectivity).

Credibility responds to how congruent findings are with reality (Merriam, 1998). Hence first, authors suggest utilizing well established methods derived from previous studies that implemented them successfully (Guba, 1981; Yin, 1994). In the present study, both selected methodologies for analysis (thematic and narrative methods) are well known as successful strategies widely used by qualitative researchers over the course of time. Second, scholars mention that it is important to be familiarized with the culture of participants and organizations involved in the study (Shenton, 2004). In this sense, the researcher's professional background in

this study includes being a teacher with sixteen years of experience in public education and guarantees enough knowledge about the setting, and how to establish and manage contact with parents. Third, the authors argue that the way participants are selected matters (Shenton, 2004). In this study, all parents with whom contact was made were invited to participate. Then, participants decided whether they wish to be part of the study or not. That self-selection process minimized the researcher's bias and collaborated with the study credibility.

As a fourth point related to credibility, Guba (1981) and Breuer and Hunter (1989), explain that using different data collection methods can compensate singular methodology limitations strengthening their benefits. This process also known as triangulation, combined with a researcher's reflexivity section, can be seen as a way to ensure confirmability. As well, this study supported credibility and confirmability by conducting focus groups (thematic analysis) in combination with unstructured interviews (narrative portraitures). Likewise, it encouraged the presence of diverse participants whose viewpoints and experiences could be compared (Shenton, 2004). Participants had the possibility to refuse to take part in or withdraw from the study at any time. This fact ensured genuine involvement and contributions (Shenton, 2004). Rephrased questions and required probes or detailed explanations were included to recognize and avoid lies and ensure transparency.

Moreover, peer debriefing was carried out before and after the data collection was completed and analyzed to ensure the reliability in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2000; Spall, 1998). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer debriefing supports the credibility of the data and establishes the trustworthiness of the findings. For this study, the researcher selected an impartial peer to discuss the methodology, findings, and progress of the inquiry. The peer

selected was a Spanish speaker teacher, also fluent in English, and prominent PhD candidate at

NIU in the education setting, knowledgeable of the area of study and the qualitative

methodology. Both, researcher and peer had several discussions during the design of the

proposal in relation to data collection, initial analysis, and methodological steps. After data

collection and analysis was done, the researcher sent all the transcripts and finding reports to the

debriefer, and they discussed results in order to ensure that the researcher interpretations were

worthy, honest, and believable (Spall, 1998). Thus, combined with other strategies to ensure

credibility employed in qualitative methods, debriefing increased the credibility of this study and

validate the researcher's interpretations (Denzin, 1994; Greene, 1994).

Furthermore, a pilot focus group involving five Uruguayan parents who already had

children at elementary schools was conducted. In the process, questions were assessed to

conclude if they were understandable, necessary and if their meaning conducts to the answer that

the researcher is looking for. Similarly, testing the focus group made it possible to estimate the

duration of data collection, the possible ways of organizing the information for analysis, how to

manage and promote discussions, and know the perceptions and feelings that the participants

experienced when answering the questions.

Related to transferability, or the possibility of applying findings to other situations

(Merriam, 1998), it is necessary that qualitative research focuses on context. According to

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Firestone (1993), the researcher must ensure enough contextual

information to allow readers to transfer findings. This proposal provides enough background

information in the Literature Review chapter, such as organizational and school characteristics

and geographical features, letting the reader build a complete picture of the context where the

study is being developed. Similarly, an in-depth description of the research design and implementation, detailed data gathering processes, and reflections about the implications of the project were included to allow other researchers to replicate the study in similar conditions (dependability) (Shenton, 2004).

Challenges of This Study

One of the challenges identified for this research was the selection of the setting. Salto in comparison to Montevideo (the capital city) has less levels of poverty, inequity, and educational segregation. However, most of the studies developed on this topic are focused on the capital city being the interior of the country an unexplored setting. For that reason, Salto was selected as the most appropriate state to start with the exploration research.

Another challenge could be the development of online focus groups. However, the pandemic allowed researchers to start exploring new methodologies and techniques and many recent studies ensure that the final quality of online research is equivalent to traditional research methods of data collection (Colom, 2021; Fox et al., 2007; Gibson, 2020; Mare, 2017). Following the directions provided by previous research that conducted online methods of qualitative data collection was a way to ensure quality and trustworthiness to the process.

Participation of parents and their dropouts from the study were another challenge of the data collection process. Involving parents in the process and let them feel that their perceptions are extremely important for this project was essential. However, the decision of participating or dropping out the study was their entire decision. For that reason, the researcher recruited at least

5 more parents in order to use some of them as substitutes if someone decided not to continue with the process.

Reflexivity

There are two personal motivations for investigating educational segregation and particularly socioeconomic segregation in Uruguayan schools. On one side, educational segregation is connected to my professional background as an elementary teacher with 17 years of experience in the educational field. My observations and life experience in the setting allow me to start thinking in this issue as a main problem that educational policies should focus on immediately in my country because of the harmful effects that it can produce on students' educational achievements, their life, and the society. My thoughts, also as a researcher, were reinforced by a recent publication of the National Institute of Educational Evaluation (INEEd) in my country that present actualized data about the increasing trend of educational segregation in public elementary schools in Uruguay.

On the other side, I am also a mother, and I am always in contact with other parents that are not teachers and struggle with the lack of information about their school choice possibilities. This fact makes me to be aware of the contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors that may influence parents' decision-making process about school selection, and how difficult could be for those parents to make appropriate decisions in order to benefit not only their children, but also the entire students' community. For these and other academic reasons, and because of my personal and professional background is why I have selected this topic to be studied.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This qualitative case study explored Uruguayan public urban elementary school parents'
perceptions and experiences about the influence of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional
factors in the decision-making process of first grade students' school registration in Uruguayan
public elementary schools. Based on data from six focus groups and two in-depth interviews
with three participants, it was found that they were driven by diverse influences when choosing a
school for their children. Differences between parents' decisions were influenced by their
socioeconomic status in relation to the geographical area they used to live, their own perceptions
about their SES, familiar traditions, values shared, expectations about education and schools, the
information managed about schools, and the institutional requirements for students' enrollment.

Findings obtained from the analysis of both focus groups and conducted interviews are
presented in this chapter. Contextual, institutional, and sociocultural factors that give rise to
educational segregation in Uruguayan elementary schools according to Uruguayan parents'
perceptions are organized in themes obtained during the thematic analysis. These themes respond
to each of the research questions of the present study. Figure 6 presents a visual diagram that
includes all themes identified and developed in this chapter.
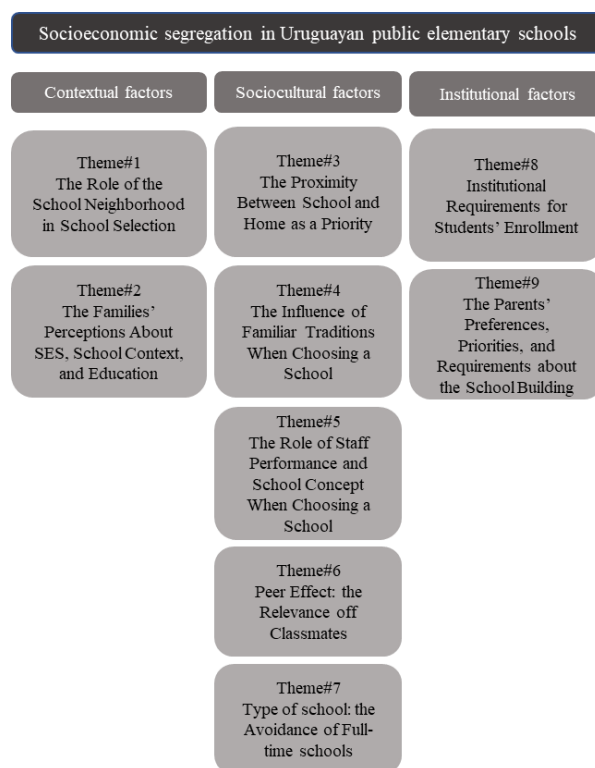
Figure 6: Visual diagram and themes identified (own elaboration).

In addition to the analysis of the focus groups, this chapter includes the findings obtained during the two interviews. They are presented as portraitures to complement and deepen the initial analysis of the focus groups findings. Below, the contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors are presented following participants' perceptions and experiences.

Contextual Factors

The analysis of the six focus groups conducted revealed several findings related to contextual factors. As it was previously stated in this study, contextual factors involve the school setting features and all demographic trends that occur in those backgrounds (Bonal & Bellei,

2018; Córdoba et al., 2020). In other words, talking about contextual factors refers to the school

context, and more specifically, the characteristics and relationships of both, school

socioeconomic context and participants' neighborhoods.

To better understand the findings presented in this section it is important to present and

consider main elements that would clarify the context and vocabulary employed in this section.

First it is necessary to present the two school contexts identified by parents because these

contexts are mentioned throughout the study. Figure 7 was designed to illustrate how

neighborhoods were classified by parents and where schools involved in this study were located

according to parents' perceptions.
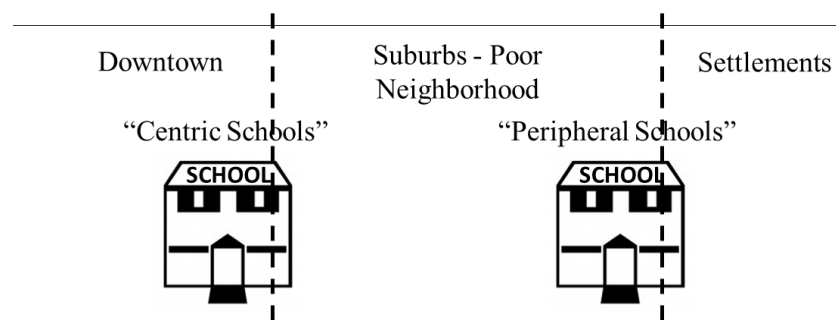
Figure 7: Types of neighborhoods and school location according to parents' perceptions (own
elaboration).

Participants identified two kinds of schools considering the neighborhood or context

where they were located. On one hand, considering a term provided by participants, there were

"centric schools" located mainly near downtown areas, but also partially in contact with the

suburban area. In Uruguay, suburban neighborhoods are characterized by lower socioeconomic

resources in comparison to downtown neighborhoods. On the other hand, parents identified

"peripheral schools" located in the suburbs of the city, but also partially in contact with settlements.

Second, it is important to consider the participants' self-definition of their own SES and how they named themselves when talking about their socioeconomic background. This study could identify great differences between neighborhoods and families who live there that are essential to understand the educational segregation phenomena in Uruguayan public elementary schools. According to the evidence collected during the focus groups, the main difference detected was that centric schools' neighborhoods were constituted by families from middle and middle-high socioeconomic backgrounds. The peripheral schools' neighborhoods on the contrary, were characterized by the presence of families from middle-low and low socioeconomic backgrounds, self-defined as "working-class families."

It is important to clarify that to establish and understand the differences in the socioeconomic status of families, two basic concepts were used: self-determination by Rubin et al. (2014) and Bourdieu's human capital theory (1997). Following the assumption that the notion of socioeconomic status is complex, subjective, and intersectional, it is essential to take into account the subjective self-definitions of the participants when determining to which socioeconomic context they belong. The participants used, during the focus groups and interviews, certain terms typical of their culture and recognized in their language that must be taken into account to avoid misunderstandings or misinterpretations when developing an analysis in a language different from their native. On one hand, the terms referred to low SES or medium-low SES, context or backgrounds in this thesis involve participants' terms like humble or very humble participants, poor or deprived people, low-income families that feel part of a working-

class, people that live near or in a settlement struggling to survive day to day, and people who

had children that attended peripheral schools. On the other hand, when in this thesis high or

medium-high SES, context or background are mentioned, reference is being made to

participants' terms such as high-income participants that have high education levels, people that

live in centric neighborhoods or downtown with access to diverse services and transportation,

and whose children attended centric schools. Table 7 explains all the self-definitions of the

participants in accordance with the names given in this study to the two socioeconomic levels

identified and considered for the analysis.

Table 7.

Participants' Self-Definition of Their Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Categorization

Participants' SES Category	*Participants' Self-definition of SES*
Low SES or Middle-low SES/ background/ context	-Humble or very humble
	-Poor
	-Deprived
	-Low-income
	-Working-class
	-Live near or in a settlement
	-Attend peripheral schools
	-Live day to day
Middle-high SES or Upper SES/ background/ context	-Live in centric neighborhoods
	-Live in downtown
	-Attend centric schools
	-High educational levels
	-Access to diverse services
	-Access to transportation
	-High income

Both categorizations of school neighborhoods and participants' SES self-definitions are essential to understand the data presented in this study according to parents' perceptions.

Once these clarifications have been made, the themes related to the contextual factors mentioned by participants are presented.

The Role of the School Neighborhood in School Selection

It is important to consider that during the focus groups and interviews parents gave particular attention to the school neighborhood when selecting an educational institution for their children. To better understand their perspectives on how contextual factors affected their decisions when choosing a school, it is necessary to know how parents perceived the school context and the neighborhoods where the school was located. Moreover, it is necessary to consider that most of the participants lived in the same neighborhood where the school was located. Only some of the participants said that they commuted from other neighborhoods to take their children to the school, especially parents from medium and high socioeconomic backgrounds.

During focus groups, participants provided diverse descriptions that allowed the researcher to locate them into two different (almost opposite) kinds of school contexts. On one hand, there were schools located near downtown, denominated by parents as "centric schools." For example, Bruno, an upper SES parent, stated, "the neighborhood of the school is centric, (...) a nice neighborhood." Julio agreed with Bruno, "the school is located in a central area [of the city]. It is a very nice area." Carmen explained that "the school is in a good part of the city and many buses pass around it. The children come from faraway places." According to participants,

the students who attended these schools were mainly from medium and medium-high socioeconomic contexts. Similarly, Julio, Karina, and Julia described the school socioeconomic context as "medium" and Bruno reinforced the idea with additional information, "regarding the socioeconomic context of the families [of the school] I think it is middle class." Pedro and Cata argued that "the socioeconomic context of the families that live near the school is medium-high."

On the other hand, there were "peripheral schools" situated on the city's surroundings and the corresponding neighborhoods were defined by participants as "humble" or "poor." For example, Magela, categorized as low SES mother based on the participants' self-identification provided in previous chapter, described that "it is a neighborhood of working families (...). There are areas with very needy families. Around the school the [socioeconomic] context is medium-low." Estela, Laura, and Franc agreed with Magela that "it is a neighborhood of working people." Sonia explained that "It seems to me that it is one of the neighborhoods of the city where there is a low socioeconomic level in general. It is a neighborhood where settlements are also observed."

The first school context mentioned ("centric schools") was defined and described by parents from medium-high socioeconomic context as the "preferred" and "the most prestigious school context." Julia concurred, "School [school number] is known as one of the best schools in Salto. When we went to find out about that school, there were no seats available." According to parents, people came from diverse places of the city to take their children there. For example, Sofi expressed that "we live quite far from the school now, not at the beginning. But we decided to keep her [her daughter] there because in our neighborhood the schools do not meet our expectations." Similarly, Carmen, another participant from a medium-high SES, shared:

> This school is far from my house, and what's more, I have one two blocks away, but I wouldn't change him [her son]. I am satisfied with the teachers who taught him throughout the time we attended and also with the principals who passed and those who are still working there.

Additionally, participants emphasized people's mobility and crowded streets as one of the positive characteristics of centric schools. Families focused on these characteristics as they were the result of full access to all kinds of services and transportation present in those kind of neighborhoods. In parents' words "it is a nice neighborhood." Bruno stated that the school "is surrounded by shops and practically all the necessary services" such as supermarkets, banks, police office, restaurants, post office, and all other kinds of stores. Pedro also explained that "the school has a strategic location" and Carmen agreed that "it is in a good point of the city since many buses circulate around." According to participants, all these features make the school and its context an attractive option to choose for their children to be served.

Additionally, other participants underlined the possibility to access many services and transportation in a safe way as a main difference with other families located in other neighborhoods. Pedro mentioned that "The school has a strategic location (...) with all the services within reach." Carmen also stated that "many buses pass" around the neighborhood. Moreover, Julia enlightened that families from middle-high SES experience "heavy traffic [but] safe." Similarly, Sofi talked about the crowdedness of the neighborhood and clarified that "despite that, it is very safe." Hence, it can be said that upper SES families defined themselves as families with high educational levels that lived in crowded and safe neighborhoods with access to all kind of services and transportation.

Furthermore, participants from upper SES, affirmed that their children were in a safe place. They expressed that centric schools were located in safe environments, so they do not

need to worry about their security while they were at school. For example, Julia and Sofi agreed that despite the crowded context where the school was located, they perceived that their children were "safe."

The second school context mentioned ("peripheral schools") showed a different panorama. Participants who identified with this type of school context were referred to as "medium and low socioeconomic status", but Elsa also explained that there were "families that live quite well and others that live day to day." Parents from medium-low socioeconomic context who live near peripheral schools describe the school neighborhood as "nice", "quiet", and "with some stores nearby", especially the ones selling food. Eva defined the school neighborhood: "I think it's a pretty nice and spacious neighborhood. It has stores near the school, which is good. In particular for me, there would be things to fix around like pavements and signage." Celia concurred, "as for the neighborhood, it is nice, quiet, there are stores nearby and the high school is near the school." Unlike upper-middle class families who emphasized the presence of many services near the school, low class families valued that the stores surrounding the school sell food. For them, getting food every day was a priority.

Parents also described the school neighborhood as "humble", "poor", characterized by "the presence of settlements nearby." Moreover, they underlined that it needed fixes such as pavement repair and more street signals to keep it safe. For example, Sonia explained, "It seems to me that it is one of the neighborhoods of the city where there is a low socioeconomic level in general, since it is a neighborhood where settlements are also observed." Sara complemented, "For me they [the local government] would have to fix the streets a little more and put signals near the school."

Therefore, it can be seen that participants liked their neighborhood and felt affection for it. Franc, one of the participants who expressed affection stated, "the [name of the neighborhood] neighborhood of Salto is a district that has been around for many years and is very pretty." Lorena concurred and added, "I've been living in the neighborhood for a few years but there's access to everything, that's the good thing." Moreover, participants showed a strong sense of belonging and strong traditions. For example, Noelia explained: "It is a neighborhood that I have a lot of love for, as well as the school because I grew up here."

Parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds placed greater emphasis on safety than the rest of the participants. This may be because they are more exposed to daily criminal situations than the rest of the participants due to the context where they live. For example, Sara stated, "with regard to security, it is the best [school]." Similarly, Eva shared:

> Due to the security issue, we know that today this issue is somewhat complicated. I didn't say it, but I agree [with Sara], the security they have regarding the children is excellent, always trying to take care of them as well as possible.

Other low SES parents such as Juan and Ana focused on security more related to the building. They described, "the front [of the school] has bars and a large gate." Mari added, "it has walls around and the front with bars and a gate."

During the focus groups participants also reinforced the idea that it was a "normal" neighborhood. "It's a normal neighborhood, like any other neighborhood" Juan said. Families did a constant allusion to the normality of their life situation. For example, Juan suggested, "The neighborhood of the school, in terms of the socioeconomic context of the families, is normal [compared to] any other neighborhood." Ana coincided, "The neighborhood is like any other neighborhood, normal." This compliance and acceptance also were translated to the school

environment. Even though parents recognized that there were things to improve, they accepted

the school deficiencies as natural. For example, Magela recognized that "there are improvements

to be made in school" because "classes are taught in containers" but at the same time low SES

participants described the school building as "acceptable", "adequate" or "fairly good."

Moreover, Sonia, one of the mothers of this socioeconomically vulnerable context was satisfied

with the school because it had "electricity, drinking water, sanitation, a dining room" to ensure

the basic needs of their children.

The Self-definition of the Neighborhood Families and the Relation to Education

Families identified shared diverse perceptions about the distinctive characteristics that

define their own socioeconomic background. For example, families from upper socioeconomic

backgrounds consulted associated their socioeconomic status not only to income but also to the

educational level reached. For example, Bruno explained his own SES referring to the fact that

"the families who live in the school neighborhood are middle-class families, with complete

educational levels such as secondary school at least." This discourse showed the importance that

these families gave to education and the connection established between socioeconomic status

and educational levels.

On the other hand, low SES families involved did not link school context and

socioeconomic positions with education. They described the neighborhood families focusing on

socioeconomic conditions and values shared without references to educational levels or

educational achievements. The main reference to the school context was related to families that

were used to live "day to day." This phrase means that their worries were related to getting

money to pay the daily expenses and the uncertainty about what would happen the next day. For

example, Celia explained, "Regarding the socioeconomic level of the families [in the

neighborhood], it's quite good, some of us get along quite well and others live from day to day."

Elsa concurred that families within the neighborhood "are pretty good. Some of us live from day

to day."

Participants from low SES denominated themselves as "working families" but they

clarified that not all families living in the neighborhood were the same. They explained that there

were families with which they did not feel identified. For example, Carla stated "The

neighborhood has many low-income people, but also, many people who work and struggle every

day. Kind people but also hostile people. Clean people and dirty people." The working families

that participated in the focus groups were often as vulnerable as other families in the

neighborhood. However, they felt the necessity to make a difference between the ones who did

not have a regular income and handle other values and customs as well. Therefore, middle-low

and low SES families that lived near peripheral neighborhoods identified themselves as low-

income humble families.

<div align="center">Sociocultural Factors</div>

Sociocultural factors detected during the focus groups were associated with school

choice. They were defined as the possibility for parents to register their children in the school of

their preference. During the focus groups, parents gave the impression that schools in Salto can

be chosen. The words "I choose", "we choose", "I enrolled" or "we decided" were common

phrases when the question about school selection was asked. For example, Celia stated, "I

choose that school and I will continue choosing it." Only Sonia, one of the participants,

suggested that the educational system assigned the school for her child despite their

predilections. The arguments for the assignment were related to distance between school and

home and she was not able to find a way to change the situation at that moment. Sonia, a low

SES participant explained:

> I enrolled my son [in school]. At first, I wanted to send him to another school that was close to my home. But the system determined that this school belonged to him, and since it is one block away and I noticed that there were few students per class, I thought that my child would be better served compared to other schools that have the maximum number of children.

> According to parents' perceptions, several reasons for choosing a school were identified.

The reasons exposed by parents during the focus groups appear on table 8 below. All the reasons

were classified under main categories to facilitate the thematic analysis.

Table 8.

Reasons for Choosing a School

Reasons	Categories
It is near my house.	**Proximity**
It is in my neighborhood.	
It is the same one I attended as a child.	**Tradition**
It is the same one that was attended by other relatives.	
It is currently attended by other relatives	
It has teachers with excellent academic training.	**Staff performance**
It employs teachers who are kind with children.	
It has an efficient principal when making decisions.	
Good teaching is given.	
I know the people who work there.	
Someone recommended the school.	**School concept**
It is socially recognized for its academic excellence.	
It has social prestige.	
It has access to transportation.	
It is attended by the same classmates since kinder or *CAIF*.	**Peer effect**
It provides an appropriate environment for my child to make friends.	
There were seats available at the time of registration.	
It is not a full-time school.	**Type of School**

All the reasons presented in table 8 were ordered as they were mentioned by parents. For example, the most mentioned reasons were the ones referred to proximity and traditions categories, followed by staff performance, school concept, and social recognition. Peer effect and type of school were less mentioned, but parents gave strong arguments that were considered to better understand the phenomenon of socioeconomic segregation in Uruguayan public elementary schools.

During the analysis it can be noticed that some reasons and arguments for choosing a school differed significantly depending on parents' socioeconomic status. Except proximity and traditions, that were common reasons for most of the participants, the remaining reasons were presented differently by parents from low socioeconomic contexts and middle-high socioeconomic backgrounds. Hence, all these considerations are presented, explained, and exemplified in the following themes.

The Proximity Between School and Home as a Priority

One of the most mentioned reasons to select a school was proximity. 63% of the participants mentioned proximity as the principal fact they took into consideration to select a school. Many parents from diverse socioeconomic status agreed that a short distance between school and home could be a strong reason to select a school. Phrases like "it's close to my house", "it's only one block away", and "it is the closest school", were some of the most common arguments provided during the focus groups. Julia mentioned, "First of all we took into account the proximity between the school and our house since they are only four blocks away."

Similarly, Carla said, "I enrolled him (...) because [the school] was two blocks from where I lived. Now I've moved and it's far away, but at least for this year it's going to end there."

The families consulted explained that they generally chose the neighborhood schools. Therefore, those families who lived in a centric neighborhood chose the closest and most prestigious schools. On the other hand, those who lived in the peripheral neighborhoods chose schools made up of more socioeconomically vulnerable populations. For example, Ana explained, "I chose it [the school] because I went to that school since I was a child and it's the neighborhood school, and almost all of us know each other." It is necessary to highlight that school proximity had a close relationship with residential segregation and could determine the socioeconomic composition of schools (Caetano & Macartney, 2021).

The Influence of Familiar Traditions When Choosing a School

Tradition was a factor when selecting a school and it was a revealing reason not previously identified in any of the literature consulted for this study. 62% of participants mentioned the importance for their children to attend the same school that someone in the family had previously attended. Parents from both, low and medium-high SES, mentioned that they chose a school previously attended by them or other relatives in the past. For example, Rosana assented, "I enrolled my child because I attended that school, and I liked it." Likewise, Ana explained, "I chose [the school] because I went to this school since I was a child and because it is the neighborhood school and almost all of us know each other."

Other participants considered not only their own experience attending a particular school, but also the experiences of other relatives. For example, Cata shared, "I took into account (...)

that the whole family attended [at that school]." Franc also stated, "Mom, grandmother, uncles, they all went to that school. When enrolling her, I took into account (...) if there were relatives who went to that school." Similarly, Noelia shared, "I enrolled [name] in that school because (...) I went to that school, I'm fond of it and also all my siblings went." For these participants, following traditions or maintaining familiar traditions was part of their children education and made all of them feel proud. Sofi for example, explained, "(...) My daughter really likes going to school and, in some way, she is proud to study in the same place where her father and some of her uncles studied."

Parents who showed tradition as a main motivation for choosing a school shared some outstanding features such as the detailed knowledge about the school building, an appropriation of the educational institution as a family asset, and a feeling of pride towards the school and the school actors. For example, as they have attended the same institution previously, they could describe the entire organization of the classrooms in detail. Sofi described:

> The facilities in general are good for a somewhat old place. In any case, I feel that it needs one more classroom since there is a room that is divided into the same place as the dining room. I also find the classrooms a bit small and do not have a break room or place inside to recreate when it rains.

Carla, added more information about the school and classrooms organization, "They fixed rooms, placed air conditioners, painted, made a room with a TV to watch things and work in that room. For all preschool children there is a small square that in many institutions there is not."

They could also locate the position and describe the characteristics of the break rooms and described the operation of the school day. For example, Juan explained in detail that the school "it is made up of material, it has ten rooms, bathrooms, dining room and kitchen, music

room, management room (...)" while Mari added that "it also has a video conference room (...), it has three break rooms: one is only for kindergarten, other is shared from first grade to third grade and the last one is for fourth grade to sixth grade."

In addition, they could compare the changes that the institution has experienced historically, since they counted with their own previous experience and the school stories of their ancestors who also attended the same institution many years before. For example, Carla expressed, "the school has been improved since I attended. They fixed rooms, installed air [conditioners], painted, made a room (...)" and Noelia added, "the school has improved a lot since I attended it. The facilities are better than a few years ago." Hence, the fact that several family generations have attended the same school turned the institution into a symbolic family asset, which they all share, and it is expected to be passed on to future generations. Furthermore, families developed a sense of belonging and a common identity with the school. Many times, during the focus groups, parents assured that they "feel proud to be part of the school."

The Role of Staff Performance and School Conception When Choosing a School

During focus groups, parents explained that another strong motivation to enroll their children in a school was the image that the school projected in the social imaginary. This motivation was more frequently mentioned by parents from medium or high socioeconomic backgrounds who looked for schools considered as "the best public schools" or "well regarded" and "recommended" schools. For example, Bruno mentioned, "[the school] has always been highly regarded as an educational center." These schools were characterized by a quickly run out of seats available and participants ensured that families who lived far away traveled every day to

take their children there. Julia explained that "children come from far-away places" because "it is one of the best public schools in Salto."

In addition, families consulted also explained that another factor that prevailed when choosing a school was the characteristic of the staff. Karina stated that she chose the school "for the very good teaching" and Julia complemented, "It consists of a great team of teachers." In other words, these families looked for schools that have social recognition and prestige, especially due to the good teaching that is supposed to be found there. Sofi gave her opinion, "I believe that the school must have teachers and staff who are highly committed to the institution and that the work they do is by vocation." Lorena concurred, "More than anything, I appreciate that it has good teaching staff, willing to work, to teach and with a lot of patience."

Low SES families did not mention the school and staff performance in such a strong way. They mostly looked for teachers that were kind and tolerant with children. Julia for example said, "my child had three teachers and all of them were excellent and dedicated." They explained that outstanding and kind teachers assured quality learning and children's well-being. Elsa mentioned, "the teachers are very good and my child feels very comfortable with her." Celia was more specific, "the teacher is a sweetheart." Franc concurred that teachers "give a lot of love and dedication." Thus it was observed that in low SES contexts, teaching was more associated with emotions than with performance.

For the participants, teachers were an important but not enough part of their requirements. They also looked for schools that had an efficient principal capable of solving problems and making decisions on behalf of the students. For example, Karina exposed; "for me [the school] has to have good teachers and a good principal (...). I think that everything

complements each other and if everything works well, the child will be enthusiastic and we as parents will remain calm and feel safe." Flor agreed that what was needed was "teachers [and] a principal (…) who support them [the students] and give them the best."

Additionally, it was also noted that parents from middle-high socioeconomic backgrounds considered that the best schools for their children were those in which they can participate and contribute, since they felt capable of doing so. For example, Bruno stated, "parents, students and teachers should be able to find themselves in an institution that makes them feel comfortable to carry out their tasks in the best possible way."

During the focus groups, it was detected that upper-middle class families deployed certain mechanisms that allowed them to obtain reliable information on the performance of the school staff as well as the school organization and operation. Sofi explained that she and her husband "took into account the opinions and experiences of others (...) with the school." They selected some schools that were most mentioned in social gatherings or in comments that they collected among people with whom they were linked. Additionally, for these participants of the focus groups, the information about the staff, the quality of teaching, and the efficiency of the principal can also be obtained through actors that worked within the educational institution. Julia explained that she also "collected information from people who work in the institution" itself such as other parents who were part of support teams, service assistants, or teachers. The participants indicated that knowing someone who actively participated in school activities or who works within the institution was what gives them greater confidence when choosing a school.

Peer Effect: The Relevance of Classmates

Many families that participated in this study selected a school considering the students'

composition of the school. Families from upper SES, for example, searched for schools whose

students could contribute positively to their children's growth and learning. Sofi for example,

preferred schools that "provide a good environment (...) to interact and make friends." For these

families consulted, the school was seen as a tool for social bonding. Therefore, they selected

possible schools that other peers from similar SES deemed valuable to attend. Given that school

contexts are perceived as homogeneous, it is worth asking if what these families seek is to

strengthen and develop bonds of friendship with peers from the same socioeconomic context.

Socioeconomically vulnerable families who participated in the study also paid special

attention to classmates but in a different way. Many of these families said that one of the reasons

for choosing a school was to maintain certain friendships that their children kept from

kindergarten. Mari for example, explained that, "in general, the classmates came together from

the CAIF centers" (in English: Child, and Family Care Centers). According to CAIF (2022),

these centers respond to a public policy that seeks to guarantee and protect the rights of early

childhood (from birth to three years). They offer an interdisciplinary approach regarding

attention and early stimulation to children. It also supports families in their parenting practices,

psychomotor stimulation, and healthy diet. They are primarily aimed at children in situations of

poverty and social vulnerability. The experience is managed by the Uruguayan State, civil

society organizations, and municipal governments (CAIF, 2022).

Participants from low SES perceived that having the same classmates since their students were three years old was a beneficial experience. Carla stated, "they develop affection to the classmates" and Franc concurred that after many years "they feel care for their peers." Parents explained that their children felt happy attending a school with the same peers for a long time. Franc argued that "classmates know each other" and Mari confirmed that this made them "feel comfortable" and "adapt quickly to the institution." Parents also said that they contributed to the fellowship because they taught their children that at school "they are all the same." For example, Celia stated, "to me they are all the same" and Magela added, "and everyone learns the same." Additionally, in a low SES context, having the same peers from early childhood was one of the main reasons not to change school. Mari mentioned that separating children from their peers "would be a very hard change" because "they have a lot of classmates" and "they have affection for them."

However, a few low SES mothers emphasized that, in their opinion, having the same peers throughout school was not favorable in socioeconomically vulnerable contexts. These mothers expressed concern about the effect that the early contact with the same partners may have in the long term. For example, Sonia considered that:

> I've thought about it [changing school], but not in recent years because he's still a kid. Because I think it's better that he's in a small group and it seems to be a nice group. But I state that I fear for what may happen in the following years, that children who may have problems at home (I know there are many), in one way or another may affect my child. Either with the bullying or that things may be missing from his backpack since my son is often distracted. Or also that they teach him things that they should not. I don't know, I fear for the next few years but for now I wouldn't change him.

These parents referred that habits and values of some more socioeconomically vulnerable students were not always the ones they prefer or the healthiest. Additionally, Lorena exposed:

> Yes, I would change him, but because of my personal opinions. (...) Honestly, I don't like people. They go from one extreme to another. For example, there are mothers who show everything in summer [referring to the scant clothing]. They believe that their children are the best, and with six years old, they criticize the snack, uniform, and hair of their classmates, making them feel inferior. (...) Then, there are those who steal snacks, and the mothers pretend that nothing has happened.

According to their perceptions, the effects would not be as visible at an early age, but as the children grow older. Therefore, these mothers would like to change their children's schools, but they lack the means (transportation and time) to do so. Lorena explained that other schools of her choice were far away "that's why I didn't take him there." She also said that "I have another two [year-old] child and I am going to have a baby; it is difficult for me to go far."

As in various aspects mentioned above, there were clear differences regarding the consideration of classmates when choosing a school according to the socioeconomic context of origin of the families involved in the study. However, in both cases, despite the different perceptions, the parents' aim was to maintain certain classmates, which led to the reproduction of inequities and educational segregation.

Type of School: The Avoidance of Full-time Schools

Although considerations about the type of school attended was not one of the most widely mentioned aspects, it is considered an important factor to be analyzed. The type of school was mentioned by some participants especially from upper socioeconomic contexts. For them, it was important to avoid enrolling their children in full-time schools. Karina mentioned, "In my case, it never crossed my mind to send her to a full-time school, neither did my other daughter, they were always the same."

In Uruguay, full-time schools are public elementary schools attended by children for seven and a half hours a day versus four hours in other urban schools. Part of the activities are carried out by teachers and the rest of the time overseed by special teachers or workshop leaders. Historically, full-time schools were designed to strengthen the learning of less-privileged sectors of the population and for this reason they were also built-in deprived areas of the cities (Peralta, 2007). Currently, any type of student is allowed to attend the school, regardless of their social class of origin.

Participants in this study did not mention explicitly the school socioeconomic context as a reason to avoid full-time schools. However, they let it be seen, for example in Karina's words who expressed, " I also don't think they never needed [to attend a full-time school]", associating the type of school with a socioeconomic need. They also explained that "it takes many hours" and "children end the day exhausted." Sofi told,

> I attended a full-time school and loved studying there very much. But I also considered how my daughter is, and she is a girl who really needs to rest after the educational day. (…) In any case, it is always an option if at some point work requires us to spend fewer hours at home.

Parents also prioritized spending time with their children and said that having extended school days "take away hours of rest and recreation." Flor explained, "It seems to me that full-time schools take up many hours for her, and if they have extracurricular activities, she ends up exhausted. Besides, since my working hours are changing (...) I would have less time to be with her." Sofi concurred, "[my daughter] was always very interested in doing extracurricular things, and we really didn't want her to feel exhausted being so young." These families preferred to carry out other types of extracurricular activities, such as physical and artistic activities, or even

learning support out of the school. They could afford such types of activities and liked to choose when and with whom their children recreate.

Lower SES families, on the contrary, required that public schools provide recreation for free. These participants explained that for them, an ideal school immersed in a vulnerable context should offer all those extracurricular activities that students cannot access. For example, Sonia considered that the best education for their children should include "extra activities such as sports, music, art, English, (...) things that add up and make children enjoy going to school" and are not present in all schools in Uruguay. She also claimed, "Not to mention that the *Verano Solidario* stays for those children who finish the year and do not have their lunch and snack (…) and can share with their classmates at school and not on the street." Summer schools (formerly *Verano Educativo* or *Solidario*) are a government pedagogical extension project whose purpose is to support the most vulnerable communities during the holidays and offer learning activities, recreation, music, corporality, as well as a food service (La Diaria, 2022).

Hence, school choice related to school type should be considered as one of the factors that lead to educational segregation by socioeconomic level. The type of school involves a cultural conception of the school and the students that attend the institution, sometimes, this perception could be discriminatory. Additionally, the type of school determines the opportunities and possibilities that the school itself offers to students. For example, a school immersed in an unfavorable context, which offers free activities for the most vulnerable children, could be seen as exclusive to this type of population. This idea is reinforced by certain phrases shared by middle-class participants who seek to avoid these schools and wish that their children "never need" to attend a full-time school. This kind of phrase reinforced the idea that only "those who

need" would attend these schools and collaborated with educational segregation and social segmentation.

Institutional Factors

Institutional factors involved in this study refer to how educational policies and school organization and administration contribute to increase educational segregation (Córdoba et al., 2020; INEEd, 2021; Rossetti, 2014; Treviño et al., 2014). From the analysis of data provided by the participants, it can be inferred that institutional factors also have a significant weight when choosing a school compared to contextual and sociocultural factors. However, the educational institutions practices were more hidden and implicit when enrolling students. According to the perceptions of the parents involved in the study, it could be seen that the educational institutions they selected were not segregationist or "discriminatory." For example, Juan exposed, "Students are not differentiated or rejected based on their economic situation." Mari concurred, "It is a school where no difference of any kind is made, both parents and students have the support of the principal for whatever is needed. It is a very supportive school." Likewise, Sonia said, "I personally have not seen that kind of discrimination", and Julia explained, "During this time we have never experienced a situation of rejection or socioeconomic discrimination." However, some parents did not agree. Noelia for example, expressed, "I believe that there is no discrimination on the part of the teachers, but there can be around the peer group, depending on the upbringing and education of each child." Cata had a similar perception, "I don't think that at school [there is discrimination]. Yes, with some families. I do believe that there are denials."

The participants also based their arguments on the insight that their children were accepted immediately and without any problems at the time of enrollment. Phrases like "he was accepted immediately" or "There was no problem at the time of registration" were shared by many participants such as Eva, Elsa, Rosana, Magela, Estela, Laura, Karina, Pedro, Juan and Sofi. Other parents such as Flor added some details about registration, "She was accepted without problem. Likewise, at the time of registration they asked me to say two more school options in case she didn't stay in that one." Julia experienced a similar situation, "(...) when I went to enroll her there were no seats available, but we were lucky a few days later. What a thrill! And a great relief." Although in most cases there were no problems when registering the students, it is also true that in certain schools the registration may be conditioned by the number of students who wish to enroll there. Hence, certain aspects that appeared explicitly and implicitly in the parents' speeches made it possible to assert that educational institutions could be collaborating with educational segregation, perhaps without even noticing it, especially among the requirements that schools asked for students' enrollment.

Institutional Requirements for Students' Enrollment

In Uruguayan public schools, enrollment for first grade begins in December and continues through the month of February. Classes used to start during March. In general, and for various reasons that this study does not intend to address, parents consulted expressed that some schools were more in demand than others. In these schools, long lines of parents can be seen while they intend to gain access for their students. They tried to avoid being placed in waiting lists that lead them to decide on another school that may not be of their liking. Participants explained that during the days in which registrations are open, any adult responsible for the

children can attend to register them and the institution ask for some documents to proceed with the registration.

According to the parents who participated in the study, at the time of registration they were asked for certain documents such as the child's identity document, their parents' identity document, a certificate that the child is healthy, a vaccination certificate, and some parental data such as age, contact telephone number, and studies carried out. These documents were requested in a general way from all the parents participating in this study at the time of enrolling their children in school. However, participants mentioned certain elements present at the time of registration that could be considered promoters of educational segregation.

According to the data collected in this study, there were significant differences in the documentation required according to the socioeconomic context of the school. Considering the perceptions of the parents consulted, in schools characterized by a low socioeconomic context, they were only asked to declare the address in which they live, or they were simply asked how many blocks from the school they live. For example, Carla said, "They asked me for documentation of the child, of the family that lived with him. They asked me if he had siblings at school, how far away I lived, and family and parent information." Similarly, Magela told, "I went to school on registration days with the girl's documents. [They asked me for] the documents, the address, information about the parents." Estela concurred, "ID of the child, address, phone number and ID of mom and dad." Parents explained that in these schools there were always places available to enroll students. For this reason, the distance from the school to the home would not be so decisive. As explained above, there are other contextual and

sociocultural factors that would be decisive for families living near a certain school to choose it as their first option.

Something very different occurred in schools with upper socioeconomic context. These institutions have a high demand from families to get an available place that allows them to send their children there. Moreover, families who could travel considerable distances to take their children to these schools did so without hesitation. For this reason, according to parents, in these institutions, waiting lists were very usual, that is, lists with names of promising students who wanted to attend there but arrived after other children. Given the real demand for places, it was not enough for these schools to ask for address or blocks distance from school to those enrolling their children. In order to reduce the number of families who wanted to register their children there, schools asked for a proof of residence. For example, Karina said, "They asked me for proof of address, if I had another brother and they asked me for two options from two other schools in case she didn't stay in that one." Rosa and Julia concurred, and Sofi provided some more details, "At the time of registration they asked me for the CAIF pass, the identity card of the child and the parents. Certificate of address, if he had siblings, pediatric card, and vaccination schedule. And two other options of educational centers." Cata and Bruno also mentioned the proof of residence as a requirement. This certificate can be issued by the police or parents can use a receipt for the payment of a service.

The Parents´ Preferences, Priorities and Requirements About the School Building

Another institutional factor that determined the choice of school by families was the condition of the school building. The facilities in which the school operates was mentioned

repeatedly by the participants of this study. Parents hinted that the type of building, its structure, distribution, as well as its location were important aspects to consider when choosing a school for their children. During focus groups they used to discuss the general characteristics of the building and compared them with other educational institutions. For example, Franc described, "It is a one-floor school, with spacious and comfortable classrooms. It has two breakrooms, a dining room and a computer room. All rooms have air conditioning." Sonia also stated, "It seems quite adequate to the basic needs of children (...)." They also talked about the distribution of spaces within the school, the activities it favored, the inclusion of technologies, and the need for certain improvements. Magela mentioned about it, "The facilities are acceptable. Obviously, there are improvements to be made." The participants demonstrated knowledge of the institution and most of them mentioned feeling part of it.

Most parents from both low SES contexts and those from upper SES contexts stated that they were satisfied with the building and the organization of the school their children attended. However, notorious differences could be observed in their conversations during focus groups according to the socioeconomic context to which the families belonged. It was found that the aspects of the institution that they valued, as well as what the institutions themselves prioritized in terms of building improvements, depended largely on the needs of the students who attended there. For example, families from a low socioeconomic context valued that the school building provided the necessary security for the children who attended there. As it was previously mentioned in other sections of this study, families mentioned the presence of high walls, bars, and large gates as very valuable elements. For example, Julio said that "There must always be things to change within an institution but for the moment we are very satisfied with the

treatment, security and education that they provide to our girl." It can be seen how for these families, the security of the building was just as important as the type of care and education that a school should provide. This aspect can be linked to the fact that the school provided protection from possible criminal acts that can occur in the neighborhood. But they can also be related to isolating their children from the precariousness of the context in which they live.

Families from high SES context were more demanding regarding the conditions of the building and the need for improvements. For example, Bruno mentioned, "I consider that the school facilities are adequate for the development of school activities, although some reforms would be needed, more than anything in the classrooms." Pedro concurred, "It is a very old building adapted so that classes can be taught normally, it requires reforms to be more comfortable." Carmen also told, "It is a building with many years, and every year something is done, some reform." During the focus groups they insisted that the school "needs classrooms (...) and does not have a break room or other place inside to recreate when it rains." They added that the school "would need some reforms (...) to be more comfortable." Cata explained, "(...) there is a lack of repairs, it is an old school and there is a lack of comfort for the children." Accordingly, these families highlighted the need for the school to provide "comfort" to the students.

<div align="center">Summary of the Focus Groups Findings</div>

Sub research question 1 (Sub-RQ1) findings indicate that participants gave special attention to the school neighborhood when choosing the educational institution for their children. However, there were some differences detected according to the socioeconomic context of the families. Hence, low-income participants prioritized security and knowledge of the school, while

upper SES families focused on prestigious schools, located in centric neighborhoods with access to services and transportation. Moreover, living in different neighborhoods made these families to have diverse perceptions and value differently the role of education in their own life situation.

Next, sub research question 2 (Sub-RQ2) focused on the impact of sociocultural factors in educational segregation. Families who participated in this study posed proximity and familiar tradition in the first place when choosing a school. They explained that they used to select schools that were located near their homes and at the same time, they considered schools previously attended by other relatives or themselves. Furthermore, they took into consideration the features of the staff, the peers and the school itself. Here, there also were some differences between expectations of families depending on their socioeconomic context. Therefore, families from upper SES preferred prestigious schools with good teachers and efficient principals. They also looked for schools with students that can contribute to their children growth and development. Low SES families, on the contrary, chose schools with kind teachers and they tried to maintain the peers that attend with their children from kindergarten. Additionally, parents from upper SES tried to avoid full-time schools because they take a lot of time for their kids and parents preferred to provide out of school activities for them. On the other hand, although the low SES parents did not mention full-time schools, they did explain that for them the school has to provide all possible extra activities for those who cannot access them outside the institution.

Finally, sub research question three (Sub-RQ3) focused on institutional factors that lead to educational segregation. It was noticed that parents were interested in the school building when choosing a school, but upper SES families focused on comfort and low SES families prioritized security. In addition, it was detected that educational institution had different

requirements according to the SES context where they are located. For example, institutions located in a low SES context only asked for the address at the time of registering students, while upper SES schools asked for a proof of residency that limited the school choice for parents that did not live in the school neighborhood.

These findings will be discussed in the following section. A summary of the findings is found in Table 9.

Table 9.

Summary of the Focus Groups Findings

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	FINDINGS
RQ According to Uruguayan elementary school parents, what are their perceptions and experiences about the decision-making process of registering in public elementary schools? **Sub-RQ1. According to parents, how do contextual factors influence their decision-making process of school selection?**	**Theme #1: The Role of the School Neighborhood in School Selection** Diverse families showed different perceptions, values and needs about the school neighborhood when choosing a school for their children. The participants from both families gave great importance to the neighborhood of the school when choosing an educational institution, but the main differences lie in the fact that low-income families selected the school prioritizing safety and knowledge of the school context. However, families with greater socioeconomic resources focused on prestigious schools, located in a centric neighborhood, with access to all possible services and transportation possibilities. **Theme #2: The Families' Perceptions About SES, School Context, and Education** The two types of families previously identified established different links between their socioeconomic context and education. The most socioeconomically privileged families made a direct association between their SES and the educational level attained. Therefore, they directly related economic income to educational achievements and chose prestigious schools in terms of the educational level that they develop in their students. The most socioeconomically vulnerable families, on the contrary, did not establish a direct relationship between income and their level of study. They considered that their life situation was given by external factors that were accepted without question and perceived as normal. These participants trusted and claimed the value of their constant struggle for survival on a day-to-day basis rather than in the educational level they can achieve.

(Table 9 continued)

| Sub-RQ2. According to parents, how do sociocultural factors influence their decision-making process of school selection? | **Theme #3 The Proximity Between School and Home as a Priority**
A short distance between school and home was one of the main reasons to make decisions. 63% of the participants expressed that they chose the school located in their neighborhood. Families from upper SES were freer to take their children to schools located far away. However, low SES families were forced to choose the neighborhood school since they experienced time and transportation limitations.

Theme #4. The Influence of Familiar Traditions when Choosing a School
62% of parents consulted determined familiar traditions as a main reason to select a school for their children. Parents from both SES identified mentioned that it was very important for them to choose a school previously attended by them or other relatives in the past. This was a revealing reason because it was not previously mentioned in any reviewed literature.

Theme #5. The Role of Staff Performance and School Conception When Choosing a School
The staff performance and the school sociocultural conception was one of the reasons most mentioned by upper SES families consulted. They preferred schools recognized for its social prestige, characterized by good teachers and an efficient principal. These parents had access to valuable information that allowed them to make the decision.

Theme #6. Peer Effect: The Relevance of Classmates
Families consulted considered that the kind of students that compose the school was an important reason when deciding. Upper SES families looked for schools with similar SES and students that could contribute positively to their children's growth and learning. While low SES families opted to keep the classmates who had already been attending together since kindergarten or CAIF. However, sometimes, they felt that the vulnerability of the peers could negatively affect the relationships in the future. |

(Table 9 continued)

Theme #7: Type of School: The Avoidance of Full Time Schools

High SES parents consulted avoided enrolling their children in full-time schools because of the time that these kind of school inputs and the sociocultural conception of vulnerability that characterized it. They preferred to send their children to extracurricular activities (out of school). Low SES families, on the contrary, required that the school could provide all possible extracurricular activities as well as demanded that the *Verano Solidario* not be missed because children eat and learn at school.

Sub-RQ3. According to parents, how do institutional factors influence their decision-making process of school selection?	**Theme #8: Institutional Requirements for Students' Enrollment**

Parents involved in this study agreed that they were received appropriately in the schools selected at the time of registration. There were no problems or difficulties when enrolling their children. However, it was detected that the documentation required by the institution to register the students was different in low and upper SES school contexts. For example, in low SES school context, families were asked to present IDs from all family members, health certificates and only tell their address. While in upper SES school context a proof of residence was required. This fact implied that only the families who live near the school (centric and not vulnerable neighborhoods) can opt to attend this kind of institutions, promoting educational segregation.

Theme #9: The Parents´ Preferences, Priorities and Requirements About the School Building

Most of the participants consulted expressed that the school building and its maintenance that the educational institution offered was an important fact considered when choosing a school. There were significant differences detected about the expectations and requirements that families from low SES and upper SES had about the school building. The first families mentioned prioritized school security while the second families required mor comfort for their children when attending the school.

Portraitures

Two portraits, as a complementary methodology, are shared in this chapter because only two participants from the 27 initially contacted accepted to be part of this additional data collection methodology. The interviews were used to illustrate background information and detailed descriptions about parents' life experiences and perceptions according to the influence of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in the process of school selection. Additionally, the narrative data analyzed was utilized to improve the credibility of the focus groups findings because some themes found in the interviews overlap and complement the findings from the focus groups.

The first portraiture corresponds to Noelia, a separated mother who lived in a peripheric neighborhood and needed to choose a school for Julián, her 6-year-old son. Additionally, the second portraiture is the result of an interview conducted with a medium-high SES couple who decided to be interviewed together. Rosa and her husband Claudio explained in detail how they chose a school for her daughter Carolina, and how contextual, socioeconomic and institutional factors influenced that decision.

<u>Noelia</u>

Noelia was one of the participants of one of the focus groups who agreed to participate in an interview. She was the mother of Julián, a 6-year-old boy. She was recently separated from Julián's father and returned to live in her parents' house, in one of the most socioeconomically vulnerable neighborhoods identified by participants in this study.

Noelia said that her son attended CAIF until he was three years old, and then Kindergarten. After that period, she had to choose an institution for her son to attend elementary school, and she had no doubts: she chose the same school that she and her four siblings attended as children. In this regard, she explained, "Well, look, I chose that school first of all because I (...) and my brother and sisters did, that is, we all attended that school."

To make the decision, she relied on her mother's opinion, "I asked my mom what she thought, what she thought about [choosing that school] and she said yes." Opinions, experiences, and family traditions were decisive when choosing a school for her son. For Noelia, continuing the family tradition was very significant. She explained, "We have a family history at that school" and finally concluded, "We love that school."

She also mentioned that the school was close to her parents' house, "(...) I came to live with my parents, and I am one block from that school, so it was great for me." However, this aspect was not mentioned once more in the rest of the interview, so it can be inferred that for Noelia, proximity was a minor motivation. The important thing for her lay in historical and familiar tradition and transmission of family culture to the youngest members of the family.

Noelia and her family have always felt part of the school. She recognized that being part of that educational institution gave her the possibility of having detailed knowledge about it, as well as getting to know the teachers who worked there. For Noelia, that was a kind of advantage when choosing a school. For example, she said that there still were teachers who also worked when her youngest sister went to school. "For example, Julián's teacher was the teacher of one of my sisters", recounted with pride. She also remembered:

> Also, for example, the physical education teacher knows my sisters and he [Julián] has classes with that teacher, and then, I don't know, it's like he remembers my sisters and said: I taught your aunts. He loves him, do you understand me?

For Noelia, this kind of recognition of the family members by the oldest teachers of the institution gave her satisfaction, pride and generated a certain security and confidence when sending her son to school.

Moreover, attending that same school and getting to know it also allowed Noelia to make certain comparisons when deciding to choose that school for her son. For example, she told that, according to her perception, the school had changed for the better since the time she attended. She explained:

> [The school] changed for the better because, as I told you, I see that the school has had a lot of repairs, including construction repairs (...). Also, as I told you, they added physical education, the music part that is very important for them (...) they even teach English.

In her words, both the building that had undergone renovations and the extra activities that the school offered allowed her to confirm that sending her son there was a good decision: "The school has been improved, you see, so, that was also what helped me, that is, it made me decide to send him to that school."

Noelia and her four siblings always did very well at that school. From what she told, they were always honorable students. Both she and her siblings were representatives of the institution as flag bearers. In Uruguay, being a flag bearer is a very important recognition. The grades that were awarded during elementary school are considered and then, the best graded students are voted by their peers to be their representatives. Noelia remembered:

> (...) I was an escort [of the flag] and my other sisters too. My brother was a flag bearer. I don't know, I always liked school, I have no complaints about that school. (...) If we all went, it's because we did well at school. I have a nice memory (...).

The recognition and being chosen for a memorable act seems to be something that Noelia also

expected for her son. Among the anecdotes she told, she highlighted the fact that the teacher

chose a production by her son for an exhibition. Noelia narrated:

> Look, a little while ago they had to make a toy bird, and his dad helped him to make a metal one. (...) I don't know what it was, but it seems that the teacher chose that toy bird, which was special, and took it to an exhibition. You saw, for him it was something beautiful.

> Her anecdote is also linked to the opinion that she had about the role that teachers play in

the education of children. For Noelia, not everything should be requirements for the performance

of the children. The most important thing for her was how the teachers make the students feel. At

one point in the conversation, she expressed, "(...) what is important is the treatment that you see

from the teachers. That's what matters, understand?" For Noelia, the affective bond that teachers

can generate with students must prevail when choosing a school, especially in vulnerable

contexts in which, according to her words, "perhaps many children do not have it at home."

> According to Noelia, this link can only be generated by teachers who work by vocation:

> (...) There are teachers who work by vocation. They generate that relationship that is not from a mother, but they generate that beautiful relationship that later, when you grow up, you remember that teacher. And there are teachers who do not do it by vocation, they do it to earn money. You realize when a teacher does it by vocation because your son tells you.

> Undoubtedly, for Noelia, feelings, her own history, and the memories she kept of the

experiences at school prevailed. She wanted that for her son, too. Therefore, she chose the same

school that brought her so much satisfaction and from which she and her family had such fond

memories.

> Look, I kept a memory of the principal, that is, the principal loved me so much, I don't know, maybe we were good students, I don't want to show off, but when I left school, she gave me a little chain with an elephant. That principal is no longer there (...) but that

memory stayed with me, did you see? For a student, if a person who is the principal gives you a chain, for me it was, I don't know, an honor. I don't know, you saw, there are things that remain in the heart. (...) So, I don't know, I wanted my son to go there also because of that, because of the family issue. It's like I went to that school and he's going to go to his mother's school.

At the time of the interview, Noelia wanted to continue feeling part of the institution. According to her, the school motivated families to participate in different activities. She maintained that the institution invited parents to attend, read stories, and take part in outings. She told for example:

This thing about inviting parents to attend, I don't know, the outings, it's nice too, because you share with your child. And those activities, for example, (...) that the parents go to tell a story, that is also good, because it implies that you are part of the school.

Despite the love that she expressed for the school she attended and the one that her son attended at the time of the interview, Noelia was critical and realized that not everyone thinks the same as her about the institution. According to her perception, many people discriminate against the school because of the context or the neighborhood in which it was located. Noelia explained:

Unfortunately, society often gets carried away by the school area. (...) and there they generate discrimination because, for example, I have heard parents say: no, not to that school because many poor people go, and they are discriminating, because they do not want their children to associate with that kind of people.

In response, Noelia expressed her opinion and maintained that for her there are no major differences between educational institutions. From her point of view, the real differences lie in the family and in the upbringing and education they provide to their children. Noelia argued, "I believe that the schools are all the same and that education, as I always say, (...) is at home." Later, in her speech, she continued to reinforce her idea in which the family appeared as the main institution responsible for education.

I don't think it has much to do with school. It seems to me that the base, the root of education is at home, in the family. The teacher can do something, but (...) the teacher is not everything. The teacher is there for four or five hours, but everything occurs at home. If a child has problems, he brings them from where? Obviously from home.

At the end of the interview, Noelia did not hesitate to give advice to families who must go through the process of choosing a school for their children. She recommended:

For me, if you're going to choose a school, don't take what others tell you in consideration. (...) I mean, for me, if a parent is going to choose a school, he or she should go with what they feel, do you understand? Not because of what other tell you.

To sum up, for Noelia, education was more closely linked to the family and to the values that it transmits than to the school. The school accompanies the educational process and therefore, it is important that family traditions be considered when choosing a school. According to Noelia, choosing the school that parents or other relatives attended before guarantees knowledge of the institution, of the teachers, family recognition over time, and the possibility of continuing to be part of the school. When choosing, therefore, Noelia recommended following feelings, "what the heart says" and not considering external opinions or recommendations.

Rosa and Claudio

Rosa and Claudio were married and used to work in the business sector. At the time of the interview, they were in the mid-forties and had three daughters. They were enthusiastic about the interview and welcomed me into their home near downtown. They preferred to answer the interview questions together, since they were both the ones who made the decision when choosing a school for their daughter.

At the beginning of the interview, they explained that they had chosen a school in an informed manner. Since Carolina was in kindergarten, they began to seek advice and ask for

recommendations on which of the three options they had considered was the most convenient for their daughter. Rosa explained that they started the inquiry "when [Carolina] was in 5-year-old kindergarten. But not quite on date, we started to find out long before." She continued, "Well, the first thing we did was ask someone we knew." Among the people they knew, they selected some with whom they shared in their social circle. Rosa detailed, "We asked people who already had children in those schools and some of the teachers we already knew. (...) [We also consulted] the parents of other Carolina classmates, acquaintances, and neighborhood residents."

What Rosa and Claudio wanted to know was if the teachers "had enough academic training and were demanding." For them it was essential that their daughter acquire knowledge. Claudio expressed:

> [The most important thing in school] is knowledge, that they go somewhere and learn. That is going to be the tool or the basis for what they are going to continue studying later. That is, that students learn to study, to be responsible for the activities they have to do.

Rosa agreed with Claudio. For her, everything that concerned the school and teaching was directly related to teacher training and the teaching that the teachers imparted. She expressed, "(...) the teachers are always very well trained, very well trained, and in fact she [Carolina] has had a very good education thanks to that."

At the time, when they just began to look at which school Carolina could attend, proximity was an aspect that they considered. Claudio said, "(...) obviously we saw the location, that it was close to us. We had two options close by, and well, we took the option because we had good references." For them the location was not a main aspect. "Actually, if it was because of where we lived, another school was closer to us than the one we finally chose", Rosa clarified.

For them, other aspects such as the type of education and teacher training prevailed. For both, Rosa and Claudio, education must allow access to a certain type of knowledge and, at the same time, require the student to give his or her best. Rosa explained that the family accompanies, but it is the school that must meet the expectations, needs and requirements of the society in which the students are going to be inserted. In her words:

> It happens to us that beyond demanding and wanting them to have other access to knowledge of the things that happen daily, it is not just that we demand that the school do it, we support from home. But sometimes you feel that you support and insist more from home, and then they go to school and not so much is required of them.

In addition to considering the teachers, their training and the type of teaching they teach, it also seemed essential to consider the building infrastructure, safety and hygiene of the institution. In this regard Rosa commented, "(...) Basically the options available were three schools (...). And well, yes, we look at the infrastructure, at the level of the teachers, at the safety and hygiene of the institution (...)." In order to have reliable information about what the building was like, the organization of the classrooms and the security of the breakroom, Rosa and Claudio requested permission to access the school and tour it. For example, Rosa recounted, "Yes, I asked to enter the bathrooms. It was something I asked, and I saw that the boys' bathrooms were well separated from the girls' bathrooms, and that they were clean."

Once inside the institution and enabled to tour it, they also took the opportunity to observe the characteristics of the principal and his management team. In this regard, Rosa clarified, "And well, later when we went and accessed the school, well, we had a talk with the principal and with the sub-principal to see how much confidence they gave us." For both Rosa and Claudio, the role of the principal was fundamental and knowing how the principal behaved and made his decisions was part of their own decision when choosing a school. Rosa expressed,

"Many times everything happens because of who is in charge. (...) [The main fact] is the head, as in any company." Claudio concurred:

> The one who directs has to have things clear. I believe that it is good for the teachers or professors, and aside from that, it marks a path and, well, progress is being made in that sense. I think it's important.

Rosa and Claudio also observed the place that the educational institution gave to participation. They told, "New classrooms were made that expanded the school, a lot of work was done in an outdoor green space..." They valued the possibility to be part of the school and collaborate. Moreover, they stated that participating in the institution also permitted to be part and interact with other parents. Claudio remembered, "When [Carolina] started school (...) within the idea that we had, it worked well. There was a nice group of parents (...) and you could see a lot of work by the principal and the team he led, right? People were always helping." Rosa also commented, "That's good because you could see that at school there were always people trying to help." For this couple, the possibility of participating in the institution was also a reason for choosing that school. For them, participation was not only rooted in the contact they could have with their daughter in a classroom, but in a broader project in which decisions could be made regarding the institution itself. But above all, participation implied the social and cultural bond with other families that sent their children there. Collaborating with the institution also allowed them to take a position regarding situations with which they did not agree. Claudio for example, told, "The times we had to go to speak we always had a favorable response, we were taken into account, and we were listened."

At the end of the interview, they highlighted the possibility of choosing a school as very positive and important fact since, for them, education was a long-term investment. Rosa commented:

> (...) if there are the conditions… if there is a school that is five kilometers away from me and I can take her because it seems to me that it will be an investment of expense, time, because the academic training there is different or has another connotation within society, it seems to me that it is very important that you can choose.

Both argued that it was essential to choose a school in an informed manner since not all the schools are the same, or they instruct students in the same way Claudio explained:

> (...) basically because of the differences that may exist between one institution and another. Because if suddenly the educational level was more even, it wouldn't be so difficult to say I have to go to this place and that's it. The issue is in the quality of knowledge and learning that suddenly exists in a certain place and not in another.

To sum up, for Rosa and Claudio it was essential to be able to choose a school, but that decision should not be taken lightly. For them, it must be an informed decision. Distance was secondary. For them, the important thing lay in the service that the institution could offer them, as well as the guarantees that it could give them in relation to the teaching and knowledge provided to their daughter. Both the quality of the teachers and the efficiency of the principal were critical in the decision. Equal importance was given to the building and the possibility of participating in its improvement and conditioning. Also, for them, the institution was the place to establish new social ties with other parents.

Narrative Discussion

As in the focus groups, during the interviews it was possible to observe that there were different perceptions, values, expectations and needs when choosing a school depending on the

socioeconomic context of the families. Although in both portraitures the participants explained that they felt they were choosing a school for their children, various aspects that they presented showed that this choice was not made under the same conditions, nor with the same information, and that ultimately, the way in which that the educational system is designed limited their possibilities of choice and fostered educational segregation.

The first difference identified that was also mentioned by the rest of the participants in the focus groups was which school they chose. Noelia, a low SES mother, selected the same school that she and her siblings attended. Just as several of the focus group participants expressed that following certain family traditions was important when choosing a school, for Noelia, sending her son to the same school that she and her siblings attended gave her peace of mind and confidence. Knowing the school, the teachers and the staff that work there was an advantage for Noelia. For this reason, when she asked her mother if she agreed to send her grandson to the neighborhood school, her mother did not hesitate and the family decision was immediately made without consulting anyone else.

Rosa and Claudio, a married couple from a high socioeconomic background, made the decision to choose a school as a family, but first they asked a lot of questions and searched for a lot of information. Similar to other medium and high SES parents who participated in the focus groups, Rosa and Claudio consulted people who already had children in school, parents of their daughter's kindergarten classmates, acquaintances, and neighbors. At first, they handled three school options but finally they chose the most recommended one.

Among the elements that were most taken into account when making the decision, Noelia expressed that knowledge of the school, being the one in the neighborhood and having attended

there, was essential. But almost as important to her was the treatment that the teaching staff gave to the students. This aspect was also mentioned by other low SES families during the focus groups, in which they explained that children who attend schools in these contexts need love, support and tolerance. Rosa and Claudio, on the other hand, took into account other elements such as building conditions, safety, hygiene, teaching level, and the role of the principal as an efficient manager of a company. Their preferences were similar to those of other parents from a similar socioeconomic background who participated in the focus groups. During the online conversations, they highlighted that one of their priorities when choosing a school was that their children had comfort and that the teachers were solvent and demanding when teaching.

In both cases, the proximity between school and home was a secondary reason for choosing a school. However, Noelia chose the closest school, the one in the neighborhood, while Rosa and Claudio did not choose the school that was closest to their house, but another one a little further away but highly recommended. These aspects were also evidenced during the focus groups. All the participants from the most vulnerable socioeconomic contexts explained that they chose the neighborhood school. Other participants from medium and high socioeconomic contexts had more financial resources to move to other areas of the city and therefore chose other schools that, according to their perceptions, were more socially prestigious.

When Noelia, Rosa and Claudio were asked what advice they would give to other parents who were thinking about which school to send their children to, different perceptions also emerged. Noelia, for example, suggested that sending the children to a school that the parents knew and appreciated was the best option, especially if it was the same school that the parents themselves or other family members had attended. For Noelia, school was important but the real

education happened at home. The school was a support for that central formation that took place at home.

Rosa and Claudio, instead, suggested only choosing a school once enough information has been collected and enough references have been requested. For them, the school was in charge of their children's education and that is why it was important to think carefully before choosing. They also mentioned that it should be a school in which they were allowed to participate, since the parents were in charge of supporting the education that was taught there and could make suggestions if their expectations were not met.

Summary of the Portraitures' Findings

The next comparative table (Table 10) presents the findings obtained from both portraitures presented.

Table 10.

Portraitures Main Findings

Categories	Portraiture 1 Noelia	Portraiture 2 Rosa & Claudio
SES	Low	Upper
Chosen school	The same one that she and her siblings attended.	The one that their acquaintances recommended. They handled three options.
Who did they consult?	Her mother.	People who already had children in school, parents of their daughter's kindergarten classmates, acquaintances, neighbors.
What is the most important thing when choosing a school?	Follow the family tradition and the treatment that the teachers give to the students.	The building infrastructure, safety, hygiene, teaching level, the role of the principal as the manager of a company.
Do you prefer to choose a school or have the educational system assign it one?	Choose.	Choose.
Proximity	It is important but secondary.	It is important but not limiting.
Who is responsible for education?	The family. The school supports.	The school. The family supports, but the school does not always meet familiar expectations.
Advice	Choosing a school guided by feelings towards the institution.	Choose school after asking for references. Find out, tour the school, and participate.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative case study explored participants' perspectives and experiences about contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in their decision-making process of school selection in Uruguay. Additionally, it explored how those factors led to educational segregation in Uruguayan public elementary schools. Employing a qualitative case study approach, this study utilized a focus group technique to document the perspectives of 27 Uruguayan parents who needed to select a school for their children to better understand how contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors influence that decision and if the decision collaborated with the increasing educational segregation present in Salto. Additionally, three parents were interviewed to get their detailed perceptions and experiences about the school selection process. The interviews also were done to deepen and complement the findings obtained during the focus groups.

The data, once analyzed and interpreted, were used to respond to a main research question and the three sub-research questions related to the specific factors that were present during the decision-making process of choosing a school in Uruguay. According to INEEd (2022a), there is a situated process in which families elaborate their preferences regarding the choice of school. To do this, they consider intrinsic factors such as their own histories, biography and culture, combined with extrinsic factors such as recommendations or school advertising

(INEEd, 2022a). Based on these factors, certain possibilities and conditions arise and place each family in a different position at the time of choosing (Carrasco et al., 2016; INEEd, 2022a).

In a study carried out by INEEd (2022a), it was detected that the enrollment of students in public educational institutions in Uruguay has been changing over time. Similarly, Alegre (2010) argues that the assignment of students to schools went from a forced assignment according to the area of residence to an open choice model where each family can choose the school to which they wish to send their children. According to INEEd (2022a), this change was basically due to the need to universalize the access to education, but it is currently generating processes of educational segregation.

Likewise, data collected during this thesis suggested that, given the flexibility that characterizes the Uruguayan model of access and enrollment to public education, families were allowed to choose a school for their children. However, it was found that not all families chose schools in the same conditions. The results seem to indicate that contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors influenced the decision-making process of school selection. According to INEEd (2022a), in Uruguay, the open choice of educational institutions by families is prioritized, but this open choice is not given on equal terms since not all families have the same opportunities and possibilities when choosing a school.

It is necessary to remember that in this thesis educational segregation is understood as the unequal distribution of students with certain characteristics (such as ethnicity, gender, performance) in various organizations (such as the neighborhood, school, work) (INEEd, 2022; Lisboa Bartholo & Da Costa, 2014; Vázquez, 2016). For this particular study, the focus is on the

socioeconomic level of students and their unequal distribution in public elementary schools in Uruguay. The socioeconomic factor was selected since it is predominant in Uruguayan education (INEEd, 2022b).

Various authors have recommended studying educational segregation since it is an obstacle to improving learning, affects the socio-emotional skills of students, makes the educational system less efficient, and directly affects equity based on the principle of social justice (INEEd, 2022a; INEEd, 2022b; Maroy, 2008). For an educational system to be equitable, it is necessary to favor the integration of students of diverse origins in schools (INEEd, 2022b). Educational segregation is detrimental to this integration and generates the conformation of homogeneous classrooms with a loss of the diversity of cultural models, lower motivation and self-esteem of teachers and students, and lower overall performance in relation to the educational achievements (INEEd, 2022a; OCDE & UNESCO, 2003; Thrupp et al., 2002; Veleda, 2014).

School segregation is a complex and multicausal phenomenon and therefore must be analyzed considering its relationships with the social structure, urban geography, and the sociodemographic and cultural characteristics of the population (INEEd, 2022a; Musset, 2012; Orellana et al., 2018). Hence, three major factors that affect educational segregation were analyzed from the parents' perspectives: contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors (Jenkins et al., 2008). These three factors are presented and discussed below in relation to the themes that emerged during the analysis. These findings are intended to contribute to the study of a little-explored area in Uruguay: considering parents' perceptions on the process of registering students in Uruguayan public elementary schools. It was also important to collaborate with the

design of educational policies that mitigate the increase of educational segregation that negatively affects the educational system and the Uruguayan society in general.

Parents Perspectives on Contextual Factors that Influence the Decision-making Process of School Selection

For the families that participated in this study, the context of the school and particularly the neighborhood in which the school was located, was of particular importance when deciding about a school for their children. In Uruguay, families are unevenly distributed among neighborhoods and in schools strengthening their advantaged and disadvantaged situations (INEEd, 2021). Similarly, Maloutas et al. (2019) explain that the socio-demographic composition of neighborhoods impacts on living and school conditions. According to Atkinson and Kintrea (2001), some neighborhood features such as prevailing role models, forms of social capital, and the quality of services are transferred to the classroom, leading to socially unequal educational trajectories. Jenkins et al. (2008) argue that it is of particular importance for any analysis related to educational segregation to know where parents from diverse backgrounds live and how they perceive their neighborhoods and school contexts.

From the findings obtained in this thesis and according to participants' terms, it was possible to distinguish the presence of two types of schools (centric and peripheral) located in two areas or neighborhoods of the city with dissimilar and sometimes opposite characteristics. For example, centric schools were located in safe and crowded areas, full of services and transportation, while peripheral schools worked in more isolated areas from downtown, with more shortcomings and need for fixes. The identification of these two school contexts by

participants also made it possible for them to associate a specific and differentiated population to each one. Thus, families from medium and high socioeconomic contexts were linked to centric schools, while families from low socioeconomic contexts were located around peripheral schools. Likewise, in general, they sent their children to schools located in their neighborhoods. Hence, following participants' perspectives, the school socioeconomic context mirrors the socioeconomic context of the neighborhood.

All the characteristics presented before serve as evidence to confirm that, when this study had been developed, there was significant residential segregation in Salto. In a general understanding of the concept, residential segregation is the degree to which some social groups live separately in different parts of the city (Massey & Denton, 1988). In the case of Salto and according to participants' perceptions, residential segregation was a result of historical and institutional factors. Participants from low socioeconomic backgrounds showed a strong sense of belonging and respect to traditions and culture reflected in phrases like "this was the neighborhood where I lived my entire life." The literature on the topic showed that residential segregation across neighborhoods is one of the main channels that leads to segregation between schools (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Jenkins et al., 2008).

Participants in this study showed that when choosing a school, these socioeconomic and cultural contexts were decisive since they influenced the different perceptions, experiences, values, and needs of the families that live in each one. In other words, all the experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and perspectives acquired by the participants in a certain context influenced their decision-making process of school selection. For example, the expectations that participants from high socioeconomic backgrounds had regarding their children's education were

very different from what parents from more socioeconomically vulnerable backgrounds expected

from school. This situation is exacerbated by the hidden and covert competition that exists on the

part of schools to capture and satisfy those familiar needs and expectations (Bellei, 2015).

During focus groups and interviews, upper SES families explained that they looked for

prestigious schools located in esteemed and safe neighborhoods. They valued the access to all

possible services and transportation around school and showed high expectations about their

children's education and the school context. Likewise, it is known that families from medium

and high socioeconomic contexts are more informed about the operation and the educational

results of the schools and base part of their choice on them (Rojas et al., 2016). Moreover, they

fear that their children will mix with students with different values, so they dismiss schools that

serve socioeconomically vulnerable students or that are in neighborhoods considered dangerous

(Bellei et al., 2019; Canales et al., 2016; Raczynski et al., 2010; Rojas et al., 2016).

According to upper SES participants' perceptions there was also a strong link between

their socioeconomic context and the education they have received. For them, high levels of

educational achievements represented more possibilities of ascent in the social scale and greater

access to a higher salary. Many studies have concluded the existence of a relationship between

these two variables and the identification of the socioeconomic background as the main predictor

of educational achievement (Fransoo et al., 2005; Gil-Flores, 2011; Ma, 2000). Hence, students

who come from socioeconomically advantaged families tend to obtain better educational results

and reach higher educational levels since they have diverse resources provided by their families

that favor their performance as a student. (Gil-Flores, 2011). Although it is not convenient to

make generalizations, Jeynes (2002) exemplifies that students who come from more favored

contexts have families with a higher socio-educational level that enriches the social and cultural

environment in which they grow up. They have developed skills to maintain the status they have

achieved, as well as abilities, skills, and lifestyles that often transcend economics and that

promote educational achievement. Furthermore, the importance of the socioeconomic level of

families lies in developing certain attributes to achieve and maintain a social status as a cultural

element directly linked to education (Jeynes, 2002). For this reason, the upper SES parents who

participated in this study placed special emphasis on selecting a school characterized by a more

favorable socioeconomic and cultural context.

On the other hand, low SES participants explained that they prioritized and valued the

knowledge of the school building and its organization. For them, these expectations can only be

met if they chose the school located in the same neighborhood they lived. It was remarkable how

these families have developed an enormous feeling of belonging with their neighborhood.

Moreover, they chose the most known, the closest, and the most appreciated school. According

to what was expressed by the participants in this study and in accordance with a study carried out

by Ballion (1986) in France, low SES parents seek their children to be educated in institutions

that preserve similar social and cultural characteristics.

Additionally, low SES participants prioritized school safety. It is important to notice that

safety is a concern that all parents take into consideration when choosing a school (Schneider et

al., 1998). However, for low SES families it was extremely important to keep their children safe,

especially due to the conditions within which they are used to living. The school then became a

kind of bubble in which children can live and develop. However, this is not always possible, and

the socioeconomic and cultural context of the neighborhood inevitably filters into the educational institution, leaving isolation as a mere illusion of the families.

These low SES families considered for this thesis did not show high expectations about academic achievements in schools and, unlike the upper SES families, did not link their level of education with their life situation. According to Lareau (1987), it is important to consider that the characteristics of family life and family behaviors also mediate family-school relationships. Additionally, low SES participants underlined the role of struggle in their daily routine and how this effort allowed them to be perceived as working families. This perception responds to a traditional vision of social class closely linked to production systems (Latorre, 2015). For the working class, the same power relations that exist in the workplace are reflected in behaviors, values, and ideas, affecting family relationships, the use of free time, the importance given to education and self-esteem (Latorre, 2015). Similarly, Valdes (1996) states that cultural heritages influence students' educational and lifelong opportunities. Hence, according to participants' perceptions, the ones who were not used to work in their neighborhood had different customs, values and were located in a lower social position than theirs. With regards to their perceptions, auto defined working class families shared the belief that they had a certain social position that allowed them to identify with similar people and differentiate themselves from the less privileged neighborhood families (Centers, 1949).

Consequently, this thesis found that contextual factors identified led to educational segregation and impacted in different ways between socioeconomic groups. Therefore, contextual factors had effects at the school level that cannot be underestimated. First, it is necessary to consider that there was detected an unequal distribution of socioeconomic resources

that promoted a strong residential segregation. Second, the school that most of the families consulted chose was usually the neighborhood school. Therefore, the socioeconomic context of the school mirrored the context that characterized the neighborhood context. Third, the families that constituted each context in this thesis had different needs and expectations regarding education. Therefore, they chose a school based on those needs and possibilities. Finally, it can be affirmed that the low SES families consulted were the most affected in terms of contextual factors because they had fewer economic, social and cultural resources when making decisions. Most advantaged families have more resources that support them at their disposal. They had neighborhoods with more resources, schools were attended by children of middle and upper social classes, they had access to information about schools, and they had the means to travel in searching of schools that they considered better.

Parents Perspectives on Sociocultural Factors that Influence the Decision-making Process of School Selection

Findings associated with sociocultural factors showed that the main reasons for choosing a school were proximity between school and home and familiar traditions and culture. Proximity referred to the short distance between school and home and was determinant at the moment of making a decision about school choice. In this thesis, 70% of participants used to live less than ten blocks from school. According to INEEd (2022a), this is a desirable condition if the aim is to promote regular attendance at the educational center and the bond with the student's family. However, it is not beneficial when talking about educational segregation. That percentage includes all families of low socioeconomic status and a minority of families of higher levels.

This coincides with the perspective of several authors who maintain that the most socioeconomically vulnerable families choose schools close to their homes, where they feel accepted, and can establish closer ties with the management team and teachers (Gutiérrez Martínez, 2020; INEEd, 2022a; Orellana et al. al., 2018). However, the proximity between the school and the students' house is not completely restrictive since 13% of the families involved in this study live between eleven and twenty blocks from the school, and 17% live more than twenty blocks from the institution to which they send their children. These percentages correspond to the least vulnerable families that participated in this study and is mainly because these parents were able to travel and took their children to schools of their choice.

This situation strengthens the existing link between educational and residential segregation since the place of residence and the possibilities that parents have to move or not determine the socioeconomic makeup of students who attend an educational center (INEEd, 2022a). Hence, the most socioeconomically disadvantaged families may be unable to choose a school of their preference, mainly because of transportation costs (Barseghyan et al., 2019). The most socioeconomically advantaged families, on the contrary, will choose better schools for their children, exacerbating educational segregation in public schools (Barseghyan et al., 2019). Similarly, Córdoba et al. (2017) have detected that students with similar socioeconomic levels travel different distances when attending a school, depending on the area in which the institutions are located, what these institutions offer, and family preferences and expectations in relationship with those schools. Thus, it is expected that students of a certain SES are concentrated in different schools, constituting homogeneous contexts in which they experience

different conditions of learning and socialization according to their place of origin (Veleda, 2014).

As was already mentioned, another preponderant factor when choosing a school was following family traditions. This can be recognized as a revealing element in this study since no references to it were found in any of the literature consulted. It is also one of the motivations most mentioned by the families that participated in this study and, therefore, it should be considered as a prominent element for this and future analysis.

In this study, familiar traditions involved choosing the same school previously attended by other family members. Although this practice was not identified as exclusive to a specific socioeconomic sector, it was mainly widespread among low SES families that explained feeling part of the institution and recognized it as a family asset. In the literature, tradition was understood as a socio historical, familiar, and even cultural reason for choosing a school. According to Soares (1997), a tradition in social science is the logic that makes people act in society, conforms the group identity, and collaborates with collective memory.

For this thesis it is important to mention the notion of *habitus* proposed by Bourdieu (1984), who argues that the preferences and behaviors of parents are influenced by their social and cultural background. Therefore, the *habitus* determines the parenting style of these families and the possibility of selecting those schools in which they had positive experiences (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Likewise, Bourdieu (1987) explained that the transmission of educational trajectories within the family and through generations involves the transmission of cultural capital that operates in the relationships between the family strategies and the school. According

to the author, the kind of relationship established determines the adaptation or exclusion of students according to the social class to which they belong.

Data collected in this study showed that following traditions had diverse consequences for families. On one hand, families that selected a school following a family tradition acquired a certain power and recognition within the educational institution, and even felt "pride" at being part of it. For them, the fact that other family members have attended the same institution strengthens their family identity and culture. Correspondingly, different authors from different countries maintain that the experiences of parents in the educational field promote the formation of homogeneous educational circuits that reproduce the same sociocultural inequities throughout generations (Gutiérrez et al., 2020; INEEd, 2022a; Veleda, 2014).

An additional sociocultural fact that parents mentioned in this study was the role of the school concept and the staff performance when choosing a school. This fact was especially mentioned by participants from upper SES who looked for schools socially recognized as prestigious and with excellent teaching staff performance. The schools that are closest to the community, show their work and make their management visible are among the most requested by families (INEEd, 2022a). According to the study carried out by INEEd (2022a) and in accordance with the findings of this study, the schools considered to be the most prestigious in Uruguay are those that have good facilities, allow the participation of families, have a stable and committed staff, have a good pedagogical proposal, hold festivals, work in a network with other institutions, and are open to the requirements of the community. Thus, academic criteria are not prevalent when choosing a school, but other social aspects such as prestige and social distinction are also important for these families (Olmedo& Santa Cruz, 2008, 2011). Additionally, authors

such as Oyarzún Maldonado (2019) and Orellana et al. (2018), consider that educational institutions carry out underhanded campaigns to improve their image and thus obtain greater social prestige which, as has been seen, affects the choice of schools by families. In achieving this goal, the role of the principal and the management team is also essential (INEEd, 2022a).

To select those schools, upper SES families deployed diverse mechanisms to obtain valuable information to make decisions. According to participants, all the information collected came from the experiences and opinions of similar SES and qualified informants. That is, they considered the perceptions and experiences that other families of the same or higher socioeconomic level have had. According to Carrasco et al. (2015), these parents usually seek prestigious institutions that they, their family members, and their circle of friends have attended. It is necessary to point out that, according to the evidence collected, in order to obtain information, they developed searching strategies and have been trained in specific topics of education, such as teaching methodologies and organizational strategies. Many of them knew and asserted their rights as citizens and developed discourses that demonstrate access to scientific knowledge. Likewise, Rojas et al. (2016) state that parents from upper SES are more informed about evaluation results and consider this information in their decisions. However, it is not always the access and interpretation of the statistical data that prevails, but the social nature information that works above the rest (Ball and Vincent, 1998). In other words, the social capital of families and their own social networks are the main and most unequal source of information (Green & Vryonides, 2005; Orellana et al., 2018; Villavicencio, 2013).

Therefore, there is an unequal possession of capital (cultural, social, economic) that favors and legitimizes the reproduction of class differences (Bourdieu, 1997). Due to the social

networks that they have developed and the greater knowledge about the functioning of the

educational system, parents from upper SES could make more informed decisions than those

parents with a different or lower socioeconomic and educational level. In this unequal

distribution of power, the most socioeconomically vulnerable classes are the most harmed since

they have the possibility of choosing but have fewer resources to do so (Olmedo, 2007; Orellana

et al., 2018; Reay et al., 1997). For example, as it was found in this study, low SES families

recognized the importance of the presence of trained teachers but were more worried about the

love, kindness, and support that their children received at school.

Other less mentioned but equally important sociocultural reasons for choosing a school

according to parents' perceptions were the effect of peers, and the school type. First, it was

detected that families also collected information about the students' composition of the school

and how the effect of peers can impact on their children's performance. According to INEEd

(2022a) and in accordance with the findings of this study, it was found that families who have

attended public schools in the past also chose public schools for their children. In their discourse,

they presented the idea that public schools were inclusive, and that the same things were taught

in all of them. However, in practice this did not happen, and parents opted for educational

centers attended by other students of a similar socioeconomic level. According to INEEd (2022a)

there is a contradiction between the integrating discourse of Uruguayan families and the attempt

to access to public schools in which most students come from the same socioeconomic

background.

The idea that "it is still a public school in which there are children of all socioeconomic

levels" continued to exist in the participants' imagination. Moreover, participants from low SES

argued that "learning is imparted in all schools equally." Although these statements are partly

true, they also show a lack of knowledge of the reality of educational segregation in the country.

Public elementary schools in Uruguay are characterized by homogeneous students' populations

(INEEd, 2021). It is necessary to understand that schools are socioeconomically and culturally

homogeneous. Likewise, it is necessary to understand that there are school minorities who will

be affected by that homogeneity in the short, medium, and long term.

In this thesis, the dichotomy between discourse and reality was present for both identified

socioeconomic contexts. For example, upper SES families looked for schools that ensured

sociocultural connections and the maintenance of social capital. These families sought education

to strengthen social ties with people of the same social class while trying to isolate themselves

from social classes considered inferior. Alegre and Benito (2012) argue that these families fear

that their children will be exposed to negative situations associated with contact with social

groups considered inferior and run the risk of losing their class status. Similarly, low SES

families considered the role of peer effect on their children and looked for schools attended by

the same classmates that their children had since they were little. However, some parents

expressed some worries about peer relationships in the future, particularly between their children

and more vulnerable students with different values and education.

Second, some parents also considered the type of school as a reason to make decisions.

Upper SES families, for example, explained that they avoided full-time schools, arguing that the

extended school-time deprived them to be with their children and to enjoy activities outside the

school. However, an implicit discourse was detected during focus groups. Those parents

assumed that full-time schools were designed for socioeconomically vulnerable students, and

they needed a strong reason to send their children there. Although this educational proposal has been opening up to other student audiences, a higher concentration of students from a low socioeconomic level is still observed (INEEd, 2021). The participants' conception linked to what is observable in these schools enhances the differences between students and leads to educational segregation.

Parents' Perspectives on Institutional Factors that Influence the Decision-making Process of School Selection

Finally, findings about institutional factors showed that educational institutions unconsciously collaborate with educational segregation. Either by the way in which schools responded to the needs of families, or by the strategies they used to enroll students, it was possible to observe that schools behaved differently depending on the socioeconomic context within which they work.

In the first place, it was detected that, as happened with the neighborhood or the school context, upper-class families presented other demands and claims that were different from those raised by lower-class families. For example, participants from upper socioeconomic environments were worried about school comfort when choosing an educational institution. According to Hernández (2010), comfort in educational institutions allows them to be more habitable. Habitable schools are institutions that favor the development of teaching and learning processes by improving the physical school environment (Hernández, 2010). This author states that the term "comfort" related to an educational institution includes thermal comfort, ventilation, acoustics, lighting, and quality of furniture. There is no doubt that comfort in schools can help to improve student learning. However, this also involves economic investment and

collaboration of families with material and economic resources. This is more likely to occur in institutions with families from a high socioeconomic background. It is also expected that these kinds of families could be more involved than low SES families with respect to their collaboration in the improvements of the institution.

The most socioeconomically vulnerable families, on the other hand, were satisfied with the school building, and although they recognized that there were things to be fixed, they also expressed agreement with the education and treatment provided to their children. These families were satisfied that their children had their basic needs covered and on certain occasions blamed the educational system in general for not providing certain services to the institution. At no time did they imply that they could solve something through their participation. Thus, it can be concluded that educational segregation also generates inequalities that educational institutions and the educational system legitimize.

It was also observed that there were significant differences between schools during the enrollment process. In Uruguay, according to INEEd (2022a), registration for the first year takes place in December. There is an online platform that reserves places for students who are already in kindergarten at that school and for those who must repeat the year. Then, from the seats available, a pre-registration is made in which the family attends the school of their choice with the corresponding documentation. However, in this study it was found that schools asked for different requirements when students are being enrolled.

INEEd (2022a) argues that for the enrollment of first-year students there are no clear criteria on priorities in Uruguayan schools. According to the report, some schools prioritize those who have siblings in the school, others establish priorities for attending a certain initial education

center, some use the proximity criteria, while others establish the order in which registration was carried out. In short, it is each principal with the management team who can determine what criteria to follow. Therefore, those families that are more informed, or even perceive that the order of arrival at registration could favor them, end up being the most privileged when choosing (Carrasco et al., 2016; INEEd, 2022a; Veleda, 2014).

Historically, the assignment of students to Uruguayan schools was territorial - that is, by proximity of the school to the home. However, this regulation has been made more flexible and currently families can choose the educational center according to their needs and preferences. To verify and enforce the territorial regulations for the distribution of students, the schools requested a proof of residence. When student registration became more flexible, this document was no longer requested. However, during this study it was found that in some schools that are most in demand, they continue to ask for it. It was inferred that schools in upper SES contexts asked for a proof of residence to limit and control the access to the institutions that were generally overcrowded.

It is important to analyze how in these high SES contexts, the requirement of proof of residence determines who can attend and who cannot. Requiring a proof of residence establishes that those who will attend the institution will be the students of the neighborhood. As these schools are in centric neighborhoods, far from the humblest neighborhoods, it can be inferred that children from a medium-high socioeconomic context are the ones with more chances to attend. Moreover, children from more socioeconomic vulnerable contexts will be left out. Hence, the idea that parents are choosing schools is in doubt.

The strategies that families develop and the information they access to achieve the goal of accessing schools recognized as the most privileged also play an important role here. For example, it was found that many people who lived outside the school surroundings use diverse strategies to enroll their children despite living far-away. According to Landoni (2012), parents used to present their work address, or proof of the addresses of relatives who live near the school, arguing that this is where their children spend most of their time.

Hence, it can be interpreted that educational institutions do favor the selection of students and even promote school segregation. The aforementioned institutional factors affect the possibilities of choice and make them unequal depending on the socioeconomic level of the families, since not all have access to the same information or are capable of interpreting it in the same way (Carrasco et al., 2016; INEEd, 2022a; Veleda, 2014). Additionally, there is a lack of transparency in the enrollment criteria that also varies depending on the socioeconomic context of the school. This can promote the selection of students by the institution or the design of an educational offer that allows attracting a certain type of population and excluding another (Campelo Koslinki and Tavares de Carvalho, 2015; INEEd, 2022a; Maroy, 2008). Moreover, it can be assumed that institutions serve differently according to the socioeconomic context they are situated in and they try to differentiate themselves from other centers, generating covert competition to attract students (Oyarzún Maldonado, 2019). Therefore, it can be concluded that there are certain institutional factors that promote educational segregation by socioeconomic level in Uruguayan public schools.

Implications and Recommendations

This study explored parents' perspectives and experiences about the influence of contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors in the decision-making process of school selection by Uruguayan families. Additionally, it explored how those factors led to educational segregation in Uruguayan public elementary schools. Understanding parents' perceptions and experiences about this process gave insight to many areas. The data collected in this study also helped the understanding of how the socioeconomic context of families affects decision-making and produces inequalities in the educational area.

One implication of this study is for policymakers. It is known that educational segregation has strong and negative effects on the social cohesion of a population (López, 2013; Rossetti, 2014). According to INEEd (2022b), higher levels of educational segregation are directly linked to high levels of social inequality. According to this study, since the reduction of inequality is one of the purposes of educational policy, it is necessary to review the student assignment policies, the real possibilities of choice of educational center by families, the freedoms that are granted to management teams at the time of student enrollment, as well as the democratization of information that circulates. It will also be necessary to consider the implementation of a student distribution system that includes the socioeconomic origin of the students, their personal and family history and culture, their educational trajectory, their needs and other elements that can emerge from future research, in order to provide them with an education quality based on equity. Likewise, the focus should be placed on the most socioeconomically vulnerable families and neighborhoods. It will be necessary to strengthen

them from the educational point of view, offering more possibilities of access to resources and information.

The second implication was for the potential role of the educational government to act on the institutional factors that favor educational segregation. Although educational segregation is linked to social inequality and depends to a large extent on residential and socioeconomic segregation, it is considered that the educational system has the capacity to act to reduce it (INEEd, 2022a; Maroy, 2008). According to the findings of this study there are some of strategies that can be useful to make the decision-making process of school selection more equitable and to reduce educational segregation in Uruguay. One of the strategies could be to strengthen the management of educational centers to help them improve their image. In particular, schools categorized as low socioeconomic context will need more economic resources, but also social and cultural ones that allow them to be a viable option for any family while being able to provide a quality education for all students, regardless of the SES of origin. This can be complemented with other actions or strategies such as providing more continuous training for teachers, improving the quality of services in the most vulnerable neighborhoods, and even providing means of free transportation for students to get around. Another strategy could be making the assignment of students to institutions more transparent. Using resources that elementary schools are already using, such as the GURI computer system or the *Monitor Educativo*, which has a large amount of information about students and schools, could be beneficial when establishing the procedures by which schools (all equally) enroll students. They also will collaborate with families to allow democratic access to information, but it is necessary first to adequate the systems and teach families on how to use them.

A third implication lies in the effect that this research may have on other researchers on the subject. As it was previously mentioned, the identification of the factors that affect educational segregation in Uruguay is an unexplored topic. Since this is a case study, it is recommended to expand it to other scenarios and states in the country to complement and compare the results at the national level and with other countries in the region. Knowing, analyzing, and studying segregation processes as well as the factors that affect it becomes absolutely necessary. Additionally, it is important to underline that this is also a world issue so this thesis could be relevant to other people interested or dealing with this phenomenon in other countries.

Finally, I hope that this study will have implications for Uruguayan families from all socioeconomic backgrounds. I believe that any regulation in the assignment of students to schools should not only be based on top-down policies. In my opinion, families themselves should become aware of the role that their decisions play and how they can affect the society in which they are immersed. Although I understand that this study may not be widely accessible to those families, I also hope that it could be considered a basis for somehow raising awareness among families about their role in integration and equity that the Uruguayan society needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although most of the families consulted for this thesis perceived that they were freely choosing an educational institution to which they want to send their children in Uruguay, not all do so from the same place or with the same opportunities. It was found that the choice of school is affected by the unequal distribution in the position that families occupy in the

social and cultural framework, which essentially responds to a class position (Ball, 1993). Hence, participants made different decisions depending on their behaviors, perceptions, expectations, and values associated with their socioeconomic backgrounds. These decisions were also limited and affected by contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors that lead to educational segregation in Uruguayan public elementary schools.

Families made decisions considering contextual factors such as the school neighborhood and their conceptions about their socioeconomic context and its relationship with education. They were also affected by sociocultural elements such as the proximity between school and home, familiar traditions, the prestige of schools and their staff, the classmates, and the type of school. Finally, they were influenced by institutional factors such as the school infrastructure and the requirements for registration.

Although it is known that families strive to influence their children's educational opportunities, this study shows that contextual, sociocultural, and institutional factors affect family decisions in different ways, basically depending on the class structure. Hence, the most socioeconomically vulnerable families are the most affected by these factors due to their unequal access to economic and social resources and to relevant information when choosing a school.

This study explored parental perspectives on how contextual, socioeconomic, and institutional factors influence families' decision-making when choosing schools and enhance educational segregation in Uruguayan public elementary schools. The findings of this study contribute to a little explored area of knowledge in Uruguay. It will be necessary to continue researching the problem of educational segregation in other areas of the country, as well as

exploring possible ways to mitigate this phenomenon considered as highly detrimental to

Uruguayan education and society

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP

APPENDIX A. Questions for Focus Groups

Spanish Version (Grouped by Factor)

Es usted de Salto? Nació y concurrió a la escuela allí?

Contextual Factors

Cómo es el barrio de la escuela? Cuál es el contexto socioeconómico de las familias que viven cerca de la escuela?

Cómo son las instalaciones de la escuela?

Cómo creen que es el contexto socioeconómico de la mayoría de los niños y niñas que allí asisten?

Creen que en la escuela se aprovechan las diferencias socioeconómicas de los/las alumnos/as? O existen situaciones de discriminación o rechazo hacia determinados sectores socioeconómicos?

Institutional Factors

Qué conocimiento previo tenía de la escuela?

Usted lo/la inscribió allí? Por qué? Qué tuvo en cuenta? Qué pasos siguieron para la inscripción?

Cómo tomó la decisión de elegir esa escuela? Pidió consejos? A quién?

Qué se les pregunta en la escuela al momento de la inscripción?

Su hijo/a fue aceptado/a inmediatamente o hubo algún inconveniente? Con quién? Cuente su experiencia. Cómo solucionó el problema?

Sociocultural Factors

Cómo cree que se siente su hijos/a yendo a esa escuela?

Considera que todos los niños y niñas en la escuela tienen las mismas posibilidades de aprender independientemente de su contexto socioeconómico?

Cuál es el vínculo de su hijo/a con los compañeros? Su hijo/a tiene oportunidades de interactuar con otros niños o niñas de diferente contexto socioeconómico? De ejemplos.

Si tuvieran la posibilidad de cambiar de escuela a sus hijos/as, lo harían? A qué tipo de escuela lo/la enviarían? Una escuela privada podría ser una opción viable?

General Questions

Qué tiene que tener una escuela para brindarle la mejor educación a su hijo/a?

Cuánto se alinea esa idea con la escuela a la que su hijo/a concurre?

Qué cree que la escuela debería mejorar o cambiar para alcanzar ese ideal?

English Version (Grouped by Factor)

Are you from Salto? Did you born and go to school there?

Contextual Factors

How is the school neighborhood? What is the socioeconomic context of the families that live around the school?

How are the school facilities?

According to your perception, what is the average socioeconomic context of the students that attend the school?

Do you think that the socioeconomic differences of the students are taken advantage of at school? Or are there situations of discrimination or rejection towards certain socioeconomic sectors?

Institutional Factors

What prior knowledge did you have of the school?

Did you enroll him/her there? Why? What did you consider? What steps did you follow to register?

How did you make the decision to choose that school? Did you ask for advice? To whom?

What did the school administrators ask at the time of registration?

Was your child accepted immediately or was there a problem? With whom? Tell your experience. How did you solve the problem?

Sociocultural Factors

How do you think your child feels about going to that school?

Do you think that all boys and girls in school have the same opportunities to learn regardless of their socioeconomic background?

What is your child's relationship with peers? Does your child have opportunities to interact with other children from different socioeconomic backgrounds? Give examples.

If you had the opportunity to change your children's school, would you do it? What kind of school would you send him/her to? Could a private school be a viable option?

General Questions

What does a school have to have to provide the best education for your child?

How much does that idea align with the school your child attends?

What do you think the school should improve or change to reach that ideal?

APPENDIX B

PARENTS DEMOGRAPHICS

APPENDIX B. Parents' Demographics

Parents' Demographics (Spanish Version)

Edad	18 a 25	25 a 35	35 a 45	45 o más
Sexo	F	M	Otro	
Estatus socioeconómico	Bajo	Medio	Alto	
Cantidad de hijos	1	2 o 3	4 o más	

Estudios cursados   Primaria incompleta

Primaria completa

Secundaria incompleta

Secundaria completa

Terciaria incompleta

Terciaria completa

Universitarios

Distancia del hogar a la escuela   1-10 cuadras

11-20 cuadras

Más de 2 kilómetros

Parents' Demographics (English Version)

Age	18 to 25	25 to 35	35 to 45	45 or more
Sex	F	M	Other	
Socioeconomic Status	Low Low-medium Medium Medium-high High			
Number of children	1	2 or 3	4 or more	
Studies	Incomplete elementary school			
	Complete elementary school			
	Incomplete secondary school			
	Complete secondary school			
	Incomplete tertiary studies			
	Complete tertiary studies			
	University studies			
Distance home-school	1-10 blocks			
	11-20 blocks			
	More than 2 kilometers			

APPENDIX C

AGENDA FOR UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW

APPENDIX C. Agenda for Unstructured Interview

Broad guide to topic issues that might be covered

Spanish version:

Cuente en detalle cómo vivió usted y su familia el proceso de toma de decisión sobre en qué

escuela inscribir a su hijo/a.

Incluya:

- Dónde ocurrió el proceso

- Tiempo que les llevó decidir

- Personas que estuvieron involucradas en el proceso

- Alguna anécdota o comentario que haya ocurrido en su momento

- De qué manera esa decisión afectó (positiva o negativamente) la vida familiar y la de su

  hijo/a

- Cómo cambió su forma de pensar luego de esta experiencia

- Consejos que le daría a otros padres en su misma situación

- Sugerencias a las autoridades sobre el tema

English version:

Tell in detail how you and your family experienced the decision-making process to register your child in the school.

Include:

- Where did the process occur?

- Time that was necessary to make the decision

- People involved in the decision process

- Some anecdotes or comment that happened at the time

- How that decision affected (positively or negatively) your child's and family life

- How did your thinking change after this experience?

- Advice you would give other parents in the same situation

- Suggestions to the authorities on the subject