

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WENNIBA

**FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' DECISIONS ON THE
CHOICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD FACILITIES FOR THEIR
CHILDREN: A SURVEY OF PARENTS WITHIN THE SUAME
MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA**



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MASTER OF EDUCATION

2022

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WENNIBA

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OF PARENTS WITHIN THE SUAME MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA**



200051888

**A dissertation in the Department of Early Childhood Education,
Faculty of Educational Studies, submitted to the School of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment**

**of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Education
(Early Childhood Education)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

DECEMBER, 2022

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, **Eva Appiah-Kubi**, hereby declare that this project work is my own effort with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works, international journals which have all been identified and acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Signature:

Date:



Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby certify that the preparation and presentation of this dissertation was supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of project work laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Richardson Addai-Mununkum

Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to Almighty God and my dearest mother, Madam Agnes Ampomah.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey to the attainment of my second degree could not have ended successfully without the unique assistance received from various great persons and groups. I would like to acknowledge and offer thanks to them for their contributions and diverse support. First, my heartfelt appreciation goes to a special personality in this journey, whose actions yielded this fruit. He is in the person of Dr. Richardson Addai-Mununkum, my most dependable thesis supervisor. I truly appreciate his timely positive critique from the proposal stage until now. Second, family plays an important role during such an academic journey. I, therefore, express my sincere thanks to the Kotor and Kubi families. The list could be endless; however, special gratitude goes to, soon to be Dr. Kotor Asare, my lovely husband, and my Alpha Hour Prayer Group, who always helped me to wake up at midnight to work on my thesis. A special appreciation also goes to my lovely children; Antwi Lucky Joseph; Kaakyireba-Paapa, Kwaku-Aboagye, Asare-Kotor; Maame-Adwoa, Nyarko-Adepena, Asare-Kotor and, not forgetting my supportive father-in-law, Paapa Kwame Aboagye-Kotor and my sole brother Daiji Kwasi Owusu.

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ABSTRACT

Parents all over the world make a lot choices on behalf of their children, including the first school they attend. The purpose of the study, therefore, was to examine and rank the factors that influence parental decisions on the choice of early childhood facilities for their children. It also sought to establish relationships between parents educational, economic and gender status and their early childhood facilities choice within the Suame Municipality in Ghana. The study was grounded through the lenses of the Migration, Rational Choice Theories by building on the Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice. Using a descriptive survey design within the quantitative approach in the positivism paradigm, the study addressed three main research questions. A multi-stage simple random sampling technique was employed to survey 80 respondents. Confirmatory Factor Analysis was employed to determine validity and reliability, whilst using the relative importance index to rank the overall factors influencing parents school choice. Pearson Correlation Test was also performed to explore the relationship between parents' educational, economic and gender status regarding their choice of early childhood facilities for the children. The result suggested that parents place high premium on financial factors, which recorded RII of 0.800 than the personal reasons with RII value of 0.72 when deciding on early childhood facilities for their children to attend. The results also indicate that security and safety were ranked as top-most priorities among the personal factors, whilst the environment of school and children bringing food from home were also ranked as the second and third high important personal factors parents consider. Similarly, flexibility of fee payment structure was ranked as the top-most financial factor that influences parents' early childhood facilities choice for their children. This was followed by convenient mode of payment, affordability of fees, and value for money. The results further revealed that parents' gender, educational, and economic status had the strongest significant positive effect on their early childhood facilities choice, recording ($\beta=0.510$, p-value =0.000; $\beta=0.089$, p-value =0.010 and $\beta =0.035$, p-value =0.036) respectively. The study, therefore, concludes that the parents have the sense of appreciating the value for money consideration in line with the school choice for their wards. The study recommends that early childhood entrepreneurs ought to provide value for money service to the parents, with specific concentration on safety and secured environmental conditions, whilst offering flexible school payment options for the parents. Again, Ghana Education Service ought to sensitize parents and school owners on quality issues in early childhood education to inform policy, practice, and theory.

Keywords: parents, school choice, facilities, rational choice theory, push and pull factors.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Parental involvement, participation, and choice of schools had been a hot political issue for more than a decade, as lifeblood, informing educational policy formulation at all levels of the educational system, including early childhood education centers (Hsieh, 2000). National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2000) defines Early Childhood Education (ECE) as the kind of professional service and care offered to ensure the holistic development of children from birth up to the age of eight. Early childhood education is seen as a term that refers to educational programs and strategies geared toward the development of children from birth to the age of eight (UNESCO, 2000).

The quality of (ECE) is highly important to children's early development and learning, which contributes to their school readiness and lifetime well-being (Shi & Ye, 2016). Parents, educational practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers worldwide have paid significant attention to the assessment of ECE providers since the 1970s in China and other parts of Asia. However, assessment in ECE still has some problems related to the criteria and process (Li & Hu, 2012)

ECE providers globally, mainly include public and private kindergartens, nurseries, and early years centers, which aim to provide kindergarten children with high-quality childcare and education, thereby improving their development and learning (Li, 2016). Judging and gauging the quality of ECE providers is to assess their provision of care and education being the worth area for a research study. In other words,

assessing the quality of ECE refers to the inspection of the degree to which the ECE providers satisfy the stakeholders' needs, which is considerably determined by whether the providers successfully promote young children's mental and physical development and wellbeing in general (Li & Hu, 2012).

Yet, not all the service providers are delivering the expected quality service and facilities as the various definitions of the concept suggest. Researchers, therefore, have mapped out two fundamental aspects of ECE quality, i.e. structural quality and process quality, which are interwoven and intertwined with crucial influences on child development (Huang, Li, & Zhong, 2018). Structural quality deals with issues like hardware inputs, including physical resources, teacher qualifications, and teacher-child ratio..

The factors of process quality are important to children's daily experience in the ECE settings but are often demonstrated in a dynamic and not a static situation. The assessment of process quality is, therefore, complex (Huang & Song, 2013). Similarly, Yang and He (2017), however, added a third component of ECE quality, i.e. structural quality, process quality, and result quality. In addition to structural quality and process quality as mentioned earlier, the outcome quality deals with the child's mental and physical development outcomes, such as fine and gross motor skills, language and communication, social and emotional abilities, etc. This can be likened to the output of work by the ECE service providers to their clients.

Ghana has often lived up to its slogan, of being the star and gateway to Africa, when it comes to the promotion of children's welfare, with its pioneering role as the first country in the world and Africa to have rectified the Convention on the Right of

Children (CRC) and Universal Compulsory Education (UBE) respectively (Wolf, 2018). Because of this, more and more children in Ghana are now attending private or international schools. More than half of the children enrolled in pre-K during that time period attended programs run by non-government organizations such as community groups, religious organizations, and private businesses (Garcia et al., 2008). Over the years, the government has had very little control or mandate for coordination, management, and support of the centers since these services have been provided solely by the communities and the private sector. For this reason, difficulties with quality and availability, particularly for kids in rural areas, persist even now (National Statistical Office, 2008). Business people and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Ghana are largely responsible for the proliferation of kindergartens around the country.

As a consequence, many low-income and rural areas cannot access the educational opportunities provided by the early childhood schools since they are concentrated in densely populated areas (Ayebah, 2009). The Republic of Ghana Presidential Education Review Committee (2002, p.22) was of the view that; “the philosophy underlying the educational system in Ghana should be the creation of well balanced (intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically) individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, values, and aptitudes for self –actualization and for the socioeconomic and political transformation of the nation”.

The fundamental educational system went through significant changes in order to include basic compulsory education system (Ghana Education Service, 2004). As a consequence, education for children aged 4-6 years was included as an essential component of the formal educational system in Ghana in the year 2003. This came

about as a direct response to recommendations made by the President's Committee on Review of Education Reforms regarding the significance of early childhood development.

Children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, need access to high-quality care since it is the single most important factor in fostering their cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Burchinal, Magnuson, Powell, & Hong, 2015; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Gialamas, 2015; Krieg et al., 2015; Li et al., 2016). However, it would seem that ECE policy attempts in the Suame Municipality have neglected to take into account the elements that affect parents' decisions on ECE options. The motivations behind parents' enrolment in underperforming kindergartens should be investigated.

1.2 Problem Statement

Several studies demonstrate that there is a relationship between parents' gender, socio-economic status, personality traits, religious beliefs, and that of the children's academic achievement in relation to their school choice (Grogan, 2001; Hsieh, 2000; Walberg, 2000;). In spite of these, it appears little information exists on the exact decision-making factors that influence parents' choice of early childhood facilities within the Ghanaian context.

A lot of the studies conducted on parents' school choice, using choice theory are often located in the western context and literature, with the dearth of literature in the African context. However, of these numerous studies in the western literature, there appears to be limited literature on the actual decision-making process parents employ when selecting an early childhood education facility, as most efforts had been

concentrated on the higher level of the educational ladder (Grogan, 2011).

In both high and low-income nations, such as Cambodia, Colombia, India, and Germany, there are substantial cultural differences in how the benefits of early childhood education are understood (Gertler et al., 2014). According to research by Gertler et al., (2014), parents in Colombia favor play, exploration, and the arts as foundational components of early childhood care and education, whereas parents in Cambodia prioritize connection with strangers via social niceties and other linguistic standards. The parents of urban Indian and German children, Yoshikawa (2017), observed, place a premium on self-maximization and individual performance. Parents in rural India and Cameroon saw ECE's emphasis on social connections, group cohesiveness, and positive conduct as fundamental (Yoshikawa, 2017).

Despite the fact that various writers have proposed that research is required to explore parents' decision-making process for ECE options, it remains unclear how these elements and structural factors like class size and teacher credentials are weighted and prioritized in the decision-making process (Canada & Bland, 2014; Coley et al., 2014; Joshi, 2014; Navarro-Cruz, 2016). Yet, numerous studies on the global scale still indicate that most parents are not well informed and knowledgeable, regarding the important consideration to be weighed in order to make a quality school choice for their children (; Cryer et al., 2002; Cryer & Burchinal, 1997; Shpancer et al., 2002).

Parents all over the world, are an integral part as collaborators, regarding the provision of education and training of their children. In view of this, most of the early life choices are often made by the parents on behalf of their children. Typically, parents decide the kind of the first school to be attended by their children. This

decision has a lifetime turning point in the life of an individual. Because parents are the most important stakeholders in ECE placement choices, it is essential to have a deeper understanding of the processes that guide their decision-making in order to build programs that would promote more equal access for children to ECE services of a high-quality (Forry, Simkin, Wheeler, & Bock, 2014).

It appears that not much has been researched and known in the African and Ghanaian context, regarding what influences parents' choices, when selecting schools in general for their children, let alone those at the early childhood level. In the few studies in Ghana, gauging the actors influencing parents' school choice, the approach appears mostly to be qualitative oriented, with a limited sample size, thereby generalizing the findings in the Ghanaian context is often limited.

For example, Kabay, Wolf, and Yoshikawa (2017, p 28), using a qualitative study gauged the perspectives of parents, about their expectations, regarding the type of education to be provided for their children in early childhood facilities in Ghana; the parents indicated their desire was to get the “mind of kids open up”. The researchers, therefore, concluded that there was the need to further assess the perspectives of the parents, as the key stakeholders, on a large-scale survey in Ghana, regarding the school choice for their children, in order to inform policy and practice. The seemingly lack of knowledge by the policymakers and ECE business entrepreneurs within the Suame Municipality, regarding the gauging and rating the factors that influence parents' decision-making processes, is the problem that shapes this survey study.

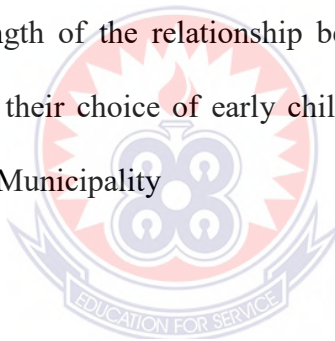
1.3 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative survey was to examine and rate the factors that influence parental decisions on the choice of early childhood facilities within the Suame Municipality in Ghana.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study sought to attain these objectives:

1. Assess personal factors that inform parental decisions on the choice of early childhood facilities for their children within the Suame Municipality
2. Examine economic factors influencing parental decisions on the choice of Early Childhood facilities for the children within the Suame Municipality
3. Evaluate the strength of the relationship between parents' educational and gender status and their choice of early childhood facilities for their children within the Suame Municipality



1.5 Research Questions

1. To what extent do personal factors influence parental decisions on the choice of early childhood centres for their children in the Suame municipality?
2. What economic factors influence parental decisions on the choice of early childhood centres for their children within the Suame municipality?

What is the relationship between parents' educational and gender status and their choice of early childhood centres for their children in the Suame Municipality?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research would be crucial because it focuses on decision-making processes for choices that set the tone for a child's whole life. These decisions may have a profound impact on a child's development. In addition, it is possible that this study would fill a gap in the existing literature about the decision-making processes of parents regarding ECE options. Third, factors influencing parents' decision-making processes for early childhood education have not been explored up until this point; as a result, early childhood education policies have overlooked parental perspectives as a factor in early childhood education choice (Okobah, 2018). This study fills in this information gap by examining the factors that influence parents' decision-making processes for ECE. This research also hopes to shed light on this context and provide information about systemic problems associated with the selection of quality early childhood education (ECE) programs as well as the nature of family priorities and considerations in terms of deciding where to place a child in ECE.

The research also aimed to give a knowledge of the decision-making processes that parents go through when making ECE decisions to the various stakeholders in the education system. This might lead to increased regulatory attention or the reform of low-quality programs. In conclusion, it is hoped that the study would contribute to social change by producing information that is essential to ECE policymakers in the country of study for the purpose of designing equitable quality programs that would be relevant in that they would provide the foundation for future learning, responsive in that they would support parents' participation in the labor force, and realistic in that they would create a fairer and more equitable society.

1.7 Scope and Delimitations

The study's focus was on the factors influencing parents in the Suame Municipality regarding their selection of the early childhood facilities in the area for their children. Research participants were confined to parents whose children were enrolled in public, nonprofit, or private (ECE) programs in the Suame Municipality during the 2021/2022 school year. Furthermore, the study only dealt with the factors influencing parents' school choice and not that of other relevant stakeholders like the children themselves. Again, among the numerous factors such as religious, political, ideological and old school affiliations that could affect parents school facilities choice only three of them were considered, namely gender, educational and economic.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

Decision making: A process that entails picking one option out of many possible outcomes in order to get what you want (Eisenfuhr, 2011).

Early childhood: The first eight years of a person's existence, beginning at birth (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2012).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): Adults are responsible for the processes and procedures that help promote a child's growth in the first few years of life. These include caring for children's bodies as well as their social and emotional well-being, fostering their intellectual growth, and paying attention to the children's health, safety, and nutrition (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2012).

Education For All: The guaranteeing of access to a fundamental education for all children, adolescents, and adults (Haddad, Colletta, Fisher, Lakin, & Sutton, 1990).

Education for everyone, regardless of socio-economic background or location; this includes preschool and elementary school for younger students and adult literacy, numeracy, and life skills training for older students and adults (Haddad et al., 1990).



CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Overview

This chapter talks about the literature search strategy and the conceptual framework and how researchers in the field have dealt with the problem. Also talked about were empirical studies on how parents see the quality of ECE and how they choose early childhood facilities. Literature related to the research was also looked at, and the chapter ends with a summary. The study was built on two frameworks that worked well together. The first, Lee's Theory of Migration from 1966, gave a framework for figuring out why parents choose one place over another. The second theory, Rational Choice Theory (RCT), was based on deduction and helped explain how parents make decisions.

2.1 Lee's Model of Migration

According to Lee (1966, p. 49), the definition of migration is "a permanent or semi-permanent change of domicile." . In the context of this investigation, the term "migration" refers to a move that is either permanent or semi-permanent in terms of the schools attended and/or the types of education received. According to Lee, every act of migration comprises three components: a starting point (the previous school and/or method of learning), an ending point (the new school and/or method of schooling), and a series of challenges that arise in between. According to Lee, the factors that lead to an actor's decision to migrate (in the case of this study, a parent's decision to migrate) can be summed up under four headings: "(1) Factors associated with the area of origin; (2) Factors associated with the area of destination; (3) Intervening obstacles; and (4) Personal factors (p. 50)." In addition,

Lee said that while there are reasons that drive actors away from a location (or school and/or method of training), there are also elements that tend to keep actors there and/or attract them. Despite this, there are still many aspects of life that individuals do not care about. However, for some players, the set of intervening barriers may either delay or prevent migration completely. For some actors, the set of intervening hurdles may be low, and as a result, migration may be delayed or prevented entirely. The author's first explanation for this phenomenon is shown in

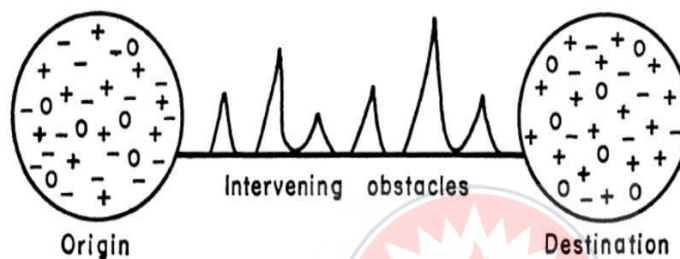


figure 1, which also includes his model.

Lee's Model of Migration +s,-s, os

Figure 1: Lees Model of Migration

Note. From "A Theory of Migration," by . Lee, 1966, *Demography*, 3(1),

Lee's (1966) Model for Migration (Figure 1) describes how both the point of departure and the final destination include characteristics that either push people away (shown by -s) or keep them there (marked by +s) and those that they don't care about either way (indicated by 0s). Push factors are defined as those that discourage actors from participating, whereas pull factors are those that keep them interested. Again, the hurdles that an actor must overcome are context-specific and range from the insignificant to the catastrophic. In each case, circumstances outside the control of the actor affect the final outcome of the actor's migration choice.

Some groups have a similar reaction to a given set of factors at both the origin and the destination, as proposed by Lee (1966), even though the factors that hold or repel are defined differently for each actor. Indeed, as we can never describe the precise set of circumstances that impels or prevents migration for a specific individual, we can, in general, simply lay out a few that appear of exceptional relevance and notice the overall or average response of a big group. Lee chimed in to say that although some people need more prodding than others to make the move north, everyone has his or her own unique set of motivations for making the move. Therefore, Lee's Theory of Migration served as a useful lens through which to investigate the pull and push forces that led parents to choose home schooling, charter schools, and religious schools as alternatives.

2.2 Rational Choice Theory

According to Lee (1966), economic conditions have a significant impact on migratory patterns. Migration rises as a result of economic expansion. At the time of the research in question, connections were made between Lee's theory of greater migration and a theory of enhanced parental choice. The availability of diverse schooling alternatives was fast growing, both geographically and academically. The Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) helped us comprehend parental discretion from a monetary standpoint (Walberg, 2000).

A RCT "is a basic premise of market theory," as stated by Walberg (2000. para. 3). According to sociologists Friedman and Hechter (1988), rational choice models presume customers (or parents in this instance) have given preferences and behave with the explicit intention of achieving stated goals compatible with a preset hierarchy of preferences. Consumers have good intentions, but they're not

always easy to carry through because of limitations like time and money. Positive or negative penalties for a path of conduct may be provided by social institutions, or the limits imposed by society (Friedman & Hechter, 1988). For a visual explanation of the framework and the steps customers take to obtain a desired social result, see Figure 2.

The Various Paths to Social Outcomes in Rational Choice Explanations

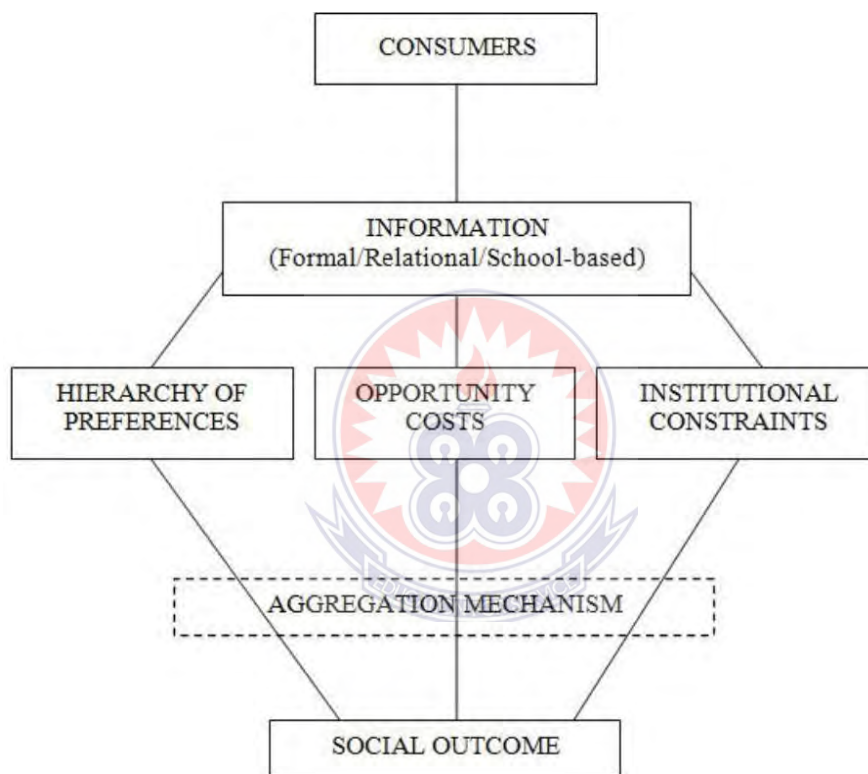


Figure 2: The Various Paths to Social Outcomes in Rational Choice Explanations

Note. From “The Contribution of Rational Choice Theory to Macro-sociological Research,” Friedman and Hechter, (1988).

The model that Friedman and Hechter (1988), developed (shown in Figure 2) offers a heuristic tool for investigating consumer choice, and it was used in this investigation as well. Market theorists place an emphasis on individual choice rather than centralized decision-making and claim that it is in the best interest of consumers to have as much of a say as possible in the manner in which they should distribute their own personal resources (Walberg, 2000). The use of such market concepts has resulted in significant changes to educational policy and reform, which eventually led to the development of the education marketplace that is more popularly referred to as school choice.

Many people, like Peterson (2006), have advocated that schools should be run more like American businesses and industries in order to boost quality and better meet the requirements of individual families. According to Zey (2001), randomized controlled trials (RCTs) may be used to investigate parents' inclinations since they are founded on the idea that people make decisions that best serve their own interests in light of the means at their disposal (Sato, 2013). When applied to the growing trend of parents opting for their children to attend a school of their choice, RCT believes that parents would choose the option that they feel will best serve their children. Options become more limited or have altered costs and advantages depending on factors including the individual's preferences, their current resources, and the nature of the product's market (in this case, the sort of education being sought). Furthermore, the list of options is affected by contacts with other consumers, due to the fact that the subjective limitations produced by learning about each party's preferences are mutual (Sato, 2013).

The success of a parent's decision depends on three factors that Hamilton and Guin (2005), described. First, parents should have preferences and knowledge to enhance their comprehension of the various alternatives. Friedman and Hechter (1988) argued that the amount and quality of available data should be considered a key factor. Simply stated, “meaningful knowledge is required in order to make logical choices” (Hall, 2009, p. 35). Second, parents should try to compare and contrast the schools’ features. Finally, parents choose the one that most closely matches their own individual tastes. With so many factors to consider, actors analyze and recalculate their options in light of new information, yet they still behave rationally and choose the optimal option based on the anticipated value of their decision (Zey, 2001).

The framework is book-ended by the push and pull variables connected with both the origin and the destination, and these aspects are what first engage the parents in the decision-making process. As a result, it is worthwhile to investigate them by means of the collection and examination of data for the aim of responding to the two research questions posed by this study:

1. Why do parents select home schooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?
2. What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between home schooling, faith-based schooling, charter schooling?

Given its significance in American education history and the evident growth of the school choice movement, the framework also served as a prism through which to examine school choice at the micro level, where, as discovered in Lee's (1966)

study, movements take the shape of distinct streams (i.e., homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling).

2.3 Schools

While different characteristics can be used to describe the range of schooling types. Luke (2010) identified four types of schooling, each of which serve people from a particular socio-economic background. These are working-class schools where basic skills and rules are emphasised, middle-class schools which show progression from rule-based rote learning to learning that promotes comprehension, affluent schools that construct knowledge through questioning, inquiry and experience and finally, elite schools where students are identified by their social standing (Luke, 2010). In choosing a school, parents may be aware that their outcomes differ and that some choices offer better chances of success (Whitty, 2001,).

There are clear distinctions between public and private schooling. Public education is mandated to promote general social well-being and the public interest using government funds. In contrast, private education is considered to support specific interests, such as religious groupings. It could be argued that it is a form of social stratification, since in many cases it is very costly. Hofmeyr and Lee (2004), argued that schools can be categorized as:

Firstly, both systems' exit level examinations are regulated and they follow the same national curricula. Secondly, numerous low-cost private schools have emerged. Thirdly, some elitist private schools are attempting to generate a socially responsible citizenry which might serve the interests of "wider public". Many public schools are so caught up with redress of past inequities that "public interests" fall by the wayside

(Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004). All these factors influence how parents understand the choices they make when they select the school in which they wish to enroll their children.

Parent Characteristics

The parent stands at the centre of school choice decision-making. How parents construct themselves within the field of education affects the manner in which they make school choices. Knowledge of what comprises quality education and good schools should determine school choice. However, not all parents have access to knowledge on the types of school and curriculum delivery. This could prevent them from making informed choices (Bosetti, 2004, p. 400).

There has been much research on how parents' socio-economic status affects their involvement in their children's education and their access to school-related resources (Azmat & Garcia Montalvo, 2012; Goldring & Shapira, 1993). According to research conducted by Hanushek et al. (2007), on charter school families, those with lower incomes are less concerned with their children's academic performance than those with higher incomes. As a result, fewer parents from low-income households make the choice to transfer their children to a new school than those from higher-income homes. Ball and Vincent (1998), and Teske and Schneider (2001), claimed, however, that the extent of parents' knowledge depended more on parents' motivating functions than on their financial status.

School choosing behavior differs significantly between urban and suburban parents, as found by Lareau and Goyette (2014), who evaluated the decision-making processes

of families residing in various density settlements (including rural, small town, suburbia, and metropolitan areas). They discovered that families from the middle and high classes of metropolitan areas, as well as those families from the working class, are the most engaged and driven when it comes to selecting a school for their children. "Family searches might seem frenetic and loaded with significance at times" (Lareau & Goyette, 2014, p. 34). Families in the city may be more self-conscious than those in the suburbs, hoping they've made the correct decisions but prepared to make amends if they come to that conclusion. However, parents living in the suburbs seem to take a far more laid-back approach to finding a good school for their children. Suburban parents "rather trusted the reputation of the schools they picked, with minimal confirmation from outside information or school visits,"(p. 45).

Goldhaber (1999), argued that school choice decisions are based on two assumptions, "that parents know how to choose good schools; and that good schools are actually providing competent education" (p. 16). When parents choose schools, they search for identifiable resources that they believe could ensure successful outcomes. A parent's socio-economic status as well as that of the school, the type of pupils in terms of age, gender, academic achievement and under-achievement, teachers' qualifications and training, school resources, location and extra-curricular activities, safety concerns at the institution and the principal's characteristics contribute to parents' evaluation of the school (van der Berg, 2008). Evaluation of school quality is a strong influence in making school choice decisions, which rests on the agency of the parent. However, parents are also influenced by macro-systemic forces. The determinants of school choice decision making are thus a combination of internal and external factors and are also influenced by parents' biographical and educational

background, their lifestyle, and future aspirations for their children. This study therefore aimed to probe whether or not specific factors or forces are likely to influence particular groups of individuals. Specific parents' narratives were used as a methodological strategy to explore this issue. This offered a more in-depth perspective than that provided by the above-mentioned studies.

2.4 What does school choice mean?

School choice often refers to the ability of parents to choose between public school services and private school substitutes (Barrows, Cheng, Peterson, & West, 2019). Internationally, school choice policies are adopted by governments to provide better schooling opportunities to disadvantaged children. Each country has its own interpretation of how parental school choice is mediated and managed. Permutations may also exist within countries, as different states, provinces or regions interpret policy goals and intentions in local contexts. Hill (2005), notes that there is a range of school policy options in the US, which reflects different interpretations of how to regulate and provide opportunities for parents to make school choices. Fataar (2015) referred to this as “school choice displacement” (, p. 66), where places of living become disconnected from places of schooling as children travel daily to schools in the city or sought-after schools within their townships but still a distance from home.

2.5 Parental role in school choice

Much of the earlier international and local literature on school choice focuses on the measurable determinants that contribute to such choice. Bosetti (2004, p. 400), referred to this as a “mix of rationalities”, which suggests that parents exercise choices in relation to defined (oftentimes overt) understandings of the quality of education, their satisfaction with the choice of school and whether their choice meets

their personal goals. Parents also look for a school that caters for their children's needs. Parents that are dissatisfied with public education, look for a private institution that matches their social and educational aspirations for their children. Ball (1997, p. 9), referred to this as "child-matching". It occurs in both prestigious sought-after schools and among rank- and-file public schools, where parents seek schools that pays attention to children who do not perform very well academically (Reay & Ball, 1997).

2.6 Gender

Who are the parents that actively engage in school choice decision-making? Mothers seem to be at the centre of active decision-making with regard to their children's educational choices and social class affects the way they approach education issues. O'Donoghue (2013), argued that working-class women are aware of their lack of capacity to engage with education-related issues and structures and submissively accept the positioning assigned to them by the school as well as its authority.) Cooper (2005) noted that the race, social class, and gender positioning of working-class Afro-American mothers determine how they make school choice decisions. However, middle-class mothers demonstrate a form of narcissistic behaviour pattern as they use their success in child-rearing and in choosing educational pathways, to increase their agentic properties. This is also influencing how they evaluate their children's success in relation to others (Brantlinger, 2003).

2.6.1 Differences in Parents' Income and Education Level

In order to help low-income and disadvantaged families gain equal footing with middle- and upper-class families in the school selection process, it is generally agreed that school choice legislation should be implemented. Recent studies on school choice

in Western industrialized countries have shown, however, that parents who make these decisions tend to be more educated, more financially secure, and less likely to be unemployed than parents who do not participate in the decision-making process (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Report, 1992; Martinez et al, 1994; Gewirtz et al, 1995; Goldthorpe, 1996; Bosetti, 1998; Hatcher, 1998; Whitty et al, 1998; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999; cited in Bosetti, 2004).

Furthermore, better-off families tend to choose schools where the percentage of students receiving subsidized lunches is substantially lower than at other options (Burgess et al., 2009, 2015; Riedel et al., 2010). According to a survey conducted by Bosetti (2004), in Canada, the proportion of students attending religious private schools is higher among those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, while the proportion of students attending non-religious private schools is more than double that of religious private schools among those from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Different conclusions were drawn from the same survey by Schneider, Marschall, Teske, and Roch (1998). They have stated that;

“any differentiation along SES and racial lines in the choice of schools will not necessarily result from parents of higher SES strategically placing their children in the best schools. Rather, differences may emerge as the result of “sorting,” in which lower SES parents stress a different set of values in education and choose schools that reflect different dimensions of education they view as important” (p. 489).

This finding has been confirmed by certain recent empirical studies. There is a positive correlation between socio-economic status and private school enrollment, as revealed by studies by Epple and Romano (1998, 2002), Hoyt and Lee (1998), and

Chakrabarti (2006, 2008). Therefore, children from higher-income and higher-ability families tend to attend private schools, whereas those from lower-income and lower-ability families prefer to attend public schools.). Riedel et al., (2010), who studied school choice in Germany, found that low-income families were more inclined to have their children attend their neighborhood's designated schools. Phillips, Hausman, and Larsen (2012), examined intra-district transfer policies in an urban school district and found that affluent parents tended to send their children to the schools with the best academic records, while low-income parents tended to send their children to the schools with the worst academic records.

Hatcher (1998), offered an explanation for why middle-class, college-educated families choose different schools than low-income families or those with parents who are less likely to have a college education. Hatcher believed that persons from lower socio-economic backgrounds might maintain or even improve their social standings by finishing high school. Middle-class families, on the other hand, worry more about their children's educational opportunities because of the greater social advancement that may be achieved via earning certain educational skills and credentials. In light of these perceived stakes, middle-class parents are more likely to be inclined to participate in school marketplaces..

2.7 Proximity

Mixed findings emerged from studies that analyzed the role of geography on parents' decisions about which schools to enroll their children. Most studies found that higher-income and more educated families cited academic standards as an important factor in school choice, whereas lower-income and less educated families cited proximity. The demographic disparities in sample frames and the school

choice sets accessible to parents may account for the contradictory findings among studies. Findings from both the oldest and newest studies included in this synthesis show that parents place a premium on location above all others (Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Chumacero et al., 2011). Some research (Elacqua et al., 2006; Riedel et al., 2010; Schneider & Buckley, 2002), shows that parents of all socio-economic backgrounds value proximity very highly when making school decisions, while other research shows that parents place less importance on it (Glazerman, 1998; Kleitz et al., 2000; Weiher & Tedin, 2002). According to Bosetti (2004), parents from public schools (20%), alternative schools (19%), and private schools (7%) all felt that students' inability to go to other public schools through public transit was a problem (p. 396). Still other pupils cannot be moved from the public schools, according to those who believed that transportation is a major barrier (Krueger & Ziebarth, 2004).

Some research has shown that students of different races and ethnicities, as well as those with different school choices and parental educational backgrounds, place different values on geographical proximity. According to research by Williams, Hancher, and Hutner (1983), distance is a major factor for public school parents who do not explore other schools, a secondary factor for public school parents who do consider other schools, and a minor one for private school parents. Both whites and blacks prefer to attend schools in close proximity to their homes, although whites will typically drive farther to attend schools with a larger white population. Families place a high importance on proximity to jobs and schools, but those with a strong desire for education tend to be more flexible about moving further away. According to research by Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, and Wilson (2009), 40% of parents with

no educational or occupational credentials consider proximity to be the most essential element in their decision. Nearly twice as many people without any kind of formal education or training as those with some sort of degree or similar certification cite proximity as the most significant factor in their decision.

2.8 Parental Perception of ECCE Quality

Individuals' perceptions are the results of taking in and analyzing data from their immediate environments. Therefore, perception is the means through which we assimilate data about our surroundings and the cues that guide our behavior. According to Canada and Bland (2014), parents' opinions of ECE programs hinge on their impressions of the instructors and the amount of contact between the teachers and the children. Canada and Bland (2014), identified six essential indicators that parents can use to evaluate the quality of an early childhood education program: teacher quality, teacher retention within the program or school, multicultural setting, enriched curricula, support for parental engagement and involvement, and safety and security within the ECCE facility. Another group of indicators of structural quality was outlined by Bauchmuller, Certz, and Rasmussen (2014). These indicators included the staff-child ratio, the number of male and female employees, the number of trained employees, the percentage of employees from ethnic minority backgrounds, and the level of employee retention. The five quality indicators listed below have the potential to be objectively measured and comparable among ECE programs.

The quality of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs is often overestimated by parents compared to the assessments of ECCE experts, even when parents' conceptions of excellent ECCE programs vary (Forry et al., 2013; Rentzou

& Sakellariou, 2013). Parents' expectations of the caliber of teaching personnel and the nature of staff interactions with children are thought to contribute to the discrepancy between how parents and professionals evaluate ECE programs (Grammatikopoulos, Gregoriadis, Tsigilis, & Zachopoulou, 2014).

Further, Rentzou and Sakellariou (2013), discovered that parents of babies and toddlers correlated quality with observable ECE experiences like the connection between the child and the caregiver, rather than with organized components like staff-child ratios, group size, and the certification of staff. Parents' perceptions of the value of early care and education (ECCE) programs are shaped by their cultural and socio-economic origins (Ansari, 2017; Petitclerc et al., 2017). The viewpoint that parents have on early childhood education (ECE) is granted a high degree of relevance because parents are the ones who are ultimately responsible for choosing whether or not their children will engage in ECE programs (Scopelliti & Musatti, 2013; Weng-Yan Wong, 2013). It's possible that parents are selecting inadequate programs for their kids because they aren't paying close enough attention to quantifiable criteria.

However, what goes on in an ECE classroom is crucial in identifying a good facility to enroll the child. Therefore, the quality of a program aimed at young children depends on three main aspects: interactions with adults, the setting, and the program's infrastructure (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). These three considerations are crucial for achieving high standards. To rephrase: having a lot of materials in class is useless if you don't have a good instructor to manage them. Furthermore, a successful educator cannot be effective without administrative support, instructional aid availability, and developmental guidance received (Kivunja, 2015). Further,

there are few ways to evaluate a program's success in meeting the needs of the children enrolled in it. In the same vein, it may be difficult to tell whether a kid is actively engaged in and taking part in age- and stage-appropriate play (Workman & Ullrich, 2017). It's possible that people enrolled in subpar programs because they lacked the knowledge to properly assess their quality.

However, ECE quality is determined by how well a curriculum advances children's growth and learning (Anderson, Raikes, Kosaraju, & Solano, 2017). However, there are a variety of methods used to evaluate and report on the efficacy of preschool and kindergarten offerings. Class Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and the Program Administration Scale are all examples of these tools used to measure program quality. Also included are the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS), and the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) (PAS). Since each program is likely to follow a somewhat different path to excellence, national accreditation is one way for establishments to prove to parents that they are following the rules set out by the state in which they are located. Eventually, an agreement emerged on how to define excellence in ECE programs. This definition should include localized standards for children's growth and development. Children's verbal, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development should all be taken into account while setting these goals (Anderson & Raikes, 2017).

2.9 Empirical Studies on Factors Influencing Parents' School Choice for their children

In addition to literature on the history of private education, a review of literature was conducted by Hill (2016) on factors influencing parents to enroll their children in early childhood schools. In a study conducted in Detroit, parents of upcoming kindergarten students visited school options in their communities and shared their findings (Hill, 2016). The research project was a community-based, participatory action research study consisting of 22 participants. Hill collected data using a mixed-method research approach consisting of quantitative method, including closed-questioned surveys and checklists, and qualitative method, including open-ended questions and interviews.

The surveyed respondents visited public, private, and charter schools and completed surveys once they completed the school visits. The researcher coded integrated documentation and excerpt transcripts to identify themes in the data. Based on group discussions and surveys. The parents' desired characteristics were diversity, academic rigor, child-centered practices, community involvement, and parent involvement. The study's findings revealed that the parents believed that all the schools evaluated, the top public, charter, and private schools in the area, met their desired school characteristics. According to the data, parents of kindergarten students in Detroit did not prefer any particular school type, such as private, charter, or public. The main concern of the parents was whether the school demonstrated their desired characteristics. The study implied that parents were not as concerned about their children's type of school as the school's perceived quality.

In a quantitative study, Krull (2016), analyzed the methods used by newly enrolled kindergarten parents for school choice selection. The study's purpose was to analyze the school selection process of parents with children attending enrollment-rich public schools. Ninety-two kindergarten parents with children enrolled in the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) system participant schools completed surveys on their school selection processes. Krull recoded the Likert survey responses and added weights based on the schools' race/ethnicity. No matter the families' education level or economic status, academics was the leading factor influencing the decision-making process. There was no significant difference between families with different incomes and the importance of academics ($p > .070$), and there was no significant difference between families with different educational levels and the importance of academics ($p > .099$). The responses indicated that most of the parents did not exhaust their options during the school selection process. Instead, the participants settled on a school choice after considering three or fewer school choices. Although the Krull study focused on public schools, the research was relevant to the literature review since it implies the importance of academic programs during the school selection process.

Prichard and Swezey (2016), conducted a grounded theory study on the factors affecting kindergarten through 12th-grade Christian parents' school choice decisions. The researchers interviewed 13 participants from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds and developed field notes. The school types that the children attended included public schools, private schools, and homeschools. The researchers transcribed the interviews verbatim and utilized the open coding process. The analysis process continued with axial and selective coding to identify themes in the

responses. Based on the interview data, participants used the satisficing theory in their school choice decisions. The theory supports that people make a satisfactory decision that solves their problem with minimal effort (Greenwald, 1993). Therefore, the participants did not exhaust their options when selecting a school. Instead, they stopped the search once they found one that seemed sufficient for their needs. The parents' important factors were their own school experiences, financial status, expected enrollment trends, and socio-economic background (Prichard & Swezey, 2016). The study implied that parents' spiritual goals for their children did not influence their educational decisions for their children despite their identification as Christians.

Sikkink and Schwarz (2018), conducted a quantitative study on the correlation between parents' school experiences and their school choice decisions for their high school children. The researchers randomly selected 1,500 participants in the United States and Canada to complete the Cardus Education Survey (CES) about their childhood school experiences. Sikkink and Schwartz analyzed the parents' school sector's information in relation to the student's school sector by fitting multinomial logistic regression models predicting school sector enrollment using the data from the survey. The researchers also incorporated controls, including parents' education, income, age, and religious service attendance, to isolate the relationship between parents' school experiences and students' school enrollment. Based on the findings, parents tend to send their children to the school type that they attended. More than any other group, parents who graduated from religious private schools were likely to send their children to the same school type ($p < 0.001$). Rather than researching the school choice that best met their children's needs, parents often enrolled their

children in the school sector they attended. The study results implied that parents that attended Christian schools were more likely to send their children to Christian schools.

Harris Interactive (2013), using an online national survey conducted a study on behalf of the Fordham Institute to identify schools' characteristics important to parents during the school decision-making process (For the quantitative study, 2,007 parents and guardians of kindergarten through 12th-grade students enrolled in public and private schools completed the survey questions. In the survey, the participants responded to questions using the maximum-difference scaling survey technique. The respondents ranked five random educational goals at a time totaling in the ranking of 30 educational goals. The researchers analyzed the responses based on race, household income, political views, religious service attendance, school type, and location.

Harris Interactive (2013), analyzed educational goals by identifying the consistent rankings of the educational goals. The data presented the "non-negotiables," "must-haves," and "desirable" characteristics of schools preferred by the parents. Based on the responses, parents had similar preferences no matter their ethnic, financial, or religious background. The most important characteristic for the majority of the parents was a strong academic program supported by a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program. The factors identified as "must-haves" included the teaching of communication skills, study habits, life skills, self-discipline, and critical thinking skills. Parents and guardians also desired that the schools instill a love for learning and prepare students for college. The focus of the study was private schools rather than distinguishing between the different types of

private schools; however, the results can be generalized to Christian school parents.

A correlational study on factors contributing to private school enrollment by Warmbier (2018), focused on the importance of school facilities and parents' school culture during the decision-making process. Warmbier conducted the quantitative study to find the correlation between schools' enrollment and the schools' facilities and culture. Over 200 kindergartens through eighth-grade private school administrators in California responded to a survey by rating the school facilities and culture conditions using a Likert scale. Once respondents completed the survey, the researcher analyzed the responses utilizing descriptive and inferential statistics. The study results indicated no significant correlation between school enrollment and the school facilities ($p > 0.05$), and the study revealed a mild correlation between school enrollment and school culture ($p < 0.05$). The study results suggested that school facilities and culture are not factors in the decision-making process when parents select schools for their children.

In a quantitative study conducted by The Friedman Foundation for School Choice, 2,056 parents, consisting of those receiving state funding and those not receiving funding, in Indiana, responded to a survey on why they chose to send their children to private schools (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016). In the survey, parents had to rank the factors for enrollment in the order of importance. Catt and Rhinesmith identified themes in the responses. Both parent groups ranked the reasons for sending their children to a private school in the same order of importance. The school choice parents' top-ranked reason was the importance of their children receiving religious education (38%). Better academics (20%) and moral instruction (19%) as the second and third reasons they selected private schools for their children. The study implied

that religious education is an important factor for Christian school parents, no matter their socio-economic backgrounds.

Beabout and Cambre (2013), confirmed the importance of religious and moral education for private school parents. In a qualitative study conducted at St. Thomas Catholic School in New Orleans, the researchers interviewed 16 parents receiving vouchers for their child to attend the Catholic school. The school principal called school parents regarding their availability to participate in the semi-structured interviews. All the participants were mothers of elementary students and received state funding due to meeting the poverty level requirements. The data analysis process included transcribing the interviews and selectively coding the data to identify emerging themes.

The parents reported that they chose to enroll their children in St. Thomas for the religious and moral instruction and small class sizes that were characteristics of the school. The participants reported that they did not have evidence that the school demonstrated the identified factors of importance until their children began attending the school. Therefore, the participants based their decisions on enrollment on the elements they perceived were present at the school. The study's significance is that the parents enrolled their children in the school based on perceptions of the school rather than the school's verifiable factors. The results implied that parent perceptions influence enrollment decisions when parents select schools for their children.

Rodriguez (2014), studied the reasons caregivers in California chose to enroll their children in Christian schools accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). Participants with children enrolled in 39 different ACSI schools completed a survey with pre-determined factors. A total of 297 caregivers completed an electronic survey consisting of three parts. In the first part of the survey, each participant rated each of the 16 factors provided in the survey. The researcher gave the responses numerical values to find the mean and standard deviation utilizing the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 22). In the second part of the survey, participants ranked the top five factors in order of importance. The final section consisted of open-ended questions regarding the participants' background and the opportunity to provide additional important information. The researcher analyzed the data using frequency analysis by comparing the factors of all three sections to find the common factors for school enrollment presented in each survey section. The participants' most highly valued factors were the Biblical instruction and values taught at the school. Unlike studies conducted on school choice options, including public options, the participants rated academic quality (29.6%) below the factors of Biblical teaching (40.4%). The quantitative research supported the importance of religious education on parents' decision-making process.

Another study on enrollment in private schools supported the influence of religion on school choice. An empirical case study on parent religiosity, studied by Richard (2012), yielded similar results. To complete the study, Reichard surveyed 226 parents of children attending a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve religious school utilizing the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL). The researcher

analyzed the statistical data, and 125 of the participants stated they used school choice vouchers to cover the school's tuition expenses. Reichard identified that religious parents preferred sending their children to religious schools. He identified that religious parents chose private religious schools regardless of their affiliated denominations and their financial abilities. However, scholarship programs did make religious private schools more attainable for parents without financial means. The findings supported the implication that religious parents preferred religious education for their children.

Research by Davis (2011), identified contradictory findings. The interpretative qualitative study included a pre-identified list of interview questions. In the study, Davis interviewed participants consisting of three groups: parents, administrators, and students. The participants were all associated with private schools and shared the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in private schools. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed by Davis to identify commonalities among the responses.

All three participant groups identified perceived academic excellence as the primary factor influencing enrollment in private schools regardless of their religious affiliation. Another characteristic of importance identified by the participants was the learning environment. The researcher noted that the parents' perceptions of private schools influenced their factors of significance rather than their actual experiences with their children in the schools. The study implied that private school parents were concerned about a school's perceived academic excellence, making parent perceptions an important factor in the school selection process.

2.10 The Task of Selecting an ECE Program

Most households need ECCE, which puts parents in the difficult position of determining which ECCE programs are most suited to their children (Child Action, 2013). Parents often have to juggle a number of different employment, care, and family responsibilities at once, limiting their range of possible actions and decisions (Choo, 2015; Forry et al., 2014; Johnson, Padilla & Votruba-Dizal, 2017; Spiers, 2015). There is a great deal of variety in the ECE industry, and the many configurations it offers reflect substantial variations in both method and structure. Every family has limited options, and those options may not be a perfect fit for their needs (Family and Childcare Trust, 2013). According to Tronto (2013), evaluation of ECE quality service delivery requires an intensive investigation and requirements and capabilities of all parties concerned need to be top-notch.

Communities often provide a wide range of quality services, leaving parents to make tough choices. Some programs are required to follow state health and safety rules because they have been granted a license. Licensed programs are required to adhere to regulations that restrict the overall number of participants and cap the number of children in each adult day care based on the staff-to-child ratio (Child Care Solutions, 2016). A nanny, a drop-in program at a fitness club, leisure programs and day camps, care by family, friends, and neighbors, parenting groups, and parents after school enrichment activities all fall within the second category of programs that do not need a license.

Additionally, family requirements and resources, cultural norms, and parental preferences about the accessibility, cost, and accessibility of ECE options all play a role in deciding which program is ultimately selected (Coley et al., 2014; Weng-Yon

Wong, 2013). Safety, trustworthiness of staff, parental participation, a robust curriculum, a low student-to-teacher ratio, and a small class size are five of the most important considerations that parents consider when choosing a daycare or preschool (Forry et al., 2014; Navarro-Cruz, 2016; Rothenberg et al., 2013).

Parental education, family wealth, child age, and family structure have all been cited as factors in parental choice of early childhood education (ECE) (Laughlin, 2013; Petitielerc et al., 2017). Language skills, education levels, and racial/ethnic backgrounds are also included (Coley et al., 2014; Miller, Votruba-Dizal, Coley & Koury, 2014; Vesley, 2013; Zachrisson et al., 2013). Like other factors, the activities and instructional techniques used by staff have the greatest impact on parental decision making in ECCE programs. The quality of the center, the variety and quantity of the playground's play equipment, the size of the playground, and the quality of the buildings themselves are all important factors in selecting a program (Bauer, 2014; Boyd, 2014; Forry et al, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Rothenberg et al., 2013).

Further, parents' preferences are often influenced by variables like as the availability of alternatives and the parents' past experience with the ECE program (Citizen Advice, 2015). Opportunities, limitations, and hurdles are all taken into consideration while deciding which ECE program to enroll their child in (Coley et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2014). Parents are under increased pressure to adjust their schedules to accommodate work commitments and ECCE arrangements that are more flexible, and to seek out and implement the most effective options to suit the requirements of their children (Rothenberg et al., 2013).

Consequently, it may be difficult to juggle various programs, and any choice must consider the requirements of the whole family as a whole (Rothenberg et al., 2013). Choosing an early childhood education (ECE) program is a process, not an event. Parental considerations such as a shift in employment or work schedule, a maturing kid, or a change in subsidy policy or money might make an initial ECE choice less appealing. Each of these shifts has the potential to force parents to reevaluate their initial choice of early childhood education for their kid (Coley et al., 2014; Lipscomb, 2013). At the same time, a decision's result might affect how a family looks by restricting or facilitating a parent's ability to take on more responsibility at work or advance their schooling. Furthermore, both good and bad outcomes connected to a prior decision may influence ECE choices made for subsequent children or after relocating to a different area (Citizen Advice, 2015).

Though many people assume that picking an ECE program is a simple question of personal preference, financial constraints sometimes prevent them from enrolling in the most suitable option (Spier, 2015). Parents prioritized a school's skilled and experienced personnel, a pleasant and caring atmosphere, "excellent Ofsted rating," and a reasonable tuition, in that order, according to one survey (Daycare Trust, 2010). Priorities identified in earlier research include an outstanding staff, a warm and welcoming atmosphere, and high-quality facilities that prioritize patients' health and safety. Most parents place a premium on trust (Forry et al., 2014; Rothenberg et al., 2013).

Researchers and policymakers agree that the ECE selection process is time-consuming because it reflects the interplay between parents' individual preferences, circumstances, and available options (Forry et al., 2013; Goodstart Early Learning,

2015). Researchers in the field have gathered data on the elements and procedures involved in ECE selection, but we still don't know much about how parents experience the challenge of finding care for their children. How parents make decisions about early childhood education (ECE), including whether or not to enroll their kid in a low-quality program, what information they use to make these decisions, and how they synthesize all this information to make a final choice. Since people tend to make judgments based on what they consider to be the best option, it stands to reason that the values by which ECEs make their selections would mirror those preferences. In other words, knowing what factors play a role in the choosing process can help parents make decisions based on how they will benefit most from the options available to them.

2.11 Summary of the review of related literature

According to what has been discovered in the body of academic research, choices are made based on the alternatives that seem to be most advantageous to the values and preferences of the individual making the decision; the decision on the selection of ECE is not an exception to this rule. ECE choices are influenced by a variety of variables, including socioeconomic situation, mother education and work, the developmental age of the child, socio-demographic characteristics, and the availability of government subsidies, according to research conducted in this field. In addition, findings from research suggest that parents equate quality with visible actions and pay less attention to structural elements as a component of quality. However, there is widespread agreement that selecting an ECE is challenging and comprises the consequence of several interactions including the choices of parents, the options available to them, and the constraints they face.

In Chapter 3, in-depth information was presented on the strategy and methodology of the investigation, which included a survey research approach and the reasoning behind its selection for the study. Additionally, the researcher's position was discussed in detail. The reason for the participant selection was dissected, along with the procedure for data collection and the approach used to data analysis.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

The methodology describes the research paradigm, design, population, sample and sampling technique. It also deals with the instrument for data collection and its administration. It further spells out the techniques used to gather and analyse the data; the research trustworthiness and ethical considerations are also discussed.

3.1 Research Approach

Believing in the postpositivist ontological worldview, that truth or reality is from a single source, as against the multiple or contextualized perspectives, and thus research needed to be conducted in an objective and not subjective manner, whilst using tried and testable tools, the researcher employed a quantitative research approach in this study. The epistemological foundations of quantitative research are based on the idea that the world is "hard, real, and external to the person" Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 42), which suggests that numerical data may illustrate the source or the effect of occurrences (Bryman, 2012).

There are two types of descriptive research designs: surveys and correlational studies (Alassaf, 2010). Several of these experts in the field of research methodology have expressed the opinion that a survey design would be best suited for the current investigation. Researchers may learn more about a case, facts, activities, phenomena, moral, personal experiences, behavior, and responses to events by conducting a survey study, as stated by Wisker (2007) and Gilbert (2008). In other words, it uses a representative sample to depict the characteristics, attitudes, or points of view of a

larger group. Unlike correlational research, which can only be applied to two groups at a time, a descriptive survey study may be applied to an unlimited number of groups (Alassaf, 2010).

In addition, regarding the benefits of descriptive survey design, the researcher may collect data on the sample using a variety of methods, including in-person interviews, telephone interviews, mailed or hand-delivered questionnaires, and online surveys. Standardized examinations of achievement or performance, as well as attitude measures, are common methods of data collection, as confirmed by Cohen et al., (2011). To "explain a mass of numbers in terms of broad patterns, to tabulate data, and to show data graphically, (p.46)" as Coldeway (1989) puts it, descriptive statistics generated by quantitative approaches are invaluable. Given the aforementioned benefits of descriptive survey research, the researcher wanted to acquire sizable random samples that accurately represented the population in order to collect enough information for characterizing and predicting the variables of interest.

This researcher needed to establish a reliable and efficient relationships among the parents' demographic background and their influence on their choice of early childhood facilities for their children in the Suame Municipal. This further enabled the researcher to generalise the findings to the entire parent population within the Suame Municipality of the Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly in Ghana (Johnson, 1994; Yin, 1994). This is due to the fact that it was anticipated that the questionnaire might give inferential statistics for the purpose of generalizing the outcomes of the study to all public and private early childhood schools located within the Municipality.

3.2 Population

Everyone living in Suame Municipality who is the main caretaker or parent of a kindergartener enrolled in a school of any sort (public or private) for the 2020-2021 academic year was included in the study's demographic.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

A total of 80 respondents were surveyed in this study. A multi-stage sampling approach was employed, in order to ensure evenly and fair representation. First the three educational circuits in the municipality were sampled purposively due to convenience and proximity. Cluster sampling technique was utilized to draw 13 early childhood facilities from each of the three educational circuits in the municipality. Simple random sampling was subsequently used to pick five participants each of the 13 facilities (using 2: 3 ratio in favour of the private schools as they out-number the public early childhood facilities in the municipality). The researcher added the respective parent on the Parents Teacher Association's WhatsApp platforms. The five participants from each selected schools were therefore chosen randomly, using 'yes' and 'no' lottery or lucky-dipped approach on the social media platforms before being included in the survey.

3.4 Instrument for Data Collection

A Personal /Ideological and Economic Factors (PIEF) Likert-type questionnaire was developed and validated through piloting to collect data. Likert-type scales are frequently used in educational research to measure a wide range of variables, including but not limited to: teacher stress and burnout (Dworkin, 2002), self-efficacy (Cheung, 2006), school and teacher effectiveness (Bangert, 2006; Reynolds, 2001;), school organization (Firestone & Firestone, 1984), school climate and culture

(Wagner, 2006), and assessment practices. The Likert scale allows the researcher to efficiently operationalize the variables and then find their linkages, which will help to enhance both the quality of existing early childhood institutions and the options available to parents when making educational decisions for their children.

Some scholars worry that using the in-between values on a Likert scale may compromise the validity and reliability of their studies, while others aren't convinced. Researchers in the field of education should familiarize themselves with the discussion surrounding the inclusion of midpoint opinions on scales (3, 5, 7, and 9 point Likert Scales, for example) because this discussion not only illuminates the issue of research quality but also the reliability of research inferences and recommendations for the educational system. The aforementioned studies show that there is still no consensus on whether or not the Likert scale's midpoints are optimal. However, from a methodological perspective, the question of whether or not to use midpoints on a measurement's reliability and validity is unresolved, as the midpoints may not actually affect reliability and validity (give more consideration to the epistemological issue while designing the rating scale of a measurement) (Matell & Jacoby, 1971). Therefore, it is recommended that academics focus more on the epistemological problem while creating a scoring system for a test. Because of this, the researcher decided to use a 5-point scale that has an average score.

The (PIEF) questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part sought to collect background information of respondents such as age, educational background, length of teaching experience, gender, parents economic, religious and occupational status as well as institutional placement for their children (public and private). The remaining two areas measure parents' views on their personal or ideological reason for a choice

of ECE facility being (11 items), while the remaining (6) items gauge and rate their perceived economic reasons guiding the school choice for children. Each item was measured on a five – point Likert scale – “SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, NS = Note Sure, D = Disagree and SD= Strongly Disagree”.

3.5 Test for Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

In order to validate the (PIEF) questionnaire in this context, it was pilot-tested using the parents in the Kwadaso Municipality, which shares boundary with the Suame Municipality within the Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Area. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the degree of its validity and reliability. Cronbach alpha is often used as an appropriate measure of internal consistency of an instrument. The test of reliability of the instrument based on the responses of the parents from the selected schools yielded a reliability coefficient of .830 (Refer to Appendix E). De Vellis (1991) claims that the coefficient is credible and useful for collecting the necessary information. The items unquestionably had the ability to elicit the anticipated information.

In spite of the potency of the instrument in collecting the required data, five items namely; canteen services (children only), canteen services (free), canteen services (parents pay periodically) were deleted from section B of the draft questionnaire as they deviated significantly. Similarly, statements such as; my choice of early childhood facility depends on extra services they offer (example, bathing, brushing of teeth, weekend-in etc) were deleted due to their non-conformity. The entire questionnaire was, however, not tested again.

3.6 Questionnaire Administration

Before administering the instrument, a personal letter seeking permission to involve the parents in the study was also sent to the education directorate and the respective head of schools (Refer to Appendix C). The questionnaire was administered personally in electronic format using a google monkey survey link. The link was sent specifically those parents sampled randomly on the WhatsApp platform hosting the parents and teachers in the selected schools. Osuala (1982) provides a concise summary of the benefit that results from this, which is that the researcher has the chance to brief respondents to ensure that they understand precisely what the questions represent in order to achieve the appropriate replies. The practice of assuring respondents of their anonymity and confidentiality during research is considered to be ethically sound. For this reason, a cover letter was included with the questionnaire to ensure respondents of these things and to solicit their full cooperation. The letter also indicated a one-week period within which respondents were requested to complete the questionnaire. After the one-week period, the researcher downloaded the completed questionnaire from the internet link. The questionnaires recorded 98.5% return rate 90 out of the 91 sampled respondents completed questionnaires fully were returned them electronically

3.7 Data Analysis

The study applied the statistical data analysis software package called Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS 28.0) (Arbuckle, Fraser, Fisher, Davis, Liang, Lupien, 2013) and HLM 6.0 (Raundebush & Bryk, 2002) for the management and analysis of the quantitative data. A series of analysis methods were used to analyse the data. In order to provide the general information on both the participants and the

variables that were the subject of the research, descriptive analysis was used. With the use of confirmatory factor analysis, we were able to demonstrate validity and reliability for convergent and discriminant validity, construct's composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha for items' internal consistency. In addition, the Relative Importance Index (RII) method was used in order to conduct an analysis of the data that was acquired on the elements that influence the choices that parents make about the early childhood institutions that their children attend. In order to investigate the connections between the variables, the Pearson correlation test was carried out.

3.8 Reliability and Validity

3.8.1 Reliability

Composite and item internal reliabilities of the scales was analyzed (Bagozzi, 1993; Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). For investigations in the social and behavioral sciences, it is essential that the composite reliability (CR) and items' internal consistency CR and Cronbach's alpha ratios all above the minimal criterion of 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981;; Hair et al., 2010). The reliability of the scales was verified by comparing the findings to those of earlier research, which is standard procedure.

3.9 Validity

In accordance with Fornell and Larcker (1981), the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs was investigated in order to determine validity. In order to evaluate both the convergent and the discriminant validity of the model, the Average Variance Explained (AVEs), the square roots of the AVEs, and the Maximum Shared Variance (MSVs) were calculated, evaluated, and compared. Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Hair et al., (2010) recommended the use of AVE values that are greater than or equal to .50, values that are greater than MSV values, and the square root of

AVEs that are greater than correlation coefficients among inter-factors for convergent and discriminant validity, respectively.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are guiding set of principles that helps the researcher in carrying out ethical studies. The following ethical principles were used in conducting the research:

3.10.1 Confidentiality

A written letter of permission and ethical clearance was taken from the University of Education, Winneba to assure the participants of the purpose of the research being of academic and not commercial (see appendix F). The consent of the participants was also sought in a written form, whilst indicating right to opt out of the study at any time deem fit, since the participation purely voluntary.

Maintaining the privacy of study participants is crucial to the concept of confidentiality. In this regard, the researcher obeyed confidentiality of trust by assuring the participants that their confidence would not be used for any ulterior motives. In line with the international best practices, the information gathered from the parents who had children in the early childhood facilities within the Suame Municipality of Ghana were treated with the ultimate confidentiality and as such the identities of the respondents were not disclosed in writing. The data, therefore, were reported in the aggregate. To ensure confidentiality, codes were used on the form instead of their real names. To further ensure confidentiality and privacy, only codes (pseudonyms) were used on questionnaires and to identify respondents. All these were done by the researcher to enhance confidentiality.

3.11 Limitations

The current study, although was conducted with utmost rigor using samples from a lower-middle-income called Ghana (LMIC), the following were some of the possible limitations that the researcher encountered. Of paramount interest amongst them, was the use of self-reports data which is usually seen as a subject of an overt embellishment, deceit, and fabrication or prejudice due to the varying socio-economic environment.

Again, time and financial constraints limited the sample size, the duration of the study and the geographical area covered. Furthermore, the study solely relied on deliberate cooperation of only parents, who enrolled their children in the early childhood facilities in the Suame Municipality as the participants.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.0 Overview

The main purpose of this survey was to examine and rate the factors that influence parental decisions on the choice of early childhood facilities for their children. It also sought to establish relationships between parents' educational, economic and gender status and their early childhood facilities choice within the Suame Municipality in Ghana. This chapter has been grouped into four main parts: respondents' demographic profile, descriptive statistics, validity and reliability and Relative Importance Index (RII) and Regression and Pearson correlation Analysis.

4.1 Respondents Demographic Profile

The respondents' demographic profiling results are presented in Table 4.1. The results show that the majority of the respondents representing 46 (57.5%) of them are female whiles the remaining 34 (42.3%) are males. The reason for this is that mothers normally bring their wards to the facilities as compared to the fathers. Forty seven representing (58.8%) of the participants indicated that they are married whiles 27 (33.7%) of them are single. A significant number of the participants representing 26 (35.4%) revealed that they have two children whiles 21 (26.3%) and 21 (26.3%) of the respondents indicated that the number of their children are one and three respectively. The results show that 8 (10%) of the respondents have four children in the early childhood facilities whiles 4 (5.0)

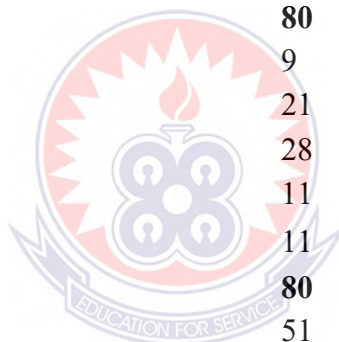
0%) have five or more children in early childhood facilities but majority of them representing 48 (60%) are in private early childhood schools. Regarding the participants relationship with their wards, a 62 of them representing 77.5% reveal that they are parents of the children they bring to the school.

On the age group of the respondents, the findings reveal that a little over 61% of the respondents are between the age of 26 and 35 years. However, 28 representing (35%) of the respondents reveal that their ages at the time of the data collection fell within 31-35 years. It was also found that 31 (38.8%) of the respondents had first degree as their highest level of education as at the time of the study, followed by Diploma education numbering 30 (37.5%) and Post-graduate Degree of 16 (20%). Besides, 51 (63.7%) of the total participants of the study indicated that they are public servants. Also, 30 of the respondents representing 37.5% revealed that their monthly income range is GHC1001 – 2000 while 18 (22.4%) indicated that their monthly income is GHC 2000 – 4000. Finally, 66 of the participants representing 82.4% of the total respondents revealed that they were Christians, whilst 13 representing (16.3%) were Muslims.

Table 4.1: Respondents' Profile

Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	80	100
Male	34	42.5
Female	46	57.5
Marital Status	80	100
Single	27	33.7
Married	47	58.8
Divorced	6	7.5
Number of biological Children	80	100
1 Child	21	26.3
2 Children	26	35.4

3 Children	21	26.3
4 Children	8	10.0
5+ Children	4	5.0
Relationship with Ward	80	100
Parent	62	77.5
Guardian	18	22.5
No. of Children in Early Childhood Facility	80	100
0 Children	5	6.3
1 Child	22	27.4
2 Children	23	28.7
3 Children	17	21.3
4 Children	5	6.3
5+ Children	8	10.0
Type of Early Childhood Facility	80	100
Public	27	33.7
Private	48	60.0
Mission Private	5	6.3
Age Group	80	100
20 - 25	9	11.3
26 - 30	21	26.3
31 - 35	28	35.0
36 - 40	11	13.7
41 - 45	11	13.7
Occupation	80	100
Public Servant	51	63.7
Civil Servant	8	10.0
Private Sector	10	12.5
Teacher on Study Leave	1	1.3
Self-Employed	8	10.0
Security Service	2	2.5
Average Monthly Income	80	100
GHC 200 – 500	13	16.3
GHC 501 – 1000	13	16.3
GHC1001 – 2000	30	37.5
GHC 2000 – 4000	18	22.4
GHC4001 – 10,000	4	5.0
GHC 10,000+	2	2.5
Religion	80	100
Christian	66	82.4
Muslims	13	16.3



Traditional	1	1.3
Level of Education	80	100
Senior High School	3	3.7
Diploma	30	37.5
First Degree	31	38.8
Post-graduate Degree	16	20.0

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics results are presented in Table 4.2. The descriptive statistics assessed in this study comprises assessment of normality using skewness, kurtosis and the mean and standard deviation of the usable research data. The Skewness value was calculated in order to determine whether or not the distribution was symmetrical, and the Kurtosis value was utilized in order to determine whether or not the distribution was "peaked." The findings reveal that both values were within the range of ± 2 , which is indicative of a normal univariate distribution for all items and constructs (George and Mallery, 2010; Gravetter & Wallnau 2014). According to the findings of previous studies (George & Mallery, 2010; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014), the values for asymmetry and kurtosis that fall within the range of -2 to +2 are considered to be acceptable in order to demonstrate that a normal univariate distribution exists. This range also indicates an acceptable value for a good normality of the data (George & Mallery, 2010; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014).

Table 4.2: Normality Assessment

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Observed Variables									
PF1	80	2	5	4.32	0.938	-1.455	.269	1.276	.532
PF2	80	1	5	3.90	0.949	-1.162	.269	1.340	.532
PF3	80	1	5	2.69	1.143	0.541	.269	-0.752	.532
PF4	80	1	5	3.62	1.184	-0.494	.269	-1.004	.532
PF5	80	1	5	4.23	1.018	-1.428	.269	1.572	.532
PF6	80	1	5	3.40	1.176	-0.353	.269	-0.960	.532
PF7	80	1	5	3.39	1.227	-0.197	.269	-0.990	.532
PF8	80	1	5	4.10	0.963	-1.514	.269	2.660	.532
PF9	80	1	5	3.99	1.153	-1.043	.269	-0.034	.532
PF10	80	1	5	4.06	1.011	-1.411	.269	1.899	.532
PF11	80	1	5	3.89	1.067	-1.244	.269	1.132	.532
PF12	80	1	5	2.94	1.246	0.201	.269	-1.172	.532
PF13	80	1	5	3.19	1.264	-0.055	.269	-1.251	.532
PF14	80	1	5	4.46	0.899	-2.241	.269	1.395	.532
FF1	80	1	5	3.68	1.053	-0.978	.269	0.723	.532
FF2	80	1	5	3.41	1.144	-0.456	.269	-0.631	.532
FF3	80	1	5	1.85	0.956	1.646	.269	1.140	.532
FF4	80	1	5	4.49	0.914	-2.462	.269	2.605	.532
FF5	80	1	5	4.25	0.948	-1.989	.269	1.788	.532
FF6	80	1	5	4.00	1.243	-1.137	.269	0.193	.532
Latent Variables									
Gender	80	1	2	1.58	0.497	-0.309	.269	-1.954	.532
Education	80	1	4	2.75	0.819	0.071	.269	-0.787	.532
Economic	80	1	6	2.91	1.214	0.128	.269	-0.186	.532
PF	80	18.00	70.00	52.175	7.412	-1.930	.269	2.875	.532
FF	80	15.00	26.00	21.675	2.243	-0.285	.269	0.053	.532

4.3 Validity and Reliability

Within this part, an analysis of the study data's validity and reliability is presented. Internal consistency (as measured by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), convergent validity (as measured by average variance extracted, or AVE), and discriminant validity (as measured by the square root of AVE) were all evaluated in order to determine the extent to which the data could be used to make accurate predictions (see, Tables 4.3). Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) were the statistical tools that were used in order to evaluate the measurement model's internal consistency and reliability, respectively (see, Table 4.4).

According to the findings, each of the composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha values associated with the latent variables is more than the generally acknowledged cut-off point of 0.7 (Henseler et al., 2015; Hue & Bentler, 1999). This demonstrates that the standards used to assess the constructions are trustworthy. The convergent validity was evaluated by the use of indicator loadings in addition to the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to the findings, each of the 26 items had a factor loading that was more than the minimal threshold of 0.5, indicating that it was substantially loaded onto the respective factors (Hair et al., 2010; Jadhav & Khanna, 2016). The fact that the findings in the AVE values of each component are likewise higher than the suggested threshold of 0.5 demonstrates that the measurement model has appropriate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010; Malhotra & Dash, 2011).

Table 4.3: Validity and Reliability

Latent Variable	Indicators	Loading	CR	EVA	α
Personal Factors	PF1	0.724	0.775	0.741	0.748
	PF2	0.865			
	PF3	0.792			
	PF4	0.818			
	PF5	0.813			
	PF6	0.830			
	PF7	0.821			
	PF8	0.820			
	PF9	0.810			
	PF10	0.753			
	PF11	0.763			
	PF12	0.769			
	PF13	0.737			
	PF14	0.701			
Financial Factors	FF1	0.858	0.746	0.767	0.730
	FF2	0.850			
	FF3	0.750			
	FF4	0.795			
	FF5	0.719			
	FF6	0.795			

Notes: AVE = Average Variance Extracted = $(\sum \text{squared standardized loading}) / (\sum \text{squared})$, CR = Composite Reliability & α = Cronbach's Alpha

Source: Author's Own Construct (2022).

4.4 Factors Influencing Parents' Decisions on the Choice of Early Childhood

Facilities for their Children

The collected data on what influences parents' choices about their children's early education settings was analyzed using the Relative Importance Index (RII) method. In this investigation, relative significance indices were used to rank numerous significant

components. The analysis show the variables and categories with the highest effect on parents' kindergarten facilities preferences. RII value should be $0 \leq RII \leq 1$. For this part of the questionnaire, the five-point likert scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree) was adopted and the relative importance indices (RII) for each of the factors affecting parents' choice of kindergarten facilities. Eq. 1 shows the formula which was used to find out the relative index (Olomolaiye et al., 1987; Chan & Kumaraswamy, 1997).

$$RII = \frac{\sum W}{A \times N} = \frac{5n_5 + 4n_4 + 3n_3 + 2n_2 + 1n_1}{5 \times N}$$

In this instance, N is the total number of respondents and W is the weighting (from 1 to 5) that was assigned to each variable (Kometa, Olomolaiye, & Harris, 1994; Zdemir, 2010; Waris, et al., 2014). The RII number may be anywhere from 0 to 1, with 0 being outside of the range. More emphasis should be placed on factors with larger RII values, and vice versa. According to Chen et al., (2010), the various importance levels derived from RII are High (H) ($0.8 < RII < 1.0$), High-Medium (H-M) ($0.6 < RII < 0.8$), Medium (M) ($0.4 < RII < 0.6$), Medium-Low (M-L) ($0.2 < RII < 0.4$) and Low (L) ($0.0 < RII < 0.2$).

4.5 Overall Ranking of Factors Influencing Parents' Decisions on the Choice of Early Childhood Facilities for their Children

The (RII) analysis results of the overall factors affecting parents' decision on the choice of kindergarten facilities for their wards revealed that among the twenty factors used in this study, nine (9) of them were identified as "High" importance level factors with Relative Importance Index (RII) range of 0.800–0.898. These high-ranking factors which include both personal factors and financial factors are Environment of

school (RII = 0.865), Children bringing food from home (RII = 0.845), Canteen services (parents' pay periodically) (RII = 0.820), Schools' focus on skill development (RII = 0.813), Security of the facility (RII = 0.893), Affordability of fees (RII = 0.830), Flexibility of fee payment structure (RII = 0.898), Convenient mode of payment (Momo, bank, countertop, etc.) (RII = 0.850) and Value-for-money (RII = 0.800).

Table 4.4: Ranking of Factors Affecting Parents' Choice of early childhood

Facilities for their Children

Factors Affecting Parents' Choice of Kindergarten Facilities	RII	Overall Ranking	Importance Level
Personal Factors	0.746	2	H-M
Environment of school	0.865	3	H
School's proximity	0.780	11	H-M
School's high enrollments	0.598	19	M
Fewer children in each class	0.725	14	H-M
Children bringing food from home	0.845	5	H
Canteen services (children buy)	0.680	16	H-M
Canteen services (free)	0.678	17	H-M
Canteen services (parents' pay periodically)	0.820	7	H
Academic performance of pupils	0.798	10	H-M
Schools' focus on skill development	0.813	8	H
Availability of transportation	0.778	12	H-M
Beauty and style of school uniforms	0.588	20	M
Extra services the school offer	0.638	18	H-M
Security of the facility	0.893	2	H
Financial Factors	0.800	1	H
Low level of fees	0.735	13	H-M
High level of fees	0.683	15	H-M
Affordability of fees	0.830	6	H
Flexibility of fee payment structure	0.898	1	H
Convenient mode of payment (Momo, bank, countertop, etc.)	0.850	4	H
Value-for-money	0.800	9	H

From Table 4.4, flexibility of fee payment structure was ranked as the highest and the most important factor with RII value of 0.898, which shows that the most important parameter parents based on it to decide the early childhood facility for their children education is flexible school fees payment structure. This was respectively followed by Security of the facility (RII = 0.893) and environment of school (RII = 0.865). The Security of the early childhood school facility was ranked as the second highest factor with an RII value of 0.893 and the general environment of the school was also ranked the third most important factor parents consider before sending their wards to an childhood facility , with an RII value of 0.865.

Finally, Convenient mode of payment (Momo, bank, countertop, etc.) was ranked as the fourth most important factor for parents' choice of early childhood facility for their wards with RII value of 0.850. The results also show that among the top nine factors, five personal factors and 4 financial factors have been rated as "High" priority indicators by the respondents. However, on average, RII, financial factors recorded RII of 0.800 which indicates that it was ranked the "High" important group of factors, and personal factors scored RII value of 0.742 which means the personal factors were ranked as "High-Medium" important factors to be considered. This result show that parents place high premium on financial factors when deciding on which early childhood facility they should choose for their children's education.

Besides, out of the 11 remaining factors, nine (9) of them were ranked by parents as "High-Medium" important factors. These comprises Academic performance of pupils (RII = 0.798), School's proximity (RII = 0.780), Availability of transportation (RII = 0.778), Low level of fees (RII = 0.735), Fewer children in each class (RII = 0.725), High level of fees (RII = 0.683), Canteen services (children buy) (RII = 0.680),

Canteen services (free) (RII = 0.678) and Extra services the school offer (RII = 0.638). On an average, “High-Medium” RII value for personal factors is 0.589 and that of financial factors is 0.709.

This also confirms that financial factors are the most important factors that parents consider before choosing kindergarten facilities for their children early childhood education. Finally, the RII results revealed that the beauty and style of school uniforms (RII = 0.588) and School’s high enrollments (RII = 0.598) were ranked as the “Medium’ importance factors to be considered by parents when choosing early facilities for their children. In a nutshell, the RII results showed that the factors affecting parents’ decision to choose early childhood facilities for their children are ranked between “High” and “Medium” importance level.

4.5.1 Personal Factors

The RII was used to rank only the personal factors that parents consider before choosing kindergarten for the children and the results are presented in Table 4.5. The results show that the parents who took part of the study ranked the “security of the school facility” as the most important personal factor affecting parents’ decision on selecting kindergarten for their children with an RII of 0.893.

The “environment of school” and “Children bringing food from home” were also ranked the second and third “High” important factors parents consider when making decisions regarding the early childhood facilities they should send their children for education. These factors recorded RII values of 0.865 and 0.845 respectively. The RII results further reveal that the beauty and style of school uniforms (RII = 0.588) and School’s high enrollments (RII = 0.598) were ranked as the “Medium’ importance

factors to be considered by parents when choosing early childhood facilities for their children.

Table 4.5: RII and ranking of Personal Factors

Personal Factors	RII	Category Ranking	Overall Ranking	Importance Level
Environment of school	0.865	2	3	H
School's proximity	0.780	7	11	H-M
School's high enrollments	0.538	14	20	M
Fewer children in each class	0.725	9	14	H-M
Children bringing food from home	0.845	3	5	H
Canteen services (children buy)	0.680	10	16	H-M
Canteen services (free)	0.678	11	17	H-M
Canteen services (parents' pay periodically)	0.820	4	7	H
Academic performance of pupils	0.798	6	10	H-M
Schools' focus on skill development	0.813	5	8	H
Availability of transportation	0.778	8	12	H-M
Beauty and style of school uniforms	0.588	13	19	M
Extra services the school offer	0.638	12	18	H-M
Security of the facility	0.893	1	2	H

4.5.3 Financial Factors

The results presented in Table 4.6 show the RIIs and ranks of the 6 factors categorized under the “Financial Factors”. The RII results show that the participants of this research project ranked the “Flexibility of fee payment structure” as the highest most important financial factor that influence parents' decision to choose kindergarten facilities for their children, with an RII of 0.898. This was followed by “Convenient

mode of payment (Momo, bank, countertop, etc.)” (RII = 0.850), “Affordability of fees (RII = 0.830) and “Value for money” which recorded RII value of 0.800.

Table 4.6: RII and ranking of Financial Factors

Financial Factors	RII	Category Ranking	Overall Ranking	Importance Level
Low level of fees	0.735	5	13	H-M
High level of fees	0.683	6	15	H-M
Affordability of fees	0.830	3	6	H
Flexibility of fee payment structure	0.898	1	1	H
Convenient mode of payment (Momo, bank, countertop, etc.)	0.850	2	4	H
Value-for-money	0.800	4	9	H

Table 4.7 Relationship between parents educational, economic, and gender status and their choice of early childhood facilities.

DV	IV	Unstandardized Estimate	Standardized Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P-value	Interpretation
School choice	< Gender	0.109	0.089	0.043	2.572	0.010	Supported
	-- Edu						Supported
	Backg d	0.540	0.510	0.039	13.786	***	
School choice	< Econ			0.048		0.0	supported
	-- Backg d	0.049	0.035		1.023	36	

Significance of Pearson’s Correlations: * $p < 0.050$, ** $p < 0.010$, & *** $p < 0.001$

The Pearson Correlation results of the direct relationships between the constructs are presented in Table 4.7. The results reveal that parents’ gender had the strongest significant positive effect in favour of the females on early childhood facilities choice

($\beta = 0.510$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$). This finding signifies that there is a significant positive relationship between parents' gender and early childhood facility choice. Similarly, the Pearson Correction results show that there is a significant positive relationship between parents' educational status and early childhood facility choice ($\beta = 0.089$, $p\text{-value} = 0.010$). This implies that the more educated parents are, the more improved their early childhood facility choice would be.

4.6 Summary of the results

The main purpose of the research was to examine and rate the factors that influence parental decisions on the choice of early childhood facilities for their children. It also sought to establish relationships between parents' educational, economic and gender status and their early childhood facilities choice within the Suame Municipality in Ghana.

The results show that the majority of the respondents representing 57.5% of them are females while the remaining 42.3% are males. On the age group of the respondents, the findings reveal that a little over 61% of the respondents are between the age of 26 and 35 years. However, (35%) of the respondents revealed that their ages at the time of the data collection fell within 31-35 years. It was also found that a significant 38.8% of the respondents had first degree as their highest level of education as at the time of the study, followed by Diploma education (37.5%) and Post-graduate Degree (20%). Besides, 63.7% of the participants of the study indicated that they are public servants. Also, a significant number of the respondents representing 37.5% revealed that their monthly income range is GHC1001 – 2000 while 22.4% indicated that their monthly income is GHC 2000 – 4000. Finally, majority of the participants representing 82.4% of the total respondents reveal that they were Christians.

4.7 Ranking of personal and economic factors influencing parents' early childhood facilities

The RII results show that the factors affecting parents' decision to choose early childhood facilities for their children are ranked between "High" and "Medium" importance level. The results also show that among the top nine factors, five personal factors and four financial factors have been rated as "High" priority indicators by the respondents. However, on average RII, financial factors recorded RII of 0.800 which indicates that it was ranked the "High" important group of factors, and personal factors scored RII value of 0.742 which indicates that the personal factors were ranked as "High-Medium" important factors to be considered. This result means that parents place high premium on financial factors when deciding on which early childhood facilities they should choose for their children education.

4.8 Financial factors

The RIIs and ranks of the six factors categorized under the "Financial Factors". The RII results show that the participants of this research project ranked the "Flexibility of fee payment structure" as the highest most important financial factor that influence parents' decision to choose kindergarten facilities for their children, with an RII of 0.898. This was followed by "Convenient mode of payment (Momo, bank, countertop, etc.)" (RII = 0.850), "Affordability of fees (RII = 0.830) and "Value for money" which recorded RII value of 0.800.

4.9 Personal Factors

The results show that the parents who took part of the study ranked the “Security of the school facility” as the most important personal factor affecting parents’ decision on selecting kindergarten for their children with an RII of 0.893. The “Environment of school” and “children bringing food from home” were also ranked the second and third “High” important factors parents consider when making decisions regarding the early childhood facility, they should send their children for education. These factors recorded RII values of 0.865 and 0.845 respectively. The RII further results reveal that the beauty and style of school uniforms (RII = 0.588) and School’s high enrollments (RII = 0.598) were ranked as the “Medium’ importance factors to be considered by parents when choosing early facilities for their children.

4.10 Relationship between parents educational, economic, and gender status and their choice of early childhood facilities.

The results reveal that parents’ gender had the strongest significant positive effect in favour of the females on early childhood facilities choice ($\beta = 0.510$, p-value = 0.000). This finding signifies that there is a significant positive relationship between parents’ gender and early childhood facility choice. Similarly, the Pearson Correlation results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between parents’ educational status and early childhood facility choice ($\beta = 0.089$, p-value = 0.010). This implies that the more educated parents, the more improved their early childhood facility choice would be.

The Pearson Correlation results of the direct relationships between the constructs are presented in Table 4.7. The results reveal that parents' gender had the strongest significant positive effect in favour of the females on early childhood facilities choice ($\beta = 0.510$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$). This finding signifies that there is a significant positive relationship between parents' gender and early childhood facility choice. Similarly, the Pearson Correction results show that there is a significant positive relationship between parents' educational status and early childhood facility choice ($\beta = 0.089$, $p\text{-value} = 0.010$). This implies that the more educated parents are, the more improved their early childhood facility choice would be. The results show that there is a significant positive relationship between parents' economic status and early childhood facility choice ($\beta = 0.035$, $p\text{-value} = 0.036$). This implies that the more parents are financially sound, the more improved their early childhood facility choice would be.

4.11 Discussion of the Results

4.11.1 Personal Factors influencing parental decision on the choice of early childhood facilities

In this study personal factors fell slightly behind the economic factors in terms of parents rating when selecting early childhood facility for their wards. Similar research findings indicate that each parent order the early childhood facility quality indicators according to variations in the personal preference (; Joshi 2014; Matei, 2014; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). The overall ratings, however, suggest that the parents who took part in this study ranked the “security of the early childhood facility” as the most important personal factor affecting their decisions on selecting a school for the children with an RII of 0.893. The “environment of school” and “children bringing food from home” were also ranked the second and third “high” important factors

parents consider when making decisions regarding the early childhood facilities, they should send their children to be educated.

These findings are in sharp contrast to that of Lockwood's (2014) study, which rated religious influence, academic and strong discipline respectively in line with the personal factors affecting parents school choice for their children. The possible deviation in the two studies is that the Lockwood's study was conducted in the USA, which also involved parents enrolling their children in the entire elementary school spectrum, while the present study was from the Ghanaian context involving parents having enrolled their kids in the early childhood facilities only. The cultural, aspirations and personal or socio-economic values of USA and the Ghanaian parents, likewise the deferring educational streams might have accounted for the sharp contrast in the two studies findings, regarding the topmost personal considerations of the parents when enrolling their wards in a given school. The other possible conjecture could be that school facilities in the USA regarding safety, environment and food choice already meet the expected standard across schools, whilst in the Ghanaian context such facilities are rather emerging, hence their decision to top rate deferring school quality issues.

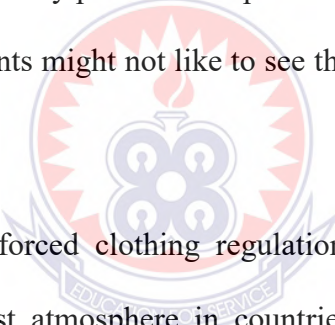
When choosing an early childhood education program for their children, parents place a high priority on their children attending a secure, trustworthy, and loving school setting, according to the results of this research, which confirmed the findings of Day Care Trust (2010). In a similar vein, the majority of people who took part in this study regarded their own personal safety and security as both an essential quality indicator and a top personal priority (Lopez Boo, Araujo & Tome, 2016; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). According to Matei (2014) and Natsiopoulou and Vitoulis (2015), parents rank

safety, child-teacher interactions, learning and supporting environment as extremely important when choosing an early childhood education (ECE) facility for their children. As a result, parents' choices of quality indicators agreed with these reports. In addition, Maria, Tracy, and Nkoli confirmed the findings of Forry et al., (2014) and Rothenberg et al., (2013), which said that a welcoming, caring, enabling, and conducive learning environment is a priority for parents to consider when making decisions about early childhood education.

The implication of this findings, which appear to be consistent with a number of the other findings from the international literature is that the Ghanaian parents seem to know what constitutes quality ECE service delivery. The other possibility is that the Ghanaian parents in this study have their children at heart and therefore want to best care for them. They therefore mindful of the children welfare, safety security both physical and food. This probably explains why the parents prefer the ECE facilities that allow children to bring their own food to school in order to guarantee their food security and possible reduction of cases of food poisoning.

It is, however, surprising to have arrived at these findings relating to the personal facts that are often considered by the parents, since in the Ghanaian culture and traditions, children are seen as precious gift from God, who are to be given the utmost protection both physically and spiritually. Failure to do might result in possible curses on the negligent parents, who might not prosper in life. The parents in this might have therefore taken a cue from Goldhaber's (1999) argument that parents personal decision regarding their school choice for the wards are premised on two main yardsticks: thus, knowing how to select good schools; and how the good school also provide value for money educational service to the clientele.

The RII results in this study further revealed that the beauty and style of school uniforms (RII = 0.588) and School's high enrollments (RII = 0.598) were ranked as the "Medium" importance factors to be considered by parents when choosing early facilities for their children. Many believe that the practice of mandating school uniforms in elementary and secondary schools across England dates back farther than in any other nation. Christ's Hospital in London is a school for the orphaned and destitute children of the area (Scott, 2014, p. 1). The founders gave all the kids identical blue jackets to foster a feeling of community and harmony. The idea of uniforms spread throughout England and today "bluecoat schools" are still a prominent part of British institutions. The implications therefore could be that school uniforms rather be preferred by parents with poor socio-economic background, which the financially sound parents might not like to see their kids in school uniform, owing to its less classic history.



Uniforms and strictly enforced clothing regulations are often seen as an integral element of the collectivist atmosphere in countries ranging from South Africa to South Korea (Kim, Kasser, & Lee, 2003). South Korean students have been required to wear uniforms since the 1990s in an effort to improve school discipline, equality, and academic achievement (Park, 2013). Until the 1980s, all South Korean students were legally forced to wear the same school uniform (Park, 2013). Wilken (2012) found that in South Africa, both teachers and parents agreed that students must wear uniforms to school.

Contrary, in this study, parents of both socio-economic values (high and low class) rather rated school safety and environment as their topmost priority and instead ranked school uniform attractive and style as a less priority. One would have expected

the parents who rated safety and environment as high rated factors in their early childhood facility choice to have agreed with Stanley (1996) who concluded that school uniform policy could be one of the strategies to restore safety school environment and order in the classroom. Additionally, ideally a well-designed uniform has the capacity to provide warmth, whilst preventing sun-related skin deformity, however, in reality, uniforms are hardly well-designed (Reidy, 2021).

However, the parents in this study might rather believe in the studies that have concluded that there is no direct relationship between children academic performance and behaviour in relation to the wearing of school uniform (Hattie 2009; Gentile and Imberman, 2012). The possible explanation could be that in Ghana wearing of school uniform had been a common practice in both public and private early childhood facilities and that all public school by law wear same dress irrespective of parents' socio-economic or educational status.

The implication of this present study is that the parents surveyed rather value and prioritize other variables other than the school uniform, when selecting early childhood facilities. School owners ought not to place too much premium by prescribing or designing high class and attractive uniforms for the school children, since the parents being their customers look beyond such a factor. The school owners should therefore prioritize by improving the overall safety measure and that of developmentally appropriate school environment as a way of attracting more parent to enroll their children in the schools.

Further implication will be in line with Wilson's (2016) assertion that parents have prioritized choices in the school market. School owners therefore ought to find the trump card, having known what informs their choice, to attract the parents to select their school over numerous others in the market place. Again, the parents in this might have therefore taken a cue from Goldhaber's (1999) argument that parents personal decision regarding their school choice for the wards are premised on two main yardsticks: thus, knowing how to select good schools; and how the good school also provide value for money educational service to the clientele.

4. 11. 2 Economic factors influencing parental decision on the choice of early childhood facilities

This result in this study also suggest that parents place high premium on economic factors as against that of the personal factors when deciding which early childhood facilities, they should choose for their children education. The parent in this study, however, top-ranked six factors categorized under the economic or financial factors. The RII results showed that the participants of this research project ranked the “flexibility of fee payment structure” as the highest most important financial factor that influence parents’ decision to choose early facilities for their children, with an RII of 0.898. This was followed by “Convenient mode of payment (Momo, bank, countertop, etc.)” (RII = 0.850), “Affordability of fees (RII = 0.830) and “Value for money” which recorded RII value of 0.800.

This study therefore corroborates the finding from Day Care Trust's (2010), which equally reported that parents identified cost as the top-most priority when making ECE selection for the kids. Similarly, studies such as the possibility of the parents rating economic issues higher could be due to the seemingly economic challenging of

the Ghanaian the wake of financial crises in the country in the wake of covid-19 and Russian-Ukraine and its subsequent impact on the Ghanaian economy. It is not surprising that the parent would further consider payment of the school fees by instalment, flexible mood of payment and above all the value for money rating respectively.

The implication therefore could be that school owners should consider giving parents flexible school fees payment plans and options such as mobile cash platforms in order to reduce the other cost of lorry fares to the school premises to make payment of the ward's fees. Schools that provide such flexible payment plans and value for money options to that parents as a form of reducing the financial burden on the parents stand the chance of increasing the school enrolment, since most parents might select such early childhood facilities for the ward's education.

4.11.3 Relationship between parents educational, economic, and gender status and their choice of early childhood facilities.

The results revealed that parents' gender had the strongest significant positive effect in favour of the females on early childhood facilities choice ($\beta=0.510$, p -value=0.000). This finding signifies that there is a significant positive relationship between parents' gender and early childhood facility choice. This finding situates well with similar studies conducted in the other parts of the world including O'Donoghue (2013), who indicates that mothers seem to be at the centre of active decision-making with regard to their children's educational choices and social class affects the way they approach education issues. Cooper (2005), notes that gender positioning of working-class Afro-American mothers determine how they make school choice decisions. However, middle-class mothers demonstrate a form of behaviour pattern as

they use their success in child-rearing and their choice of educational pathways, to increase their agentic properties. This also influences how they evaluate their children's success in relation to others (Brantlinger, 2003). The possible explanation of this phenomenon, whereby mothers appear to on top of issues regarding school choice than the fathers could be due to their unique caring nature and close association with their children. In the Ghanaian setting, mothers are those, who mostly spend most hours with the children at home, while the fathers go out our labouring to meet the economic needs of the family. Mother often take children to school and back home. They rather in most homes are those who assist the children at home to complete their school assignments and home works.

Again, due to the transitional issues in early childhood education, especially on the children's first day at school, mothers often send the kids to school on day. This is partly due to the caring nature of the mothers, who have the unique approach of comforting and assuring the children of their safety and security issues, as most children might go through separation anxiety and discomfort.

In view of this, school owners should tailor out unique strategies to gain the attention of mothers, who are the probable costumers, when it comes to school choice for their children. This is based on the premise that in most families in this study, the mothers might be the ones whose opinions would count most when selecting a school for the children. The study implies that mothers, might place much premium on the children education than the fathers in this study, despite the fact that mostly the fathers do the actual school payment. The Person Correction results in this study showed that there is a significant positive relationship between parents' educational status and early childhood facility choice ($\beta = 0.089$, $p\text{-value} = 0.010$). This implies that in this study,

the more educated parents, the more improved their early childhood facility choice would be. Krull (2016), however, in a similar study found no significant difference between families with different incomes and the importance of academics ($p > .070$), and there was no significant difference between families with different educational levels and the importance of academics ($p > .099$). The responses indicated that most parents did not exhaust their options during the school selection process and rather rely beyond their educational level. The parents' important factors were their own school experiences, financial status, expected enrollment trends, and socioeconomic background (Prichard & Swezey, 2016).

The study implied that parents' educational status did not influence their educational decisions for their children despite their attainment of higher level of education. The possible explanation could be that in the USA where this study was conducted, the parents might have equal or similar educational qualifications and more importantly, the literacy rate in USA far outweighs that of Ghana. Hence, the parents might look beyond their educational status and rather consider other equally important variables regarding educational institutions choice for their children.

This outcome is, however, consistent with Bosetti's (2004), research, which reveals that parents with a bachelor's degree or above were considerably more acquainted with magnet schools and education savings accounts than parents without a college degree. Bosetti's study was conducted in 2004. The findings from Bosetti (2004) still hold true today: parents who have greater levels of education and money are more likely to be aware about the many educational alternatives available to them and more responsive to the development of choice laws in their state.

The plausible explanation to this consistency in the finding could be that all other things being equal, parents with higher formal education are expected to be well informed regarding what constitutes developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education than those with lower educational status. They would therefore be in a position to make such a better choice. This could imply that, parents with lower educational status might settle for low quality early childhood facilities for their children to attend and thereby affecting their further career choice.

The results in this study further showed that there is a significant positive relationship between parents' economic status and early childhood facility choice ($\beta = 0.035$, p -value = 0.036). This implies that the more parents are financially sound, the more improved their early childhood facility choice would be. Contrary to the finding in this study, Ball and Vincent (1998) and Teske and Schneider (2001), argued that the magnitude of parents' awareness of factors influencing choice depends more on parents' motivational functions than their socio-economic backgrounds. The possibility in this study might be that the parents in that study could be have been of equal socio-economic status, hence other variables would have been prioritized.

Phillips et al., (2012), found that these choices operated in different spheres when they studied the intra-district transfer policies of an urban school district. This is due to the fact that advantaged parents choose the most affluent schools with the best academic records, while disadvantaged parents choose away from the least affluent schools with the worst academic records to schools that are slightly better. In addition, parents who have greater resources tend to pick schools that have considerably lower percentages of students who are eligible for free school meals in comparison to other schools that are open to their children (Burgess et al., 2009,

2015; Riedel et al., 2010). Bosetti's (2004), survey research in Canada revealed that more students from lower income strata attend religious private schools than non-religious private schools. On the other hand, the number of students from higher income strata attending non-religious private schools more than doubled the number of students who attend religious private schools. Bosetti's (2004), research was conducted in Canada. Riedel et al., (2010), conducted research on the topic of school choice in Germany. Their findings showed that families living in disadvantaged areas in Germany were more likely to send their children to the assigned schools when compared to families living in neighborhoods with advantages.

The connection between parents' socioeconomic situation and the amount of school awareness and information collecting that they do has also been the subject of a great deal of research and study (Azmat & Garcia Montalvo, 2012; Goldring & Shapira, 1993). Researchers Hanushek et al., (2007), looked at families with children attending charter schools and found that families with lower incomes were less concerned about the quality of their children's education than families with higher incomes. As a consequence of this, a lower percentage of low-income families than higher-income families make the option to move schools for their children. The implication may be that it is commonly accepted that school choice policies should level the playing field for low-income, disadvantaged families when it comes to selecting a desirable school. This is because low-income, disadvantaged families do not have access to financial resources comparable to those that are available to families from the middle or upper middle classes.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the summary, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for this study in line with the research questions.

5.1 Summary of the Results

The purpose of the study, therefore, was to examine and rate the factors that influence parental decisions on the choice of early childhood facilities for their children within the Suame Municipality in Ghana. It also sought to establish relationships between parents' educational, economic and gender status and their early childhood facilities choice within the Suame Municipality in Ghana. The study was grounded through the lenses of the Migration, Rational Choice Theories by building on the Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice. Using a survey design within the quantitative approach in the positivism paradigm, the study addressed three main research questions. **A multi-stage simple random sampling technique was employed to survey 80 respondents. Confirmatory Factor Analysis was utilized to determine validity and reliability, whilst the relative importance index used to rank the overall factors influencing parents' school choice. Pearson Correlation Test was performed to explore the relationship between parents' educational, economic and gender status regarding their choice of early childhood facilities for the children.** The results suggest that parents place high premium on financial factors, when deciding on early childhood facilities for their children to attend. The results also indicate that security and safety were ranked as top-most priorities among the personal factors, whilst the environment of school and children bringing food

from home were also ranked as the second and third high important personal factors parents consider. Similarly, flexibility of fee payment structure was ranked as the top-most financial factor that influences parents' early childhood facilities choice for their children. This was followed by convenient mode of payment, affordability of fees, and value for money. The results further revealed that parents' gender, educational, and economic status had the strongest significant positive effect on their early childhood facilities choice

Ranking of personal and economic factors influencing parents' early childhood facilities

The RII results showed that the factors affecting parents' decision to choose early childhood facilities for their children are ranked between "High" and "Medium" importance level. The results also showed that among the top nine factors, five personal factors and 4 economic (financial) factors have been rated as "High" priority indicators by the respondents. However, on average RII, economic (financial) factors which indicates that it was ranked the "High" important group of factors, and personal factors scored which indicates that the personal factors were ranked as "High-Medium" important factors to be considered. This result means that parents place high premium on financial factors when deciding on which early childhood facilities they should choose for their children education.

Personal Factors

The results showed that the parents who took part of the study ranked the "security of the school facility" as the most important personal factor affecting parents' decision on selecting early childhood facilities for their children.. The "environment of school" and "children bringing food from home" were also ranked the second and third

“High” important factors parents consider when making decisions regarding the early childhood facilities, they should send their children for education. . The RII further results revealed that the beauty and style of school uniforms and School’s high enrollments were ranked as the “Medium’ importance factors to be considered by parents when choosing early facilities for their children.

Financial factors

The RIIs and ranks of the six factors categorized under the “Financial Factors”. The RII results showed that the participants of this research project ranked the “Flexibility of fee payment structure” as the highest most important financial factor that influence parents’ decision to choose early childhood- facilities for their children, with an RII . This was followed by “Convenient mode of payment (Momo, bank, countertop, etc.)” “Affordability of fees and “Value for money”.

Relationship between parents educational, economic, and gender status and their choice of early childhood facilities

The results revealed that parents’ gender had the strongest significant positive effect in favour of the females on early childhood facilities choice.. This finding signifies that there is a significant positive relationship between parents’ gender and early childhood facility choice. Similarly, the Person Correction results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between parents’ educational status and early childhood facility choice.. This implies that the more parents are educated, the more improved their early childhood facility choice would be.

Similarly, the Pearson Correction results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between parents' educational status and early childhood facility.. This implies that the more educated parents, the more improved their early childhood facility choice would be. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between parents' economic status and early childhood facility choice.. This implies that the more parents are financially sound, the more improved their early childhood facility choice would be.

5.2 Conclusions

Some conclusions are drawn from this survey that add to the body of knowledge regarding the factors influencing parental choice of early facilities in the Ghanaian context. Essentially, the study contributes to the little-known research evidence in the Ghanaian context regarding this phenomenon. Four main conclusions are made in line with the answers to the research questions, likewise the results and the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

1. The parents in this study prioritized economic or financial issues over personal considerations regarding factors influencing parents' early childhood facilities selection.
2. Safety, and options such as bringing food to the early childhood facilities and promotion of secured environmental factors are top-most priorities of the Ghanaian parents surveyed in this study. These were even rated ahead of the educational learning outcomes to be received by the children.
3. Parents prefer flexible mode and instalment payment options of school fees as against the traditional banking hall or in-person approach.

4. Educated females, and middle-class parents are well-informed about the factors influencing early childhood facilities choice ahead of their male counterparts and lower class respectively.

Consequently, these findings in this study align with the Rational Choice Theory employed in this study, in that the parents make rational choice of early childhood facility based on their own preferences regarding the prevailing influencing factors. They therefore have appreciation of value for money in line with school selection for their children.

5.3 Recommendations

1. The early childhood entrepreneurs ought to provide value for money services for the current and prospective parents to guide their selection process
2. School owners ought to prioritize safety and secured environmental conditions in their schools in order to meet the parents' unique selections criteria
3. School owners ought to implement flexible mode of payment by exploring payment by instalments options to meet the demand of parents and to also increase enrolment in the schools
4. Ghana Education Service should organize workshops to sensitize parents and school owners on the known actual quality issues underlying ECE facilities choice, as it pertains to the global standards, while narrowing it to the Ghanaian context.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

The researcher believes that using a mixed method design to explore the width and breadth of the concept of parental school choice, while ranking parents influencing factors regarding their school choice for the kids could be an ideal suggestion.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Limitations constrain the study from being completed as scheduled (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Some limitations were therefore evident with this survey study. First, there were methodological limitations regarding the sample size selection for the study and the actual study location. The study used 80 parents enrolling their children in the private and public early childhood facilities but was only selected from one municipality in Ghana. Due to this, the findings and results cannot be safely generalized to all the parents in the municipality. However, due diligence employed throughout the data collection and analysis could guarantee some limited generalization and credibility of the findings in the study.

Further, the seeming lack of relevant and related literature on the parents' early childhood facility choice, especially in the Ghanaian context, meant that the literature used was mainly from the foreign context and that could be viewed as a limitation. However, consented efforts were made to gather some closely related but few local literature materials whilst juxtaposing them with the international sources to give the needed blend for a proper literature review carried out. Despite these possible limitations, it could be concluded that the right choice was made by employing the survey design. It appropriately addressed the relevant research questions, whilst exploring parents' perception regarding factors considered before enrolling their children in the early childhood facilities in Ghana.

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APPENDIX

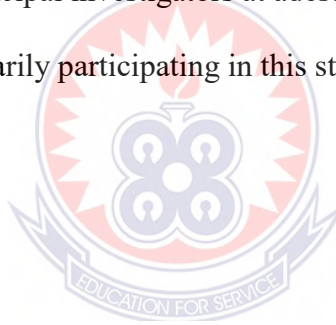
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION – WINNEBA FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES RESEARCH STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear parent,

As part of my postgraduate studies at University of Education, Winneba, I am conducting a research study and request that you participate. I am researching factors influencing parental decision on the choice of early childhood facility for their wards. You have been selected because you are parent. Your participation involves answering this questionnaire which will require approximately 15minutes of your time. Your honest response to all the questions is very important to this research. I do not expect any negative side-effect to participating in this study. To protect you, do not write your name or any personal details that can identify you on this questionnaire. Moreover, the responses you provide here will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Your participation is voluntary and you may decide to opt out at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, you may reach my supervisor who is the principal investigators at adesuafo@gmail.com, 055-597-1000.

Do you consent to voluntarily participating in this study? Yes [] No []



Background Data

- X1. Gender: Male [] Female []
- X2. Marital status: Single [] Married [] Divorced []
Widowed []
- X3. Number of children/wards
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5+[]
- X4. Relationship with ward
Guardian [] Parent []
- X5. Number of Children in early childhood facility
0 [] 1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5+[]
- X6. Type of early childhood facility your wards/children attend
Private [] Public [] Mission Private []
- X7. Age range: 20 – 25 [] 26 – 30 [] 31 – 35 []
36 – 40 [] 40 – 45 [] 46 – 50 []
50 + []
- X8. Occupation Public Servant [] Civil Servant [] Security
Services [] Private Sector []
Self-employed [] Other (please specify)
- X9. Average monthly income level
GHC 200 – 500 [] GHC 501 – 1000 []
GHC1001 – 2000 [] GHC 2000 – 4000 []
GHC4001 – 10,000 [] GHC 10,000+ []
- X10. Religion
Christianity [] Islam [] Traditional []
Other (please specify)
- X11. Level of education
Basic education [] Secondary [] Diploma []
First degree [] postgraduate degree(s) []

Factors: Personal/ideological

For each of the following statements, indicate your level of (dis)agreement by choosing from the options: **Strongly Agree (SA)** **Agree (A)** **Not Sure (NS)** **Disagree (D)** **Strongly Disagree (SD)**, & checking (✓) in the right box

	Statements	A		S		D
		5)	4)	3)	2)	1)
1	My choice of early childhood facility depends on the environment of school					
2	My choice of early childhood facility depends on the school's proximity					
3	My choice of early childhood facility depends the school's high enrollments					
4	My choice of early childhood facility depends fewer children in each class					
5	Accessibility of feeding options for children:					
5i	Bringing food from home					
5ii	Canteen services (children buy)					
5iii	Canteen services (free)					
5iv	Canteen services (parents' pay periodically)					
6	My choice of early childhood facility depends on the academic performance of pupils					
7	My choice of early childhood facility depends on the schools' focus on skill development (examples: learning how to play musical instruments, cadet etc)					
8	My choice of early childhood facility depends on availability of transportation					
9	My choice of early childhood facility depends on the beauty and style of school uniforms					
10	My choice of early childhood facility depends on the extra services they offer (example, bathing, brushing of teeth, weekend-in etc)					
11	My choice of early child hood facility depends on the security of the facility					

Factors: Economic Factors

For each of the following statements, indicate your level of (dis)agreement by choosing from the options: **Strongly Agree (SA)** **Agree (A)** **Not Sure (NS)** **Disagree (D)** **Strongly Disagree (SD)**, & checking (✓) in the right box

	Statements	A	4)	S	2)	D
		5)		3)		1)
1	My choice of early childhood facility depends on the low level of fees					
2	My choice of early childhood facility depends on the high level of fees					
3	My choice of early childhood facility depends on affordability of fees					
4	My choice of early childhood facility depends on the fee payment structure					
	Flexibility of payment terms					
	Mode of payment (Momo, bank, countertop etc)					
5	I choose an early childhood facility that will provide value-for-money services					

