

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, PAST ACADEMIC RECORDS, PROXIMITY TO SCHOOL AND QUALIFIED TEACHERS AS PREDICTOR OF PARENTS CHOICE OF SCHOOLS FOR NURSERY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN BENIN METROPOLIS

IMASUEN, KENNEDY (Ph.D.) & AIBINUOMO, M.P (Ph.D.)

Abstract

The study aimed at assessing the contributions of learning environment, past academic records, proximity to homes, and qualified teachers in the parent's choice of school for their children. To achieve this, five research questions were raised. The study population consists of parents/guardians whose children were in nursery schools in Oredo local government area, Edo State. The sample was 400 parents who were conveniently selected from public and private pre-primary schools in the local government area. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire which used the four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by three experts of Measurement and Evaluation at the Institute of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, and it had a reliability index of 0.87. Research questions one to four were

answered using simple linear regression while research question five was answered using multiple regression analysis, at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings from the study showed that learning environment, past academic records, proximity, and qualified teachers contributed to and also jointly predicted parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children. However, proximity to parents' homes was not a significant predictor of parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children. It was therefore recommended among others that parents should critically examine the school learning environment, teacher's qualifications, and past academic records of schools, before entrusting the care of their children to them

Key Words: Learning environment, proximity, school records, academic performance

Introduction

Education is a major tool that has led to the advancement of any nation; it is the vehicle for the development and transmission of the cultural heritage of any society or nation (Imasuen & Aibinuomo, 2022). One way of achieving this developmental stride in all areas of life and society is through teaching and learning, with teachers the drivers of this vehicle called education (Imasuen & Aibinuomo, 2022). Dewey cited in Sudhakar (2018) stated that education is everything including growth and has no final destination. It is a lifelong process. The development of any child to be able to function effectively and contribute to his/her society depends on the type of education he/she has acquired. The child's developmental strides and contributions to society can only be attained if the child gets the right education. This right education is a function of the school the child attends. In the choice of a good school for children, parents are always careful because if they miss it at that level, it could jeopardize the development of the child. Thus, parents are not carefree about the schools simply

because children will spend more time in school. Therefore, parents would ensure that the children's security, health and effective learning would be guaranteed.

One of parents' most important decisions is where their children are educated. Due to the importance of this choice, parents weigh dozens of factors in making this decision (Parsons, 2019). The second most important decision a parent makes, apart from the number of children, is deciding on which school to enroll them. Making the right decision is vital as this could put them on a path towards lifelong learning, a prestigious tertiary education and a successful career (Gomendio, 2017). There has been a consistent interest in the phenomenon of school choice by academics, economists and policymakers (Levin & Milgrom (2004). In the standard view, rational choice is defined as the process of determining what options are available and then choosing the most preferred one according to some consistent criterion. Searching for the best school for a child can be a daunting process for parents across the globe. With so many influential factors to put into consideration, advice for parents is growing, helping them map out the best route for their soon-to-be pupils. Crowded by choice, it is hard to know which academic institution offers the best educational experience. Parents worry most times is how their children will be cared for

Institute of Education, University of Benin, Benin City
Email: kennedy.imasuen@uniben.edu

Corresponding Author
IMASUEN, KENNEDY
E-mail: kennedy.imasuen@uniben.edu

whenever they send them away from home, thereby making the children happy (Kilpatrick, 2019). If a child is not happy, he or she will not perform academically. Thus, for a child to have a successful time at school, they must have a sense of being recognised, valued safe and secure.

Among the criteria parents need to meet for making the choice of school for their children or ward is the proximity of the school to their homes, or place of work. Parents most often want to be near their kids in nursery schools. This is necessitated by ease of accessibility, less stress in picking up and dropping off children, to avoiding fatigue due to long trekking to school, thereby sleeping off in the class, while others learn. Proximity to school according to the Oxford Learners' Dictionary (9th Edition, 2015) is the state of being near somebody/something in distance or time. It also means closeness, nearness in space, time or relationship. The proximity of schools to pupils' homes refers to the distance or the geographical proximity between the students' residential location and the school they attend. It is an important factor as it affects the accessibility and convenience of attending school, particularly for younger children who may have limited transportation options. The closer the school is to the child's home, the easier it is for them to attend school regularly and participate in extracurricular activities. The distance between the children's home has an impact on the academic performance of the child. The long-distance trekked by children from their homes to their school made them tardy and with empty stomachs which could result in school dropouts (Mhiliwa, 2015). Moreover, students who have to walk daily at a lengthy distance from their homes to school spend less time studying and sleeping leading them to be waking up late in the morning. Besides, walking long distances is physically and mentally tiring (Zuckerman, 2021). Some students arrive at school exhausted and drained, both physically and mentally (Wheaton et al, 2016). As a result, it is harder for them to focus on studying after they get home, and it can lead to low performance in school (Matingwina, 2018). Distance from school is one of the hindrances to learning that students in rural areas are facing. The present trend in population growth in urban areas resulted in the infringement of population into rural areas making land available for another developmental process scarce. This may result in many difficulties in the provision of land for schools in urban areas and other rural areas. Thus, students would travel much distance to acquire sound education (Ogoro et al., 2018).

Another criterion for the choice of school for their children's parents is the learning environment. Learning environment refers to the physical, social, and emotional

conditions that affect the learning process. It is also seen as the learning culture as well as the physical surroundings created by teachers and pupils. It can be in the school building(s) but also outdoors, online and away from school (Erasmus, 2021). A good learning environment is that which supports and enhances learning, engagement, and achievement. This environment can be a physical classroom, an online learning platform, or any other place where learning takes place. Some of the key components of a good learning environment include positive relationships, clear expectations, appropriate resources, flexibility, engagement, feedback and support. Williams and Clint (2022) believe that learning environments vary from classroom to classroom, context to context. They opined that there are four types of learning environments, each with unique elements. They are: student or learners-centred, knowledge-centred; assessment-centred; and community-centred. In further classification of learning environment, the Western Governors University (WGU, 2021), gave the types of learning environment that influences learning as the physical environment which consist of vibrant, colourful classroom or rows of deck. This category is all about the design of the classroom, including how it is laid out to influence learning, and which spaces are designated for learning. The second is the psychological environment, and the last is the emotional environment

A survey by Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability and Professionalism (LEAP) African in Folorunsho and Oyeibisi (2020) found that most public schools in Nigeria were not conducive enough for children to learn effectively and develop the right attitudes, skills and knowledge that would shape their lives in the future, due to an unconducive school environment. This has led to low-quality education. The learning environment can also foster positive emotion which motivates the student to learn, while negative emotions such as stress and alienation will inhibit their learning (Ambrose, 2010). A good learning environment is not limited to only a teacher's good communication skills, knowledge, credibility and preparedness contributing towards teaching excellence. An environment that best prepares the students for their future professional lives and contributes towards their personal and psychosomatic development, as well as their social well-being, is considered an ideal academic environment.

Students learn better when they are part of a supportive community of learners. When a positive learning environment is created, where students feel accepted, seen, and valued, they are most likely to persist

in their studies. In addition, children learn best in an environment where they can have secure relationships with caring and responsive adults, where they feel safe, and where they feel free to explore and learn. A well-arranged environment can help to meet children's needs during play and routines. Supportive environments send children a variety of positive messages about their learning (Dodge et al, 2010). As with adults, preschool-age children are affected by their environment, even if they cannot yet express these feelings in sophisticated ways. There is a strong positive correlation between students' motivation and an enhanced learning environment (Dhanapala, 2021). In the same vein, the learning environment is a determinant factor that contributes to stimulating the outcomes of learning that facilitates academic performance by encouraging effective teaching and learning.

Another issue to consider is the past academic records of the school. School records generally refer to information about students, staff, processes, facilities, finances and many more. It is essential to have these records properly documented to aid transparency and ease in accessing information in the future (Umer, 2022). The school office keeps and maintains these records for use and retrieval of information when needed. Keeping school records is important as it would help school management make informed decisions which in turn help them have a better outlook to the externals who may be monitoring the school or scouting from a distance. The academic records and school records or achievements of the students in the past are often made public and parents or guidance most times would consider them before any selection takes place. These students' achievement in examination usually forms the major tool for attracting students, as they are mentioned in the course of advertising the school and programs available.

Performance ranking is a common phenomenon globally, and it differs in terms of the procedures and methodologies used, as well as the use of such ranking. This has been the practice in the United Kingdom (Goldstein, 2013), Australia (Rosenkvist, 2010), and Tanzania (Blackmon, 2017), where records are used to rate the school's performance and qualifications to determine whether or not the school should be selected. Parents need to pay close attention to these records as they reveal the state of the schools and their potential; what the pupils stand to gain when they are registered as students. When this is passed successfully, parents can make informed decisions on which school to select, to give their children the best. Other records kept by the school that can also affect parents' decisions include the

prizes won, trophies, inter-house sports and others. The past academic records of the schools are widely investigated before a child is registered with such a school. There are some schools with massive achievements in certain subjects that have given them public recognition while there are some that are known for massive failure. Whether it is the previous records of pupils or of the school itself, there is a need to confirm if the school's capability is commensurate with the current level of development of the child.

It is possible for the schools to be located in a serene environment, have adequate facilities, with good past academic records, but no qualified teachers, the educational attainment will be in jeopardy. Teachers are role models for their students. They can inspire and motivate their students to achieve great things. A good and well-qualified teacher can make a big difference in a child's life. They not only bring out the best in the students but teach them valuable life skills, such as communication, compassion, organization, and presentation. These are geared towards doing better in every domain and helping to achieve their life goals. Teachers' qualification means having both academic qualifications and proper training in pedagogy. It means recognizing teaching as a full profession that requires specialized training. The minimum requirement to teach in a Nigerian school according to the National Policy on Education (2013) is the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE), and must also be a registered member of the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). Teachers' qualifications have a significant effect on the academic performance of pupils in public primary schools (Yasin, 2021). The teachers are such an influential factor in the pupils' academic and overall development, that it will be a great disservice if children are entrusted to their care, without having the requisite qualifications. The quality of teachers is of great importance in determining the good school to hand over the education of children to. It is on record that parents would choose more capable hands than quacks. In this part of the world, eligibility for the teaching profession is not checked. There are a lot of people teaching without the minimum qualifications. They can cause more harm than good with their unskillfulness.

Several other factors influence parents' choice of school that have been extensively used in literature, some of which are school popularity, school quality, future option, parent's income level, and parents' educational level (Abubakar & Abubakar 2020). However, the learning environment, the proximity of schools to homes, qualified teachers and past academic records of schools are important variables that may affect the choice

of parents of pre-primary schools for their children, but, their relative importance has not been investigated. Furthermore, assessment of the joint effect of these variables has most often not been given adequate attention. Therefore, it is imperative to find out the extent to which these variables from the perspective of parents predict their choice of pre-schools for their children. Consequently, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the contribution of learning environment to parents' choice of pre-primary school for their children?
2. What is the contribution of past academic records in parents' choice of pre-primary school for their children?
3. What is the contribution of proximity to home in parents' choice of pre-primary school for their children?
4. What is the contribution of qualified teachers in parents' choice of pre-primary school for their children?
5. Do learning environment, past academic records, proximity to home and qualified teachers predict parents' choice of primary schools for their children?

Methods

The study is a survey which adopted the correlational design aimed at assessing the contributions of learning environment, past academic records, proximity to

homes, and qualified teachers in the parent's choice of school for their children. The population of the study consisted of parents/guardians whose children are in nursery schools in Oredo local government area, Edo State. The sample size was 400 parents who were conveniently selected from public and private pre-primary schools in the local government area. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire which was divided into two Sections A and B. Section A elicited the demographic details which included, sex, occupation, and marital status. Section B contains twenty (20) items that the parents were to respond to. It used the four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The weights of 4, 3, 2, and 1 were assigned to Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by three experts of measurement and evaluation at the Institute of Education, University of Benin, Benin City. Appropriate modifications were made as pointed out by the validators. 30 copies of the instruments were administered to parents in Egor local government area, while the Cronbach reliability statistics was used, and it yielded an index of 0.87. The data were collected by the researchers and three other research assistants. Research questions one to four were answered using simple linear regression while research question five was answered using multiple regression analysis, at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Regression Analysis of the Contribution of Learning Environment in Parents' Choice of Pre-Primary School for their Children

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
1	Regression	1575.168	1	1575.168	272.146	0.000	Significant
	Residual	2413.577	417	5.788			
	Total	3988.745	418				

R = 0.628; R Square = 0.395; Adjusted R Square = 0.393

Table 1 shows an F value of 272.146 and a corresponding p-value of 0.000. This is an indication that the learning environment contributed significantly to the parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children ($p < 0.05$). The adjusted R Square of 0.393 implies that the learning environment contributed about 39.3% of the total variance of parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of the Contribution of Past Academic Records in Parents' Choice of Pre-Primary School for Their Children

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
1	Regression	1315.203	1	1315.203	205.136	.000	Significant
	Residual	2673.542	417	6.411			
	Total	3988.745	418				

R = 0.574; R Square = 0.330; Adjusted R Square = 0.328

Table 2 shows an F value of 205.136 and a corresponding p-value of 0.000. This is an indication that past academic records contributed significantly to the parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children ($p < 0.05$). The adjusted R Square of 0.328 is an indication that past academic records contributed about 32.8% of the total variance of parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children

Table 3: Regression Analysis of the Contribution of Proximity to Homes in Parents' Choice of Pre-Primary School for Their Children

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
1	Regression	1158.696	1	1158.696	170.731	.000	Significant
	Residual	2830.049	417	6.787			
	Total	3988.745	418				

R = 0.539; R Square = 0.290; Adjusted R Square = 0.289

Table 3 shows an F value of 170.731 and a corresponding p-value of 0.000. This implies that proximity to homes contributed significantly to the parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children ($p < 0.05$). The adjusted R Square of 0.289 indicated that past academic records contributed about 28.9% of the total variance of parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children.

Table 4: Regression Analysis of the Contribution of Qualified Teachers in Parents' Choice of Pre-Primary School for their Children

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
1	Regression	1031.593	1	1031.593	145.469	.000	Significant
	Residual	2957.151	417	7.091			
	Total	3988.745	418				

R = 0.509; R Square = 0.259; Adjusted R Square = 0.257

Table 4 shows an F value of 145.469 and a corresponding p-value of 0.000. This implies that qualified teachers contributed significantly to the parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children ($p < 0.05$). The adjusted R Square of 0.257 is an indication that past academic records contributed about 25.7% of the total variance of parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children.

Table 5: Regression Analysis of the Learning Environment, Past Academic Records, Proximity, and Qualified Teachers as Predictor of Parents' Choice of Pre-Primary School for Their Children

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
1	Regression	1847.283	4	461.821	89.282	.000	Significant
	Residual	2141.462	414	5.173			
	Total	3988.745	418				

R = 0.681; R Square = 0.463; Adjusted R Square = 0.458

Table 6: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.633	.565		2.892	.004
	Learning Environment	.434	.061	.389	7.088	.000
	Past academic records	.130	.054	.138	2.409	.016
	Proximity to homes	.072	.063	.063	1.140	.255
	Qualified Teachers	.218	.049	.207	4.453	.000

Table 5 shows an F value of 89.282 and a corresponding p-value of 0.000. This is an indication that learning environment, past academic records, proximity, and qualified teachers jointly, significantly predict parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children ($p < 0.05$). The adjusted R Square of 0.458 is an indication that learning environment, past academic records, proximity, and qualified teachers jointly contributed about 45.8% of the total variance of parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children.

Table 6 shows that learning environment, past academic records and qualified teachers were good predictors of parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children ($p < 0.05$). However, proximity to parents' homes was not seen as a good predictor of parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children ($p > 0.05$).

Discussion of Findings

The study aimed to assess learning environment, past academic records, proximity, and qualified teachers as predictors of parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children. Specifically, it was to assess the contribution of each of the independent variables to parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children. The results indicated that the learning environment, past academic records, proximity, and qualified teachers contributed immensely to parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children with the learning environment contributing the highest. It was also revealed that learning environment, past academic records, proximity, and qualified teachers jointly predict parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children. However, it was only the learning environment, past academic records, and qualified teachers that showed to be good predictors, while proximity was not a significant predictor in this study. These findings aligned with other studies earlier studies carried out by other authors such as Leap African, cited in Folorunsho and Oyeibisi (2020); Matingwina, 2018; Zuckerman, 2021; Ambrose, 2010; Dodge et al., 2010; Dhanapala, 2021; and Yasin, 2021).

Conclusion

The study shows that learning environment, past academic records, proximity, and qualified teachers contributed to and also jointly predicted parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children. However, proximity to parents' homes was not a significant predictor of parents' choice of pre-primary schools for their children.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was recommended that:

- i. Parents should critically examine and investigate the school learning environment, teacher's qualifications, and past academic records of the schools, before entrusting the care of their children to them
- ii. Proximity to homes, though important should not be the basis in the choice of primary schools for their children.

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