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The Perceived Impact of Open Inspection Data on the Quality of Education in Dutch Primary Schools: A Parent Perspective

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Abstract

Open government has become a prominent issue for governments in recent years. Many studies focus on the data published by governments (supply) instead of on the needs of potential users (demand). In this study, we investigated the perceived impact of open data provided by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. The research question is what is the perceived impact of open inspection data, as used by parents, on the quality of education in Dutch primary schools? The empirical data have been gathered by both surveys and interviews. The results of the surveys show that both the factual use and the perceived usefulness of the Inspectorate's open data are relatively low. Parents want all individuals and institutions, in general, to have more influence on the quality of primary education. The results also indicate that the increasingly frequent visits to the Inspectorate of Education's website are linked to parents' desire to have more influence on the quality of primary education. Finally, as parents are more involved in the schools or visit the Inspectorate's website more often, they want the participation councils to have more influence. Nevertheless, Dutch parents highly estimate the average quality of the education provided by primary schools. However, when their involvement increases, their assessments of their school's performance decrease. Frequent visits to the Inspectorate's website are related to lower performance assessments. So, open inspection data are potentially valuable for (critical) parents, especially when attention is also paid to "soft" quality indicators.

Keywords

educational governance, open data, parent involvement, public inspection data, quality of education

Introduction

Open government has become a prominent issue for governments in recent years (Chapman & Hunt, 2006; Janssen & Zuiderwijk, 2014; Lathrop & Ruma, 2010). In the United States, the open government theme is strongly linked to U.S. President Obama's *Memorandum on Transparency and*

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Open Government (2009), in which government agencies and local authorities were encouraged to publish more data sources online. In the same year, the Open Government Directive was implemented, based on three pillars, namely, openness, participation, and collaboration. In this context, the Internet website www.data.gov was launched, on which government data are accessible. This initiative has been a source of inspiration for many governments in other countries to take similar steps.

Various motives may underlie open government. One reason is to achieve more transparency in relation to the outcomes of specific policy programs (James, 2006). This, however, puts high demands on the quality of the published data. In addition, open data can promote public participation and strengthen democratic processes; this, however, requires a culture of openness (James, 2006). Furthermore, open data, especially in relation to the idea of big data, are also said to stimulate innovation and economic growth (European Commission, 2010; Janssen, Charalabidis, & Zuiderwijk, 2012).

One example of the provision of open data is the publication by governments of performance information in relation to public services. The idea is that publication on the Internet will not only help to improve the quality of performance but also add to the process of external political and public accountability (Meijer, 2007). An example is the Dutch Inspectorate of Education (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs*), which increasingly puts inspection data on the Internet. Various considerations have a role in this regard. The first assumption is that the digital availability of education data improves the information position of parents, creating a level playing field that enables all stakeholders to obtain validated information that is based on a shared perception of the quality of education in schools (Bekkers & Homburg, 2002). This presupposes the availability of open data. The second assumption is that public education data from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education helps parents to make a better assessment regarding the choice of suitable schools for their children. The idea behind is that parents act like a ''homoeconomics,'' a rational consumer who will call upon different sources of information to make optimal choices (van de Walle & Roberts, 2008). But is this really the case?

In this article, we investigate the (perceived) impact of open inspection data on the quality of education in Dutch primary schools. Hence, the research question of this article is what is the perceived impact of open inspection data, as used by parents, on the quality of education in Dutch primary schools? The subquestions are what is the perceived impact of public information from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education on parents? How do parents perceive their actual and desirable influence on the quality of primary education? And finally, how do parents assess the quality of primary schools? We thereby acquire an empirical insight into the added value of open data for (potential) users—an insight that is currently rather scarce (Askim, 2009; Janssen et al., 2012).

This article has the following structure. The second section sketches the context of the open use of inspectorate data by looking at the role of the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. Also, the formal influence of parents on the quality of education in Dutch primary schools is addressed. In the third section, we present the theoretical framework that we have used to theoretically understand our research question. In the fourth, we explain our research methodology. In fifth section, we describe and analyze the results of our empirical study. The article ends with conclusions in the sixth section.

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education and the Formal Influence of Parents

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education—part of the Dutch Ministry of Education—inspects primary schools to ensure that the schools are complying with Dutch educational laws. Another aim is to improve the quality of Dutch school education. To achieve this, the Inspectorate carries out school inspections. Each school is assessed by a standard set of measures. These consist of questionnaires, observation instruments, and prestructured interviews.

On an annual basis, the Inspectorate collects and analyzes information regarding possible risks in all schools. The results of the risk analysis indicate whether a school needs to be investigated more extensively or whether the school can be trusted to perform adequately during the next year. If the analysis does not reveal any risks, the Inspectorate has sufficient trust in the quality of the education provided to qualify the school for the so-called basic inspection program. If a school performs inadequately, the Inspectorate specifies the shortcomings that have to be improved and subsequently monitors these improvements. After each inspection, the inspector writes a report on the inspected school and makes recommendations as to how the school can improve. The Inspectorate also publishes an annual report on the state of education in the Netherlands. This report is sent to Parliament and to the Minister of Education and generally attracts a lot of media attention.

Since 1998, the Inspectorate's individual school reports, which were formerly exclusively provided to the school itself and to the Minister, have been made public. All school reports, including an actual list of very weak schools, are now available on the Inspectorate's website (www.onderwijsinspectie.nl) for public consultation. By doing this, the Inspectorate makes information about the quality of primary schools transparent to the outside world.

Luginbuhl, Webbink, and de Wolf (2007) investigated the impact of the Inspectorate's reports on the performance of Dutch primary schools. Their assessment was based on a rather narrow approach, namely, ''Cito'' test scores of pupils in their final year of primary school. The Cito test is an independent test used to measure what Dutch children have learned in their 8 years of primary school education. Luginbuhl et al. found evidence that school inspections do lead to measurably better school performance in terms of increased Cito test scores. Their analysis also indicated that the more intensive inspections produced greater improvements in school performance than the less intensive ones. School managers can also use inspection reports as a basis for policy making. For parents, the Inspectorate's data on the Internet could possibly be a reason to start a discussion with primary schools about the quality of education.

This latter possibility brings us to the formal influence of parents on Dutch primary school policy. In terms of parent activation, we can make a distinction between formal activation, namely, involvement in a participation council (PC) or a joint participation council (JPC) and informal participation, namely, parents talking with the school team (school leader or teachers) about the quality of education. In terms of formal influence, the Participation Act in Schools (*Wet medezeggenschap op scholen*), ratified in January 2007, should be mentioned. This law gives staff and parents the formal right to participate in their children's education. For this purpose, the establishment of a PC (*medezeggenschapsraad*) is mandatory in each school. The PC consists of at least four members. The school staff representatives are appointed by the school, and the parents' representatives are chosen by election. Both groups are equal in number. Most schools work together, for example, in foundations where several schools are affiliated. At this higher management level, a JPC (*gemeenschappelijke medezeggenschapsraad*) is required. The JPC members are elected by the PC members; thus, the relationship between the individual school level and the joint schools level is assured. These councils have a (general) right to obtain the information they need and different approval and advisory powers.

Nevertheless, the influence that parents can exercise in schools is relatively limited (Vogels, 2002). Although school leaders and teachers claim to attach great value to actively involved parents, in reality parents' contributions are not always taken seriously. Teachers usually do not approach parents as equal partners in topics about which they consider themselves the preeminent expert. Maintaining their professional identity seems to play a role in this. On the other hand, teachers also have an interest in active parents, for example, for practical, hands-on helping services in schools (Karsten, de Jong, Ledoux, & Sligte, 2006). International research also shows that the position of parents toward schools is relatively weak and needs to be strengthened before one can speak about equal partners in education (Smit, Sluiter, & Driessen, 2006). Schools report that they frequently

inform parents, but parents are not always aware of the information that schools say they provide. This means that the position of parents does not seem to be strong enough to make codecisions together with schools.

In international research, the term ''partnership'' is used as a concept referring to meaningful interactions between schools and parents (Leming, 2002; Taylor, 2004). The Dutch government has also embraced this notion. Nevertheless, a real partnership between schools and parents does not exist yet (Onderwijsraad, 2010). This observation can be made transparent by the so-called participation ladder. The participation ladder is an instrument to measure the degree of interactive policy making (de Graaf, 2007; Edelenbos & Monnikhof, 2001). The steps on this ladder are, respectively, informing, consulting, advising, coproducing, and codeciding. Informing is perceived as the lowest degree of interaction. The highest degree of interaction is codeciding, which implies that schools and parents make important decisions together. In reality, the interaction between Dutch primary schools and parents is often on the level of schools informing parents about school issues rather than codecision making. Nevertheless, for parents, it is extraordinarily difficult to get an idea of a school's quality, although the parents who participate in the PCs and JPCs are often highly educated (Herweijer & Vogels, 2004). Furthermore, research also shows that parents have different needs regarding (primary) schools and use various measures to assess the quality of schools (Karsten et al., 2006). For schools, it is difficult to meet these differentiated needs, especially when the school population is heterogeneous. Furthermore, it seems difficult for parents to assess the quality of schools in a realistic way (Karsten et al., 2006). This finding is at odds with the assumption that involved parents are able and willing to form an opinion about the quality of education as articulated in the Dutch Ministry of Education's governance policy (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2005).

The Use of Open Performance Data: Toward a Conceptual Model

The use of open performance information has increasingly been receiving academic attention (Hammerschmid, van de Walle, & Stimic, 2013; van Dooren & van de Walle, 2008). However, little research has been done on whether and how citizens perceive and use the open performance information published in evaluation and monitoring reports, quality assessments, and inspection reports (Andrews & van de Walle, 2013; Hammerschmid et al., 2013; Pollitt, 2006; van de Walle & Bovaird, 2007; van de Walle & Roberts, 2008). Most studies focus on the ''supply'' side of open (performance) data, namely, governments that publish data. Fewer studies pay attention to the ''demand'' side of it, namely, the needs of (potential) users and how these needs are addressed (Askim, 2009; Janssen et al., 2012). Hence, it is important to investigate when and how citizens use performance data and to identify which citizens use performance data (Pollitt, 2006). Another observation is that there is still a lack of strong evidence on the effects of school inspections on school improvement (Ehren & Visscher, 2006; Ehren & Visscher, 2008; Perryman, 2010). A nuancing note is that not only inspection reports but also external (media, political, and parental) pressure can force schools to improve.

In theory, the publication of performance results can have several beneficial effects. First, publication may promote public trust by reassuring the public that government and officials are accountable (Mason & Street, 2006). However, publication can also create distrust when the media highlight the failures of existing systems (Meijer, 2007). Second, publication can stimulate quality improvement and cost control within government agencies. Publication of performance results stimulates schools to score better on performance indicators because they feel the public eye is watching them, thereby creating ''consumer pressure'' (Marshall, Shekelle, Davies, & Smith, 2003; Meijer, 2007). However, outcome measurement cannot guarantee quality assurance. For example, evaluations of the publication of English hospital performance data indicate that there

is little support for government claims that performance is improving as a result of either publication or ''naming and shaming'' policies (Snelling, 2003). Third, publication is intended to support citizen choice, for example, to enable citizens to make more informed decisions when they are choosing a school or a hospital. However, research does not seem to support this (Schneider & Epstein, 1998; Mason & Street, 2006). Marshall, Shekelle, Davies, and Smith (2003) found that public reporting on the quality of hospitals in the United States and Scotland had little impact on citizens. ''The public does not search it out, does not understand it, distrusts it, and fails to make use of it'' (Marshall et al., 2003, p. 141). Hence, research indicates a lack of public interest in quality reports. In general, citizens seem to trust their own data or those of friends and family rather than comparable information published by governments about the quality of public services (Marshall, Hiscock, & Sibbald, 2002).

According to Smith (1995), the publication of performance results can also have dysfunctional consequences. First, tunnel vision causes organizations to concentrate—at the expense of other important unquantified issues—on the quantified areas that are being measured. Schools can aim at quick wins instead of long-term school improvement. Second, publication can result in the pursuit of narrow local objectives and short-term issues at the expense of broad organizational goals and long-term strategies. Third, public disclosure can result in misrepresentation of performance results as a consequence of data being manipulated by massaging them. Finally, public disclosure can generate game-like behavior in order to obtain strategic advantages.

Negative side effects have also been mentioned in the literature (Ehren & Visscher, 2006). One possible side effect is ''isomorphism'' (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This is a constraining process that forces organization units to resemble other units. In the case of school inspections, pressures or rewards that lead schools to focus on the performance indicators in the inspection framework may be one such effect. Another possible side effect is the ''performance paradox'' (van Thiel & Leeuw, 2003). The performance paradox refers to a weak correlation between performance indicators and real performances. School inspections may lead to better quality but may also lead to strategic behavior. Strategic behavior may lead to higher scores but not to an improvement in organizational effectiveness. On the contrary, performance results can be used inappropriately or misused, for example, leading to manipulation of data, and result in less, rather than more, attention to outcome and quality (Bird et al., 2005; Mason & Street, 2006; Perrin, 1998). A ''measure fixation'' is an exclusive focus on what can be easily measured rather than on what is important (Marshall et al., 2003; Meijer, 2007). A third side effect is that schools may become dependent on the Inspectorate and become unable or unwilling to decide for themselves what kind of improvements they need to make (Ehren & Visscher, 2006). The last side effect relates to the publication of inspection findings and the negative publicity resulting from this. As a consequence, parents may avoid some schools. However, there seems to be little evidence of parents seeking alternatives for failing schools. The impact of school performance indicators on parents seems to be small because parents' choices are only partly based on rational decision making. Social, cultural, and pragmatic factors play an important role as well (Waslander, Pater, & van der Weide, 2010).

Conceptual Model

The Dutch Ministry of Education's rational assumption is that public information as a manifestation of open data, stemming from the Inspectorate, plays an important role in the quality of education in Dutch primary schools. The assumed relationships are as follows. First, the publication of data by the Inspectorate can activate parents to talk with primary schools about the quality of basic education. Second, the activated parents can use the open data from the Inspectorate to start a discussion with representatives of schools about the quality of education and finally (potentially) influence the quality of education in Dutch primary schools. In this article, we investigate whether

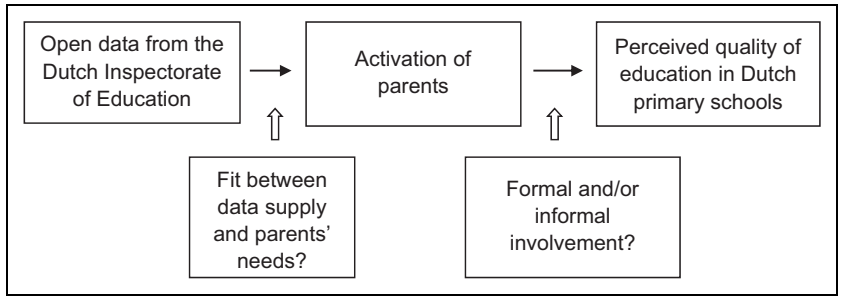

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

these assumptions about rationality are also relevant in parents' experiences and perceptions. In our conceptual model, we have added the importance of a fit between the supply characteristics of inspection data (reliability, relevance, actuality, usability, accessibility, and publicity) and the needs of parents. In our conceptual model, we also make a distinction between formal and informal parental involvement (see Figure 1).

Research Methodology

In order to collect our empirical data, we have used a mixed method strategy (triangulation), with both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

Surveys and Semistructured Interviews

To gather insight into parents' perceptions, quantitative surveys were conducted among parents of pupils in different school classes. More than 30 primary schools in different Dutch regions were approached to participate in our research; 25 of them participated. Within each school, 60 questionnaires were distributed among parents (1,500 in total). These questionnaires were spread, in agreement with the school management, over two different classes of pupils in every school, namely, a high and a low group. Parents could complete the questionnaire in writing or online. A total of 293 questionnaires were returned, representing an average response rate of 23.4%. Given that primary schools are intensively surveyed for various reasons, this is a reasonable score. Of these returned questionnaires, 245 were answered completely. On 14 written questionnaires returned, the school that the parents' children attended was not indicated. It was decided to include these 14 questionnaires in the follow-up analyses because the level of analysis was not focused on individual schools. Second, semistructured in-depth interviews were conducted using a topic list (general questions, perceptions toward the Inspectorate, the PC, parents' roles, and perceived impact of contextual factors). In total, 35 interviews were conducted among respondents from the Inspectorate of Education, school management, and parents on schools' PCs. These interviews were useful for gaining insight into the motives and considerations underlying stakeholders' perceptions.

Characteristics of the Sample

As regards the educational level of the parents who completed the questionnaire, 0.4%had primary education only; 2.4% had completed prevocational education; 5.7% had prevocational secondary education; 6.9% had senior general secondary education; 3.4% had preuniversity education; 26.6% had senior secondary vocational education; 35.5% had higher professional education; and 13.1% had a university degree. In all, 44.5% of parents indicated that they had a religious

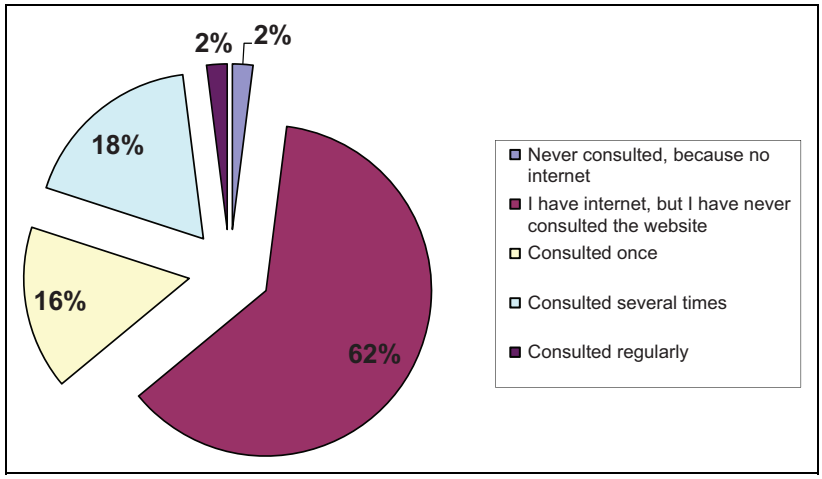

Figure 2. Extent to which parents visit the Inspectorate of Education's website.

background, and 55.5% indicated that they were not religious. Over 36% also indicated that they felt it was important that their child would be educated according to a particular faith. Also, 11.4% said they had played an active role, in the sense that they were or had been members of the school board, the school council, the PC, or the JPC. In contrast, the vast majority (over 81%) of parents were involved in supporting activities in the school, such as reading with pupils in class or accompanying school trips.

Empirical Results

Introduction

We first discuss the perceived impact of public information from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education on parents (the perceived impact of open data from the inspectorate of education on parents section). Then, we analyze how parents perceive their actual and desirable influence on the quality of primary education (The perceptions of parents about their own actual and desirable influence section). Finally, we describe how parents assess the quality of primary schools (the perceived quality of education in dutch primary schools section).

The Perceived Impact of Open Data From the Inspectorate of Education on Parents

To what extent do parents consult the Inspectorate of Education's website? In the survey, parents were first asked to what extent they visited the site of the Inspectorate of Education. The results are shown in Figure 2. More than 62% indicated that they had access to the Internet but never visited the Inspectorate of Education's website. Only 2% of the parents indicated not having access to the Internet. Also, 16% of the parents had visited the website only once, 18% had visited the site several times, and only 2% visited the site regularly. However, the website can have an indirect impact because the few parents who do visit the website can spread the information among parents who do not consult it. We did not investigate these possible indirect impacts of the website.

How do parents perceive the usefulness of the Inspectorate of Education's website compared to other sources of information? The next question is whether parents perceive the Inspectorate of Education's website as relevant and useful, compared to other sources of information. To get more insight into this, parents were asked to indicate the extent to which they regarded the information from various

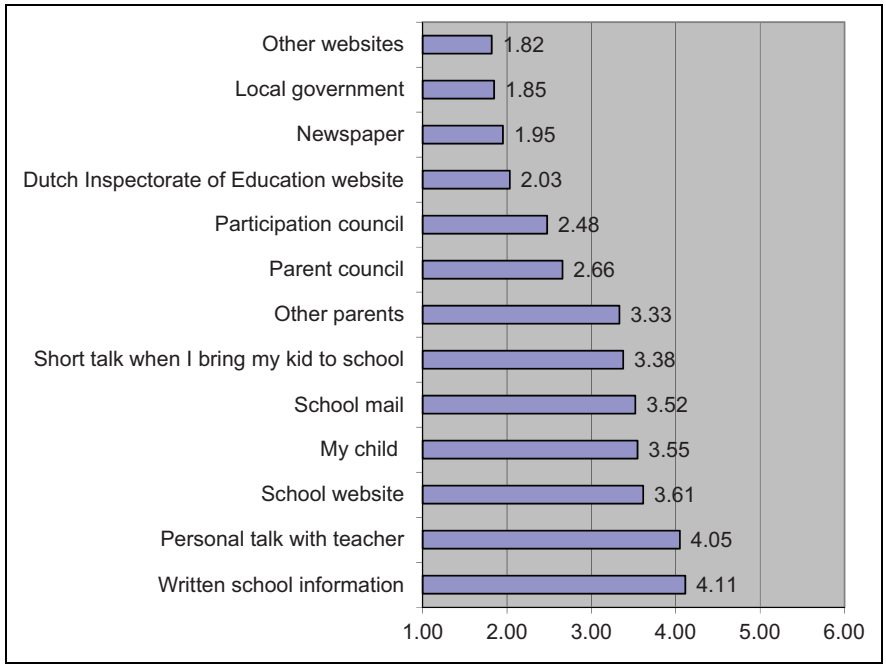

Figure 3. Perceived usefulness of information from various sources.

sources as useful. The main question was: "Very useful information about the school, I get from . . . " followed by an enumeration of various information sources (see Figure 3). The response categories ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) with the neutral point 3 (*neither disagree nor disagree*). Figure 3 shows the averages per data source.

The results show that the Inspectorate's website achieved relatively low scores in terms of usability compared to other sources of information. Only "other sites" and the "municipality" score lower as a useful source of information, whereas "newspapers" do not differ significantly as a useful source in comparison with the Inspectorate's website. All other information usability scores are significantly higher than the Inspectorate's website. The highest scores are for "written information from the school," "conversations with the teacher," and "the school website." Interview respondents from PCs and JPCs agreed with that. They used the website only for "first orientations" before having personal talks with managers and teachers at the school. So written open data provided by the Inspectorate of Education can be a starting point for face-to-face information collection at primary schools.

Conclusions

The results from the surveys show that we have not found evidence supporting a positive effect between the open data from the Inspectorate of Education and the factual use and perceived usefulness of these open data. Respondents who participate in the PCs and JPCs use the website from the Inspectorate only for first orientations before having personal talks at schools.

The Perceptions of Parents About their Own Actual and Desirable Influence

How do parents perceive their own actual influence and that of other individuals or institutions on the quality of primary education? Parents indicated on a scale of 1 (*no role*) to 6 (*participation in decisions*) the perceived impact of various institutions and persons on the quality of primary education. Figure 4

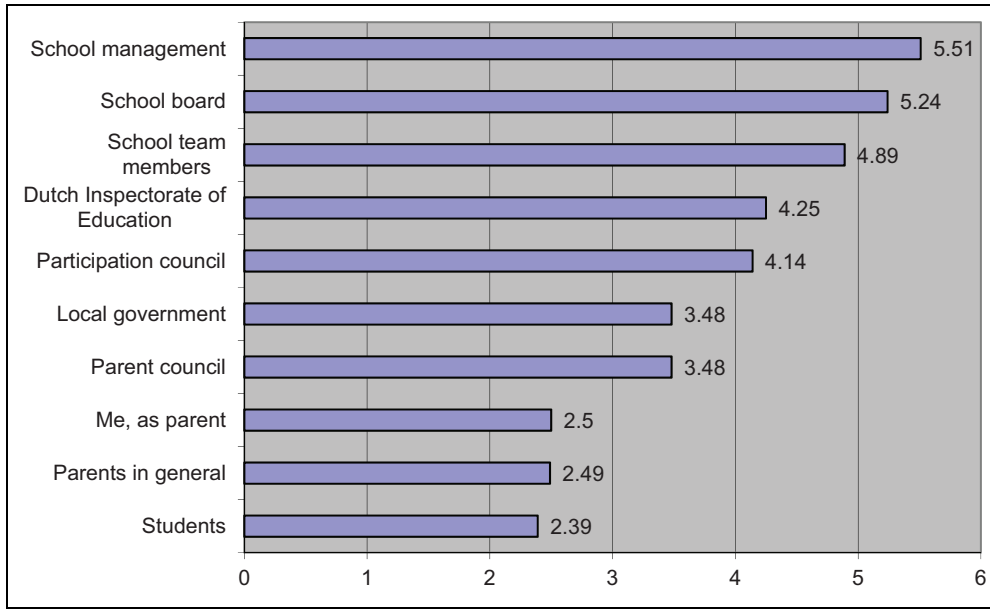

Figure 4. Perceived impact of various institutions and persons on the quality of primary education.

shows the averages per actor. The results indicate that parents perceive their actual impact as low, together with the influence of pupils. All other institutions and individuals show significantly higher scores in the eyes of parents when it comes to perceived impact on the quality of primary education. The school management, the school board, and the team members are perceived as the most influential.

How do parents perceive their own desirable influence and that of other individuals or institutions on the quality of primary education? Parents indicated on a scale of 1 (*no role*) to 6 (*participation in decisions*), the desirable influence (as perceived by them) of various institutions and persons on the quality of primary education. Figure 5 shows the averages per actor. The results indicate that parents perceive their desirable influence as low, together with the desirable influence of pupils. All other institutions and individuals score significantly higher in the eyes of parents when it comes to their desirable influence on the quality of primary education. The influence of the school management, the school boards (*schoolbesturen*), and the team members are perceived as the most desirable. The influence of the PCs and the JPCs, the parent councils (*ouderraden*), and the individual parents are perceived as less desirable.

From the qualitative interviews, it can be derived that several respondents who participate in PCs and JPCs observed from their own experiences that PCs usually do not have much influence on the quality of schools, often dealing only with minor issues like school milk. They also note that they are highly dependent on the information they get from the school management. Furthermore, they note that they become involved rather late in decision-making processes and that this can result in the feeling of "going over old ground." However, other respondents stated that PCs are important "to keep school managers sharp and alert."

Conclusions

When we compare parents' perceptions about their factual influence (Figure 4) with their desirable influence (Figure 5), we can conclude that parents want *all* individuals and institutions in general to

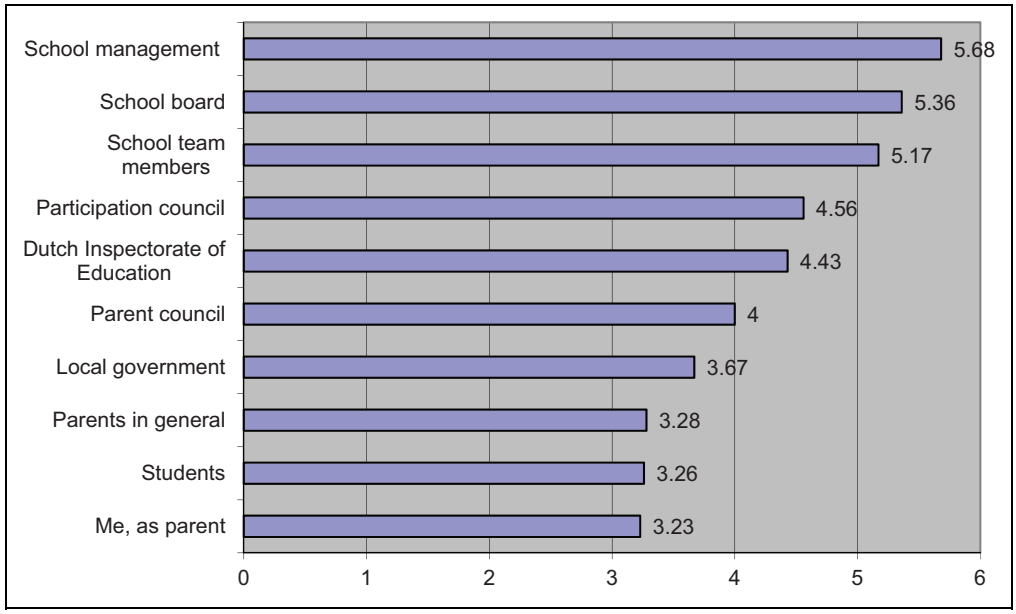

Figure 5. Desired impact of various institutions and persons on the quality of primary education.

acquire more influence on the quality of primary education. The results also indicate that more frequent visits to the Inspectorate of Education's website are linked to parents' desire to have more influence on the quality of primary education. Finally, the more parents are involved in the schools or the more they visit the Inspectorate's website, they want the PCs to have more influence. Several respondents who participate in PCs and JPCs observed from their own experiences that PCs usually do not have much influence on education quality in primary schools.

The Perceived Quality of Education in Dutch Primary Schools

How do parents assess the quality of the primary school? In the survey, parents could indicate on a 0–10 scale the extent to which they perceived the quality of the primary school. First, we investigated whether differences in answers about school performance are related to individual differences in responses between parents or partly on differences in responses between groups of parents from different primary schools (see Figure 6).

The results show that parents highly estimate the average quality of their children's school, with an average of 8.63. The atmosphere at school has the highest score (9.01), instructional materials, like computers, have the lowest scores but still very positive (8.35).

Using regression analysis, we examined whether the Inspectorate of Education's website plays a role in parents' quality assessments. In this regression analysis, we investigated the relationships between parents' background factors, consultations of the Inspectorate of Education's website, and parents' assessments of the quality of primary schools. The results are shown in Table 1.

Background factors (level of education, beliefs, active role, and level of involvement) play a role in parents' assessments. We see that religious parents rate the quality of their school on average significantly higher than secular parents. The results also show that when the involvement of parents increases, their assessments about the quality of their school decrease. Finally, we observe that frequent visits to the Inspectorate of Education's website are related to a lower assessment of quality by parents.

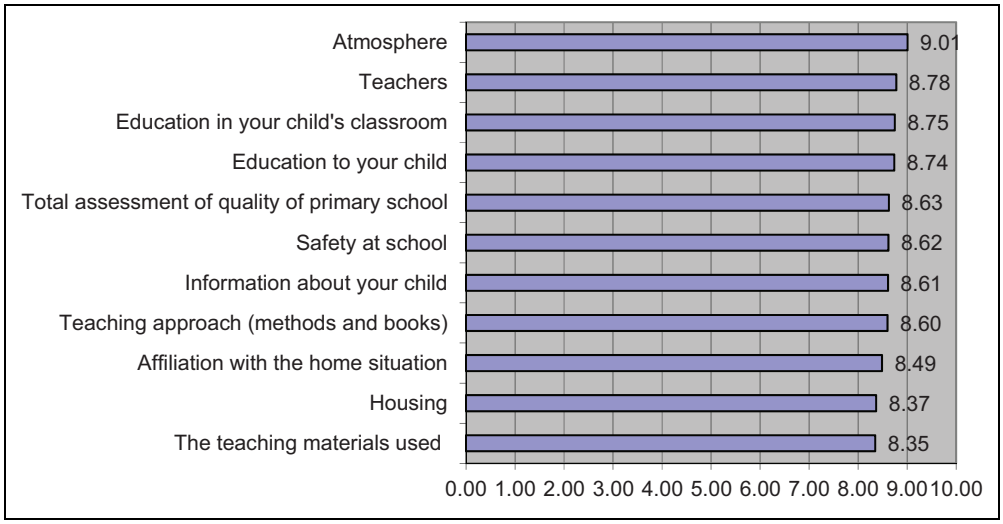

Figure 6. Parents' rating of various quality elements in primary schools.

Table 1. Regression Analysis of Relationships Between Parents' Background Factors, Consultations of the Inspectorate of Education's Website, and Parents' Assessments of the Quality of Primary Schools.

	β	*t* tests	Significance; *$p < .05$; **$p < .001$
(Constantly)		25.25	
Level of education	−.01	−0.11	
Religious background	.15	2.34	*
Active role in school board, participation council, or parent council	−.08	−1.17	
Involvement in school	−.22	−3.37	***
Frequency of consultation Inspectorate's website	−.12	−1.96	*
Adjusted R^2	.05		

How do parents assess primary school performance? We asked nine questions to examine how parents assess primary school performance. The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Figure 7 shows the parents' averages for each of the nine questions. The results show that parents attribute an average rate of 3.43 to the quality of schools and that is positive. In the interviews, parents stressed that quality should not be restricted to measurable numbers like counting, grammar, and language but that attention should also be given to children's social, cognitive, and creative development. At the same time, they have the impression that schools anticipate on standards ''imposed'' by the Inspectorate.

A regression analysis was done to investigate whether the Inspectorate's website plays a role in parents' assessment of school quality. In this regression analysis, we investigated the relationships between parents' background factors, consultations of the Education Inspectorate's website, and parents' assessments of primary schools' performance. The results are shown in Table 2.

The results indicate that religious parents are more positive about school performance than secular parents. It also appears that the higher the degree of parental involvement in the school, the lower the parents rate the school's performance. Moreover, the results show that frequent visits by parents to the Inspectorate of Education's website are negatively related to parents' assessment of primary schools' performance.

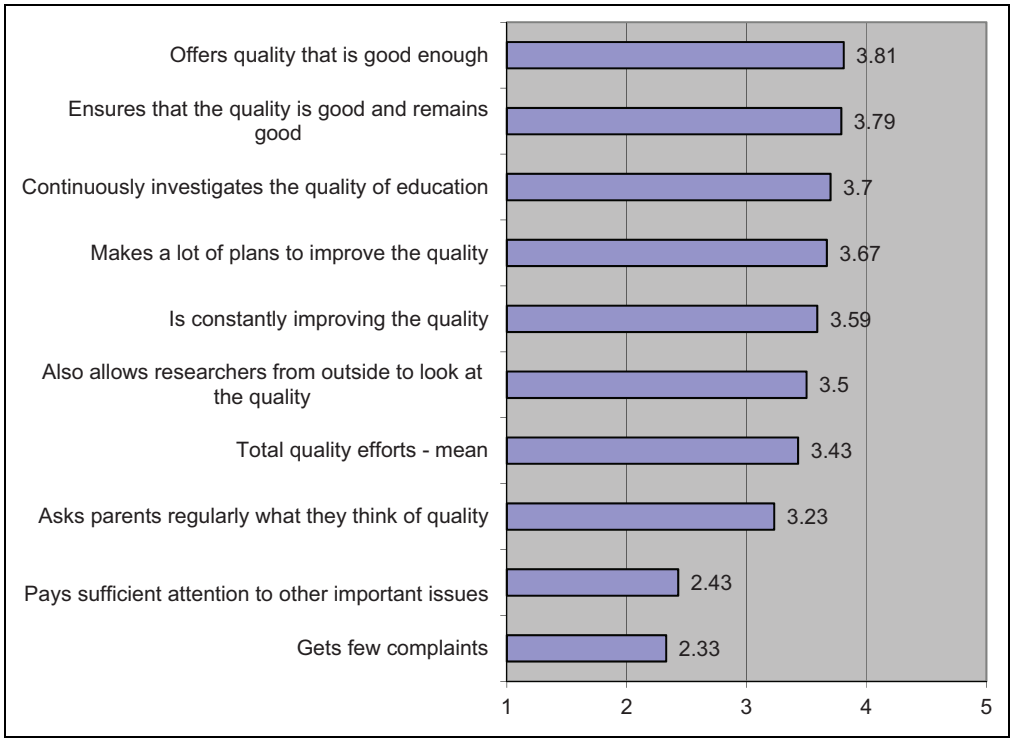

Figure 7. Parents' assessment of primary schools' performance.

Table 2. Regression Analysis of Relationships Between Parents' Background Factors, Consultations of the Education Inspectorate's Website, and Parents' Assessments of Primary Schools' Performance.

	β	*t* tests	Significance *$p < .05$;**$p < .001$
(Constantly)		20.46	
Level of education	−.06	−0.90	
Religious background	.17	2.79	*
Active role in school board, participation council, or parent council	−.07	−1.05	
Involvement in school	−.26	−4.13	***
Frequency of consultation Inspectorate's website	−.20	−3.35	***
Adjusted R^2	.11		

Conclusions

The conclusion is that parents highly estimate the average quality of Dutch primary schools. However, when their involvement increases, their assessments about their school's performance decrease. Frequent visits to the Education Inspectorate's website are related to lower performance assessments.

Conclusions

Open government has become a prominent issue for governments in recent years. In this study, we investigated the perceived impact of open data provided by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education on the quality of education in Dutch primary schools from the perspective of parents.

Our empirical findings show that we have not found evidence supporting a positive effect between open data from the Inspectorate of Education and the factual use and perceived usefulness of these open data for parents. Parents who consult these open data seem to use these data for first orientations only but strongly prefer personal talks at schools. The results also indicate that more frequent visits to the Inspectorate of Education's website are linked to the parents' desire to have more influence on the quality of primary education. Hence, open data in the field of education stimulate parents' participation efforts. This supports one of the assumptions behind open data.

The more parents are involved in their children's school, or the more they visit the Inspectorate's website, the more influence they would like PCs to have. However, several respondents who participate in PCs and JPCs observed from their own experiences that PCs usually have a limited influence on the quality in primary schools. So, open data have the potential to contribute to the empowerment of parents and other relevant external stakeholders.

Despite perceived modest parental impact, Dutch parents highly estimate the average quality of primary schools. However, when their involvement increases, their assessments of their school's performance decrease. Frequent visits to the Education Inspectorate's website are related to lower quality assessments. Two explanations are possible. First, open data can make parents more critical. Second, critical parents are more willing to collect information about primary schools, including from the Inspectorate's website. In order to get insight into these causal relationships and other relevant trends, we recommend sending surveys periodically to the same parents during their children's school career.

Open inspection data are potentially valuable for (critical) parents, especially when attention is given not only to ''hard'' indicators and badly performing schools (which seems to be the Inspectorate's current focus) but also to ''soft'' performance indicators and schools who perform well or even excellently. For that reason, we advocate shifting the focus from ''naming and shaming'' to ''naming and faming.''

An important challenge is to integrate the Inspectorate's ''hard'' open data with the ''soft'' indicators about the quality of primary schools, for example, by explicitly linking open data from the Inspectorate with the open data provided by primary schools on their own websites.

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