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PERCEPTIONS OF MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES REGARDING SCHOOLS' CHOICE FOR THEIR CHILDREN AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Haq Nawaz¹, Ammara Murtaza², Mehboob UI Hassan³

^{1,2,3} PhD Scholar, Institute of Education and Research, University of the Punjab Lahore, Pakistan
(PAKISTAN)

haqnawazsheroz@gmail.com¹, hassanbhattig@hotmail.com³

ABSTRACT

Middle class families have different perceptions regarding educational institutions working for students' success. Schools' choice is key construct for middle class families to polish their children's abilities and hidden potentials. This study was conducted to find out the perception of middle class families regarding schools' choice for their children at elementary level. This research was quantitative and descriptive in nature. Sample of the study consists of 200 male and female parents selected purposively. Self developed questionnaire was developed by the researchers using Likert type options. Questionnaire was validated from three experts and important addition and deletion in final questionnaire were made. Reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by calculating Cronbach's Alpha score 898. Data was coded in SPSS version 16 employing independent sample t-test. Findings of the study explore that there was no significant difference between perceptions of middle class families regarding schools' choice for their children.

Key Words: *school choice, middle class families, gender, school type*

1. INTRODUCTION

Choice of an individual is more appropriate for selection of reputable institutions (Greene, 1998; Goyette, 2008; Goyette, 2014). Choice of a school stimulates and enflames middle class families (Elam, 1990). Parents enrolled their children for better education in schools. Schools' choice exists in diversity of forms. School choice has been come into sight in society as an impartial explanation (Mansoor, 2004). In modern trend, school choice has been launched a crucial aspect toward making school quality for the betterment of our children (Lareau, 2011). School choice has significant affect on child's better outcomes in their education. Educational institutions tailor diversity of programs for students' intellectual needs, different styles of learning to motivate them for better academic achievements. Schools' choice includes parental best setting of education according to their needs and demands (Sander, 1999; Roof, 2015). Mechanism of school choice can be improved by two different things; performance of school and diverse school infrastructure (Hoxby, 1998), in reality, both indications moves towards educational betterment (Grigg & Borman, 2014). School choice enables parents to discriminate benefits in field of education (Henig, 1994; Harris, Larsen, 2014; Hastings, Weinstein, 2008). Families have different perceptions towards schools choice that influence on their children's skills, potential and development (Carroll, 1993; Johnson & Shapiro, 2003). It cracks the monopoly of educational institutions and implements all that rules and schemes of studies to enable learner to cope market needs (Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Ravitch, 2013).

Parents have different options for their children to select best and affordable educational institution. Parents who have potential to support their kids admit them in nearby well reputed educational institution (Goldhaber, 1999; Figlio & Stone, 2001; Gleason, Clark, Tuttle & Dwoyer, 2010). In the start of 21st century a remarkable trend has increased in middle class families for schools' choice (Lee, Croninger & Smith, 1996; Hoxby, 1998). It is due to two major aspects; vanishing of educational institutions that were capable of working against the consequence of entrepreneurship and procedure of individualization of institutions that were working violently (Hirsch, 2006; Henig, 2009). Male parents decide their children's type of educational institutions; public or private (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Male and female parents of Pakistani community have their own perception regarding public and private schools' working to promote students' learning. Private schools are of better quality and more compelling in bestowing quantitative and semantic abilities (Lareau, 2014). Public institutions have low monthly fee and good school infrastructure. Private schools monthly collect huge funds to enhancing their school reputation and students achievements (Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Private schools focus on tuition based education and that attract offspring of middle class families and canny understudies. Fundamental particular points of interest of private schools are more autonomous and self-maintained (Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Lubienski & Dougherty, 2009). Guardians are inspired to choose private schools for determination of their children studies. Parents of middle class families having high social and financial status inspires them to enroll their children in private schools (Wells, Baldrige, Duran, Lofton, Roda, Warner, White & Grzesikowski, 2009).

Middle class parents are generally more satisfied for selection of private schools for their children for three primary reasons; parents choose schools based on their own self-interest, the interest of their child and parents once they make their choice, feel a need to justify their decision (Vadde, Syrotiuk & Montgomery, 2006; Rhodes & DeLuca, 2014). Schools' choice stimulates parents and increases their passions to enroll their children in schools around the country. It is defined in exclusive terms that paint portrait either a positive or negative (Betts, Hills, Brewer, Bryk, Goldhaber & Hamilton & McEwan, 2006). Advocates of this idea believe that choice will account for improved school productivity. This increases the opportunities for low-income families to access high-quality education (Hausman & Brown, 2002; Roof, 2015). Parents focus to study their students in well furnished educational institutions (Teske, Fitzpatrick, Kaplan, 2007; Stewart & Wolf, 2014).

School choice for middle class families improves the productivity of educational institutions for better outcomes (Hausman & Brown, 2002). Hand to mouth and middle class families had the great motivation to enroll their children in public educational institutions. Public educational institutions had the great intention towards high technology and modernizations of societies. School choice supports parents to select those educational institutions that have smother directions towards competition and productive outcomes (Hausman & Goldring, 2010). They have differentiated between Govt. and non Governmental organizations for the purpose of commerce procedures for parental choice of school (Goldhaber & Eide, 2000).

School choices of the parents differ greatly by social class (Hastings et al., 2007). Education Act Reform documented that rich families have a better chance to send their child in desirable schools than poor families (Burgess & Briggs, 2006). Private schools are only attended by those students that make desire for free school meals while these schools are not attended by those students that not make desire for free school meal housing in same street. Moving to a desire able place of poor families have no effect on child's educational improvement because their children have no access to high quality schools. Low quality schools were attended by children of poor families (Roda & Wells, 2013). Focusing the importance of the study, researchers are eager to find the perceptions of middle class families regarding schools' choice for their children at elementary level. The ultimate aim of this study is to explore the parents' perception regarding their children enrollment in public or private educational institutions of District Lahore.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted to find out the perceptions of middle class families regarding schools' choice for their children at elementary level. Study was descriptive in nature. All the middle class families, whose children were enrolled in public and private school at elementary level in Lahore city, constitute the population of the study. Sample of study consisted of purposively selected 200 parents; 100 male and 100 female. After review of literature, researchers self-developed questionnaire on five point Likert type options mode of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree (Edmunds, Thorpe & Conole, 2012; Hassan & Akbar, 2016). Questionnaire was divided into six sub-scales: Educational environment, educational philosophy, institutional facilities, co-curricular activities, school reputation and location & transportation. Instrument was validated from experts. There were taken minor changes in the different statements of the questionnaire. Initial questionnaire was distributed among 30 parents for pilot testing. Normality of the data was confirmed in SPSS by calculating Shapiro-Wilk test. Normal distributed data provide direction to researchers in applying sound statistical techniques (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). Reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by calculating Cronbach's Alpha score; .898, .915, .876, .798, .927 and .892 respectively. Researchers collected data personally. Each statement was read out and explained to parents. Parents of middle class families were asked to answer each statement as honestly. Middle class families were allowed to complete the questionnaire at their own pace. Data was analyzed in SPSS applying statistical techniques; mean, standard deviation and t-test were employed.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND ITS INTERPRETATION

i. Research Question No. 1

To explore the pattern of middle class families in terms of parents' gender

Table. 1 Independent Sample t-test on parents' gender

Gender	N	M	SD	df	F	t	p
Male	146	232.92	24.59	198	.101	1.204	0.751
Female	54	237.54	22.5				

Interpretation of above table shows that there is no significant difference between perceptions of middle class families by their gender, $t(198) = 1.204$, $p > 0.05$. Results concluded that male ($M= 232.92$, $SD=24.59$) and female

($M=237.54$, $SD=22.5$) parents have about same perceptions of middle class families regarding schools' choice for their children at elementary level

Table. 2 Independent sample t-test against factors regarding parents' gender

Factors' Name	Gender	N	M	SD	df	F	t	p
Educational environment	Male	146	27.32	4.72	198	0.01	0.936	2.528
	Female	54	29.24	4.88				
Philosophy of education	Male	146	24.25	4.11	198	4.66	0.032	2.313
	Female	54	25.65	2.79				
Institutional facilities	Male	146	19.5	3.37	198	0.03	0.873	0.886
	Female	54	19.98	3.53				
Co-curricular activities	Male	146	17.03	6.35	198	0.04	0.834	1.443
	Female	54	18.5	6.57				
School reputation	Male	146	15.99	4.28	198	0.01	0.97	0.007
	Female	54	15.98	4.43				
School locality & transportation	Male	146	13.32	1.9	198	0.21	0.647	0.956
	Female	54	13.61	1.89				

Interpretation of above table shows that there is no significant difference between perceptions of middle class families regarding schools' choice by parents' gender against factors; educational environment, $t(198) = 0.936$, $p > 0.05$, philosophy of education, $t(198) = 0.032$, $p > 0.05$, institutional facilities, $t(198) = 0.873$, $p > 0.05$, co-curricular activities, $t(198) = 0.1443$, $p > 0.05$ and school locality and transport, $t(198) = 0.647$, $p > 0.01$. Significant difference was existed between perceptions of middle class families regarding schools' choice against factor regarding school reputation by parents gender, $t(198) = 0.97$, $p < 0.05$. Male parents have about more perceptions to school reputation ($M=15.98$, $SD=4.28$) as compare to female parents ($M=15.98$, $SD=4.43$).

ii. Research Objective No. 2

To explore the pattern of middle class families in terms of parents' choice by school type

Table. 3 Independent Sample t-test on parents' choice by school type

School type	N	Mean	SD	df	F	t	p
Public	91	231.769	23.635	198	0.01	1.29	0.92
Private	109	236.174	24.358				

Interpretation of the above table reveals that there is no significant difference between perceptions of middle class families regarding their choice of school type, $t(198) = 1.29$, $p > 0.05$. It is concluded that parents have about same perceptions regarding school for their children to get admission in public schools ($M= 231.769$, $SD=23.635$) as well as in private schools ($M=236.174$, $SD=24.358$).

Table. 4 Independent sample t-test against factor by parents' type of school choice

	School type	N	Mean	SD	Df	f	t	p
Educational environment	Public	91	27.571	4.349	198	5.95	0.72	0.02
	Private	109	28.064	5.206				
Philosophy of education	Public	91	24.044	4.025	198	5.33	1.97	0.02
	Private	109	25.110	3.637				
Institutional facilities	Public	91	19.374	3.450	198	0.04	0.97	0.85
	Private	109	19.844	3.381				
Co-curricular activities	Public	91	16.231	5.686	198	8.33	2.43	0.00
	Private	109	18.422	6.851				
School reputation	Public	91	14.538	4.337	198	1.76	4.55	0.19
	Private	109	17.193	3.912				

School locality & transportation	Public	91	13.703	1.677	198	5.33	2.08	0.02
	Private	109	13.147	2.040				

Results of the above table depicts that there was significant difference between perceptions of middle class families regarding school choices for their children against factors: educational environment, $t(198) = 0.72, p < 0.05$, parents given more choices ($M=28.064, SD=5.026$) to educational environment of private schools as compare to public schools ($M=27.571, SD=4.349$); philosophy of education, $t(198) = 1.97, p < 0.05$, parents given more choices ($M=25.110, SD=3.637$) to private schools educational philosophy as compare to public schools ($M=24.044, SD=4.025$); co-curricular activities, $t(198) = 2.43, p < 0.00$, parents were better perceptions ($M=18.422, SD=6.851$) to private schools' co-curricular activities as compare to public schools ($M=16.231, SD=5.686$) and; schools' locality and transportation, $t(198) = 2.08, p < 0.05$, parents gave more preferences ($M=13.147, SD=2.040$) to private schools' locality & transportation as compare to public schools ($M=13.703, SD=1.677$) and; there was no significant different perceptions of middle class families regarding school choices for their children against factors regarding institutional facilities, $t(198) = 0.97, p > 0.01$ and; school reputation, $t(198) = 4.55, p > 0.01$.

4. DISCUSSION

Parents of middle class families have different perceptions regarding school choice for the better education of their children. School choice is significant construct in many studies from the last several decades. These studies have been interlinked with parental school choices for their children's educational satisfaction and better development (Berends, Springer & Walberg, 2008).

Some of studies conducted by (Betts & Tang, 2014) reveal that gender of child is one of the factors that has been playing crucial role. They further conclude that parents have fully focused on their male students as compare to girls. The results of our study are totally contradicted. The findings of many researchers like (Cheng, 2004; Berends, 2014; Berends, 2015; Berends, Springer, Walberg (2008) contradict with the findings of our research that middle class families have no intention towards their child education.

Many factors are observed while selection of school for middle class parents. School's educational environment and their facilities attract parents towards selection of educational institutes (Bell, 2009; Betts, 2005). Parents concentrate on private educational institution having well educated teaching faculty, more competent in theoretical knowledge and practical skills (Lacireno & Brantley, 2008). Parents are more inclined towards school environment and institutional facilities that play positive role in students' development. Result of (Bets, Hill, Brewer, Bryk, Goldhaber, Hamilton & McEwan, 2006) correlates the findings of our research.

Co-curricular activities insert significant affect on the physical development of the young ones (Schneider, Teske & Marschall, 2000). Some studies also show that parents concentrate equally on their child gender (Cheng, 2004; Berends, 2014; Berends, 2015; Berends, Springer, Walberg, 2008; Betts & Tang, 2014). Responses of parents showed that significance of school philosophy play positive role on students' educational achievements. Our study concludes that male parents have more perception towards private schools educational philosophy and findings correlates with the findings of the study conducted by Buckley and Schneider (2003). Many studies showed that parents having poor perceptions about educational institutions having less quality of education cannot make proper decision of their child enrollment (Krueger, & Lindahl, 2001). It significantly affects on their children' academic achievement scores (Alison & Maury, 2003).

Attractive educational aspect move towards parental first-class back ground level (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Berends et al., 2008; Angrist, Cohodes, Dynarski, Fullerton, Kane, Pathak & Walters, 2011). Educated families enroll their children having good school locality & transportation for their Childs' betterment. Many researchers conclude that distance between educational institutions from home is an important factor for middle class parents (Bell, 2009; Lubienski & Dougherty, 2009). They conclude that 79 % parents were in favor that distance and transportation is important. Remaining 21 % middle class parents did not focus on home location and transportation (Rhodes & DeLuca, 2014). If parents feel satisfaction, there are more chances to select reputable institution for their students' success (Teske & Reichart, 2006).

Better educational institutions are the weakness of many parents for their child education (Calarco, 2011). It is dilemma that mostly parents visit schools' educational environment and assure transportation & location of school to satisfy themselves to admit their children (Witte & Thorn, 1996; Schneider, Marschall, Teske & Christine, 1998). Results of our study are interlinked with the findings of the study conducted by Coons and Sugarman (1978). Parents perceived that resources utilized in educational institutions to educate their child like; highly furnished educational institutions, well equipped labs with instruments and activity based education arouse their students' interests towards learning (Tourangeau, Rips, Rasinki, 2000; Holmes, 2002; Chen, 2007; Ravitch, 2010).

5. CONCLUSION

Over all research concludes that parents have different patterns of school choices among middle class families for their children. This study focuses on different patter of school choice for their children. Parent gave preference to religious

and cultural composition educational institution that has higher education. It was concluded that parents give second priority educational environment, third institutional facilities of the student educational institutes like water, electricity, play ground, etc and educational environment. They focus on that educational institution where teachers are more qualified and have better grip on his practical and bookish knowledge. In most of the cases these factors have significant effect on researchers' observations. More rapidly these factors have lifelong effect on the research arenas accordingly. In short, according to the current study different factors were the main aspects that were focused in Pakistani scenario. School locality and its transport was also choice of parents. Pick and drop facility attract middle class families. Parents preferred; philosophy of education is also one of the factors that attract them towards institute. Some parents favored that students' outcomes are the best opportunities for their students. For the betterment of their child they also focus on co-curricular activities. In short these patterns cause diverse judgment as the respondent that has different family back ground, race and thought.

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6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Following recommendations were given by the researcher

1. Educational reputation of the school is one of the current attractions for parents and teachers.
2. All educational institutions should be focused on the co-curricular activities as it makes students physically and mentally fit.
3. Teacher knowledge not effect on students. They increase pedagogical skills. Teacher motivates slow learner students. They have to provide activity base education.
4. Public sectors schools should reduce their fee so that all sorts of students can gain knowledge and students academic achievements be enhances.
5. Every educational institution should be planned a proper philosophy of education according to the need of the time. Parents have full access on it. They can read, understand and follow it.

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Questionnaire for Middle Class Families**Respected Sir/Madam**

Please read the following statements below and tick the appropriate one. Make sure that your responses will be kept confidential, highly appreciated and used research purpose only.

SA=Strongly Agree

A=Agree

U=Undecided

DA=Disagree

SDA=Strongly Disagree

Sr. #	Statements	SA	A	U	DA	SDA
Educational Environment						
1	Equipped facilities of teaching and learning material					
2	Environment was creatively designed					
3	Fully equipped labs					
4	comfortable learning environment for students					
5	Perfect interaction between society and school					
6	Library of school furnished with material					
7	Latest usage of technology for effective learning					
Phi8losophy of Education						
8	Concentrate on students moral character building					
9	Enhances children problem solving skills					
10	Enhances students skills for future competence					
11	Excel students logical reasoning					
12	School focuses on ethical values					
13	Students with broader vision					
Institutional facilities						
14	Availability of filtered drinking water					
15	Convenience of play grounds in schools					
16	Entrance access manage practiced suitable					
17	Good parking for parents and staff					
18	Provision of first aid facility in bad conditions					
Co-Curricular Activities						
19	During vacations different educational programs arranged					
20	Educational institution won many awards					
21	In athletic competition students show better performance					
22	Languages foreigner teachers are hired for student help					
23	There are an marvelous results of the students in contest					
24	Various study programs are set for students to join					
Reputation of School						
25	Attracted school annually students performance					
26	Made their school publicity on social media					
27	Made their school publicity via print media					
28	Offered free programs for students					
29	Well known among neighborhood communities					
School Locality Transportation						
30	Easily pick and drop for my children					
31	Nearest location to my home					
32	School located in an upper class area					