

Capstone

Meritocracy, Equity & Education

An analysis of privatisation in Dutch secondary education



University College Fryslân
Campus Fryslân, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

BSc. Global Responsibility and Leadership

Under the supervision of
Alex Belloir
&
Caspar F. van den Berg

By Hendrik G. Willemsen

Acknowledgements & Personal Note

Ever since I left secondary school I have always been involved in education in some form or another. I have been working as a study assistant for over 3 years now and in my free time I also volunteer as a scouts leader. Therefore, it was completely natural to write my thesis (Capstone) on an education topic. Fortunately, I was able to combine this with my interest for topics relating to inclusivity and equality.

This thesis would not have been possible without many different people. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Alex Belloir, for all his feedback and support. Thanks to Alex, I also met Hennie Brandsma, who helped me a lot to narrow down my topic. Second, I would also like to thank all the headmasters that agreed to participate in an interview, despite the hustle of the ongoing exams. Last, I also have to make a special thanks to Mirjam Kingma for proofreading.

Illustration

The illustration on the front cover of my Capstone is my own design. The scale represents evaluation. It is measuring whether effort (books = meritocracy) or money (socio-economic background) is more important for reaching goals. The stairs represent the way towards reaching goals.

Meritocracy, Equity & Education

An analysis of privatisation in Dutch public secondary education

Abstract

Equalities are rising. Yet, it is a deeply held societal belief that people get what they work for. This belief is the essence of meritocracy. In order for meritocracy to be true, people in a society need to have equal opportunities. One of the most important influences on equality of opportunity is education. Currently, the Dutch government holds the ambition to increase equality of opportunity in the Netherlands. They envision a big role for public education in reaching this. This thesis analyses privatisation in Dutch secondary schools from the perspective of school headmasters through the lens of equality of opportunity. Combining a literature review, document analysis and qualitative research have led to the conclusion that privatisation is posing a danger to equality of opportunity. Secondary schools seem to be aware of this. Consequently, they are also hesitant to cooperate with a private company. Yet, one of the main findings of this study was that schools are sometimes forced to work together with a private company, because of an ongoing teacher shortage on a national scale. At the same time, the private education sector is also identified as one of the reasons for the ongoing teacher shortage in the Netherlands. If the Dutch government wants to increase equality of opportunity in public secondary education, it is necessary to prioritise solving the ongoing teacher shortage.

Table of content

Introduction	6
Literature review	8
Meritocracy - An economic perspective on equality	8
Methodology	10
Literature review	10
Document analysis & background	10
Qualitative research: Semi-structured Interviews	10
Literature review, document analysis & qualitative research combined	11
Document Analysis & Background	12
The Dutch education system and privatisation	12
Why look at education?	12
Current state of education in the Netherlands + Historical origins	12
General	12
An equaliser	13
Privatisation	14
Analysis - Qualitative Research	17
Results	17
Participating schools	17
The interviews	17
Attitudes towards private companies	17
Equality of opportunities, Awareness & Responsibility	18
Considerations for hiring private parties	18
Benefits & disadvantages - Potential Negative effects/impact	19
Paying extra	19
School programme & extra support	20
NPO-gelden	20
/ Impulse (1)	20
/ CGBN (2)	20
/ De Dyk (3)	21
/ AMS (4)	21
Keeping track of private support	21
Discussion	23
Participating schools	23
The interviews	23
Attitudes towards private companies	23
Equality of opportunities & Awareness	23
School programme & extra support (from school or private) + school finances	24
Keeping track of private support	25
Relevance, Limitations & future research	25
Relevance	25
Limitations	25
Future research	26
Conclusion & Recommendations	27

Recommendations	27
Sources	29
Webpages	29
Literature	31
Appendix	34
Interview Guide	34

Introduction

Global inequalities continue to be ubiquitous and are even increasing (Berkel, 2021; Chancel, 2022; Mijs, 2021). In fact, disparities are as big as they were in the early twentieth century, when Western imperialism was at its peak according to the World Inequality Report 2022 (Chancel, 2022). Other metrics paint a similar picture, with the World Social Report published by the United Nations in 2020 stating that income inequality has risen globally, especially in developed countries (UN, 2020). Furthermore, climate change is having the biggest impact on the poorest countries and people. To top it all off, the corona pandemic aggravated inequalities as well (Chancel, 2022; UN, 2020).

On a national scale here in the Netherlands, we see similarities and differences to these global trends. According to the *Central Bureau voor de Statistiek*¹ income inequality is relatively small compared to other European Union members and on a global scale (CBS, 2021). In recent years the income of the top 1% has been relatively stable covering 6,5% of primary income (SER, 2021). However, at the same time, the corona pandemic put equality of opportunities under pressure (SER, 2021; Onderwijsraad, 2021-B). People with a lower income are more vulnerable. Especially since the corona pandemic started more people have been going to the foodbank (Voedselbanken Nederland, 2022), and with the ongoing war in Ukraine and the consequent price increase for energy, we see more and more people are struggling to make ends meet (NOS, 2022).

Faced with such challenges, we see a lot of attention for topics such as equality. In October 2016, the *Gelijke kansen alliantie* (Equal Chances Alliance) was founded by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in order to promote equality of opportunity (OCW, 2022). At the same time documentaries and articles have been published on the topic. In 2021 broadcaster *Human* produced a documentary, '*Klassen*' exploring equality of opportunity in education for children in Amsterdam-Noord (Human, 2022). The recent documentary series by Dutch broadcaster VPRO, '*Sander en de kloof*', explores inequalities in Dutch society (VPRO, 2022).

Equality has been an important topic in the Dutch political landscape. The Dutch constitution was recently complemented in order to be more inclusive and thus equal (De Nederlandse Grondwet, 2022). Moreover, in the most recent coalition agreement (*Coalitieakkoord*), published in December 2021, the government committed to increasing equality of opportunity within education (BWK, 2022). According to the Ministry of Education, tackling inequality of opportunity is "*a task for everyone, with a big role for education*" (OCW, 2022).

Education is facing major challenges, such as teacher shortages, digitalisation, and the impact of the corona pandemic (Rijksoverheid, 2022). However, this paper will focus on the role of education in equality of opportunity. In March of 2022, Minister for Primary and Secondary Education, Dennis Wiersma, announced he would be investigating the impact of a growing private sector in education and develop policy to limit it (VOR, 2022). This was a response to a report published by the Education Council (*Onderwijsraad*) stating that equality of opportunity in education is under pressure as a result of an increasing private education sector (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B; VOR, 2022).

The Dutch government wants to increase the equality of opportunity '*with a big role for education*'. Therefore, this thesis will investigate the role of public secondary education in the Netherlands in terms of equality of opportunity and will specifically focus on the relationship between public

¹ Central Statistics Office

secondary education and private companies. This perspective was chosen, because the Education Council concluded that 1 in 4 students is currently using a private company for study support. In this sense, in this research, we focus on the encroachment of private companies. This manifests itself in multiple forms tutoring, homework support and exam training. Private schools have been extensively studied before, as depicted in the literature review. Therefore, private schools are excluded from this research. This research focuses on new developments in public schools.

This thesis aims to answer the following research question: *What is the role and influence of privatisation within public secondary education in the Netherlands according to headteachers and how does it affect equality of opportunity?* To answer this research question, I will first provide a theoretical framework for equality in the literature. Second, the methodology of this thesis will be detailed. Thereafter, a document analysis will provide a case study of Dutch public secondary education. The following section will detail the results from the qualitative research that was done for this thesis in order to complement gaps in the literature. Finally, the results will be discussed in order to answer the research question in the conclusion.

Literature review

Meritocracy - An economic perspective on equality

The concept of Meritocracy was introduced by Michael Young (1958). Over time this concept has been defined in varying ways (Arrow et al., 2000). Nowadays, the basic idea of meritocracy is generally defined as: Everyone's social-economic position in society is decided by their individual merit (Arrow et al., 2000; Bregman & Frederik, 2015; De Beer & Van Zijl, 2016). This definition implies that what people earn is determined by their achievements in society. Here it is important to distinguish between two possible meanings of earning: 1.) Getting a certain salary and 2.) A normative verb: Deserving something. (Bregman & Frederik, 2015). Since the concept of meritocracy is not merely about money but also about social status, for this paper we will define earning in the broader meaning of deserving.

When evaluating meritocracy two questions should be asked. The first is whether we think what people earn *should* be determined by their achievements. Phrased differently: Should merit be the determinant of social-economic status? According to the coalition agreement, the answer of the government is yes looking at their recent focus on equality of opportunity (VOR, 2022). If people are prepared to work for something they should be rewarded based on their efforts. Now, we are just talking about how it *should* be if meritocracy was the case. However, there is a one-word difference, yet significant difference, with the definition of meritocracy. In light of this, the second question is hence: *Is* what people earn determined by their achievements? Despite evidence showing the contrary, it is a deeply held belief in many western societies that people earn what they work for. In short, there is a strong belief in meritocracy/the American Dream (Arrow et al., 2000; Bregman & Frederik, 2015; Mijs, 2018).

A study in the United States found that in general people hold a belief in meritocracy, although there are significant differences among people with different political affiliations (Ellis et al., 2017; Newman, Johnston & Lown). Another study in the same country found that people with a low income are less likely to reject the idea of meritocracy when they live in areas where income inequality is relatively large compared to more egalitarian (Solt, 2016). A study investigating meritocratic beliefs in Western countries found that acceptance and popularity of meritocracy increased between 1930 and 2010 (Mijs, 2018). Furthermore, increases in inequality are often legitimised with meritocratic arguments (Mijs, 2021). A Dutch study concluded that Dutch people value meritocracy to a high extent (Werfhorst, 2015). In general, beliefs in meritocracy are high in the Netherlands, this is remarkable considering the recent increases of inequalities globally (Berkel, 2021; Mijs, 2021).

Meritocracy is hence the idea that one's socio-economic position is a result of one's merit and people in western societies hold the belief that we indeed live in meritocratic societies (Mijs, 2018; Werfhorst, 2015). This concept of meritocracy provides a framework for looking at equality. If a society, let's say Dutch society, is meritocratic it would mean everyone is equal. Meritocracy implies equality of chances. If we look at equality in the Netherlands we can say that all people are equal as decided in article one of the Dutch constitution. Over the past years, different political parties have been making an effort to complement this article (De Nederlandse Grondwet, 2022). However, it would be better to look at equality of opportunity. In his essay *Equality of Opportunity* John Roemer (1998) discusses meritocracy in terms of equality of opportunity. Meritocracy supposes equality of opportunity and thus it does not take into account the fact that people are born in different places under different circumstances (Bregman & Frederik, 2015). Therefore, if we look at society and equality of opportunities we see that (western) societies are not so meritocratic at all.

Equality assumes everyone starts in the same place. We already established this is not the case. When talking about equality of opportunity Roemer (1998) distinguishes between two kinds of equality of opportunity. 1.) Society does what it can to create an equal playground for everyone. 2.) Everyone with the appropriate skills should be included in the eligibility for a certain position ignoring race, sex, economic status etc. The first he calls the *level-the-playing-field principle* (Roemer, 1998; Arrow et al., 2000-B). He then moves on to argue this is how we should look at equality of opportunity and how to do this best. In this sense, when we are talking about equality of opportunity and creating an equal playground, we may as well talk about equity. Equity is often discussed in terms of equal access to healthcare, then it is often referred to as health equity (Braveman & Gruskin, 2003; WHO, 2022) In more general terms, equity can be most easily explained by a quote from palliative care physician Naheed Dosani: “*Equality is giving everyone a shoe, equity is giving everyone a shoe that fits.*” (Naheed Dosani, 2014). An academic definition of equity within an educational context is the just provision of education considering individual contexts (Espinoza, 2007). We can compare the example given in the quote with the aforementioned example of students during corona lockdown. In this case online education is the shoe. All students got the same online education (the same shoe). However, that shoe did not fit everyone, students that did not have access to a computer or tablet were unable to follow classes online. Providing a shoe that fits, would mean online education (because of the pandemic), but also access to the internet and a computer if a student does not have these things. One example of this is very recent. As a result of the corona pandemic students from parents with a lower economic background had trouble following online classes during the lockdown, because they had no access to a computer. Consequently, these students scored lower or got behind, not because of a lack of effort but because of a lack of the right facilities (SER, 2021).

While beliefs in meritocracy increased both globally and in the Netherlands, global inequalities increased as well. It is problematic that belief in meritocracy is supposing a situation that does not reflect reality. People do not have equal opportunities (Berkel, 2021; Mijs, 2021). Therefore, it is relevant to see how public secondary schools look at this.

Methodology

My methodology consists of three parts. First, a literature review was conducted. Second, document analysis on Dutch secondary education is provided. This is followed by qualitative research in the form of interviews. Below all parts are explained more in-depth.

Literature review

The overall topic of my research is equality, the literature review provides an overview of theories and papers written on equality. The review evaluates equality from an economic perspective and focuses specifically on meritocracy. Combining different economical and sociological theories creates an understanding of equality and meritocracy. The literature review composes the theoretical base for this thesis.

Document analysis & background

The second part of this thesis consists of a document analysis of Dutch public secondary education, this will not include private schools. This part is important for providing the background necessary for understanding the Dutch education system. It can be considered the case study to which the theory of equality and meritocracy is applied. First, it provides an account of the development of the Dutch educational system ending with the current state. This account is based on the book *Een geschiedenis van het onderwijs in Nederland* by Piet de Rooy (2018) combined with various governmental reports (Rijksoverheid) and research by the Education Council (Onderwijsraad). This section will also specify the research into privatisation that has already been done and identify gaps in the existing literature.

Qualitative research: Semi-structured Interviews

For this research four semi-structured interviews were conducted with the headmasters of four Dutch secondary schools located in the City of Leeuwarden. School headmasters were selected for the interviews because they have the best overview of all relevant topics that are important to schools and because they are important decision makers for the school. School headmasters have a better sense of the general going of a school as opposed to teachers who are likely to know most about their own subject and not the others. A disadvantage of interviewing headmasters is that they are likely to be less in direct contact with students compared to teachers, however, this research focuses on the stance of schools, not students.

All interviews were held between the 13th and 23rd of May, all of them took around 20 minutes and were audio recorded. All conversations were held in Dutch. Three of them were in person interviews and one (AMS (4), see table below) was initially planned as an in person interview, but changed into an online interview because of an emergency appointment of the interviewee. The interviews were limited to schools in the City of Leeuwarden for time constraints and to avoid travelling for interviews, but also to select a homogenous environment (socio-economic background) to enable evaluation of differences between schools.

Schools were selected in such a way that all school levels would be represented. This makes it possible to see if there are any differences between schools with different school levels. Initially, ten schools were approached for an interview by phone, most of the schools then asked to send an email with the request for an interview. Only four of the schools agreed to cooperate to an interview in time. Two schools replied too late, the other four schools did not reply.

The table below shows the interviews in chronological order with the full name of the school and the school levels offered. In the table you can also find an interview number and abbreviation of the school, these will be used in the results and discussion to discuss the content of the interviews. The results of the interviews have been categorised into four themes (in-vivo approach), which will be discussed separately in the results section. When parts of an interview are cited, the transcription has been translated to English. In the interviews and the rest of this research *private companies* always refers to companies offering some form of study support, this can be tutoring, homework support or exam training. When talking about public schools, this refers to all schools fully funded by the government.

Interview details

Interview number	Full school name	abbreviation	school levels
1	Impulse - Piter Jelles	Impulse	Vmbo-t, have, vwo
2	Christelijk Gymnasium Beyers Naudé	CGBN	vwo/gymnasium
3	De Dyk - Piter Jelles	De Dyk	Vmbo-t (mavo), have
4	Anna-Maria Schurmanschool	AMS	Vmbo basis, vmbo kader, vmbo-t, havo & havo+

For the results the content of the interviews was grouped into different themes that relate to the theory in the literature review. The interviews were conducted to 1.) Get an understanding of the attitudes secondary schools hold towards private companies 2.) Investigate existing cooperations between secondary schools and private companies and thus 3.) Getting an understanding of the role of private companies in public secondary schools. This was investigated with a couple of questions central to answering the RQ in mind. First of all, how do schools work together with private companies? Second, what are general attitudes of schools towards working with private companies? Third, are schools aware of the possible effects of privatisation in public education? The word equality of opportunity was intentionally left from the interview out to see if headmasters bring it up themselves without being primed. The interview guide for the interviews can be found in the appendix.

The rationale behind these interviews is that there is a lack of information on the relationship between public schools and private companies, despite an upcoming interest in the topic in politics on a national level. This qualitative research aims to fill that gap by looking at a micro-level. It focuses on the people that are involved daily in education, witnessing the potential influence of privatisation first-hand.

Literature review, document analysis & qualitative research combined

In the results, discussion and conclusion findings from the literature review, document analysis and qualitative research will be combined. The theoretical framework from the literature review will be applied to the case study from the document analysis. Finally, the results from the interviews will be added to this in order to answer the research question.

Document Analysis & Background

The Dutch education system and privatisation

Why look at education?

Having analysed the concepts meritocracy and equality of opportunity, we will now observe their application in practice - more specifically, within the context of Dutch secondary education. This however raises an essential question: Why secondary education in the Netherlands specifically? First of all, because education is frequently discussed in terms of equality, we can here make a connection to existing literature. However, a gap in the literature was also identified. This evaluation will focus on the Dutch education, specifically public secondary education, because there is no research investigating the relationship between public schools and private companies. Private schools are excluded, because there is already a lot of literature about this.

It can be argued that education plays an important role in societal equality, since education is mandatory (*leerplicht*) in the Netherlands for children aged from 5 to 16 and thus plays a significant role in shaping the lives of children growing up in the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2022-H). Next to this, education has a significant role in the secondary socialisation of children. Secondary socialisation refers to all values and beliefs learned through people other than family members (the people who raise the child) (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) Furthermore, Tolsma and Wolbers (2010) found that education seems to be the main distinguishing factor in society in their research conducted for the Dutch government on social mobility. Next to this, the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie from the ministry of education says: “*Countering inequality of chances is a task for everyone, with a big role for education.*” (OCW, 2020)

Current state of education in the Netherlands + Historical origins

General

To evaluate education in terms of equality we first need to have an understanding of the education system under examination. In this case we are discussing the Dutch system, specifically the mandatory part (until age 16). Whenever education is discussed in this paper it will refer to secondary schools in the Netherlands, unless stated differently. In order to understand the intricacies of the Dutch system, it is necessary to provide a concise overview of the Dutch education system and its workings.

The Dutch Educational system is divided into two parts. First comes primary education (Basisonderwijs) for children aged roughly 5 to 12 years old. A unique feature of kindergarten in the Netherlands is that they are integrated in the primary school system (Rijksoverheid, ; Passaretta & Skopek, 2018). As such, the step between not going (kindergarten) and going to school (primary school) is smaller (Passaretta & Skopek, 2018). After primary school follows secondary education (voortgezet onderwijs) for children at least until the age of 16. All mandatory education in public schools is free, however parents often pay an extra voluntary contribution. This is a yearly monetary contribution to the attended school for extra activities and facilities (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B; Rijksoverheid, 2022-B). Most schools in the Netherlands are public schools, but the number of private schools has been increasing over the past years according to the Education Council, unfortunately this is not specified with any data (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B). There are two kinds of public schools in the Netherlands 1.) Public schools with education that is not based on any religious or ideological motive

(Openbare school) and 2.) Special schools based on a religion or pedagogical current (Rijksoverheid, 2022-B).

The Dutch system for secondary education consists of roughly four different school levels, ranging from more practical oriented education to more theoretically oriented education (Het onderwijsloket, 2022). From practical to theoretical they are: 1.) Praktijksonderwijs: pro, 2.) Voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs: vmbo (basis, kader & tl), 3.) Hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs: havo and 4.) Voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs: vwo. Within these four levels there are further distinctions, which will not be further elaborated upon within this thesis as they surpass our scope of inquiry.

An equaliser

The Dutch government has been continuously working on improving education in the Netherlands, especially since the 1950's. Participation, facilities and quality have all risen substantially during that time (De Rooy, 2018). Education is often put forward as the main instrument to create equal opportunities in society in the Netherlands, the so-called great equaliser ('de grote gelijkmaker'), especially during campaign time around the elections (Visser, 2021; Wolbers, 2014). The question is to what extent it is. First of all, primary and secondary education are almost completely free in the Netherlands when it comes to school fees (Rijksoverheid, 2022-D). When it comes to study materials books are free, materials such as a calculator or clothes for gymnastics have to be bought by parents themselves (Rijksoverheid, 2022-E). When it comes to devices such as laptops and tablets, schools are not obliged to provide these unless the teaching materials require this to a large extent. In this case the school has to provide them for free, although they are allowed to ask parents for a voluntary contribution (Rijksoverheid, 2022-E).

Not only is secondary education free in the Netherlands, it is even demanded by law that municipalities make sure there are enough schools within their areas (De Nederlandse Grondwet, 2022-B). Municipalities have the responsibility to make sure all children can attend school. If it is not possible to open a school in the area where a child lives, the municipality has to provide solutions such as free transportation to the nearest school (Rijksoverheid, 2022-B). Furthermore, there is also a law demanding that schools provide education that fits students and takes into account specific needs (VNG, 2022). Schools are required by law to make sure that students can attend school even if they have extra needs, this is known as *zorgplicht* (duty of care) (Rijksoverheid, 2022-F).

Since the fifties the average level of education has risen significantly (Tolsma & Wolbers, 2010). Because of the education expansion, inequality of educational opportunities decreased significantly between people from different social backgrounds (De Graaf & Ganzeboom, 1993; Wolbers & De Graaf, 1996). However, in 2016 the *Inspectie voor het Onderwijs (IVO)* yearly report on the state of education published that not all students are able to follow the education corresponding to their school level. Monique Vogelzang, the inspector-general of the IVO, writes that there have always been differences in opportunities, but that this is increasing in recent years (IVO, 2016, p.5-7). Factors such as the education of a child's parents are becoming more decisive for what school a child ends up attending (IVO, 2016).

In recent years more interesting reports on the state of Dutch education were published. In April 2021 the Education Council (Onderwijsraad) among others published a report stating that equal educational chances are under pressure and that the Dutch educational system does not promote equality of chances as much as we tend to think (Onderwijsraad, 2021-A; Visser, 2021). Another report by the

Socio-economic Council (Sociaal-economische Raad (SER)) emphasised the need for structural investment in equality of opportunity (SER, 2021). Later, in December of that same year the Education Council published another report emphasising the importance of protecting the public character of schools. What these reports have in common is that they were all related in the sense that they discuss equality of opportunity (in a way).

Privatisation

There is a lot of academic literature on privatisation. A study assessing privatisation in various Western countries found that privatisation is often hidden and introduced into policy only under the name of educational reform. Furthermore, it observes a global trend of increasing privatisation globally (Ball & Youdell, 2007; Walford, 2013). Decentralisation of governments is identified as a main factor encouraging privatisation (Zajda, 2006). Global trend, but data hard to find, also because it is complex to measure privatisation of education (Winchip, Stevenson & Milner, 2019). Although the term privatisation is used in many papers, the concept is never evaluated in terms of data. The Education Council merely states an increase of the private sector, but does not provide data to show this. Moreover, there is no research on private companies (privatisation) in public education in the Netherlands. Various studies are done investigating private schools, but this does not include private companies involved in public education. This is a gap in the literature this thesis aims to fill.

Privatisation is a significant factor maintaining existing inequalities (Halsey, 1984). One of the issues the Education Council has raised in their report is privatisation, which means an increase of private companies being involved in public education. Currently, more than a fourth of all students in primary and secondary education are using extra education (aanvullend onderwijs), which can be in the form of homework support, tutoring and/or exam training (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B). As this research is focussed explicitly on privatisation in public schools, private schools will be left out.

The Education Council is quite explicit in their formulation of the current situation in education: “*Education is drifting away from societal goals such as creating a well-educated workforce and social cohesion*” (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B). They advise the government and educational institutions to protect the public character of schools in such a way that all extra help offered in public schools is available to everyone without cost. Furthermore, they argue for a ban on advertisement for commercial services and products in public schools (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B). According to the Council this kind of advertisement can lead to the impression that private services belong to a public school and that they are necessary. Also, parents with less financial means may experience “less accessibility” to education because of advertisements for private study support (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B). This is explained as being more hesitant to ask for extra help.

Currently, one of the major challenges of education in the Netherlands is the lack of certified teachers (Rijksoverheid, 2022-G). This has multiple reasons, however, as a detailed elaboration is beyond the scope of this thesis, we limit our focus to the increasing number of private schools, making it challenging for public schools to find enough teachers (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B; Rijksoverheid, 2022-G). Data on teacher vacancies in 2021 is the most recent data available. In 2021 there were 10.145 open vacancies for teachers in secondary education (voortgezet onderwijs), most of them were for Dutch teachers (2307) and Mathematics (1731) (Tweede kamer, 2021).

For the purpose of this research it would be informative to know the number of private tutoring companies in the Netherlands. The Chamber of Commerce (Kamer van Koophandel) is a government

body that registers all official companies in the Netherlands. They are able to see how many companies related to study support are registered in the Netherlands. However, this information can only be accessed through payment. What we do know is that the number of study support companies has increased a lot over the past ten years from a report from the Education Council (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B).

The only data I was able to retrieve on privatisation is the increase of private schools, so-called B3-schools, in the Netherlands (see table on the next page). B3-schools are similar to public schools, but private. This means the same educational laws and standards account for these schools compared to public schools (IVO, 2022). Other forms are international schools or homeschooling, these are not included in the data. Looking at the data we see that in 2008 there were 34 private schools with a total of 903 students attending² (Van Der Meer & Van Der Ploeg, 2008). In 2021, there were 32 B3-schools for secondary education and 38 B-schools for primary education. All B3-schools had between 2 and 140 students, in total these schools were attended by approximately 1700 students (Auditdienst Rijk, 2021). Comparing the data from 2008 and 2021, we see an 88% increase of school enrollment in private schools. Also, the number of private schools has increased with 36. Thus, the data confirms the Education Council finding that there is an increase of privatisation in education.

This document analysis provided an overview of the dutch education system, specifically public secondary education, necessary for understanding the context in which privatisation is researched.

² This data does not distinguish between private schools for primary and secondary education. However, the report providing the data does state that most schools include both school types (Van Der Meer & Van Der Ploeg, 2008)

Number of students in B3-schools in 2008 and 2021 compared

Number of B3-schools in 2008			
Total amount of B3-schools	34		
Number of B3-schools in 2021		Total number of B3-schools by school level offered 2021	
Only Primary Education B3-schools	38	Total number B3-schools offering Secondary Education	32 (10+22)
Both levels B3-schools	22	Total number B3-schools offering Primary Education	60 (38+22)
Only Secondary Education B3-schools	10		
Total amount of B3-schools	70		
Total number of students going to a B3-school in 2008	903		
Total number of students going to a B3-school in 2021	1700		
Difference between 2008 and 2021 in total number of students going to a B3-school	797		
Increase between 2008 and 2021 in total number of students going to a B3-school in percent (%)	88,26%		

Source of data for 2008: Van der Meer, M., & van der Ploeg, S. W. (2008). Particuliere B3-Scholen 2007–2008.

Source of data for 2021: Auditdienst Rijk, Ministerie van Financiën, Onderzoeksrapport; Toezicht op B3-scholen (definitief), (2021).

Analysis - Qualitative Research

Results

In this section of my research I will discuss the results. The results have been categorised into four themes that are discussed separately. The themes came up during the analysis of the results (in-vivo approach) and represent the main themes. The four themes are 1.) Attitudes towards private companies, 2.) Equality of Opportunities & Awareness, 3.) School Programmes & Extra Support, 4.) Keeping Track of Private Support.

Participating schools

Before going into the results it is important to provide some information about the participating schools. Below you find a table with all participating schools and the school level(s) they teach. The relevance of this information will be covered in the discussion section. All results will be discussed using the interview numbers and abbreviations indicated in the table.

Interview details

Interview number	Full school name	abbreviation	school levels
1	Impulse - Piter Jelles	Impulse	Vmbo-t, have, vwo
2	Christelijk Gymnasium Beyers Naudé	CGBN	vwo/gymnasium
3	De Dyk - Piter Jelles	De Dyk	Vmbo-t (mavo), have
4	Anna-Maria Schurmanschool	AMS	Vmbo basis, vmbo kader, vmbo-t, havo & havo+

The interviews

Attitudes towards private companies

One of the main interests of this research was to get an understanding of the attitudes schools (school boards/staff) have towards private companies that provide a form of educational support. First of all, all schools indicated that there was no regulation regarding working with private companies. However, they all indicated that the general advice within the *scholenkoepel* (overarching school body/collective) was to be hesitant (*terughoudend*) with this kind of companies, while individual schools still have the freedom to decide how they work together with private companies. According to interviewee 2, schools do this in many different ways. This is also visible from the results (see: school programmes & extra support). Yet, all of them also said to be hesitant with allowing private companies in practice. Three schools (1,2,3) indicated to prefer solving the need for extra support internally, De Dyk indicated that there are more open to a private company in order to solve this. Schools were also asked if they allowed private companies to advertise in their buildings. Although all schools said they preferred not to have any advertising from private companies, some were more vocal than others. One school, Impulse (1), said: “*That’s absolutely not allowed [...] Sometimes we have it [advertising] hanging around [...] but we remove this. We are quite aggressive with this.*” The other schools (2,3,4) were also hesitant, but seemingly less so. This connects well to how the headmaster of Impulse (1) described the role of schools and private companies:

“[...] *our primary responsibility is to educate students to get a vmbo, havo or vwo diploma, this is not the responsibility of an external company. Those will always remain as assistance, but they are used by the school as little as possible.*” (1, Impulse)

In line with this statement all schools indicated they either do not bring up private study support themselves; or even go as far as advising against using it. They prefer to solve needs for extra support internally as much as possible.

Despite being hesitant, all of the schools have some kind of cooperation with a private company. Two schools (3,4) hired a private company, De Huiswerkkamer, to provide homework classes, the other two schools (1,2) organised this internally. De Dyk (3) hired a teacher through a private company, because this was cheaper. Three schools (1,3,4) hired an external company for exam training, CGBN (2) organised this by themselves. However, CGBN was also the only school that used/offered private tutoring and used externals (students) for surveillance during exams. The latter was also to decrease work pressure for staff. In general, work pressure seems to be an important consideration for allowing external/private companies.

Overall, all schools have an ongoing cooperation with a private company, despite indicating being hesitant with working with private companies. Most schools prefer to limit their cooperation with private companies to a minimum. None of the schools allow for advertising, although there is no official policy regarding this.

Equality of opportunities, Awareness & Responsibility

A second interest of this research was to see what considerations are made for allowing or refusing private companies. The most important topics to evaluate this are 1.) How schools evaluate the existence of private study support; and 2.) more specifically if schools are aware of the potential effects of private education on equality of opportunities. The first will allow for a broad understanding of the considerations made by schools regarding cooperation with private companies. The latter will allow for evaluation in the light of equality of opportunity.

Overall, all interviewees seemed to be aware of the negative effects. They all indicated that, because of the high costs, not everyone has equal access to private study support. Furthermore, they indicate private companies are making the teacher shortage worse. Three interviews (1,2,4) explicitly mentioned equality to be one of their considerations for their cooperation with a private company. The terms equality and equality of opportunity were intentionally not used in the interviews to see if headmasters would discuss it without being primed. In two interviews (1,2) the term equality of opportunities (*kansengelijkheid*) was brought up by the interviewees themselves when talking about private educational support. In interview 4 this equality of opportunity was only mentioned in relation to the *wet kansengelijkheid* (equal opportunities bill), although this headmaster did use the words equality and inequality. In interview 3 this term was only introduced by the interviewer at the end of the interview and there was no mention of the word (in)equality.

Considerations for hiring private parties

In spite of all schools being hesitant to hire private companies, all of them do in some way. For doing so they made the following considerations. Understandably, it showed from all interviews that the schools look mostly at the interests of students. However, not just the students but also teachers are taken into account. Work pressure among teachers turns out to be an important consideration for

hiring a private company. Another important factor was costs for students. The headmaster of Impulse (1) said: *“I know enough stories about students here at school that cannot afford it. [...] I would find it a pity if those people did not receive the support they need.”* (1, Impulse)

The deputy headmaster of CGBN (2) said that extra support, specifically tutoring, has to be affordable. Noticeably, CGBN is the only school using a private company, where students have to pay for tutoring classes by themselves, although in some cases the school pays (see next section). This is especially remarkable, because at the same time, interviewee 2 explicitly said that equality of opportunity is the most important consideration to him:

“I find equality of opportunity the most important, when you are paying a company from the schaduwcircuit [private company]. In principle good education has to be free [...]. When a student needs something extra, they shouldn't have to pay a lot of money for it. As a society we shouldn't want that.” (2, CGBN)

For De Dyk (3) there was also another reason to hire a private company for their homework support. The school received extra money (npo-gelden)³ during the school year and thus at the time they were stuck to a certain timetable. Therefore it was easier to hire an external. Next to this, the headmaster of this school believes that external people can bring expertise with homework classes that the school doesn't have. Interviewee 4 also added that private companies can guarantee a certain quality that may be an addition to the schools programme.

Benefits & disadvantages - Potential Negative effects/impact

Schools saw different positive and negative sides to private study support. One of the advantages indicated by Impulse (1) is that *“some parties do have a lot of expertise and this can benefit a student, because they really have the time to toil with a student [...]”*

However, schools mostly see some serious disadvantages to private companies providing study support. The main concern is that it is expensive, which means it's only for people *‘with a fat wallet’ (dikke portemonnee)* (2,4). Furthermore, the deputy headmaster of CGBN (2) points out that a big private sector is bad for the current staff shortage. Private education institutions are taking away teachers from where they are most needed. The deputy headmaster says it's often young teachers that could teach in school that go to private companies, because they earn more here. *“There are many factors, salary, working times that make it attractive to do this.”* Such work pressure for teachers is related to privatisation in even another way. Lastly, the headmaster of school 1 also points out another disadvantage which is that when students take study support classes their attention shifts from school to these support classes.

Paying extra

Schools mostly viewed having to pay for extra support as something undesirable, because it is expensive and bad for equality, because it is generally expensive and will thus only be available for people who can afford it. However, two interviewees (3,4) also mentioned a benefit of having to pay something for extra support, namely that this commits parents and students more to actually (regularly) attending this support. The headmaster of AMS (4) said that at some point parents had to pay a symbolic amount of money for study support to create commitment, in the interview he explained this as follows:

³ NPO-gelden is explained in the next section: School programme & extra support > NPO-gelden

“It was a very small sum and most of it was paid by the school. But this small price was actually more symbolic to make youth aware that this was important and that they could not just stay away, because their parents were paying for it.” (4, AMS)

The headmaster of De Dyk says something similar, when having to pay something *“people treat it more seriously. Both parents and students. Regularly (nog wel eens) I get an e-mail from parents saying their child won’t attend the homework classes anymore.”* He indicates that students easily stopped making use of extra study support, when they were not committed to it.

School programme & extra support

When it comes to extra study support for students on top of regular classes, there are roughly two options to meet this need. First of all, the school can offer this, or second, a private company can do it. Surprisingly, all schools turned out to be offering some kind of extra study support themselves. Although all schools offered it within their programme, the way this is provided differs. Some organise it completely by themselves and some use private companies.

NPO-gelden

In all interviews the participants talked about the so called *NPO-gelden* (NPO funds). This stands for National Programme for Education. They are funds (extra money on top of regular budget) from the government aimed at the recovery and further development of education during and after the corona pandemic (Nationaal Programma Onderwijs, 2022).

All schools offer some form of homework support and some form of extra support for specific subjects. The way schools offer their extra support is especially relevant to this research, because it can show ways to avoid or limit private study support. To distinguish clearly between the kinds of support offered by the different schools, all schools will be discussed separately in a brief section.

/ Impulse (1)

At Impulse they offer what they call *Het Plusprogramma*. As the name (plus) implies this is extra support for students, however this programme is fully incorporated into the regular curriculum. Consequently, timetables were designed in such a way that teachers have time to provide *Het Plusprogramma* within school times. Classes run between 08.30 and 15.15, when students have no class, they can go to a place called *supportplein* for support and to do homework. For certain subjects, such as mathematics, students can also follow extra classes (*bijles*) provided by teachers. Next to this, students also get at least one and a half hour of coaching every week as part of their curriculum.

/ CGBN (2)

At CGBN they offer three kinds of support. There are homework classes every Tuesday. If a student is struggling with a subject there are moments outside school time to ask questions (*inloopspreekuur*). Next to this, CGBN is working together with a tutoring company called TopTutors. If a student needs extra support for a subject, they recommend using this company, because they work with old students who are familiar with the school. Usually students have to pay for this tutoring themselves, however the school pays for students that are behind because of the corona pandemic. Unfortunately, it is unclear from the interview how these students were identified. In the latter scenario tutoring is paid through NPO-gelden. Last, CGBN also used an external company for surveillance during exams.

/ De Dyk (3)

De Dyk has homework classes outside school hours provided by De Huiswerkkamer (external). Further, at De Dyk they also offer extra support that is incorporated in the daily timetable, a schedule that is the same for every student. It starts at 9 and ends at 15.25 every day. This never changes. At the end of every day there is time for support classes (*Ondersteuningslessen/O-lessen*). Students get invited by the school to attend these classes, if students have passing grades, they don't have to attend. The headmaster of De Dyk summarises it this way: "*We reward in free time. By rewarding with free time we create small groups for support classes*". Consequently, teachers also have more attention for the students that need support. Next to support classes, students also get personal classes (*persoonlijke lessen/p-lessen*), every week students have to choose eight classes of any subject themselves depending on their needs. He explains this way of education as follows:

"If you want to give students equal opportunities within education, [then] you have to provide unequal education. When I was young I was good at mathematics, for me two hours of class were enough. My sister, who was in the same class, was bad at mathematics and needed four hours of class. But no, both of us got three hours of class." (3, De Dyk)

/ AMS (4)

The AMS school offers two ways of extra support for students. Just like De Dyk they have homework classes provided De Huiswerkkamer. Next to this, they also provide tutoring from 8.15 until 9, before the other classes. This is called *Op maat* (customised) and done by the regular teachers, because "*they also know the problems students are facing and how to get them back to speed within a limited amount of time*". As a motivation for extra support the headmaster of AMS said that his school is "*Treating equality with inequality*".

One thing that stands out is that most of the extra support offered by schools is paid through the NPO-gelden (see previous section). Impulse (1) is the only school where the extra support (*plusprogramma*) is organised within the regular budget of the school, meaning that it is not dependent on *NPO-gelden*, yet this money is still used to improve the support programme. The other schools (2,3,4) mainly finance their current extra support through NPO-gelden, so outside the regular budget. When organising extra support for students, work pressure among teachers was an important consideration for all schools. Apart from the students' interests this seems to be the most important consideration in relation to shaping extra support.

Keeping track of private support

As discussed in the Document Analysis, the Education Council stated in their report that currently 1 in 4 students (25%) is using some form of private study support (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B). Based on the interviews it is difficult to conclude whether this number applies to the participating schools. All schools indicated that they are keeping track of the students that are using the extra support provided internally (homework classes and extra support for a subject). Based on these numbers all schools seem to be far below 25%. However, these numbers provide an incomplete picture. To illustrate this I will use the case of CGBN (2), when the headmaster of this school was asked how many students were taking tutoring classes, he provided the following overview:

“Thirty students spread over all school years are taking tutoring classes. The centre of gravity lies in ‘klas 5’⁴, where ten students are following tutoring classes. There are 520 students in this school.” (3, CGBN)

So, based on these numbers, 5,7% of the students in CGBN are taking tutoring classes, of which almost 1,9% are in *klas 5*.⁵ These numbers included all students using the tutoring services offered by TopTutors, both paid and unpaid. However, he also indicated: *“We don’t have a picture of the student taking tutoring elsewhere. We don’t have data on this.”* All schools presented a similar case, where the number of students taking extra classes internally is below the national average, but without having data on classes provided externally.

⁴ In this case *klas 5* is the year before the final year. This is generally the hardest year for students.

⁵ Calculations: $(100/520)*30 = 5,7\%$; $(100/520)*10 = 1,9\%$

Discussion

Participating schools

Secondary schools in the Netherlands are divided into different school levels⁶, because of these different levels it is important to be aware of the school levels taught by the schools involved in this research. The participating schools represent all school levels existing in the Netherlands. Yet, an important side note is that the school level most attended in the Netherlands, vmbo⁷ (basis, kader & tl) attended by 48,7% of all students in the Netherlands, is less represented compared to havo and vwo (Nji, 2022).

The interviews

In this section of my research I will discuss the results that came from the interviews, analyse them and relate them to equality of opportunity. Ideally, public education should provide equal opportunities for everyone. If it is the case that chances for everyone in education are equal, meritocracy works. In order to have equal opportunities equity, unequal treatment for equal opportunities is needed. Privatisation can put equality of opportunities under pressure, as was also warned about by the Education Council (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B). Furthermore, the current minister of education Dennis Wiersma is looking into the possibilities of creating better policies with regards to private companies (VOR, 2022). The latter also underlines the value of this research. The results will be discussed (with)in this context.

Attitudes towards private companies

In their 2021 report, the Education Council (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B) proposed several measures to limit privatisation. One of the measures they proposed was a ban on advertisements in schools. Based on the results, such a ban seems/is unnecessary, since schools do not allow advertising already. However, this may be different in other schools. Nevertheless, it may be more rewarding to focus on limiting privatisation in general instead of only banning advertising for it. The number of private companies within public education has risen significantly over the past ten years and since this is likely to increase even more according to the Council for Education (2021). There are several ways in which this could be done. The overarching school bodies (*scholenkoepels*) could be playing a role in this, according to all schools there are currently no existing policies for working with private companies. The national government may also take a role as they are currently developing policy (BWK, 2022). If the government wants to keep the public character of public schools, it is necessary to create policies to limit privatisation. Furthermore, privatisation is not just affecting equality of chances, but also has an impact on the shortage of teachers. It turns out an important factor in deciding whether to hire a private company is the workload for teachers while that same sector is taking away teachers from where they're needed. This will be discussed in more detail in the second next section.

Equality of opportunities & Awareness

In general, schools seem to be aware of the importance of equality of opportunities. When thinking about this both students and teachers are taken into account. The headmasters of all schools seemed to be aware of the impact of their choices for their school and their influence on equality of opportunities at least to some extent. Schools are definitely aware of the negative effects of privatisation and are generally hesitant to work with private companies. However, they do not always have a choice

⁶ For a full overview of different school levels in the Netherlands see Document Analysis & Background > General

⁷ School 4 is the only school with all vmbo-levels

whether to hire or not hire a private company, because of the shortage of teachers. Also, from the interviews it shows that schools are treating private companies/privatisation in different ways.

All schools agreed that payment by students or their parents for extra support is undesirable, because in this way not everyone will be able to afford it. Here the schools are quite explicitly taking a stance for equality of opportunity. However, one school, CGBN, still made their students pay for tutoring classes, although this is not further elaborated upon.

One argument is made to make parents pay something for the extra support a student needs. In order to make parents and students more committed to extra classes offered, they might have to pay a symbolic amount of extra money, as suggested by interviews 3 and 4. An alternative to this might be to have a signed agreement with students and their parents to create commitment without financial means. This way financial means can form no obstacle and chances are equal.

School programme & extra support (from school or private) + school finances

All interviewed schools had some kind of cooperation with a private company. Nevertheless, it was surprising to see how much schools were already doing internally. In general, schools prefer to solve the demand for extra support internally. This means both that they wish to organise extra support themselves, and that they prefer students take this support from the school and not from an external party. In terms of equality, this is the most desirable approach, because solving needs internally guarantees a public school remains in control of support being freely available.

In terms of equity, Impulse (1) seems to be most effective in handling the need for extra support. Their extra support is completely part of the regular programme and not dependent on extra funds nor external staff. Timetables have been designed in such a way that teachers can provide both regular and extra classes. Compared to the other schools this is the most sustainable solution in the long term. Both De Dyk (3) and AMS (4) are doing similar things as Impulse (1). However, part of their extra support, homework classes, are provided by a private company. This is no problem in terms of equality, since students can attend it for free. However, this is more expensive and currently funded by NPO-gelden. Therefore, it might not be as sustainable as incorporating it into the regular programme and the timetable of the teachers. School 3 does also have personalised classes, where students choose some of the classes they need themselves. This is also good for equity, since this way students are likely to receive education for the things they need. At school 2, extra support is not part of the daily timetable at all. Yet, students can get extra support outside classes for free. Still this school does work together with a tutoring company.

As mentioned by two of the interviewers, equality has to be treated with inequality. This reflects equity and is done by multiple schools already. They do this by making extra classes only mandatory for those who need it, by rewarding with free time and consequently have more attention for those who need it.

Regarding privatisation, we see an interconnectedness of problems. Schools are facing a national teacher shortage. Staff-wise it may not always be possible to provide extra support with their own teachers. Related to this all schools indicated that work pressure (relief) is an important reason for hiring a company in the private sector. But at the same time that same private sector is causing part of the teacher shortage in the first place. Privatisation is making teacher shortages even worse. This can serve as an argument to limit privatisation. If we want to create equality of opportunity, if we want

public schools to be truly public, it shouldn't be more attractive to work for a private company than for a public school.

One thing that stands out from the interviews is that most of the extra support currently offered by schools is paid through the NPO-gelden⁸. This raises a concern about future sustainability. The NPO-gelden are funds to improve education, but they will be temporary. The extra support might stop, when these funds stop.

When a school is not able to provide a service (extra support) themselves, they should make it accessible to students, ideally in such a way that students don't have to pay for it. This is done by De Dyk for example with homework classes. In terms of equity a school either has to pay or offer study coaching themselves. Ideally, this is done/provided internally. However, it may be good to use externals more for non-teaching related work such as exam surveillance, as done by CGBN (2).

Keeping track of private support

The Education Council estimates that 1 in 4 students are taking some kind of extra study support (Onderwijsraad, 2021-A). As far as the four participating schools are concerned, these numbers do not seem to add up (e.g. 5,7% of students taking tutoring classes instead of 25%)⁹. In the future it might be desirable to keep better track of which students are following private classes. Numbers provided by the schools suggest that they differ a lot from the national average. However, it is worth noting that such numbers only reflect tutoring supported by NPO-gelden. The interviewed schools were unable to provide complete numbers, because they did not keep track of this. To resolve this issue, making it mandatory for private companies to report on the students using their services may assist in getting a better picture.

Relevance, Limitations & future research

Relevance

Currently, the government is working on creating policies to control privatisation in public education. This is a good development in terms of equality of opportunities. This makes it valuable to evaluate the current situation of privatisation in public education. Also, schools have to work on this individually as well. The government should focus on their influence on companies and the teacher shortage.

The main concern of this thesis is the influence of privatisation on equality of opportunity in Dutch secondary education. However, Dutch education is currently facing many challenges, privatisation is just one of them. The following section discusses the limitations of this research and the potential directions for future research.

Limitations

For this research, a limited number of four interviews were conducted. Interviewing more schools, especially in different areas of the Netherlands, will give more diverse results. Currently, only schools

⁸ For more information on NPO-gelden see Results > School programmes & extra support > NPO-gelden

⁹ See the full example calculation made in: Results > Keeping track of private support

in the City of Leeuwarden were interviewed. Within this research the school level Vmbo is less represented, even though most Dutch secondary school students go to this school level. In this case havo/vwo are relatively overrepresented. However, the gathered data does not suggest there are significant differences regarding attitudes and cooperation in school with vmbo school level.

Future research

First of all, future research could be conducted on a larger scale with more interviews. Furthermore overarching school organisations could be involved in this as well. In this research I did not look at the role of *scholenkoepels*. This might be worthwhile in the future, because they also have an influence on the way schools cooperate with private companies. Last, it is necessary to create a better understanding of the size of the private sector providing extra educational support and the way different companies operate in order to effectively limit this kind of companies. This should also include the number of students using a form of private study support as data on this is incomplete.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The aim of this research is to evaluate the way Dutch public secondary schools view and treat private companies offering different study support services. In recent years, privatisation has increased significantly, and as a result, the Education Council wrote a report warning this development may put equality of opportunity under pressure (Onderwijsraad, 2021-B). After this report, the minister for education also announced that he will be developing policy to control the entanglement of the private sector with public education. As a result of these recent developments, this paper analyses privatisation in public education through the lens of equality of opportunity. Within this context we discussed the concepts of meritocracy and equity.

Meritocracy is a deeply held belief in society, the best known lay term to explain this concept is *The American Dream*. It's the belief that people get what they deserve through hard work (Arrow et al., 2000; Bregman & Frederik, 2015; De Beer & Van Zijl, 2016). Meritocracy can only be true if there is equality of opportunity within society, and in order to reach equal opportunities, equity is needed. This entails giving everyone the right shoes to walk in, even if for some people normal shoes may suffice, while others need special shoes.

This research focussed on secondary schools and the way they treat private companies. In the end, a couple of conclusions can be drawn. First of all, it turns out that schools are aware of the impact of their choices on equality of opportunity and the negative effects of privatisation. When thinking about this topic, school prioritises the interest of the students, although the workload for staff is also an important consideration.

When looking at the way schools treat private companies, we see that all are hesitant in working together with the private sector. However, we also see that all schools have some kind of cooperation with a private company. The form of this cooperation differs per school. When it comes to extra support all schools agree as well that payment is undesirable. This is in line with equality of opportunity, therefore it is encouraging to see schools look at this the same way. Some schools still argued that payment can be used for commitment, however this could be solved with a written agreement instead of payment.

One of the most important findings of this research is that the shortage of teachers and the issues schools are facing because of this shortage, seem to be interconnected with privatisation. Privatisation is not the cause of the shortage, but it is potentially making it worse by taking away educated teachers from where they are most needed.

As we saw in the Document Analysis data from 2008 and 2021 confirmed the trend observed by the Education Council. Privatisation in public education is increasing. The increase of private schools could also partly explain the teachers shortage. This is also indicated by the interviewees.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion from this research, we can formulate a couple of recommendations for government and schools regarding privatisation. Let's look at the government's influence first. First of all, a ban on advertisements for privately paid services seems unnecessary, because schools do not allow this without policy already. Second, the hesitant attitude schools hold towards private companies should remain, because in this way schools will prioritise solving needs for extra support internally and because this is better for equality of opportunities. Therefore it should not become more

attractive to work together with the private sector. In line with the previous two points, it would be good for governments to limit the amount of private companies through policies, since not only is privatisation undesirable for equality of opportunities, it also seems to deteriorate the existing teacher shortage. Furthermore, the government should give more priority to solving the teacher shortage.

When it comes to schools, a few recommendations equally surface. For sake of equality of opportunity it would be best to fully incorporate extra support students need into the regular school programme. From one of the schools we know this is possible. Also, this should be done by using the regular school budget as by making sure extra support is independent of temporary funds, the extra support will become sustainable. In order to establish such a curriculum it would be beneficial for schools to exchange knowledge and experiences. Schools can learn from each other to organise extra support internally. This would also be good for looking into possibilities of personalised education to ensure a high level of equity. If schools have concerns regarding the commitment of students to extra support, the school can consider making a signed agreement for commitment between them and students. Finally, it would be good to create a system to better keep track of which and how many students are taking private classes. In general, more research into more schools and the number of students taking private classes is needed.

Though privatisation is posing a clear danger to equality of opportunities within Dutch public secondary education and Dutch society, it seems that schools are aware of this more than anyone. Schools hold hesitant attitudes towards cooperation with private schools, but often they do not have a choice but to work with a private company, because of the ongoing teacher shortage. Even though sufficient attention has been brought to this matter, it is also necessary for the Dutch government to develop effective policy, not merely to limit privatisation, but also solve the teacher shortages.

Sources

Webpages

[Leerplicht | Rijksoverheid.nl](#) - Rijksoverheid, 2022-A; 14-03-2022

[Uitbreiding non-discriminatiegronden - Nederlandse Grondwet \(denederlandsegrondwet.nl\)](#) - De Nederlandse Grondwet, 2022-A; 05-04-2022

[Artikel 23: Het openbaar en bijzonder onderwijs - Nederlandse Grondwet \(denederlandsegrondwet.nl\)](#) - De Nederlandse Grondwet, 2022-B; 05-04-2022

[SER: kwaliteit onderwijs onvoldoende, corona vergroot kansenongelijkheid | NOS, 18-06-2021](#) (NOS, 2021)

[Social determinants of health \(who.int\) | World Health Organisation \(WHO\), 05-04-2022](#)

[Openbaar en bijzonder onderwijs | Vrijheid van onderwijs | Rijksoverheid.nl](#) - Rijksoverheid, 2022-B; 06-04-2022

[De Staat van het Onderwijs: onderwijsverslag 2014/2015 | Rapport | Inspectie van het onderwijs \(onderwijsinspectie.nl\)](#) Rijksoverheid, 2016

[Welke schooladviezen kan mijn kind krijgen in groep 8? | Rijksoverheid.nl](#) Rijksoverheid, 2022-C

[Wat zijn de kosten voor mijn kind in het voortgezet onderwijs? | Rijksoverheid.nl](#) Rijksoverheid, 2022-D

[Wat zijn de kosten voor mijn kind in het voortgezet onderwijs? | Rijksoverheid.nl](#) - Rijksoverheid, 2022-E

[Zorgplicht en samenwerken scholen in passend onderwijs | Passend onderwijs | Rijksoverheid.nl](#) - Rijksoverheid, 2022-F

[Er komen meer leraren bij, maar personeelstekort blijft groot | Nieuwsbericht | Rijksoverheid.nl](#) - Rijksoverheid, 2022-G

[Onderwijs | Rijksoverheid.nl](#) - Rijksoverheid, 2022-H

Sociaal-Economische Raad (SER) (2021). *Gelijke kansen in het onderwijs; Structureel investeren in kansengelijkheid voor iedereen*

[UNDESA World Social Report 2020 | DISD](#) World Social Report, UN, 2020

[Wetgeving Passend onderwijs | VNG](#) - (Vereniging voor Nederlandse Gemeenten) VNG, 2022; 07-04-2022

[De Staat van het Onderwijs: onderwijsverslag 2014/2015 | Rapport | Inspectie van het onderwijs \(onderwijsinspectie.nl\)](#) - (Inspectie van het onderwijs) IVO, 2016

[Particuliere B3-scholen | Particulier onderwijs | Inspectie van het onderwijs \(onderwijsinspectie.nl\)](#) - (Inspectie van het onderwijs) IVO, 2022; 07-06-2022

[3. Inkomensongelijkheid \(cbs.nl\)](#) - CBS, 2021

[Tendrapportage Arbeidsmarkt Leraren po, vo en mbo 2021 | Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal](#) - Tweede Kamer, 2021

[Home | Nationaal Programma Onderwijs \(nponderwijs.nl\)](#) - Nationaal Programma Onderwijs, NPO 2022

[Cijfers over onderwijsprestaties | Nederlands Jeugdinstituut \(nji.nl\)](#) - Nederland Jeugdinstituut (NJI), 2022

[Over het programma Gelijke Kansen | Gelijke kansen \(gelijke-kansen.nl\)](#) - Ministerie voor onderwijs, cultuur en wetenschap (OCW), OCW, 2022; 05-06-2022

[Richtlijnen voor privaat aanbod en maximering ouderbijdrage - VO-raad](#) - Vereniging voor scholen in het voortgezet onderwijs, VOR, 2022; 04-06-2022

[Flinke groei klanten voedselbank –160.500 mensen voorzien van voedselhulp | Voedselbanken Nederland Newsroom](#) - Voedselbanken Nederland, 2022; 05-06-2022

[Het Nederlandse onderwijssysteem | Het Onderwijsloket](#) - Het onderwijsloket, 2022: 03-06-2022

Auditdienst Rijk, Ministerie van Financiën, Onderzoeksrapport; Toezicht op B3-scholen (definitief), (2021). Retrieved via:

<https://open-pilot.overheid.nl/repository/ronl-275eea6f-8476-4860-9e68-c5e1aa98bc51/1/pdf/Onderzoeksrapport%20ADR%20Toezicht%20op%20B3-scholen.pdf>

[Ineens redden deze middeninkomens het niet meer | Nieuwsuur \(nos.nl\)](#) - (NOS, 2022)

[Klassen - HUMAN](#) (Human, 2022)

[Sander en de kloof - VPRO](#) (VPRO, 2022)

[Coalitieakkoord 'Omzien naar elkaar, vooruitkijken naar de toekomst' | Publicatie | Kabinetsformatie \(kabinetsformatie2021.nl\)](#) Bureau Woordvoering Kabinetsformatie (BWK), 15-12-2021

<https://twitter.com/naheedd/status/451847459242012672?lang=en> - Naheed Dosani, 2014

Literature

- Arrow, K. J., Bowles, S., & Durlauf, S. N. (Eds.). (2000). *Meritocracy and economic inequality*. Princeton University Press.
- Ball, S. J., & Youdell, D. (2007). Hidden privatisation in public education.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor.
- Berkel, J. V. (2021). Meritocracy does not legitimize inequality for everyone.
- Boudon, R. (1974-A). Education, opportunity, and social inequality: Changing prospects in western society. Wiley-Interscience
- Boudon, R. (1974-B). Educational growth and economic equality. *Quality and quantity*, 8(1), 1-10.
- Braveman, P., & Gruskin, S. (2003). Defining equity in health. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 57(4), 254-258.
- Bregman, R., & Frederik, J. (2015). *Waarom vuilnismannen meer verdienen dan bankiers*. De Correspondent.
- Chancel, L., Piketty, T., Saez, E., & Zucman, G. (2021). World inequality report 2022.
- Centraal Planbureau (CPB, 2020). Ongelijkheid van het jonge kind. Den Haag: CPB.
- Beer, de, P., & van Zijl, J. (2016). Hoe meritocratisch is Nederland en is dat reden tot zorg?.
- Ellis, C. (2017, April). Social Class, Meritocracy, and the Geography of the “American Dream”. In *The Forum* (Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 51-70). De Gruyter.
- Espinoza, O. (2007). Solving the equity–equality conceptual dilemma: A new model for analysis of the educational process. *Educational research*, 49(4), 343-363.
- Halsey, A. H., Heath, A. F., & Ridge, J. M. (1984). The political arithmetic of public schools. In *British Public Schools* (pp. 9-44). Routledge.
- Helmers, H. M. (2011). Overheid en onderwijsbestel: beleidsvorming rond het Nederlandse onderwijsstelsel (1990-2010). Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau.
- Newman, B. J., Johnston, C. D., & Lown, P. L. (2015). False consciousness or class awareness? local income inequality, personal economic position, and belief in american meritocracy false consciousness or class awareness? *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(2), 326–340.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12153>
- Mijs, J. J. (2021). The paradox of inequality: Income inequality and belief in meritocracy go hand in hand. *Socio-Economic Review*, 19(1), 7-35.

Mijs, J. J. (2018). Visualizing belief in meritocracy, 1930–2010. *Socius*, 4, 2378023118811805.

Onderwijsraad (2021-A). *Later selecteren, beter differentiëren*.

Onderwijsraad (2021-B). *Publieke karakter voorop*.

Passaretta, G. en J. Skopek, 2018, From Birth to the End of Compulsory School - Social and Migration-related Achievement Inequality in a Stratified Education System, in G. Passaretta en J. Skopek, *Roots and Development of Achievement Gaps*.

Roemer, John E. 1998. *Equality of Opportunity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rooy, de, P. (2018). Een geschiedenis van het onderwijs in Nederland. Wereldbibliotheek.

Solt, F., Hu, Y., Hudson, K., Song, J., & Yu, D. E. (2016). Economic inequality and belief in meritocracy in the United States. *Research & Politics*, 3(4), 2053168016672101.

Thompson, R., & Simmons, R. (2013). Social mobility and post-compulsory education: revisiting boudon's model of social opportunity. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34(5-6), 744–765. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.816038>

Tavares, O., Sá, C., Sin, C., & Amaral, A. (2022). Equity Policies in Global Higher Education: Reducing Inequality and Increasing Participation and Attainment.

Tolsma, J., & Wolbers, M.H.J. (2010). *Naar een open samenleving? Recente ontwikkelingen in sociale stijging en daling in Nederland*. Den Haag: Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling.

Van der Meer, M., & Van der Ploeg, S. W. (2008). *Particuliere B3-Scholen 2007–2008*.

[Visser, J., 2021, Onderwijs is niet de grote gelijkmaker - De Correspondent](#)

Walford, G. (2013). Privatisation, education and social justice: Introduction. *Oxford Review of Education*, 39(4), 421-425.

Werfhorst, H., (2015). *Een kloof van alle tijden. Verschillen tussen lager en hoger opgeleiden in werk, cultuur en politiek*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Winchip, E., Stevenson, H., & Milner, A. (2019). Measuring privatisation in education: methodological challenges and possibilities. *Educational Review*, 71(1), 81-100.

Wolbers, M.H.J. en P.M. de Graaf (1996). *Onderwijsexpansie of meritocratisering? Een verklaring voor de afgenomen samenhang tussen het ouderlijk sociaal milieu en het hoogst bereikte opleidingsniveau van kinderen*.

Wolbers, M.H.J. (2014). *De twee gezichten van het onderwijs*.

Young, Michael. 1958. *The Rise of Meritocracy, 1870-2003*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Zajda, J. (2006). Introduction: Decentralisation and privatisation in education: The role of the state. In *Decentralisation and privatisation in education* (pp. 3-27). Springer, Dordrecht.

Appendix

Interview Guide

Ondertekenen toestemmingsformulier

Welkom. Voor we beginnen met dit interview, heb je nog vragen?

Laat ik beginnen met een korte inleiding, zodat we op één lijn zitten.

Waar gaan we het over hebben? Ik doe onderzoek naar private bedrijven zoals bijlesgevers en huiswerkbegeleiders binnen het publiek gefinancierde onderwijs, dus door de overheid betaald en gratis toegankelijk voor kinderen. Ik focus op middelbare scholen. De afgelopen jaren zien we in Nederland dat het aantal kinderen dat een vorm van bijles volgt sterk toegenomen is. Tegenwoordig maakt 1 op de 4 kinderen in het middelbaar onderwijs gebruik van een vorm van bijles, dat is best veel. Het onderwerp van mijn onderzoek en dus ook van dit interview is hoe scholen omgaan met private bedrijven die studie-ondersteuning aanbieden. Sommige scholen kiezen ervoor dit actief aan te raden, anderen kiezen ervoor deze bedrijven zoveel mogelijk te weren. In dit interview zou ik er graag achter willen komen hoe jouw school hiermee omgaat? Dus laten jullie wel of geen studie-begeleiding door private bedrijven toe, zo ja op wat voor manier én wat voor afweging is er gemaakt in deze beslissing.

Dan nog even kort over de terminologie:

- Wanneer ik het heb over private bedrijven, bedoel ik: Bedrijven die een vorm van studie-ondersteuning aanbieden (dus bijles, huiswerkbegeleiding en examentraining)
- Wanneer ik het heb over een publieke school, bedoel ik een publiek gefinancierd school, dus door de overheid betaald.

Als jij er klaar voor bent, gaan we beginnen.

Aanwezigheid private bedrijven

1. Werkt jouw school samen met private bedrijven? En zo ja, welke bedrijven? (denk aan bijles, huiswerkbegeleiding etc.)
2. Zou je per bedrijf langs willen gaan waarom jouw school samenwerkt met dit bedrijf?
3. Zou je per bedrijf langs willen gaan hoe je samenwerkt met dit bedrijf? (Wat is het dienstverband? Is er sprake van een betaling etc.)
4. Wat is de rol van dit bedrijf/deze bedrijven binnen jouw school? Is die rol belangrijk/onmisbaar

Leerlingen

5. Zijn er veel leerlingen die gebruik maken van bijles, huiswerkbegeleiding of examentraining? (schatting)
6. Wat betekent die extra studie-ondersteuning voor leerlingen? Is dit belangrijk? Is het onmisbaar?

Verbanden

7. Zou de school zonder samenwerkingsverbanden met private bedrijven kunnen? Dit zijn dus bedrijven die een vorm van studie-ondersteuning aanbieden.
8. Zijn er in het verleden ook andere bedrijven geweest?

Totstandkoming

9. Hoe is de samenwerking met private bedrijven tot stand gekomen?
10. Welke overwegingen zijn er gemaakt bij het toelaten/inzetten van private bedrijven?
11. Is er beleid dat iets zegt over het aantrekken/toelaten van private bedrijven?
12. Als de school geld besteedt aan private bedrijven, hoeveel is dit?

Gevolgen

1. Wat zijn volgens jou de voor- en nadelen van privaat bekostigde bijlessen? Voor leerlingen, voor de school, voor het algemeen belang en de maatschappij.
2. Bent je je bewust van de nadelen van privaat bekostigde studie-ondersteuning? En zo ja, wat zijn die volgens jou?
3. Hebben jullie voor en nadelen van privaat bekostigde studie-ondersteuning bewust tegen elkaar afgewogen?