Chapter 1
EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF DEMAND

Responding to demand is rapidly becoming an established part of the discourse on educational reform. This conceptual chapter explores different definitions and coverage of the demand concept, and develops a framework which is used to organise the rest of this publication. The framework locates the concept of demand in the changing historical context of OECD societies. Parents with growing levels of educational attainment increasingly demand more influence over the education their children receive and education systems are coping with increasingly diverse demands. The framework distinguishes between these demands – shaped by their expectations and satisfaction – and the ways in which they are expressed. Such expression becomes manifest either through choice of an alternative (exit) or by making changes through participation in decision-making (voice). Exit and voice can be exercised by individuals or by groups and interests operating at the collective level.

Introduction

The notion of “demand” in schooling is now in common currency in the educational policy world. Many identify a critical shift of debate and reform from traditional models of the past to dynamic ones of the future to be defined by the change from “supply-dominated systems” towards more demand-sensitive arrangements. This characterisation of shifts from the schooling of yesterday to that of tomorrow makes this a subject ripe for exploration as part of the OECD/CERI “Schooling for Tomorrow” programme. But what does “demand-driven” mean in practice? Is it more than a facile slogan? As this chapter shows, a family of terms and developments related to demand – choice, personalisation and individualisation – are some of the most important, as well as controversial, aspects of education today. There is need to clarify these different concepts and their relationships. This publication complements another recently
published in the “Schooling for Tomorrow” series on “personalising education” (2006a), as part of OECD/CERI’s contribution to clarifying issues in the way ahead for schooling.

Demand is a multi-dimensional concept which warrants further exploration. Once these dimensions start to come into focus, they should be subject to empirical analysis in order to move beyond abstraction and ideology. This publication is the result of such empirical review; it brings together analytical work in the form of national case studies from 11 countries. The different availability of information in the countries means, however, that the report’s evidence base is patchy. Its purpose therefore is exploratory: it indicates the different dimensions of “demand” and how it operates in very different OECD settings, and in doing so it provides insight into the dynamics at play. It highlights questions for further exploration and research.

The aim of this chapter is to review key ideas and concepts related to demand by way of introduction to the findings generated by this study. It presents a framework for analysis in terms of the interactions between forms and levels of demand, educational supply, context, and the articulation of demand. It also recognises by way of introduction diverse other forms of “demand” which have not been explored in this study.

Different meanings of “demand”

It is useful to recognise at the beginning that there are different usages and reactions to the term “demand” as well as the different components and relationships we seek to clarify in the chapter. Some of these are treated in this report, others are not:

- “Demand” is commonly used in an aggregate sense corresponding to “participation”. Often, this usage is associated with “student demand” to refer to the overall outcome of a myriad decisions relating to demand, supply and context which end up with a larger or smaller portion of each generation looking to stay on in education or choosing a particular track. So, for example, an increasing participation beyond compulsory schooling is often described as “the growing demand for upper-secondary education”.

1 The national case studies were from: Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Finland, Hungary, Japan, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Spain, with a separate expert report prepared on the United States.

2 For this chapter and the framework we are heavily indebted to a paper written by David N. Plank (2005), “Understanding the Demand for Schooling” (see www.oecd.org/edu/future/sft)
This study is not about participation in this general sense but the dimensions explored are relevant to understanding better how the “demand” element may well be influencing aggregate participation decisions.

- Another aggregate usage expresses “demand” less in terms of *behaviours* – choices and participation – and more in terms of *rights*. This is typically about “the demand” rather than diverse demands; it is less to be observed or measured but instead to be claimed or asserted. This sense of demand as a human or social right sets the scene (see below) but it is also beyond the scope of this report.

- There is another usage which is not framed as demand *for* (education) but is about its *recognition* through “demand-sensitive” educational arrangements or even “demand-led” systems, as referred to at the beginning of this chapter. This is essentially about process and the “expression of demand” and this is dealt with in this report. Describing schooling as “demand-led”, however, begs questions about whose demands are being listened to, to what extent, and what these demands actually are.

- One can distinguish between the *causes/factors* shaping demands and the *demands themselves*. This report is particularly focused on improving our understanding of the latter. But, as recognised in this chapter, there is a philosophical question this raises about how able people are to articulate what they want. Might they want – demand – something else that they haven’t yet thought of if it were seriously on offer? We recognise the serious caveats to be made about evidence derived from expressed opinions but also propose that taking stock of knowledge about the demand side through such evidence is an important first step on which to build.

- What is “demand” through one prism can be “supply” through another. Teachers have a myriad demands to make about the aims and conditions of education, which arguably could have been included in this study. We have adopted the position that it would confuse an already-complex subject were the report to include the viewpoints of teachers alongside those of parents, students and the wider public when teachers are more conventionally regarded as part of the supply-side of the educational equation.

  There is another reaction framed in the very suitability of the economic terminology of “demand” and “supply” when applied to education, a language which many in education strongly resist. This is an understandable concern from those working within traditions which find this language an
alien one. But, such a reaction is not grounds enough to reject such perspectives if it amounts to resistance for reasons of association not substance. Such terminology has become a *lingua franca* in policy analysis, however much some may wish otherwise. To use this *lingua franca* is not about privileging the economic grounds for education over non-economic ones, and indeed “demand” is as much about rights, wishes, and participation as it is about seeking any material benefits which may accrue to educational attainment.

We should also make clear that whilst it is likely – and these are some of the powerful arguments in its favour – that enhanced demand will lead to greater diversity, higher quality and improved responsiveness on the part of institutions and the system, there is no logical necessity that demand be expressed primarily or at all through the standard choice mechanisms which operate for commodities. This study is not based on any presupposition that promoting market or quasi-market mechanisms in education is inherently preferable.

The countries in the case studies underpinning this publication illustrate the wide variety of concepts of “demand” in play and of national policy discourse. This study is about clarifying concepts and relationships informed by evidence, rather than pinning down any elusive notion of “pure” demand. Demand, in short, is a complex concept that needs to be unpacked.

**Unpacking a complex concept**

No matter how hard we may look, no study can reveal any pure expression of “demand” abstracted from “supply” and context. What people want is closely shaped by what is on offer. And what is on offer and what is asked for both reflect a myriad of influential variables in the environment of schooling and of social and economic life. Moreover, demand needs channels to be expressed; there are different mechanisms to ensure that supply and demand “meet”. These mechanisms have different implications – positive advantages and negative costs.

To illustrate the interaction, we can distinguish between demand for *something existing* vs. demand for *something new*. Often people express their demands with regard to an infrastructure that already exists, for example demanding higher standards in science teaching or improved health care in schools. Sometimes – more rarely – the articulation of demand goes beyond what is already in place and calls for the creation of a new educational infrastructure. It takes more imagination to demand something which does not exist, as compared with reacting positively or negatively to something – supply – which already exists. This is further reason why
asking people what they want cannot be taken as any pure expression of “demand” as what is wanted tends to be shaped by perceptions of the possible at any one time.

A simple framework of key distinctions and concepts helps us to think about this multi-faceted concept of “demand”, as represented in Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1. Unpacking demand**

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<th>iv) Context</th>
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<td>i) Demand</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Collective</td>
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<td>ii) Supply</td>
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<td>iii) Expressing demand</td>
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<td>- Exit</td>
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<td>- Voice</td>
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The basic idea underlying this figure is that i) demand and ii) supply are interacting, mediated by iii) mechanisms to express demand and influenced by iv) the context in which the interaction takes place. The fact that outcomes are shaped by the mutual influence and tension between these different elements does not diminish the value of focusing on the demand side – the focus of this report. The focus is especially useful because so much of educational policy analysis is either about supply – teacher knowledge, structures of school systems, resources etc. – or about social, economic or political context which shapes it (the knowledge economy, migration, social inequality and so forth). To look at demand and its more effective expression is thus contributing to a more balanced, comprehensive framework for policy analysis rather than one dominated by system and, to a lesser extent, context variables.

The elements in Figure 1.1 – context and supply, demand, and expressing demand – are now discussed as part of unpacking this cluster of relationships. The chapter concludes with key questions which have informed this study related to the demand side of the overall picture.
Changing context and the supply-side

The interest in according greater importance to the demand-side is strongly related to the changing context of schooling, especially regarding how this has altered the primacy of the supply-dominated, publicly-provided schooling tradition which has held the stage for most of the twentieth century. The traditional rationale for the public provision of schools was essentially political. Schools were expected to produce citizens, by providing young people with canonical knowledge including familiarity with national languages and civic traditions. The primary function of public education was tutelary, aimed at incorporating young people into the state by fostering civic unity and national homogenisation through the schools. Next to this political rationale an economic rationale existed for the public provision of schooling. Schooling is what economists characterise as a merit good. Unlike most other goods the private consumption of schooling produces external benefits that accrue to the advantage of the broader society. The general diffusion of schooling supports gains in productivity, public health, and economic growth that improve the lives of all citizens, not just those who go to school.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the critical dynamics in the education system reflected efforts by the state to enhance the supply of schooling, both by increasing access and by improving the quality of education provided. In many countries the public school system traditionally comprised a highly diversified set of educational opportunities, with access to different options dependent on criteria that included measured aptitude or ability along with gender and race/ethnicity. Access to valued outcomes including university enrolment was dependent on participation in the higher status tracks in the education system. Access to these educational opportunities has often been contingent on examination performance, but sometimes on other criteria including race and gender.

The strong focus on the supply side had its origins in the increasingly wide acceptance of a notional right to education. In this context, the state is responsible not only for building schools, but also for ensuring that citizens avail themselves of educational opportunities. Accepting this responsibility, governments around the world have committed vast resources to expanding and improving their public education systems. Over time the number of young people attending school has steadily increased, as previously marginalised or excluded groups (e.g. rural children, girls, and the disabled) have been brought from the margins and into the mainstream of public school systems. In a parallel development, the length of time that children and young people spend in school has steadily increased as well. In most OECD countries, the very large majority of young people now complete at least 12 years of schooling. At least 90% are enrolled in age band spanning...
14 or more years in Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Iceland, Japan and Spain. In OECD countries as a whole, a 5-year-old can expect to have 17.4 year of education, based on current enrolment patterns (OECD, 2006c). Inadequate supply nevertheless continues to constrain enrolments in many parts of the world.

Demand was not缺席 from the traditional conception of schooling, but it was articulated in terms of access to more, better, and higher-status opportunities within the existing system, rather than for alternatives to the regulated opportunities provided by the state. Initially, disadvantaged households and groups have sought to improve their position through the education system, while prosperous and ambitious households have sought to maintain theirs. Where the demand for schooling was weak or absent (e.g. in rural and some religious communities), the role of policy has traditionally been to persuade or coerce parents to send their children to school with consequences for equality in the distribution of educational opportunities.

The issue of demand has traditionally not been problematic as long as it is homogeneous and congruent with the state’s expectations. In education systems where the state is the monopoly supplier, it generally has expressed itself in terms that are readily compatible with the state’s efforts to equalise and standardise educational opportunities. Communities and households demand that the state provide more and better schooling for their children. Those who find themselves excluded or marginalised may seek inclusion and more equal access to educational opportunities. These manifestations of demand are easily managed; indeed, governments themselves often seek to shape and strengthen the demand by families for education. As standards and expectations for minimal educational attainment have risen, the very success of the policy efforts to equalise opportunities has produced new demands as households have sought to ensure that their own children have privileged access to the best schools and programmes. In some countries this has involved strategic investment in real estate; in others, the purchase of elite private education. In other countries, the demand for schooling has found its expression in the shadow education system of cram schools and supplementary tutoring, which thrive on the margins of state control (Bray, 1999). The lengths people will go to in order to enjoy the advantages associated with education draws attention to the question of why education is so keenly demanded: it is often not for the learning as a good in itself but for the advantages that are associated with it. We return to this issue below.

There is now a new context in which a combination of individualisation, diversification and increasingly critical citizens has increased the pressure on the state to deliver more diversified public services. This has coincided with two other developments. First, there is the growing belief, now
reaching primary and secondary education though in some countries more than others, that public services improve when they are delivered decentralised and in competition. Second, there is the notion now increasingly stressed by educational scientists that putting the young person in the centre of the learning process is more effective than traditional approaches in which the young person is not so much involved as done to. So now critical policy questions arise about how governments should respond to these new demands. To date, their responses to variation coming from the demand side has been ambivalent at best.

**The articulation of demand**

In recent years, countries around the world have been confronted by the articulation of increasingly differentiated demands on the public school system, which are less easily managed within the constraints of the traditional education system. The school systems underpinning this study have all undergone significant change in recent decades, where parents and students are increasingly seeing schools as service institutions which should be responsive to their demands.

**Individual and collective demand**

It is valuable to distinguish the demands which come from individual households and families and those which are associated with groups and collectivities. The economics of education has long worked with the distinction between the individual and social demand for education, which has tended to be understood as distinguishing the individual from society as a whole (the broader notion of the demands and interests of the economy, the nation, etc.). In this report, the notion of collective demands is understood in a more sociological sense. It refers to how demand can be articulated by specific interests and groups, for example those based on region, ethnicity, or language, but also by employer organisations, labour unions or political parties. Their demand is for educational policies and practices that better serve the interests of their group.

On an individual level, parents and students have become more demanding, as educational attainment has gone up and individualisation has become more pronounced. Paludan (2006, p. 84) makes the useful distinction between “optimisation demand” and “maximisation demand”. The key characteristic of an “optimisation demand” is that, like someone’s demand for food, an individual reaches a point where the need has been satisfied and no more can be consumed – any more and that person is worse off, not better. This he contrasts with learning and health where no natural
ceilings exist. To let public services reflect demand in this sense entails limitless expenditure well beyond the means even of the most affluent OECD countries. Paludan is referring especially to the individual concepts “learning” and “good health” rather than the social arrangements to cater for them – “education” and “health-care”. It may seem uncontroversial that we cannot learn too much or be healthy enough, but we can certainly spend too much time in a school or hospital.

Fred Hirsch’s 1970s analysis is relevant to the question of limiting the voracious individual demand for education, apart from the sheer scarcity of resources. He identified education as an exemplar of “positional” or “social” goods (to be distinguished from “material” goods), whose value is not absolute but depends on whether others are consuming it, too. An example is the lonely beach, which is idyllic when someone enjoys it alone but the value of which evaporates when everyone else wants to do the same. For “lonely beach” one can substitute, say, a prestigious university qualification: keenly sought after so long as relatively few have one but with far less appeal were it to be on everyone’s curriculum vitae. The concept of “positional goods” applies particularly to the social and cultural spheres, where there is a fixed supply; consumer frustration sets in the more that access is democratised. The concept of Hirsch’s concept to schooling is clear – its value to the individual depends in part on how many others have similar attainments, and education is subject to continually growing participation and widening access. This sets in train a continual demand for more, not because of the absolute benefits it brings but the relative ones. For schooling to be responsive to the demands of individuals may in general be desirable in terms of creating more democratic and effective public services. But, as learning has no natural ceilings to cap demand and as more education is sought in the never-ending pursuit of relative advantage, schooling cannot be “demand-led” without limits.

Similarly, there may be problems in responding to collective demands. These may be in line with the state’s education project but equally the articulation of new demands may represent a serious challenge to the accomplishment of the system’s educational objectives. In many countries, for example, demands for instruction in local languages and the affirmation of local cultures in the curriculum may advance local autonomy at the expense of the state’s nationalising project. Demands for the acknowledgement of religious beliefs and rituals in publicly-supported schools may alienate students who do not share the dominant religion, or foster fragmentation along confessional lines. These new and diverse demands may conflict with the tutelary, nation-building purposes of the public education system, and with the state’s economic objectives as well (e.g. if religious traditions restrict the educational opportunities available to
We are not judging whether the collective demands are valid and which should be heard rather than others; we are pointing to the potential conflicts such diversification of demand can give rise to.

Moreover, the individual and collective dimensions of the demand for schooling may diverge and intersect in a variety of ways, further complicating the problem of how to respond. For example, the corporate demand for local control over schools may conflict with the demand of individual parents for educational opportunities that improve the social and economic prospects of their children. The nature of this dilemma reveals itself over and over again: in debates over the design of school choice policies; in public disputes over the wearing of headscarves and other ostensibly religious symbols in public schools; in controversies over curriculum content in history and science. The authority and legitimacy of state control in the education system can no longer be taken for granted, and the emergence of diverse demands means that many decisions that were once simply ceded to the state are now open to contestation. Both collective and individual demands may be conflicting when certain individuals or groups have other interests and therefore other demands that cannot be logically combined within one school or one system. Employers may have different priorities from parents; highly educated parents may have different demands than parents without formal education. This diversity of demands may be so great that it is impossible to cater for it within one public system.

**Expectations and satisfaction**

Both for individual and collective notions of demand, there is a further distinction which is helpful in understanding what shapes demand: *expectations and satisfaction* (Figure 1.2). Expectations critically shape what people want from schooling. Expectations can differ in terms of what and how much is expected. Parents for example may be expecting school to provide their children with different skills or they might expect higher quality without expecting changes in the curriculum. Attitudes expressed as satisfaction provides a measure of how well people assess their expectations to have been met: the more radically expectations differ from what has been experienced, the less satisfied will people be.

**Figure 1.2. Demand – expectations and satisfaction**

![Diagram showing the relationship between demand, expectations, and satisfaction](image-url)
Satisfaction mirrors both reality and expectations. As we will see in the next chapter, middle-class higher-income parents are in general less satisfied with schooling than poorer parents reflecting their higher expectations of what it should achieve. The closer people are to schooling – for example, persons with children at school as compared with employers – tend to be more satisfied as their proximity gives them reason to feel that their expectations have been met. The satisfaction variable is important as dissatisfaction provides an important spur to action and change. Given the contextual trends discussed above, people have clearer expectations than in times gone by and are more demanding about how these should be met.

**The expression of demand**

Two important mechanisms for expressing demand are *exit* and *voice* (Hirschman, 1970). These concepts have served as key organising precepts for this report. They provide a valuable way of conceptualising behaviour when stakeholders act on their demands to make changes, be it for something different or for something better. That is, they can pursue two alternatives:

- Leave an institution or system in favour of an alternative (*i.e.* exit), or
- Articulate their concerns and become involved in change from within (*i.e.* voice).

School systems to differing degrees offer opportunities for both.

*Exit strategies* cover a wide range and can look as different as parents selecting a private school for their child or students remaining absent from a class they dislike. Exit strategies can be “horizontal”, seeking alternative forms of education or schools based on different belief systems. Or, they can be “vertical” in search of better quality, but with the aims and contents of education not in question. At its most extreme, “exit” means leaving the schooling system altogether: individually this kind of exit may be opting for home tuition – small in most OECD countries but growing in some – or chronic absenteeism; collectively, it means creating new establishments or parallel schooling systems.

*Opportunities for voice* are provided through political influence on official policy, lobbying and interest group politics. At an individual level it may be through official forms of participation as offered in school or parent councils but also through more informal contacts with schools and teachers.

Both exit and voice can be used collectively or individually as shown in the table below (Table 1.1). This combines the a) individual/collective
dimension – who are the stakeholders expressing demand? – with b) their strategies for expressing demand – exit or voice?

Table 1.1. Dimensions and expressions of demand
A matrix of strategies and approaches

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EXIT</th>
<th>VOICE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INDIVIDUAL</td>
<td>Individuals choosing and changing a school or programme, market choice mechanisms, or leaving altogether such as for home tuition.</td>
<td>Parents or students directly participating in decision-making in schools and having an important role in the learning process (personalisation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLECTIVE</td>
<td>Groups establishing schools – purely private or publicly-funded private – based on particular religious, ethnic, linguistic or pedagogic grounds.</td>
<td>Interest group influence on schooling issues, such as through curriculum consultation, lobbying, pressure group politics.</td>
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Recent developments in education policy suggest a growing role for exit, and a changing role for voice. Both of these trends pose significant challenges for the traditional, state-centred public education system, where the demand for schooling is assumed to be essentially homogeneous. With parents complaining about schools that fall short of their educational expectations, in a number of countries the policy response to dissatisfaction has been to provide them with alternatives, including charter schools, home schooling, and private schools. This is discussed particularly in Chapter 3. The policy move toward choice reflects a growing reliance on market-type mechanisms as a strategy for addressing public policy problems, and illustrates the growing importance of “exit” in education systems.

However, the development towards greater diversity and greater choice in educational systems is not without costs. For example, decisions by some households to leave particular schools or school districts can reduce the range and quality of educational opportunities provided to the students who remain behind (Fuller, Elmore and Orfield, 1996). Also, as Hirschman argued, it will usually be the clients who care most about quality that will opt to exit the system, meaning that the system is left with a less quality-minded and critical clientele. The lack of critical and (possibly) constructive voice reduces the opportunities for institutional improvement. Finally, greater reliance on the market can reduce the equity of the schooling systems. Highly educated parents with more income, in choosing those schools they consider best for their children, are more able to pay the tuition fees charged by schools that offer, say, better facilities or extra-curricular
activities. Over time, this can lead to the concentration of children of better-off, better-educated parents in some schools and those of the less well-off and less highly educated in others.

Not creating choice (exit) options can be problematic, too. Without some form of exit possibility, parents and students lack the “muscle” with which to back up voice – threatening exit can lend credibility to strongly-expressed voice. Exit and voice both need to be present in some kind of effective balance. Instead of leaving with the first whiff of dissatisfaction, quality-sensitive parents need to stick with their school and engage in attempts to improve it – in Hirschman’s analysis, they need loyalty. He maintains that it is loyalty that prevents consumers from exercising immediate exit, using the threat of exit as one forthright strategy for improving the product or the organisation they care about. However, the creation of markets in education has potential risks in this respect: rising consumerism, for instance, might well lead to declining loyalty.

According to Hirschman, the optimal mix of exit and voice is nevertheless elusive. Managers of organisations have a short-term interest in maintaining their own freedom of manoeuvre and therefore in minimising the exercise of both exit and voice. For consumers or members of an organisation, Hirschman concludes that there is a tendency increasingly to neglect the one of these two which is used: “Once members have a slight preference for, say, voice over exit a cumulative movement sets in which makes exit look ever less attractive and more inconceivable. As a result voice will be increasingly relied on by members at a time when management is working hard to make itself less vulnerable to it” (1970, p. 125). This suggests that either voice or exit mechanisms will dominate at any time, but that a switch to or sudden shock with the other may be very effective. For schools, this suggests that there will never be an ideal, steady balance of voice and exit. Both should be available and each may be used to effect as an alternative to the other.

Concluding remarks

Demand has quickly become an established part of the discourse on educational reform across the world. It is a controversial concept. For some it is associated with the precepts of New Public Management – an increased role for clients and markets, even privatisation – which are at odds with the social and humanistic traditions of education to promote equity, cultivate humanity, and sustain local communities. All these senses have a reflection in the broad concept of “demand”, whether to seek to improve public services via the pressures of quasi-markets or to enhance participation and active forms of personalised teaching and learning. That enhancing the role
of demand takes a prominent position in the reform debates in many OECD countries, while being such a broad elastic concepts, calls a systematic clarification of both the concept and associated empirical evidence. Hence, the value of the exploration in this volume.

The point of departure has been clarification in terms of the ways in which demand can be expressed (exit and voice) and the potential impacts a more demand-led system may have for key issues like quality and equity. Thus demand is understood as a multi-dimensional concept that needs to be unpacked. The dimensions of exit and voice at both the collective and individual levels have been outlined in this chapter. These different levels and expressions of demand interact in complex ways. For example, the demands for special types of education from specific societal groups (collective voice) lead to diversity that allows individuals to choose.

Better understanding the mechanisms for expressing demand and their interactions is not only useful in itself but it also permits a focus on the outcomes resulting from applying these mechanisms at the levels of schools and the school system. Again the relations are complex. Greater voice may be a force pushing schools to deliver relevant and high-quality teaching; it could be a way for privileged parents – with greater influence and a more developed idea of their demands – to dominate school decision-making in favour of their own children. Hence, the value of backing up the theoretical possibilities by recourse to evidence. The following chapters explore these issues by drawing on the results of the country case material, using the framework developed in this chapter to organise the analysis and discussion.
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