

### Student and parental attitudes towards voucherization of education

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Indexing

Abstracting

## STUDENT AND PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS VOUCHERIZATION OF EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *Voucher system of education implies the use of vouchers as instruments of financing public and private education. Unlike the traditional ways of financing education, the voucher system creates the assumptions for increasing the freedom of choice regarding educational programs within different levels of education. Paper will use scientific methods of systematization and analysis of existing literature regarding school vouchers, in order to give a critical review of the influence of vouchers on increasing the competitiveness of education. The paper will also present the results of the research of student and parental attitudes about towards voucherization of education. Research sample includes respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Croatia and Republic of Serbia. Along with the conclusion, the paper also offers some recommendations regarding the use of vouchers for the improvement of local education systems.*

**Keywords:** *education; education management; education vouchers*

## INTRODUCTION

When it comes to models of educational system there have been remarkable changes over the past few decades. This is, in particular, related to prevailing financial model for education as well as the question of the parental freedom to decide in which educational institution to send their child. In this context, the concept of voucherisation of education emerges, i.e. educational vouchers that allow parents to have a certain degree of freedom of choice. Starting from the current fact that the issue of voucherization of education is still insufficiently researched and discussed in public discourse and academic literature in the Western Balkans, the paper seeks to explore the theoretical concept of education vouchers, and empirically determine the attitudes of parents and students about this issue, from countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Serbia.

The subject of the research is the attitudes of the key decision makers (students and parents) about the process of education voucherization. In this regard, the research objective is to explore the knowledge and attitudes of decision-makers, i.e. parents and students about the system of voucherization of education, as well as the effects of the voucherization phenomenon.

This paper uses the scientific methods of systematizing the existing knowledge and analysis of the results of empirical research. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part gives an overview of the literature by reviewing the present research in this field and the theoretical framework of the research. The second part of the paper is related to research methodology, while the third part of the paper refers to the concrete research results. Finally, an appropriate conclusion is provided, with recommendations for further research in this area.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The majority of educational voucher debates is normative and theoretically based (Campbell, West, Peterson 2005) on the basic reason that a very small percentage of students had the opportunity to use these vouchers. In the total number of students, there is only a negligible number of those who use or have used educational vouchers, which narrows the space for broader empirical research in relation to the effects of education voucherisation. For this reason, previous research was usually done only in certain countries, or parts of countries, like in the case of the USA where these vouchers were introduced. Based on that, Morgan and others argue that the following effects of education voucherization can be researched (Morgan, Petrosino, Fronius 2015):

- Improvement of educational institutions according to increased competition due to voucherization;
- Fulfillment of social justice because marginalized groups have the opportunity to go to school and/or choose better schools;
- Phenomenon of “removing cream” by some schools in order selects the best students;
- Socio-economic stratification of students by schools;
- Poor results in one and better in other schools.

The study of the Chilean experience of applying educational vouchers shows that there has been a significant improvement in the quality of private educational institutions, but primarily because of their discretion to choose their own students. Thus, private schools developed a tendency to enroll a certain student profile. This has led to the migration of talented students to private schools. Improving the overall quality of education as a result of voucherisation remains unclear possibly due to hardly available earlier results on test success (Hsieh, Urquiola 2006). Dynarsky (2016) lists a number of negative effects of voucherization in his report which primarily refer to poorer grades of participants who went to private schools based on voucher system. Similarly, research carried out in Luziana (USA) indicates the negative effects of voucherization, primarily for the poor students (Trilling 2016). Nakić (2017) states that in Colombia, voucherization has increased the proportion of students who completed elementary school education by 10%. He also states that in Sweden, where education vouchers are being implemented since 1992, there has been increased competition between private and public schools and the improvement of students' results on the PISA test. An analysis conducted by Wolf (2013) shows that vouchers have a positive impact on the completion rates of secondary schools and have a positive impact on reading ability, but not on mathematical abilities. Similarly, research shows that vouchers are associated with the completion rate, but also by enrollment and perseverance in four-year colleges (Cowen 2013). Studies by Hoxby (2003) and Chakrabarti (2008) show that public schools in the USA that are using vouchers achieve better results in tests. Similarly, Brooking (2013) gives the example to the state of New York (USA).

As a part of the study on the direct impacts of education vouchers, there is no academic consensus which implies that researchers usually recommend further research (Trilling 2016). Because of this, Epple, Romano and Urquiola (2017) summarize the existing arguments for and against the voucherisation of education. Arguments for educational vouchers are:

- voucherization puts education on the market that increases competition among educational institutions, as well as freedom of choice for end users (students and parents);

- the development of the education market creates more educational variations, leading to better matching of supply and demand;
- application of regulations prevents negative externalities of educational vouchers;
- educational vouchers provide better access to education for poor students.

Same authors also cite the following arguments against voucherization of education:

- educational vouchers affect the segregation of students (according to income and abilities);
- segregation of students leads to the decline in quality of education;
- in the long run, segregation can condition the success of some students in the labor market;
- education of students with special needs requires more financial resources, which creates pressures on public schools;
- there is a possibility of poor choice (of students and parents) according to the phenomenon of asymmetry of information on the market.

When it comes to regional research, nothing was done. Some public policies were made, for instance Stanojević's recommendation (2014) in Serbia, proposing Milton Friedman's vouchers system to solve the problem of elementary schools in this country.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

Voucherisation of education implies the use of vouchers in the model of financing of education. A voucher is a document, a paper by which the owner proves that he has the right to realize certain benefits when buying, paying, and conducting other economic activities (Zavod za lingvistiku 2001). In the case of educational vouchers, this is a right that allows parents to choose any pre-school, primary and secondary education institution regardless of being a privately or public owned. The issuer and financier of this voucher is the government, usually the ministry of education, depending on the political system of concrete country. As the issuer of education vouchers, the government determines who can, under what conditions and at what level of education use the educational voucher. In the case of education voucherization, the primary role of the government is to ensure that schools meet certain standards, such as having the minimum standard content in their programs (Ed Choice 2003). With the voucherization of education, the government significantly changes the current dominant form of financing education. However, it still remains the main financier of the education system.

Different voucherization models have different objectives, and the form of using educational vouchers in one country can be significantly different from the form in others (Arenas 2004). In some countries, education vouchers are only used for attending private schools (LaGrange News 2017) because the government does not have the necessary financial and infrastructural capacity to support an educational system that will be inclusive for all. In this case, vouchers support the growing phenomenon of private schools for the poor, in countries like Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, India and China (Tooley 2005). Other countries use vouchers to improve the existing education system, such as Sweden, which introduced this form of education financing in 1991 (OECD 2017). The third important reason for introducing a voucher involves improving the freedom of choice for student's parents. This form is usually pushed by lobbying organizations and parents themselves, and as is the case in the USA. When it comes to defining this model of financing, the broadest definition of an educational vouchers emphasizes that it is a government payment to a school (or directly to parents), selected by the parents of students. Education voucher finances the whole or partial education (Morgan, Petrosino, Fronius 2015). This leads to the transition of funding from a specific institution to an individual (Bašić 2017), i.e. parents as legal guardians of a child attending a given educational institution. Hsieh and Urquiola (2006) state that the basic argument for the introduction of educational vouchers is that public schools are inefficient local monopolies. The debate about educational inefficiency leads to Adam Smith, the founder of the modern economics, who discussed in his capital book "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations" about the method of financing education, as well as the motivations of teachers, as suggested by Melnik and Tamm (2008). Smith was concerned about the long-term problem of lack of motivation by teachers in the education system (Melnik, Tamm 2008). Friedman believes that the educational voucher aims to provide parents with freedom of choice, and the purpose of this is to ensure competition, which implies greater innovation and inclusiveness (Ed Choice 2003). Consequently, the question of justification of the introduction of educational vouchers can be observed in accordance with the needs of various education stakeholders.

Voucherization introduces three educational reforms: it allows parents to choose a school; it creates school initiatives to increase enrollment; and it provides schools with managerial autonomy to respond to demand (Gauri, Vawda 2003). Thus, education voucherization primarily satisfies the parents' need for the freedom to choose the school that their children will attend. This increases the autonomy of schools and their initiative to increase competitiveness. In exceptional situations, this allows other stakeholders to participate in the establishment of educational institutions. In Ireland, the trend has been that parents jointly establish schools as trading companies without the intention of making profits, and this has been proven to be a very successful model (Nakić 2017).

Education voucherisation additionally introduces profit motive in education. Namely, private and public schools receive an initiative to improve their own educational capacities and meet the educational needs of their users (students). Melnik and Tamm (2008) cite seven arguments for introducing a profit motive into education:

- More desire for expansion from education institutions;
- Better quality control;
- Education institutions branding solves the problem of asymmetry of information;
- Greater necessity of research and development;
- Suitable rewards for the efforts of teaching staff;
- Attracting investments and cost-effectiveness;
- Better career for student.

Profit motivates educational institutions to expand, while ensuring a certain level of quality in the long run, in line with competitive pressures. In doing so, educational institutes must develop their own brands, improve teaching staff and attract new students.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research focused on students and parents from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, and the Republic of Serbia. The research sample was made from 126 students and 33 parents. The research was conducted using social networks on Internet. Data were collected using the questioning method, with a survey questionnaire as a data collection instrument. A five-level Likert scale was used to measure the attitudes of students and parents. The collected data was processed with the help of SPSS software.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Research results are presented separately for parents and students. Presentation is done in the form of tables, with adequate explanations of the results.

### *Results related to parents*

The results showed that 88% of parents are not familiar with the voucherisation of education, but about 94% of parents would like to get a voucher in order to enroll their child in the school. Furthermore, 79% of parents would choose a private school for their child in the event of having a voucher, while 21% would not do so. As the most important factor that influences the decision to choose a primary school, parents point

out the location (34%) and tradition and the school brand (21%). Regarding high schools, these factors are relating to the level of knowledge and skills gained (40%), and potential to enroll to desired faculty (21%).

**Table 1: Parental attitudes about voucherisation of education (Source: Authors research)**

Number	Statement	I totally do not agree	I do not agree	I do not agree, nor disagree	I do agree	I totally do not agree
1.	I believe that the education voucher should be available to all students.	6%	9%	6%	9%	70%
2.	The education voucher should be available only to the best students.	46%	24%	12%	9%	9%
3.	The education voucher should be available only to marginalized groups of students (children with poor material status, national minorities, children with special needs, etc.).	55%	21%	3%	6%	15%
4.	The education voucher should be available only to students who enroll in rare occupations.	55%	21%	18%	3%	3%
5.	Voucherization leads to greater competitiveness of private and public school institutions, thus ensuring higher quality of education in public schools.	15%	9%	21%	9%	46%
6.	Vouchers will contribute to increasing the number of students in private schools.	9%	15%	21%	18%	37%
7.	Vouchers allow young people to enroll schools that match their competencies and/or preferences.	3%	12%	12%	21%	52%
8.	Education vouchers lead to better co-ordination of education with the labor market.	6%	12%	15%	21%	46%
9.	Voucherization leads to the justified elimination of technological surplus in schools.	12%	12%	18%	18%	40%
10.	The voucher system will punish bad schools/teachers and reward good schools/teachers.	18%	12%	15%	21%	34%
11.	Students using education vouchers will achieve better learning outcomes.	9%	21%	21%	21%	28%



Table 1 presents the views of parents regarding the voucherization of elementary and secondary education. Majority of parents (70%) fully agree with the claim that vouchers should be available to all students. 46% of them do not agree that vouchers should be available only to the best students, and 55% do not agree that vouchers should be available only to marginalized groups of students. Also, most parents (55%) do not agree at all with the statement that vouchers should be available only to those students who enroll in rare occupations. Furthermore, 46% of parents believe that vouchers lead to greater competitiveness of private and public schools, thus ensuring higher quality of education in public schools, and the same number of them believe that vouchers lead to better co-ordination of education with the labor market. 37% of parents fully agree with the claim that vouchers will contribute to the increase in the number of students in private schools, and 34% fully agree that the voucher system will punish bad schools/teachers and reward good schools/teachers. Opinions regarding the claim that students using vouchers will achieve better results are divided, and only 28% of parents fully agree with this claim.

**Table 2: Results of ANOVA tests (parents) (Source: Authors research)**

Statement	Professional education				
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Students using education vouchers will achieve better learning outcomes.	7,011	4	1,753	0,969	<b>0,440</b>
The voucher system will punish bad schools/teachers and reward good schools/teachers.	10,004	4	2,501	1,096	<b>0,378</b>
Vouchers lead to better co-ordination of education with the labor market.	6,765	4	1,691	1,013	<b>0,418</b>
Voucherization leads to greater competitiveness of private and public school institutions, thus ensuring higher quality of education in public schools.	6,018	4	1,504	0,621	<b>0,651</b>
Education vouchers will contribute to increasing the number of students in private schools.	4,491	4	1,123	0,566	<b>0,690</b>
Education vouchers allow young people to enroll schools that match their competencies and/or preferences.	5,768	4	1,442	1,007	<b>0,421</b>
Voucherization leads to the justified elimination of technological surplus in schools.	8,629	4	2,157	1,055	<b>0,397</b>
	Average monthly income of the household				
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Students using education vouchers will achieve better learning outcomes.	0,959	3	0,320	0,163	<b>0,920</b>
The voucher system will punish bad schools/teachers and reward good schools/teachers.	9,601	3	3,200	1,444	<b>0,250</b>
Vouchers lead to better co-ordination of education with the labor market.	0,171	3	0,057	0,031	<b>0,993</b>
Voucherization leads to greater competitiveness of private and public	14,501	3	4,834	2,361	<b>0,092</b>

school institutions, thus ensuring higher quality of education in public schools.					
Education vouchers will contribute to increasing the number of students in private schools.	2,494	3	0,831	0,419	<b>0,741</b>
Education vouchers allow young people to enroll schools that match their competencies and/or preferences.	5,668	3	1,889	1,362	<b>0,274</b>
Voucherization leads to the justified elimination of technological surplus in schools.	0,612	3	0,204	0,091	<b>0,965</b>
	<b>Country</b>				
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Students using education vouchers will achieve better learning outcomes.	7,401	2	3,701	2,210	<b>0,127</b>
The voucher system will punish bad schools/teachers and reward good schools/teachers.	0,429	2	0,215	0,088	<b>0,916</b>
Vouchers lead to better co-ordination of education with the labor market.	1,801	2	0,900	0,522	<b>0,598</b>
Voucherization leads to greater competitiveness of private and public school institutions, thus ensuring higher quality of education in public schools.	5,492	2	2,746	1,205	<b>0,314</b>
Education vouchers will contribute to increasing the number of students in private schools.	5,321	2	2,661	1,458	<b>0,249</b>
Education vouchers allow young people to enroll schools that match their competencies and/or preferences.	1,879	2	0,939	0,640	<b>0,534</b>
Voucherization leads to the justified elimination of technological surplus in schools.	5,900	2	2,950	1,475	<b>0,245</b>

Table 2 shows the results of the One-way ANOVA test which tested the statistical significance between the mean values of the parents' views on the voucherization of primary and secondary education in relation with their different socio-demographic characteristics (professional education, average monthly income of the household and the countries from which they come). The results showed that in no case a statistically significant difference was found in the responses of the observed groups of subjects (significance level of 0.05).

### *Results related to students*

In the following lines are the results related to students' attitudes about the use of vouchers in higher education. The results of the research showed that 87% of students are not familiar with the system of voucherization of higher education, while only 13% have some information about this. When it comes to reasons for studying in a public higher education institution, 38% of students indicated a higher quality teaching process, and 30% stated "free education" as a reason. As the main reasons for the selection of a private higher education institution, 37% of students indicated a more open relationship between academic staff and students, and 35% stated more modern study programs offered by private higher education institutions. Students' views on

whether to choose another public/private higher education institution duo to voucher introduction were also measured. In that case, over half of the polled students (57%) studying at a public higher education institution would not choose another higher education institution, while 43% would. In contrast, 76% of students studying at a private higher education institution would not choose another higher education institution, while 24% would.

**Table 3: Student attitudes about voucherization of education (Source: Authors research)**

Number	Statement	University	I totally disagree	I disagree	I do not agree, nor disagree	I do agree	I totally agree
1.	I believe that the education voucher should be available to all students.	Public	5%	14%	17%	23%	41%
		Private	4%	4%	35%	11%	46%
2.	I believe that the education voucher should be available to all students.	Public	26%	29%	27%	9%	9%
		Private	17%	35%	30%	11%	7%
3.	The education voucher should be available only to marginalized groups of students (children with poor material status, national minorities, children with special needs, etc.).	Public	25%	26%	25%	15%	9%
		Private	15%	26%	28%	17%	14%
4.	The education voucher should be available only to students who enroll in rare occupations.	Public	39%	29%	20%	8%	4%
		Private	32%	26%	35%	2%	5%
5.	Voucherization leads to greater competitiveness of private and public school institutions, thus ensuring higher quality of education in public schools.	Public	10%	5%	35%	25%	25%
		Private	6%	2%	37%	28%	27%
6.	Vouchers will contribute to increasing the number of students in private schools.	Public	10%	5%	31%	20%	34%
		Private	2%	2%	39%	20%	37%
7.	Vouchers allow young people to enroll schools that match their competencies and/or preferences.	Public	6%	4%	27%	25%	38%
		Private	2%	2%	30%	33%	33%
8.	Education vouchers lead to better co-ordination of education with the labor market.	Public	8%	2%	34%	20%	36%
		Private	4%	0%	37%	26%	33%
9.	Voucherization leads to the justified elimination of technological surplus in	Public	8%	5%	30%	32%	25%
		Private	4%	0%	35%	28%	33%

	schools.						
10.	The voucher system will punish bad schools/teachers and reward good schools/teachers.	Public	8%	5%	30%	26%	31%
		Private	4%	0%	33%	33%	30%
11.	Students using education vouchers will achieve better learning outcomes.	Public	9%	7%	40%	29%	15%
		Private	9%	7%	43%	15%	26%

Table 3 presents the views of students regarding voucherization of higher education. The results show that 41% of students studying at public higher education institutions and 46% from private higher education institutions fully agree with the claim that vouchers should be available to all students. With the claim that vouchers should be available only to the best students, only 9% of students from public higher education institutions and 7% from private ones agree. Furthermore, 9% of students from public higher education institutions and 14% of students from private higher education institutions absolutely agree with the claim that vouchers should be available only to marginalized groups of students. Most students from public (50%) and private higher education institutions (55%) agree with the claim that vouchers lead to greater competitiveness of private and public higher education institutions, thus ensuring higher quality of education. With the claim that students using vouchers will achieve better results during the studies, only 15% of students from public higher education institutions and 26% of students from private higher education institutions absolutely agree.

**Table 4: Results of ANOVA tests (students) (Source: Authors research)**

Statement	The method of financing the studies				
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Students using education vouchers will achieve better learning outcomes.	3,505	3	1,168	0,849	<b>0,470</b>
The voucher system will punish bad schools/teachers and reward good schools/teachers.	0,730	3	0,243	0,168	<b>0,918</b>
Vouchers lead to better co-ordination of education with the labor market.	1,208	3	0,403	0,333	<b>0,801</b>
Voucherization leads to greater competitiveness of private and public school institutions, thus ensuring higher quality of education in public schools.	2,452	3	0,817	0,603	<b>0,614</b>
Education vouchers will contribute to increasing the number of students in private schools.	2,129	3	0,710	0,577	<b>0,631</b>
Education vouchers allow young people to enroll schools that match their competencies and/or preferences.	1,085	3	0,362	0,281	<b>0,839</b>
Voucherization leads to the justified elimination of technological surplus in schools.	0,710	3	0,237	0,180	<b>0,910</b>

	Country				
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Students using education vouchers will achieve better learning outcomes.	1,931	2	0,966	0,701	<b>0,498</b>
The voucher system will punish bad schools/teachers and reward good schools/teachers.	0,415	2	0,208	0,144	<b>0,866</b>
Vouchers lead to better co-ordination of education with the labor market.	0,022	2	0,011	0,009	<b>0,991</b>
Voucherization leads to greater competitiveness of private and public school institutions, thus ensuring higher quality of education in public schools.	0,352	2	0,176	0,129	<b>0,879</b>
Education vouchers will contribute to increasing the number of students in private schools.	0,220	2	0,110	0,089	<b>0,915</b>
Education vouchers allow young people to enroll schools that match their competencies and/or preferences.	0,396	2	0,198	0,155	<b>0,857</b>
Voucherization leads to the justified elimination of technological surplus in schools.	3,239	2	1,619	1,259	<b>0,288</b>
	Year of study				
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Students using education vouchers will achieve better learning outcomes.	5,162	5	1,032	0,745	<b>0,591</b>
The voucher system will punish bad schools/teachers and reward good schools/teachers.	3,440	5	0,688	0,474	<b>0,795</b>
Vouchers lead to better co-ordination of education with the labor market.	7,266	5	1,453	1,233	<b>0,298</b>
Voucherization leads to greater competitiveness of private and public school institutions, thus ensuring higher quality of education in public schools.	3,734	5	0,747	0,546	<b>0,741</b>
Education vouchers will contribute to increasing the number of students in private schools.	3,751	5	0,750	0,607	<b>0,695</b>
Education vouchers allow young people to enroll schools that match their competencies and/or preferences.	1,874	5	0,375	0,288	<b>0,919</b>
Voucherization leads to the justified elimination of technological surplus in schools.	2,832	5	0,566	0,429	<b>0,828</b>


One-way ANOVA was also used in the measurement of student attitudes, and for testing statistical significance among the mean values of attitudes on voucherization of higher education with regard to different socio-demographic characteristics (the method of financing the studies, the country where students live, and year of their study). The results showed that in no case a statistically significant difference was found in the responses of the observed groups of subjects (significance level of 0.05).

## CONCLUSION

According to the theoretical framework of research, review of previous research, and primary research in this paper, it can be concluded that the voucherization of education is still a relatively unexplored area, not just in countries of Western Balkans, but in other world countries also. There are significant differences in previous research, which largely depend on the bias of research and countries of research. Nevertheless, researchers are showing an interest in this research field, and educational vouchers are being introduced in the world as one of the financing models for the education system.

Based on the results of the conducted research, it can be concluded that the concept of education vouchers is still unknown, both among students and among parents. The results show that students and parents are more likely to have a general model of voucherisation than a partial model, i.e. that vouchers should be available to all students, and not just to individual groups. A significant percentage of students and parents think that having vouchers would have an impact on their choices when it comes to primary and secondary school or college.

There is a positive attitude of students and parents when it comes to the effects of introducing vouchers in education in the context of the quality of educational institutions. In addition, there were no statistically significant differences in attitudes, both of parents and students, in relation to the different observed socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Paper research has its limitations primarily because of the specificity of survey questionnaire that was distributed via social networks on the Internet. Also, the sample is relatively small, therefore, further research in this field is recommended, and it would be particularly interesting to conduct an experiment regarding the practical implementation of the voucher system at lower levels of government, or particular schools and other educational institutions. In addition, this study examined the views of students and parents as stakeholders of voucherization process. For a wider understanding, it is necessary to examine the attitudes of teachers as well as and the representatives of the relevant ministries of education, which are also important stakeholders for this issue. 

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