

Examination Of Factors That Influence The Choice Of Senior High School By Junior High School Students In Ghana (A Case Study Of Nungua Basic Schools)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study has been to determine the major underlying factors that influence the choice of senior high schools. To this end, a survey of 510 BECE candidates in Junior High Schools in Nungua, a community in Accra, was conducted. The students were asked to indicate their opinions on twenty seven variables on a five-point Likert scale. The data generated from the survey were multivariate in structure since 27 variables were recorded on 510 respondents. The data was explored, using frequency distributions of the responses. The research revealed that Controlled social atmosphere is the most influential factor that underlies the selection of senior high schools. A second most influential factor is parental guidance/individual needs. Quality of education and the location of the school are the other factors that cannot be ignored.

Key Words: Accra, Nungua, Education, Factors, Opinion, Social, Influential, Parental

1. Introduction

School selection can be a difficult process for many Junior High School graduates and their parents in Ghana. There are many factors that go into deciding which is the right school. Gorard (1999) analyzed four different studies of school choice and compiled them into five main groups: Academic (for example, the quality of teaching staff) situational/convenience (for example, proximity to home) organizational, selective (for example, ability and religion) and security (for example, discipline). According to Bossetti (2004), most parents place a strong emphasis on academic reasons in order to select a particular schools or types of schools because they perceive that their children will excel academically and have a better educational path there. Elacqua et al. (2005) found empirical evidence that parents across all school types (both public and private) rated academic reasons as the most important factor in their school choice. Schneider and Buckley (2002) observed parents' search patterns of schools on an educational website and found that, on average, parents looked at schools that performed better academically (higher reading and mathematics scores) as their search progressed. In other words, parents eliminated schools with poor academic performance. Other studies confirm academic reasons as central in parental school choice (Armor and Peiser, 1998; Denessen et al 2005; Goldring and Hausman, 1999; Moe, 1995; Weiher and Tedin, 2002). Another group of academic reasons include quality of education, and others focus on the attainment of academic achievement, which parents link to: Good quality teaching staff (Hammond and Dennison, 1995), Good choice of subjects (Woods, 1992), Good examination results (Solomon, 2003), Discipline (Goldring and Hausman, 1999), Good pupil behavior (Echols and Williams, 1995), Smaller class size (Kleitiz et al., 2000), Morals (Bussell, 1998) and attention paid to each child (Denessen et al 2005). Elacqua et al. (2005) report that almost every category of parents of different educational levels mentioned the importance of the quality of education in selecting a school. Out of the 17 elicited school choice reasons, Denessen et al. (2005) found that quality of education was the most important school choice reason. Examination results are an indicator of quality of education. A study on parental preference and school choice in the UK revealed that 64% of parents indicated a school's good examination results was one of the reasons for their school choice (Collins and Snell, 2000). Bridge and Blackman's study (1978) had 71% of parents mention location as a factor influencing their school choice. Similarly, Williams et al. (1983), who conducted a nationwide survey in Washington DC on parental school choice, found that 15% of parents cited transportation or convenience as one of the most important factors in their selection of a school. In a study of school choice in the UK, Hunter (1991) found proximity to home to be one of the top four reasons (good discipline 15%, good exam results 15%, single sex 13% and proximity to home 12%). West et al. (1995) report that when thinking about their first-named secondary schools, more parents cited proximity to home as a reason for selection over good academic results 19%, compared to 14%. Their results on second-named secondary schools produced similar findings 13%, compared to 10% per cent. This suggests that although most parents want the best academic school for their child, they still consider the distance factor important and are influenced by the travel time required to reach a school. Morgan et al. (1993) found parents included convenience as one of the five main school choice determinants (alongside ideological, educational, dissatisfaction and mixed marriages). Parents indicated that they sent their child to a particular school because it was the nearest school and it was easy to reach on their way to work (Morgan et al. (1993).

On average it takes about 16 years for a child to complete his or her education from basic to the University or Polytechnic in Ghana. Under the educational reforms implemented in 1987, they go through a three-year Junior High School system. This system prepares them to sit for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) at the end of the third year. Progression from the basic to the secondary is based primarily on the performance of the student in the Basic Education Certificate Examination. In 2011/2012 academic year there were 14360 recognize public primary school, 5473 recognize private primary schools ,8336 recognize public Junior High Schools,3231 recognize private Junior High Schools, 515 recognize public Senior High Schools,242 recognize private senior high schools,141 recognize public technical and vocational institutions, 106 recognize private technical and vocational institutions , 38 recognize public Colleges of education,1 recognize private College of education, 10 Polytechnics, 60 Universities which includes 9 public universities serving a population of over 24 million. This means that most Ghanaians have relatively easy access to good education. Placement of students from Junior High School to Senior High School was done manually from 1990 to 2004. In 2005 the Government introduced a computerized system of placement. During the first placement exercise in 2005, 151,016 out of a total of 177,070 qualified candidates representing 85.3% were placed in senior high and technical schools. In 2006, 308,379 BECE candidates registered with 160,119 qualifying for placement. A total of 145,961 candidates were placed but 3,031 did not take up their admission. More than 188,881 candidates were placed in 2007 while 179,000 were placed in 2008. This paper seeks to identify factors considered by Junior High School students in Nungua in the process of selecting Senior High School to attend. The data for the study was collected from five (5) Junior High Schools in Nungua through the use of structured questionnaires. The remaining of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describe the methodology

2. Methodology

The study was conducted in Nungua a sub metro in the Ledzokuku Krowor Municipal Assembly, one of the newly created municipalities established on 1st November, 2007 and inaugurated on 29th February 2008, under the Legislative Instrument (LI 1815). With a total land area estimated at 50 square kilometers and an estimated population of 261,571 in 2008, the general population density is calculated as 5,231 persons per square kilometer.

The census figures for the 2010 population and housing census revealed that the Municipality is populated by people from various ethnic backgrounds with the Ga Adangbe Group (of which the indigenous Gas belong) making up a majority 44.3% followed by the Akans 34.8% and Ewes 12.4%. In order to achieve the stated objectives of the research, the researcher used questionnaire to randomly obtained data from five hundred and ten (510) form three students from eight(8) out of thirteen(13) Junior High Schools located in Nungua . Twenty-seven variables on considerations for school selection were identified and the respondents were asked to rate the variables on a five point scale with 1 being Very unimportant and 5 being Very important. For easy reference, the variables are defined below.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| X_1 - Close to where I live , | X_2 -School has boarding facilities |
| X_3 -School has produced my role model | X_4 - Financial constraints |
| X_5 -Subjects the school offers | X_6 - School has produced great men |
| X_7 - High disciplinary training | X_8 - My friends are in the school |
| X_9 - Recommended by teachers | |
| X_{10} - School is good in extra curricula activities | |
| X_{11} - Good academic records | |
| X_{12} -Does not impose too much restriction on students | |
| X_{13} - Advised by my parents | |
| X_{14} - School that can help me achieve my future goals | |
| X_{15} - Restrictions of computerized selection procedure | |
| X_{16} - Health problems | |
| X_{17} -School has day facilities | |

- X_{18} - Able to meet my special needs
- X_{19} - School is in a town where a relative lives
- X_{20} - Prepare me for my future profession
- X_{21} - A relation is an old student of the school
- X_{22} - Can easily adapt to the environment of the school
- X_{23} - Just want to attend school outside my region of residence
- X_{24} - Develop other potentials apart from academics
- X_{25} - Most of my friends have chosen that school
- X_{26} - Located close to urban centre
- X_{27} - Close to Accra

3. RESULTS

The data was explored to identify the basic patterns exhibited by the variables under study. The tool used in the exploration includes percentages, frequencies and other routine techniques.

3.1 Analysis of Responses on the Indicator Variables

The results of the analysis of the responses on the twenty seven indicator variables which were measured using the following scale: Very unimportant --1, Not important--2, Not sure -- 3, Important-- 4, Very important-- 5 are discuss below.

On the first indicator variable majority of the respondents disagree about the importance of where one lives in choosing a secondary school. A few of them constituting about (35%) do find this variable as an important consideration for their choice of secondary school. Thus, a consideration for the closeness to where one lives does not appear to be popular among respondents.

On the second indicator variable majority (62%) of the students consider the variable X_2 - School has boarding facilities as very important. Sixteen percent (16%) of the respondents were not sure of considering the school's boarding facilities as a factor in the selection of school. Cumulatively, only 22% do not find the school's boarding facilities as important. Thus, a lot of consideration is given to boarding facilities in choosing a school by respondents.

About 32% considered the indicator variable X_3 as not important in the selection of the type of school to attend after JHS. 57% considered the indicator variable as important. Thus, the indicator X_3 appears to be quite popular among the respondents.

Majority (73%) considers financial constraints as important in the selection of school.

Only a few (9%) of the respondents consider the variable as not important. This shows that one's financial position appear to be an issue many will not overlook in choosing a schools.

77% of the respondents consider the variable, X_5 as important. Only 9% were not sure of considering the subjects the school offers, and still about 14% would consider subjects the school offer as unimportant. Thus, the consideration of X_5 appears to be very crucial for respondents. On the variable X_6 - School has produced great men only few number of respondents consider this issue as important. This means that the issue of being able to produce great men by the school is not popular among respondents.

On the seventh variable (X_7 - High disciplinary training) majority of respondents consider it as an important factor in the selection of school. This is evident as 74% of the respondents view the variable as very important. Thus the consideration X_7 - High disciplinary training is very popular among the respondents.

Majority (72%) of the students consider the indicator variable, X_8 -My friends are in the school as unimportant factor in school selection.15% of respondents consider the variable as important. It can be concluded that the consideration does not appear to be popular among respondents. Less than half of the respondents consider the indicator variable X_9 - Recommended by teachers as important factor in school selection. On this issue, we see

that close to 30% of respondents are unable to determine its significance. Generally, the distribution shows wide variability in opinions on the significance of teachers influence in school selection.

The most observed reactions to this variable are those who agree to its importance. However, it can also be seen that almost the same number who consider X_{10} to be crucial also do not find its important or are unable to express their opinion. Thus, on the whole there exist wide differences in opinion on the relevance of being good in extra curricula activities in a school of one's choice. Majority of the respondents considers the indicator variable X_{11} - Good academic records important in the selection of the school they would attend after JHS. Only a small number of the respondents consider the variable as unimportant. Thus, the consideration of good academic records of the school appears to be very popular among respondents.

There was wide variability in opinion on the significance of imposition of restriction on students. On this issue, about a quarter (129 out of 510) of the respondents are undecided on its importance. It appears that on the whole, less number of respondents agrees to the issue of being strict on students than those who do not. Thus, imposition of restrictions on students appears not to be popular with respondents.

A little over half the number of respondents supported the involvement of parents in school selection. Only a few (about 21%) of them are not sure of the relevance of parents involvement in the selection. Thus, just a slim majority are in favour of parental guidance in school selection.

The distribution of responses on the contribution of the school to achieving one's future grade is negatively skewed. This means that a large number of respondents find it necessary to attend a school that would guarantee the future for them. We also find out that a number of respondents do not find this criterion necessary; a few are undecided about this variable. Thus, it is a popular consideration among BECE candidates surveyed that the senior secondary school to attend must be that which prepares the candidate to achieve set grades.

Majority of the respondents considered the variable X_{15} - Restrictions of computerized selection procedure as important in the school selection. That is, a large number of the respondents support computerized placement into schools. Thus, computerization of school selection is popular among the respondents

There was wide variability in opinion on the relevance of considering health issues in the choice of a school. That is, consideration for health issues is debatable among the respondents. We also observe that on this issue, about a fifth of the respondents are undecided on its importance.

A slight majority (53.7%) of respondents agree that a consideration should be made for day facilities in their selected school. Of those who have contrary view, about half of them are undecided about whether or not day facilities are necessary.

“Special needs” is also an indicator variable on which responses were measured. A large number of respondents find it necessary to consider the capability of the chosen school to provide for their special needs. Thus, consideration for one's special needs is popular among the respondents.

The next variable considered is X_{19} - School is in a town where a relative lives. We observe that wide variability exists in the responses on this consideration. A little less than half the number of respondents see closeness to a relative as necessary. Almost a fifth of the respondents strongly disagree to the relevance of selecting a school in a place where a relation lives. On the whole, the importance of selecting a school in a town where a relation lives is a debatable issue.

Another variable considered is X_{20} - Prepare me for my future profession. It was observed that the responses on this issue is highly negatively skewed. The negative skewness suggests that an overwhelming majority of the respondents are of the view that they consider the variable as very important in their school selection. What this means is that majority of the students would want to go to a school that would prepare them for their future profession. It is interesting to observe that a few candidates do not find this variable as important, though this group constitutes an insignificant minority.

The next variable of study is X_{21} - A relation is an old student of the school. The response on this variable shows that close to a third of the respondents are not decided on the import of giving consideration to a relation being an old student. The remaining respondents appear to be split on the importance of this variable. Almost the same number that disagrees to the relevance of the variable also agrees. Thus, there exists some amount of variability in opinion on the importance of considering a relation who is an old student of one's school of choice.

The other variable of study is X_{22} - Can easily adapt to the school environment. It was clear from the responses that a large number of respondents were undecided on this variable

This number constitutes a little more than a quarter of the respondents. Generally, opinions are varied on the relevance of adaptability to environment in school selection.

On the variable X_{23} - Just want to attend school outside my region of residence. About half of the respondents think that it is desirable to attend a school away from one's region of residence. About 19% are not decided on this issue whilst the remaining 31% think that this is not an issue to consider. Thus, in general, the importance of X_{23} is acknowledged by some slight majority of the respondents.

The variable X_{24} - Can develop other potentials apart from academics is the next variable considered. It was observed that majority of the respondents endorse the importance of this variable. This number is close to two-thirds of the respondents. Thus the idea of developing non-academic potentials is a laudable one for most of the candidates. Again, we observe that a large proportion (23.5%) of the candidates have their minds not made up on the relevance of this consideration. Some 10% of the candidates do not see the need for developing other potentials apart from what would prepare them to achieve their academic grades.

Another variable considered was the variable X_{25} - Most of my friends have chosen that school. We see that much more people disagree to the relevance of this variable than those who agree. The distribution therefore is positively skewed. A large number of respondents are not decided on whether or not it is important to have most friends in the same school.

Very few (about 5%) think that it is absolutely necessary to consider this variable. Thus, it is clear that consideration for friends in the same school is not a popular one among the respondents.

The next variable considered was the variable X_{26} - Located close to urban centre. About 23% of the respondents were undecided. Majority think that they would not like their school to be sited close to urban centre. The number that disagrees constitutes about 43% of the respondents. The remaining number that supports the assertion forms about a third of the respondents. Thus, acceptance for choosing a school that is located in urban centre is not overwhelming.

Last in the list of variables examined in this study is X_{27} - Close to Accra. We see that opinion on the relevance of this variable is varied. Large number of respondents agrees to the importance of this variable; and equally large number disagrees to its relevance. About 20% of respondents are undecided. Thus, the importance of attending secondary school in Accra is debatable among the BECE candidates who reside in Accra.

3.2. General Comparison of Responses on the indicator variables

Responses on a number of variables exhibited large variability. These variables are listed as follows:

- X_9 - Recommended by teachers;
- X_{12} - Does not impose too much restriction on students;
- X_{16} - Health problems;
- X_{19} - School is in a town where a relative lives;
- X_{22} - Can easily adapt to the school environment;
- X_{27} - Close to Accra.

It can be seen that generally, these variables cover issues that are concerned with convenience and discipline. The distribution on very few of the variables exhibited positive skewness; indeed, it was only on two variables that this pattern was very obvious. These variables are:

X_8 - My friends are in the school;

X_{25} - Most of my friends have chosen that school.

It is obvious that these two variables are related. It is not surprising that the distributions on them are also related. This means that opinion on the issue of having friends in the same school is consistently seen as generally not relevant.

Support for consideration of some variables was overwhelming. These variables are:

- X_5 - Subjects the school offer;
- X_7 - High disciplinary training;
- X_{11} - Good academic records;
- X_{14} - School that can help me achieve my future goals;

X_{18} - Able to meet special needs;

X_{20} - Prepare me for my future profession.

We observe that these variables are related. It is thus not surprising that the responses on them are also related. We see that generally, these variables cover issues that are concerned with academic work.

On all the variables some respondents were undecided about their relevance in school selection. For some of these variables, the number that found them difficult determining their importance was prominent. These variables are:

X_{12} - Does not impose too much restriction on students;

X_{21} - A relation is an old student of the school;

X_{22} - Can easily adapt to the school environment.

We see that these variables are concerned with convenience or discipline of the school. Thus, this group of variables is similar to the first in this section. It was observed that the variable X_{21} - A relation is an old student of the school is the one consideration on whose importance candidates are undecided the most. It will be recalled that on the issue of a relation being an old student, close to a third of the respondents were not sure of its relevance in school selection.

4. Discussions

This study has been concerned with the study of factors that influence the selection of senior secondary schools by final year students of Nungua Junior High Schools. The data was obtained on twenty seven variables that are indicators of the latent factors of school selection.

Preliminary analyses of the data made use of routine exploratory methods such as a study of the distributions of the responses on the study variables. It was realized that the patterns of the distributions on some groups of variables were similar. Two of the variables were seen as unpopular considerations in the selection of schools. These were concerned with having friends in the same selected school. There was overwhelming support for six of the variables. The six variables generally covered issues that were concerned with the academic performance in the school. Consideration for six of the variables in school selection was highly debatable. These variables generally covered issues that were concerned with convenience and discipline. It was also realized that on some of the twenty seven variables, some candidates were unable to determine their importance in school selection.

One thing that is worthy of discussion from the study is that, on all the variables a good number of respondents were not sure of their relevance in the selection of schools. This is even surprising in the case where one would think the variable in question must be an obvious consideration in school selection. For example, one would have thought that the following variables are absolutely necessary in school selection: X_{14} - The only school that can help me achieve my future grades and X_{20} - Prepare me for my future profession. However, we observe that a number of respondents think otherwise. This brings to the fore the need for some external intervention in the selection of schools by BECE candidates.

However, the relative importance of the factors in this work defers from those in the literature. For example, academic reasons have been identified by many researchers Coldron and Boulton, (1991) Bossetti, (2004); Bauch and Goldring, (1995), Elacqua et al., 2005) to be the most important factor in school selection. However, in this study, we observe that the most important factor is *controlled social atmosphere*. An indication of this factor is that a student should not have (too many) friends from his former basic school in the same school. According to the respondents they are of the opinion that, perhaps, if too many “old” friends find themselves in the school, they may get unnecessarily distracted from their academic work. Similar to the academic reasons in the literature, this work identifies a factor that may be best referred to as *quality of education*. This factor is the third most important factor. Indicators of quality education are high disciplinary training, good academic record of the school and guarantee of obtaining the desired grade.

Proximity is another factor that has been identified in the literature as an important consideration in school selection. Similar to this factor is what has been identified in this work as the location factor, which is the fourth most important. By location, respondents rather mean lack of proximity to their home or those of relatives. We see that this fourth factor is consistent with that of the first. We recall that the respondents for this study live in Accra, and on the issue of selecting a school in Accra, opinions varied widely. Also, on the issue of selecting a school close to where one lives, more respondents disagreed than agreed.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study looked at factors analysis of selection of senior high schools, using data collected from BECE candidates at the Junior High Schools at Nungua, a community in Accra. The objective was to identify the factors, if any, that influence the choice of senior high schools. At the end of the analysis, four main factors were found to underlie the selection of secondary schools.

In order of importance, the four factors that influence school selection are: the controlled social atmosphere of the school; the parental guidance/individual needs of the student; the quality of education offered at the school and the location of the school.

Indicators of the first factor concern issues that are likely to help to eliminate distractions from the main academic on school campus. These distractive tendencies include having (too many) friends in the same school from one's former basic school. Another measure for controlling the social atmosphere is the imposition of some level of restriction on students.

The objective of this work was to identify the major latent factors of selection of secondary schools by BECE candidates. The determination of these four factors clearly realizes the main purpose of the work. Students of junior high schools and their guardians can now be guided by these findings to make informed choices of schools. Thus, by the findings of this work, the hope is to reduce the risk on a child's future that is associated with school choice.

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