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School Choice Determinants And Quality Education Among Public Senior Secondary School Students In Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated school choice determinants and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. 3 research questions and 3 hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a correlational design. The population comprised (71,960) students in the three hundred and eleven (311) public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample was 362 students determined using the multi stage sampling technique. The instruments that were used for data collection in this study were two self-structured scales titled 'School Choice Determinants Scale' (SCDS) and 'Quality Education Scale' (QES), which contained 73 items in all, developed by the researcher. The reliability coefficient was obtained using Cronbach Alpha method to determine the internal consistency of the instruments. The reliability coefficients are as follows: 0.82 and 0.84 for the (SCDS) and (QES), while the reliability coefficient of each variable were 0.80, 0.81, 0.82, respectively. The research questions and hypothesis were answered and tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics. The findings revealed that there is a strong relationship between school choice determinants (school curriculum offerings, co-curricular activities, school location) and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. It was concluded that school choice determinants had a strong and positive correlation with quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended amongst others, that principals of public senior secondary schools should ensure that the curriculum of the schools are implemented accordingly. Also, principals should ensure that co-curricular activities are active in their respective schools, by encouraging students to participate in school activities, as well as organizing excursions for them to attend.

Keywords: School Choice, Quality Education, Public Senior Secondary School, Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

Education is seen and regarded as the bedrock of growth and development for any nation. It is the transmission of ideas, culture, knowledge and values from one generation to another. Education is the oil that drives the wheel of any society and is often referred to as the tool for meaningful transformation. For any society to grow and develop, it must ensure that the tenets of education are entrenched in its activities. The foundation of sustainable and attainable change for any nation can be found in education and its values are needed to be present for this to occur. Education aims to educate the citizens of a nation and also ensure that they become useful to themselves, as well as their society. The main purpose of education is to train individuals within a society, to prepare and qualify them for work in the economy as well as to integrate them into the society and teach them the values and morals of the society (Karim & Abdullah, 2012).

Quality in education has been recognized as an issue that can guide the effort to improve the teaching and learning process. It is associated with the improvement of the learning process. This improvement results from the implementation of appropriate teaching practices and methods, from the design of a curriculum that meets students' needs to the improvement of services provided by schools. However, the quality of education is difficult to evaluate, as it is influenced by various factors, such as social and historical circumstances, policy choices, and the quality requirements of the parties involved (Hatzidimitriadou, 2011). Quality education is seen as education that contributes to the moral development, character development, integration of personality, and the spiritual upliftment of individuals. It is one that provides all learners with capabilities they require to become economically productive and develop sustainable livelihoods.

Quality determines how much and how well children learn and the extent to which their education translates into developmental benefits. It emphasizes the need of a stimulating pedagogy. It is the teaching and learning process that brings the curriculum to life, which determines what, happens in the classroom and subsequently the quality of the learning outcomes. The quality of education derived is related to the schools attended by learners. This brings their choice of schools to bare. Learners choose the schools they want to attend and this also affects the quality of education they get. To a large extent, the quality of education acquired by learners depends on the schools they attend.

School choice is a concept that allows individuals have the freedom to choose the best educational option they prefer. It recognizes that not all schools are created equal and that different educational approaches may work better for different students. Connecting the quest for better education with school choice is important because it empowers parents to actively participate in the development process of their children. According to Kamal and Zunaid in Shiferaw (2024), when parents can choose the school that aligns with their values, goals and preferences, they can ensure that, their children receive an education that meets their individual needs. A school's efficient use of facilities, security, status of the school's surrounding and effective management are important in selecting school. To provide students with a good learning environment, safe with healthy environment make parents feel that their children is safe in the school. Also, convenient space will help students to learn, and teaching activities should cater to students needs and progress.

School choice is an umbrella concept covering different types of programmes allowing parents to choose their children's school. School choice is quite a recent area of study in economics of education. School choice is defined as the parents' possibility to choose a school for their children. The quest for quality education is not merely an educational endeavor but a societal and individual imperative with far-reaching implications for individual empowerment, social cohesion, and national development. This is why individuals make deliberate conscious efforts in making the right school choices for quality education. Parents consider a variety of criteria when selecting a school for their children, including school academic offerings, school location, extracurricular offerings etc.

The subjects and the kind of curriculum that schools offer determine the choice of schools learners will choose. Parents and students often pursue schools that provide a well-rounded curriculum, including core subjects such as Mathematics, English Language, Sciences, and Social Studies, as well as elective subjects in arts, vocational studies, and technology. According to Ogunbanwo (2014), the quality of teaching, availability of advanced courses, and preparation for national examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) are also significant factors influencing school choice decisions.

Parents and students also look at the level of co-curricular activities carried out in schools before choosing. This is a huge determinant of school choice. Co-curricular activities play an important and vital role in secondary school choice. Schools that offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as cultural activities, sports, debates and club are often preferred and accepted by parents and students. They help engage the students and keep them fit and active while in schools. These activities also contribute to students' holistic development, fostering skills in leadership, teamwork, creativity, and social responsibility (Mahoney & Cairns, 2021).

Parents and students, while choosing schools also look out for the location of the schools. The location of schools is another essential factor and determinant when choosing a school. Factors such as transportation and the choice of schools their children would attend. When learners attend schools closer to their homes, it costs, safety measure, arriving to school on time, and prompt accessibility inform parents' decisions on the help to reduce transportation costs as well as enable them to get to school on time. School attendance has eluded many students owing to how far their schools are from their houses, besides other reasons. Schools located near students' residences are often favored, as they reduce commuting time and logistical challenges for families (Bifulco & Ladd, 2020). Also, they also look out for schools that are in calm and serene areas. Schools that are located where there are factories, industries, markets and noisy areas are usually avoided when choosing schools. The location of the schools matters a lot because students will not learn and be well coordinated if they attend schools where noise exists.

The quality of education derived in schools to a large extent depends on the kind of schools. Different schools portray different quality of education. Choosing a school is determined by the aforementioned variables, including many others. Quality education can only be achieved if schools have all it takes to transmit knowledge and give sound and moral education to students. School choice is related to quality education because individuals would want to get the best form of education, hence, their decision in selecting schools that would give them what they need. Quality education contributes to the growth and development of any society. Individuals harness and handle the resources available within the societies to make this happen, and so the schools they attend is very important in grooming them into becoming useful citizens and self-independent. For quality education among senior secondary schools in Rivers State, there is need for schools to be proactive and possess good characteristics in order to attract individuals who would select them as a place of knowledge acquisition. In this assertion, the researcher investigated whether school choice determinants (school curriculum offerings, co-curricular activities and school location) have a relationship with quality education among senior secondary schools students in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between school choice determinants and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives sought to:

1. determine the relationship between school curriculum offerings and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.
2. investigate the relationship between school co-curricular activities and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.
3. find out the relationship between school location and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the relationship between school curriculum offerings and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between school co-curricular activities and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between school location and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant relationship between school curriculum offerings and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant relationship between school co-curricular activities and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

3. There is no significant relationship between school location and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted correlational design since its emphasis was interested in finding out the relationship between school choice determinants and quality education. The population for this study consisted of the (71,960) students in the (311) public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample size that was used for this study was 362 students gotten using The sampling technique that was used was multi stage sampling technique, while Taro Yamane formular was used in determining the sample size. The instruments that were used for data collection in this study were two were two scales titled ‘School Choice Determinants Scale’ (SCDS) and the second one was ‘Quality Education Scale’ (QES). The scales were structured using four points modified Likert-type rating of Strongly Agreed (SA) = (4 points), Agreed (A) = (3 points), Disagreed (D) = 2 points), and Strongly Disagreed (SD) = (1 point). The instruments were face and content validated by five experts in University of Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was estimated using Cronbach Alpha Statistics with a co-efficient of 0.82 and 0.84 for the independent and dependent variables respectively. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher and two research assistants and out of 397 copies of the instruments that were administered, 362 copies were correctly filled and were retrieved which represented 91.1% return rate. The research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested respectively using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics.

RESULTS

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1: *What is the relationship between school curriculum offerings and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State?*

Table 1: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient Analysis on the Relationship between School Curriculum Offerings and Quality Education among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

Variables	N	df	r	Result
School Curriculum Offerings	362	360	0.642	Strong relationship
Quality Education				

From Table 1, with 362 respondents and at 360 degrees of freedom, the r. value stood at 0.642 which falls between 0.51-0.75, indicating a strong relationship between the two variables being compared. Based on the foregoing, the researcher was constrained to establish that strong relationship existed between the two variables, school curriculum offerings and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: *What is the relationship between school co-curricular activities and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State?*

Table 2: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient Analysis on the Relationship between School Co-curricular Activities and Quality Education among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

Variables	N	df	r	Result
School Co-Curricular Activities	362	360	0.672	Strong relationship

Quality Education

From Table 2, with 362 respondents and at 360 degrees of freedom, the r. value stood at 0.672 which falls between 0.51-0.75, indicating a strong relationship between the two variables being compared. Based on the foregoing, the researcher was constrained to establish that strong relationship existed between the two variables, school co-curricular activities and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: *What is the relationship between school location and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State?*

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient Analysis on the Relationship between School Location and Quality Education among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

Variables	N	df	r	Result
School Location	362	360	0.702	Strong relationship

Quality Education

From Table 3, with 362 respondents and at 360 degrees of freedom, the r. value stood at 0.702 which falls between 0.51-0.75, indicating a strong relationship between the two variables being compared. Based on the foregoing, the researcher was constrained to establish that strong relationship existed between the two variables, school location and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between school curriculum offerings and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Table 4: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient Analysis on the Significant Relationship Between School Curriculum Offerings and Quality Education among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

Variables	N	df	r	Sig	P. Value	Decision
School Curriculum Offerings	362	360	0.642	0.000	0.05	Significant (reject)

Quality Education

From Table 4, with the total number of respondents as 362, using 360 degree of freedom, r. value was 0.642, at 0.000 significant value and a p. value of 0.05. At 0.05 p. value, 0.000 significant value, the r. value of 0.642 is rejected because the significant value of 0.000 is less than the p. value of 0.05. Based on

the foregoing, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative that, there is a significant relationship between school curriculum offerings and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between school co-curricular activities and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State

Table 5: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient Analysis on the Significant Relationship Between School Co-Curricular Activities and Quality Education among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

Variables	N	df	r	Sig	P. Value	Decision
School Co-Curricular Activities	362	360	0.672	0.000	0.05	Significant (reject)
Quality Education						

From table 5, with the total number of respondents as 362, using 360 degree of freedom, r. value was 0.672, at 0.000 significant value and a p. value of 0.05. At 0.05 p. value, 0.000 significant value, the r. value of 0.672 is rejected because the significant value of 0.000 is less than the p. value of 0.05. Based on the foregoing, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative that, there is a significant relationship between school co-curricular activities and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between school location and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Table 6: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient Analysis on the Significant Relationship Between School Location and Quality Education among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

Variables	N	df	r	Sig	P. Value	Decision
School Location	362	360	0.702	0.000	0.05	Significant (reject)
Quality Education						

From Table 6, with the total number of respondents as 362, using 360 degree of freedom, r. value was 0.702, at 0.000 significant value and a p. value of 0.05. At 0.05 p. value, 0.000 significant value, the r. value of 0.702 is rejected because the significant value of 0.000 is less than the p. value of 0.05. Based on the foregoing, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative that, there is a significant relationship between school location and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding of the study revealed that there is a strong relationship between school curriculum offerings and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. This implies that school curriculum offerings correlates with quality education among public senior secondary school students. Parents and guardians look at the nature of subjects and the quality of curriculum that school offer while making a choice for schools their children or wards will attend. Parents and students often chase and pursue schools that provide a well-rounded curriculum, including core subjects such as

Mathematics, English Language, Sciences, and Social Studies, as well as elective subjects in arts, vocational studies and technology. This is in agreement with Okebukola (2012) who discovered that the quality of teaching, availability of advanced courses, and preparation for national examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) are also significant factors influencing school choice decisions.

The subjects taught in schools, as well as the quality and experience of those who teach them are criteria that parents look out for when choosing schools for their children. Essential subjects such as Mathematics and English are very important in the curricula development of any child. It is imperative to note that many schools offer these subjects, but do not have capable hands teaching them. Many teachers do not know how to teach the mathematics subject very well, and this hampers on the quality of education gotten by students. Having competent teachers teaching these essential subjects is very paramount in the quality of education to be derived. This corroborates with the finding of Masaiti (2021) which found out that school academic performance is the biggest determining factor in parents' school choice, hence the importance of the kind of teachers teaching subjects in the curriculum. Shiferaw (2021) did not differ in his opinion when he stated that parental school choice is critically affected by parent-related factors like parents' education, income, family size, and education level of the children, and the school-related factors: quality of education, performance of teachers, school facilities, school cost, parent-teacher relationship, and above all these, school curriculums are the major ones.

Results from the second finding of the study showed that there is a strong relationship between school co-curricular activities and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. This implies that school co-curricular activities correlates with quality education among public senior secondary school students. Co-curricular activities refer to a range of activities organized outside of the regular school day, curriculum or course intended to meet learners' interests. This corroborates with the finding of Nathan (2023) who discovered that curricular activities can help learners become more involved in their school or community and can help them to develop social and soft skills and to promote wellbeing. They are programs outside of the regular school curriculum. Extracurricular activities play a major role in the lives of many secondary school students. They can provide a forum for students to explore their interests, develop new skills and make friends with like-minded peers.

This finding also agrees with the opinion of Al-Malki, Collins and Akbari (2018) who found that students who participated in extracurricular activities were more likely to achieve higher grades in their academic studies than those who did not. It also found that the students who participated in extracurricular activities were more likely to develop better study skills, such as better time management and improved organization. These skills may have a positive impact on academic performance, as they can help students to better manage their academic workload.). Extracurricular activities also provide an outlet for expressive action, enabling participants to explore their personal talents and interests and formulate their identities. The broadening of social networks also creates a sense of belonging to socially recognized and valued groups. Participation in extracurricular activities can consequently be expected to improve educational outcomes through the accumulation of both cultural capital – skills and dispositions – and social capital, or contact networks. Gabay-Egozi (2015) did not differ when he stated that exposure to academically oriented adults and peer groups shapes young people's plans and decisions, which tend to become more academically oriented. The quality of a student's high school experience can be cultivated through involvement in extracurricular activities. A student's connection to the many aspects of a school's culture often facilitates the development of school pride and personal responsibility. One of a school's primary means of developing school pride and personal responsibility is through active participation in co-curricular and extracurricular activities. This also corroborates with George (2012) who reported that participation in extracurricular activities promotes a higher level of academic achievement. He also discovered that participation in school related activities was more strongly associated with achievement than was participation in activities outside of school. Students tended to have higher academic achievement levels when participating in school sponsored extracurricular activities.

Results from the third finding revealed that there is a strong relationship between school location and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. This implies that school location correlates with quality education among public senior secondary school students. The school is a social and learning agent that provides the environment upon which a child may be formally educated in order to attain educational goals. Olutola (2018) corroborated on this when they stated that on the academic performance of students in rural and urban school located areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria, it was noted that lateness and absenteeism is an imminent problem and when students come late to school or are outright absent, performance academically will be affected negatively. Schools in the urban areas are exposed to modern facilities and teaching materials which may not be readily available in schools located in rural areas.

Schools are located variously, some in the urban while others are in the rural areas. It is observed that schools located in the urban areas tend to have more facilities, manpower, government attention, etc. as against those located in the rural areas. School location refers to the particular place, in relation to other areas in the physical environment (rural or urban), where the school is sited. This is in agreement with Fredrick (2011) who viewed school location as one of a majors factors that influence students academic achievement in Biology or other subjects. The area where a school is located is expected to affect the students' achievement either positively or negatively due to the fact that the location is linked with teacher retention and provision of necessary school facilities. School location is an important factor to be considered when discussing the academic performance of students. The community where the school is located could either be rural or urban and since the community forms part of the school environment, it therefore means that the community has a part to play in the students' academic performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that there is a strong and positive correlation between school curriculum offerings, co-curricular activities, school location and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Also, there is a significant relationship between school curriculum offerings, co-curricular activities, school location and quality education among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. Principals of public senior secondary schools should ensure that the curriculum of the schools are implemented accordingly. They should do this by encouraging teachers to teach subjects like Mathematics and English well, as well as organize trainings and workshops for them to improve their teaching capabilities.
2. Principals should ensure that co-curricular activities are active in their respective schools. They should do this by encouraging students to participate in school activities, as well as organizing excursions for them to attend.
3. Parents should select schools close to their houses for their children to attend. They should also ensure that they choose schools in less noisy and serene areas, as it would have an influence on the quality of education their children will get.

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