

**Factors affecting parental choice of schools for their grade 1 learners
by**

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DECLARATION



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DEDICATION

This dissertation is completed in honour of my mother Christina (Corrie) Rosetta Miller. Thank you for convincing me that I could do this.

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ABSTRACT

One of the seminal changes that occurred with the advent of a democratic government was the change in the South African education system. These government driven interventions have arguably been about ensuring that all learners have equal opportunities to “quality” education. Parental decision with regard to the choice of a primary school for their Grade 1 learner in the public school system in South Africa, had become more complex than twenty five years ago. Initially this had been a very straightforward decision for many parents who chose to send their children to the nearest public school. Today, parents have more choices of a public school for their children. Given this opportunity, parents are beginning to exercise this choice to ensure that their children receive quality education. In this study, I examined the experiences of parents’ choice of schools focusing on the factors affecting their choices. I also investigated how parents could be supported in finding the most appropriate school for their children.

The purpose of this research therefore was to contribute to the discourse on factors influencing parental choice of schools for their Grade 1 learners, and thus contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of Early Childhood Education. To this end, the study’s primary research question is:

- What are the factors that affecting parents’ choice of a school for their Grade 1 learner?

The sub-questions for this research study are:

- What information do parents need when making choices for their Grade 1 learner?
- How do parents perceive school related factors to impact on their choice?
- How will the findings of this study contribute to education policy in relation to curriculum and school access?

The preliminary findings were that there are various factors that affect parents’ choice of school for their children, for example interpretation of national policy, the curriculum of the school, language, safety and discipline. There is a general lack of access to information of the school apart from minimum website text which is used as an advertisement by the school. Although the factors articulated were based on individual needs, there seems to be a correlation on these needs, yet it does not align to any transformation agenda in South Africa.

Key words; *Grade 1, school choice, factors, national policy, curriculum, language, safety, discipline*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
EEA	Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
NEPA	National Education Policy Act No.27 of 1996
SASA	South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996
SGB	School Governing Body
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

One of the seminal changes which occurred with the advent of a democratic government was the change in the South African education system. A primary consideration for the educational changes was to make schooling more accessible to all South African children. Given the above, it stood to reason that parents could therefore choose which school they wanted their children to attend seeing that there was this strong movement towards access to schooling in South Africa. This study aimed to investigate factors which affect parental choice in deciding on the school for their Grade 1 children.

According to Jansen and Taylor, a major challenge for the post -1994 government was “to redress the inherited inequalities through social and educational reform” (Taylor, 2003, p. 3). They further asserted that the South African government since 1994 attained a number of achievements such as “the creation of a single national department of education out of 19 racially, ethnically, and regionally divided departments”. They also argued for the consideration of “the creation of non-discriminatory school environments into which access was gained on the basis of criteria other than race or religion” (Taylor, 2003, p. 9) amongst others. There had been clearly legislated evidence that there were considerable educational interventions since 1994 which attempted to bring about transformation in the South African education system. Amongst these interventions were also those which especially related to accessibility. There was also the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework and “the establishment of a comprehensive curriculum project called Curriculum 2005. This was a progressive model of education based on the principles of outcome-based education” (Education, National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008, 2008). Curriculum 2005 had undergone subsequent reviews and changes which found expression in the National Curriculum Statement (2011) based on a report commissioned by the Minister of Basic Education (Altenhofen, Dipholo, Hoadley, Khembo, Muller Volmink 2009) and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (Education, Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement, 2011). The primary consideration of these interventions was to enable the schooling system to have a learner centred focus, which could essentially be interpreted as enabling learners to access

learning. Chisholm (2003) outlined the complex process and the multiple role players involved in the review and redesign of the curriculum to ensure equity and access but also optimal enablement of educators to teach and facilitate learning.

The South African School Act No. 84 of 1996, as amended by Act 15, of 2011 clearly set out that schools in the democratic South Africa needed to provide education that “will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people’s talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic wellbeing of society” (Department of Basic Education., 1996, p. 1). It is important to note that the National Development Plan particularly recognised the importance of Early Childhood development and in Chapter 9 dedicated to Education, Training and Innovation stated; “Make early childhood development a top priority among the measures to improve the quality of education and long-term prospects of future generations. Dedicated resources should be channelled towards ensuring that all children are well cared for from an early age and receive appropriate emotional, cognitive and physical development stimulation” (South African Government, 2012, p.12).

These government driven interventions were arguably about ensuring that all learners had equal opportunities to “quality” education. This may be, to a large extent, true, however in taking a more in depth look, it seemed that certain parents, in wanting to access “quality” education, had more choices than others with regard to access to schools. In a policy seminar the panellist Fraser Nelson argued,

“...the state system works for those who can afford to live in the catchment areas of good state schools. This has effectively led to a situation in which a proxy market in education is already operating through the housing market instead of the education system itself – giving rise to a system in which the rich get the best schools, and the poor get the worst (Policy Connect, 2012, p. 4).

1.2. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Parental decision with regard to the choice of a primary school for their Grade 1 learner in the public school system in South Africa, had become much more complex than twenty five years ago. Initially this had been a very straightforward decision for many parents who commonly sent their child to the public school nearest to their domicile. It seemed that some parents gained more voice now in the choice of a public school, and would like to exercise this choice in an attempt to find a public school which offered “quality” education.

This study was of particular interest to me as I had great difficulty in making a choice of a primary school for my son. The reason being I had very little information on the accessible schools which could inform my choice. In my immediate geographical area of domicile there were three public primary schools and two public primary schools close to my place of work. I had numerous conversations regarding this decision with different parents who faced similar challenges, or already had children attending one of these primary schools. My intention was to establish whether their motivations for their choices found connection with my uncertainties and needs.

My needs for my son commonly shared by all parents were related to being in a safe environment and that basic teaching and learning happened for the duration of the school day. However I was also concerned whether the democratic values as set out in the South African Constitution (1996) and espoused by the South African School Act (1996 as amended 2011) found expression in the school's curriculum and its organisational culture. To this extent I wanted to know how aspects of inclusivity, combatting of racism and sexism and recognition of different cultures and equality were being taught through the curriculum and lived in the organisational culture of the school. Essentially, my hesitations in making a school choice was affected by my need that the school had to some degree show evidence that it was embracing the national transformation agenda. It was important that it should not simply be a functioning school but had practices of embracing the goals set for transforming the education system towards visible equity, quality, effectiveness and democracy practices and instilling these values in their teachers as well as the learners (Taylor, 2003, p. 7).

Bussel (1998) contended that parents had become “customers” when making a school choice and therefore “there has been increasing interest among both educationists and marketers in the relationship between school and parents, particular in the processes and reasons behind parents’ choice of school for their children” (Bussel, 1998, p. 137). In England, the Education and Inspections Act of 2006 was promulgated, “to strengthen the role of parental choice in this assignment, banning covert selection of pupils by school, establishing ‘choice advisors’ for parents” (Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles & Wilson, 2009, p. 2).

It was still not clear to me, even though I eventually made a school choice, how parents could inform themselves adequately with regard to the school programme, its taught curriculum and quality of the education practice other than anecdotal comments and conversations with other parents. I became conscious that my experience was not exclusively mine alone. Many parents had the same doubts and hesitations with regard to school choice, affected by a variety of factors. Within this study I would like to examine the lived experiences I and other parents had. I would also like to examine the knowledge we gained during this process of making a school choice and how these could be formalised to support other parents in the quest to select the most fitting school for their children.

1.3. PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this research was to contribute to the discourse on factors influencing parental choice of schools for their Grade 1 learners, and thus contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of Early Childhood Education.

There seemed to be a gap in parents’ information levels which could inform their choice of schools for their child in terms of the democratic principles of social transformation such as, safety, discipline and the general curriculum of the school which is to promote equity, quality, and effectiveness and how schools supported their children to become functioning citizens in a democratic South Africa. An article in the British Journal of Sociology, “I heard it on the Grapevine” (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p. 377), captured part of my own experience. Making a choice of a primary school in my experience, had very little to do with evidence based on

results. It was rather based on the opinions of others of the school. In their article, Ball and Vincent asserted “The most striking aspect of the ‘grapevine’ was its pervasiveness on the data. It was almost impossible to find a transcript where parents did not refer to drawing upon the impressions and experiences of friends, neighbours and relatives in their choice-making” (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p. 378). The research study therefore aimed to investigate and provide recommendations regarding factors which parents, schools, and the Department of Basic Education could take cognizance of to inform their decision with regard to the choice of school. These recommendations could be applied by both schools and parents to realise the possibility of a more suitable match between the family institution and that of the school.

1.3.1 Possible contributions of the study

The intention was to share the recommendations with the necessary institutions such as schools, institutions of higher learning and the education department and to highlight the needs of parents and what these institutions could do to facilitate their access to school for their Grade 1 learners. The recommendations should be applicable to all parents, whether they wanted to send their children to main stream schools or schools for children with special needs. In addition, policy makers could be informed by the findings from this study of what possibly could be done in the system in collaboration with schools and institutions of higher learning, to ensure that the system is accessible and that the curriculum espoused the values of the South African Constitution as set out above.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following section sets out the primary and secondary research questions.

1.4.1 Primary research question

The primary research question is:

- What are the factors that affect parents’ choice of a school for their Grade 1 learner?

1.4.2 Secondary research questions

The secondary questions are:

- What information do parents' need when making choices for their Grade 1 learner?
- How do parents perceive school related factors to impact on their choice?
- How will the findings of this study contribute to education policy in relation to curriculum and school access?

1.5. CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

The following concepts are applicable to this study:

Primary school

According to the South African Schools Act No 84 of 1996 a “**school**” means a public school or an independent school which enrolled learners in one or more grades from Grade R (Reception) to grade twelve; (Definition of “school” substituted by s. 1 (c) of Act No. 100 of 1997 and by s. 6 (b) of Act No. 48 of 1999). It was essentially an institution or agency of education. According to the National Education Policy Act No 27 of 1996 (South African Government, 1996) “school” meant a pre-primary, primary or secondary school.

Learner

According to the South African Schools Act No 84 of 1996 a “**learner**” meant any person who was receiving education or obliged to receive education in terms of this Act (Department of Basic Education., 1996).

Grade 1

According to the South African Schools Act No 84 of 1996 “**grade**” was defined as that part of an educational programme which a *learner* may complete in one *school* year, or any other education programme which the *Member of the Executive Council* may deem to be equivalent (South African Government, 1996). This was the first grade in a public school and learners had to be between six and seven years to gain access to Grade 1.

Choice

The website of Oxford Dictionaries provided the following definitions for choice, all three which were suitable for this study:

- **“Choice”** is literally the act of choosing between possibilities, this could include between two possibilities or a range of possibilities. It also includes the ability of someone to choose. In other words someone has options and do not have to be satisfied with only one offering.

According to Levin, “In the standard view, rational choice is defined to mean the process of determining what options are available and then choosing the most preferred one according to some consistent criterion” (Levin & Milgrom, 2004).

Factors

A **“factor”** according to the Oxford Dictionaries was something that could contribute to a given result or achievement. “A circumstance, fact, or influence that contributes to a result.” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.)

Parents

A **“parent”** is the lawful person responsible for the child for the purposes of this study. It is defined according to the website Legal dictionary as “the lawful and natural father or mother of a person. The word does not mean grandparents or ancestor but can include an adoptive parent” (Legal Dictionary, 2017).

Curriculum

Figure 1.1 **“Curriculum”**, draws on the working definitions which are set out in Section 41 B of the Continuing Education and Training Act No. 16 of 2006.



Figure 1.1: Curriculum

Democracy

“Democracy” generally refers to a system of governance. It identifies how an organisation and or a country is being governed. According to the online Oxford dictionary, democracy is “A system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.).

It needs to be noted that democracy refers to a political and governance system which essentially means citizens being involved in governance of the country, (Dahl, 2017).

The majority of adults are allowed to participate in the decision making and in the case of a country this participation is through the vote. There is also a clear demarcation of power and specifically in a modern democracy such as South Africa there is a clear demarcation of power between the executive, judiciary and legislature (South African Government, 1996).

1.6. LITERATURE STUDY

Lauen (2007) argued that one had to find a contextual explanation for how parents chose schools and highlighted the number of experiments on school choices which had been queried. One of the key areas which was highlighted was “that the family plays a central role in negotiating the school-choice process” (Lauen, 2007, p. 181). He further argued that it was possible as the United States of America’s educational system allowed parents to “shop” for schools through “residential mobility and to advocate on behalf of their children for favourable course and school placements” (Lauen, 2007, p. 181). However it was important to also take into account the context of particular neighbourhoods and “factors such as school staff, geographic location, school and neighbourhood poverty and segregation, and transportation constraints” (Lauen, 2007, p. 181) on the influence of parental choice of schools.

Maddaus (1990) highlighted another important aspect about how political leaders promoted parental choice of schools as “ways to promote competition and increase accountability in public education” (Maddaus, 1990, p. 273). Two important aspects were also highlighted; excellence and equity. In analysing parental choice in terms of excellence it focused on the question of “what parents’ educational goals (or more narrowly, their criteria for selecting schools) were, compared to existing and potential institutional arrangements” (Maddaus, 1990, p. 273). The various factors which make up equity make not only “demands on the parents, but also on policymakers and administrators”. Murnane (1984), as cited in Maddaus (1990), argued improvement in the performance of students. He mentioned the following mechanisms that support learner performance:

- (a) matching student interests and capabilities with programme characteristics;
- (b) choosing schools as an occasion when students and their parents focus on educational goals and the means necessary to achieving them;
- (c) being chosen to participate in a competitive programme requiring sustained effort for continuation (Maddaus, 1990, p. 273).

He therefore recognised that if one had to take the last factor into account most of the students that may need a programme, might be left out which had an impact on the notion of equity.

Adler (1997) partly captured my own experience when he argued that “parents who made placing requests represented a wide cross-section of the community. Choice appeared to be motivated by pragmatic and practical concerns rather than educational considerations. Parents who made a placing request were influenced more by geographical considerations, for example proximity and safety at primary level and by the general reputation of the school, rather than by educational considerations, for example the curriculum, teaching methods or examination results” (Adler, 1997, p. 298). This, I argued was partly because, according to the conversations in my network I had some impressions of the academic quality of the school. Adding this to practical distance made the school a real option in school choice.

Burgess et al. (2009) highlighted one of the major assumptions which I wanted to examine in the assertion when they stated; “More educated and higher socio-economic state (SES) parents are more likely to cite academic standards, whilst less educated and lower SES parents are more likely to cite proximity. More advantaged parents choose better performing schools, particularly in areas with many schools and therefore a lot of potential school choice” (Burgess et al., 2009).

Motala (2005) in the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) report, argued that the South African government employed a number of fiscal reforms to ensure that the gap between rich and poor schools were addressed in order to improve the quality of education in all schools and overall to achieve equity in the South African education system (Motala, 2005, p. 15). This was an important aspect to highlight in relation to parental choice in the South African context as it was inevitable that better resourced schools would attract the interest of parents.

In the CEPD report on the transformation of South African Schools, Motala motivated that the condition of South African schooling “invites the need for greater clarity, certainty and definition since the nebulosity of the concept of transformation is analytically untenable” (Motala, 2005, p. 8). Given this assertion it was important to be clear what was implied by the use of the concept of transformation for this study. In the 2001 CEPD report Karlsson alluded that for at the time there were “incremental progress”, [which is regarded as reform] leading to the transformation goals which are then translated into “increased access, deeper democracy in structure and process, greater equity to redress the inequalities of the past,

and improved efficiency” (Motala, 2005, p. 10). This progress happened in the areas of school financing and resources, the curriculum, school governance, school management and educator support and development. This said, it needed to be clarified that most public schools had been provided with the basics.

An UNESCO statement on social transformation described social transformation as “increasingly used to describe societal changes and generally indicates a critical stance towards older notions of the idea of development” (UNESCO, n.d.). It is important to note that social transformation “in the social sciences refers to the change of society's systemic characteristics” (UNESCO, n.d.). This then is inclusive of constructing changes in all spheres of society including the economy, technology, politics and culture.

Spaull (2012) expanded on the above argument and strongly put forward that the South African schooling system operated in a “bimodality” system. This meant that “historically disadvantaged schools remained largely dysfunctional and unable to produce student learning, while advantaged schools remained functional and able to impart cognitive skills” (Spaull, 2012, p. 5).

1.7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Levin and Milgram (2004) put forward a very important aspect for consideration for this study. They argued that “Individual decision-making forms the basis for nearly all of microeconomic analysis.”(Levin & Milgrom, 2004). It was about “rational choice” which was defined to mean the process of determining what options were available and then choosing the most preferred one according to some consistent criterion. It was important for this study to take cognizance of this argument as its focus was about individual parents making choices for their Grade 1 learners.

The study applied the theoretical framework of Hirschman (1970), of the concepts of exit, voice and loyalty. This study constructed its research based on the manner in which Msila (2005) demonstrated how these concepts manifested in the South African schooling system. Msila argued that parents had different options by which they exercised school choice. These

three options Msila described as parents using their agency to make decisions. In this instance agency was used to describe parental choice, the ability of the individual parent to make an independent decision and being fully aware of the consequences of such a decision. (Moore 2016) Parents therefore make choices regarding a school and have the ability to manage and deal with the consequences of such choice. These manifested themselves as: firstly parents made a choice to stay in the school and thus remained loyal to the school; secondly that parents would use their voice to address issues in the school which they did not agree with in an attempt to rectify these and thirdly that as parents, they made the choice to exit the school if they felt that their needs were not accommodated by the school. Visible evidence of this agency of parents could be seen daily in schools and later in Chapter 4 participants in this study articulated their actions which were related to the three options theory.

The argument further supported the notion that actions of exit and voice as demonstrated by South African parents, were connected to upward social mobility, where parents moved their children to schools which were perceived to be “better” for reasons they defined themselves. Hirschman argued that the concept of voice within the organisation was also an indicator of members of the organisation, in this instance the school, exercising the democratic right to voice their needs and critique aspects of the organisation which did not meet their needs. It further also demonstrated the concept of loyalty, when parents who remained with the school, were caught between wanting to exit but maybe did not have an alternative to exercise this option and they also liked certain elements in the school.

1.8. RESEARCH DESIGN

1.8.1 Phenomenological assumptions

This research study was conducted within the qualitative interpretive paradigm. The researcher placed herself within the context where she had to make such a choice of primary school and therefore found herself immersed in the phenomenon of parental choice making of a primary school. The qualitative interpretive paradigm allowed me to acknowledge the multiple realities, which were offered by the participants, of the same phenomenon.

According to Krauss (2005), qualitative researchers also operated under different ontological assumptions about the world. One was not to make "an assumption that there was a single unitary reality apart from our perceptions." Crotty (1998) (as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 8) identified several assumptions, amongst others that: Firstly, human beings make meaning of the world in which they live. Secondly, they do this founded on their "historical and social" perspectives. Thirdly, meaning is dependent on social interaction amongst humans.

Granted the above, the open ended questions used in qualitative research enabled the participants to share their views. It was the aim of this qualitative study to gain an understanding of the context in which participants socialised and interacted. The data collected through listening to or reading the responses of the participants, observations within the context of the participants amongst others, were then interpreted, meaning made of data and knowledge created which was ultimately presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

I went through the process of making a school choice for my son. I made the assumption that many parents who had to make a school choice, also found it a very complex and disconcerting experience. I further assumed that this process could have been less anxious if one was informed by available knowledge. Ideally such knowledge was to be articulated on aspects such as equity, equality, non-discriminatory practices and attention to individual child development. The research focus for this study was to investigate possible factors that affected parental choice, which could be assumed were highly affected by individual interactions, the social and economic contexts of participants as well as their historical background.

Using open ended prompting questions to help participants to create the lived experiences of the participants, was important, so that I could listen to and read the individual responses. These experiences were analysed to establish if there were any discernible patterns of factors influencing school choice making. The choice of the research methodology was appropriate as it allowed for making meaning from the various lived experiences of the participants. It enabled an inductive analysis of the data from which key factors could be composed, recognising the complexity that it might have presented in the diversity of the individual experiences (Creswell, 2009, p. 12).

1.8.2 Research methodology

The research methodology was determined by the nature of the phenomenon that was investigated. Parents expressed multiplicity of realities and therefore a method which was applicable to qualitative research was used. This method is “increasingly used in studies of educational experience. One theory in educational research holds that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead story lives” (Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). I employed a narrative research methodology. This meant that I attempted to elicit the lived experiences from different parents of their choosing of a primary school. This was then chronologically documented, as indicated by Clandinin and Connelly (as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 12).

As stated I used open ended prompting questions to help participants to create their narratives, as it was important to listen to and read the individual responses. I analysed these to establish if there were any discernible patterns of trends. The choice of the research methodology was appropriate as it assisted with making meaning from the various lived experiences of the participants. In the analysis of the data, trends were identified which took into account the nuanced stories of the participants based on the diversity of their individual experiences (Creswell, 2009).

The “social constructivist worldview” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8) allowed me to explore multi-layered interpretations of the parents’ experiences that were of interest to the research study. It assisted with the development of an understanding of how parents made meaning of their experiences in making a school choice for their Grade 1 learner. The research was not about finding the truth but rather to interpret the parents’ experiences and to create knowledge from these to share with others. This knowledge could then be presented as factors which were identified by parents and the school to enable a more informed school choice making process.

Mildon, (as cited in Yang, 2011) argued that “The basic tenet of ‘constructivism’ was that knowledge was a ‘constructed reality’ whereby we imposed meaning upon the actual world in ways that seem familiar and ‘understandable’ in ways that ‘fit’ what we understand already” (Yang, 2011, p. 204). The open ended semi- structured interviews enabled the creation of

knowledge from the lived experiences of people, for this research, that of parents. This meant the different experiences of choice as told by parents. In telling their experiences, they created their own stories which I used as “diachronic data” to construct knowledge. (Polkinghorne, as cited in Yang, 2011).

Essentially it focused on creating knowledge about the experiences of parents in making choices, which I analysed into key school choice making factors. The constructivism view assisted in respecting the multiple layers of the knowledge. Yang argued that “The constructivist view has altered the previously unshakable acceptance of the positivistic world view. It has also been the cornerstone for qualitative research of which narrative inquiry is a part” (Yang, 2011, p. 207). My concern was with the experiences of parents and not a search for the truth. It was about making meaning and the creation of knowledge - “a storied construction of reality has less to do with facts and more to do with meaning” (Yang, 2011, p. 209). Magolda stated that even in identifying trends in the experiences of parents it became important to acknowledge and to “remain open for particularities across individuals” (Magolda, 2010, p. 36).

1.8.3 Data collection

Data collection was through qualitative methods. Parents with children in the foundation phase was targeted. I interviewed individual parents and they were encouraged to write their experiences if they felt that they did not have enough time during the interview. I used prompting questions (see Annexure A) during the one-on-one interviews. It was then possible to read their responses and elicit the patterns of trends which responded to the research question. The focus was on the personal interaction with participants as explained by Cladinin (1990) who cites Silko (1996), “our identities are inextricably linked with our experiences in a particular place or in places and with the stories we tell of these experiences” (Cladinin, 1990, p. 4). It was anticipated that the responses to some of the questions would not be definitive, which provided an opportunity for probing in a conversational manner. It was further anticipated that the method would provide descriptive data such as the emotions, and the lived experiences of the participants when they had to make a choice with regard to school choice, as well as the experiences and decisions of the

principal regarding her impressions of what factors affected parental choice in relation to this particular school.

1.8.4 Data analysis

The data was analysed through the use of phenomenological analysis processes. This process assisted with making meaning of the lived experiences of the participants. It also enabled the engagement with the data as presented as participants related their lived experiences and to determine which aspects of their experiences were consistent amongst them. By applying these processes it enabled the deduction of the school choice making factors influencing parental choice making. The analysis of the data was guided by the process as set out by Nieuwenhuis (2007), McMillan & Schumacher (2014) and Creswell (2014) which meant that the following phases were implemented to analyse the data:

- Invitation to participants - participants were formally invited to participate in the research. The purpose and potential use of the research findings were explained to everyone.
- Recorded interviews – the interviews were recorded and each one was numbered and dated.
- Transcriptions – the recordings were transcribed and consistent aspects of the conversations were listened for.
- Read transcripts – the transcripts were read in order to become familiar with the data and to listen to consistent responses to the questions and prompts.
- Data interpretations - to determine and deduce the key factors influencing parental school choice making.

Given the fact that I had such a central role in this inquiry, I was immersed in the experiences of the participants. The intention was to use the interviews based on open ended questions and the transcriptions to gain the data for this study. This then became part of the “ongoing narrative record” (Clandinin, 1990, p. 5).

I recognised Clandinin’s argument in the work I was doing given my own experience with this phenomenon. There was a sense in some instances that the writing began during the opening negotiations with participants or even earlier as ideas for the study were first

formulated during the proposal phase of the study. It is common, for instance, for collaborative documents such as letters to be included as part of the text. Although I did not include additional writing or communication, except the formal invitations, it can be argued that additional material written for different purposes such as conference presentations may become part of the final document (Clandinin, 1990, p. 7).

It is important to note the plausibility of the enquiry draws from making meaning of the whole of the story and not only highlighting parts of it into themes and sub-themes. The intention is not to tell a story based on cause and effect only, but to draw out the factors from these stories (Clandinin, 1990, p. 7).

The validity and the reliability of the research study was determined by how accurate the experiences of the participants could be captured. According to Creswell validity in qualitative research was about how accurate the research findings were from the researcher, participant or readers perspective (Creswell, 2014). The method to determine validity in this study was triangulation. The researcher was able to triangulate the different responses of the parents with one another as well as with the responses of the school principal. It is furthermore important that the researcher had to be open with regard to her own experience with the phenomenon of choosing a school, to create openness and trust, ensure that the transcripts honestly and correctly reflect the participants' experiences, determine the categorisation and remain truthful to these and record discrepant information should it present itself (Creswell, 2014).

1.8.5 Units of analysis

The population of the study included the parents and the principal of the chosen school.

The units of analysis were:

- The experiences of the individual parent who had to make the decision regarding the choice of school. The unit of analysis was selected using purposive sampling. The unit of analysis was specified by looking at a purposefully selected sample of middle-class parents who had a selection of schools in the same geographical area to choose from. They made such a choice in the last three years. The sample was focused on parents who sent their children to the same school. The reason for selecting this as

the unit of analysis was that the experiences of parents of foundation phase learners were relatively recent. Parents of learners beyond the foundation phase already had a second chance of making a school choice. The choice of the latter group of parents would had to be based on prolonged experiences of the school beyond three years;

- The described experiences of the school principal of the same school where parents sent their children. This school was regarded a “good school” and a number of parents tried to get their children into the school. From my personal observations as a parent the school increased their classroom space by putting up temporary structures. This was an indication that the school was accommodating more learners than it was originally built for.

1.9. ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

Given the nature of this inquiry the role of the researcher was central. The motivation of the study was borne from my own complex decision making process when I had to choose a primary school for my child. It was inevitable that during the conversations with participants there was a mutual sharing of experiences. This role for the researcher was quite acceptable in the nature of this inquiry. According to Creswell, “This introduces a range of strategic, ethical, and personal issues into the qualitative research process (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). With these concerns in mind, the inquirers explicitly and reflexively identified their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status that may shape their interpretations formed during a study.

1.10. QUALITY CRITERIA

Like other qualitative methods, the narrative methodology relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalisability. According to Clandinin and Jean the criteria for quality could be whether the enquiry ascribed to “apparency and plausibility” (Clandinin, 1990, p. 7).

According to Yang, 2011 the criteria set out by Lincoln and Guba still hold true for in that the quality can be assessed whether it finds resonance, rhetoric, empowerment and applicability rather than generalisability. Therefore, for this study the initial criteria of “apparency and plausibility” sufficed. I found that it was important for me to keep the interpretations of the experiences open to explore and not to force a specific answer and trend from these.

1.11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I ensured that the research was conducted with the necessary ethical considerations and therefore I obtained informed consent from all prospective participants to make public some of their narratives in their own words and as inferred by me. I maintained the confidentiality of participants and requested for voluntary participation in the study. Furthermore I also had to ensure that participants were fully informed on the purpose of the research as well as being explicit on any partiality if any from my side. It was also important to ensure that the interviews were done at the convenience of the prospective participants. The proposal for this study was subjected to the University of Pretoria’s Ethics committee.

1.12. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The inquiry was through face to face interviews and conversations. I was not looking towards generalising the trends throughout the different conversations but in the analysis of the narratives I focused on the content and meaning of the narratives. I was aware that the meaning making process “occurs throughout the research process rather than being a separate activity carried out after data collection” (Etherington, 2009, p. 8). This acknowledged that the research eventually was a “co-construction of meaning by both the researcher and participants”. The conversations sometimes veered into an unstructured pattern which could have made it complicated to discern the words to code into categories which ultimately form the patterns.

1.13. OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 Introduction and Background

This chapter provides an overview of the enquiry which is inclusive of the purpose of the research and research approach and methodology. It also provides some explanation of the research process which was followed.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter provides succinct explanations and analysis of the existing literature on the phenomenon of parental choice for primary schools and it also further elaborates on the theoretical framework of narrative research which underpins this enquiry.

Chapter 3 Research methodology

This chapter provides more detail on how the data collection methodology fits into the narrative research framework and qualitative research approach. It establishes the correlation between the data collection strategy and that of the purpose of the enquiry.

Chapter 4 Analysis and results

This chapter presents an analysis of the data. It focuses on the emerging factors, indicating their interdependence, as experienced by parents and what it was that could be learnt from these.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter presents the conclusions which could be gleaned from the data. It discusses the possible contribution to knowledge generation, the recommendations from this as well as the limitation that it presented.

CHAPTER 2 A LITERATURE REVIEW: FACTORS AFFECTING PARENTAL CHOICE OF SCHOOLS FOR THEIR GRADE 1 LEARNERS.

2.1. INTRODUCTION

An overview of the research study was provided in Chapter 1. This chapter focuses on an in-depth literature review of factors affecting parental choice of schools for their Grade 1 learners. The review gave particular attention to various factors that parents take into consideration when choosing a school for their Grade 1 learners. The literature search I focused on the factors that presented itself in social network conversations and the information which could be found on schools' websites. It was thought provoking to read what other scholars had to say regarding these factors. Additionally the literature research also expanded on other factors which might not have manifested in my own school choice making process. The literature reading took into account factors such as access to schooling in relation to proximity to domicile, school discipline and safety, culture of learning and teaching and education policy amongst others. It was against these literature findings that I later in this study conducted semi-structured interviews with parents to assess their lived experiences. These factors from the first reading seemed to have no preference in weighting for parents as it depended on the context and needs of the individual households.



Figure 2.1: Individualised school choice making factors Source:
<http://lifestyle818.blogspot.com/2016/04/lifestyle-choices-definition.html>

The theoretical framework which I applied to support this study would also be discussed. The work by Msila and the three categories he identified were discussed in detail.

2.2. PARENTS' DECISION ON SCHOOL CHOICE

The second most important decision a parent will make, apart from deciding to have children in the first place, is deciding in which school to enrol them. Making the right decision is vital as this could put them on a path toward lifelong learning, a prestigious tertiary education and a successful career. There had been a consistent interest in the phenomenon of school choice by academics, economists as well as policy makers. According to Levin and Milgrom (2004, p. 1), "In the standard view, rational choice is defined to mean the process of determining what options are available and then choosing the most preferred one according to some consistent criterion." A further important aspect raised by Levin and Milgrom (2004, p. 1) was that "Individual decision-making forms the basis for nearly all of micro-economic analysis". This was important to remember, especially when thinking about the roles parents play in making a decision regarding school choice.

In response to educational challenges and especially the provision of education, different governments had adopted their own set of policies and strategies how to give parents more choice amongst schools (Plank and Sykes, 2003). Governments have an array of "...policy options, ranging from the creation of alternative programs within individual schools to provision of fully portable vouchers", according to (Plank and Sykes, 2003, p. vii). Essentially school choice is where parents have an increasing say regarding which school their children will attend, particularly in the public sector schooling system. Notwithstanding the fact that governments, through different policies, seemingly make it possible for parents to make school choices, it is ultimately the parents who decide which school their child should attend. This decision is made taking into account varied factors. This study highlighted what drives parental school choices for their Grade 1 learner. These variables are many and differ from parents to parents.

In unpacking the notion of parental school choice, one cannot omit to take into account the argument made by Brown (1995) that there has been an increasing shift from "meritocracy" to "parentocracy" in the manner children enter school. This shift is manifested in ways "where the child's education is increasingly dependent upon the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of pupils" (Brown, 1995 p. 54).

2.3. COMMODIFYING SCHOOL CHOICE

In understanding the phenomenon of parents making a school choice it was important to note that the phenomenon of school choice has two distinctive characteristics; firstly according to Plank and Sykes (2003, p. vii) "...on the demand side of the emerging market for schooling, they give parents more choices about the schools their children attend." This means that parents do not have to enrol their children in the government assigned schools which are nearly always assigned based on proximity to where the family resides. This is notwithstanding the fact that other deciding objectives may also be employed such as race or gender amongst others. The second characteristic according to Plank and Sykes (2003, p. vii) is that on the "the supply side of the market, school choice policies produce an explicit or implicit competition among schools for students and revenues."

2.4. CONTEXTUALISING SCHOOL CHOICE

The phenomenon of school choice needed to be contextualised in the political and social changes which happened and are still happening in the broader South African society. With the advent of democracy post 1994, attention was given to restructure the fragmented South African schooling system. A key principle during the drafting of the legal and policy frameworks was to give each learner in the system access and equal opportunities to quality education. To this extent it stood to reason that there would have been a distribution of state resources to ensure that all schools have the best infrastructure as well as teaching and learning resources. According to Maile (2004, p. 94) "The investigation of this trend, for this study, was important because the new laws seem to focus on equity. This means that more resources are to be allocated to previously disadvantaged schools." Although this study was not focusing on the migration of learners from township schools to former Model C schools per se, the study could not be truthful to the phenomenon of choice if this migration of learners was not acknowledged as a way of how parents exercised school choice.

2.5. THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTITUTION AND SCHOOL CHOICE

According to the South African Constitution, (Government of South Africa, 1996b), every child should receive basic education “...the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account (a) equity, (b) practicability; and (c) the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices” (South African Government, 1996a, p. 12). Albeit the concerted effort from Government to bring about equity and access to good quality schooling in all communities since 1994, the migration of learners from township schools to former model C schools, which are primarily in former predominantly white suburbs in South Africa, still presents a large part of how school choice manifests in South Africa.

However, Msila (2009) argued that the township to suburb migration was not the only way how school choice is being exercised in South Africa. “...it should be noted black parents have not only ferried their children to the ex-Model C in search of better and quality education, they have also registered their children in Apartheid constructed Coloured and Indian schools.” (Msila, 2009, p. 8). This was an important aspect to bear in mind when articulating the individual factors, as there had been a perception that race is a key factor for school choice by parents.

With the advent of a democratic South Africa, came the passing of the South African Constitution Act no 108 of 1996, and the South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 (SASA), which supported the transformation agenda of schools and specifically schools’ attendance which started pre-1994 onwards Maile (2004). According to Maile (2004, p. 99), SASA “...is promulgated to guide transformation in schools and to regulate democratization of schooling.” According to Woolman and Fleisch (2006), with the promulgation of SASA parents were given a great amount of decision-making with regard to how the school is governed including its learner admission policies. Parents take advantage of this and exercise their choice within the legislation framework. “The legal regime governing education opportunities for primary and secondary learners in South Africa offers far greater choice than one would find most anywhere in the voucher-happy, market oriented school systems of the United States” (Woolman and Fleisch, 2006, p. 32). The legislation post 1994 had to

prevent unfair discrimination, it had to be committed to freedom of movement and residence, according to Woolman and Fleisch (2006).

This already alluded to the fact that the matter of school choice was a complex phenomenon and one needed to understand the varied parts which make up this phenomenon. Notwithstanding general public perceptions, school choice in South Africa is greatly constructed and enabled through an array of legislation.

2.6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework can be defined as a system of concepts, assumptions, theories, beliefs and expectations that shape the research according to Abend (2008). The theoretical framework that was used to support this study is the work by Msila based on the seminal work of Hirschman (1970) that apply three different elements to understand and identify the phenomenon of school choice in South Africa. Msila (2009) structured a theoretical framework and identified the three key positions that parents take when exercising choice of schools for their Grade 1 learner. Msila (2009, p. 83) categorised these positions as; “parents can exercise choice by selecting any three kinds of choice when it comes to school choice. These are voice, loyalty and exit option.”

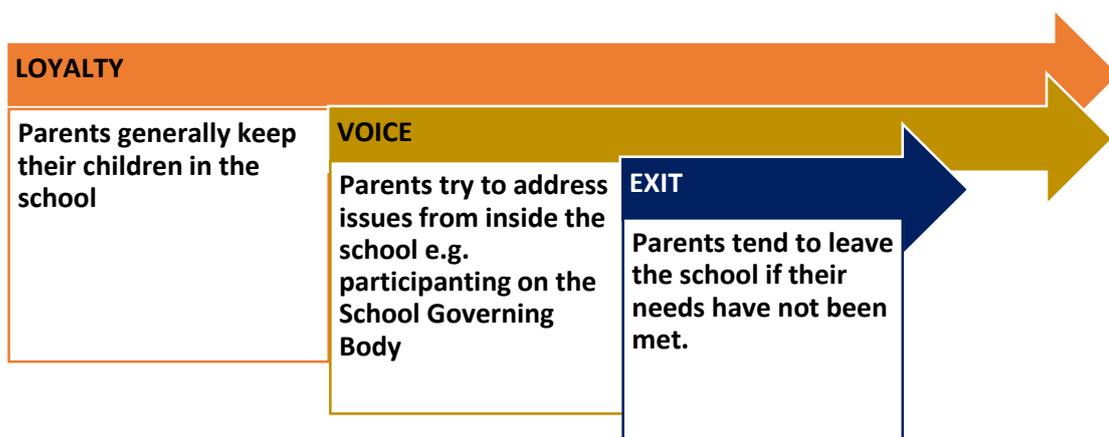


Figure 2.2: Parental Choice Making

Voice, Loyalty and Exit

These positions occur consistently when parents make choices regarding their children's school attendance. "The voice option alludes to when parents decide to stay in their current schools whilst they try to change them from within. Loyalty refers to the option when parents do not have any other recourse of alternatives and they end up letting their children remain in (township) schools even when they are not effective. The exit option refers to the option frequently exercised by a number who have moved their children from schools in their domicile to find them schools usually situated in suburbs" (Msila 2009, p. 83).

It is my opinion that the elements of "voice, loyalty and exit" are further supported by the assumptions which Msila explained, when he contended that choice is an informed practice by parents. "...parents are not simply forced by class interest or organized group pressures; parents, when they articulate it, seek to resolve a problem based on their experience and future needs; and parents may alter their perspectives on what constitutes preferred education in response to their experiences" (Maile, 2004, p. 100).

Organising tool

This theoretical framework was apt for this study as it provides the researcher an organizing framework by which the different factors could be sensibly categorised. It was providing the impression that school choice factors were not loose standing elements but that parents through their own agency make decisions to either stay in the school, or change the school or demand change from within the school body.

Unpacking school choice using this theoretical framework enabled me to understand school choice in South Africa. It was not only about children moving from township schools to suburbia, albeit it had been the dominant trend. It was really about how parents use voice, loyalty and exit, to find the best school possible for their children using their set of factors by which they determine "the best" or "a better" school. This theoretical framework also assisted with the analysis process of the data as it could be an organizing framework against which to present the data.

According to Maile, parents exercised parental choice, because they wanted to attain a set of objectives for themselves and their children. It was for this reason, Maile (2004, p. 102) maintained, that: “These objectives are treated as desires that motivate the individual. The presumption is that an individual with a variety of objectives is capable of comparing alternatives that were available in the past.” Given the above, it provided an explanation and understanding how parents exercise school choice through “voice, loyalty and exit”. In the next section of this chapter, an overview of the different factors which generally influence parental school choice for their children is provided.

2.7. FACTORS AFFECTING PARENTS’ CHOICE OF SCHOOLS

The following section of the chapter articulates the different school choice factors which affect parental decision making as set out in the different literature sources. Some of these factors had been written about and explained more than others, as they do not only hold value for the individual parents, but they also have value for the macro education system in respective countries and South Africa in particular. Bowe, Gewirtz, and Ball (1994, p. 64) argue that “the nature of parental involvement in education and schooling more generally are the subject of continual political and social debate; they are not 'givens', they are political constructs.” There is a movement to see school choice in the market and see school choice really as parental power being exercised over the nature and quality of schooling their children could access.

In order to demonstrate the varied nature of this phenomenon, I endeavoured to give a broader account of what literature is espousing as factors influencing school choice. In the literature, it became evident that there were definite trends. The purpose of this study was not necessarily to look at parental choice from the “traditional township to suburbia school choice”, notwithstanding that this may be the dominant discourse for South African literature, but rather to look at what factors individual families used in making school choices. The researcher was cautious to not oversimplify this phenomenon and remained conscious of the complex legislative, political and social labyrinth that affect school choice.

2.7.1 International examples of school choice

School choice had been an area of intense debate in the United States of America (USA), Britain and Australia. This phenomenon had been formally legislated with the intention of providing opportunities for learners who were recognized to have particular academic acumen or sporting and art skills. It further allowed for the establishment of schools based on the needs of a group of parents. These systems had been under critique for a number of reasons as there were arguments both for and against this system.

2.7.1.1 Quasi-markets

Essentially the way that parental choice manifests itself in the public schooling system is through a process of supply and demand. As education is not traditionally seen as a trading commodity, it is regarded as a quasi-market system. What needs to be acknowledged is that the legislative framework, which I will also address later in this chapter, in relation to South Africa, created a quasi-market system in the education system. According to Hoadley (1999, p. 28), the discussion with regard to school choice has been on centralising the “conceptualization which sees choice as code for the marketization of education.” School policies and legislation focus on regulating school choice context in Britain and the US. The school policies in these countries were put in place ostensibly, to promote excellent performance in the schooling system. The core of the argument is that “an education system organised around free choice will enhance competitions amongst schools and in turn promote education performance” according to Chubb and Moe (1990) (as cited in Hoadley, 1999, p. 29). If school choice is related to the market, then one has to acknowledge that it has an impact on the selection process and the options that parents can exercise. One of the most visible factors is how parents can exercise their choices.

2.7.1.2 Voucher and Charter systems in the United States of America (USA)

School choice had been engineered through legislation. School choice had been consciously contrived in the American schooling system. According to Holme (2002), the advocacy for the voucher and charter systems in the USA is about advocating equity so that lower-income families also have the ability to exercise the choice of school. Higher income families often

do this by having the means to choose schools through their ability of choice they can exercise in terms of where they live. “Choice advocates argue that because upper-income families have the means to ‘choose’ their schools by choosing where they live, equity requires that low-income parents be granted the same kinds of choices through charter schools or vouchers” Holme (2002, p. 178). The argument for the voucher and charter systems has become more and more compelling as higher income families also benefit from tax rebates in support of them exercising their schools choice within the public schools system (Holme, 2002). The practice of school vouchers, Magnet schools and Charter schools have been entrenched in supporting school choice. According to Henig and Sugarman (1999, p. 13) “...more than half of American families now exercise school choice.” The phenomenon of schools choice in America already occurred in the early 1920’s when the practice of school choice found its roots in alternative and progressive education. This alternative education in public schooling continued in the 1960s and 1970s when parents wanted a more non-traditional curriculum. (Henig & Sugarman, 1999). Another form of school choice is the Magnet schools. Henig and Sugarman (1999, p. 18) state that “Magnet schools are another important sources of intra-district choice...” The magnet label is usually attached to choice schools that were intentionally developed as part of a school district’s plan, sometimes in response to a judicial order, to achieve school integration... These schools generally use racial balance criteria in selecting among those who apply.” After the *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 the Magnet schools were supported by the education propensity that “students of either race could voluntarily transfer to any other school in the district”... rather than addressing the all–white all-black schools (Henig & Sugarman, 1999, p. 19). The Charter school laws were enacted in 1991 in America and by 1996 the charter laws had already been enacted by twenty five states. These schools admit students on first come first serve basis and do not take into account the domicile of a pupil. This stance obviously will have an impact on whether there are enough schools that supply in this demand (Hill, 1999).

2.7.1.3 Flexible enrolment in Australia

Angus described the evolution of school choice in the Australian public school system as “Local management, flexible enrolment policies and curriculum specialization are driving contemporary public school reform. It will be inevitable that when investigating factors

influencing school choice, I have questioned how government policy, focusing on school reform, influenced parents' decision making with regard to school choice. All these features are conducive to the extension parental choice of schooling" (Angus, 2003, p. 125).

Education policy

In South Africa, according to Woolman and Fleisch (2006), the legislative framework such as NEPA no. 27 of 1996, SASA no. 84 of 1996 and EEA no. 27 of 1996 created school choice and therefore created a quasi-market system in the public school system. The elements required for a quasi-market in schools exist. According to Woolman and Fleisch (2006) these are: (1) multiple schools of variable quality, (2) information dissemination that can ensure informed decision making, (3) various schools and information on each so that parents can prioritise their preferences and (4) a variation in price which meets the demands. Again this quasi-market system is skewed. In urban areas there are enough products (schools) to choose from and enough buyers (parents). However, in especially rural areas many parents cannot exercise school choices as the high costs exclude many parents from exercising these options against a limited option of available schools. It is also within this system that schools with exorbitant prices also select who can access their school and thus determine who they choose.

Although the above perspective seems quite simple and straightforward, the work from Woolman and Fleisch argued how the interplay of various events in the South African legislation framework creates schools choice, albeit not consciously, which enable parents to make the choice to exercise "voice, loyalty and or exit". It will be fair to note that school choice is a complex phenomenon driven by a varied set of factors, enabled by public policy and dependent on supply and demand which create conditions for quasi-markets in schools" (Woolman & Fleisch, (2006, p. 31).

Social class

The complexity of choice is further affirmed by the work done by Ball et al. (2006) on school choice who argued that "parental choice of school is not susceptible to one definitive analysis. Different kinds of analyses bring out and highlight different aspects and patterns of

choice. There are recurring themes and patterns, like, importantly, the multifaceted relationships between social class and choice.” (Ball, 2006, p. 89). He further made the point that parents are required to regard themselves as consumers of education, in other words they can “shop” around for schools which best suit their needs. “Parents are encouraged to see themselves as consumers of education, and 'good parenting' is defined, at least in part, in relation to the 'responsibilities' of choice (The Parents Charter, Department for Education 1992). In 2003 John Pampallis contended that school choice was part of addressing the injustices brought about by apartheid Pampallis (2003, p. 143) “Given South Africa’s recent history, it is perhaps not surprising that the issue of school choice is inextricably bound up with overcoming the legacy of apartheid and racism.” Notwithstanding the fact that school choice is linked to addressing the injustices of the past Apartheid system there are also a number of factors that the practice in South Africa resonates with that in the international arena. These factors as identified by Pampallis (2003, p. 143) are “parental control, and community participation, school fees, marketization and competition between schools, class privilege, resource distribution, decentralization, liberty versus equality, and school admission policies.”

Culture of teaching and learning

It was important to acknowledge the perceptions and experiences of parents which give rise to parental choice. According to Venter (1997) parental school choice is hugely influenced by the perceptions of parents as well as evidence that the culture of teaching and learning have steadily declined in some schools. This decline of the learning and teaching manifest itself in dilapidated buildings, bad school discipline by educators and learners and delay in stationery and learning materials (resources as a factor) acquisition. Having experienced and or observed this, it stands to reason that parents will take action in their spheres of influence to ensure that their children attend a school where these issues are not a problem. According to the findings of Evans and Cleghorn (2014), although the primary focus of their work was on the medium of classroom instruction, school choice was influenced by reputation and medium of instruction. In their research study a significant percentage of parents cite the reputation of the school as a key choice factor. According to Evans and Cleghorn (2014, p. 11), “the reason which received the highest percentage response (95.3%) was provided for the firm discipline the school apparently maintains.” The parents

alluded, in this regard, to the fact that the school has high standards which also contribute to the school's positive reputation. This factor is also evident in the international scenario that even when parents do not participate in the voucher or charter system, parents still ranked educational quality at or near the top according to Hamilton and Guin (2005, p. 42). They stated that "When families that use vouchers are asked about the reasons for that decision academic quality is typically cited as the most important reason though religion and cultural values often rank highly as well." Although the curriculum is relatively standardized in South African schools, schools may add to what they offer. Parents do recognize this in their choice of schools. Parents do appreciate "more detailed understanding of their children's strengths and weaknesses, what teaching approaches are likely to be effective with them," (Hegarty, 1993, p. 124)

Good discipline and school safety

Literature, on school choice, categorises or groups the factors according to the trends that their findings revealed. According to Msila (2009, p. 89) "good management, discipline, reputation and history and teachers' dedication" are amongst the choice factors which were highlighted by parents during the study on parental choice. "A number of these parents also stated that despite the lack of resources, there were better schools in the township" (Msila, 2009, p. 89). In the South African context it is important to note that these factors did not necessarily refer to a choice movement from township schools to suburbia schools. Maile (2004, p. 103), identified the following factors by stating; "Usually these schools are regarded as effective and have the following characteristics: good management of time on tasks; good monitoring of progress; relationship with parents; safe and positive learning environments; a clear mission and academic focus; and high expectations" (Smith as cited in Maile (2004, p. 103).

Costs

Furthermore, Msila also noted that certain participants in the study also said "the nearby schools are usually preferred for practical purposes suiting the parents' pocket" Msila (2009, p. 89) This group of parents, according to Msila (2009) although still choosing township schools, could make a school choice that may be further from their domiciles and therefore

chose the best of the better schools according to the factors mentioned in the study. This choice was expressed amongst other as “Many of the important people in the community had studied there and this school is also one of the oldest schools. The parents who exercised choice within township schools showed that, despite their economic situation, some of them know what they wanted for their children” (Msila, 2009, p. 90). In their study Evans and Cleghorn (2014) stated that school fees do influence parental choice of schools. According to Woolman and Fleisch (2006, p. 46) a number of market related factors also influence schools choice. In their study they recognised that parents do seek out schools with reasonable school fees. This is telling evidence that choices that parents make, they contended, subscribe to the markets. According to Holme (2002) the fact that it is high income parents that can exercise school choice, is often overlooked. Yet, seventy percent of the parents exercising school choice are these high income parents. They do this, by being able to afford homes in the school districts where they know good school are available. It is also then evident that parents who can exercise this choice, then also have the choice of proximity as described in Section 2.4.9. below. Woolman and Fleisch (2006) contend that the National Education Policy Act no. 27 of 1996, the South African Schools Act and the Employment of Educators Act provide the conditions that incentivise parents to exercise their options of school choice because the parents have such great authority in the governance in the school through the SGB. Schools can charge school fees. These amounts are determined by the SGB. It is in the interests of the schools to then allow as many full fee paying learners notwithstanding their domicile. This influences the parental school choice as parents can more freely “shop” around for the school of their choice notwithstanding their domicile.

Technology

Maile raised another interesting factor which is particularly noteworthy in the 21st Century and that is the attraction that schools offer by being technologically connected. According to Maile (2004, p. 105) “Schools with new information technologies and innovative programs are becoming magnetic.” This factor is strongly linked to future employment opportunities, as schools which offer innovative programs tend to be in private public partnerships with enterprise development and are therefore competitive and add value to a future work pool, according to the Department of Education as cited in (2004).

Proximity

Parents in a study by Evans and Cleghorn (2014, p. 1) also cited proximity to home and work place as important factors influencing schools choice. In the responses “46,5% stated that the fact the school is located close to where they live is important; another 60.3% stated that the school is close to where they work, again suggesting location is an important factor in school choice” Evans and Cleghorn (2014, p. 11).

Medium of instruction

The fact that parents also based their choice on medium of instruction, and particularly English, is a particular interesting factor. In the Evans and Cleghorn (2014, p. 1) study this was particularly evident when parents chose a particular school with an Afrikaans history yet “there are four English –medium primary schools within less than three kilometres of each other.” The school has adopted English as the medium of instruction. The researchers described the school’s population as follows; “The demographics of the school have changed so fundamentally that currently almost 1,800 African learners are served by 56 staff members, the majority of whom are white although none speak English as their mother tongue” Evans and Cleghorn (2014, p. 5). Furthermore, the research found that seventeen different languages were spoken by the learners in the sample drawn from the four grade three classes Evans and Cleghorn (2014). The language factor is of particular significance in influencing parental choice, as it illustrates once again parental perception that English provides their children access to better resources and ultimately the world of work, where English is the dominant language (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014; Maile, 2004; Msila, 2009). The choice of schools based on language and especially English in the current South African society has strong political and improving social standing connotations (Lombard, 2007; Maile, 2004; Msila, 2009). “English [is] commonly viewed as the gateway to modernity” according the Heugh as cited in (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014). However, one should not hold an absolute view of English versus indigenous language use as English being the superior. According the Heugh (2002, p. 15) “an attachment to and high value accorded to English does not necessarily imply that an attachment to indigenous languages is proportionately reduced.”

Available information on the school

Holmes further elaborated on two factors which are of interest for this study in that many parents make their choice not so much on the information disseminated by the schools but really through friends. “Most parents stated that they based their judgments about the school quality primarily on information from individuals in their social networks” (Holme, 2002, p. 180). In the study it was also noted that the kind of information parents shared was not generally about the school curriculum and the “instructional quality” but it is more about the status of the parents who send their children to the school. “Status, in fact, dominated every aspect of these parents’ choices. They not only implicitly trusted the information given to them by other high-status parents, but also read a great deal into these parents’ own school choices” Holme (2002, p. 180). This observation is supported by the work of Msila when parents based their choice of school on the historical reputation of the school and they could identify former community and national leaders who had attended the school. “Many of the important people in the community had studied there and this school is also one of the older schools” (Msila, 2009).

It was important to note that the above factors played itself out in South African schools amidst the desire of the Ministry of Basic Education to ensure that all learners have an equal access to education. In an independent review on the transformation of education by the Department of Gauteng Education, equality is again emphasized “Equally important is that the GDE, driven by a belief that all children have the basic human right to equal access to quality education, has deliverables set out to narrow the gap between the performance of learners from poorer backgrounds who generally attend quintile 1-3 schools which do not charge fees, and learners from wealthier backgrounds who attend quintile 4 and 5 schools” (Maringe & Prew 2015, p. 6). The Department of Basic Education in an attempt to address issues of inequality in public schooling amended the South African Schools Act in 2005, establishing the quintile system. According to the quintile system, schools identified in five (5) categories based on levels of domestic income of the communities surrounding the respective school. The schools identified in the poorest communities are quintile 1 and schools identified in the wealthiest communities are classified as quintile 5. School categorised in Quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools are not allowed to charge fees. They are also known as no-fee schools in the education system.

According to Hegarty (1993, p. 122), schools have to take the open days seriously as the information gained at these events is an important factor which may influence parental school choice. This may even include opportunities to “observe classrooms in action” and therefore provide first hand insights in the quality of the teaching and learning in the school.

School Governing Bodies as gatekeepers

The education system prior to 1994 consisted of “15 different education ministries” Pampallis (2003). These ministries and therefore the schools under their executive authority were organised along racial lines and also differently resourced. It stands to reason that Black parents disliked the fact that their children were denied access to better resourced schools and therefore the “democratic movement, as part of the broader struggle against apartheid, demanded that schools should be open to all irrespective of race” (Pampallis, 2003, p. 144).

Woolman and Fleisch (2006) contended that the state thought that parents, entrusted with the governance responsibility of a school, will act in the best interest of their children and therefore do what is best for the school. In White Paper 2; this contention is supported with the statement that; “...these proposals will mark a major advance in the decentralisation of educational control, and the fulfilment of a goal for tens of thousands of parents, teachers, students, former students and community workers who have campaigned to secure the achievement of democracy in schools. At the same time, the new policy marks a decisive shift toward a national, democratic and non-racial system of schools.” (Department of Education, 1996, p. 14).

Parents have the majority decision making in the governance of a public school. Parents also make up the majority of the school governing body which is responsible for the governance in the school. It is through this authority that parents influence the schools choice phenomenon and can become enablers or gate keepers of parents finding access of their choice for their children. “The term ‘governing body’ will be used uniformly to describe the body that is entrusted with the responsibility and authority to formulate and adopt policy for each public school in terms of national policy and provincial education regulations” (Department of Education, 1996, p. 13).

2.8. CONCLUSION

In the literature, it became evident that school choice factors are never singularly at play. In other words, parents do not base their decision making of school choice for their Grade 1 learner on only one factor but they examine a combination of these. They then seem to base their decision on a combination of factors which tick most of their preference boxes. It is anticipated that in the analysis of the data, if it is desired to present their experiences in an authentic manner, I will have to listen how they made sense of the factors presented by the respective schools on which they made their decisions.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Two, a detailed review of the literature and a discussion of the theoretical framework underpinning the study was presented. In Chapter Three, the research methods, approach, and procedures which were followed in conducting this study was presented. And discussed. The research methods were explained, along with the sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Further, an explanation of how the data was collected and analysed within the interpretive paradigm was provided. Lastly, the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the research study were discussed.

The aim of the research study was to determine the factors affecting parents' choice of schools for their Grade 1 learner. In order to do this, the research methodology assisted the researcher to elicit the experiences of parents. The research methodology also enabled the analysis of the data in order to determine what key factors were affecting parents' choice of school. The research methodology provided the guide as to the most appropriate approach which could allow parents to relate their experiences and therefore produce information, in other words data that could be used to create categories and trend. These categories and trends, formulated through the "research lens" provided some insights of the parental experiences in making a school choice. The research methodology was thus the "general approach the researcher takes in carrying out the research project" Leedy and Ormrod (2005, p. 12)

3.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is simply referring to the different methods which were chosen and applied in conducting this research. (Crotty, 1998). Research was done to gain knowledge of a particular topic. The intention is to do research so that more knowledge can be constructed on a particular topic in order to contribute or introduce new thinking and new ways of doing. "All progress is born of inquiry", according to Kothari (2004, p5). In order to

gain this knowledge and improve practices, researchers apply different research methods and techniques. The most commonly research approaches were the qualitative research and the quantitative research approaches (Creswell, 2009). In order to ensure that the desired results were achieved, in this study it was important to choose the most appropriate methodology or methodologies for the design as the collection of the data, in other words the “research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data”. (Kothari, 2004, p31). An appropriate approach for this study was the qualitative approach as it allowed the inquiry of the social phenomenon of school choice. As the concern for social science is to gain “...knowledge for what it can contribute to practical concerns” Kothari (2004, p 6), it was the intention to determine how the knowledge gained from this study could inform the parental school choice phenomenon.

The study took cognisance of the Brundrett and Rhodes (2013) argument for the recognition of the difference between the terms “methodology” and “methods”, as they cannot be applied interchangeably. “Methodology” referred to the “broad system or body of practices and procedures that will be employed to investigate a set of phenomena” whereas “methods” can be described as the “actual analytical approaches that will be employed in the research process” (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2013, p.13).

Herewith follows a complete clarification of the research methodology which was applied in this study.

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Creswell described the research design as a plan which the researcher drafted and followed during the processes of conducting research. He further advocated that the researcher should have an understanding of the three parts which make up the research plan during the design phase. These three parts comprised of the researcher’s own understanding of the world in other words the researcher’s “philosophical worldview”, the “selected strategies for inquiry” and the selected “research methods” (Creswell, 2009, p. 5).

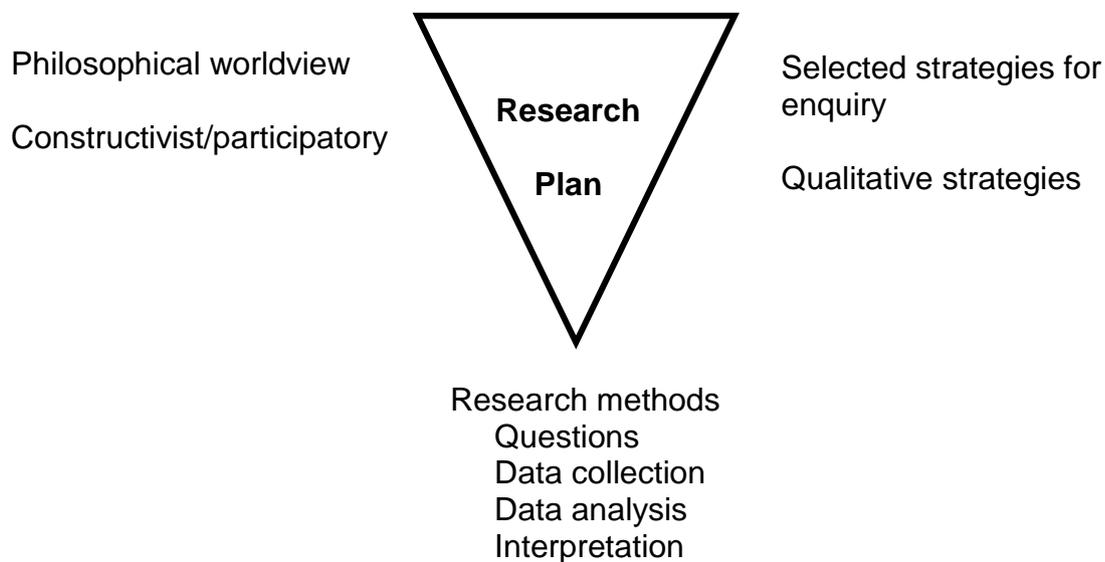


Figure 3.1: A Framework for Design-The Interconnection of Worldviews, Strategies of Inquiry, and Research Methods adapted from (Creswell 2009:5)

It was this triangular understanding that helped me to navigate the processes of determining the research objective, the kind of inquiry strategies and thus the methods to ensure that the kind of information elicited could be formulated and presented as findings.

This research study was concerned with the question of how parents make decisions regarding school choice for their Grade one pupil. In essence, the research objective was about access to a school of choice in the public schooling system in a democratic South Africa. To this extent I was investigating a key aspect of equal access to schooling given the South African context in which this research was conducted. This research objective resonated with the “social constructivist worldview.” Creswell (2009, p. 8) was convinced that the research finding could be distributed to bring more awareness to parents to be more diligent in determining why their child should attend a particular school. I could also influence their knowledge levels of what questions to ask of the school.

It is to this end that I was convinced that the theoretical framework as set out in Chapter 2 was applicable and that it fairly represented the multi layered aspects of parents’ school choice experiences.

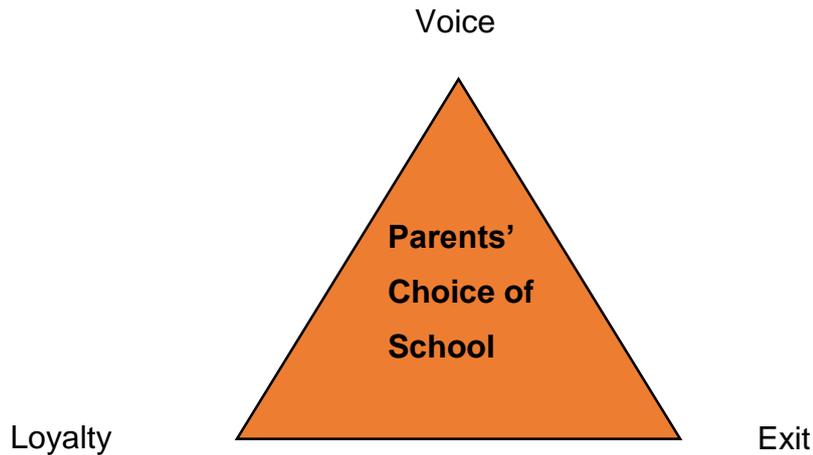


Figure 3.2: Adapted from Msila's application of Hirschman's theory (2009:83)

According to Msila “parents can exercise choice by selecting any one of three options when it comes to school choice. These were the voice, loyalty and exit options” (Msila, 2009, p. 83). Msila proceeded to explain how these different options manifested themselves when parents made a choice. The voice option alluded to when parents decided to stay in their current schools whilst they tried to change them from within. Loyalty referred to the option when parents did not have any other recourse to alternatives and they ended up letting their children remain in (township) schools even when they were not effective. The exit option described the option frequently exercised by a number of parents who moved their children from schools close to their domicile to find them schools usually situated in suburbs (Msila, 2009, p. 83).

This theoretical lens implied that parents had agency and that they could use this by exercising it in the above three-mentioned options in making a school choice. According to Creswell “Therefore, theoretical perspectives may be integrated with the philosophical assumptions that construct a picture of the issues being examined, the people to be studied, and the changes that are needed” (Creswell, 2009, p. 10).

3.4. RESEARCH PARADIGM

Creswell's perspective, as mentioned above, is confirmed by different researchers. Guba and Lincoln defined a paradigm as "Paradigms as Basic Belief Systems Based on Ontological, Epistemological, and Methodological Assumptions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). In order to explain this statement the researchers set it out as follows:

Basic beliefs

The basic beliefs represented the set of first principles the researcher holds and with which the world is viewed. These views were basically accepted as it presented itself without question as "simply on truth" as the "ultimate truthfulness" was not yet established.

Ontological question

It is concerned with what is understood to be the "nature of reality". It asks the questions about "how things really are" and "how things really work".

Epistemological question

I was concerned with understanding the epistemological question. The social constructivist worldview allowed me to explore multi-layered interpretations of the parents' experiences that were of interest to the research study. It assisted with the development of an understanding of how parents made meaning of their experiences in making a school choice for their Grade 1 learner. As a parent myself, who recently had to make this choice, I was keenly aware of the complex nature of decision making for parents facing this situation. It was therefore important for me to use research methods that involved the participant and also enabled in an authentic manner the representation of their multiple experiences. It was therefore, notwithstanding the factors identified in the literature review, important to allow the participants during the interviews to identify and define their own factors. In the social constructivist paradigm, Researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences. "Rather than starting with a theory" (Creswell; 2009 p. 8). My intention was to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others had about the world from the interviews.

Nieuwenhuis (2016:72) pointed out that the traditional linear and prescriptive guide, typical to research in a positivism paradigm towards research planning and conducting, was no longer the most effective way of conducting qualitative research. Nieuwenhuis (2016, p. 52) provides the following definition for a paradigm: “a set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which gives rise to a particular world-view”. I was conducting this research in a social constructivist paradigm as I wanted to find out more about how parents viewed the world of schooling. I wanted to know how they interacted with the information available to them regarding the different schools and what the content of the information was. In other words, the factors that convinced them to make a school choice. In this research, by asking questions about the factors which affected the parental decision regarding school choice, I was inevitably questioning their “fundamental assumptions taken on faith, such as beliefs about the nature or reality (ontology), the relationship between knower and known (epistemology) and assumptions about methodologies” (Nieuwenhuis, 2016, p. 52).

In making use of methods which allowed for participants to relate their stories about how they constructed their decision making regarding school choice, I wanted participants to make their own meaning. I then used this information and organised it in such a manner that provided insights on how a certain group of parents made sense of the decision-making process they faced. The social constructivism perspective allowed me to attempt to understand the phenomenon “through the meaning that people assign to them” (Nieuwenhuis, 2016, p. 61). The assumptions made through the social constructivist perspective applied to this research study as set out below. (Nieuwenhuis, 2016, p. 61):

Table 3.1

Assumptions	Application to this study
“Human life can only be understood from within.”	The focus of the study was to determine how parents made meaning of their experiences in terms of choosing a school. The face to face open-ended interviews encouraged parents to tell their stories regarding their experiences, feeling and processes they had to go through when choosing a school for their Grade 1 learner.

“Social life is a distinctively human product.”	The experiences of the parents were contextualized during the interviews as the participants had been chosen based on their actual experiences, in choosing a school, in the last three years.
“The human mind is the purposive source or origin of meaning.”	Through the literature study and document review, and the interviews with parents, I created an opportunity to explore the phenomenon of factors influencing school choice and its complex and nuanced challenges for parents. This provided a richer understanding of what challenges parents experienced when making a school choice.
“Human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world.”	The interaction with participants directly allowed for an improved understanding of the factors regarding school choice.
“The social world does not ‘exist’ independently of human knowledge.”	My experience regarding school choice as well as the in-depth reading regarding factors influencing school choice, assisted with the design of the research questions as well as the research plan and choice of research methodologies.

3.5. RESEARCH APPROACH

Given that the research question was about determining the factors which affected parental school choice for their Grade 1 learner, I found that the qualitative research approach enabled me to focus on the natural occurrence of parents making a school choice for their Grade 1 learners. “...qualitative research is *naturalistic* that is, it focuses on natural settings where interaction occurs, in other words, viewing social life in terms of processes that occur rather than in static terms” (Nieuwenhuis, 2016, p. 53). It therefore allowed for data to be collected during a conversation with parents who recently had this experience.

In these conversations I focused on how parents were relating their experiences as well as their feelings during the selection and decision making process.

3.5.1 Qualitative Approach

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) identify nine characteristics for qualitative research that could be present to some degree in a qualitative study. I made the assumption that this could be used as an assessment gauge against which I could determine the quality and authenticity of my research methods and instruments during this study. These characteristics according to McMillan and Schumacher (2014, p. 345) are as reflected in Table 13.1:

Table 3.2

Characteristics	Applicability to this study
Natural setting	This study was about parental choice-making experiences as it occurred.
Context sensitive	The interviews considered situational factors and even encouraged participants to tell their stories in this regard.
Direct data collection	The data was collected directly from the parents who were the main choice-makers.
Rich narrative description	The conversational nature of the interviews allowed for parents becoming quite insightful regarding their experiences, as it often was the first time they reflected on these experiences.
Process orientation	It was inevitable that participants reflected on why and how their choice making were influenced by situational factors.
Inductive data analysis	Given their parental stories some similarities and difference in experiences were shared which could be used to determine categories and thus some level of generalization was possible.
Participant perspective	The parents told their own stories giving meaning to their own experiences, using

	their own language to describe the processes and ultimate choice making.
Emergent design	I anticipated that this might happen, however it did not happen to the extent that it influenced the original aim and question of the study.
Complexity of understanding and explanation	This became quite evident early in the study. The factors which were identified were much more layered than I initially anticipated.

Understanding the above made me conscious of how I should allow for the conversations to flow naturally notwithstanding the prepared instruments I used to initiate and prompt the conversations.

3.5.2. Key Research Objective

The objective for the study was to investigate and provide recommendations regarding “quality” factors of schools as to what parents would like to know and for parents to inform their decision with regard to the choice of school.

According to Babin, Carr, Griffin and Zikmund (2012), it was important to determine what the research objective was for the study as the research methodology such as the sampling methods, the data collection strategy and analysis were determined by the objectives and the questions to be answered. The following sections in this chapter set out the methodology in terms of the sampling strategy and analysis which the research would follow.

It therefore requires that the key stakeholder group for this study need to be the parents who are responsible for the decision-making with regard to school choice. An additional stakeholder was the principal of the school. The school principal was able to relate the kind of information which the school shared with parents.

The primary research question for the study is:

- What are the factors that affect parents' choice of a school for their Grade 1 learner?

The sub-questions for this research study are:

- What information is needed when making a primary school choice?
- How do parents perceive school related factors to impact on their choice?
- How will the findings of this study contribute to education policy in relation to curriculum and school access?

3.5.3 Research Techniques: Semi-structured interviews

Data was collected through interviews. Data had been collected from parents and the principal of one school. "Interviewing, then, is a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experiences has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 8). The motivation for the interviews was to get parents to tell their stories, essentially recounting their lived experiences. It would have been difficult to get this data from just observations or documents. This was for me the most authentic data collection technique to employ. According to Peter Reason (1981) as cited in Seidman (2006, p. 8), "The best stories are those which stir people's minds, hearts and souls and by so doing give them new insights into themselves, their problems and their human conditions." To this end I am in agreement when he argues that, the question should not be "Is story telling science? but Can science learn to tell good stories?" (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p. 50). The semi-structured interview process provided the opportunity to interview the parents in groups of two or even one-on-one interviews in order to accommodate participants' schedules when they were available. It seemed that parents were most comfortable in sharing their experiences in response to the prepared prompting questions. This was possible as I had chosen parents on the basis that they had recently had the experiences of making a school choice for their Grade 1 learner. I had agreed to this, as I realised in the first interview that it provided the depth which could enhance the data. It became apparent that this method created a comfortable environment for the parents and they related their own stories by being stimulated by each other's memories and experiences. This created much richer information than if the interviews were only conducted one-on-one.

I further favoured using semi-structured interviews as I was not necessarily interested in testing a hypothesis or to assess a particular phenomenon to make a judgment whether it was right or wrong. The aim of this study was to understand different parents' experiences and to ascertain the factors which affected their decision making in their school choice. "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other peoples and the meaning they make of that experiences" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). I was particularly interested in how parents made meaning of their experiences and how they navigated this decision-making process. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) identified different types of interviews.

This study applied elements of two types of standardised open-ended interviews. During these semi-structured interviews the expectation was for the participants to respond to a set of prepared questions which I used to prompt the conversation with. The responses to the questions, seeing that it allowed for the participants' own authentic responses, enabled me to clarify their responses and therefore a more open and in-depth discussion ensued (Nieuwenhuis, 2016).

However, I also had elements of a "phenomenological interview" as I shared my own experience and then had an in-depth interview with parents to find out about their own experiences and how it affected them. I explained to parents my own personal experiences in choosing a school for my Grade 1 son and thus my interest in this topic as a way of introducing the topic. "Phenomenological studies investigated what was experienced, how it was experienced, and finally, the meanings that the interviewees assign to the experiences". McMillan and Schumacher (2014, p. 382). There was therefore an explicit focus on both my own personal experiences and that of the parents. According to Seidman (2006), phenomenology is complex and he identified four themes. Firstly it emphasised the temporary and changing nature of the human experience. This was seen as the "temporal and the transitory nature of human experiences". Secondly it was important to understand whose point of view was sought. Schutz, as cited in Seidman (2006), argued that the way participants related their experiences were "subjective understanding". Thirdly, according to Schutz as cited in Seidman (2006), interviews in the phenomenological perspective, were to find out more about the "lived experiences" of the participants. This "lived experience" was constituted of many different elements which were not edited at all. Only when we reflected on these experiences and then "reconstructed" them in our responses, only then the

elements which made up these experiences “constructed elements”, became a “phenomenon” Seidman (2006, p. 17). Fourthly, the interviewing strategy was about “making meaning”. This process is about enabling participants to tell their stories, using their language. According to Schutz (as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 18), it is not the lived experiences that creates the meaning. It is rather the “act of attention”. Through the interviewing process, when participants are requested to respond, and they have to think about their experiences and then relate these, “interviewers encourage participants to engage in the “act of attention” that then allows them to consider the meaning of a lived experience (Seidman, 2006, p. 19).

In planning and preparing for the interview process I took cognizance of Nieuwenhuis’ key indicators of successful interviewing (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 88) and applied them during the interviews.

Table 3.3

Key indicators	Applied to the interview process of this study
Find the persons who are best qualified to provide data.	In my approach to parents I asked whether they had to make a school choice for a Grade 1 learner in the last three years. In this way I ensured that the experience was relatively recent and they actually did experience the school choice making process.
Clearly communicate the aim of the interview and your research.	In the invitation letter as well as at the beginning of the interview, I stated the aim of the research. I was particularly clear that I was working towards a master’s degree and therefore would actually gain something from their contributions.
Endeavour to obtain rich and descriptive data in order to saturate your data.	I allowed the interview to go its course and only prompted with the next question when participants were ready to proceed.

Ensure a good questioning strategy.	None of the questions elicited yes or no responses. I also took into account participants' time constraints. The conversations were kept focused.
The types of questions are important and therefore you need to include a variety of question types.	The included questions focused on sourcing information of the experiences, feelings, behaviour (actions) and knowledge of the participants.
Be a good listener and do not dominate the discussion.	Although I participated in the interviewing process, I listened to what the participants were relating and made follow-up responses and or questions. I did not judge or criticize their responses.
Also observe the non-verbal communication.	I made sure participants felt heard, giving each one an opportunity to relate their experiences, making sure that participants had an authentic experience of being heard.

I further ensured that the interviews were recorded. Permission was obtained from the participants. To this extent I employed the interview protocol as asserted by Creswell (2017) in that recordings should have a heading, a date as well as the place where the interview was conducted.

3.5.4 Research Instruments: Interview questions

I used a set of prepared open ended questions to elicit responses from the participants. The interview instrument included a section A which asked questions regarding the profile of the participants and section B had nine open ended questions which I used to prompt for responses and conversations in relation to primary and secondary research questions, see **Annexure A**. The prepared research questions assisted me to manage the interviews. As stated by Charles and Mertler (2002, p. 163), interviews “are managed through the use of an interview guide, which contains questions sequenced in the order they are to be put to

respondents.” The follow-up probing questions arose from the responses. These were captured in the transcriptions.

3.5.5 Sampling Strategies

According to Patton (2002, p. 261) “Purposeful sampling is one of the core distinguishing elements of qualitative inquiry. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ($n = 1$), selected purposefully.” According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), criterion sampling is when the researcher decided during the research planning phase on the characteristics of the participants. This sampling technique “overlaps with some of the other sampling strategies identified by Patton” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 79). This strategy was also referred to as Judgment sampling and or Purposive sampling. This was when the sample represented a segment of a population and the researcher made a judgment regarding the characteristics of the sample that would be best suitable for the research study (Charles and Mertler, 2002).

I applied criterion sampling to this study. During the planning phase I decided on the characteristics of the prospective participants whom I wanted to invite to participate in the research. I wanted a particular type of parent. These characteristics included parents who had to make a school choice for their children relatively recently, at most in the last three years. Therefore, I was not looking at the parents of the whole school population. I focused my sample on parents with children in Grades 1 to 3. These criteria assisted in accessing participants who were most likely able to provide the necessary information and had the experiences in the phenomenon which I was investigating. I then had to ensure that I found the required number and that the preferred norm was saturated.

The sample size for this study was forty (40) parents however only ten (10) parents responded to the invitation. The reason for this was that many parents were unavailable due to their work commitment. According to Yin (2016) the primary purpose or goal for choosing your sample is to select those ‘instances’ that will ultimately provide the best and richest information on the topic under investigation. The sample size was not the ultimate determinant of the richness of the data. According to Yin (2016, p. 95), “There is no formula for defining the desired number of instances (or sample size) for each broader or narrower

unit of data collection in a qualitative study.” This sample size provided adequate data. Phenomenological studies “typically range from three to ten” according to Creswell (2014, p. 189).

I provided each prospective participant with an invitation letter explaining the research topic and why I was doing the research, see **Annexure A**. Based on the information, parents agreed to participate in the study. I also asked each participant to complete a consent note, see **Annexure A**.

3.5.6 Methods used to ensure validity and reliability

In order for this study to have any value, I needed to ensure that my data and analysis thereof was reliable and valid. The process of ensuring validity of the data focused on improving the quality of the study. As Charles and Mertler (2002, p. 155) stated it was important to ascertain whether the data “actually measure what we intended to measure.” It was especially important that I as the researcher took cognizance of this from the beginning of the research study as the researcher was the “data gathering instrument” according to Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 80) during a qualitative research process. In order to ensure the quality of the research I had to deal with validity, practicality and effectiveness. Maree (2016, p. 40) stated “Quality research requires the use of various strategies to enhance validity”. Maree further argued that the validity of qualitative research needed to involve the researcher and the participants and the meaning they assigned to how the data had been interpreted and communicated. “The validity of qualitative designs thus includes the degree to which the interpretations and concepts used have mutual meaning for both the participant and the researcher” (Maree, 2016, p. 40).

As Charles and Mertler (2002, p. 157) argued, the reliability of the data “refers not to authenticity but to consistency.” Maree (2016) cited Merriam’s six strategies that could be employed to ensure validity and reliability. This meant that during the data collection process I had to listen to the factors mentioned regarding consistency. To this extent I have applied the “collaborative research” and “clearing research bias” methods. In terms of the “collaborative research”, I consciously involved the participants in the research process. This meant that the participants had to be provided with the opportunity to make critical comments

on the findings or the researcher could conduct follow-up interviews with the participants. In this regard I chose to make a concerted effort to involve the participants in the research process. I committed to provide participants with the analysis of the data to ensure that it was an adequate interpretation of what transpired during the interviews. This decision was also based on practicality as the participants already granted time to participate in the research study and had expressed time constraints during the invitation phase. According to Creswell, this did not mean that I had to take back the actual recordings but I could present to participants “parts of the polished or semi-polished product, such as the major findings, themes” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201).

On starting this research project, I stated my interest in the research topic based on my own experiences. I had been very conscious about being transparent and clearing my “research bias” in my invitation to the participants as well as in my proposal to do this research study. The intentions from the inception of the research study was to build the validity aspect into the research. As Creswell (2014, p. 202) states “Good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their own background. Such as their gender, culture, history and socioeconomic origin.” To this extent I was transparent about my own history with regard to the phenomenon of school choice for a Grade 1 learner.

Furthermore, seeing that this research study was work done towards obtaining an academic qualification the rigour of testing validity and reliability was further strengthened by the submission of the research to my supervisors who scrutinized the research and asked critical questions on the entire work. Although not necessarily regarded as a peer, this process involved reading and interpretation with the intention to improve the research process and the presentation thereof. “This strategy – involving and interpretation beyond the researcher and invested in another person - adds validity to an account” (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). The expectations were that my supervisors made comments about the weaknesses and the strengths of the research study. The supervisors fulfilled this role. They guided the research process and assessed the strategies, interpretations and findings. Their experiences, and the quality of the inputs they provided contributed to the trustworthiness of the research study. Additionally the research study was also submitted to external examiners. This rigorous examining process was further used to scrutinise the validity of the research study.

In essence, the research study had been subjected to multiple strategies such as clearing bias, collaborative research processes and critical reading from my supervisors to ensure the accuracy and validity.

3.6. ANALYSIS

I understood the purpose of the analysis process was to make meaning and sense of the information I obtained from the different participants through the semi-structured interviewing process. I had to find a means to communicate and present these and link the information to my primary question regarding the factors that affected parents' choice of a school for their Grade 1 learner in a democratic society. According to the guidelines provided by Hycner (1985, p. 280), "No method (including this one) can be arbitrarily imposed on a phenomenon since that would do a great injustice to the integrity of that phenomenon". I applied phenomenological analysis processes in order to analyse the experiences of the participants. This enabled the deduction from the data of the factors influencing their choice-making with regard to a school for their Grade 1 learner as told by the participants.

3.6.1 Preliminary exploratory analysis

As part of my preliminary exploratory analysis I started by explaining purpose and the process which was followed to the participants who were invited and agreed to be part of the study. This was particularly important as participants hailed from different contexts (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). As already indicated I had conversations with ten parents. All the participants were gainfully employed, and had schooling years above twelve years. A more detailed account of profiles of the participants will be provided in Chapter 4. This initial exploratory analysis was helpful as it gave me a sense that I accessed the appropriate target group of parents as anticipated during the planning of the research.

I followed a similar process as set out by Nieuwenhuis (2007), McMillan and Schumacher, (2014) and Creswell (2014) to do the preliminary exploration of the data. These processes included:

- Recording of the interviews – the interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder. I had also taken notes during the interviews. These I labelled as per participants' identifier and the dates.
- Transcribing of the responses – transcripts were made of all the recordings. I briefed the transcriber on the research focus and the possible concepts that may be heard on the transcriptions for example the term school zoning.
- Reading through the transcripts – this process was followed in order to familiarize myself with the data in preparation for the categorising process.

3.6.2 Data coding and interpreting the data

A first listing and reading of the data was done in preparation of the coding or categorizing process. During this process I had to be conscious of my own lens through which I was interpreting the data. Firstly understanding that I was applying a phenomenological approach, I had to be conscious that I wanted to understand the participants' experiences in relations to their making a school choice for their Grade 1 learners. In the process, I also acknowledged my own experiences with regard to this phenomenon. As stated by Sutton and Austin (2015, p. 227) this “filter does not diminish the quality or significance of the analysis, since every researcher has his or her own filters”. I followed this principle through this research study.

Secondly, I also acknowledged in organising the data, that I listened to and read with a social constructivist lens; listening for the agency of parents in terms of voice, loyalty and exit. As argued by Sutton and Austin (2015, p. 227) “Being aware of the standpoints you are taking in your own research is one of the foundations of qualitative work.” In not doing this I could easily have written the data as an essay of stories told by the participants weaving it from my own stance in relation to the experience of making a school choice rather than what the participants had experienced.

I followed the following steps to interpret the data. During the coding process I listened to the information and initially focused on the frequently used terms and or concepts participants were using. I made a broad list of these. I then interpreted and segmented the data through the elements of my theoretical lens of voice, loyalty and exit. This enabled me to consult the

initial list and the recording and organize the data into sub-categories underneath each of these elements. This process assisted in introducing order to the data. Thirdly, I then went back to the recordings and filled in the list with the descriptive language that the participants used in relating their experiences. And lastly I determined what in their responses, were anomalies which was maybe just experienced by one participant. I also listed the circumstances described by the participants that gave grounds for this experience. Nieuwenhuis (2007) suggests that the above described process helps the researcher to find connectedness and inter-connectedness amongst categories and one can then begin to recognize how the content was linked and track the connections.

3.6.3 Presenting findings

The goal of this research was to present plausible findings to be included in the dissertation towards obtaining an academic qualification. This in itself was a primary determinant as to how to present the “meaning making” of participants in responding to the question “What are the factors that affect parents’ choice of a school for their Grade 1 learner in a democratic society?” According to Forsey (2012, p. 374), it was good to be conscious of the “creative tension of straddling positivism and interpretivism”. I found this particularly when I did the categories. Using the said lenses as described above, I needed to make decisions regarding information which was relevant to the study. Given that the research was done from a phenomenological approach, it was important to frame it within my own experiences and that of the participants. I decided to present the findings in a narrative discussion, describing my insights based on the data analysis. I proceeded by giving an overview, relating to it to what had been found in the literature as per Chapter 2 of this study and reflecting on the meaning of the data by applying my theoretical lens of voice, loyalty and exit. (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p. 410; Nieuwenhuis, 2016).

3.7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The inquiry was done through face to face interviews and conversations. I was not looking towards generalising the trends throughout the different conversations but in the analysis of the responses I wanted to focus on the content and meaning. I was constantly aware that

the meaning making process “occurs throughout the research process rather than being a separate activity carried out after data collection” (Etherington, 2009, p. 8). This acknowledges that the research eventually was a “co-construction of meaning by both the researcher and participants”.

3.7.1 Representivity of the sample

The participants which were included using the criterion sampling process were all employed parents. This was done to firstly keep the research study manageable and secondly to accommodate the assumption I made that parents who are employed had some choice ability. This also proved to create practical limitations for the research as the participants had limited time to dedicate to the study. Participants could only award limited time to participate in the study as they were all in employment and parents were actively involved in their children’s lives after working hours. I had to rely on the time that they could allocate to participate. This also meant that instead of having focus-group interviews, I had to do interviews in pairs which accommodated my time scheduled as a single working mother as I also had to take into account the time schedules of the participants. However, I found that this meant that the available time could be optimally used and there was not too much of a constraint on participants to fully participate during this scheduled time slot.

3.7.2 Geographical bias

I must acknowledge that the participants were drawn only from Pretoria.

3.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Firstly this research study adhered to the ethical processes as prescribed by the University of Pretoria’s Ethical Committee. Once I obtained clearance I had to ensure that I adhered to these principles throughout the research process. To this end I invited parents in writing and provided written assurance of the confidentiality of their responses. I also again shared the invitation letter with participants prior to starting the interviews upon which participants then signed the note of consent and then only could I proceed with the interviews.

I adopted the four ethical qualities as set out by McMillan and Schumacher (2014, p. 363):

Table 3.4

Ethical qualities	Applied in this study
Informed Consent as a dialogue	I negotiated access to participants through a written invitation which I followed up with personal contact and arranged the interviews within their time constraints.
Confidentiality and Anonymity	I assured the confidentiality in writing and I did not mention their personal names in the text when I did the analysis.
Privacy and Empowerment	I provided a secure and private space for the interviews. I also committed to share the research finding with the participants. During the interview process I genuinely engaged with the aspects which the participants raised and did not shy away from difficult aspects such as race, social class and language which were described as barriers to entry rather than enablers.
Caring and Fairness	Although the research process did not pose any physical threat to the participants, I still endeavoured to be respectful of the needs of the participants during the negotiations for access as well as during the interview process.

This process was important as McMillan and Schumacher (2014, p. 362) indicated that qualitative research will most probably involve people. This required that as a researcher one wanted their cooperation, trust and for them to adjust their schedules to accommodate the researcher. To this end the researcher would always be “indebted” to the participants of the research. The onus was on the researcher to reciprocate participants’ support in one way or another. To this end I committed to participants that I would share the research findings with them. It was also important that I worked with the understanding that I had made a decision regarding the conceptualization and the way the research would be conducted

which could be an “either oppressive or emancipatory practice” (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011, p. 81)

To the above qualities I also added accuracy. I wanted to make sure that the data was presented accurately and therefore, I first recorded the interviews, I transcribed the interviews and reviewed these transcriptions. I then carefully formulated the findings to ensure that I represented what I heard participants were relating. This I regarded as important so that I could try not to fabricate information or omit information which they had regarded as important. As stated by Christians (2011, p. 66), “Ensuring that data are accurate is a cardinal principle in social science code”.

3.9 CONCLUSION

It will be important that the analysis process retain the richness of the participants’ experiences. The processes enabled me to provide an authentic account of the research participants’ experiences and at the same time allowed for the factors to be highlighted underpinned by the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to present and discuss the results of the study. The data collection process was guided by the main research question and supported by the secondary question. The primary research question for the study was:

- What are the factors that affect parents' choice of a school for their Grade 1 learner in a democratic society?

The secondary questions for this research study were:

- What information is needed when making a primary school choice?
- How do parents perceive school related factors to impact on their choice?
- How will the findings of this study contribute to education policy in relation to curriculum and school access?

It was important that I determined the relationship between the data and the theoretical framework. In order to achieve an understanding of what the data was revealing, I had to make an in-depth analysis of the relationship between theoretical framework as set out in Chapter 3 of this study and the collected data. The data analysis strategies, as set out in Chapter 3 were applied. The correlation between the data analysis and the theory that became evident during the literature review in Chapter 2 became clear.

The data was recorded during each interview. I listened to the recordings and made notes with regard to the factors as articulated by the participants. This already initiated the analysis process whilst the data collection process was underway. This kept the momentum of the study as it was not necessary to wait until the transcriptions were completed to start with the analysis process. By doing this, I gained insights and could enrich the interviews as the study progressed. This also gave opportunities to juxtapose what participants were expressing with what the literature review exposed.

4.2. RESEARCH SETTING

The participants were all middle class individuals as set out in Chapter 1 Section 1.8.5 of this study. The participants have been selected to fit a particular profile as per the criterion sampling process as set out in Chapter 3 Section 3.3.5. The participants were selected as it was assumed that middle class parents in South Africa have the ability to exercise choice of schools when making a school decision for their Grade 1 learner. According to Hunter (2015 p. 48) “ Scholars have shown that changes in the labour market resulted in and from a shift from race to class inequality in South Africa. But patterns of school children movement demonstrate how education is reshaping and being reconfigured by race and class.”

The study targeted parents who were in the process of making a school choice from grade R to Grade 1 as well as parents who had recently at most in the last three years had to make a school choice. The timing of the research project was well defined as some participants were in the process of making a decision on which school their prospective Grade 1 learner should attend. The conversation was rich with currently lived experiences with the online application process which had been introduced by the Gauteng Department of Education. The semi-structured interviews with the parents were conducted at places of convenience for the parents as I was aware of the parents’ packed schedule and did not want to impose a particular physical setting on the parents. To this extent, I was willing to meet the parents, at home, office and other public spaces as identified by parents. I also endeavoured to meet with parents at times which seemed most convenient to them.

I also had a semi-structured interview with the principal of one primary school which seemed to be quite popular with parents, given the number of learners that were enrolled in Grades 1 to 3 at the school. The school has a very rich history and was opened on 17 May 1901. It is a public school, which is governed by the South African Schools Act. (South African Government, 1996b). This school is a Section 21 school which means that funds are allocated by the Department of Education to the school. As per section 34 of the South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996, (South African Government, 1996). “The State must fund public schools from public revenue on an equitable basis in order to ensure the proper exercise of the rights of learners to education and the redress of past inequalities in education provision.” The school is to greater extent responsible for the financial affairs of

the school affairs such as ordering stationery, textbooks, paying amenity accounts and doing maintenance. The Section 21 public schools appoint additional staff members to keep the teacher-pupil ratio at least to 1:35. The salaries of the additional staff members and any additional expenses are covered by the school fees determined by the School Governing Body (SGB) and other fundraising efforts by the school. In Chapter 2 item 2.4.12., it is explained how the SGB can be enablers or gatekeepers of parents' school choice. The SGB, in collaboration with the parents of the school sets the school fees of the school.

4.3. DESCRIPTION OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, I had allocated a number to each participant and therefore referred to the participants as "participant 1" to "participant 10". I also refrained from using the name of the school and therefore the name of the principal. I further obtained written consent from all participants after I informed them about the objective of the study. I followed the process as set out in Chapter 3 of this study under Section 3.6 in order to adhere to the ethical considerations which governed the research process.

I contacted each participant individually and negotiated a convenient time and venue. On three occasions I had to change the initial arrangement with the participants. Again, my willingness to do so indicated the consideration I had for the individual participants' needs and assured them that the interview could only be conducted if they were available. This had an impact on the planned timeframe for the data collection, however it was more important to ensure that there was always a sense of comfort from the participants. This stance ensured that the participants had a positive experiences during the data collection process. Participants 1 and 2 expressed that it was the first time that they had an opportunity to reflect on their experiences. Participant 1 intended to remove her children from the current school and observed that she will use this new found consciousness in the search for a new school.

4.4. PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The interview was started by asking participants to give personal information which they felt comfortable with. I then used the responses to gain insights into the profile of each participant. The description on each participant below was gleaned from this information. This also provided evidence that the participants were drawn from the middle-class strata of the South African society. All the participants were employed and received salaries above the minimum wage income. Each of the participants had access to private transportation and lived in homes which they paid for.

4.4.1 Participant 1

Participant 1 was an English speaking, female parent between 30 and 35. She has three children. Her third child is currently in Grade 2. She held a fulltime job as a senior administrator. She earned a monthly income of between R30 001 and R40 000. She had 14 years of schooling. She travelled approximately ten kilometres daily to drop off her children at school.

4.4.2 Participant 2

Participant 2 was an isiZulu speaking, female parent between 30 and 35. She has two children. Her oldest child is currently in Grade 3. She held a fulltime job as an eLearning practitioner. She earned a monthly income of between R20 001 and R30 000. She had thirteen years of schooling. She was in the process of completing her undergraduate studies. She travelled approximately fifteen kilometres daily to drop off her child at school.

4.4.3 Participant 3

Participant 3 was a Setswana speaking, female parent between 30 and 35. She has three children. Her second child is currently in Grade 1. She held a fulltime job as a senior human resources practitioner. She earned a monthly income of between R20 001 and R30 000. She had fifteen years of schooling. She travelled approximately ten kilometres daily to drop off children at school.

4.4.4 Participant 4

Participant 4 was an Afrikaans speaking, male parent between 30 and 40. He has two children. His first child is currently in grade R and he was busy with the application process. He holds a full time job as a home loan specialist at one of the major banks. He earned a monthly income of between R50 000 and R60 000. He had sixteen years of schooling. He travelled between seventeen kilometres daily to drop the child off at school.

4.4.5 Participant 5

Participant 5 was a Flemish speaking, male parent between 40 and 45. He has two children. His first child is currently in grade R and he was busy with the application process. He holds a full time job as a paediatrician in a government hospital. He earned monthly income exceeding R50 000. He had seventeen years of schooling. He travelled approximately seventeen kilometres daily to drop the child off at school.

4.4.6 Participant 6

Participant six was a Sesotho speaking, female parent between 30 and 35. She has two children. Her second child is currently in grade R and she is in the process of determining a school for Grade 1. She held a fulltime job as an administrator. She earned a monthly income of between R10 000 and R20 000. She had fourteen years of schooling. She travelled between seventeen kilometres daily to drop children off at school.

4.4.7 Participant 7

Participant seven was a Sesotho speaking female parent between 30 and 35. She has one child. Her child is currently in Grade 3. She held a fulltime job as a personal assistant and also held a part time job as an editor. She earned a monthly income of between R30 000 and R40 000. She had fourteen years of schooling. She travelled approximately ten kilometres daily to drop the child off at school.

4.4.8 Participant 8

Participant eight was an Afrikaans speaking, male parent between 40 and 45. He has two children. The second child is currently in Grade 2. He held a fulltime job as a director of eLearning. He earned a monthly income of between R60 001 and R70 000. He has more than seventeen years of schooling. He travels less than one kilometre to drop the child off at school.

4.4.9 Participant 9

Participant nine was a Sesotho speaking, female between 21 and 30 has two children. The eldest child is currently in grad 3. She holds a job as a senior HR. practitioner and earned a monthly income of between R30 001 and R40 000. She has more than fourteen⁴ years of schooling. She travels between ten and fifteen kilometres to drop the child off at school.

4.4.10 Participant 10

Participant ten, was a Sesotho speaking, male between 31 and 40 and has two children. The oldest child is currently in Grade 2. She is a middle manager at a government department. He earned a monthly income of between R30 001 and R40 000. She has more than thirteen years of schooling. His daughter uses school transport and travels between one and ten kilometres to school.

4.4.11 School principal

The school principal is female. She was the deputy principle of the school. She had been acting as school principal for the last six months at the time of receiving her responses. Unfortunately, the acting principal of the school did not have time to participate in a semi-structured interview but agreed to respond to the questions in writing.

4.5. DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The data analysis process followed the following steps:

Step 1

The data was collected by conducting open-ended interviews with all ten participants. During the invitation process, I already started a conversation with the prospective participants about the focus of the research so as to ensure that I have the correct participants which could relate to the research study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The questions in the research tool (Annexure A) were specifically focused to initiate the conversations with the participants on how parents choose schools for their Grade 1 learners. The questions were designed based on my own personal experiences as well as the insights I gained through the literature (my own filters) which I studied in preparation for the data collection process (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Participants were also further prompted when a particular interesting factor was being raised.

Step 2

Each interview was digitally recorded and I also took notes as the participants were sharing their experiences.

Step 3

The recordings were then transcribed which provided the text against which I could once again compare my notes.

Step 4

I then continued to follow the process as described in Chapter 3, using my own filters. I carefully listened and read through each interview. This provided a broad picture of the responses by the participants.

Step 5

I then made initial notes of the comments which alluded to aspects of the theoretical framework of voice, loyalty and exit (Msila, 2009). These notes include comments and concepts that were continuously occurring in the different conversations, comments of

interest as well as interests which were particularly mentioned by a singular participant and had some relevance towards the focus of the study.

Step 6

I then read and listened to the data again, this time to determine in more detail how the participants articulated the school choice making factors influencing parental decision making regarding a school for their Grade 1 learners. This process of structuring the data informed the ordering process of the data (Creswell (2009). Through this process I could commence with the identification of factors and the trends of how parents experienced these during their own decision making processes.

4.5.1 Coding of participants

I used the following coding of participants to ease the referencing of the responses of the participants during the semi-structured interviews.

Participant 1	P1
Participant 2	P2
Participant 3	P3
Participant 4	P4
Participant 5	P5
Participant 6	P6
Participant 7	P7
Participant 8	P8
Participant 9	P9
Participant 10	P10
Principal	SP

4.6. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.6.1 Emerging factors from semi structured interviews

As I continued with the analysis the factors influencing parental decision making regarding the school choice for their Grade 1 learner emerged from the conversations with parents. It became quite apparent that the factors were interdependent, and therefore for authenticity how parents experienced these could not be presented as standalone factors. In the analysis below this will be illustrated. I also included verbatim responses from the participants to articulate the factors as they had experienced it. These factors and the experiences of parents were discussed, with no allocation of priority, in further detail below:

4.6.1.1 Key Factor 1: Interpretation of Education Policy and the effect on school choice based on proximity to domicile

There seems to be an interconnectedness between parental interpretation of the education access policy in relation to school proximity to domicile and how parents exercise school choices for their Grade 1 learners. The responses by participants gave an indication that parents did not always favour the closest school to their domicile but was guided by public education policy to consider this factor during school choice.

Parents expressed it as follows:

Given this new basic education system it does not give you much choice, because schools are sort of divided according to zones you live in and so because this school was in my zone other schools refuse to take my child So I did not have much of a choice, I was sort of almost force to put her in that school (P1).

When I took him there, we lived in the zone, then we moved houses and I was very reluctant to take him out (P2)

I lived in an area that wasn't, so ideal in terms of schools ... Remember the Department of Education will do the zoning story and because of that zoning,

my zone A had a public school of not good quality, so we had to move further out (P3)

It was not even on the list [of the schools] that we could apply to according to the list that we could apply to (P5)

It is closest to where I work (P7).

It is the closest school to where I live but the choice was not only about the closest school (P10)

Now that she is no longer in grade 1 I can look at other schools, because I do not have to go via the online system. I am now able to go to other schools (P1)

My daughter was actually put on the B list yes, and they called me just a couple of days before schools opened. I applied at a lot of schools that offered English as a medium of instruction, but all of them declined her because she is not staying in the area (P9)

All the other the other schools that I wanted my child to go they are very far away [...] she would wake up early in the morning and it was too much on her and on myself so that's why I decided to take her out of [...] and bring her closer to home' (P9).

The observation by P1, P3 and P9 also indicated how parents exercised their choice by using their ability to exit a school. They were not satisfied with the school and therefore found strategies to remove their children from the school.

P3's observation gave an indication of how parents exercised loyalty to the school. Although the parent moved further away from the school she opted to leave the child in the school, the child was already in Grade 2 at this stage, as she was satisfied with what the school offered the child.

P1 also later indicated that she is no longer satisfied with the school and could now move her child as she is no longer restricted by the GDE compulsory online process. P9 could move her daughter closer to home after two years of attending a school quite far from home.

These comments referenced the practice of the Gauteng Department of Education, providing parents with the names of schools which are closest to their domicile or closest to their places of work. Five participants regarded this practice as restricting their school choice.

The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) introduced compulsory online application for learners in Grade 1 and Grade 8. (Gauteng Department of Education, 2018), which sets out four criteria which parents have to apply in making a school choice for their Grade 1 learner. Parents are required to reference the GDE policy which requires parents to indicate that their choices are determined by the following four criteria;

- Home
- Work
- Sibling
- Choice of school

Several participants reflected on the influence that the education policy had on their school choice making processes. Participants referred to the “school zoning” process. According to Msila (2009) parents exercise school choice through loyalty as well as exit. This choice option is clearly illustrated in the interview conversation with P1 and P2 who expanded on why they had respectively chosen to keep their child in the school or take their child out of the school.

4.6.1.2 Key Factor 2: Learner – Teacher relationships and the impact on the Culture of Teaching and Learning

Participants also reflected on the relationship between parents and teachers and teachers and learners in relation to the quality of teaching and learning. Although there was an acknowledgement that it was difficult to get access to this information, it was strongly recommended that parents should try to ascertain this aspect as it was recognised as a

strong indicator of the quality of teaching and learning that parents could expect from the school.

You know my seven year old daughter's teacher is an excellent teacher, she is an old teacher but you can see she is passionate about teaching" [My daughter] she is excited about learning. (P1).

Check for the relationship between the child and teacher and parent and teacher – how that relationship is – those are some of the things I also look into also what kind of feedback – when you go for the reports, when you have your one on one with the teacher what kind of feedback does the teacher give you is it a positive and or negative one – and if it is a negative one how is she handles that feedback (P2).

...what was great about the school of the where a child struggles they make provision for extra classes and they identify they even identify the problem before you and they inform you to say that your child is struggling with x and this is what we are going to do and in the meantime please also do this so that it is a joint effort (P3).

I had an incident - this was in grade R, the teacher says to me 'I think your child is too clever for me' – it made a negative impact because when he went to grade 1 the teacher got that report from the previous teacher – this one is a special child - then - there was a negative relationship between the child and the teacher and the parent and the teacher cause when I met the teacher for the first time she said Oh you are so and so's parents with that attitude, I know, ja so I took my child out (P2).

I mean your child is placed randomly in a class and you basically meet teacher on day one right, but from there on the relationship between, especially in the foundation phase, the relationship between the parents and the teacher I think is very important, that child is with the teacher for the whole day (P8).

Clearly P8, is satisfied and therefore placed his second child at the school which could be interpreted as exercising his loyalty towards the school. When they are not satisfied they will exercise their exit agency. It was important to note the emphasis that parents put on

personal relationship with the teachers as well as between the teachers and their children. This was regarded a key indicator for the quality of teaching and learning as well as a key factor influencing parent school choice for their Grade 1 learners. According to Venter (1997) parents are certainly looking for evidence of the culture of learning and teaching in a school. Although this may not be immediately evident, it still is a crucial factor for parents. Parents search for evidence of the possibility of a good relationship between the teacher and the learner when they have the first conversation with teachers during the open days that schools host. Venketsamy contends that “An education situation implies a specific relationship or association between the educator and the learner” Venketsamy (2002, p. 2). It concerns parents that they entrust their child with the teacher and therefore they would like the child and the teacher to have a relationship that will enable the child to be immersed into the practice of learning. Therefore parents need to gain at least a perception during the choice making process that the teachers in the school will acknowledge the individual learner’s uniqueness and therefore the teachers will also respect each individual learner’s inherent values and dignity. P1 and P2 agreed with what Venketsamy describes as a process of relationship building that is required for a healthy and conducive culture of teaching and learning to emerge “Initially, educator and learner are strangers and a definite 'distance' exists between them. As educator and learner work towards a better relationship their knowing and understanding of each other improves; trust in and respect for one another gradually increase or decrease; willingness to allow for authoritative guidance grows” (Venketsamy, 2002).

4.6.1.3 Key Factor 3: Access to available information on the school

It became apparent in the semi-structured interviews with parents that they based their school making choice for their Grade 1 learner on very limited access to formal information sources. The primary formal information sources are the open days of schools and maybe physical visits to the school. It was also interesting to note that participants do visit the school websites however this information is regarded as advertisements with the realisation that it may not be a truthful reflection of the school. The biggest information sources are really informal in nature, which are ‘by word of mouth’ during conversations with friends, colleagues and other parents who had or have children at the same school. Participants seemed to find these more trustworthy.

P5 mentioned: "...we heard from colleagues whose children are also going there we weren't aware of the other Afrikaans medium schools such [...] I wasn't even aware that there was such a school"

Although it was important for this participant to place the child in an Afrikaans medium school, he only gained knowledge about the existence of other Afrikaans medium school in the area once he had access to the GDE list of allocated schools close to his domicile.

P4 added: "Basically I went [...]to a few schools to enquire also on what it is they can help us with, how they can accommodated us."

What facilities they have, how long the school have existed and just by going to the school and see what kind of facilities they have and the mix of students they have and so because you will find a list of schools the Department of Education provides that and then I would go to the school, to check to review it myself. I had conversations with teachers on an open day or a special visit to the school. There is normally a person that will take you through the school, how many classes they have what kind of methods they use to encourage learning and also the number of children they accept and why. (P7).

For me I never I had any information cause I did not hear anywhere about the school as I was new to Centurion area I did not get a referral of some sort. I just googled, I called the school (P3).

You go on google – you get so much information on the school" "so looking at all those things and also hearing what people were saying about it made me believe it is a good school. (P4).

...you do your homework and you go on the reputation of the school, so obviously you go by word of mouth and you speak to other parents and you hear what schools are good in terms of their discipline and you know that type of thing (P1).

So we knew people who had children in the school, we also went to the open day of the school for me personally only went to one open because I drive pass the school every morning so we decided we gonna go for the closest school that suits our needs (P8).

SP commented: “We have open days whereby prospective parents are invited. Our website also attract prospective parents.”

The responses from participants made it clear that parents trust informal information and especially information obtained from other parents who had experiences in the school. It would be important for the school to begin to determine how this information can be harnessed to ensure that their formal communication channels carry these experiences. It is important for schools to take cognizance and evaluate the critiques by parents in order to understand how they can address the aspects in the school which are not supporting the school programme optimally. A high premium was placed on information gained through informal networks. Parents suggested that prospective parents should speak to parents who have children attending the school or whose children attended the school in the past. This is supported by research done by, Berends and White (2016) who argue that parents do rely on their social networks to determine their school choice. According to Bishop, (as cited in Altenhofen et al., 2016, p. 3), “Within these networks, people tend to associate with others who are like them, whether by SES¹, race/ethnicity, values, age, religion, and/or cultural tastes” This information is highly valued amongst the group. Their study makes a finding that there is a difference amongst access to information between low-income parents and high-income parents, stating that “social networks of low-income families may be restricted in the information they are able to provide. In contrast, higher-income families have a greater array of social resources and connections to trust when choosing a school, and making the choice seems almost effortless” as according to Bell, (2009a). However, according to Lareau (2014) and Stein, cited in Altenhofen et al. (2016, p. 4), the finding in this study was that the difference was not that marked different except for additional access to the school’s website by the interviewed middleclass parents.

¹ SES – Social Economic Status

The principal's response focused on the given modes of information dissemination such as the formal open school days and the websites which according to many of the parents were not their key sources of information. It was also key to note that the principal did not respond to the "what" information parents would need to make a decision, but rather only focused on the mode of information sharing.

4.6.1.4 Key Factor 4: Good discipline and the safety of their children

Discipline and safety were regarded as key factors influencing parental decision in the making of the school choice for their Grade 1 learner. Discipline and safety were regarded as interdependent as discipline was regarded as a precursor to a safe schooling environment. The importance of these factors should also be understood, given the violent society South Africa had become; a violent society towards women and children. In a report on school discipline, according to the Department of Basic Education (2014), it was estimated that bullying in school is as high as 14%. Given these statistics, it is to be understood that parents articulate discipline and safety as key factors influencing their school choice making process. It should also be noted that parents related school discipline as a key requirement for a safe schooling environment. It was articulated as follows:

You speak to other parents and you hear what schools are sort of good in terms of their discipline. I knew that there was a disciplinary issue, the thing is the school took on more kids than what they could manage – it was not necessarily bad but the school is losing its reputation. That time I said let me give the school the benefit of the doubt ...and now I want to take my kids out of the school, I have been there, I have seen it with my own eyes... And the thing is if you looking at Grade 1 and Grade 8 with those two grades, you gotta to go via the online system so because now my daughter is no longer in Grade 1, so now I can look at other schools, because I do not have to go [via] that online system. For me it is a safety issue I wanna know, what time is break, are the small kids separated from the bigger kids, are they supervised during breaks (P1).

It was mostly from friends who had taken their kids there so they were praising the school, it's disciplined and the teachers are quite good. I chat with them when something is troubling me (P2).

After Grade 1 I took out my son, for Grade 2 he is going to the one he is going now. My choice for taking him out was how will my voicing out my dissatisfaction affect him if I leave him there. How will they treat him; Oh this is the trouble-makers child you know, it was also in terms of protecting him (P2).

You know I have a friend, who you know, the daughter, I think is currently now in grade 6 so has been attending meeting so, this friend recommended, you know that this is a good school (P10)

It is worthy to note that P2 placed high emphasis on the teacher-parent relationship. It gave a sense that if she could trust the teacher her child would be safe in the school. She had already removed her child from the first school when she had the perception that this relationship could jeopardise her child's safety.

Throughout the process you got impressed by the professionalism, the strict method, you are thinking fortunately the way they are doing it will keep out the riffraff, they not just going to take anybody (P3)

Also the area for me I felt a little bit more secure where the school is basically based at. When I visited the school to enquiry about it the way they actually kind of protect the kids, the way you need to sign into the school, the way the school is actually situated - kids can't really come out (P6).

When we went there you had to sign in at the gate there's fencing around the school, I could leave my child there without worrying about their safety (P8).

One is the safety, it is very much critical. (P10)

It was evident, during the conversations with the parents, that they would exercise their agency and exit the school when they perceived that their children's safety would be compromised. They have a strong sense that they have to protect their children. This can be manifested through their satisfaction with the visible security system of the school, the quality of the child – teacher relations or even with the relation of aspects of social class. According to Msila (2009, p. 83), parents will also use the safety factor, or rather the lack thereof, to move their children out of their area of domicile. This was quite evident in the comments from the parents as they also felt that post Grade 1 they were no longer restricted to comply with the online application system as required by GDE and thus had access to more schools to choose from. It has been shown that safety is definitely a critical factor in determining school choice. In a study on school choice and safety, Deming (2012) found that students who feel safer in schools are "more likely to remain enrolled in school and they show modest improvement on measure of behaviour such as absence and suspensions". Safety at school is according to Walter "a critical piece in determining whether a child has a quality educational experience" (Walter, 2012). According to Altenhofen, et al. (2016) safety in schools and discipline in schools are often cited as important factors influencing choice of schools and parents may even consider statistical data from state departments to determine the safety of the school area and the school itself.

4.6.1.5 Key Factor 5: Curriculum

The curriculum is a strong factor for parents. The insights to the curriculum according to the participants, was once again obtained from parents who had experiences of the foundation phase. Further information was also obtained during the open days hosted by the school. A number of parents based their final decision making on what they understood the curriculum could offer their Grade 1 learner. A notable aspect that was raised by parents was their appreciation of the elements additional to the classroom in the curriculum. This appreciation went beyond what the school promised to give in the class. This included the extra-curricular or as it known the extra mural activities, sport and the support that the school provides for learners who are either struggling with the academic programme or other social aspects.

Where he has learnt is the extra-curricular activities he chose to do some science 'eksperi-maatjies', and he is really enjoying it, he is learning a bit of science about the weather, kind of – physics and chemistry at his level (P5).

It is a government school which is historically white and so they tend to be better than historically black schools. I think teaching should not just end at the classroom – what encouraged me to place my child in the school is what else they do over and above just classroom education. Extra-mural activities, what kind of teaching goes on in these extra curricula activities? I strongly believe in them to occupy the time of the child – particularly given that lower [in] middle class we work 9-5, we [are] rushing through taxis most of the time, so the simplicity of aftercare for me is not enough. I like a school that would involve the children in soccer in sports, art and other things they can do over and above just homework (P7).

It is a very positive space, it is I think an exciting space for the kids and the teachers are attentive and so it's giving the child a hunger for learning. It's giving her an energy to learn more, she is looking forward to going to school the next day. It is not only about marching order so it is a very relaxed, the learning is also, like it says– the programme is such that the children will enjoy being at school and engaging and learning so it give them a kind of they [are] keen to go back (P7).

My daughter became more open-minded in terms of her thinking they encourage a lot of independent work. They did not handhold kids for too long and even, you know when you start, you see a child has improved when they are interacting with their peers and you could see that her level of acting, of reasoning is beyond that of her peers ...What was great of the school – where a child struggles they make provision for extra classes – and they identify the problem before you identify the problem (P3).

You know my seven years old daughter's teacher, she is an excellent teacher, she is an old teacher but you can see she is passionate about teaching and she has all these tricks and things to keep them, you know – she is excited about learning (P1).

It is like the teacher [my son] had for Grade 2, till today my son loves maths, the way the teacher made maths for him exciting, till today my son loves maths and excels in maths (P2).

What was very important to us was that the school has a solid academic programme A solid academic programme was [...] what we knew was that they [...] they do English home language with the children. Their mathematics [...] do very well in the AMESA challenges things like that P8 and then the school also has an extensive extra-mural programme for the children (P8).

We have and excellent academic record and our learners are thoroughly prepared to begin Grade 8 with confidence...“We offer a variety of extra murals and co-curricular activities that cater for all our learner (SP).

The importance of the curriculum and academic quality of the school choice factor is supported by various research studies. This is evident in the response of SP. This is also supported by work done by Altenhofen et al. (2016, p. 2), who commented “One of parents’ main concerns when choosing a school is academic quality”. However, the definitions and identifying characteristics of “academic quality” may be influenced by different variables for different parents. This phenomenon is explained by Altenhofen et al. (2016, p. 2) in a survey and longitudinal study done who stated that results showed that “63% of parents reported that academics was an important factor in their choice”. However, when this was tested against test schools “on the basis of test score data, they found that although some students switched from lower-performing schools to higher-performing ones, many more switched from higher- to lower-performing schools.” This argument is supported by the work done by Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, and Wilson (2009, p. 5) who found that “results show that the three main factors that families care about are academic attainment, school socio-economic composition and travel distance.” The process that parents go through in making the school choice is by making “trade-offs” on their perceptions of the school’s academic achievements, the social composition of the learner population and distance to the school which they have to travel. So, as similar with the school which my son attended, although a number of lower socio economic children attended the school, middle income parents still chose the school due to its very good academic achievements and the comprehensive school curriculum. This

was indicated by SP's comments which referred to the school's academic record attracting learners. A plausible argument for the South African context of what really influence the decision making process regarding school choice was advanced by Burgess et al. (2009, p. 3), who argued that "The difficulty of disentangling constraints from preferences makes this a difficult question to address" in separate stand-alone factors.

4.6.1.6 Key Factor 6: Medium of Instruction

This section deals with medium of Instruction as a key factor in the manner parents exercised school choices for their Grade 1 learners.

It was more around, we really I wanted to put him in an Afrikaans medium school, and looking around it was actually the best one (P6).

The closest school is actually right next door to us, next to our complex but it is an English school, the second closest to us is an Afrikaans primary school and that is why he is there. We speak Afrikaans at home and that is why both my children are in an Afrikaans primary school. I am a firm believer in primary school in mother-tongue education so for me it was great that we could have mother tongue education, but still a good solid foundation for when they grow up one day and I realize that when they go to university they're going to have to converse in English. The standard of the English for me was important so the fact that they are doing English first language for me is important (P8).

Yes it is the nearest school that provides English as the medium of instruction. [The nearest schools] use vernacular languages like Sepedi, Venda and Zulu (P9).

Participants equated the language factor to providing them with the opportunity to access the "best". According to Evans and Cleghorn (2014) parents do apply language as a factor for making a school choice. In their study there was a recognition of the importance of mother tongue instruction, especially amongst the "younger and slightly better educated parents" which is clearly the case with three of the participants in this study. The search for an Afrikaans medium of instruction school amongst the three participants, as opposed to the preference of English as medium of instruction for the rest of the participants was notable.

Given the above comments, it is evident that parents who will choose to be loyal to the school when they are satisfied with the medium of instruction and teaching and learning in the school

4.6.1.7 Key Factor 7: Social Class

This factor could be detected in the subtle and nuanced manner in which it was described by parents. When asked about the safety and discipline of the schools the parents often referred to the segment of the population the school was serving. One parent was clear that she was willing to travel a bit further from her home to ensure that the child goes to a “better” school. P3 commented “We lived in an area what wasn’t so idea in terms of the schools, Zone A.”

These parents then decided to select a school outside of the area to which they were assigned a school by the Gauteng Department of Education.

...hearing what people say out it made me to believe that it was a good school...throughout the whole process you get impressed by the professionalism and the strict methods and you’re thinking, fortunately this is the way they’re doing it, this is the way they keep out the riffraff (P3).

...the decision was not merely based on how close the school but also in terms of reputation (P10)

...two is, you know the school has been known predominantly, that it has raised you know under its watch, it has raised you know successful people and they were all grounded, you know from the school (P10)

According to Lareau (as cited in Altenhofen et al., 2016) families in a higher income bracket had access to social networks that provided important information regarding schools. When this information is shared other parents felt that they could trust this information to the extent of selecting the same school. These parents did not question the curriculum of the school but was satisfied that the school shared their set of beliefs and ethos. According to Bosetti

(2004) parents applied a number of arguments to determine school choice, amongst which was a vague determination of the quality of education offered by the school. However what needed to be noted was that most parents made their decision on school choice based on the critiques they heard in their social networks, the visitation to the school and conversations with teachers. She further argued that this kind of information may be completely biased and did not address the understanding parents needed to determine the choice of school based on their child's actual needs. These comments were reminders of what Ball (2003) argued, amongst others, how the middle class used education to advance and perpetuate the existence of the middle class as they had access to economic, social and cultural capital.

4.7. CONCLUSION

The chapter focused on the lived experiences of parents engaging in the choice making process. The factors which affected their decision making processes were layered and influenced by multiple factors and therefore the factors could not be presented in any form of priority. Some of the factors as indicated in literature in Chapter 2 were not mentioned by parents and it seemed as if the "left out" factors were not uppermost in the consciousness when they engaged in the decision making process. Chapter 5 I will again refer to these and examine why they were not mentioned by the participants.

CHAPTER 5 INTERPRETATIONS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 described and discussed the data collected from the participants in the study. The data was analysed and through the analysis factors were identified that affected parental school choice for their Grade 1 learner. The participants' responses were presented. Some of these responses were aligned with the literature review in Chapter 2.

In this chapter the research findings were interpreted in relation to the relevant literature focusing on parental school choice of schools for their Grade 1 learner. Furthermore, the study's theoretical framework, namely Msila's three option theory of "loyalty, exit and voice", about how parents exercise school choice was used to interpret and explain the findings. In so doing, this chapter endeavoured to respond to the research question as set out in Chapter 1 of this study.

5.1.1 Primary Research Question

The primary question was:

- What are the factors that affected parents' choice of a school for their Grade 1 learner?

5.1.2 Secondary Research Questions

The sub -questions for this research study were:

- What information do parents' need when making choices for their Grade 1 learners?
- How do parents perceive school related factors to impact on their choice?
- How will the findings of this study contribute to education policy in relation to curriculum and school access?

This chapter was organised by responding to the above questions and it assisted in the provision of relevant interpretations of the findings. When Hirschman's (1970) theory of "exit, voice and loyalty", as applied by Msila (2009) in South African schools was applied to the

factors which emerged in Chapter 4, it became clearer in the presentation of the findings and recommendations that the school choice made by parents was complex and layered, which also accounted for the increase in the live emerging debates both internationally and in South Africa regarding this topic. The most evident state structured intervention in this phenomenon was the Charter School intervention in the United States of America according to Hage (2014). In South Africa, as indicated in the literature, Chapter 2, school choice was inadvertently initiated by government policy to address equity and equality post the 1994 democratic elections (Woolman & Fleisch, 2006). This study primarily focused on a sample of the South African population who already lived in suburbs, who all earned a stable income of above R20 000 per month and therefore had the financial ability to access school in their immediate surroundings.

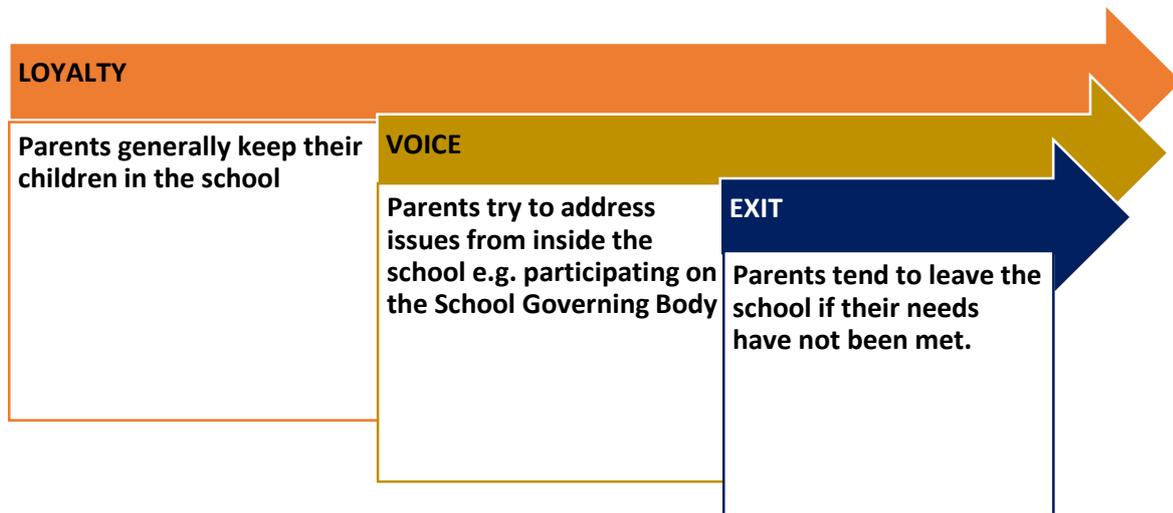
5.2. EMERGING KEY FACTORS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

With the interpretation of the research findings it was important to substantiate the key factors that emerged from the data analysis against the theoretical framework of this study. This was done in order to ensure that a comprehensive interpretation of the findings was presented. In presenting the emerging key factors, it became clearer that it would be impossible to isolate each factor as there was an interdependent interaction of the respective factors. The grouping of the factors was based on my discretion and how I heard it from the participants. I also assumed that these factors could be differently presented should different lenses be used, such as the implementation of national policies or focusing on the socio-economic ability of the participants. However, in order to be true to how the participants related their lived experiences I made the choice of grouping the factors according to the following themes:

- Education Policy and Proximity to Domicile;
- Information on the school and social class;
- Perceptions of the teachers and the culture of teaching and learning;
- Medium of instruction and the curriculum;
- Good discipline and the safety of their children.

The key factors were grouped as they were articulated by the participants and then juxtaposed with the key choice of options as set out in the theoretical framework. The following diagram (diagram 2) was presented in Chapter 2.

Parental Choice Making



This diagram was my interpretation of Hirschman’s (1970) theory of Exit, Voice and Loyalty as applied by Msila (2009) on how parent exercise their school choice making process. I integrated key factors for this study to loyalty, voice and exit options as indicated in the theoretical framework and presented how it was practiced in the lived experiences by the participants.

Table 4.1 Key factors grouped according to the options which parents will choose when presented in the theoretical framework

Choice Options	Key factors
<p>Loyalty</p> <p>Parents decided to keep their children in the school as they were generally satisfied with what the school offers</p>	<p>The key factors which determined parental choices to stay in the school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium of instruction • Proximity to domicile • Curriculum support activities • Culture of teaching and learning • Teacher – learner relations (their

	children were happy at the school)
<p>Voice</p> <p>Parents addressed issues which they were not satisfied with.</p>	<p>The key factors which determined parental choices were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum – learning support for their children • Social class - there are not easily accessible alternative schools • Safety and discipline – if there is a problem • at school they will first try to resolve it before considering exiting the school
<p>Exit</p> <p>Parents opt to leave the school when they experienced issues which they are not satisfied with</p>	<p>The key factors which determined parental choice to leave the school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School was not first choice • Culture of teaching and learning – teacher and learner relationships • Perception that the number of children not of the same social class were gaining access to the school

5.3. INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON THE FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTAL CHOICE OF SCHOOLS FOR THEIR GRADE 1 LEARNER

The individual factors had not been presented in any order of priority. As already stated, school choice was essentially motivated by parental concern to exercise their agency over the nature and quality of the schooling their children accessed. It should therefore be understood that in respect of parental school choice, according to Bowe et al. (1994, p. 64), the notion of school choice, however done at the micro family level, remains an issue of social and political debates on the macro level of governments and school governance authorities. In the interpretation of the factors it became clear that each of the factors, as experienced by the participants in the study, was multi-layered and interdependent of one

another as the participants related their lived experiences. The complexity of school choice was supported by Ball et al. (1996) with the argument that “parental choice of school is not susceptible to one definitive analysis. Different kinds of analyses bring out and highlight different aspects and patterns of choice” (Ball, 2006, p. 89). The following interpretation of the research findings needed to be presented in a manner which took cognizance of this multi-layered interdependent nature of the factors.

5.3.1 Education Policy and Proximity to Domicile

Parents recognised that the education policy (South African Government, 1996) enabled school choice. However this school choice was limited to the allocated schools based on the domicile of the applicants. Their choices were limited to what the participants referred to as school “zones.” The school “zone” was determined by the parents’ proof of address, in other words the domicile of the parents. Unfortunately for some parents, their preferred school was not within the allocated “zone”. To this extent parents found that the school choice process was limiting and denying them access to their choice of school. The Gauteng online application process for learners in Grade 1 was compulsory, and parents had to comply with the school application policy which strictly applied the Provincial admission application process. This admission application process provided parents with three school options closest to their proven domicile or place or work, thus parents had to choose from the three options given. They could not access their school of choice.

This admission policy and application process was guided by Section 9 of the National Education Policy Act, Act no 27 of 1996, to a Public School which stipulates that:

In terms of Section 9 of NEPA the Admission Policy of a Public School and the administration of admissions by an Education Department must not unfairly discriminate in any way against an applicant for admission. Section 34 provides the preference order of admissions as: (i) Learners whose parents live in the feeder area in their own or employers’ domicile (ii) Learners whose parents work address is in the feeder area.

The Provincial Admissions Regulations, General Notice No. 4138 of 2001, provides that the learner whose parents live or work in the area must apply to a school closest to the address or apply to a school where the learner has a sibling Gauteng Department of Education (2012).

Participants also indicated that they tended to comply with the policy stipulations to gain access to public schools for their children. They used their discretion during the second schooling year to take the child out of the allocated school zone and move the child to a school which satisfied their needs and requirements. This was one way of parents accessing the school of their choice.

The policy intention by the Ministry of Basic Education, was to transform the South African schooling terrain in such a way that all learners have an equal access to education. "Equally important is that the GDE, driven by a belief that all children have the basic human right to equal access to quality education..." (Maringe & Prew, 2015, p. 6).

The practice of not totally accepting the school closest to domicile by parents was not regarded as a negative process. Most of the parents accepted the choices closest to their domicile and only one parent, in this study, drove approximately fifteen kilometres from home.

As the study by Evans and Cleghorn (2014, p. 1) Evans and Cleghorn (2014, p. 1) indicated, parents regarded close proximity to home and workplace as important. In their study "45,5% stated the fact that the school was located close to where they lived was important; another 60.3% stated that the school was close to where they worked, again suggesting location was an important factor in school choice" (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014, p. 11).

According to Holme (2002), the fact that it is high income parents that can exercise school choice, is often overlooked. Yet, 70% of the parents exercising school choice are these high income earning parents. They do this by being able to afford homes in the school districts where they know good school are. It is also then evident that parents who can exercise this choice, also have the choice of proximity as described in Item 2.4.9.

5.3.2 Perceptions of the teachers and the culture of teaching and learning

Since parents of a potential Grade 1 learner did not generally have prior access to the school, it must be acknowledged that parents tended to have their own perceptions about schools which motivated them to exercise their parental choice. According to Venter (1997), parental school choice was hugely influenced by the perceptions of parents. This was supported by the parental responses during this study. They related the culture of teaching and learning with their potential relationship with the teacher and the relationship between the teacher and their child. It was very important for the parents to be satisfied that the attitudes and propensities of the teachers towards their children, should enable learning. One participant removed her child from the school which he attended in grade R going onto Grade 1, due to a comment made by a teacher. She did not want to risk her child being labelled and therefore negatively influencing his learning experiences.

Evans and Cleghorn (2014), found that should a school's reputation be tainted in any which way, it would influence whether parents would choose the school over another as respondents did indicate that the reputation of the school was a key choice factor (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014, p. 11).

During the participants' responses they alluded to the fact that the school had high standards which also contributed to the school's positive reputation. It is to this end that parents identified extra attention given to children through focused interventions offered to their children. Parents appreciated that "demand at high-performing schools is more responsive to increases in mean test scores." (Jacob & Lefgren, 2007 cited in Burgess et al., 2009). They expected their children to perform well in the schools which they had chosen. As also indicated by participants, the culture of teaching and learning was supported by certain teachers in the school. Particularly, P1 referred to the fact that she wanted to remove her children from the current school as the "good teachers are leaving". This argument is supported by Jacob and Lefgren (2007), (as cited in Burgess et al., 2009), who argued that parents "revealed preference for teachers within schools by looking at transfer requests made to the school." They further argued that in higher-income schools "parents seem to respond to the relative abundance of academic inputs by seeking out teachers who also

increase student satisfaction”. It is to this end that it was found that parents were recognising the additional activities which the school offered.

In the South African schooling context, the curriculum was standardised and all public schools followed the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grade R-3 (DBE, 2011). Schools may add to this standardised curriculum and therefore according to Hegarty (1993) parents do recognize these options that schools have and often this determine their choice of schools. Parents do appreciate “more detailed understanding of their children’s strengths and weaknesses, what teaching approaches are likely to be effective with them,” Hegarty (1993, p. 124) .

5.3.3 Information on the school and social class

In this study it was confirmed that parents relied on informally obtained information regarding the school. Most participants indicated that they did their homework regarding the school. Often this meant that information was obtained from members in a social network or colleagues or, as one participant (P8) related, how he observed learners’ behaviour in the morning when he passed the school, due to his close proximity to the school. This finding is supported by the work of Holme (2002) who argued that “ most parents stated that they based their judgments about the school quality primarily on information from individuals in their social networks” (Holme, 2002, p. 180). It was observed that source or access of information on the school and issues regarding social class were closely related. Parents tended to inherently trust information regarding the school if it was obtained from peers social-economically more comfortable than themselves. It confirmed what the literature was saying about how middle class parents tended to focus on and shared information towards the status which the school had in others’ opinions. This sharing of information amongst their social networks had a limited focus on the “instructional quality” or the quality of learning and teaching. “Status, in fact, dominated every aspect of these parents’ choices. Literature confirms that many parents form an opinion of a school from perceptions of their peers, colleagues and social media. This study found that parents shared information about the status of the school, rather than focusing on the “quality of instructional teaching and learning in the school”. The “status” of the school was a determining factor in parents’ choice of school for their Grade 1 learner. Parents also went further and did their own research on the school

of their choice (Holme, 2002). In making a school choice, parents definitely considered the reputation of the school and how it's perceived in their own social circles (Msila, 2009).

Another significant finding for this study in relation to access to information of the school was that parents had very limited knowledge of what was actually taught in class. When asked about the curriculum and whether it responded to the transformation of the South Africa, (Question 8: "How do you think the school programmes impact on your child's educational experiences?" Question 9: "Do you think the school consciously address transformation in South Africa?") The responses were vague and most had not given it any particular thought. It created the impression that their child obtained access to the school and the best was not to disturb the status quo unless something drastic, such as bullying towards their child, may have occurred. Ball (2003, pp. 168 -171) argued that the middle class was the "purveyors of normality" in order according to them to give the children the best opportunities in life. These expectations and aspirations are entrenched in the social networks using their social currency "to ensure a high probability of success for their children." (Ball, 2003, pp. 168-171).

5.3.4 Medium of instruction and the curriculum

The medium of instruction was a key factor for parents. P8 and P9 clearly articulated how they chose the school in order to ensure that their children could access a school where they would be taught in Afrikaans and English respectively. Initially P9 travelled quite far to ensure that the child could attend an English school. The child was moved to an English medium school closer to home in Grade 3 when a space became available. Section 29(2) of the Constitution provides that:

"Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practical. In order to ensure the effective access to and implementation of this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account— (a) equity; (b) practicability; and (c) the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices." (South African Government, 1996a).

It was notable that although one of the participants' first language was Afrikaans and the other nine participants did not speak Afrikaans or English as their first language, they all preferred their children to attend schools which had English as the medium of instruction.

The arguments that parents' perceived competence in the English language to provide social and academic mobility for their children, was shared by the participants (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014; Maile, 2004; Msila, 2009). They felt that their children will have academic and social mobility if they are already proficient in English and argued that for these reasons they had sent their children to English medium schools. P9 stated that the school offered English as a first language also and not as a second additional language. This ensured that their children would be able to cope when they had to go to secondary and tertiary education. Choice of schools based on a preference for English as a medium of instruction in the South African context has strong political and desire for improving social standing connotations (Lombard, 2007; Maile, 2004; Msila, 2009)

Participants were to some extent relating the "quality" of the curriculum offered to the language it was offered through. There was a perception by parents that English and Afrikaans medium schools offered a better curriculum. This perception was albeit the standardisation of the curriculum in South African schools according to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement which has been prepared for all the official languages Education (2011). Additionally to the content taught in the classroom, there was also an appreciation of the extra curriculum activities these school offered. These activities could be sport, learner support and emotional support for the learners. These additional offerings are also often used by the school as a key element of their marketing strategies. It was quite noticeable when asked about the curriculum as a transformation element in South Africa that parents' responses were quite vague and it was evident that they did not give this aspect much thought. I found this response by parents quite perplexing given the political and social context of South Africa transitioning from a legislated apartheid society which advocated and implemented inequality. According to Pitsoe and Mahlangu (2014) who cite the work of Dewey that "schools are agents for social change" it was then concerning that parents did not have the expectation of schools to contribute to social change in the South African society. This is deduced from their choice of schools based on primarily their exclusionary use of English, and not demand for the use of other indigenously official languages.

Parents are over-reliant on the content and medium of instruction only in schools, as Dewey (1964) cited in Pitsoe and Mahlangu (2014, p. 143) argued that “...to depend overly on subject knowledge and methods was fatal to the best interests of education” and that there should be a concerted effort from teachers to instil in learners the ability to critical reflect on self, knowledge and social justice.”

Given what was presented by the participants it could be deduced that they were relatively satisfied with the status quo in the school and may, as argued by (Ball, 2003), Pitsoe and Mahlangu (2014, p. 144) both citing the work of Bordieu (1984) “ culture *is* the language, the categories, and the principles of living; and plays a paramount role in structuring life chances. Thus, cultural reproduction involves the transmission of existing cultural values and norms from generation to generation.” (Bordieu, 1984).

5.3.5 Safety and Discipline

Parents indicated safety as a key factor taken into consideration when choosing their school for their Grade 1 learner. As indicated by P5 and P6, one of the key choice factors for them was that their children could not leave the school grounds or environment without their parents. Given the crime against children in current South Africa, as per the South African Policy Crime Report (2016/17), it was perfectly in sync that parents would want their children to be as safe as possible at school.

A clear indicator of safety and discipline for the parents were their reception by staff of the school during open day or an individual visit to the school. These impressions were important to the parents. P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 all mentioned that this first impression gave them an indication that their children would be safe and that there would be discipline in the school. These aspects of the school were mentioned by Msila (2009, p. 89) as indicators of a safe and well discipline school, “good management, discipline, reputation and history and teachers’ dedication” were regarding as key indicators which will make parents choose a school as they had a sense that they can entrust the safety of their child to the school” (Msila, 2009, p. 89).

5.3.6 Other Factors

The following factors, according to the literature as per Chapter 2, also affected parental decision making. However, in this study there was no evidence from the participants' responses that they were key factors.

5.3.6.1 Costs

It can only be reasoned that the research study focused on public school in South African and it did not make any comparisons with private schooling. Although the literature alluded to this being a factor, public schooling in South African primary schools still remained reasonable and parents did not regard this as key factor of choice making. Cost was also dealt with in relation to proximity to domicile. As already indicated in Chapter 2, according to Woolman and Fleisch (2006) cost influenced parents' school choice and parents tended to look for a school with reasonable school fees.

5.3.6.2 Technology

Parents did not regard this as a key choice making factor in choosing a school. Most of the parents indicated that their children had access to technology at home which they could access for research purposes. All the schools had computer laboratories and children had access to learning certain competencies in this regard. The fact that all the possible school options had technological capabilities ensured parents that their children would be prepared to access innovation and future work. Department of Education (2004)

5.3.6.3 School Governing Bodies

Parents were informed about the role of the school governing bodies and their rights and responsibilities as parents who wanted to access a public school. They did not think that School Governing Bodies, in the schools they were targeting were unreasonable and therefore it was not regarded as a key choice factor. Given the consciousness of parents in South Africa in 2018, parents in this study regarded their interactions with school governing

bodies supporting the “shift toward national, democratic and non-racial” education, Department of Education (1996,p. 13).

5.4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this research project was to develop an understanding of the parental experiences when choosing a school for their Grade 1 learners. The findings revealed key factors such as policy, access to information, language of instruction and the curriculum to inform their school choice making processes. It also revealed that factors such as technology, cost and school governing bodies are not regarded as such key factors by parents in their choice making processes. The following findings and recommendations will be presented in response to the research questions as articulated in Section 5.1.1.

5.4.1 Policy and proximity to domicile

Finding 1

The data indicated that parents’ lived experience had been that their choice of access to a public school was limited to the schools allocated by the Department of Education. The choice was limited to three schools in close proximity of your domicile.

Recommendation 1

The rational recommendation from this study is that the Department of Basic Education, and the Gauteng Department of Education should pay attention to the quality implementation of the curriculum across schools. This should be done by improving the oversight responsibilities by the Gauteng Department of Education to ensure quality of teaching and learning happens on a more equal level in all schools.

It would be fair to note that school choice is a complex phenomenon driven by a varied set of factors, enabled by public policy and dependent on supply and demand which creates conditions for quasi-markets in schools Woolman and Fleisch (2006, p. 31). It was quite

evident that even for the middle-class population in South African urban areas there were enough products (schools) to choose from and enough buyers (parents) in the public schooling system. Taking into account the empirical work done by Ball (2003), Maile (2004) and Msila (2009) as indicated in Chapter 2, 3 and 4 of this study, there was enough evidence to show that there was not really any significant changes to the existing policy that would be required. The Gauteng Department of Education may want to consider opening choice without any restrictions to distance from domicile.

5.4.2 Information

Finding 2

It became evident from the data that the main source of information which was trusted by parents, was obtained through their social networks. The information gleaned during the open days hosted by schools were secondary to that obtained through their social networks.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that schools design more interactive introductions to the schools. It is important to note that P2, P3 and P9 based their choice of school primarily on their first impression of the school, how they were met by the staff and the “professional” attitude by the staff during this interaction. It is therefore further recommended that the schools enter the space of these social networks

According to Hegarty (1993, p. 122), schools have to take the open days seriously, as the information gained at these events was an important factor which might influence parental school choice. This may even include opportunities to “observe classrooms in action” and therefore provide first hand insights in the quality of the teaching and learning in the school. My experience with the open day at school was that it was very formal and only the staff were allowed to introduce themselves and the offered curriculum requirements, and uniform requirements were presented. As Ball (2003, pp. 161-162) indicated, to choose a school is an emotional process for parents and their children. Parents “...worry about getting things wrong, about failing the child, about mistaking priorities, about not finding the perfect school”.

A practice at some private schools had been that previous parents (alumni) meet and greet prospective parents and share their experiences at the school. This could easily be transferred to an interactive website capability where parents can meet other parents who have had positive experiences at the school. As argued by Ball (2003, p. 162) “certain sorts of information are valued more highly than others. Hot knowledge gleaned through social capital networks is one such.” Parents perceived that they would be making the correct choice as the information was shared amongst the members of the social network which they valued and trusted.

5.4.3 Curriculum

Finding 3

According to the data, parents were interested in the curriculum offered by the school. It should be noted that according to the responses from the parents and that of the principal, it seemed that the concern was much more focused on the extra-curriculum activities. This could be argued because the classroom section of the curriculum in South African Government schools is standardised. According to the data this aspect of the school curriculum persuaded the parents’ decision in favour of the school.

Recommendation 3 a

Parents should become more aware and involved in what is happening in the whole curriculum of the school. South Africa needs the school curriculum to support the transformation of the country. The school therefore has a role to play to ensure that it improves the academic ability children but it also contributes to the dismantling of destructive social behaviour such as racism, violence amongst children and social discrimination amongst others.

The study was conducted at a time when the South African school curriculum came under scrutiny once again. A debate was initiated about making history compulsory throughout grades R to 12. The Minister of Education constituted a task team in 2018. A telling comment in the executive summary of the report read: “While CAPS achieved the primary goal of

lightening the administrative and content load of the curriculum, there was a marked depletion and fragmentation of credible content, concepts and methods which are foundational to African History” (Gauteng Department of Education, 2018). This statement could also be applied as indicator of the near lack of concern by the participants regarding the curriculum and its contributory role toward transformation in South Africa.

Recommendation 3 b

A recommendation from this study would be to examine the teacher education and school leadership and management preparation. The training of undergraduate teachers and the continuous professional development of in-service teachers and school leadership should take cognizance of the context in which they are teaching. It would be important to understand that the demographics in most public schools had changed and the curriculum needed to recognize and accommodate these changes. Vandeyar (2010) cautioned against the practice of “assimilation” where certain cultural values, perspectives, ethos and characteristics are being favoured at the expense of other groups of learners in the school. It will be important that faculties of education continue to prepare teachers to teach the content and advocate values in such a way that it manifested the values of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (South African Government, 1996a).

5.4.4 Medium of Instruction

Finding 4

Data indicated that the language of instruction is a key factor which affected parental school choice. There is strong propensity towards English as the medium of instruction.

Recommendation 4

It is recognised that English is the preferred medium of instruction for parents when choosing a school for their Grade 1 learner. It is recommended that parents demand from schools to offer the indigenous languages with equal status based on the language demographics of the school community.

The Constitution of South Africa Article 6 determined the official status of eleven South African languages and sets out the responsibility of the state towards ensuring the advancement of all the official languages in South Africa (South African Government, 1996a). This is further related to education as it is articulated in the Bill of Rights, Chapter 2 of the Constitution. (South African Government, 1996a). Despite the recognition of the equal status of languages, according to the data, parents still their children to learn in English. Coffi (2017) and de Wet (2002) supported the argument which the parents held that English as the language of learning and teaching prepared their children to enter the world of trade and industry, further education and eventually to economic freedom .

5.4.5 Discipline, school safety and social class

Finding 5

Parents in a subtle manner equated school catering for a certain social class to be more disciplined and safe and therefore aspired for their children to attend these identified schools. They were prepared to move their children in Grade 2 to attend a school of their preferred choice which adhered to their perceived social class standards.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that the school leadership should be capacitated to understand and manage schools in a highly complex and diverse society. All schools should be managed in such a manner that learners feel safe. It should also instil discipline by applying methods that encourage social cohesion and social justice amongst the whole school community; the learners, staff and parents. In their article van Vuuren, van der Westhuizen, and Van der Walt (2016, p. 246) suggested that school leadership should be trained and be provided with the necessary competence to understand and implement a curriculum that could contribute to the transformation of the South African Society. School leadership should be able to understand their role and therefore their “conceptualization has to be balanced and holistic, in other words, it should transcend any limited emphasis or one-sided view about isolated aspects of diversity.” (Vuuren, van der Westhuizen, and Van der Walt 2016, p. 246)

5.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

According to Creswell et al., (2009) any research and more especially qualitative research has both strengths and weaknesses, and I have noted some limitations. These limitations were dealt with as best as possible. A key limitation for this study was the difficulty to gain access to the participants as all were employed and therefore found it difficult to give time to study. I have dealt with this limitation by allowing participants to provide time slots which were suitable to them. I also found it particularly difficult to access the principal of the school. I eventually had to resolve the matter by allowing the principal to complete the questionnaire in writing.

5.6. CONCLUSION

In this research study a sample of ten parents presented their challenges and the complexity of choosing a school for their Grade 1 learner as experienced by many parents in South Africa. The intention of all parents was to provide their children with the best learning opportunities. The argument by Woolman and Fleisch (2006) might be that parents, and certainly middle class parents, do have more access to school choice. However, in practice it does not mean that the alternatives are equal in quality and social status. This makes the competition for the few schools, which parents regard as “good” schools so much fiercer. It also resulted, as indicated by myself and the parents, in children being moved from school the school where they started during the foundation phase of schooling to access their school of preferred choice by the parents.

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Annexure A

Parent letter of consent



Factors affecting parental choice of schools for their grade 1 learners in a democratic society

Dear Parent

My name is Denise Miller and I am a Masters student at the University of Pretoria. The research I wish to conduct for my Master's thesis involves an exploration of factors affecting parental school choice with the title; ***Factors affecting parental choice of schools for their grade 1 learners in a democratic society.***

This project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr Roy Venketsamy and Professor Ina Joubert, Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Pretoria.

You are kindly invited to be part of the data collection phase of this study by taking part in a semi-structured interview. The interview will be scheduled according to your availability and will take place at a venue convenient for you. The semi-structured interview should not take longer than 30-45 minutes.

Your participation in this study is absolutely voluntary and confidential. Furthermore, it is your right to withdraw at any point during the research study without any consequences or explanations. You can be assured that your decision will be respected. Confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed at all times by assigning numbers to the participants during the transcription phase. No participant names or personal information will be reported in my findings.

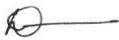
If you are willing to participate in this research study you will be asked for consent by the researcher to make audio recordings of the semi-structured interview (to make transcription of data easier and

more accurate). The recording will be securely stored. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the audio recordings. All data will only be used for academic purposes.

You may ask questions before or during the time of participation. If you have any concerns regarding the data collection procedures, please notify me or my supervisor. You as the participant will have the opportunity to verify the expressed views and the transcriptions of interviews made by me if so requested.

Please sign to indicate full comprehension of the nature, purpose and procedures of the research and to give your consent to participate.

Kind regards



Denise Miller

E-mail address: denisemillere@gmail.com

Contact number: 0842004052

Supervisor: Dr R. Venketsamy

E-mail address: roy.venketsamy@up.ac.za



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH

I, _____, hereby give permission to Denise Miller to include me as a participant in her research on ***Factors affecting parental choice of schools for their grade learners in a democratic society.***

Signature: _____

Date: _____



Dear Principal

My name is Denise Miller and I am a Masters student at the University of Pretoria. The research I wish to conduct for my Master's thesis involves an exploration of factors affecting parental school choice with the title; ***Factors affecting parental choice of schools for their grade 1 learners in a democratic society.***

This project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr Roy Venketsamy and Professor Ina Joubert, Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Pretoria.

You are kindly invited to be part of the data collection phase of this study by taking part in a semi-structured interview. The interview will be scheduled according to your availability and will take place at a venue convenient for you. The semi-structured interview should not take longer than 30-45 minutes.

Your participation in this study is absolutely voluntary and confidential and only information which you wish to disclose will be used for the study. . Furthermore, it is your right to withdraw at any point during the research study without any consequences or explanations. You can be assured that your decision will be respected. Confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed at all times by assigning numbers to the participants during the transcription phase. No participant names or personal information will be reported in my findings.

If you are willing to participate in this research study you will be asked for consent by the researcher to make audio recordings of the semi-structured interview (to make transcription of data easier and more accurate). The recording will be securely stored. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the audio recordings. All data will only be used for academic purposes.

You may ask questions before or during the time of participation. If you have any concerns regarding the data collection procedures, please notify me or my supervisor. You as the participant will have

the opportunity to verify the expressed views and the transcriptions of interviews made by me if so requested.

Please sign to indicate full comprehension of the nature, purpose and procedures of the research and to give your consent to participate.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized initial 'D' followed by a horizontal line.

Denise Miller

E-mail address: denisemillere@gmail.com

Contact number: 0842004052

Supervisor: Dr R. Venketsamy

E-mail address: roy.venketsamy@up.ac.za



Faculty of Education

Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH

I, _____, hereby give permission to Denise Miller to include me as a participant in her research on ***Factors affecting parental choice of schools for their grade learners in a democratic society.***

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Individual semi-structured interview schedule for the parents



Interview questions/prompts (the questions are only guidelines and the researcher will further be guided by the parents' responses).

Good day

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview.

Your responses are voluntary and will be confidential.

You may ask questions before or during the time of participation. If you have any concerns regarding the data collection procedures, please notify me or my supervisor. Each participant will have the opportunity to verify the expressed views and the transcriptions of interviews made by me if you so wish.

Thank you, your participation is sincerely appreciated.

Denise Miller

Individual interview schedule for parents

A. Background

1. How far does your child travel on a daily basis to attend school? Please tick (√) one

Daily distance travel	(√)
1-10 kilometre	
11- 20 kilometres	
21-50 kilometres	
More than 51 kilometres	

2. Please tick the highest year of education completed? Please tick (√) one.

Years	(√)	Education Levels
7		Primary school
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		Secondary School
13		
14		
15		Graduate
16		
17		Post graduate

3. Monthly Income for the family. Please tick (√) one.

Rand Values	(√)
3000-6000	
6001-8000	
10000 -20000	
20001 - 30000	

30001 - 40000	
50000 - or more	

4. In which grade is your child in the foundation phase? Please tick (√) one.

Grade	(√)
1	
2	
3	

B. Interview questions for parents

1. Is this the closest school to where you live?
2. Why did you choose to place your child in this particular school?
3. What did you know about the school before placing you child at this school?
4. Where did you get information about the school?
5. Do you think that the information you had prior to placing your child at this school was adequate?
6. What kind of information (additional to what you mentioned previously) do you think parents need to make a school choice for their child?
7. If you had this kind of information (as mentioned above), how would it have affected your decision?
8. How do you think the school programmes impact on your child's educational experiences?
9. Do you think the school consciously address transformation in South Africa?

Note: All interviews will be audio recorded (to make transcription of data easier and more accurate) with consent from the participant.

Individual semi-structured interview schedule for the principal



Interview questions/prompts (the questions are only guidelines and the researcher will further be guided by the principal's responses.

Good day

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview.

Your responses are voluntary and will be confidential.

You may ask questions before or during the time of participation. If you have any concerns regarding the data collection procedures, please notify me or my supervisor. Each participant will have the opportunity to verify the expressed views and the transcriptions of interviews made by me if you so wish.

Thank you, your participation is sincerely appreciated.

Denise Miller

Individual interview questions for the principal

A. Background

1. What is your position at the school?
2. How long have you been in this position?

B. Interview questions for the principal

1. Why do you think parents are choosing to send their children to this school?
2. What information is shared with prospective parents that will motivate them to send their children to this school?
3. Which opportunities do you have to share information about your school with parents?
4. Are there any programmes in the school curriculum that have been structured to address areas of social transformation as it is set out in the South African Constitution 2006?