A Case Study Looking at Aspects of Parental Choice in Five Schools in Ghana

David Longfield

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Abstract

The research looks at the factors that parents say they use when choosing one of the five case study schools in the northern suburbs of Accra. The six most common factors quoted by parents were, in order, (1) good academic standards and exam results, (2) the location of the school relative to the home, (3) the quality of English teaching, (4) the Christian basis for the education, (5) the school curriculum and (6) the size of the classes. While these were the most common overall, there were differences between schools, with parents from different schools being influenced by different factors. The research found that almost all parents have universally high expectations and hopes for their children. The findings generally show that the schools in the study perform well or were strong in the factors for which the parents chose them, so indicating that parents may be making informed choices. Also the research tends to support the view that the principals of the schools are aware of the reasons why the parents choose their school. The data collected on reading age shows that there is a difference in reading ability across the pupils in the schools, with school type being a determining factor. The difference between government and private schools was significant in the statistical analysis, and the general trend was that quality of education, as measured by the difference between reading age and chronological age, was positively correlated with the cost of the education.
1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

This research looks at five different schools in the northern suburbs of Accra, Ghana, with the aim of investigating parental choice for those who have chosen these schools for their children.

The dissertation begins with an introduction. This includes an outline of the research questions, the reasons for the research and a little background about Ghana and the education there. Then there is a literature review. Following this there is a discussion of the methodology employed in the research, including aspects of ethics, validity and reliability. The section on the research findings looks at each of the research sub questions in turn. Finally, some conclusions are drawn and there is a discussion on the relevance of the findings, their relationship with the existing literature and some ideas of possible ways forward.

1.2. The research sub-questions

In order to study different aspects of parental choice, the research has focussed on the five sub-questions outlined below.

These are

1. What are the key factors that these parents use in making the decision about where to send their child to school?

Clearly it was important to discover the influential factors for parents, and different sources of information were used for try to establish these, because these factors are central to the research. Once these had been established, the similarities and differences between these results and other published research could be analysed.

2. What are the key sources of information that these parents use in making that decision?

The source of parental information was a peripheral question that proved difficult to answer adequately.
3. What are the educational aspirations of these parents for their children? Do they value education and do they think it is important for their children?

It was also interesting to seek to ascertain the aspirations of parents for their own children, when these parents had very different educational backgrounds themselves. Were the hopes of parents of first generation educated children different from the hopes of parents who themselves had been through tertiary education?

4. How do the schools that these parents choose for their children perform in the areas for which they are chosen?

A major area of interest was the relationship between the qualities that the parents desired (and for which they chose the school) and the nature of the school itself. If parents sought an academic environment and chose School A for that reason, was there any evidence that School A had higher academic standards or achievements than the other schools? If parents chose a school believing that there was good quality English teaching, did they get a school with good quality English? The matching of parents’ expressed hopes and desires (the factors for which they chose the school) with the available objective facts and with the feedback of present parents about these schools, was the goal of this aspect of the research.

5. How does quality of education, as measured by reading ability, relate to the choices and costs of education?

It is not easy to assess quality in education, but to obtain objective quantitative data it was decided to look at the reading age of pupils at these five schools. The goal was to compare government and different types of private schools and to see if there was any connection or relationship, in these cases, between the cost of the education and the reading ability of the children in the schools.

Through these questions and the data that was collected to answer them, it is hoped that a reasonable picture can be constructed of the parental choice situation in these schools.
1.3. The background to the research question (Why parental choice?)

While some researchers believe that the subject of parental choice has been sufficiently studied for there to be little new to understood (Gorard, 1999), it appears that the researchers in the developing and the developed world have had different approaches and goals. Less has been done in the developing world to see the reasons parents themselves express for their choices.

In much of the developed world choice is a luxury or an option; parents who make no choice will find that the education authority assigns their child a place in a local government school, and the authorities then ensure attendance\(^1\). However in different parts of the developing world parents have to make an active decision to enrol their children in school, they have to choose the government school or a private school or the default is that their child does not go to school at all.

In addition, there is sometimes a wider range of choice available to parents in the developing world. There are different curricular options as the syllabus is not always rigidly controlled by the government and there can also be different media of instruction. Low cost private education is extensively available and accessible to more than the most wealthy, unlike the UK where only 7% of the population access the private educational sector (Garner and Russell, 2006). Also there are often schools with different, but strong, religious foundations and expressions.

For many parents in the UK the only choice that they have is between the local comprehensive school and another comprehensive, run by the same LEA, having the same curriculum and similar ethos but further away from their home. The most significant difference being that the second school involves a trip in the car to drop the children which effectively rules it out as a choice.

Therefore, for some, there is no real choice

“There was no option, there was the only one upper school in the town. There was no way we were going to go to. ... If you sent your child to ... you had to get them there under your own steam and with my job I wouldn’t be here to take him to school in the morning and the wife doesn’t drive” (Bagley et al., 2001, p. 314).

---

\(^1\) A study in Scotland showed that 90% of parents did not make a placing choice for a non-designated school Willms, J. D. (1997)
In many parts of the developing world there is real choice which makes the research more interesting. The opportunity to consider the match between the parents’ choices and the qualities of the schools adds another dimension to the debate about whether parents can make informed decisions.

1.4. Ghana: the background and educational scene

This research could have taken place in any number of possible locations, but the personal and course-based connections that existed meant Ghana was chosen. Ghana has a population of 28.3 million, of whom 10.2 million (36%) are aged under 15. The population is growing at 2.1% p.a. (World Bank, 2011).

Ghana has about 29% of its population below the national poverty line and 51% of the population living in an urban setting (World Bank, 2011). The table below compares Ghana to the SSA region and shows that its situation is slightly above the average for the region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ghana</th>
<th>SSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality (per 1000 births)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child malnutrition</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to improved water (% of population)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy (% of population age 15+)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(World Bank, 2011)

1.4.1. Education: a brief history of policy, plans and educational structure

The first major plan to establish education for all came in 1945, when a long term sustainable project began which aimed to ensure all children received education in the next 25 years. In 1951 the Accelerated Development Plan for Education aimed to achieve universal education faster by abolishing tuition fees. This commitment to free basic education continued after independence
with the 1961 Education Act. Later reforms in 1987 and 1995 were aided by investment from external donors. All these reforms had some success, but high enrolment and completion were not successfully sustained (Akyeampong et al., 2007).

The reform in 1987 (linked to a World Bank structural adjustment programme, which aimed to reverse the decline in the effectiveness of the education sector by emphasising primary schooling (World Bank, 1987)) brought about radical changes in the format of the school system. Prior to 1987, Ghana’s educational system consisted of six years of primary schooling. Then pupils followed one of two routes: through four years of Middle School, or directly via an entrance exam, to five years of study for O levels and two more for A levels at a secondary school. Since the educational reforms of 1987, the structure has been six years of Primary School and three years each of Junior and Senior Secondary School (JSS and SSS). Government educational provision up to the end of JSS is free (Sackey, 2007).

Recent changes have taken place at the secondary level with the Senior Secondary School being extended to four years and reduced again to three (GhanaWeb, 2007). These changes have been considered here because they are an influential factor in school choice for some parents (see section 4.5.1.).

Recent changes (in 2002) have introduced an optional 2 years of pre-primary (nursery) education for children aged 4 and 5 (Akyeampong et al., 2007). The Government School visited for the research had a separate nursery school attached to it, as it was part of a larger complex made up of the nursery school, 2 split shift primary schools using the same premises and a JSS in the adjacent building. Each school functioned separately.

1.4.2. The history of the use of English as a medium of instruction

Prior to the establishment of western style formal education, traditional education was conducted in the indigenous Ghanaian languages. Then, with the establishment of the castle schools and the

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2 It was possible to go to secondary school after completing middle school which meant that a pupil following that route would complete 17 years of education before being able to attend university.
subsequent educational work of the Christian missionaries between 1529 and 1925, much of the education was bilingual. The second language depended on which European nation was in power. This use of the Ghanaian languages in primary education was so strongly established by 1925 that it continued to be the situation that primary education was in the vernacular during the colonial period from 1925 to 1957, though secondary education was in English during that time. Changes were made in the primary sector at independence and repeatedly afterwards, with periods of time when the medium of instruction was English from Primary 1 and other times when schooling began in an indigenous language and changed to English as the pupils progressed through primary school (Owu-Ewie, 2006). The present situation is that most primary education in the government schools is in English with an indigenous language taught throughout primary school and used as an additional medium of instruction for the younger classes. Most private schools are English medium, though the researcher found that there are also some Muslim schools which are Arabic medium.

1.4.3. The present educational situation

Some overall education statistics for Ghana are shown below.

Table 2: Education summary statistics for Ghana 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary net enrolment rates</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>76%³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary net enrolment rates</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary net enrolment rates</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Literacy rates</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Literacy rates</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2011)

³ This figure is up from 60% in 2000. For more information see (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2011)
According to these statistics there are a large number of primary aged children (24%) who are not enrolled in primary school\(^4\) and some of those who do complete primary school do not continue on to JSS. However, Ghana is moving towards universal primary education, and overall some of the concerns regarding the MDGs are more to do with quality than quantity (Barrett, 2009).

There have been low points in the educational scene in Ghana, with a dip in output around the mid 1980s and some improvement over the last decades. The improvement is partially evidenced in the way that the adult literacy is lower than the youth literacy\(^5\).

Overall there is continuing growth in the private sector with one study, conducted between 2003 and 2005, showing that parents of over 60% of the primary-age school-going children had opted for private schools (Tooley and Dixon, 2006). This situation is the backdrop to the present research into the “how” and “why” of parental choice.

1.5. This dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five main chapters. This introduction has set the scene, outlining the main research topic, the sub-questions and the educational situation in Ghana that forms the background to the research. The Literature Review (chapter 2) follows. Here aspects of education in the developing world are considered in the light of educational choice. Also included are some pieces of research, of a more qualitative kind, that look specifically at the process of parental choice. Chapter 3 gives a theoretical basis for doing a case study research and outlines the methodology used. Chapter 4 contains the research findings. First is an overview of the five case study schools, then each research sub-question is addressed in turn. Finally, chapter 5 looks at the conclusions that can be drawn from the study and discusses them in the light of the relevant literature, while also noting the limitations of the present research. It also raises ideas that could

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\(^4\) It may be an overestimate due to the presence of pupils in unregistered schools, unknown to the government statisticians, see Tooley, J. and Dixon, P. (2005) Private education is good for the poor. Washington: CATO Institute.

\(^5\) Further information is available (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2011)
be addressed or considered as ways forward from this research. The appendices include copies of the questionnaires and other documents used as well as some additional graphs.

2. Literature review

This literature review considers some of the research that has been carried out into school choice in the developing world. In the first chapter we saw the rationale for this research and the overall research interest along with sub-questions. The chapter therefore sets out the relevant findings from the literature associated with this empirical piece of work. Literature tends to be divided into several themes and these themes will be looked at in individual sections. The main themes are:

1. Choice and EFA
2. Choice and Accessibility
3. Choice and School Quality
4. The ability of parents to make choices
5. The epistemology of school choice research
6. What parents themselves say about the factors they use.

2.1. School choice research

The context for this study is the increasing educational opportunities and choices that exist for parents in the developing world. Over the last two decades there has been a huge increase in the availability of private schools of different types in many urban and rural parts of the developing world. For example India (Tooley et al., 2007b), Pakistan (Andrabi et al., 2008; Andrabi et al., 2007; Alderman et al., 2001), various parts of Africa (Oketch et al., 2010) including Ghana (Tooley et al., 2007a), where the present study takes place, have all seen a large increase in the number of low
cost private schools, even in some of the poorest areas. Indeed there is evidence that the majority of children in certain areas are attending private schools\(^6\) (Tooley et al., 2011).

\(^6\) 76\% in parts of Hyderabad, India; 63\% in sections of Ga district Ghana and 74\% in areas of Lagos state, Nigeria (Tooley, J. and Dixon, P., 2005).
2.2. Choice and EFA

Some studies (Lewin, 2007; Tooley et al., 2007b) have looked at the impact that these “mushrooming” numbers of schools (Rose, 2002, p. 1) have or could have on reaching the Millennium Development Goals (U.N., 2010) and the goal of “Education for All” (UNESCO, 2010) and have reached different conclusions. Lewin (2007) concludes that non-government schooling can only have a “limited impact on progress towards universalising access to basic education in SSA (Sub Saharan Africa)” (2007, p. 18), while Tooley and Dixon see that these low cost private schools are already having a large and increasing impact on primary education in different countries (Tooley and Dixon, 2005). On the other side the impact of government initiatives to provide Free Primary Education is much debated, with some data pointing to a large increase in enrolment in government schools (Ahn and Silvers, 2005), and some researchers pointing to a net loss of children from schooling in some areas of Kenya, because of its introduction (Tooley et al., 2008). However as this is not the focus of this study they will not be reviewed in any depth.

2.3. Choice and accessibility

Some studies have tried to investigate whether these new opportunities and choices for the poor through private unaided recognised and unrecognised schools in low income and slum areas are really accessible to the poorest in society. While some of the conclusions that they draw are conflicting, it is generally accepted that educational choice (choosing between a government school and a private school) is not limited to only the most wealthy (Probe Team, 1999). The Oxfam Education Report suggests that,

“... the notion that private schools are servicing the needs of a small minority of wealthy parents is misplaced ... a lower cost private sector has emerged to meet the demands of poor households” (Watkins, 2000, p. 229 - 230).

Studies point out that there is therefore a choice for many poor parents in urban and rural areas of India (Aggarwal, 2000) and that this is not limited to India is clearly illustrated by James Tooley in
his book, “The Beautiful Tree” (Tooley, 2009), where the same opportunities are found in China, Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana.

Some research indicates that these educational opportunities are indeed available, but not for the poorest (Lewin, 2007) for whom the fees charged by the low cost private schools make them out of reach. Lewin’s research leads him to the conclusion

“that the low cost and (often low quality) non-government providers...[are]...not likely to reach the ultra poor and the “last 20%”” (p. 18)

This is also the general conclusion of Watkins (2000, p. 207), Härmä (2009, p. 354)\(^7\), and that recorded in a UN report (UNDP, 2003, p. 115). Others argue that even the poorest do have access to the low cost private sector because of the very low fees (approximately 4.2% to 5.5% of minimum wages in some cases) (Tooley et al., 2007b, p. 548) and to the fact that many of these schools grant concessionary fees and scholarships for those in particular need (Tooley et al., 2007b, p. 549) making them more accessible. The LEAPS project tends to support this latter view when, writing of the situation in Pakistan, they state that “the average rural private school is affordable” (Andrabi et al., 2007, p. 6), even to a someone on the dollar a day poverty line (Andrabi et al., 2008, p. 343).

\(^7\) She finds that the proportion of children in private schools steadily increases (with a corresponding steady decrease in the proportion in government schools) as they moved through the quintiles of family income from the poorest to the richest. (Härmä, J. 2009, Figure 2 p. 161)
Other surveys, by collecting data on household and district factors have tried to discover who is actually choosing to send their children to these low cost private schools (Alderman et al., 2001; Glewwe and Jacoby, 1994). Some conclude that there is a connection between household income and access to private education, with greater proportions of lower income parents sending their children to the free government schools (Alderman et al., 2001), while others suggest that, for different reasons, the private schools are accessed by those at the two ends of the economic spectrum (Oketch et al., 2010). The study by Alderman (2001) looks at, and simulates, the impact that various factors have on the choices parents make between private and government schools. They point out that “schooling choices of poor households are very sensitive to school fees, proximity and quality” (Alderman et al., 2001, p. 20). This is a deductive study from an objectivistic position, so the meaning of the data comes from the way it fits the hypothesis that these are the key factors. An alternative approach would be to ask the parents why they chose the schools that they did and for this information to inform the theory. Again the view that it is the poor who send their children to government schools stands in contrast to the findings of the Probe team (1999), who researching villages in four north Indian states. They reported that

“even among poor families and disadvantaged communities, one finds parents who make great sacrifices to send some or all of their children to private schools, so disillusioned are they with government schools” (p. 103).

Overall the literature points to the wide, if not universal, accessibility of choice to the poor in many parts of the developing world. Chapter 4 will add some qualitative evidence to the debate on this issue by recording the stated reasons why some poor parents have chosen different schools for their children.

2.4. Choice and school quality

Another area of research has been to look at the quality of these alternative low-cost private schools. As illustrated in the quote above, (Lewin, 2007, p. 18) a link has sometimes been made between ‘low cost’ and ‘low quality’ when referring to these private schools serving the poor. This
comes out in various studies, the Oxfam Education Report, for instance, notes that private schools for the poor are of ‘inferior quality’, offering ‘a low-quality service’ (Watkins, 2000, p. 230) and Rose, writing of the situation in East Africa, concludes that the ‘provision of low quality private education for the poor is not serving their needs’ (2002, p. 16). Quality education is, however, not easily defined or measured (Sarangapani and Winch, 2010, p. 503) and some researchers have looked at the inputs (Tooley et al., 2007b) and outputs (Tooley and Dixon, 2006) of various schools as proxies for educational quality. Discussion about the quality of education in these low cost schools must be taken together with the same discussions of the quality in the government schools as Tooley points out (2007b, p. 540). That the options available to the average parent are not between a well performing government school and a low fee, low quality, private school, or indeed vice versa, is clear from the many studies that have looked at the situation. Indeed the quality of the government provision has come under scrutiny. The Probe Team visiting government schools in rural north India, found “in close to half of the schools visited, there was no teaching activity at all when the investigators arrived” (Probe Team, 1999, p. 4). They are not alone in observing this phenomenon

“The public-private schooling gap is large. Children in private schools score significantly higher than those in government schools, even when they are from the same village” (Andrabi et al., 2007, p. 11).

Extensive studies in Pakistan have shown that there is a large difference in academic achievement between pupils in private schools and government schools. They have measured the performance, by recording Maths and English and Urdu scores, and have found that the private schools significantly outperform the government schools even when other factors are taken into account. The researchers state that

“These findings are by no means unique. In different parts of the world studies have shown that students do better in private schools (French and Kingdon, 2010; Das et al., 2006; Tooley and
Dixon, 2005; Jimenez et al., 1991) even when other factors are accounted for. But this may not always be the case as found in studies in Tanzania (Lassibille and Tan, 2001).

### 2.5. The ability of parents to make wise choices

The ability of lower income or uneducated parents to make rational and wise decisions about the education of their children is another area of concern raised by the availability of choice. Some researchers are anxious that unscrupulous school proprietors may take advantage of parents who are unable to assess adequately the quality of the education offered (Alderman et al., 2001). However the research that has looked into this has found that both literate and illiterate parents in Pakistan are well informed about their children’s ability, the relative quality of different schools and the attendance of the teachers.

> “Both illiterate and literate parents know a lot about schools, their teachers, and their own children” (Andrabi et al., 2007, p. 18).

They also found that the parents based their choices on this knowledge. The parents’ perception of their children’s relative ability can lead them to devote limited resources to the education of the child they believe will most benefit from the education (Andrabi et al., 2007)\(^8\).

Some studies see lower class parents (or minority parents in the US (Goldring and Hausman, 1999)) avoiding making decisions or leaving the choice more to the child or the education authority. Their values at times appear to be less academically based and more to do with making sure that the children get the support the parents feel they need (Reay and Ball, 1997). It is interesting to note, in the light of earlier sections, that some lower class parents reject the more academic or better, higher reputation schools as being “not for the likes of us” (Reay and Ball, 1997, p. 91). The negative educational experiences of the parents can also impact the decision

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\(^8\) This also leads to questions of equality which cannot be addressed here. The philosophical implications of choice are raised in some studies. The concerns are clearly expressed by Gutiérrez and Tanaka "For example, high inequality may result in a segmented educational regime, in which the very poor do not attend school, the middle class attends low quality public schooling and the rich opt for high-quality private education, therefore perpetuating future inequality (Gutiérrez, C. and Tanaka, R. 2009) This is debated more fully in the western context by Tooley and Brighouse see (Tooley, J. 2003)"
making process, in fact, whatever the educational experiences of the parents are, these do influence the choices they make for their children (Walker and Clark, 2010). Schneider’s study (1998a) has interesting insights on the rationale for less educated parents seeking the more structured education with its emphasis on passing certain tests that are gateways to education and employment, in their words “strong performance on tests controls access to good colleges and good jobs” (Schneider et al., 1998a, p. 499).

Further research in the developed world also comes to the conclusion that though parents may have different values and make different choices, they end up choosing schools that do perform or conform to the values and qualities that they seek (Schneider et al., 1998b). As is the case with the developing world, there is concern that parents have limited access to the facts about the schools when knowledge is needed for a market economy to perform properly. Some studies have found that parental knowledge is indeed limited, yet these same parents are making decisions that fit with their values, ending up choosing schools that match these values,

“on average these parents have very little accurate information about the objective conditions in the schools.....that even in the absence of such objective knowledge there is evidence of a matching process in which children are enrolled in schools that are high on the dimensions of education that their parents think are important” (Schneider et al., 1998b, p. 770)

They conclude that this happens because some parents are informed and aware of the qualities of the schools and make informed choices and this influences other parents.

Interestingly, other authors (Oketch et al., 2010) in their study in Kenya seem to suggest that the decisions of poor parents are not demand led decisions, but are supply driven. This issue will be looked at in more depth in Chapter 4.

**2.6. The epistemology of school choice research**

Much of the research from the developing world studied and referenced in this literature review approaches the question of parental choice using a deductive approach. The key factors that are considered possibly to be relevant to the decisions that parents make are investigated. These
include at least some of the following: sex of the child, child’s birth order, number of children at home, age of the head of the house, parental income, maternal and paternal educational accomplishments, parental literacy, parental occupation, family wealth and distance from the nearest school (Huisman and Smits, 2009; Ngware et al., 2009; Handa, 2002). This data is analysed such that “school decision making is conceptualized as a function of household characteristics as well as individual child characteristics” (Ngware et al., 2009). Some of the research is based on capital theory, where the parents are “expected to weigh off the future benefits of sending their children to school against the immediate costs” (Huisman and Smits, 2009). While this may be relevant and helpful, it can appear that the subjects of the study are treated as objects to be observed whose decision is preconditioned by the situation in which they find themselves. The validity of such an approach is not challenged by the acknowledgement of an alternative methodology.

The alternative approach is the one taken in many of studies of parental choice in the developed world. In these the parents are asked to express their thoughts and elucidate their decision-making process (Schneider et al., 1998a; Hunter, 1991). For decision-making is indeed a process (Bagley et al., 2001), a series of value judgements; a sifting of information and a weighing of options, influenced by different factors. Those influences may be socio-economic or related to the parents’ educational experiences (Reay and Ball, 1997). Even the parents’ awareness or perceptions of the innate abilities and aptitudes of their children (Ashon-Cudjiw, 2009; Andrabi et al., 2007) can form a basis for decision-making.

The discussion here forms the basis for the rationale in seeking to obtain qualitative information from parents in the case study undertaken. The researcher felt it was important to extend some of the ideas used in the developed world to the more complex and broader school choice situation in the developing world. The present research cannot hope even to scratch the surface of the issues but may raise the question why this has not been looked at in greater depth by others interested in this important field.
2.7. What parents themselves say about the factors they use

Other studies in developing countries have used a mixed methods approach to school choice (Tooley et al., 2008), endeavouring to hear what the parents say and also to observe the factors and facts about the relative merits of the private and government schools. In the developed countries more qualitative work has been undertaken.

2.7.1. Research in the developing world

When parents have been asked about the reasons for their choice of school, a number of positive and negative factors have been found. On the positive side, researchers have found that some parents send their children to private schools because of the English teaching they receive there (Tooley et al., 2007b; Nambissan, 2003 in Tooley et al., 2007b) and because there is more teaching activity (Muralidharan and Kremer, 2006). That parents are concerned about the quality of education is confirmed by studies in Kenya, where all parents agreed (and none dissented) with the opinion, stated by one parent, that the private school offered better quality education (Tooley et al., 2008).

Parents are drawn to the school of their choice by its positive attributes. Likewise different negative factors deter them from choosing other schools. On the negative side parents have complained of teacher absenteeism (Chaudhury et al., 2006; Probe Team, 1999), large class size, lack of commitment by teachers (Tooley et al., 2008) and low quality in government schools (Probe Team, 1999), with these ‘push’ factors being instrumental in their decision to choose private education. These issues will be addressed in the context of this study in Chapter 4.

As the research into these aspects of parental choice is limited in the context of developing countries, it is worth looking at the results of the qualitative research undertaken in the developed world. These have given clues into the key factors parents say are important to them.

2.7.2. Qualitative Research in the developed world

See appendix 5 for some comments on the research approaches
Parental choice has become a major theme of educational policy in the UK over the last decades (UK Parliament, 2011). Recent political initiatives have opened up more of a market in education, with all parents having the chance to express a preference for the state school that they wish for their child and over half a million offers of places in the state system going out to parents in 2011 (UK Parliament, 2011).

### 2.7.2.1. Positive and negative factors

Various studies have endeavoured to discover the major factors that influence parents and that inform their decisions about their choice of schooling (Schneider and Buckley, 2002; Reay and Ball, 1997; David et al., 1994; Coldron and Boulton, 1991; Hunter, 1991). In fact so much research has been done that Stephen Gorard (1999) wrote a summary based on the work between 1988 and 1999 in which he suggests that there may be little more of significance that will come from future studies unless there are major policy changes.

David et al (1994) looked at the factors that parents spontaneously put forward. The key ones they found are recorded below.

**Table 3: Factors spontaneously mentioned as important in choice of school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors important in ‘choice’</th>
<th>Percentage of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good academic results</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere/ethos</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near to home</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects offered</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/headteachers</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single sex</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good education</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked what saw</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child wants school</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(David et al., 1994, p. 79)

She also looked at the factors that parents mentioned on prompting and which factors were regarded by the parents as the most important or significant. It is interesting to note that while
“Good academic results” was the one mentioned by the largest percentage of parents it was not mentioned by two thirds of them. The influence of non-academic factors was noted by Alison Petch (1986) who found the three reasons parents chose a school were:

1. they thought their child would be happier
2. their child preferred that school
3. the discipline was better.

Academic factors are therefore not always paramount in parental decisions. Though some see that a child who is not secure and happy will not learn well (Coldron and Boulton, 1991, p. 174), so the different emphases may be more closely related than appears. This link between learning and happiness has also been shown in the developing world:

“Some parents reported that they did not wish to remove their children from the school where they appeared to be learning and happy, even if this meant they had to pay fees” (Tooley et al., 2008, p. 464).

Coldron and Bolton (1991) found their results in agreement with those of Petch but noted that the proximity of the school was also a significant factor.

Another study (Bagley et al., 2001) has looked at the negative factors influencing parents and cites poor discipline and bad reputation as some of the most significant. How relevant these are to the situation in Ghana will be discussed in chapter 4.

2.7.2.2. Different parents make different decisions

Other studies have looked at the background and hence the values of different parents and investigated how these influence the educational choices that they make (Schneider et al., 1998a; Reay and Ball, 1997). A lot more could be said about the different perspectives of parents with different educational experiences and from different socio-economic groups, but this is not a major theme of this research.
2.8. Summary of school choice findings

The main points in the literature appear to show the following:

a) there is increasing choice of schools for children in the developing world

b) there is a role for low-cost private schools to play in reaching the EFA goals, but they may not be the whole answer

c) choice is not confined to the most wealthy parents, but is available to most, if not all

d) generally it appears that private schools often outperform government schools in many developing countries

e) there are questions about the quality of at least some of the low-cost private options and there are significant concerns about the quality of some government provision

f) household wealth is among the factors that play a role in determining who goes to private school

g) parents are influenced by issues of class size, educational quality, English language provision and teacher and teaching activity as well as by the ability of their own children and, possibly by some non-academic factors.
3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This research springs from an interest in the developing world and the choices that different parents make for their children’s schooling. Having worked in India and been part of the admissions committee of a fee paying school and having personally observed the struggles that many parents have in deciding what is best for their children, it is a great opportunity to study these issues first-hand.

The availability of choice has reached unprecedented levels for many in the developing world, be that India, where the first exposure to these issues came about, or Africa, where the study takes place. Understanding the process of parental choice could perhaps help both parents and schools to make the most of this evolving situation.

Much has been written about school choice in the developing world and a lot has been done to establish whether this choice is beneficial, equitable and accessible. Studies have compared the quality of the options, but little appears to have been done to establish how parents perceive and choose to respond to the options available to them. This study seeks to do this in a small way.

3.2. The use of qualitative and quantitative data

As the emphasis is to investigate the perspective of the parents and hear their reasons, a case study methodology was employed. This allowed, and required, a multi-strategy approach. As the aim was to look at the situation from a slightly different perspective from much of the developing world literature, it was important that the participants could express their thoughts and the ideas that went into the decision making process. The use of semi-structured interviews in this research allowed the participants to express these freely. This reduced the impact that the researcher had on the ideas expressed and gave freedom to the interviewee. At the same time questionnaires were used to collect further quantitative data from the participants (the parents, principals and children).
No research had been found that comes to the situation with an inductive approach, seeking to establish the theory based solely on the findings. The establishment of a theory on the basis of observations, with further data collection (to see the conditions in which the theory may and may not hold) is an iterative approach (Bryman, 2008). As the time for this study was limited, it was decided that this type of grounded theory could not be followed and the research needed to be established on some of the categories of school choice established by studies in the developed world. In this sense the coding (the categorising of answers to open questions) in this research was based on those developed in the research done in the developed world (Hunter, 1991). This was done with the hope that they would either prove to be useful, or the evidence would provide an alternative, showing that the situations in the two contexts were sufficiently different for different theories to apply. As qualitative research does not always generate theory and theory can be used as a background to qualitative investigations, it was decided that this would be the approach in this case (Bryman, 2008). Throughout the study, flexibility was maintained and various responses were not forced into codes that did not apply. It was important to look out for new codes that were only relevant to the developing world situation and in fact, two did come up. One, “cost of education”, was anticipated and the other, “the curriculum”, soon appeared and was incorporated into the questionnaires. The coding was performed on the responses phrase by phrase and at the same time the full text of some responses was recorded and has been quoted to reveal the participants’ own views on parental choice.

The research also uses quantitative data: measurements of reading age, questionnaire results where factors are listed and ranked and Likert-type scale responses from parents where they express their satisfaction with the school of their choice under different headings. Thus this is a mixed methods research, where the two approaches are combined in a single project (Bryman, 2008). This was done to provide as full a picture as possible within the constraints of the project. Questionnaires were used to collect data from 57 parents and 124 students, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the 8 school principals and owners as well as with 35
parents. Collecting quantitative data can allow more information to be collected and analysed, because the questionnaires are arranged with preset answer categories which means that it is already coded\(^\text{10}\). Further, more ethnographic, evidence came through the friendships and informal conversations with the staff and the principals. Visits to the schools and spending time in class also revealed information about the functioning of the school, the attitudes and behaviour of the staff and also that of the pupils. Where possible written documents, produced by the schools, were viewed to assess how the schools communicated themselves to the wider public. In addition, in order to collect data that would serve for an empirical, quantitative proxy for quality, 89 students across the 5 schools were tested for their reading ability. In this way this sought to be an exemplary case study drawing evidence from each of the 6 sources suggested by Yin (2009, p. 101-113). These various sources were used to triangulate the rich text information gained in the interviews. The data collected was analysed and presented using SPSS, Minitab and Excel statistical packages.

The researcher tried to avoid introducing any bias in the interviews by making sure that the interviewee was not provided with any information as to how other participants had responded. The interviews were conducted in open places, but without anyone able to overhear the conversations, so that there would be no pressure to provide an answer that would be acceptable to anyone linked to the school. The researcher always sought to establish the truth and recorded all the information provided. He did not seek out parents who were likely to conform to any particular theory or idea. More is said about sampling in the section below.

### 3.3. The use of the Case Study research method

A case study method has been chosen for this research because it is the most appropriate in this context. According to Yin, case studies are the preferred strategy for answering "how or why

\(^{10}\) The use of closed questions can enhance the comparability of answers and make the processing of answers easier, but they reduce the spontaneity of the answers and can limit replies (Bryman, 2008). The use of an “Other” category was intended to allow respondents to give replies that were outside the range offered.
questions”, when the researcher cannot control events and when the focus is on “contemporary phenomenon within some real life context” (2003, p. 1). Different social science research methods fill different needs and situations (Yin, 2009) and the need for case studies, according to Yin, “arises out of a desire to study complex social phenomena” (2003, p. 2). The present research fits these criteria well.

While there may be three main research purposes, exploratory, descriptive and explanatory, according to Yin, case study is not confined, as other social scientists believe, to the exploratory phase of an investigation (Yin, 2009, p. 6-7).

Generally, case study method looks in depth at a single community, person, event, school or organisation (Bryman, 2008), though when a comparative design is applied to a qualitative research strategy there can be a multiple case study (Bryman, 2008, p. 60). Other researchers call this a collective case study (Stake, 1995) and such a design can be preferred over the single-case design, as there may be substantial analytical benefits of having more than one case (Yin, 2009, p. 61).

Some concerns have been expressed about the use of case studies. Perhaps the greatest concern, according to Yin (2009), is over a lack of rigour. Hence there was a need to follow systematic procedures and do everything possible to avoid any bias influencing the way that questions were expressed, findings were recorded or conclusions were drawn. Every effort has been made to report all evidence fairly. The second common concern, again according to Yin, is that they provide little basis for generalisation (2009, p. 15). While case studies are not generalisable to populations, they are to theory. The case is not a “sample” from the population in the statistical sense of representing the population when a survey is performed. The goal of case study is therefore

“To expand and generalise theories (analytical generalisation) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalisation)” (Yin, 2009, p. 15).

The present study can be used to generalise about the decision processes of parents in choosing schools, but not to seek to imply that a particular proportion of parents use any particular factor
or factors in that process. The case study enquiry looks at situations where there will be more variables of interest than data points and hence this study uses multiple sources of evidence (both qualitative and quantitative) all converging in a form of triangulation to support the conclusions.

3.3.1. The components of the research design

According to Yin, there are five important components of a research design:

1. a study’s questions
2. its propositions
3. its unit(s) of analysis
4. the logic linking the data to the propositions
5. the criteria for interpreting the findings (2003, p. 22).

This study contains each of these components.

First it seeks to address the question of why parents choose different schools and how they go about making that choice.

Secondly, the propositions fit with the sub-questions. In this study they begin with the expectation that parents do weigh up various factors and so make a conscious choice whereby they seek to match the school with the factors they desire for their child’s education. The second proposition is that parents have access to some sort of information upon which to base their decisions. The third is that parents have hopes for the future of their children and see school as at least part of the means towards those aspirations. The fourth is that schools are different and may or may not match with the factors for which the parents chose them. The final proposition is that reading ability is important to parents and that different schools may have different impacts on the reading of their pupils.
Thirdly the units of analysis or cases, as it is a multiple-case study, are the parental choices in the five schools. When undertaking a multiple-case study each case needs to be carefully chosen\(^{11}\). The cases may be chosen to replicate the findings, as a literal replication, expecting to find similar results, or as a theoretical replication, where contrasting results are found for predictable reasons (Yin, 2003, p. 47). This research has chosen to follow the route of selecting two similar schools for literal replication and three very different schools, in the same area, for theoretical replication. The obvious opportunity, in a study like this, was to investigate more than one private low-cost school for literal replication, and to look at a government school for theoretical replication. However the chance to extend the study to both a more expensive school and a Montessori school gave further opportunity for possible comparisons and contrasts. Having five cases in the study also allowed data to be pooled to give an overall view of parental choice across a spectrum of schools.

The fourth component links the data to the five sub-questions, which was done by coding the interview responses and by relating the quantitative data about the schools and the pupils to the qualitative data that came from the interviews. There was also an attempt to compare the responses to similar questions that came from the interviews with those that came from the questionnaires. The different cases were compared and contrasted using SPSS as a tool to assist the analysis (Yin, 2009) looking for patterns and similarities.

Fifthly, the findings were interpreted in relation to those of other studies which have formed the theory behind school choice. This “theory” is really just a body of literature (Bryman, 2008) on parental choice and with which the research findings could be compared, or contrasted.

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\(^{11}\) Cases can be chosen for different reasons. In the situation where a single case is studied, it may be chosen because it is an extreme or unique case, a rare case worth investigation. It may be a critical case, one that may confirm, challenge or extend a theory. Or it may be a typical case, where the aim is to study the ordinary, analyse deeply the commonplace situation, thus seeking to gain insight into the experiences of the average person or situation. Other reasons are that the study may be revelatory, as the case provides an opportunity to observe something previously inaccessible or longitudinal, observing the single case over time, showing how things change over time (Bryman, A. 2008)
Throughout the research the possibility of alternative explanations for the observations was always present and considered.

3.3.2. The sampling methods

Although this research was a case study, it did involve the choices of school, choices of parents to interview within the school and in some cases choices of whom to test for their reading ability within the class selected for study. So sampling was involved. While the whole picture of parental choice in each school was indeed the case, not all people involved could be interviewed in the time available. The first decision of whom to interview was purposive, in that they were selected as those most relevant to the research questions being asked (Oakshott, 2009; Bryman, 2008).

The choice of schools was based on the desire to find a typical low-cost private school, and the researcher visited a number of schools before School B was found. It was felt, (observing it and seeing the fee schedule on the wall of the office veranda) that this was a typical low-cost private school. The desire for a different school in the form of a local government school led to a visit to the one nearest to School B; however the reception was not warm and it was decided that the advantage of relative closeness was outweighed by the potential difficulty of obtaining quality information. The opportunity the researcher had, through living close to another government school and the very positive reception received there, led to the choice of School D. Though Schools A, B and C were all located in the same vicinity, School D was about 6km away. It was therefore decided to use a low-cost private school (School E) in the vicinity of this government school as the second typical school. Therefore the choice of these schools did not use a random sampling method. However, this is not a problem for Yin states:

“Your cases are not sampling units and should not be chosen for this reason. Rather, individual case studies are to be selected as a laboratory investigator selects the topic of a new experiment. Multiple cases, in this sense, resemble multiple experiments. Under these circumstances, the mode of generalisation is analytic generalisation, in which a previous developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study” (Yin, 2009, p. 38)
However, when it comes to selecting pupils within the school, it was possible in four of the schools to collect questionnaire data from all the members of the year group chosen, in effect a census was taken. It was also possible to do the same for the reading age data for the pupils from three schools. It was not possible for the researcher to choose the sample in the government school and so he was dependent on the choice of pupils by the class teacher. However it was felt to be better to cooperate and maintain good relationships with the staff than to insist on a procedure that could have antagonised them. This did raise questions of how representative the pupils were of the whole class in their responses and reading ability. The pupils for the reading tests in School A were chosen systematically\(^{12}\) (Oakshott, 2009). A stratified sample with equal numbers taken from the two equal sized Primary 4 classes was used in order to ensure the sample represented the whole Primary 4 population.

### 3.3.3. Research design quality

Four tests are commonly used to assess the quality of any research, these are:

1. Construct validity
2. Internal validity
3. External validity
4. Reliability (Yin, 2009, p. 40)

These will be looked at in this section.

The requirement for construct validity is that the research actually measures the concepts that are being studied. This was addressed at different levels. In this research, measurement of reading age was a proxy for school quality in the same way that test scores in Maths and English have been used in other studies (Tooley et al., 2011). The Burt Reading Test (1974) Revised, a standard well accepted test of reading was used (The SCRE Centre, 2011). These tests were consistently applied by the researcher across the pupils and the schools, but comparability with other studies may be

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\(^{12}\) Every 4th pupil from the class role was taken for the sample.
compromised as unfortunately, due to a misunderstanding, the score of the final word read was recorded rather than the word count. The questionnaires were set up in such a way to ensure, as far as possible, that parents understood what was asked and that they had the opportunity to express their thoughts. In interviews, where there was any degree of uncertainty on behalf of the interviewee, clarification was given. The use of multiple sources of evidence was used to strengthen this construct validity. The draft case study report was sent to some of the key participants for review, requesting their feedback if there was anything with which they disagreed. However nothing that has been written has been questioned.

Internal validity is important. The aim was to conduct each reading test in the same manner, allowing the same time and responding in the same way to each participant. To this end the researcher had, at times, to ask other pupils to move away to allow the reader the freedom to perform the test uninterrupted. Semi-structured interviews were used to try to ensure that the participants in the various schools were treated equally. Although the research sought to discover explanations and reasons, those reasons are not so much inferred from the investigations as expressed by the parents. This reduced the treats to internal validity. Results and reasons can be corroborated when the same ones are expressed by different parents or originate in different sources of evidence.

External validity deals with whether the results are generalisable beyond the immediate case. The results from this case study can be added to the more specific theory of school choice, found in developing and developed world literature, and it has been found that, generally, the basic theory is relevant in this particular context.

Reliability is ensuring that bias and errors are minimised, to the extent that the case study could be repeated by another researcher and the same findings and conclusions would be drawn. For this reason the procedures were recorded and the questionnaires and interview schedules were kept and are reproduced in the appendices. The data base has also been kept, but with anonymity protected.
3.4. Ethics

The ethical guidelines as set out by BERA (2004) were followed in this research. The ethical responsibility of the researcher when dealing with people, particularly children, in a social context is important. It is vital that the researcher

“operate(s) within an ethic of respect for any persons involved directly or indirectly in the research they are undertaking, regardless of age, sex, race, religion, political beliefs and lifestyle” (BERA, 2004, p. 6).

This resulted in the researcher requesting and obtaining informed consent from all those who were interviewed and who were asked to complete questionnaires. Also it was made clear to all potential participants the nature of the research (BERA, 2004, p. 6) and that they were free not to be involved, or to participate, but to limit their contributions to some answers while omitting others. Each parental questionnaire was distributed with an accompanying letter outlining the research and explaining the voluntary nature of their participation and giving a point of contact (see appendix 4). Interviewees were informed that they could withdraw without giving any reason at any point in the research (BERA, 2004, p. 6). Also anonymity was allowed to all participants; those who were interviewed were not asked their names, and those who completed the questionnaires were allowed to hand them back anonymously (BERA, 2004, p. 8). Special care was taken with the children and each was individually asked if they were happy to be involved in the reading tests before any testing commenced.

Before the data collection began the Newcastle University ethics form (ECLS Research Handbook, 2011) was discussed and the form completed and approved. It was also made clear to the researcher that help and advice was available from the supervisor. This provided a secure back up should dilemmas or problems arise (Morrow and Richards, 1996).

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13 A number of parents decided not to answer some of the questions in the questionnaire, while others completed all or none. The way that some parents answered some questions and left others blank indicated to the researcher that they understood the freedom that they had been given to participate or not.

14 This, unfortunately, meant that where there was information from the parents it was not always possible to match it up to the corresponding child.
3.5. Conclusion

This chapter has looked at case study as the methodology for this dissertation. Case study provides the academic foundation upon which the research is based and through its framework the processes, findings and conclusions can have a meaning. The research questions have been approached from multiple directions; and evidence from questionnaires, interviews, documents in schools, from reading tests, from participant observation and informal discussion are combined to allow triangulation. This enables the various cases to illustrate, confirm, generalise and challenge theory. Chapter 4 looks at the actual findings of this case study research undertaken in Accra in March 2011.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. A brief outline of the schools

4.1.1. School A (expensive private school)

This school, situated in Adenta, was started in 2004 by a lecturer at Ghana University and his British school-teacher wife. The school sprang out of a local church when the couple drew together a team to implement their vision for a school to impact the nation.

The school started in the church premises but subsequent growth and building means that they have almost taken over the church compound. Growth has been fast, with the whole of primary school and the first 4 years of secondary school catered for in their second year of operation. They are now in the process of building a new school on recently purchased land a little further out of the city. At present the senior school functions from there, but the plan is to bring the two parts of the school back together on the new site. At the primary school site there are good facilities, including a library, computer suite, separate toilets, a large hall (the church meeting room) and a playground.
The school generally follows the English National Curriculum\textsuperscript{15} and has two classes per year for most years and a maximum of 30 pupils per class. In most classes the teacher has the help of a teaching assistant (TA). The staff are well qualified and experienced and they earn a salary of £470 to £600 (€188-€240)\textsuperscript{16} per month with the TAs earning €100 (£40).

The primary school fees are £160 (€400) per term and the parents are required to buy the textbooks (many of which are produced in house) for their children. Lunch is provided (£0.60/€1.50) and packet drinking water is available. The school is open from about 7.30am, classes start at 8.00am and the school day ends at 3.30pm\textsuperscript{17}. The school seeks to offer 10% of its places free or 20% at half fees.

The school leadership have a clear vision for the school. They are strong on care and are looking to have an impact on the lives of the children above and beyond the academic, with an emphasis on values, faith, hope and relationships. In the vision, content, and the methods of the school, they are seeking to impart to the students, that they, as they learn and grow, will have a role to play in society and the nation.

4.1.2. School B (low-cost private school)

This school is also situated in Adenta and was started by the proprietor in 2003. It is a low-cost private school, run in a former house with some classrooms in outbuildings. The proprietor has nine years experience as a pre-technical instructor.

The school, a solid, simple, single story construction, is located in a compound with a small play area and some fruit trees. There are about 150 students in eight classes with nine full-time staff. Most of the staff are secondary school graduates earning £28 - £36 per month. The headmaster is older, with thirty-two years experience as a language specialist.

\textsuperscript{15} The senior school pupils sit the IGCSE and A level exams set by Cambridge International Exams (CIE).
\textsuperscript{16} Based on an exchange rate of GHC1 = £0.40
\textsuperscript{17} Parents can opt to leave their children longer as supervision is provided by the school from 3.30pm until about 5pm.
The fees are between 55p (£0.22) and 60p (£0.24) per term, lunch is available at an additional cost of 1p (£0.04) per day. Reductions in fees are offered to single parents and to families with more than two children in school, which means that about 7% of the pupils are given some type of concession.

The school motto is “The Sky is the Limit” and the crest has an eagle flying with a book in its claws. The principal indicated that he is looking to help the students and enable them to progress academically.

That said, he is clearly a businessman; his first stated reason for starting the school was that it is a “business venture”. The second reason he gave was that “education is good for community development”. The school appears to be successful as a business and some of the discussions over the days that the researcher was in the school and visiting with him indicated how his plans fitted with this business view of the school. 

4.1.3. School C (Montessori school)

This school was started in 2004 by a Muslim lady with a B.Sc. in Mathematics. As a mother, she was not happy with the performance of her four year old daughter at pre-school and so began an after-school programme for her. Neighbouring children soon joined and it was their parents who convinced her to make this informal venture into a school.

It is a Montessori type school with its own purpose-built two storey classroom blocks. There are about 135 pupils in nine classes, taught by fourteen full-time staff, most of whom have some qualification beyond school level. The staff earn salaries of between £85 (£34) to £280 (£112) per month. Class size ranges from 4 pupils (P4) to 24 pupils (combined P2 and P3). The school is registered.

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18 As the academic year was drawing to a close, he was looking to offer free places to local parents who had out-of-school children. His idea was to link them into the school, so that the parents continued to send their children to the school for the whole of the next academic year. He saw this as a good business move.

19 The principal began the process in May 2004 and had a certificate to commence business in August of that year. The full registration process with the Ghana Education Service was completed in April 2005.
The school motto is “Quality Education”, and much of what is seen in a visit to the school appears to reflect this goal. Lots of teaching materials are available and the classes were airy, light and spacious, creating a pleasant environment with posters and white boards. The whole school environment reflects the fact that education is broad; there are appeals to healthy eating, signs about washing hands and indications that teaching and education are taken seriously. The school timings are strictly enforced and parental involvement is encouraged and expected. The children appeared attentive and well-behaved.

The fees are ₡235 (£94) for children in primary classes. The cost of books is in addition to these charges. Lunch is available at ₡1.50. The principal gives two orphans and two needy children free tuition and also gives concessions to three other pupils.

In discussions, she said that she had been interested in starting a business; but her passion is to see young children learn had led her into education. She is clear about the need to teach reading and is a vocal supporter and proponent of the teaching of phonics. The school has been successful in attracting parents and in teaching children, but it is not yet successful as a business (it has been running for seven years and has yet to break even). In fact the principal stated, “If [my] motivation was money it would close.” It continues because it is supported by the principal’s husband who works in the US and travels between there and Ghana.

4.1.4. School D (government school)

This school (in Ashongman) was started in 2003, as a result of the growth in numbers at the existing government school. It is a separate entity but it shares the premises with the original school. It is therefore the second of two shifts that use the buildings. The school is in purpose-built building, but they only have the use of them for half the day. The classrooms are relatively small, with the desks packed in tightly and insufficient space, in some classrooms, for the teachers’ desk.

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20 She was advertising for a new KG teacher and clearly stipulated on the large poster advert on the main road that the teacher should be able to teach phonics.

21 Despite the lack of financial viability and the small size of the more senior classes, the principal has begun work on a second site and started a Junior High School.
(which has to be placed on the veranda). The school is well located, near a main road, a bus terminus, houses and shops, but the compound has no fence or boundary, so where the school ends and the stalls or footpath begin is completely undefined. The buildings are simple, with poor facilities; no electricity, lighting, fans or ICT equipment. The school does not provide separate toilets for girls and boys. A free lunch is provided for all the pupils.

The principal was not available at the time of the research, due to illness. The deputy, a lady who had done a 4 year teacher training course and has thirty-nine years experience, had been there since this school began.

The school, which is for students from Primary 1 to Primary 6, has large classes. The smallest has 50 pupils and the largest has 118 pupils. There are fifteen full time teaching staff, including two teachers for each class, a dedicated ICT teacher, a Ga (local language) teacher and the Principal. It was not possible to ascertain the salaries of the staff while at the school, but research indicates that their salaries may be about €300-€400 (£120 - £160) (Ghana Web, 2011; Owusu, 2011; Baah et al., 2009).

4.1.5. School E (low-cost private school)

This school was started in Ashongman in 2003 by the lady principal. She has a government college diploma and has taught in both private and government schools.

The school, located in a residential area, is formed from a series of low rooms round a long, narrow central courtyard. The classrooms are down the sides, with an office and entrance at one end and accommodation at the other. Some of the classrooms are separated by partitioning which can be opened to allow the whole school to meet for assemblies and worship. The buildings are all concrete with tiled roofs and open mesh windows. There is electricity and lighting but no fans.

There are ten teachers on salaries of between €80-€90 (£32-£36) per month. The fees are €55 (£22) per term and the parents are required to buy the standard text books, which are available in the local market.
At present the school goes up only to Primary 5. The classes each have between seventeen and thirty pupils. The school is open for the parents to drop their children at 7.30am (for breakfast); the school day begins at 8.00am and ends at 3.30pm.

The principal stated that the school had been established to provide a genuine low-cost alternative to the near-by government school. In fact, the researcher’s contact with students at the government school reinforced the idea of visiting this school as an alternative case study.\footnote{A number of the students who were part of the research at that government school had previously been pupils at this school.}
### 4.1.6. Summary of the five case study schools

Table 4: Summary of some key facts about the five schools in the research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered with gov't</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of pupils in Primary (inc nursery, KG and crèche)</td>
<td>350 (Only one pre-primary year)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>600 (No KG or pre-primary classes)</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees (per term)</td>
<td>€400</td>
<td>€55 - €60</td>
<td>€175 - €235</td>
<td>Free$^{23}$</td>
<td>€55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission fees</td>
<td>€200</td>
<td>€30 + €5</td>
<td>€100</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>€25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Classes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes available</td>
<td>KG1 to Primary 6</td>
<td>Nursery to Primary 6</td>
<td>Crèche to Primary 6</td>
<td>Primary 1 to Primary 6</td>
<td>Nursery to Primary 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined classes?</td>
<td>No, 2 classes per year</td>
<td>Yes, P2 and P3 P5 and P6</td>
<td>Yes, P2 and P3 P5 and P6</td>
<td>No, 2 teachers per class</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largest class size</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smallest class size</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch charges (per day)</td>
<td>€1.50</td>
<td>€1</td>
<td>€1.50</td>
<td>Free$^{24}$</td>
<td>€0.80 (Breakfast €0.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Salaries (monthly)</td>
<td>€470 to €600 (TAs on €100)</td>
<td>€70 - €90</td>
<td>€85 - €280</td>
<td>€300 - €400</td>
<td>€80 - €90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of full-time staff</td>
<td>17 +10 teaching assistants</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil teacher ratio</td>
<td>≈13 (=21 excluding TAs)</td>
<td>≈17</td>
<td>≈9.5</td>
<td>≈40</td>
<td>≈17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate of the teacher salary cost per child per month</td>
<td>€41</td>
<td>€5</td>
<td>€18</td>
<td>€9</td>
<td>€5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of concession fees</td>
<td>≤10%</td>
<td>≈7%</td>
<td>≈5%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School bus (number of vehicles)</td>
<td>3 (Shared with the senior school)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers for pupils’ use</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

$^{23}$ One parent stated that they paid fees of €1 per week, but other communications indicated that the education was free except for the exam fees of €2 per exam.

$^{24}$ It was not fully clear if the lunch was actually free. According to the deputy principal all children received a free meal (one of the attractions of the school according to her), but one parent in the interview said that there was a charge of €1 per week.
4.2. Question 1: What are the key factors that these parents use in making the decision about where to send their child to school?

Different sources of evidence were taken to try to establish the major factors that were influential for the parents at these five schools (Yin, 2009). Parental questionnaires (see appendix 2) were distributed through the pupils in Primary 3, with the request that they ask their parents to complete them and return them to the school or the researcher at a time indicated. Also the researcher met some parents for informal, semi-structured interviews. These interviews took place on the school premises, either at the beginning or the end of the school day. The researcher is aware that the data collected in this way might not be representative; the sampling was not random as not all parents come to the school to drop or collect their children. Any potential bias could be balanced by the way that, in the majority of schools, all parents had the opportunity to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire results were based on the parental response to pre-determined categories, while the interviews gave the parents the chance to express their thoughts without prompts or lists to influence them. Where possible the interviews were conducted first, to avoid influencing their open responses. However in some schools the two sets of respondents barely overlapped. Additional evidence concerning parental choice came from the interviews with the principals who were asked what they believed were the main reasons why parents chose their school. In many but not all cases this triangulation confirmed the results that came directly from the parents.

4.2.1. The most commonly quoted factors influencing school choice

The overall results of the parental questionnaires are considered first. There were 50 parents who between them mentioned 184 factors. Some parents mentioned five factors (the number suggested in the questionnaire) while others mentioned only one or two.
### Table 5: Results from the parental questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors indicated in Questionnaires</th>
<th>Number of times indicated</th>
<th>Percentage of total factors mentioned</th>
<th>Percentage of parents who mentioned the factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good academic standard and exam results</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian based education</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good standard of English teaching</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good discipline</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School has a good reputation</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of classes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to home</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school curriculum</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives access to the next stage of education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low cost or free education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know principal/owner/teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child wanted to go there</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The timing of the school day</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends/relatives recommended it</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other children in school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>184</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The factors are also recorded by the percentage of respondents mentioning them.

The parental interviews also yielded some results about school choice. However, as the question was an open one, it resulted in different responses. It was therefore necessary to code these responses. It became clear that the issue of “care” for the pupil did not fit into any of the original codes and so it became a new code. The reason of “Teaching quality” was included under the code of “Good academic standards and exam results”. The attraction of the Montessori Method was included under “The school curriculum”, (even though when this had come up in the questionnaires it had been in connection with the use of the English National Curriculum of School A). These results are reproduced in Table 6 below.
Table 6: Results from parental interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors mentioned in interviews</th>
<th>Number of times indicated</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close to home</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good academic standard and exam results</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school curriculum</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low cost or free education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school cares for the children</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of classes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good standard of English teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends/relatives recommended it</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other answers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian based education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other children in school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School has a good reputation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives access to the next stage of education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know principal/owner</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child wanted to go there</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The timing of the school day</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good discipline</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The response “My friends/relatives recommended it” is a category that includes some interesting comments in the interviews. Two parents described the way that they had noticed the reading or verbal abilities of friends’ or relatives’ children who were studying at the Montessori school (School C). They said things like, “they were able to speak and read good English....better than my children,” or “I saw the performance of the children here, they were able to express in English....and gave intelligent answers.” These observations were very influential in informing the decision-making process and leading to their choice of School C. A parent in School A also made a similar comment when she spoke about the way the children were “a good advert for the school”.
Table 7: Combined results from interviews and questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Number of times indicated</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good academic standard and exam results</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to home</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good standard of English teaching</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian based education</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school curriculum</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of classes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School has a good reputation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good discipline</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low cost or free education</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives access to the next stage of education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school cares for the children</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends/relatives recommended it</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know principal/owner</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other answers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other children in school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child wanted to go there</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The timing of the school day</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>254</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To summarize these results:

1. Academic factors appear to play a large role for a majority of parents.
2. The quality of English teaching and learning is important to many parents.
3. Location is a significant factor for many parents.
4. Many parents appear to be influenced by the Christian basis of the school(s).
5. Costs are a significant factor for many parents in some schools.
6. The children appear to have very little influence on the decision-making process.
7. The curriculum is a major factor for some parents.

Points to note:

The influence of friends and relatives or personal acquaintance with the owner or principal was larger than these statistics imply. In answer to another question many of the parents (even those...
who had not indicated the factor of “My friends/relatives recommend it”) pointed out how they had found out about the schools from their neighbours, friends, pastor, or fellow church members. Clearly personal acquaintances and recommendations by word or example were very influential.

Closeness (or proximity or location) was one of the most commonly quoted factors for all the schools. Even though many parents indicated “closeness to school” in the questionnaire, closeness to school can mean different things to different parents. Most of the children attending the low-cost or government schools walked to school, while the majority of those at the expensive school travel by car, taxi or the school bus. See Figure 1 - 4 below. Some of the schools’ specific aspects of closeness or location are discussed school by school in section 4.5 below.

Figure 1: Means of transport for pupils in School A

![Figure 1: Means of transport for pupils in School A](image1)

Figure 2: Means of transport for pupils in School B

![Figure 2: Means of transport for pupils in School B](image2)
The fees were a common factor for those choosing the low-cost schools or the government school. Cost was mentioned by some of the parents at the other two schools but it was not one of the most common factors.

The curriculum was a common factor in the case of the two schools that have a distinctive teaching content and/or style. The expensive school teaches to the English National Curriculum
and the Montessori school has its own methodology. Many parents were aware of these differences and they were influential in their choices.

The quality of the English language teaching was a common consideration except in the expensive private school (School A) and the government school (School D)\(^25\).

Interestingly, English language was not mentioned by the parents at the expensive school and I can only assume that it is taken for granted that the school will provide good English instruction, or that the children speak English at home and are competent and fluent already\(^26\). See Figure 6 for the language spoken at home by pupils at School A.

**Figure 6: Language spoken at home by pupils in School A**

\(^{25}\) The government school does most of the teaching in English with some in Ga. It is interesting to note that the school is officially in a Ga area, but the vice-principal indicated that Ga is not the first language of most of the pupils. The school has attempted, unsuccessfully, to have their official government status changed so that more of the students can have part of their education in their own language. This research, of a small group from one class, indicated that only 20% of these students spoke Ga as their first language see figure 7. (Incidentally only 5% had English as their first language and so 75% of the students had no teaching in their mother tongue)

\(^{26}\) See section 5.6 for further discussion
Class size was a common factor affecting choice for the parents sending their children to the Montessori and the expensive school. The issue of class size featured in at least some of the interviews with parents from each of the schools. There were positive comments about the class size in all the private schools and some negative comments from parents in the government school. Some parents gave class size as a factor they had used in making their choices and others made comments about the present situation in different schools. It was easy to see that this was an important area affecting parents and children. While some research in the developing world shows no significant evidence of a link between class size and pupil achievement (Buchmann and Hannum, 2001)\(^{27}\), the difference for these parents in putting their own child in a class of 6, 30 or 118 appears huge and is a significant factor affecting choice.

This analysis has looked at the common factors influencing school choice and it has been shown that there are some differences in the common influences for different schools. Some of these are discussed school by school in section 4.5 below and are shown in the figures in Appendix 1.

\(^{27}\)This conclusion is challenged by other studies see Simmons and Alexander’s review (1978)
4.2.2. The most important factors quoted as influencing school choice

Here we look at what each parent says is the most important factor that impacted their choice.

Figure 8: The most important factor given by parents (all schools combined)

This confirms the general conclusions that academic reasons are not only the most common, but also the most important. Two of the top three first choice reasons are academic. The reason “Good reputation” is too ill-defined, and could hide an academic or a non-academic reason. If the clearly academic factors of “Good academics” and “Good English teaching” are combined with those for “Curriculum” then these account for 50% of the total first reason questionnaire responses. The remaining 50% are spread over the schools’ Christian foundation, discipline, cost, class size and location.
4.3. Question 2: What are the key sources of information that these parents use in making their decision?

Of all the research questions, it was hardest to obtain satisfactory answers to this one. The results obtained come primarily from the parental interviews, supplemented by the parental questionnaires.

Overall there were various sources used to gather information in order to make a decision about the choice of school for their children. Much of the information was through personal contact with people involved in the schools. The advice of friends who had children in the school was a major source of information.

It was easier to obtain information from the parents at School A (the expensive school) and those at School C (the Montessori school). There was very little information forthcoming from those who sent their children to School D (the government school), making it appear that maybe these people had done less research before making the choice. As some of the government school parents had stated that “they had no choice”, then research into other options would be a waste of time and effort. There are not many government schools in the area; hence pupils often need to travel for more than thirty minutes to reach the government school. Therefore, unless the family lives part way between two schools there is little competition between government schools.

Overall results

From a total of 129 reasons they can be split into five or six broad categories:

1. Printed information or advertising (banners, signboards, leaflets and web sites).
2. Visits to the school or Open Days.
3. Information from friends, relatives or neighbours.
4. Information from children already in the school.
5. Contact with the Principal or teachers in the school.
6. Other
Some of these are hard to code: does a visit to talk to the principal belong in “Visits to the school” or “Contact with the principal and teachers”? In this regard the researcher coded contact with the principal as contact outside of a visit to the school. A number of parents who were interviewed had friendships with the principals or teachers outside the school context. When they used these as a source of information it was coded as “Information from friends and relatives”.

With these caveats, the following analysis is included.

**Figure 9: Sources of information for parents**

As it was very difficult to gain information from the government school parents, and even the low-cost private school parents were not very forthcoming, the data here is weighed in favour of the reasons produced by the parents who did supply information. Hence the impact of the sources used by the parents at Schools A and C dominate these results.

Impersonal sources of information were used, but the majority of sources were personal, with about 40% of them being “Information from friends, relatives and neighbours”. When an impersonal source was used, only one parent gave it as the sole source of information. This was an interesting contact as her child had joined the school when it first opened. This meant that there were no other sources of information for her, except perhaps to talk to those people who were about to start the school.
Two parents who were interviewed shared very different sources of information that helped them make their decisions. One had been praying about the choice of school and sensed that the school she found was an answer to those prayers. Another was not happy with the school that her children were in; the children were not doing well and she told of racial bias against them. She heard about School A and when she visited, sensed a peace in the place. This added to her conviction that this was the right place for her to send her children.

If more information had been available, it might have proved interesting to investigate if there are any observable differences between the sources of information for the parents in different schools.

4.4. Question 3: What are the educational aspirations of these parents for their children? Do they value education and do they think it is important for their children?

The questionnaires asked parents about their own educational achievements and about their hopes for their children. There were also questions about the importance of English language for the children. In addition, a lot of information to address this question came through the parental interviews and the reasons that parents gave for the choice of school for their children. These sources of information have been triangulated to give a picture of the view of education by the parents who were contacted in the research.

The first indicator that parents think education is important comes from the parental questionnaires. All the parents who answered the questionnaire, except one, indicated that it was “very important” for their child to learn English. The only parent who gave any other answer indicated that learning English was “quite unimportant”. That the parents see the school as an important source of that knowledge of English is seen by the fact that 46% of parents who indicated the things that influenced their choice of school included “The school has a good...”

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This student was at a low-cost private school and had a lowest reading age relative to their chronological age of any student studying in any of the private schools.
standard of English” as one of the important factors. Interestingly, this figure rises when only the low-cost and government schools are included\textsuperscript{29}. The second indicator comes from the answers to the questions about school choice in both the interviews and the questionnaires. Parents who had chosen to send their children to low-cost private school often gave general educational reasons like “they will learn more here”, “to get the best potential for the future”, “we want the best for them: to learn and be bright”, “there is good learning” and “the teachers are doing a good job especially English teaching”. All these answers indicate that the parents value education and are looking to find a school where the children can learn the most.

The majority of parents who sent their child to the Montessori school gave an academic reason as the first reason for choosing the school. Two of the parents made a direct comparison between the performance of the children already at the school and their own children before they joined the school. Another moved to the Montessori school because they wanted a “better school” and it was clear from the conversation that “better” meant academically better.

The majority of the government school children’s parents who were interviewed indicated that the choice had been made, at least in part, on the basis of the school’s academic quality.

In discussions with the parents who sent their children to the expensive private school, it was clear that they were looking for the best possible education for their children, that they were interested in their children’s education and they were ready to pay to get the quality that they sought. Many were looking forward to tertiary education and the issue of the curriculum and the teaching were both important to many parents.

The parents who completed the questionnaire indicated the following aspirations for their children.

\textsuperscript{29} It has to be assumed that the factor “The school has a good standard of English” was not a key one for parents who sent their children to School A, either because they would only consider schools with good English or that they spoke good English at home and didn’t depend on the school for that aspect of education.
Overall, the clear majority sought professional status for their child. No parents chose the other available options for their children, which were to complete Junior or Senior High School. This indicates that almost all parents are looking towards tertiary education.

There was not sufficient data to make school to school comparisons. However the three parents who said that their aspirations were less than a degree, i.e. to complete Primary school or to get a diploma, had their children in different schools.

Regardless of the extent or lack of their own qualifications, parents wanted high qualifications for their children. Unfortunately the categories used for the parents’ own qualifications and those of their aspirations for their children were not an exact match. However the results showed only two parents whose stated aspirations for their children were lower than their own achievements\(^30\).

From all the above evidence it is concluded that the vast majority of parents who participated in the research valued both school and tertiary education highly.

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\(^{30}\) One of those may have been a misunderstanding of the question and the second is the parent of a child in a low-cost private school whose stated goal for their child was to complete primary school.
4.5. Question 4: How do the schools that these parents choose for their children perform in the areas for which they are chosen?

From the analysis of the key factors that parents use, it can be seen that there are common themes, but also variation and differences between schools (see appendix 1). The common factors; parents are looking for a good level of English and for quality education and most have very high aspirations for their children, are the same regardless of their ultimate choice of school. Yet looking at the dominant factors separately, school by school, the figures show clear differences. The aim of this section is to try to understand if a school is chosen for particular factors whether there is any objective or anecdotal evidence of them in the school. Part of the answer to this question comes through an examination of how far the school performs in the aspects of education sought by the parents when they decide to send their children there. Another source is to look at the aspects of the school that the principals and owners regard as their strengths and ask if the parents choose the school for those reasons. The third is to look at the feedback from the parents on their perceptions of the performance of the school on key attributes.

This will be looked at school by school. The main factors expressed by parents, the values and ethos of the school, the aims and goals of the principal, the reasons he or she believes the parents choose the school and, where possible, some objective facts or more subjective observations and comparisons made by the researcher will be drawn together.

4.5.1. School A
The most frequent reasons expressed by the parents in their questionnaire responses are shown in Table 8 below.

**Table 8: The most frequent reasons expressed by the parents in their questionnaire responses and the percentage of all responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Good academic standards and exam results</th>
<th>16.5%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Christian based education</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The school curriculum</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The size of classes</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interviews supported these general categories, with many parents (8 out of 10) strongly influenced by some aspects of the academic curriculum (either general teaching methodology, the specific use of the English National Curriculum or the school structure with its 5 years of secondary schooling and 2 years of A levels\(^{31}\)). Others mentioned the following; the class size, the use of teaching assistants, the future opportunities to study abroad, the teaching quality, the care at nursery level and the relative price of the school.

Many of these factors are recognised by the management of the school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the school leadership. From these it became clear that the management sensed that parents were choosing the school for the reasons of Christian values, curriculum, and quality of education. The school itself focuses on all three, as indicated by the school’s mission statement and core values\(^{32}\).

The founder added extra insight as he outlined the changes that he felt had taken place over time. The main reasons, chronologically, were the Christian emphasis, then later the discipline structure\(^{33}\) (which does not use corporal punishment) and most recently the use of the English National Curriculum.

\(^{31}\) Many of those interviewed referred to it as “A British curriculum” or a “UK curriculum” or to the structure of the schooling being similar to the UK and to Ghana in the past. There have been some considerable structural and curricular changes because of political decisions made by the government over the last few years. This appears to have created uncertainty and insecurity for parents and the knowledge that the structure of the school will not suddenly change is a key factor for many who indicate that the school curriculum is a factor in choosing School A for their children.

\(^{32}\) The school’s two part mission statement is:
   a. “Learning together in Faith, Hope and Love”
   b. “To provide good quality education for children from every tribe and nation in an environment of faith, hope and love”

   Their three core values are stated as:
   a. Love, honour and respect God
   b. Love honour and respect all human beings irrespective of social class or age
   c. Aim for excellence in our pursuit of knowledge and truth about God’s creation.

\(^{33}\) This issue of discipline is very interesting: there appear to be some different views expressed by management and some parents. Also the attitude of the staff may be different again. However the point here is that the principal stated that he believed that this was a key factor. There was no clear evidence from elsewhere to support this view; it therefore lacked corroboration or triangulation in this study.
Quality of education is hard to define, quantify or measure. Observations by the researcher were limited to viewing the facilities, counting the computers, hearing about the school sports teams and their matches at the weekends, seeing the educational day trip head off to Cape Coast, catching the tone and ethos of the school and testing reading age of a systematic random sample (Oakshott, 2009) of Primary 4 students.

The subjective assessment of the school pointed to one where there is a breadth to the education. The school sports teams and the day trips, the extensive library and computer suite, the comment by a parent on the children acquiring “thinking skills and critical thinking” all reinforced this idea of “quality”.

The tests of reading age also produced some significant results. As pointed out in Figure 21 below, there were differences in age of pupils who were tested for their reading ability, hence the analysis looks at the difference between reading age and chronological age. A positive value indicating that the pupil’s reading is better than expected for their age, and a negative number indicates that the pupil’s reading is not as good as expected for their age. The numerical value gives the difference in months.

The statistics in the Table 9 below show that the mean difference is positive for School A (their reading age is about 3 years (36.5 months) ahead of their chronological age) and slightly negative for the other schools (their reading age is nearly 6 months (-5.5 months) behind their chronological age). But this does not necessarily indicate that any difference is significant and not due to natural chance variation in the sample data.

Table 9: The difference between reading age and chronological age for School A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number in sample</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36.54</td>
<td>28.002</td>
<td>5.716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other Schools</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>-5.55</td>
<td>38.346</td>
<td>4.756</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34 Primary 4 pupils in School A corresponded with Primary 3 pupils age-wise in the Ghanaian system.
As the standard deviations (as a measure of the spread of the data), and hence the variances, are significantly different (Table 9 above)\(^{35}\), an independent t-test has therefore been used to compare the results for School A with the combined results from the other schools and to test if the difference is significant.

**Table 10: t-test for difference of means between the reading age data for School A and the other schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The difference of reading age and chronological age (months)</th>
<th>Independent t test.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
<td>d.f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>5.661</td>
<td>56.196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this it shows that there is a probability of less than 0.001 that the two samples (For School A and for the other schools) come from populations with the same mean. It shows that the reading ability of pupils in School A is significantly different. The data also leads to the conclusion that we are 95% confident that the difference in means is greater than 27 months. In so far as reading ability at Primary 3 or 4\(^{36}\) is a valid measure of quality in education, it is clear that School A is outperforming the other schools in the investigation.

This is subjectively confirmed by the parents’ own perspectives. Those who were interviewed were asked whether the school had matched up to the expectations they had had when they decided to send their child there. In their responses there was a clear “Yes” (from 9 out of 10) with the other parent indicating that the teaching was “better than expected” and she was “impressed”.

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\(^{35}\) This difference is sufficient to be significant (Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances has a significance level of 0.023 (< 0.05)) and to require the use a test that does not assume equal variances (Muijs, 2004).

\(^{36}\) The class numbers used in School A and in the schools following the Ghanaian system are different. Primary 4 in School A corresponds most closely to Primary 3 in the Ghanaian system.
The final source of information for the assessment of quality of education for School A comes from the Likert-type scale feedback on teaching given by the parents who responded to the questionnaire. Taking three questions of Teachers Ability and Level of English and Teacher Attendance as proxies for quality gives the following parental assessments of School A.\(^{37}\)

**Figure 11: Parental assessment of teacher ability at School A**

![Teacher Ability Chart]

**Figure 12: Parental assessment of the level of English teaching at School A**

![Level of English Chart]

**Figure 12: Parental assessment of teacher attendance at School A**

![Teacher Attendance Chart]

\(^{37}\) The researcher was not able to comment on teacher ability as he was not at the school to judge or assess this. Unfortunately each attempt quietly to observe a class led to an invitation to teach the lesson! However he would tend to affirm that teacher attendance may be the issue that is least satisfactory as he observed a number of occasions where the class was left in the care of the TA.
It must be noted that one of the respondents had indicated “very dissatisfied” as their response to every one of the twelve questions\textsuperscript{38}.

Within the limited scope of this research it can be concluded that the parents who chose School A for quality of education are actually choosing a school that has quality education and they are satisfied with this quality.

The second key factor that many of the parents indicated was influential in their making a choice to send their child to school is its Christian-based education.

The school motto “Learning together in Faith, Hope and Love” gives a clear indication that the Christian faith is at the heart of the vision of those who began School A. This Christian basis is restated in their three core values which are:

\begin{itemize}
    \item a. Love, honour and respect God
    \item b. Love honour and respect all human beings irrespective of social class or age
    \item c. Aim for excellence in our pursuit of knowledge and truth about God’s creation.
\end{itemize}

The school management seeks to involve biblical principles in all that goes on in the school, the way that the staff function as well as the way that the students are taught. There are Christian assemblies, many of the individual staff are active in their Christian faith and the whole school has its roots in the founding church. If parents wanted a Christian-based education for their children then School A certainly meets those requirements.

Looking briefly at the next three key factors that many parents indicated as influential in their decision-making, it can be seen that these too are, in certain ways, fulfilled in School A.

The curriculum: as stated previously, the school is one that follows the English National curriculum. Many parents who were interviewed knew this and found it a compelling reason to choose School A\textsuperscript{39}.

\textsuperscript{38} It is not clear if these are genuine assessments or as a response to some misunderstanding. As this came from a questionnaire, not an interview, it was not possible to obtain clarification.
The classes at School A were consistently between 23 and 31 students. Parents were anxious about classes being too big in some schools. This was one, among other significant reasons, that parents stated when they indicated that they had not wanted to send their children to a government school. Here at School A there was a consistency and continuity of class size and parents expressed a reasonable level of satisfaction at this situation.\(^{39}\)

**Figure 13: Parental satisfaction at size of classes in School A\(^ {41}\)**

There is little in the way of comment that the researcher can make on the “close to home” factor, except to say that what is close for a family with a car or who use a taxi, is not close for a family who has to walk. Also School A runs three buses to collect pupils in the morning and to return them at the end of the school day, so distances are all relative. The only data that was available was the assessment that the pupils themselves made of the time they take travelling to school. The reliability is questionable, particularly in the light of the observed difficulty many students had in completing that section of the questionnaire. Though it is not of much value, it is possible to say that the distribution of times for pupils at School A did not appear to differ much from those of the

\(^{39}\) They were not misled or disappointed as the school continues on to teach to IGCSE and A level in the senior school. (These are exams set by Cambridge International Exams, based on the UK GCSE and A level syllabi and used round the world (University of Cambridge International Examinations, 2011)).

\(^{40}\) The researcher found some low cost private schools appearing to struggle to maintain class size up through the primary school. Two of the three other private schools had much fuller classes at the lower levels with small groups in Primary 3 and above.

\(^{41}\) Again the one parent who expressed himself to be “Very Dissatisfied” was the one who gave this same response to all the questions.
other schools, except that the low-cost private schools (Schools B and E) appeared to have fewer children travelling for more than 30 minutes.

Figure 14: Time taken for pupils to travel to School A

![Chart showing time taken for pupils to travel to School A]

Figure 15: Time taken for pupils to travel to School B

![Chart showing time taken for pupils to travel to School B]

Figure 16: Time taken for pupils to travel to School C

![Chart showing time taken for pupils to travel to School C]
Overall, it appears that, for School A, the reasons that parents quote for choosing the school match very well with the qualities, characteristics and stated values of the school.

4.5.2. School B

The factors most commonly quoted in their questionnaires and interviews by parents at School B were:

1. Close to home
2. Low cost or free education
3. Good standard of English teaching
4. The school has a good reputation
5. Good academic standards and exam results.
The interviews shed light on the meaning of the factor “close to home” and there are objective facts to consider when looking at the cost of education.

The factor “Close to home” was not one that came up in the questionnaires but location was mentioned in the majority of the interviews. School B is situated to the north of the busy east-west main road through the northern suburb of Adenta. It is this location that draws pupils who live on that same side of the road. Parents do not want their children to have to cross this road. There are many more schools on the south side of the road; among them are School B’s main competitors. In this case “Close to home” does not necessarily mean distance. The school’s location is a factor that the principal uses; he concentrates his advertising on his side of the road to take advantage of this opportunity.

The data for time spent travelling to school indicates that a relatively low proportion of pupils travel for more than 30 minutes and that more than 60% of the pupils who completed their questionnaire said that they walked to school.

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**Figure 18: Pupils’ means of travel to School B**

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42 Not all parents live close to the school and one parent has brought his family back to the school after moving away but not finding the local low cost private school to be satisfactory. This involves long trotros trips twice daily. This parent adds significantly to the cost of schooling by paying €6 (£2.40) per day for his family in transport charges.
With this explanation, the factor “close to home” used as a decision making factor is clearly one that is true for many who attend School B.

The second factor is one of “Low cost or free education”. Here we can consider the fees. The school fees are 60 (€24) per term. There are three terms of about fifteen weeks per year, meaning the fees are about 0.80 (€0.32) per day. These low cost fees are the second factor that the principal believes draws parents to his school. He also pointed out that he offers a number of concessions for families with three children or without a main breadwinner. Parents have chosen this low-cost private school rather than a government school, so showing that they are balancing the perceived benefits of the private education against the cost. One parent commented that the school was doing her daughter good and she would not want to send her child to a government school.

The third factor reported by parents as significant in making the choice to send their child to School B is the standard of English teaching. Here again reading age is the best available proxy to use to assess the level of English teaching.

The mean reading age above chronological age in months for School B is 9.5 months.

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43 This compares with the cost of the meal at lunchtime which is 1 per pupil per day.
44 Other low-cost private schools charge similar fees, School E charges 55 per term (0.75 per day (€0.30)) for tuition for a primary pupil, and the Omega School chain charges 1 (€0.40) per day for the tuition and the lunch.
45 The daily minimum wage is 3.73 (£1.50) per day GhanaWeb (2011) Minimum wage up 20%. Available at: http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?id=203136 (Accessed: 29th June 2011). So a man on the minimum wage would be paying 20% of his salary for one child’s school fees.
Figure 19: The mean difference between reading age and chronological age for the different schools

However when the data for School B is compared to that for all the other schools it is not significantly different.

Table 11: The difference between reading age and chronological age for School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The difference between reading age and chronological age (in months)</td>
<td>School B</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.56</td>
<td>37.897</td>
<td>11.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All other schools</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>40.876</td>
<td>4.628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: t-test for difference of means between the reading age data for School B and the other schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-.348</td>
<td>13.503</td>
<td>.733</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The independent sample t-test shows that data can be treated as having equal variances, but that there is no evidence to suggest that the data for School B has a different mean from that of the other schools. The significance level is 0.743 and it would need to fall to < 0.05 to show that the difference in means (9.56 for School B and 5.27 for the other schools) was significant.

It could be argued that parents choosing School B are doing so at least in part because of the low cost of the fees. Hence the choice for parents is between School B and another low-cost private school or a government school. Schools A and C are not options for them. No government schools were found in the immediate vicinity of School B, the nearest, a trotro’s trip away, was visited but it was not possible to collect any data. It is therefore proposed that a reasonable comparison would be between the School B and School D (the government school for which data has been collected).

Table 13: The difference in means between the reading age data for School B and School D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.56</td>
<td>37.897</td>
<td>11.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-40.70</td>
<td>24.227</td>
<td>5.417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows a clear difference in the means, but a t-test is required to see if the difference is significant.
Table 14: Results for the independent sample t-test for a difference in the means for School B and School D.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>2.598</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>4.514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>3.975</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here it can be seen that the variances are different but not significantly so (p>0.05). Hence either test could be used. They both show that the difference in means (9.56 for School B and negative 40.7 for School D) is significant and has a less than 0.1% chance of having resulted randomly. Hence we can conclude that the mean difference between reading and chronological ages is different between School B and School D. If this is the case, then it could be considered justification for choosing School B on the grounds of the quality of English.

It was difficult to obtain meaningful questionnaire data from parents at School B but the Likert results obtained show that the parents are generally happy with the school’s English language teaching but slightly less so with the teachers’ ability. The interview feedback on this was that the parents were pleased with the care, the general happiness of the children\footnote{It was interesting to note the number of references, at interview, to their child’s happiness, desire to come to school and general wellbeing when these were not factors that they mentioned when they talked about making their choice to send their child to the school. See also Coldron, J. and Boulton, P. (1991)} and the overall learning in school.
In conclusion, the investigation into the relationship between the stated attractions that cause parents to send their children to School B and the observations and investigations of the school points to a general agreement between what the parents sought and what the school appears to provide.

4.5.3. School C

The most commonly quoted reasons parents gave for sending their children to School C were:

1. Close to home
2. Size of classes
3. Good standard of English teaching
4. Good academic standards and exam results
5. The school curriculum.

The comments here will be briefer.

Closeness to home:

There was no evidence that pupils in School C lived closer to their school than pupils in the other school did to theirs. In fact School C had the largest proportion of students who said that they travelled for more than 30 minutes. It also had the second smallest proportion that walked and the second largest proportion that came by car\textsuperscript{47}.

The size of classes:

Class sizes are small and variable, but never more than the principal’s stated target of 18 pupils in Primary\textsuperscript{48}.

\textsuperscript{47} They were in second place to School A in both categories.
\textsuperscript{48} She sets a maximum of 12 pupils for the pre-primary classes.
Table 15: The size of the classes in School C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Number in class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crèche</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery 1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KG 1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KG 2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary 1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary 2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary 3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary 4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary 5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary 6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the table above and seeing how the school takes very young children and is almost full at the youngest end, it is interesting to note that the principal’s greatest satisfaction comes from the youngest children’s learning and progress and that she finds the primary children “more challenging”.

The main reason that the principal gave for parents taking their children out of school was that they did not want their children to repeat a year when they did not do well enough. The gradual loss of children as they progress up through the school, and the possibility that it may be difficult for pupils to join the school other than at the youngest ages, gives a plausible reason why the higher classes may be smaller, but further research would be needed to confirm this.

School C has small classes; this is a goal of the principal and also appears to be a consequence of the schooling system followed, so parents do get what they are looking for when they choose School C for this reason. This, again, was one of the key reasons that the parents of pupils at School C gave for not sending their child to a government school.

Good standard of English teaching and Good academic standards and exam results:

Analysis of the reading ages of the students at School C gave a mean of 9.1 months for the reading age minus chronological age. So pupils, on average, are reading above the level expected of their

---

49 The school is developing a second site for the Junior High School and they now operate one Primary 2 class in each location due to parental demand.
50 The Principal also pointed out the lack of an extra classroom for crash courses to get children (new and existing pupils) up to speed was one of the main hindrances to implementing her goals for the school.
age. This is better than three of the schools, but not statistically significant from the other schools combined. (For further analysis of reading age see section 4.6)

The interviews gave insight as to the difference in educational attainment and attitude that some of the parents had seen in the pupils here before they sent their own children to this school. As already noted, three of the parents interviewed made decisions for School C because of the English ability or general performance that they observed in the pupils outside of school. It is suggested that the differences that they observed must have been large for them to decide to change their children’s school. They clearly attributed the differences that they saw in the children to the teaching and input of School C. The data that we collected during the research provides no objective confirmation of this.

The replies given to the open question “Has the school matched up to your hopes and expectations?” also help to fill in the picture that the parents have of the school. Comments overwhelmingly expressed approval, appreciation and pleasure at the academics and the Montessori system and particularly the progress of the children. One parent summed up her decision to send her children to School C in these words: “My plan to see the kids improve is working.”

Considering the educational qualifications of the staff as a possible proxy for educational quality, it can be noted that the qualifications of the staff at School C were certainly better than those at the low-cost private schools.

Finally, looking at the reasons for the parents not to send their child to a government school, their comments were that the government schools had “low learning” and the children do not do well, “they can’t read or spell. It is not an option for us”.

The School curriculum:

It was clear from the interview with the principal, as well as the observation of the classrooms, the playground and the ethos of the school that there is good provision of materials and the type of facilities that might be expected in a school that bears the name “Montessori”. Also positive
comments were made by parents about the Montessori approach. It does appear that the school curriculum is different from the standard fare served up in some of the other schools observed.\(^{51}\)

Overall it appears that parents do get the small classes, the good academic and probably the good English that they are looking for when they decide to send their children to School C. Those who chose school C because it is “close to home” may be those who do not travel far, but there are others who do commute more than 30 minutes to the school and it may be, for them, the advantages of the education outweigh the effort involved in travelling.

**4.5.4. School D**

The class teachers and the vice principal discussed who they could ask to come to the school to see the researcher and be interviewed for this research. It was therefore only a small sample of parents who were able to contribute to the research. For this reason and the fact that sending out a questionnaire to the parents was not possible, the results are supported by less evidence. (The assessment of reading ability was not subject to the same difficulties and this is discussed elsewhere in section 4.6.)

The information that was available indicated that low cost, closeness to home and quality of education were the dominant reasons for choosing School D (the government school). For one parent, the only reason given for attending the school was the free education. She went on to say that she had “no choice, only this one is free”. For another, the only two reasons were low cost and closeness to home. Another, who did not explicitly state that the free education was a reason

---

\(^{51}\) Whether their approach goes as far as would be expected of a Montessori school in the developed world, may be questioned. Personal observation of the aftermath of a lesson on electrical circuits indicated that the pupils may have learnt the diagram on the board, but they failed to relate the symbols for the switch and bulb to the real switch and bulb in the classroom.
for choosing this school, outlined the overwhelming costs of private education if she put her children in another school\textsuperscript{52}.

It may be that parents indicating “quality of education” as a factor are, perhaps, indicating that education itself is important and this is the place where their children can be educated. The general consensus of the parents was that they would prefer private education, but there was one lady who really preferred the government schooling and even expressed “satisfaction” at the size of the classes\textsuperscript{53}.

The numerical data available from the students and anecdotal evidence from the staff indicated that a number of pupils travel long distances, walking for more than 30 minutes to get to school. 30\% of the pupils interviewed (six out of twenty), indicated that they had a journey of more than 30 minutes. This was the second highest proportion for the schools investigated (just less than the 33\% for School B). The modal means of transport was walking (75\% or fifteen of the twenty pupils interviewed).

Choice for some parents at School D appears to be seeking quality education within their limited means.

4.5.5. School E

Although the researcher was able to get adequate data from the pupils themselves and to assess the reading age of twenty children, it was not possible to contact sufficient parents to allow a clear picture to emerge of the reasons why parents chose this school. The limited information means that nothing further can be added to what has been discussed above about the relationship of the parents’ choices and the qualities of the schools.

\textsuperscript{52} This lady looks after 5 children, some are her own and others were orphaned when her sister died.
\textsuperscript{53} One of her children was in a class of 118 pupils.
4.6. Question 5: How does quality of education, as measured by reading ability, relate to the choices and costs of education?

Nearly 90 reading tests were conducted and the results are analysed in more detail here.

4.6.1. The relation between chronological age and reading age

First the results as a whole were considered and the chronological age was compared with the reading age for all the pupils.

Doing a check for correlation between actual ages and reading ages gives the surprising result that these are significantly negatively correlated ($r = -0.28$). This indicated that the older children in the sample generally have lower reading ages. The result is significant at the 1% level.

Table 16: Correlation of reading age and chronological age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chronological age in months</th>
<th>Reading age in months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chronological Age in months</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Age in months</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.280**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
This result was not expected (pupils’ reading ages do not generally go down as they get older) and required some investigation. When the data for age was analysed by school, it was found that the pupil’s ages spread was not the same across the schools.
Figure 21: Actual/chronological age of pupils by school.

![Box plot showing actual age distributions by school](image)

Table 17: A summary of the data for chronological age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>110.77</td>
<td>110.00</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>129.34</td>
<td>126.50</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>27.950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>112.00</td>
<td>113.50</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>133.20</td>
<td>134.00</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>17.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>126.36</td>
<td>126.50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>119.44</td>
<td>116.00</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>16.905</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to see that the children in School A have the lowest median age and mean age and the smallest spread, but as has been shown these children have the best reading age relative to their chronological age. The school with the highest mean and median age is also the school with the poorest results for reading age relative to chronological age. In addition the researcher noted that there were probably different proportions of pupils who were held back a year or more in the different schools. Pupils who are required to repeat (and there were some in School B) are going to be older than their classmates and possibly less

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54 See graph in Appendix 8 where Figure 20 is reproduced with the points identified by school.
55 For example the principal in School C pointed out that one of the reasons that parents take their children out of the school is when the pupil is required to repeat a year. Hence there are probably fewer such pupils in School C than some of the other schools.
proficient in their academics (which is why they need to repeat) while others who are moved up are likely to be the more able and therefore the better readers. Older pupils in the sample are therefore likely to be poorer readers. It would appear that these are the key factors causing the data to show a negative correlation between age and reading age.

A better test of the interrelation of reading age and chronological age is a paired sample t test.

**Table 18: Paired sample t-test for all pupils**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Standard Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading age in months - Actual age in months</td>
<td>5.800</td>
<td>40.339</td>
<td>4.276</td>
<td>-2.697</td>
<td>1.430</td>
<td>1.356</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>.178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows that overall there is no significant difference between actual age (chronological age) and reading age for the sample.

However if the data is considered school by school, we find a different result.

The corresponding results for School A.

**Table 19: Paired sample t-test for pupils from School A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Standard Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading age in months - Actual age in months</td>
<td>36.542</td>
<td>28.002</td>
<td>5.716</td>
<td>24.718</td>
<td>48.366</td>
<td>6.393</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here we see that there is a very significant difference between reading age and actual age, with the reading age being significantly **greater** than the actual age for these pupils from School A. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference is between 25 and 48 months.

---

56 It was interesting to see a pupil of 7 years 7 months (reading age 13 years 6 months) in the same class of School B as pupil of 11 years 10 months (reading age 7 years).
The results for Schools B, C and E also showed differences between reading age and actual age, but none was significant and there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis (of no difference between the reading age and the chronological age for pupils in these schools).

However, the results were significant again for School D (the government school), but for a different reason.

**Table 20: Paired sample t-test for pupils from School D**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading age in months - Actual age in months</strong></td>
<td><strong>40.7 24.227</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.417</strong></td>
<td><strong>-52.039</strong></td>
<td><strong>-29.361</strong></td>
<td><strong>-7.513</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here we can see that the children’s reading age is lower than their chronological age, and this difference is very significant. Based on this sample, there is significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis of equality between actual age and reading age for children at School D.

Overall there is not a significant difference between reading age and chronological age, but there are differences within two of the schools.

As age is an influencing factor, the variable reading age minus chronological age has been calculated for all the students from whom data has been collected. This new variable reading age minus chronological age will be referred to as “Reading Advantage”.

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4.6.2. Reading advantage

Figure 22: A box plot of the difference between reading age and chronological age. (Reading advantage)

(Positive values are for those who read above their age and negative values for those who read below their age)

It can be seen that there are very few pupils (3 out of 22) from School A whose reading age is lower than their chronological age, and there is only one pupil in the government school whose reading is above their chronological age. The data for School A is not very spread out, but there are two outliers. These students had particularly low reading ages relative to their chronological age and it is noted that one of them (ref 33) had been in School A for less than a year and the other (ref 34) was one of the few children at School A who did not speak English at home.

These results need to be viewed with caution for a number of reasons. First, there is no evidence that the schools cause the difference in reading advantage. It may be that the pupils at School A
have a higher IQ, or some other advantage, over the pupils in School D, which is the cause of the difference. Expressed in another way, there may be a confounding variable. Also movement between schools can affect the results. Some pupils tested for their reading had only been in that school for less than one academic year, so their reading ability is probably not a reflection of the teaching of their present school\textsuperscript{57}.

The graphs below illustrate the differences between the reading advantages of pupils in the different schools. It is clear that reading advantage and fees are positively correlated; schools with higher fees tend to have a larger reading advantage.

\textbf{Figure 23: The 95\% confidence interval for the mean reading advantage for each school, plotted against the school’s termly fees.}

\textsuperscript{57} The researcher found a number of pupils at School A who had joined only 6 months ago. There were also some who had recently joined School D having previously attended School E. Although it would have been useful to have had this information for all the students, it only appeared as an issue part way through the research and so full information was not collected.
The following is a similar diagram, but using the actual data values for reading advantage, not the mean for the school and its confidence interval. Unfortunately there is not a linear scale on the x axis, but it does show the general trend for the reading ability to increase as the school fees increase.

**Figure 24**: Difference between reading age and chronological age plotted against fee category.
An analysis of the data using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for reading advantage as the dependent variable and school as the independent variable gives the following results.

### Table 21: The ANOVA results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) School</th>
<th>(J) School</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>19.010</td>
<td>10.536</td>
<td>.520</td>
<td>-14.18 - 52.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>73.084*</td>
<td>9.022</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>44.66 - 101.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>26.244</td>
<td>8.796</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>-1.46 - 53.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-3.797</td>
<td>12.439</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td>-42.98 - 35.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>50.277*</td>
<td>11.186</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>15.04 - 85.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>3.438</td>
<td>11.005</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td>-31.22 - 38.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-19.010</td>
<td>10.536</td>
<td>.520</td>
<td></td>
<td>-52.20 - 14.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.797</td>
<td>12.439</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td>-35.38 - 42.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>54.074*</td>
<td>10.882</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>19.80 - 88.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>7.234</td>
<td>10.694</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>-26.45 - 40.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-73.084*</td>
<td>9.022</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-101.50 - 17.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>-50.277*</td>
<td>11.186</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-85.51 - 15.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-54.074*</td>
<td>10.882</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-88.35 - 19.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>-46.839*</td>
<td>9.207</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-75.84 - 17.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-26.244</td>
<td>8.796</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>-53.95 - 1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>-3.438</td>
<td>11.005</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td>-38.10 - 31.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-7.234</td>
<td>10.694</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>-40.92 - 26.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>46.839*</td>
<td>9.207</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>17.84 - 75.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The significant values, which are highlighted, show the differences that could not have come about by chance (if there was no difference in reading advantage due to the school that a pupil attended). To summarize this: it shows that there is a significant difference in reading advantage between pupils in School D and those in each of the other schools separately. No other differences are significant at the 5% level. Looking at the difference between School A and School E (significance level of 7%) suggests that it would be worth doing more research if it was important to establish whether there is a real difference.

The same conclusion comes from the homogeneous subsets produced in the Scheffe Test.
Table 22: Post Hoc, Scheffe Test results for homogeneous subsets for reading advantage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Subset for alpha = 0.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-44.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

It can also be seen that, although the mean reading advantage for School A is larger than each of the others, it is not significantly different from each of the others individually\(^{58}\).

In conclusion, there appears to be a large range of reading abilities across the sample of students assessed. The pupils at School D are generally poorer at reading (below chronological age) and those in School A generally perform above their chronological age. The relative ability of the students appears to be positively correlated with the school fees.

\(^{58}\) The t-test, conducted Table 10, showed that it is significantly different from the others when they are treated as a single group.
5. Conclusion and Discussion

The final conclusions will be considered under seven headings. First the findings for the five sub-questions will be considered and looked at in relation to the literature and the existing school choice theory. Then the present research will also be analysed to see if it can add anything to the issue of the importance of English for different parents and to the question of whether school choice is supply or demand driven.

5.1. What are the key factors that parents use in making the decision about where to send their child to school?

The research looked at the evidence for this from different sources. The parents and the principals were interviewed and parental questionnaires were used to collect data. The responses, both qualitative and quantitative, were analysed and showed that parents considered a wide range of factors when making the choice of school for their child. These factors included the key factors of English Language teaching (Tooley et al., 2007b; Nambissan, 2003 in Tooley et al., 2007b) and educational quality (Tooley et al., 2008; Andrabi et al., 2007) mentioned in the developing world research when the public private debate is addressed. The study showed that the closeness of the school was another key factor which has also been found to be the case for poor parents in Pakistan (Alderman et al., 2001) and in the developed world (Hunter, 1991) where it may be the most common factor (Coldron and Boulton, 1991) in certain situations. The cost of education came up in the study and it too has been shown to be a factor for many parents in the developing world (Alderman et al., 2001). The curriculum, as opposed to the medium of instruction, is not a factor that appears to have been extensively studied in the developing world, though there is scope to look at the appeal, for example, of the different boards in India (EducationBangalore, 2011) and different systems in other nations. The results of this study suggest that the two schools that have chosen to use a distinctive curriculum are attracting some parents. Overall the results provide some qualitative data to support the factors that are generally associated with school choice. The
push factors of low quality government education provision found in the present study fits with the literature (Rose, 2002; Probe Team, 1999)\(^{59}\). It is suggested, by some researchers, that the lack of provision in the state sector may influence some parents to choose private schools (Oketch et al., 2010). Certainly the class size in the government schools was a cause for some parents, in the present study, to reject the government schools. The studies in the developed world (Bagley et al., 2001) show that there are quite different push factors influencing parents: the first three are distance, the (bad) behaviour of the pupils at the school and the (poor) school environment. Interestingly the good behaviour of the students in three of the schools in the study was mentioned by parents as an attractive feature of those schools.

5.2. What are the key sources of information that these parents use in making that decision?

The present study found that personal contacts and informal sources were the main ways that parents obtained information about the schools that they chose. Little qualitative research appears to have been undertaken on this topic in the developing world and there is no obvious theory against which to assess these findings. The research into this area is located in the developed world and looks at the influence of the informal sources people use (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Reay and Ball, 1997). A study by J Douglas Willms (1997) draws a distinction between the sources used by parents of different socio-economic status, when he states that

“Parents of higher socio-economic status were more likely to value information obtained from teachers and headteachers, from school meetings, and through visits to the school. Lower SES parents were more

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\(^{59}\) The researcher spent one whole day in one of the classes at the government school and made 2 or 3 other visits. He did not see absenteeism or the slack attitudes to work that have characterised the findings of some studies into government schools elsewhere (Kremer et al. 2004). He found teachers present, and lessons going on, marking was being done by teachers while pupils had lunch. Neither the vice principal nor most of the parents expressed dissatisfaction at the teachers or teaching, though there were negative assessments of the school facilities, class sizes, the condition of the buildings and the lack of extracurricular activities. Without setting out deliberately to observe and compare, no noticeable difference was obvious to the researcher while visiting, between the attitudes and actions of the teachers in the private and the government schools.
concerned with school disciplinary climate and reputation than were parents of higher SES” (1997, p. 3).

The lack of sufficient data on the sources of information between the schools in the study meant that no comparisons could be made between the groups of parents. A more subjective impression is that overall there was very little official published information about the schools in the study, with only two able to provide any printed information and only one having a website.

5.3. What are the educational aspirations of these parents for their children? Do they value education and do they think it is important for their children?

The parents in the study had almost universally high educational aspirations for their children, and the majority said that they chose the school for academic reasons. This contrasts with some findings from the developed world where “happiness” (Coldron and Boulton, 1991), an ability to fit in and cope with school, and being looked after (Reay and Ball, 1997) appear to be some of the immediate aspirations of some parents for their children. Some studies have looked at the relationship of the working classes with the educational system and seen that few feel at home in education and may have negative experiences influencing their thoughts and decisions (Reay and Ball, 1997). Some of the parents in the study had little or no educational experience, so their children were first generation learners. It would be fascinating to do a longitudinal study on these children, of whom their parents have great hopes, but who are in a school system that may not be able to meet those aspirations. Some aspirations may be genuine, but possibly unrealistic. For example some parents with children at the government school, who aspired to professional status for their children, had no education themselves, expressed satisfaction with the school and the teaching but appeared unaware that the reading standards of the pupils in the school were below those of other schools. It may be difficult for such children without help from parents and with only the input of this government school, to be able to progress to and succeed in tertiary education. Will those hopes remain high as they go through school? When will they leave school? Will they reach tertiary education? If their final experiences of education are disappointing, how
will they look at education for their own children? These are all questions that a long term longitudinal study might be able to address.

5.4. **How do the schools that these parents choose for their children perform in the areas for which they are chosen?**

In the findings a case has been made that the five schools generally perform well in the factors for which they are chosen by the parents who send their children there. This fits with the findings of Schneider et al. (1998b). This statement can also be looked at from the point of view of parental choice. It appears, therefore, that parents are aware of the qualities of the various schools and choose them because they fit the factors that are important to them. If this is genuinely the case, and more specific investigation would be needed, then it begins to indicate that parents are aware and making informed choices. This supports the general theory that parents (literate and illiterate) are generally well informed about the schools and the teachers (Andrabi et al., 2007, p. 19). It begins to provide a tiny amount of data to challenge the alternative theory that parents are ill-informed and unwise in their decision making.

“Some [researchers] contend that private schools that cater to the poor are exploiting low income, often illiterate, parents who are not capable of assessing whether their children are learning. (Alderman et al., 2001, p. 305)

This is a concern that is expressed about parents in the developed world too, where

“Moe argues that a common criticism of parental choice is the idea that ‘parents cannot be counted on to make choices by reference to sound educational criteria or values.’ He continues by noting that critics often argue that ‘parents—especially low income parents—supposedly care about practical concerns, such as how close the school is or whether it has a good sports team, and put little emphasis on academic quality and other properties of effective schooling’” (Moe, 1995 in Schneider and Buckley, 2002, p. 134).

The discussion is about “wrong choices” and it can be argued that this is a middle class attitude to education and the working class may have a different set of values,

“In the popular and academic media, educational choice is typically theorised in terms of an implicit middle-class norm. The possibility of other
experiences of or orientations to choice is ignored (Reay and Ball, 1997, p. 90).

There is no scope to address this issue here and it cannot be addressed until more qualitative data is collected and the voices of the poor in the developing world are heard.

5.5. How does quality of education, as measured by reading ability, relate to the choices and costs of education?

The study found a positive correlation between fees and the reading advantage of pupils in the case study schools. There are plenty of other studies that have found that even low-cost schools outperform free government schools (French and Kingdon, 2010; Tooley et al., 2007a; Jimenez et al., 1991) and the findings of this study fit with this theory. It also takes the opportunity to look at other schools that are not low cost and begins to add some data to the discussion.

This considers the costs to the parents of the schooling, rather than the total costs. The observations of the teacher costs for Schools B, D and E as shown in Table 4 fit with the findings that the education in the government school actually costs more than in the low-cost private schools (Tooley et al., 2007a; Tooley and Dixon, 2006).

5.6. English language and teaching

If reading ability relates to English language ability, the research found a significant difference between some of the schools, with the government school doing least well and the expensive private school doing best. The tuition costs were positively correlated with the “reading advantage”, with even low fees giving some advantage relative to the free government school.

The research also found a strong preference for good English language teaching, with that preference appearing stronger with those parents choosing the lower cost schools. The desire for English as a motivator towards the private sector fits with the research done in India (Johnson and Bowles, 2010; Tooley and Dixon, 2007; Tooley and Dixon, 2005).
The stronger expression of preference for English among the poorer parents may relate to the stronger preference by lower SES parents for choosing schools that emphasised getting through “gatekeeping points”. Their preference was for schools that emphasises success on tests that gave access to jobs and to the middle class.

“Many liberal educators hold that the primary goal of education is for children to become autonomous ....... This is a very reasonable goal for people whose children are already participants in the culture of power and who have already internalized its codes. But parents who do not function within that culture often want something else.... They want to ensure that the school provides their children with the.... spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society” (Delpit, 1995, quoted in Schneider et al., 1998a. p. 492).

Parents who struggle with English language may have a strong desire to see their children fluent in the language if they see it as a means of access to additional opportunities and areas of society. Those who are already fluent, or for whom the access is already available, may not look to the school to provide this aspect of education. This may account for the different degree of importance attached to English teaching as a factor in parental choice.

5.7. Do low income parents choose and is choice supply or demand led?

Oketch et al. (2010) have suggested that low income parents do not “choose” low-cost private schools. His theory is that when there is too much demand for government schools, parents are forced to send their children to the “fee-paying [low quality] private schools” (Oketch et al., 2010, p. 23) if they want education at all for their children. Thus, he suggests that the lowest income parents “choose” private schools because of excess demand, while the wealthy parents genuinely choose the private sector because of differentiated demand, i.e. they are discerning and go for a higher quality, higher cost school out of considered choice.

This present research can look at these possibilities in two ways. Looking at the demand for schooling and the size of the classes in the government school could suggest that there is excess demand and that the low-cost private schools are meeting that need. However, this conclusion
cannot be drawn from the research carried out for this dissertation, if what the parents said in their interviews is to be believed. In the semi-structured interviews, no parents of children in private schools said that they would have preferred to send their children to the government school. All those asked had made a conscious decision to send their child to private school. Most would not countenance sending their children to the government school while others had considered and rejected the idea. Their comments about class size, lack of teaching and poor quality teaching have been mentioned already. Conversely a number of parents of children in the government school expressed a preference for the private school system and it was usually a cost issue that prevented them from doing so. So while the numbers may point to an excess of demand, the qualitative information found from the semi-structured interviews in this study questions this theory and suggests that it is differentiated demand in these case study schools that causes both types of parents to choose private education.

5.8. Possible improvements

Various issues arose during the research and certain improvements would be possible; some of these have been mentioned already in the dissertation and they are summarised here.

- It would have been helpful to have had more parents complete the questionnaires in some of the schools. If there had been time contacting more parents at school or visiting homes would have been helpful.
- Further relevant background data on pupils, such as previous schools and IQ would have helped to control for these variables.
- A means of linking the data from parents to that of their children would have enabled the background information from the parental questionnaires to be tied in to the pupils’ information and reading ability. This may have enabled some multi-level modelling to be undertaken.
A more conventional and correct use of the reading test would have allowed proper comparisons with equivalent data from other studies. (The reading age used did not invalidate the calculations done within the study as the effect was only to scale the reading ages. The results of the t-tests are therefore valid, but it gives inflated numerical values for the reading advantages.)

The sampling at the government school could have been better. Either the whole class could have been tested for their reading ability or, as the sampling frame could possibly have been obtained, a simple random or systematic sample could have been selected (Oakshott, 2009).

Additional codes about the level of care for the pupils could have been included in the parental questionnaire and the issue of “close to home” could have been looked at in relation to location as well as proximity.

However, following the basic principles of case study research and seeking out various sources of evidence resulted in a study that has meaning and reveals aspects of parental choice in the case study schools.

5.9. Conclusion

The study has looked at parental choice using a case study methodology and qualitative and quantitative methods, and in doing so has found much that fits with the present theory of parental choice. Parents were looking for quality education and good English language teaching. They were significantly influenced by the location of the school. The costs of education were found to be a significant factor for some parents and costs, low quality teaching and learning or large class sizes were push factors causing parents to reject different schools. While the study’s qualitative data adds support and depth to some of the more quantitative approaches of much of the existing literature; it challenges others’ conclusions and also raises questions that only further qualitative research can fully answer.
References


Muralidharan, K. and Kremer, M. (2006) 'Public and Private Schools in Rural India', *Harvard University, Department of Economics, Cambridge, MA.*


Appendix 1: Considering the differences between the schools

The results below show the most frequently mentioned factors by the parents of the different schools.
Appendix 2: Parental Questionnaire

Parent Questionnaire

Thank you for filling in these questions. The more information that you give the better it is, but if you can’t answer a question, or do not want to answer it, please feel free to leave it blank.

There are spaces for some answers, others you just need to put a circle round the correct answer.

I will not use your name in any of the things that I write up, so you don’t need to put it on the sheet. If you want to then you can write it on the top corner.

Start here

Fill in the name of the school that your child goes to…………………………………………………

1. What is the sex of your child?
   1. Male
   2. Female

2. What language do you speak most at home
   1. Ga
   2. Twi
   3. English
   4. Ewe
   5. Other please write the language here .................

3. What is your religion
   1. Muslim
   2. Christian
   3. None
   4. Other (please write it here) ...............................

4. If your child is in a private school, for the child in Primary class 3 / 4 please indicate which type of fees you are paying.
   1. Concessionary Fees
   2. Full Fees

5. How important is it to you for your child to learn English?
   1. Not important at all
   2. Quite unimportant
   3. Quite important
   4. Very important
6. Which of the following factors were important when you were deciding which school to send your child to? Please choose the five most important and put them in order of importance, (put1 beside the most important for you and 2 beside the next most important etc).

- Close to home
- Low cost of fees or free education
- Christian based education
- Size of classes
- The school has a good standard of English teaching
- I have other children in the school
- I know the principal / owner / teachers
- My child wanted to go there
- The school has a good reputation
- Good academic standards and good exam results
- The school curriculum
- The timing of the school day
- Good discipline
- Will help my child to get access to the next stage of education.
- My friends / relatives recommended it.
- Other reason, please specify ................

7. When you were deciding about which school to send your child, which other schools did you consider? Please list any other schools here.

- 
- 
- 

8. When you were deciding which school to chose, how did you get the information that you needed to know about the schools? Please choose the four most important and put them in order of importance, (put1 beside the most important for you and 2 beside the next most important etc).

- I read printed information about the school, or checked the school website.
- I have the opportunity to attend an open day and to see round the school
- My friends or relatives told me about the school
- I know some of the children who go to the school and I asked them.
- I have been able to talk to the principal, or some of the teachers at the school.
9. What is the **highest** level of education that the child’s father (guardian) and mother (guardian) received? Please tick one box on each side of the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s father (guardian)</th>
<th>Child’s mother (guardian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary (Up to class 6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Secondary/MSLC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Secondary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational diploma or certificate (e.g., NVTI, NCE, etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Qualification (i.e., accountancy, teacher training)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University, Polytechnic HND (BA, BSc, MA, MSc, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Please state the number of years of the child’s father’s (guardian’s) education .......years

11. Please state the number of years of the child’s mother’s (guardian) education .......years

12. Is the main wage earner of the family paid wages on a
   1. Daily basis
   2. Self employed (including farmer, fishermen)
   3. Weekly basis
   4. Monthly basis

13. What do you estimate is your total household income per month ¢. ________________

**Future expectations of your child**

14. What is your highest aspiration for your Primary class 3 / 4 child? (tick **only one**)  
0) I want my child to be able to read and write
1) I want my child to complete up to Primary standard 6
2) I want my child to complete up to form 3 Junior Secondary
3) I want my child to complete form 3 Senior Secondary
4) I want my child to take a diploma or certificate
5) I want my child to take a degree
6) I want my child to become a professional engineer/doctor/lawyer
### About satisfaction with your Primary 3 / 4 child’s school

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher ability</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher punctuality</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher attendance</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher respect for students</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>School discipline</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Amount of Homework given</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Condition of buildings</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Safety of your child at school</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>School facilities (toilets, library, etc.,)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Class size (No. of students in class)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Level of English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Student Questionnaire

Student Questionnaire

Thank you for filling in these questions. The more information that you give the better it is, but if you can’t answer a question, or do not want to answer it, please feel free to leave it blank.

There are spaces for some answers, others you just need to put a circle round the correct answer.

I will not use your name in any of the things that I write up, so you don’t need to put it on the sheet. If you want to then you can write it on the top corner.

**Start here**

Fill in the name of the school that you go to…………………………………………………………

1. Sex
   - 0. Male
   - 1. Female

2. Class .................................

3. Age ................ years ......... months

4. What language do you speak most at home
   - 0. Ga
   - 1. Twi
   - 2. English
   - 3. Ewe
   - 4. Other

5. What is your religion
   - 0. Muslim
   - 1. Christian
   - 2. None
   - 3. Other

6. How do you travel to school?
   - 0. Walking
   - 1. On the school bus
   - 2. Taxi
   - 3. Car
   - 4. On another bus or Trotro
   - 5. By motorbike
   - 6. By bicycle
   - 7. Other
7. How long does it take you to travel to school?

- 0 – 10 minutes
- 10 – 30 minutes
- more than 30 minutes

8. Apart from school work, do you do any other work?

1) Yes 0) No

9. If you do work does this interfere with your schooling?

1) Yes 0) No

10. If you do work how many hours per week do you work and if you get paid how much do you get paid per week for this work?

   Number of hours ..........................  Amount paid per week .................................

11. I am the ..................... born of my father. (Fill in 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc)

12. Can any elder member of the family write and speak English fluently?

   1) Yes 0) No

13. How many brothers and sisters do you have in your family that live as part of your family in your family home?

   Brothers ................
   Sisters ..............

14. How many people live in your house? (Please provide the numbers including yourself)

   Male Adults ..................  Male children ..................
   Female Adults ....................  Female children ............................

15. How many years have you been at this school? ................... years

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60 This was poorly expressed as the groups overlapped. It would have been better to have 0 - 9 minutes and 10-29 minutes etc.
Appendix 4: Letter to parents

Ashaley Botwe,
Accra
March 2011

Dear Parent,

I am David Longfield and am studying International Development and Education in Newcastle University UK. One of the areas of interest is the growth of the private schools in Ghana, and the role of the state schools.

I have spoken to the Principal of your school and have been given permission to contact you in my as part of a survey that I am doing on my course.

I am sending a questionnaire for you to complete.

**Please note that your participation is completely voluntary, and so is the participation of your child.**

You may decide to fill in some of the questions and not answer others, but obviously the more information that you give the better it will be for me.

**The study is about how parents choose the schools for their children and how they find out what the schools are like to make their choices.**

If you wish to contact me please note that my number while in Ghana is 0249776762.

I am collecting information from the schools and from children and parents, I am comparing the information that I get from four different schools. I am using these questionnaires. Also I would really like to talk to some parents from each school. If you would like to be involved please contact me on the above mobile number. I will also try to meet some of you if you come to school to collect your children. Any involvement in this is not compulsory.

I will be making the results of my research known to the schools, but no information will be given about any individual. Your names and the names of your children will not appear in any of the results or documents that I produce

Thank you very much for all your help. It has been great to be in Ghana, you are all so friendly and welcoming!

Yours

David Longfield
Appendix 5: Semi-structured interview guidelines

Semi structured interview schedule for parents.

School
1. What school does the student attend?
A B C D E

Parent Background

2. Who is attending the interview?
1 = Father 2 = Mother 3 = Other

Choices

3. Can you explain why you chose to send your child to this school?

4. How did you get to know about the school? Where did you get the information about the school and what it is like?
5. Has the school matched up to what you hoped for when you sent your child here? Does the school have the qualities that you looked for...mention them from part C.

6. Do you think that school education and the subjects taught are relevant and appropriate or your child?

7. Can you give an idea of the total cost of schooling for your child in class 3
   - Admission Fee
   - Tuition fee
   - Transport costs
   - Books and stationery
   - Uniform
   - Is there any payment flexibility?
Appendix 6: Recording sheet for semi-structured interview with principal

Semi-structured interview for School Principal

For the basic facts about the school (see separate sheet)

Why did the school start?

Are you recognised?

(Who decided to get recognition? How long did the process take? What did the process cost? What are the advantages of recognition?)

What is the school's vision or mission statement? What is its motto?

Why do parents choose to send their children to your school?
How do most parents who apply find out about your school?

Do you advertise?

What are main reasons why parents choose to move their children to other schools?

What do you most like about your school?

What plans do you have for the school?

What is the main hindrance to implementing these plans?
What are the biggest problems that you face?

Here are some ideas if you are not sure!

1) Financial pressures
2) Poor infrastructure
3) Lack of teaching aids
4) Shortage of teachers
5) Teacher turnover
6) Harassment by authorities
7) Lack of cooperation from staff
8) Too much time spent on teaching duties
9) Irregular salary payments
10) Lack of co-operation from parents
11) Difficult students
12) Large class sizes
13) Teacher behaviour / drunkenness / disobedience
14) Any other, specify________________________

Are there any local government schools or private schools?

What schools do you regard as your main competitors?
Appendix 7: Fact recording sheet for school information

Facts about the school
Information from Principal or School Office

1. School name ..............................

2. Principal
   a. Principal’s name .........................
   b. Gender ......................
   c. Education .........................
   d. Language .........................

3. School
   a. Opening date and stages ............
   b. What medium is used? ..............
   c. What curriculum is used? ...........

4. Fees
   a. What fees do you charge?
   b. Any help to parents who cannot afford to pay?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admission Fees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition Fees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal charges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text and exercise books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other charges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. **Numbers of pupils**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class level/standard</th>
<th>No of classes</th>
<th>(6) No. of Boys</th>
<th>(7) No. of Girls</th>
<th>(8) Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Nursery 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. KG1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. KG2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Primary 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Primary 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Primary 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Primary 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Primary 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Primary 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. **About your teachers**

1. Total number of teachers, including music, French and P.E. teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number in total</th>
<th>Salary Total per month (¢.)</th>
<th>Salary Total per year (¢.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Total numbers of non-teaching staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number in total</th>
<th>Salary total per month (¢.)</th>
<th>Salary total per year (¢.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and secretarial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caretaker, night-watchmen, bus drivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. **Demand for your school**
   a. Does the school operate in two shifts?
      
      1) Yes  
      0) No  
   b. Is there greater demand for places in your school than you can offer?
      
      1. Yes  
      0. No  
   c. If there is greater demand for places in your school than you can offer, have you considered:
      
      1) Operating 2 shifts a day, if you don’t do this already?  
      2) Expanding the number of places by building more rooms, or hiring or buying new buildings?  

8. **Facilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>Desks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building type</td>
<td>DVD, VCD TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms</td>
<td>Computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackboards</td>
<td>Fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>Separate toilets for boys and girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric lights</td>
<td>Drinking water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8: Reading age and chronological age by schools

The top left of the graph is dominated by the pupils from School A and the bottom right by pupils from School D, illustrating the point made in the text, and causing the negative correlation.