

Determinants of school choice: Understanding parental preference for public and private schools in Gilgit-Baltistan

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Abstract

This descriptive study aimed at exploring the factors affecting parental choice of a school. It also explored the sources of information which parents use in school choice. The data were collected through questionnaire from 300 parents whose children were studying in either public or private school. The questionnaire contained list of twenty one factors which may have affected decision of school choice and a list of six sources of information regarding the school choice. The most influential factors in choice of public schools proved to be a. students' moral development b. quality of the teachers c. supportive and caring school environment d. disciplined environment e. safety to and from school and in school. As far as the parental choice of private school is concerned, the most influential factors were a. students' moral development, b. reputation and school performance c. students' moral development, d. personal interaction with the school i.e. PTM, e. disciplined environment. The most important sources of information regarding the public sector schools were a. school ranking in result, b. interaction with school staff c. word of mouth from parents' social circle as friends/family/neighbors etc. d. school advertisement. The most important sources of information regarding the private sector schools were school ranking in results, interaction with school staff, word of mouth from parents' social circle as friends/family/neighbors etc. and school advertisement. Educational implications are also discussed.

Key Words: Public schools, private schools, school choice

Introduction

With increasing inhabitants, the public segment is feeling difficulties in provision of free and low expensive education to the society (Ali, Ali & Ghani, 2010). Thus, to achieve the educational needs of the increasing inhabitants, the private segment is contributing to an enormous level. The private educational institutions are not funded by the state however, are completely owned by an individual or a group and they receive fees monthly or semester wise or annually. The holders of these private schools pay registration fee annually to the government. With the rising competitions among the private and public educational institutions, there raise the question of quality of education that is provided to meet the needs of the learners. Hsieh and Shen, (2001) expressed that in today society both Public and Private educational institutions work collaboratively to improve the educational standards. Indeed, private schools are getting population acceptance now a days to ensure sustained progress of the country especially in Pakistan.

During 1990-2000, private sector emerged as a wide provider of education services in Pakistan relative to the public sector. Private sector contributed significantly in increasing literacy rate in the emerging nations. (www.pakistaneconomist.com). Parents always feel conscious about their child education. They always try to send their children to school for quality education according to their financial and social afford. In this regard Maslow's (1943) developed a theory which is very famous till now. He states that basic needs of the human being are physiological needs, safety needs and then self-esteem needs. Parents seek the best and quality education for their children where their safety needs are already met so that the children could learn more and more and develop a good self-esteem person in the society.

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) formerly known as the “Northern Areas”, is the northernmost administrative territory of Pakistan. Education has been a priority of the Government of GB. According to Department of Education GB (Gilgit-Baltistan Education Statistics 2015-16) comparing of public and private sector schools (both genders boys and girls) from class Nursery to Secondary level. In 2013-14 total, public sector schools were 1171 while total private sector schools were 447. In 2014-15 total, public sector schools were 1276 while total private sector schools were 527. In 2015-16 public sector schools were 1282 while private sector schools were 565. From the perusal of the above statistical figures it reveals that private sector institutions are rapidly growing. It is often assumed that the mostly parents prefer to send their children in private educational institutions than public institutions; there is lack of trust that's why parents prefer to private educational institutions rather than public educational institutions. Hence there is deficiency of trust among the people so the researcher intended to determine the factors affecting parental decision of school choice in GB and how parents chose the specific school.

Review of Related Literature

A huge pile of research work is available related to parental preference for school choice. This phenomenon is studied all over the world which is evident of its significance. Adebayo (2009) conducted a study in Nigeria regarding parental preference for private secondary schools. It is concluded that the factors quality and quantity of teachers, school facilities size of the class, quality of curriculum, disciplined environment, smooth teaching and learning activities, cost effectiveness and overall performance of the school is the major factors of the parental preference to the private sector secondary schools.

Bukhari and Randall (2009) managed a study and they explored the factors that influenced parental decision to leave the state funded school and admit their children in a private-sector school. The major causes of leaving state-funded school were as under: a) quality of curriculum, b) religious values, c) moral values, d) quality instruction, e) size of the class, f) milieu of the school, g) and disciplined environment. Parents were recorded that the underneath are the utmost influential causes to enroll in the private-sector schools: a) quality of education, b) religious values, c) moral values, d) quality of instruction, e) size of the class, f) milieu of the school, g) and disciplined environment. Almost similar order or ranking of the factors influenced parents to leave the state-funded school and to join private schools.

Accrocco (2013) found out the underlying factors that influence parents' choices of school for their children in private sector schools in a southern coastal city of United States. Parents who make an active decision to register their child in a private school do so because of the apparent positive learning environment within the private school environment. The parents whose children are understudy in private sector school are generally satisfied with their children's current educational experiences.

Narauanan (2013) explored that guardians worth the services and functionality of the selected educational institute and are susceptible to the distinctiveness of the substitute accessible, with feasible distinctions founded on the sex of the kid. Drastically, the probability that the selected educational institute is private school is poorer when variables indicating quality of the public educational institutions in the rural community are superior.

Pandolfini (2013) focused on Italian education system in his study which analyzed the instruments important to parents to choose children' education tracks and investigated the major reasons underlying the choice between state-funded and private-sector school, exploring how such behavior only depends on deterministic socioeconomic divisions or on other cultural variables, such as status, thought, sect, or the status appeal of an education offer. The study emphasized, besides the influence of parental education level and their socioeconomic status, the importance of other covert variables influencing parents' choice, like family involvement in school system and parental motivation.

Alsaudi (2016) conducted a study into parents' reasons for their selection of private or public school in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The study detailed and identified a factor highly regarded as influencing parental decision making. Academic factor had been divided into three identified elements i.e. size of the class, quality instruction and student-teacher relationship. It is concluded that the majority of the parents was significantly preferring the private-sector schools due to the academic performance,

which means they had wide experience of a variety of education systems. Besides, that private-sector school is apparent by parents as being more to public-sector school in terms of aspects such as size of the class, quality instruction and student-teacher relationships.

Zuilkowski (2017) concluded that parents whose children attended Low-cost private schools (LCPS) commonly opted that school based on their priorities due to its quality, whereas parents of the government sector school were also very concerned with proximity of the school and its cost.

Zuilkowski, Piper, Ong'ele & Kiminza (2018) managed a study in urban areas of Kenya. In their research study, it is found that guardians who chose LCPS for their kids were more determined by quality concerns as compare to their counterparts. They also presented knowledge on the prices of the varsity sorts, compared to family income. Despite being termed 'low cost', the fees charged by faculties primarily serving the poor were usually an important burden on families.

The following research is conducted in different areas of Pakistan. Ejaz, Khan, Noreen & Raza (2012) conducted a study in Punjab province, Pakistan and concluded four main causes for growing of private educational institutions in Punjab. Parental background of education in private schools enhances the propensity of private education. Shabbir (2014) concluded in their study that Private educational institutions performed superior as compare to government educational institutions in highest measures of performance excluding only some which has been taken in their research however both private and government educational institutions in AJK face numerous confronts. Public and private schools deprive of adequate human and material capitals to deliver quality education. Awan and Zia (2015) explored that the parents prefer to send their children in private schools and avoid public schools in Vehari district, Pakistan. It is concluded that there are five major reasons of private school choice. The factors consisted socioeconomic status of the parents, school proximity, cost of the schooling, perception of the parents towards quality education and employment opportunity.

Furthermore, socioeconomic status (Andrés & Roberto, 2013; Denessen, Driessena & Slegers, 2005; Ejaz, et.al. 2012; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Kosunen & Carrasco, 2016; Rehman, Khan, Tariq & Tasleem, 2014), quality education (Begna, 2017; Feinberg & Lubienski, 2008; Stern & Smith, 2016; Shabbir, 2014; Yaacob, 2014), class size (Al Ansari, 2004; Cassidy, 2005; Kharman, 2005; LaParo, et al. 2004), students' achievement (Ashley, et al. 2014; LaParo, et al. 2004; Ratna, 2015; Tooley, Bao, Dixon & Merrifield, 2011; Watkins, 2006), school management and administration (Aidla & Vadi 2008; Begna, 2017; Begum & Sadruddin, 2013; Damon, 2009; Karim, Lodhi & Usman 2011; Magulod & Gilbert, 2017; Nakpodia, 2011; Oluemi, 2013; Ratna, 2015; Rizwan, Azad, Ali & Mehmood, 2016; Shabbir, 2014; Tariq, et al. 2012;), teachers (Akhtar, 2013; Ali, et al. 2010; Karim, et al. 2011; Mooij & Narayan, 2010; Qasim & Qasim, 2015; Rizwan, et al. 2016; Yaacob, 2014), classroom management (Rizwan, 2016) effective learners (Ashley, 2014; Rehman, et al. 2014), academic performance (Adeyemi, 2014; Igbinedion & Epumepu, 2011; Magulod, 2017; Oluwatayo, 2012; Yaacob, 2014), transportation, faraway of schools or proximity of school (Ejaz, et al. 2012; Karim, et al. 2011), safety (Zuilkowski, 2017), learning environment (Allcock & Hulme, 2010; Begna, 2017; Mirrka & Schulze, 2016; Rehman, et al. 2014), curriculum/ contents (Ali, et al. 2010; Rehman, et al.2014; Yaacob, 2014), school climate (Ejaz, et.al. 2012; Khan, Chandio & Farooqi, 2014), public confidence/ community trust (Yousuf & Nauman, 2015), critical thinking in students (Sherafat & Morthy, 2016), facilities (Haghparrast, Nasaruddin, & Abdullah, 2014; Karim, et al. 2011; Qasim & Qasim, 2015; Shabbir, 2014), students' strength (Karim, et al. 2011), co-curricular activities (Ali,et al. 2010; Bashir & Hussain, 2012; Jasmine, 2013; Mukesh, 2013; Shabbir, 2014), teaching methodology and assessment and evaluation procedures (Ratna, 2015) are also considered responsible for school choice of parents.

Facts reveal that both public and private institutions raise slogan to provide quality education. Mostly parents and guardians of the children want to send their children in a well reputed educational institution according to their financial capacity. It has been revealed through literature review that the parents prefer to private sector schools than public sector schools. The study is an effort to find out the factors affecting on parental decision making in school choice both for public and private sectors. Hence, the researchers have planned to explore the factors that influenced parental decision to enroll their children in a school and how parents chose the specific school in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the factors which cause parents to choose a school.
2. To explore the sources of information which parents use to choose a school.

Research Design

The nature of study in this research is quantitative. Descriptive research design is used.

Population

Population of the study comprised all the parents whose children are under study in either public or private schools up-to secondary level in GB.

Sample

Sample for this study was selected conveniently from the parents (N=300) who chose either public sector schools for their children (N=150) or private ones (N=150). Data were collected from both fathers (N=196) and mothers (N=104) whose family income ranged from less than 30,000 to more than 70,000. Their qualification varied from matric to masters level. Almost half of them had their personal conveyance for sending their children to schools and the other half made their children go to schools on foot. Detail of the sample is given in table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Background variable/characteristics	N=300
School sector	
Public	150 (50%)
Private	150 (50%)
Gender of Parent	
Male	196 (65.3%)
Female	104 (34.7%)
Does your spouse work?	
Yes	138 (46%)
No	162 (54%)
Monthly family income	
30,000 and less	158 (52.7%)
31,000-50,000	106 (35.3%)
51,000-70,000	18 (6%)
71,000 and more	18 (6%)
Your qualification	
Illiterate	40 (13.3%)
Matric	28 (9.3%)
Intermediate	14 (4.7%)
Graduation	99 (33%)
Master	113 (37.7%)
M.Phil	2 (0.7%)
Ph.D	4 (1.3%)
Your Spouse qualification	
Illiterate	38 (12.7%)
Matric	127 (42.3%)
Intermediate	41 (13.7%)
Graduation	41 (13.7%)
Master	49 (16.3%)
M.Phil	4 (1.3%)
Ph.D	0 (0%)
Mode of travelling from home to school	
Personal	136 (45.3%)
School bus/van	13(4.3%)

Private van/Rikshaw
On foot

21(7%)
130 (43.3%)

Research Instrument

The questionnaire comprised demographic information in Part-A. Part-B consisted of 21 factors on four point Likert scale which affected the decision of parents in school choice. Additionally, Part-C consisted of six sources of information about the school on four point Likert scale where 1= not important, 2= somewhat unimportant, 3= somewhat important and 4= very important. Two parallel forms were used for parents who sent their children to either public or private sector schools.

Results

This section deals with the findings of study related to both the research objectives.

Table 2

Ranking of the Factors Affecting Decision of Public Sector School Choice

Name of factor	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Students' moral development	150	1	4	3.68	.64
Quality of the teachers	150	1	4	3.61	.62
Supportive and caring school environment	150	1	4	3.56	.70
Disciplined environment	150	1	4	3.52	.69
Safety to and from school and in school	150	1	4	3.45	.78
Socioeconomic background	150	1	4	3.41	.87
Quality of instruction	150	1	4	3.39	.81
Quality of school facilities and equipment	150	1	4	3.39	.83
Reputation and school performance	150	1	4	3.38	.74
Students' overall personality development	150	1	4	3.37	.83
Students' receive individual attention	150	1	4	3.35	.84
Personal interaction with the school i.e. PTM	150	1	4	3.31	.89
Quality of curriculum	150	1	4	3.25	.96
Tuition fees	150	1	4	3.22	.97
Distance and location of the school	150	1	4	3.16	.94
Extracurricular activities	150	1	4	3.12	.99
Preparation for secondary/school/college well	150	1	4	3.09	.92
Level of parents' education	150	1	4	2.85	1.04
Dissatisfaction with the private schools	150	1	4	2.81	1.02
Class size	150	1	4	2.74	1.09
Parents' profession	150	1	4	2.61	1.03

Table 2 describes the factors affecting school choice of parents whose children attend public sector schools. Five most influencing forces were students' moral development, quality of the teachers, supportive and caring school environment, disciplined environment and safety to and from school and in school. Level of parents' education, dissatisfaction with the private schools class size and parents' profession proved to be least influential factors in school choice.

Table 3

Ranking of the Factors Affecting Decision of Private Sector School Choice

Name of factor	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Quality of the teachers	150	1	4	3.74	.66
Reputation and school performance	150	1	4	3.68	.63
Students' moral development	150	1	4	3.65	.69

Personal interaction with the school i.e. PTM	150	1	4	3.63	.70
Disciplined environment	150	1	4	3.58	.78
Supportive and caring school environment	150	1	4	3.58	.74
Quality of school facilities and equipment	150	1	4	3.57	.76
Students' overall personality development	150	1	4	3.56	.69
Students receive individual attention	150	1	4	3.55	.80
Quality of curriculum	150	1	4	3.53	.81
Quality of instruction	150	1	4	3.47	.79
Safety to and from school and in school	150	1	4	3.43	.82
Extracurricular activities	150	1	4	3.40	.86
Preparation for secondary/school/college well	150	1	4	3.33	.86
Socioeconomic background	150	1	4	3.27	.97
Distance and location of the school	150	1	4	2.87	.97
Tuition fees	150	1	4	2.84	1.07
Class size	150	1	4	2.75	1.14
Level of parents' education	150	1	4	2.67	1.06
Dissatisfaction with the public schools	150	1	4	2.67	1.00
Parents' profession	150	1	4	2.45	1.11

Table 3 describes the factors affecting school choice of parents whose children attend private sector schools. Five most influencing forces were quality of the teachers, reputation and school performance, students' moral development, personal interaction with the school i.e. PTM and disciplined environment. Class size, level of parents' education, dissatisfaction with the private schools and parents' profession proved to be least influential factors in school choice.

Table 4

Ranking of Most Important Sources of Information Regarding Choice of Public Sector Schools

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
School ranking in results	150	1	4	3.41	.95
Interaction with school staff	150	1	4	3.25	.92
Word of mouth from parents' social circle as friends/family/neighbors	150	1	4	3.07	.92
School advertisement	150	1	4	2.83	1.16
Didn't consult anyone	150	1	4	2.35	1.12
School website	150	1	4	2.25	1.16

Table 4 shows the mean score wise ranking of sources of information regarding choice of public sector schools. School ranking in results, interaction with school staff and words of mouth from parents' social circle as friends/family/neighbors were three most influential sources.

Table 5

Ranking of Most Important Sources of Information Regarding Choice of Private Sector Schools

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
School ranking in results	150	1	4	3.52	.910
Interaction with school staff	150	1	4	3.45	.856
Word of mouth from parents' social circle as friends/family/neighbors	150	1	4	2.98	1.052
School advertisement	150	1	4	2.68	1.045
School website	150	1	4	2.42	1.143
Didn't consult any one	150	1	4	2.26	1.138

Table 5 shows the mean score wise ranking of sources of information regarding choice of private sector schools. The same three sources were responsible for choice of private sector schools which were earlier mentioned by parents of children studying in public sector schools.

Discussion

The current research aimed at exploring the factors that influenced parental decision to enroll their children in a school and how parents chose the specific school in Gilgit-Baltistan. Five most influencing forces which affected school choice of parents whose children attend public sector schools were students' moral development, quality of the teachers, supportive and caring school environment, disciplined environment and safety to and from school and in school. Level of parents' education, dissatisfaction with the private schools class size and parents' profession proved to be least influential factors in school choice. Five most influencing forces which affected school choice of parents whose children attend private sector schools were quality of the teachers, reputation and school performance, students' moral development, personal interaction with the school i.e. PTM and disciplined environment. Class size, level of parents' education, dissatisfaction with the private schools and parents' profession proved to be least influential factors in school choice. The important factors ranked by the parents of private sector are same as they are ranked by parents of children attending public sector schools, however, personal interaction with the school i.e. PTM is at lower level in public sector school as compare to their counterparts. The same factors are firm in previous studies (Ashley, et al., 2014; Bukhari & Randall, 2009; Hunter, 1991; Edwards & Richardson, 1981; Ejaz et al., 2012; Stern & Smith, 2016).

As far as second objective is concerned, major sources of information regarding choice of public sector schools were schools ranking in results, interaction with school staff and words of mouth from parents' social circle as friends/family/neighbors. The same three sources were responsible for choice of private sector schools as well which were extended in other research studies (Adebayo, 2009; Bukhari & Randall, 2009; Hunter, 1991).

Recommendations

The government school is losing public trust day by day. To win the public trust, the government needs to motivate the people by ensuring the quality education and taking initiatives to rebuild the public trust. There is lack of coordination between parents and teachers in public sector school, so the government educational managers need to arrange PTM frequently. Parents choose a school because they are interested in their children's' moral development through qualified teachers in supportive and caring school environment. So, it is responsibility of both types of schools to meet the parents' such expectations by providing quality education. Further research can also be conducted in GB as well as at other provincial levels in Pakistan after including other two sectors i.e. Deeni Madaris and public-private partnership schools. The research can also be extended through including social factor i.e. racial and sectarian factors in GB.

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