



PREDICTORS OF SCHOOL CHOICE: THE CASE OF PARENTS IN CAPE COAST, GHANA

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Abstract:

We identified the pertinent factors affecting parents' choice of a particular senior high school (SHS) in Ghana, focusing on parents with at least one child in a SHS in Ghana and are residents of Cape Coast. The approach and design used were quantitative and descriptive survey design respectively. A sample of 637 of the parents, made up of 349 women and 288 men, was used. The parents were selected using convenience and snowball sampling techniques. A questionnaire, with a reliability coefficient ranging from 0.735 – 0.829, was the instrument used to collect the data. Out of the 637 parents sampled, we were able to retrieve 588 completed questionnaires, representing 92.3 percent response rate. The data were analysed using cross tabulation and linear multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that parents preferred public boarding SHS which is single-sex education. Also, parents preferred schools with excellent academic record, quality instruction, and positive school values. Similarly, family/parental related factors such as family moral and religious values, and parents' income and education levels, and also social related factors such as school popularity and brand, peer influence, and social network predict significantly and positively parents' choice of a particular SHS. We conclude that school, family and social related factors are able to influence parents' school choice. It is recommended to heads of SHSs to be attentive to the various institutional factors and create schools that address the needs of the parents in their communities in order to attract and retain students.

Keywords: family factors; institutional factors; school choice; social factors; parents' choice

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1. Introduction

Sociologically, education is seen as the great equaliser, the key to a better future for all citizens. It is the tool used to narrow or eliminate both vertical and horizontal social gaps in modern societies. As a result, all nations are yearning for quality education, a phenomenon that seems to have no end. According to Milledzi, Saani and Brown (2018), the most recognised and easy way of providing long-term security and quality opportunities to the future generation of any nation is through education. Invariably, the focus of this paper is quality education, a product of quality schooling in modern society. In Ghana, access to quality secondary education is persistently becoming unequal as a result of the increasing nature of inequalities among the citizens with regard to their socioeconomic status (Milledzi & Saani, 2019). However, the introduction of 'free' Senior High School (SHS) education in the country is helping to reduce the effects of these emerging patterns of inequalities among the various socioeconomic status groups, particularly in the area of schooling. Currently, under the free SHS education policy, parents do not pay tuition, library, boarding, science laboratory, examination, utility, and Parents Teachers Association (PTA) fees when they choose a public SHS (Abdul-Rahaman, Abdul-Rahaman, Ming, Ahmed & Salma, 2018). In addition, there are free meals for both boarders and day students and free textbooks for all at the SHS level (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018). These fees are paid by the government. However, in the case of private schools, parents continue to pay these fees, a situation which is making most parents preferring public SHS as compared to private SHS. This has resulted to increase in enrolment in the various public SHSs, and most prominently lessen the weight on parents from taking care of their children fees (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2019).

Also, the introduction of school-choice and selection policies such as the Computer School Selection Placement System (CSSPS) is helping to narrow or eliminate the issue of school-choice inequalities by giving choices to all parents, irrespective of their socioeconomic status (prestige, income and education) in the society. In addition to providing parents with more school options, the country's current school-choice policy that gives parents and students opportunity to choose hierarchically five schools of their choice without paying for anything also help in creating healthy competition between SHSs, which in turn helps to improve schooling quality and educational outcomes in Ghana (Milledzi & Saani, 2019).

Before the commencement of CSSPS in Ghana, the country was using a manual framework to select and place basic school graduates to the various SHSs. However, this system was extremely powerless to human control and intrigues like pay-off and system abuse (Amonoo, 2014). The manual system created room for the bourgeoisies in the Ghanaian society to use their social, cultural and financial capitals to get their preferred SHSs for their wards who, in most cases, are not qualified to be in those schools (Babah, Frimpong & Mensah, 2020). They do so at the detriment of the proletariats. These and other dysfunctional factors such as delays in the selection and placement process and headmasters/headmistresses reporting wrong figures for vacancies in their respective schools' influence policy makers to introduce technology into the school selection and

placement process in Ghana; a situation that gave birth to CSSPS (Amonoo, 2014; Babah et al., 2020). The CSSPS came to replace the manual system and to conquer the deficiencies that were inherent in the manual framework. The question therefore is, has the CSSPS eliminate the dysfunctions of the manual system?

The CSSPS is an automated authenticity based electronic system for selection and placement of qualified basic school graduates into SHSs in Ghana. The system was introduced in 2005 as part of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ghana Education Service (GES) eu-interventions to improve productivity in the school change measure (basic to secondary level) and reduce cost. The guideline features of CSSPS are that, selection relies upon scores of six subjects. This includes four core subjects (English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies) and two other best elective subjects. The automated system gives students the opportunity to choose five schools, which one should be a technical/vocational school. The chosen schools are the ones that the students will be placed provided he/she meets the cutting-point grade of the school. The grade for a school is influence by the number of students that choose it. This situation makes the system more meritocratic and highly competitive leading to socioeconomic pressures (Amonoo, 2014).

Hypothetically, when more opportunities are given to parents to indicate their preferred choice of school for their children, administrators of the schools experience market pressures, which emerge from enrolment pressures from contending schools. In Ghana, this phenomenon is usually experienced by private schools. This is so because the CSSPS assigns students to the public SHSs. Therefore, for private SHSs to get good and more students in order to increase their funding and survival, they must improve the productivity of their own schools and the viability of their pedagogical strategies. Parents are likely to choose SHSs that they perceived to be doing well in terms of instructional quality and performance (Amonoo, 2014; Erickson, 2017).

School choice, as a concept, gives all parents and other consumers of education the power and opportunity to pick their kid's school. Similarly, it helps in empowering solid rivalry among schools, a phenomenon that influences schools to better serve parents by providing quality education and also meeting the needs of students (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018). The concept of school choice can likewise be viewed as a public approach that permits a parent to pick a public or private and day or boarding school, irrespective of the location of the school.

Ironically, in Ghana, records show that most of the high-performing Junior High Schools (JHSs) are private schools while high-performing SHSs are public schools (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2019). As a result, most of the students from the high-performing private JHSs end-up choosing the high-performing public SHSs, making it more competitive for those in public JHSs. Those in public JHSs are in the majority with regard to numbers and also regarding the number of poor-performing schools. This situation makes it more difficult for parents to choose a particular SHS for their children since public SHSs in Ghana are relatively few, especially those that are perceived to be good (Anyan, Gyebil, Inkoom & Yeboah, 2013). This phenomenon is exerting some level of pressure to the educational system of the country. According to Amonoo (2014), it is

one of the reasons for the politicisation and unfairness perceived in the current selection and placement system, a situation that has aroused so much public controversy in Ghana. This calls for the need to make public education more competitive, less bureaucratic, and more consumer oriented.

For school choice advocates, the argument is clear that government should create a fair ground for parents to choose which type of school they want for their children. Therefore, the situation where public schools in most countries have exclusive control over public education resources as compared to private schools (Lee, 2016; Woods, Bagley & Glatter, 2018), and the allocation and distribution of public funds should not be the case since such a situation will lead to the benefit of public schools over private SHSs with regard to parents' choice of a school. In Ghana, the situation is too skewed because more than 90 percent of government resources on education, with regard to secondary education, go to public SHSs (MoE, 2019).

The current school selection and placement system (CSSPS) in Ghana create room for parents and students to choose five schools, one of the chosen schools should be a technical/ vocational SHS, without paying anything (MoE, 2019). The MoE provides citizens the list of SHSs in the country and their location. However, the facilities in these schools are not made public for parents to familiarised themselves with. It, therefore, befalls on the parents to do further and better enquiry regarding the schools in order to guide their children to make a good choice, taking into consideration their academic capacity and the family socio-economic status.

Unfortunately, many parents in Ghana usually face some difficulties when choosing a particular SHS for their children (Jabbar et al., 2019). These difficulties may be arising as a result of the meaningful variations in the values parents' place on education, their educational beliefs and perceptions, and also the lack of knowledge that most of them usually have regarding the status of SHSs in Ghana (Amonoo, 2014). Similarly, school accessibility and affordability in relation to costs can also influence the choice of parents when considering a particular school for their children. A few parents could be convinced by false claims made by influential people in the society, their neighbours and the fact that they themselves are old students of the school (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018; Dahari & Ya, 2011).

In this twenty-first century, parents' taste and preference regarding schooling and education in general, are changing so fast which is making it difficult for traditional SHS operators to survive. They are losing their market to SHSs that have been upgraded into model schools, international schools, and with modern and industrially related curricula (Canals, Goles, Mascareño, Rica & Ruz, 2018). Contemplating present day parents' decision of a SHS and why they pick such a school would empower SHS administrators to comprehend and cater for the needs and preferences of these parents. Both public and private SHSs and also the international schools in Ghana must adapt certain business strategies that try to give more qualities and values to both the individual and the society as a whole. In order for the schools to effectively adapt these strategies, there is the need for them to study parents' decision regarding school so that they could understand the predictors of their choice better in order to retain their loyalty.

Currently, the challenges facing the CSSPS and the implementation challenges emanating from the 'double track system' have created an *invisible system* that restricts parents in their decision of choosing a particular SHSs for their children since they have just five schools to browse. Also, the parents do not get the chance to see the final results of their children before selecting a particular SHS for them. Generally, parents consider a range of factors in making a school choice for their children (Amonoo, 2014; Dixon & Humble, 2017). However, the CSSPS lays much emphasis on the academic performance of the students, a factor which may not be the number one factor that parents consider in selecting a school. The factors that most parents rank very high when choosing a SHS for their children, in order of importance, are academic quality, safe environment, co-curricular activities and boarding facility (Amonoo, 2014; Erickson, 2017; Dixon & Humble, 2017; Woods, Bagley & Glatter, 2018). This gap creates a system that defeats the very reasons parents consider in making their choice of a SHS.

Prior research works concerning school choice focused on school and economic related factors (Amonoo, 2014; Anyan et al., 2013), neglecting personal, social, family, peer, and media related factors. Lately, these unexplored factors have attracted the attention of educational sociologists. This calls for the need to further assess the predictors of school choice to provide a better understanding as to why parents choose a particular SHS for their children. Also, it appears there is lack of empirical research in the prior literature regarding predictors of school choice in Ghana. Previous studies have focused primarily on developed communities (Canals et al., 2018; DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018; Jabbar et al., 2019), and very little practical research has been done on school choice in developing communities such as Cape Coast, Ghana (Amonoo, 2014). Due to differences in cultural practices and socialisation between nations, particularly those in developed and developing nations, the conclusions of the works conducted in developed countries may not be generalised on developing countries. Therefore, for purposes of contextualisation and multiculturalism, there is the need to conduct the study within the context of a developing community such as Cape Coast, Ghana. Similarly, most of these works employed qualitative design to assess factors influencing parents' choice of a SHS for their children. This study employs quantitative approach in order to appreciate the issues that parents considers most in selecting a particular public SHS, focusing on parents in Cape Coast Township, Ghana.

2. Purpose and research questions of the study

The purpose of the study was to identify the pertinent factors affecting parents' choice of SHS for their children, focusing on parents in Cape Coast, Ghana. In line with this purpose, the following research questions were formulated to guide and direct the study:

- 1) What type of SHS do parents in Cape Coast choose for their children?
- 2) What are the factors that influence parents' decision of selecting a SHS for their kids?

2.1 Significance of the study

Parents, as purchasers of education, need the best for their children and realise what is to their greatest advantage, maybe more so than the government and the schools do. This makes it imperative for policy makers and implementers to understand the predictors of school choice. Schools might use this information to become more competitive by improving customer service and maintaining some of their institutional factors that influence parents' school choice. Again, it will help school managers to gain insight on ways of attracting prospective candidates by putting in place factors that can influence parents' choice in positive terms. This in the long run will help boost the funding and survival of the schools. Again, the findings will be useful to authorities and policy makers involved in CSSPS since they can consider some of the factors parents consider in choosing a particular SHS for their children, so that they can consider these factors in their placement process instead focusing much on the examination scores.

2.2 Delimitation

The problem of school choice is a global one. No day passes without media reports of parents making uninformed choices regarding SHS for their children. Most of these challenges when tackled as expected will help policy makers and implementers to consider some of the factors that parents consider in choosing a particular SHS for their children. Ideally, we should have assumed a national dimension. However, we delimited ourselves to parents, with at least one child in a Ghanaian SHS and a resident of Cape Coast. This was so because most of these parents have raised concern regarding their school choice (Amonoo, 2014), and them not getting chance for their children due to the strong competition that prevails in SHSs within the metropolis. We further delimited ourselves to institutional, family, and social related factors.

3. Literature Review

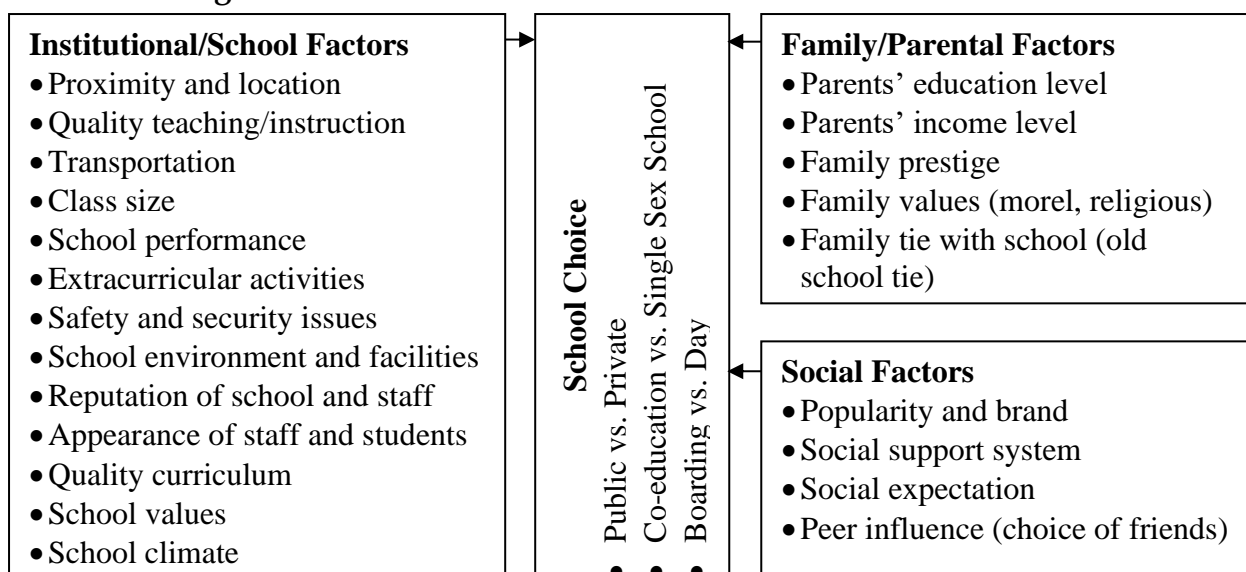
The argument of the study is underpinned by two theories on school choice; they are impulse and talent theories. Impulse theories are comprehensive theories of school choice. That is, parents' interest in a particular school may be by their impulse. These impulses will influence them to go to that school to secure vacancy for their children (DeCamp & Herskovitz, 2015). Also, parents' choice of a SHS for their kids can be described as latent function of schooling choice. Amonoo (2014) posits that most low-income families in Ghana chose a particular school for their children because they found out there was a vacancy in the school. In relation to talent matching theories, Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe (2014) aver that kids have varied academic strength and weaknesses. Therefore, when choosing a school for a child, parents should focus on the academic powers of the child in order to match the assets against the requirement of a particular school, either technical or non-technical school. Parents' choice of a particular school for their children can be seen as a progressive practice which occurs over a period of time.

The literature, generally, show that parents, irrespective of where they live, will fail to subscribe to the package of a SHS if they feel the needs of their children are not and

will not be met by that school (Amonoo, 2014; Woods et al., 2018). For example, parents for whom religion is a vital facet of their lives will usually choose a SHS with a strong religious background than the one with secular culture, particularly public schools. In general, the main reasons that surfaced in the literature irrespective of the school choice sets or school choice system and also, the wording were; excellent academic record, teacher qualification and commitment, proximity of school to home, discipline, small class size, extracurricular activities, cost or affordability, parental involvement, parent’s social-economic background and parent’s social network factors (Amonoo, 2014; Canals et al., 2018; DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018; Woods et al., 2018).

Institutional, family, and social related factors were some of the components considered in Figure 1. Our argument is that institutional, family, and social related factors are able to influence parents’ choice of a school in positive terms. However, the dynamics in parents’ decisions regarding the selection of a school for their children may be as a result of the differences in their level of education and income, values systems, and perception on education. The study, therefore, examines the issues quantitatively to understand the most significant predictors of parents’ choice of a SHS for their children.

Figure 1: Predictors of Parents’ School Choice for Their Children



Authors’ construct (2020)

4. Research Methods

In line with the positivists’ philosophical assumption, we adopted quantitative approach. Also, in order to gain an understanding of the general situation and meaning parents give to school choice, we employed cross-sectional descriptive survey design. The study area was Cape Coast while the unit of analysis was parents with at least one child in a Ghanaian SHS and are residents in Cape Coast, Ghana.

The study population was all parents in Cape Coast Township who have at least one child in a SHS. The target population was 169,894 while the accessible population

was 6,370 parents (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2014). The accessible population were parents with at least one child in the various SHSs in Ghana and are living in Cape Coast. Based on the recommendation of Amedahe (as cited in Saani, 2020), it is appropriate to sample five to ten percent of a study population in a survey. Therefore, a sample size of 637 parents with at least one child in a SHS, made up of 349 women and 288 men, was used. The 637 parents were selected using convenience sampling technique. The inclusion criteria for the study were that, irrespective of age, parents must have at least one child in a SHS in Ghana and a resident of Cape Coast. In getting all the sampled subjects for the study, we further used the snowball sampling procedure to get some of the respondents since there was lack of sampling frames for the study. Also, it was difficult to approach some of the respondents in any other way.

The instrument used to collect the data was structured questionnaire. Multiple constructs were created, and the reliability coefficients of these constructs ranges from 0.735 – 0.829. Content and face validities of the instrument were established through the help of experts and colleagues. Furthermore, the pre-test data were analysed using confirmatory factor analysis to establish the construct validity of the instrument. Items in the questionnaire were measured quantitatively using numerical values. With the help of six field assistants, we were able to administer the questionnaires in the various homes of parents after meeting the ethical protocols of research. For those who could not read and write we read the items to them and guided them to answer. Some of the respondents were used as informants to identify others who qualified for inclusion, who also in turn identified others. The process continued until the required respondents were obtained. We retrieved 588 completed questionnaires, representing 92.3 percent response rate, which was deemed appropriate and representative (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Cross tabulation and linear multiple regression analysis were used to analyse the data in order to answer the first and second research questions respectively. These statistical tools were used because the data were measured numerically, and also the distribution and respondents were normal and homogeneous respectively.

5. Results and Discussion

The first research question focused on the *types of SHS parents in Cape Coast choose for their children*. Types of school choice considered were co-education which is boarding, co-education which is day, single-sex education which is boarding and single-sex education which is day. All these types were to be considered based on their organisational structure as being private or public. The results are presented in Table 1. As contained in the table, majority (83.7%) of the respondents preferred public SHS to private one. Specifically, in relation to public SHSs, majority (62.2%) of the respondents indicated that they prefer a boarding school which is single-sex. However, with regard to private SHSs, 62.5 percent of the respondents indicated that they prefer mixed-sex day school. In relation to single-sex SHSs that are private, none of the respondents indicated that they preferred such schools for their children. In all, majority (57.2%) of the respondents prefer

single-sex education which is boarding. Nevertheless, 26.5% of the respondents indicated that they prefer co-education which is boarding.

Table 1: Parents' Choice of Senior High School for Their Children

Types of senior high schools	Public SHS		Private SHS		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Co-education **	150	30.5	6	6.3	156	26.5
Co-education *	30	6.1	60	62.5	90	15.3
Single-sex education **	306	62.2	30	31.2	336	57.2
Single-sex education *	6	1.2	0	0.0	6	1.0
Total	492	100	96	100	588	100
% of participants	83.7%		16.3%		100%	

Source: Field survey (2020) Where * represents day and ** represents boarding

The findings that emerged from Table 1 show that most parents in Cape Coast prefer public SHSs that are single-sex and have boarding facilities. However, parents who choose private SHSs prefer co-education or mixed-sex school. Also, with regard to private SHSs, parents prefer schools that are day and co-education. The finding supports the views of Dahari and Ya (2011) who indicate that one of the important factors that parents look forward to when selecting a SHS is the availability of boarding facilities. According to Amonoo (2014), most parents in developing countries prefer public SHSs that are boarding and single-sex. In such countries, SHS boarding schools have become more competitive. These schools are putting in place strategies to attract more students and also to retain already existing students. However, the findings are incongruent with that of Lee (2016) who avers that most parents in industrial nations prefer day SHSs that are co-education. Canals et al. (2018) avow that the closeness of a school to parents' residence or home is possibly less influential in parental choice of a school.

The teacher is the surrogate of middle class morality (Milledzi et al., 2018). Parents often expect the teacher to be a better model of behaviour for their children than they are themselves. Although parents may smoke, drink and gamble, they want the teacher to avoid any behaviour that they think might be bad for children to imitate. In this respect, parents may be following a sound principle, for the teacher, especially the young teacher dealing with adolescents is often a more effective model for the youth than is the parent. As a consequence, the teacher is expected to practice the personal virtues of the middle class: correct speech, good manners, modesty, prudence, honesty, responsibility, friendliness, and so on. Since these teachers are employed in these schools, and they are in charge of taking care of the children in boarding schools, most parents perceived boarding SHSs to be better places to train and develop their children totally. This means, the fact that the school is boarding is paramount to parents regardless of its location.

The second research question focused on the significant *factors that influence parents' choice of a particular SHS for their children*. As indicated in Figure 1, institutional, family, and social related factors were treated as the independent variables while parents' choice of a particular SHS was treated as the dependent variable. Parents' choice of a particular SHS for their children, which was the dependent variable, was obtained by

pooling the eight items that were used to collect data on the issues of school choice. The results of the linear multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Predictors of Parents' Choice of a Particular SHS for their Children

Variables	Non-standard Coefficients		Standard Coefficients	p-value	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)		Tolerance	VIF
Institutional/School Related Factors						
School performance	.222	.054	.242**	.000	1.239	.222
Quality teaching/instruction	.223	.057	.237**	.000	1.329	.223
Quality curriculum	.170	.060	.151**	.003	.486	2.058
Proximity and location	.137	.065	.136*	.035	.327	3.057
Extracurricular activities	.094	.027	.106**	.000	2.096	.094
Safety and security issues	.097	.046	.098*	.041	1.329	.097
School values	.158	.055	.140**	.001	.486	2.059
School environment and facilities	.035	.015	.116*	.035	.542	1.846
Reputation of school and staff	.048	.017	.107**	.000	.468	2.138
Class size	.081	.030	.083**	.001	2.933	.081
Appearance of staff and students	.065	.053	.056	.161	.374	2.674
Transportation	.114	.060	.114	.158	.378	2.645
School climate	.070	.059	.067	.236	.430	2.324
Family/Parental Related Factors						
Parents' income level	.036	.010	.215**	.000	.628	1.594
Parents' education level	.168	.056	.170**	.000	.352	2.839
Family values (moral, religious)	.122	.022	.123**	.000	1.659	.122
Family tie with school (old school tie)	.013	.014	.022	.367	.842	1.188
Family prestige	.006	.015	.012	.704	.486	2.057
Social Related Factors						
Popularity and brand	.186	.053	.197**	.000	1.346	.186
Peer influence (choice of friends)	.098	.022	.101**	.000	2.079	.298
Social support system	.026	.023	.032	.378	2.648	.226
Social expectation	.014	.013	.031	.291	.581	1.721
Constant	1.757					
R	.902					
R square (R ²)	.813					
Adjusted R square	.805					
Dependent variable: Parents' choice of a particular SHS for their children						

Source: Field survey (2020) **p<0.01, *p<0.05 (N = 588).

As presented in Table 2, 10 of the institutional related factors contributed significantly to parents' choice of a particular SHS. In order of importance, these factors are school performance ($\beta = .242$, $p < .01$), quality teaching/instruction ($\beta = .237$, $p < .01$), quality curriculum ($\beta = .151$, $p < .01$), school values ($\beta = .140$, $p < .01$), proximity and location ($\beta = .136$, $p < .05$), school environment and facilities ($\beta = .116$, $p < .05$), reputation of school and staff ($\beta = .107$, $p < .01$), extracurricular activities ($\beta = .106$, $p < .01$), and class size ($\beta = .083$, $p < .01$). Appearance of staff and students, transportation and school climate were not significant predictors of parents' choice of a particular SHS.

In relation to family/parental related factors, parents' income level ($\beta = .215$, $p < .01$), parents' education level ($\beta = .170$, $p < .01$), and family moral and religious values ($\beta = .123$, $p < .01$) were the significant predictors of parents' choice of a particular SHS for their children. Also, popularity and brand ($\beta = .197$, $p < .01$) and peer influence with regard to choice of friends ($\beta = .101$, $p < .01$) were the social related factors that contributed significantly to parents' choice of a school. This shows that institutional factors are the most contributing factor that influences parents' choice of a school, followed by family/parental and social related factors. Specifically, five (5) of the most significant factors that influence parents' choice of a particular SHS were school performance (24.2%), quality teaching/instruction (23.7%), parents' income level (21.5%), popularity and brand of the school (19.7%), and parents' education level (17.0%).

The findings that parents in Cape Coast prefer schools that have been recording high level of school performance, had qualified teachers, and quality curriculum are congruent with the views of Dahari and Ya (2011) who posit that parents are interested in schools that they perceive as good performing school; one which had qualified teachers and the teachers are committed to the school and that the school will suit the needs of their children. Similarly, the findings corroborate with that of Amonoo (2014) who avers that teacher quality is a key factor that parents ponder on when selecting a SHS. Amonoo added that parents also take into consideration the values, academic quality, and demand-driven programmes of a school.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with the comments of Canals et al. (2018) who assert that excellent academic record and prestige of schools are major factors influencing parents' selection decision, especially among parents who prefer single-sex school. Also, the finding that proximity and location influence 13.6 percent of parents school choice is in line with the views of Canals et al. who comment that where the location of a school is far away from a child's home or where the school is considered to be unsafe, parents are more likely to enrol their children in the nearest and safe school even if such a choice would imposed heavy cost burden on them. They added that reasons for choosing a particular school by parents are religious orientation and the desire for stricter discipline.

Similarly, the results from Table 2 suggest that parents select SHSs based on the philosophy and ethics of the school, scholastic quality, school location and proximity, and class size. As indicated by Anyan et al. (2013), reasons why parents select a SHS for their children are small environment as in small class size, safety, and friends and family influences. Also, their income and education levels can influence their school choice decision. Also, the findings that parents choose a particular school because of their moral and religious values and extracurricular activities are consistent with the comments of Amonoo (2014) and DeAngelis and Erickson (2018). Amonoo posits that religious orientation is another factor that some parents will hardly gross over. DeAngelis and Erickson also aver that facilities for extra-curriculum activities is sometimes the next thing parents consider after the academic potentials of the school, with the intentions of developing a complete individual. The tradition of extra-curriculum activities is used by

many schools to keep a balance between academic and non-academic development, a phenomenon that is appealing to many parents.

Overall, the results from Table 2 show that institutional/school, family/parental, and social related factors are able to predict 81.3 percent of the variance in parents' choice of a particular SHS for their children. The findings are in line with that of Amonoo (2014) who found that most parents dwell much on institutional factors when choosing a particular SHS for their children. Again, the findings corroborate with the assertion of Canals et al. (2018) who posit that parents' socio-economic characteristics influence their choice of a particular school for their children. Canals et al. added that parents consider the institutional/school related factors and their family and social factors before choosing a particular SHS for their children.

6. Limitations

Quite apart from the help the present study can give to stakeholders with regard to the understanding of the concepts, it has quite a few limitations which include the generalisability, subject and situational characteristics. The sample was limited to parents in Cape Coast. The result may have restricted generalisability to parents outside the study area. Also, the findings and conclusions of the study may not be projected for the future since issues related to school choice keep changing with time.

7. Conclusions

Generally, parents always want the best for their children; as a result, will select a SHS that they perceive to be the best. They dwell on both external and internal factors of the schools to determine which school their children should attend. We conclude that parents in Cape Coast prefer public boarding SHSs that are single-sex than other categories of SHSs. Also, school/institutional related factors contribute more to parents' choice of a particular SHS, followed by family/parental and social related factors respectively. It, therefore, means that SHSs with qualified teachers, excellent academic record, proximity and location of a school, and positive school values are able to attract most parents. Similarly, popularity and brand of a school, family values, and parents' income and education levels are some of the factors that predict significantly parents' choice of a school.

8. Recommendations

We recommend to parents that they should not put too much emphasis on ascriptive factors when choosing a school for their children, but rather focus more on achievement factors. This means, they should consider the academic, social, moral, physical and psychological capacity of their children when choosing a school. They should seek for further and better information from the teachers of their children with regard to their school life and academic performance. This will help guide the child to develop interest

in a particular school. If a child has no interest in a school chosen by the parents, it can affect the academic success of such a child in that school. Therefore, the heads of the schools should be attentive to the various institutional factors and create school cultures that address the needs of their customers in their communities if they are to attract and retain students.

Furthermore, it is recommended to heads of the various SHSs to run their respective schools as a business. That is, they should treat parents as clients/customers of the school, as a result, they must constantly evaluate the interest of parents to know and understand interests that are realistic in order to ensure that they meet the needs and demands of their customers. Similarly, the heads must ensure that they treat parents equitably but not equally since their level of education, household income are not the same but are factors that influence their school choice. Furthermore, heads of the schools must understand the dynamics of the community in order to treat parents fairly through positive discrimination since not all parents are socially connected to the school and the community.

Lastly, the government through the MoE and GES should list all SHSs in the country on the Ministry website with brief description of the individual schools with regard to their philosophy, vision, history, facilities and ownership structure. Also, leaflet on the schools can be developed and made available to parents. This will guide them to make an informed school choice for their children.

9. Implications for Practice

In view of the fact that school/institutional related factors do influence parents' choice of a particular school significantly, much attention has to be paid to these factors when categorising SHSs for selection by customers. For example, in Ghana, prospective SHS students are to select a school from each of the categories. They cannot select more than one grade 'A' schools. Therefore, government of Ghana through MoE should re-look at the categorisation of SHSs by considering institutional factors that are not only academic: quality instruction, quality curriculum, and academic performance. Factors such as school proximity and location, school moral and religious values, school environment and facilities, reputation of school staff, extracurricular activities, safety and security issues, and class size should also be considered or factored in the categorisation process. This categorisation should be made known to buyers of education, especially parents and students, to guide them in choosing appropriately their preferred school. This can be done by producing portable flyers for buyers of secondary education. Therefore, efforts put in place by MoE to improve school choice and selection processes must be guided by the needs and demands of customers. This calls for the adoption of consumer-centred approach by MoE and implementers of education since it is more appropriate to employ this approach when handling cases of school choice.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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