Parental Choice of Primary Schools in the North West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract
This study investigates what parents have at the back of their minds when they choose particular primary schools for their children. The investigation starts with presentation of the historical background of primary school progress in Cameroon from the pre-colonial era through the colonial era and post colonial era. Existing literature was reviewed with the aim of identifying the existing gaps and then investigating in detail the various factors that come into play while parents make primary school choice in the North West region of Cameroon with particular reference to Kumbo and Nkum subdivisions.

Qualitative research approach is used in the research work with the aim of getting in-depth verbal and thick descriptions of personal perspectives and experiences of parents regarding primary school choices they make for their children. Rational choice theory is applied in the analysis of the findings.

The research findings and analysis reveal that parental choice of primary schools remains a more complex issue than international literature; especially studies about the developed world tend to present. International literature paints the general picture that parents rely so much on test scores performance of various schools. Quality education is defined in terms of test scores which turn to push parents to choose schools with very high test scores for their kids. This study reveals that there is more to quality of education than just test scores. As such parents choose primary schools not simply because they want their kids to perform well in tests but rather they choose schools that will provide their kids with integral development that takes care of the intellectual, moral, religious and physical welfare of their kids.

The study ends with recommendations that the various governments need to work hand in hand with private operators of primary schools, through subsidies which can enable parents to have access to the kind of quality of education they desire. Partnership between the government and the private sector may give parents a better and wider range of choice since the government alone may not be able to provide the best schools that make for quality education.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to all who have spared no efforts in making sure that I acquire both formal and informal education. I think especially of my parents as my first educators, my brothers and sisters from whom I learnt a lot and all who have given me a cup of water as I trod the path of knowledge.
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I also wish to thank the parents of Nkum and Kumbo who spared their time inspite of their busy schedules to make time for the interviews I had with them. Without their responses, I should have gone nowhere with this study.

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Finally I remain grateful to God in whom, I live, move and owe my being.
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<thead>
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CDC</td>
<td>Cameroon Development Cooperation.</td>
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<td>CEE</td>
<td>Common Entrance Examinations.</td>
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<td>FPE</td>
<td>Free Primary Education.</td>
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<td>FSLC</td>
<td>First School Leaving Certificate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEAPS</td>
<td>Learning and Educational Achievement in Punjab Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>Parents Teachers Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTC</td>
<td>Rational Choice Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDHR</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPE</td>
<td>Universal Primary Education</td>
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<td>MINEDUC</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

According to article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) declaration adopted by the United Nations general assembly, on the 10th of December 1948 in Paris; the following aspects in relation to education were highlighted in the article:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Given this importance attached to education by the community of nations in the world, every parent or guardian, ought to take upon themselves this duty and responsibility to educate their children. Rights move hand in glove with duties and therefore the education of children is the duty of every parent. The government of each nation also has a duty of making sure that its citizens acquire education. It is therefore important that governments should see to it that education facilities are provided from basic education to higher institutions of learning. These educational facilities should therefore be made available to all citizens in every part of each country so as to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge so desired by the community of nations: the United Nations.

This study focuses on choice of primary schools from a parental point of view showing the complexities involved when parents make choices about the kind of education they want their kids to acquire which is determined by the type of school their children attend. According to Duru-Bellat (2004), the family is the first school, while parents are the first educators or teachers. Parents in general usually have a kind of perceived future they want or
wish their children to have and so they do everything possible to equip their children or empower them with education which is seen as the greatest and surest way to empower children. The future of the children depends on the kind of education they acquire and the kind of education they acquire also depends on the choices their parents make for them with regards to the schools they attend.

When it comes to primary school choice, parents play a pivotal role. The story may be different beginning from secondary schools to other higher institutions of learning, where the children may have a voice when it comes to the choice of schools. It is therefore for this reason that the work focuses on parental choice of primary schools in Nkum and Kumbo subdivisions and not parental choice of schools as a whole. Some research work has been done concerning choice of secondary and high schools, but in the areas of focus in this work; there is still a gap with regard to primary school choice.

Both the parents of Nkum and Kumbo have the following categories of primary schools to grapple with when it comes to choice: - Public or government primary schools, - Private Religious or Mission schools (Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist and Islamic primary schools), - Lay Private primary schools run by private individuals or some common initiative groups.

1.1. Contextual Background

Western (Formal) Education was first introduced into the Cameroonian society by the Missionary Societies. Following the scramble for Cameroon, the Basel and Baptist Missionaries were the first to introduce formal education. With the advent of these Missionaries, the traditional system of education witnessed a decline and was being replaced by the German colonial system of education. Firstly the Germans had a colonial policy of education that was rooted in her master race theory. According to this theory, Cameroonians of all social classes were taught to regard their German Masters as superiors (Ngoh, 1998).

The German policy of education as explained by Ngoh (1998), was based on the desire to promote German culture and civilization. They were quick to recognize that language was the key to promotion of culture and civilization. German was made the official language of instruction in schools. Reading, writing and orthography were taught in all classes. Subjects in the curriculum included arithmetic, moral principles and behaviour, German history etc. The educational model of Froebel influenced the German authorities in Cameroon to include manual training in the curriculum. They equally solicited the services of experienced teachers.
who had received training in German schools. The first of such teachers and educationist was Theordore Christaller a Cameroonian by birth that was trained in Germany and then brought back to Cameroon as a teacher. Teachers were mostly Europeans who had a sound education and professional background.

In his work Ngoh (1998) asserts that by 1912 there were already four government elementary schools in Victoria (Limbe), Douala, Garoua and Yaounde. The government operated more of vocational schools so as to have man power for the various services and trade centers created by them. These included plantations, dairies, hospitals, police schools etc. We can say that this kind of education had the main aim of training Cameroonians to be productive and useful to society through practical work which falls in line with Froebel’s model of education.

According to Ngoh (1998), by 1916 the Germans had to leave after their defeat in the First World War. The British and French took over and partitioned the country into two. Britain attached her part of Cameroon to Nigeria and administered it as part of Nigeria. As such, educational policies related to creation of schools, the curriculum, finance and registration of teachers were being dictated from Nigeria. Britain showed a care free attitude towards Cameroon and relegated her educational duties to the Missionaries who bore the burden with no assistance from the British administration. The official language became English and German schools were closed down. The Indirect Rule system gave birth to Native Administrative structures which began school systems in 1922. The main objective at this time was mass education. They introduced systems of training native teachers who taught in the schools. They based the development of education in Cameroon on adaptation policy of decentralization in which government missions and companies like CDC (Cameroon, Development Cooperation), and Pamol operated primary schools under the overall control of the British colonial administration.

The French on their own part adopted their assimilationist policy of Education in Cameroon aimed at making Cameroonians French citizens. The educational policy was geared towards transforming Cameroonians into “Black Frenchmen”. Ngoh (1998) explains further that the French wanted to inculcate French culture into the Cameroonian society. They taught the natives the French language so that they will think and act like Frenchmen. To succeed they preached “egalite” (equality), “fraternite” (fraternity or brotherhood) and “liberte” (freedom). The French operated basically three kinds of schools; village schools, regional schools and higher elementary schools at the headquarters. The curriculum consisted of
hygiene, agriculture, animal husbandry, local crafts, reading and writing, arithmetic, singing and drawing. Only the best students were admitted to regional and higher elementary schools.

By 1925 as expressed in the MINEDUC (1984) statistics there were already 14 government village primary schools with 51 teachers of Cameroonian origin. The time table was divided into two sessions, the morning sessions beginning from 08:00 am to 10:15 am while the afternoon session lasted from 02:00 pm to 05:15 pm. Given the elaborate background we shall proceed to look at some of the major evolution of Education in Cameroon after independence bearing in mind that Cameroon has two educational systems; the English and French sub systems. Banfegha (2004) highlights in his article that harmonization between the two sub systems has not been fully implemented as a policy because of many problems associated with its conception.

Following the Millennium development goals, Cameroon was not left behind with regard to the issue of universal primary education (UPE) which is supposed to be achieved by the year 2015 (UNESCO, 2003/4). Following the national statistics presented by the then Ministry of education, Primary school enrolment documented for a decade showed progress in enrolment as years went by.

**Figure 1. Progress of primary education in Cameroon between 1974 and 1984**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Primary Schools</th>
<th>Total enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>2383</td>
<td>594914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2676</td>
<td>662519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>3078</td>
<td>798680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3366</td>
<td>878686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>4102</td>
<td>1077340</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of education statistics 1984

By 1984, primary education was then made compulsory through the age of 14 years. By 2002, the gross primary enrolment rate was 108%. Gross enrolments ratios indicated here are based on the number of pupils formally registered in primary school and do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. In 2001, 84.6% of children ages 10 to 14 years were attending primary schools. The number of schools and enrolment continued to increase in leaps and bounds as years passed by.

In 1990, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) which was held in Jomtien, Thailand, agreed upon six development goals. A decade later, the goals were endorsed again
in 2000 during the World education forum in Dakar by governments and bilateral and multinational donors. The second of the goals being “Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality” (UNESCO, 2000). This goal is also integrated into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for social and economic development. Since then, achieving universal primary education (UPE) became a top priority area of social and economic policy for developing countries in general and Cameroon in particular.

Both the public and private sectors in Cameroon since then, have been putting in a lot of time, effort, material and energy to provide primary education. For the past couple of years the primary education sector has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number primary schools, both public and private. A closer observation reveals that almost every village or neighbourhood has at least a primary school, no matter how poorly or well-equipped it might be. In her efforts to implement the Education for All goals (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of progressing towards Universal Primary Education (UPE), the government of Cameroon has established and continues to establish more public primary schools and equally abolished the paying of tuition fees since the year 2000 (UNESCO, 2008). This move has tremendously increased the number of pupils too gaining access to primary education.

Njong and Ntani (2000), explain in their work that primary school education has been free since 2000 in all public schools in Cameroon. They noted that however, families must pay for uniforms and book fees and sometimes have to pay PTA (Parents Teachers Association) levies. The government too being aware of her limitations to be present everywhere in the provision of primary education gives subventions and subsidies to other private primary operators in order to subsidize the fees and make them affordable for many parents to pay. The progress and increase in the number and kinds of different primary schools has also come with the issue of choice which is the point of focus in this study. Due to the presence of many primary schools, parents have to make a choice as to which primary school is good for their children bearing in mind the kind of future they perceive for their children.
1.2. Research Problem

A closer observation of primary schools in the North West region of Cameroon reveal that parents play a pivotal role in the choice of primary schools their children attend; be they public or private. In one locality for example, one may find many different primary schools. There may be two or more public schools in the same locality or two or more private primary schools. In such cases, parents are caught in the trap of making choice for their children’s primary schools. A child residing in location ‘A’ for example may be sent to attend another school that is found in location ‘B’, while another child residing in location ‘B’ may be sent to a school in location ‘A’. This observation aroused the interest in me and I started reflecting about what parents have at the back of their minds when preferring one primary school to another.

One may be tempted to think that parents with low incomes would make great use of the free education in public primary schools, but paradoxically some still prefer to suffer destitution in order to send their children to private schools that charge exorbitant school fees even at distant locations whereas there are free schools in the neighbourhood. In a typical school day, there are lots of movements across the town to and from various locations where primary schools are located. One may also be tempted to think that parents may choose the school closest to their homes so that their kids may not have to cover long distances to and from school, but experience shows that many children bypass nearby schools and attend schools in other distant locations. These observations are therefore indicative of the fact that parental choice of school is of vital importance in the education of the child and at the same time it is a complex issue than it appears to be.

With these observations, I became very curious and interested in finding out why parents will prefer one primary school to another. After going through the existing literature about school choice in general, I came to the realization that a lot has been written by different authors about parental choice of primary schools in the United States and Europe and the developed world in general. Some work too has been written about some developing countries in general and some African countries in particular, while enough has not been done in certain parts of Africa. From the existing literature, I also realized that there has been a tendency by western authors to generalize issues for all the African countries south of the Sahara. The impression one gathers from the existing literature is that the same factors about parental choice of schools from one African country can be generalized to the rest of the other countries. These generalizations tend to give information that in reality does not apply to
every country or community given the different and varying realities existing in different countries and different communities.

In Cameroon, I found out that some research work has already been done on about parental choice of secondary, high schools and other higher houses of learning in certain regions of the country but little research about the primary school level. It then occurred onto me that there is an existing gap in the existing literature on school choice as a whole and especially about the choice of primary schools. That motivated me to contribute something in that regard with a specific interest in Nkum and Kumbo subdivisions of Cameroon.

From personal experience too, I came to the conclusion that parental choice of primary schools is a much more complex issue than it appears in the already existing literature. It is therefore for this reason that I got the interest to investigate the rationale behind the choices of primary schools parents make for their kids in a particular region of Cameroon bearing in mind that the different regions of the country have peculiar reality that may tend to influence school choice differently.

1.3. Research Questions

As already indicated above the main objective is to explore the complexities that accompany the choice of primary schools from a parental perspective. The main question is how parents make choice about primary school for their kids. The following sub-questions were developed to help guide the research process:

- How do parental life experiences and desired future life for their kids influence the educational decisions they make for their children?
- How does perceived quality of education influence parental choice of primary schools?
- How does the family socio-economic status (defined by parental education level, rural versus urban residence and income) affect the primary school choice parents make for their kids?
- How do community norms influence the primary school choice that parents make for their kids?
1.4. Structure and Organization of the Thesis

This work is divided into five chapters. Chapter one carries the general introduction to the work. Chapter two presents the research methodology that is undertaken for this study. It highlights the research approach undertaken, the data collection method, research site, research participants, data analysis procedures, reliability and validity of data and the ethical considerations. It contains the details of the whole data collection procedures. Chapter three presents the literature review and the analytical framework. The first part of the chapter presents the review of existing literature while the second part presents the analytical framework, which is rational choice theory (RCT). Chapter four is concerned with the presentation and analysis of the finding. Chapter five presents the conclusion of the study of the study and some recommendations for future research.

Conclusion
This chapter has provided us with the background, the aim and focus of the study and the general outline of how the whole work looks like.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This first part of the chapter focuses on existing international literature by looking at choice in relation to Education for All goals (EFA), choice in relation to accessibility, provision, quality and finally choice in relation to parental ability to make wise and rational decisions. The second part of the chapter focuses on the analytical framework which forms the basis or the foundation of the analysis that are going to be carried out by the end of the research. The analytical framework that will be used to guide this research work is “Rational Choice Theory” (RCT).

2.1. Literature review

The literature review will be discussed under three headings that is: literature dealing with choice in relation to education for all (EFA) goals, literature dealing with choice in relation to accessibility/provision/quality and lastly, literature dealing with choice in relation to parents’ ability to make rational choices.

2.1.1. Choice and Education for All (EFA)

With the awareness of the power and potential of education, the international community committed itself at the World Conference on education for all held in Jomtien, (Thailand), in March 1990, to meet the basic learning needs of every individual. Equally in other major conferences since Jomtien, the nations of the world have repeatedly endorsed the central importance of basic education in all aspects of the development process and thus continuous commitment has been made to achieve this education for all goal come 2015.

The implementation of the Education for All has directly or indirectly affected parental choice of primary schools. Available international literature tends to give divergent views as to how this free for all education has impacted parental choice of primary schools. This free education for all came with the abolition of school fees in all public schools with the sole aim of giving the poor and unfortunate members of society to have access as well as the rich. This implementation of free education still has its own limitations which Kewong (2008) tries to highlight in page 10 his work about EFA and how it is actually benefiting Cameroonian in general with particular attention to those in the remote areas in the following words:
Education for all still leaves much to be desired. Granted, there are no fees in public schools; how many people have access to public schools? When I look and a good number of villages around Cameroon, not everyone has access to public schools. One finds only religious schools in certain remote areas. This means that the government still has a lot to do if the Education for All goals should be met come 2015 as previewed by the international community. In other areas too, schools have been created on paper with no buildings and no sufficient teachers. One may be tempted to ask ‘how free is the education when parents have to employ PTA teachers themselves, buy all the books and end up spending a lot of money? (Kewong, 2008, p.20)

Since 1990, all the countries of the world have been working towards providing access to education for all children (EFA). According to UNESCO (2002) Global Monitoring Report, from the date of implementation till 2002, primary school enrolment rates had increased tremendously with 50 countries achieving EFA enrolment goals. However, the same report also warns that “almost one-third of the world’s population live in countries where achieving the Education for All goals will remain a dream; unless a strong concerted effort is made” (UNESCO 2002). According to this same report by UNESCO, an estimate of 115 million children are still out of school dwelling in the poorest and most remote regions of certain countries. The report cited the case of sub-Saharan Africa, where 42 million children are out of school, as well as in Asia and the Pacific, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Increased enrolments as presented in this report also bring to mind the issues of parental choice which remains a complex issue. Increased enrolments also imply the increase in the number of schools and teachers and so does parents have to make choice from the wider available options at their disposal. If as the report states that some countries may not achieve this dream, it also shows that some parents have more choices to grapple with than the others. For some parents there is no choice at all if they do not have many schools available for them to make any choices.

According to some studies by Lewin (2007), the general impression one gets is that the introduction of Education for All (EFA) goal of free primary education has made a great impact on the choice of schools by parents. This study comes to a conclusion that with the introduction of the EFA, many parents especially in Sub Saharan Africa shifted their choice of school from private schools to public schools with the aim of benefiting from the free
education in public schools introduced as part of the Millennium Development goals of the United Nations.

On the other hand, Tooley and Dixon (2005), are of the opinion that low cost private primary schools especially the ones run by Missionaries and some humanitarian organizations already has a kind of impact on some parents in some areas that the introduction of free education in public schools does not make any significant influence on choice of schools by parents. They explain that the issue of free education in primary schools does not have much significance in the parental choice of schools.

Ahn and Silvers (2005), together with other groups of researchers have come up with data trying to show and proof that there has been an increase in the enrolment in government schools. It points to the fact that many parents are preferring public schools more for their kids than the case before the introduction of the EFA goals with the purpose of benefiting from free primary education. According to this school of thought parental choice of schools is being greatly influenced by EFA giving public schools an advantage of enrolment over private schools.

With the above highlighted schools of thought about EFA and parental choice of school, one can conclude that the issue of parental choice of primary schools in relation to free primary education is still a highly debated issue. There exists a gap in existing literature which lays the ground for further research. Further research needs to see how EFA has actually influenced enrolment into various primary schools and hence how it has also affected parental choice of school.

2.1.2. Choice and accessibility/provision/quality

Garner and Russell (2006), argue that there is sometimes a wider range of choice available to parents in the developing world than parents of the developed world. According to them, there are different curricular options as the syllabus is not always rigidly controlled by the government and there can also be different media of instruction. Low cost private education is extensively available and accessible not only to the wealthiest unlike the UK where only seven percent of the total population access the private educational sector.

Some other studies have also tried to investigate whether these new opportunities and choices for the poor through private unaided recognised and unrecognised schools in low income and slum areas are really accessible to the poorest in society. While some of the conclusions that they draw are conflicting, it is generally accepted that educational choice
(choosing between a government school and a private school) is not limited to only the wealthiest (Probe Team, 1999). Watkins (2000) in the Oxfam Education Report also assert amongst other things that:

... The notion that private schools are servicing the needs of a small minority of wealthy parents is misplaced ... a lower cost private sector has emerged to meet the demands of poor households” (Watkins, 2000). Studies point out that there is therefore a choice for many poor parents in urban and rural areas of India (Aggarwal, 2000) and that this is not limited to India is clearly illustrated by James Tooley in his book, “The Beautiful Tree” (Tooley, 2009), where the same opportunities are found in China, Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana.

Over the last two decades there has been a huge increase in the availability of private schools of different types in many urban and rural parts of the developing countries. For example India (J. Tooley, Y. Bao, P. Dixon, & J. Merrifield, 2011), Pakistan (Alderman, Orazem, & Paterno, 2001; Andrabi, Das, & Khwaja, 2008 ) various parts of Africa (Oketch, Mutisya, Ngware, & Ezeh, 2010), including Ghana (Tooley, Dixon, & Amuah, 2007). Indeed there is evidence that the majority of children in certain areas are attending private schools (J. Tooley, Y. Bao, P. Dixon, & J. Merrifield, 2011). These groups of researchers are of the opinion that both the rich and the poor have the opportunities to make choices depending on what they want for their kids.

Some other research indicates that these educational opportunities are indeed available, but not for the poorest Lewin (2007), for whom the fees charged by the low cost private schools make them out of reach to the poorest. Lewin’s research leads him to the conclusion “that the low cost and (often low quality) non-government providers are not likely to reach the ultra-poor (Lewin 2007, p.18). This is also the general conclusion of Watkins (2000), Härmä (2009), and that recorded in a UN report (UNDP, 2003).

Bussell (1997) also explains that much research has been carried out to identify the criteria parents use when selecting a school for their kids. He explains further by highlighting the fact that a lot of research has been done on school choice, but that little attention has been paid to the primary schools in the following words:

A review of the growing literature in this area demonstrates that these studies tend to concentrate on the move from primary to secondary school for example, Adler, and Raab, 1988, Echols, McPherson, and & Willms ( 1990),Coldron and Boulton
In comparison, there has been little research to date on the first point of choice (choice of primary school). The most comprehensive study of primary school choice was reported by the Plowden Committee 1967.

Bussell (1997), however acknowledges the fact that some research has been done on the primary schools although limited and explaining that the data above refer to the position in 1964 and reflects a situation when provision for choice was very much at the discretion of the local education authority. He explains that the same research findings may not apply to present day realities and situations.

More recent studies which have also reported on selection criteria in the choice of primary school include (Adler & Raab, 1988) investigation into the impact of parental choice; Morgan, Fraser, Dunn, and E. (1992) research into integrated schools in Northern Ireland, a study carried out by Petch (1986) and the work of Hughes, Wikeley, and Nash (1994). All these studies suggest that parents take the choice of primary school very seriously knowing the implication or impact it has on their children’s future.

Another study conducted by Willms (1997), apparently suggests that generally in most countries of the western world, choice of schools by parents is either a luxury or an option. He explains further that parents in the western world who do not chose schools for their kids are being assigned to various government schools by government officials ensuring that these children attend school. In that case therefore, the parents either chose schools or the government in a way imposes the choice on them and in that case it ceases to be choice.

On the other hand, Gorard (1999) argues that in different parts of the developing world, parents have to make an active decision to enrol their children into any school of their choice. He explains that these parents have to choose between either the government schools or private schools. In this context, the governments of the developing world do not act like those in the western world. They do not force parents to enrol their kids to any kind of schools. He argues further that the choice for parents in the developing world is limited when put side by side the parents of the developed world who have more alternatives.

While some researchers seem to believe that the subject of parental choice has been sufficiently studied, Gorard (1999) argues strongly that parental choice of schools still needs
to be explored given the fact that the conclusions from the developed world may not be applied to the developing world that have different realities from those of the developed world. He explains that it can be misleading to presume that the factors influencing parental choice of school in the developed world are likely to be the same for the developing world with different realities.

From the observation of Gorard (1999) above, a lot of literature has been written about the developed world while less literature has been written about the developing world to see the reasons parents themselves express for the choices they make towards their children’s education. Salla (2005) explains that there are many choices that people make essentially and these choices are based on the benefits that parents foresee they will have if they choose particular schools for their kids.

Commenting about the issue of parental choice in the world, Salla (2005) says that school choice programmes have been instituted in both developed countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, England and Wales, the Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden. He also notes that however some developing countries including India, Chile, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritania, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire and South Africa have also instituted some school choice programmes. He goes further to explain that school choice programmes can take many forms such as a choice between private and public schools, between public schools, charter schools, magnet schools, vouchers and home schooling. In his view the central issue about choice of school involves the ability of families to choose which schools to send their children to rather than relying on more traditional methods of allocating children to schools, usually based on neighbourhood schools available. (Salla, 2005)

Other researchers continue to argue that even the poorest do have access to the low cost private sector because of the very low fees. According to these researchers, approximately some families earn 4.2% to 5.5% of minimum wages in some cases (Tooley, Dixon, & Gomathi, 2007) and also explains the fact that many of these schools grant concessionary fees and scholarships for those in particular need, making them more accessible. The LEAPS project (Learning and Educational Achievement in Pakistan Schools) tends to support this latter view when writing about the situation in Pakistan. According to their findings, the average rural private school in Pakistan is affordable to even poor families even to those whose income is one dollar per day according to the poverty line. They explain that even with
these low incomes they can still afford to pay access those private primary schools that do charge fees. (Andrabi et al., 2008)

Other surveys carried out by Alderman et al. (2001), and Glewwe and Jacoby (1994) based on data collected about household and district factors have also tried to discover who is actually choosing to send their children to these low cost private schools. The conclusion they draw is that there is a connection between household income and access to private education, with greater proportions of lower income parents sending their children to the free government schools while the higher income earning parents send their kids to private schools that charge fees. On the other hand, other researchers like Oketch et al. (2010), suggest that for different reasons, the private schools are still being accessed by both the high income parents and low income parents. They argue that the rich and the poor alike are having access to private schools which implies that private schools as they argued are not the sole property of the rich.

The study by Alderman et al. (2001) also examines, the impact that various factors play on the choices parents make between private and government schools. The study points out that primary school choice of poor households are very sensitive to school fees, proximity and quality of education while those from rich households are mostly concerned with quality of education and tests scores since no matter the cost, they have the capability of paying the fee (Alderman et al., 2001).

Again some other literature is of the opinion that it is the poor who send their children to government schools. This opinion stands in contrast to the findings of the Probe Team (1999), which while carrying out a research in four villages of north Indian state reported that even among poorest families and disadvantaged communities, there are still a lot of poor parents who make a lot sacrifices to send some or all of their children to private schools where fees are paid, than the so called free government schools. These poor parents the Probe team explains are not satisfied with the quality of education in government schools doted all over the area. They see the quality of education in private schools to be superior to the one in in government schools and hence are ready to go an extra mile in order to send their kids to private schools.

Another group of researchers have tried to study the quality of education low-cost private schools to see if they actually deliver quality education given the fact that they are run by private individuals or organization maybe with a little budget than the one of public schools. Lewin (2007) explains that sometimes people tend to commit a fallacy by making a direct link between ‘low cost’ and ‘low quality’ education when referring to low-cost private
schools at the service of the poor and disadvantaged of society. This erroneous link between low-cost private schools and low quality education comes out in various studies that have been carried out. The Oxfam Education Report, for instance, makes it clear that private schools for the poor are of ‘inferior quality’, offering ‘a low-quality service’ (Watkins, 2000). Commenting about the same situation in East Africa he also concludes that the provision of low quality private education for the poor is not serving their needs.

Quality education is, however, not easily defined or measured given the various and varied elements that different researchers attach to quality education. According to (Sarangapani & Winch, 2010) discussion about the quality of education in these low cost schools must be taken together with the same discussions of the quality in the government schools for a better evaluation. (Tooley & Dixon, 2007) points out that the options available to the average parent are not between a well performing government school and a low fee, low quality, private school. For him, many studies that have looked at the situation show the opposite; that some low-cost private schools perform better than the government schools. The quality of the government education provision has come under scrutiny in many areas of the world. For example, the Probe Team visiting government schools in rural north India found out amongst other negative aspects about the government school which Kremer, Muralidharan, Chaudhury, Hammer, and Rogers (2004) highlight among other things in the following quote:

…in close to half of the schools visited, there was no teaching activity at all when the investigators arrived” (Probe Team, 1999). They are not alone in observing this phenomenon “25% of teachers were absent from school, and only about half were teaching, during unannounced visits to a nationally representative sample of government primary schools in India” (Kremer et al., 2004)

Equally, extensive studies in Pakistan also have proven that there is a large difference in academic achievement between pupils in private schools and government schools. Here, students’ performance has been measured by recording mathematics, English and Urdu scores, and have found that the private schools significantly outperform the government schools even when other factors are taken into account. The researchers explain that public-private schooling gap is very large because as they observed, children in private schools score significantly higher than those in government schools, even when they are from the same village or locality (Andrabi et al., 2008).

For some other researchers, abolition of fees has an impact on the quality of education and hence affects the choice of schools by parents. These researchers explain that in theory, fee
abolition reduces the private cost of education, which results in relatively greater freedom to choose a school to obtain a higher private rate of return to education. Nonetheless, they also observe that sometimes free education comes with its own vices. They explain that free education may also compromise the quality of education. They explain further that a decline in efficiency and quality of education has already been experienced in some countries since the abolition of school fee from public schools. With this decline in efficiency in public schools, some parents are force to reconsider their primary school choices for their kids. There are also some few available studies, try to evaluate the impacts of school quality on school choice between public and private primary schools in developing countries such as the studies conducted by Alderman et al. (2001); Carnoy, Patrick, and McEwan. (2001)

In different parts of the world studies have also shown that pupils do better in private schools (French & Kingdon, 2010 ; Tooley & Dixon, 2005) They explain further that even when other factors are accounted for pupils in private schools still do better than those from public schools. Some other researcher are asserting that this may not always be the case as found in studies in Tanzania (Lassibille & Tan, 2001). This implies that parents are moved towards choosing private schools where they will live to see their children succeed than choosing free education in public schools that will lead their kids nowhere. This means that studies from one area may not be generalized for the rest of the world for they may not be giving a true picture of what parental choice of schools actually entails. With all these divergent views and opinions by different schools of thought, there is still a lot more that need to be done with regard to school choice research.

2.1.3. Choice and Ability of Parents to Make Rational Choices

The ability of lower income or uneducated parents to make rational and wise decisions about the education of their children is another area of concern alongside quality that researchers have tried to delve into. Some researchers have found out and are anxious that unscrupulous school proprietors may take advantage of parents who are unable to assess adequately the quality of the education offered (Alderman et al., 2001). However the research that has looked into this has found that both literate and illiterate parents in Pakistan are well informed about their children’s ability, the relative quality of different schools and the attendance of the teachers Their studies suggest that both illiterate and literate parents know a lot about schools, their teachers, and their own children. Because of this knowledge, they make their choices of primary schools out of conviction (Andrabi et al., 2008 ).
They also found that the parents based their choices on this knowledge. The parents’ perception of their children’s relative ability can lead them to devote a lot of resources to the education of the child they believe will most benefit from the education (Andrabi et al., 2008). Some studies undertaken by (Goldring & Hausman, 1999) on lower class parents (or minority parents in the United States), show that these minority parents avoid making decisions or leaving the choice more to the child or the education authority. Their values at times appear to be less academically based and more to do with making sure that the children get the support the parents feel they need (Reay & Ball, 1997).

It is interesting to also note as Reay and Ball (1997) explains that some lower class parents reject the more academic or better, higher reputation schools as being “not for the likes of us” that is to say that they have their own qualities or standards they want a school to possess. (Reay & Ball, 1997). The negative educational experiences of some of the parents can also impact the decision making process. In fact, whatever the educational experiences of the parents are, these do influence the choices they make for their children in one way or another. (Walker & Clark, 2010) Parents who for example had bad influence in certain primary schools that led them astray may likely not want to send their kids to those kinds of schools where their kids may have the same kind of bad or negative experiences. On the other hand, parent who had some cherished experiences from certain primary schools may likely want to choose those same schools, with the hope that their kids will benefits too from those experiences.

Schneider’s study in 1998 has interesting insights on the rationale for less educated parents seeking the more structured education with its emphasis on passing certain tests that are gateways to education and employment, in their words “strong performance on tests controls access to good colleges and good jobs” (Schneider, Marschall, Teske, & Roch, 1998). By implication from Schneider’s thought, parents will likely choose those schools that do well in official tests and examinations.

Further research in the developed world also comes to the conclusion that though parents may have different values and make different choices, they end up choosing schools that do perform or conform to the values and qualities that they seek in life. (Schneider et al., 1998). As is the case with the developing world, there is concern that parents have limited access to the facts about the schools. They may not be aware of what kind of knowledge is needed for a job market for example. They may not be aware of the kind of education that can make or prepare their kids ready for the job market. Some studies have found that parental knowledge is indeed limited, yet these same parents are making decisions that fit with their
own values, ending up choosing schools that match these values which he explains amongst other things:

…on average these parents have very little accurate information about the objective conditions in the schools… that even in the absence of such objective knowledge there is evidence of a matching process in which children are enrolled in schools that are high on the dimensions of education that their parents think are important… (Schneider et al., 1998)

They then came to the conclusion that this happens because some parents are informed and aware of the qualities of the schools and make informed choices and this influences other parents to do same. Interestingly, Oketch et al. (2010), in their study in Kenya seem to suggest that the decisions of poor parents are not demand led decisions, but are supply driven decisions.

So looking at the available literature about parental choice of schools one realizes that parental school choice for their children remains a complex and debatable issue and various schools of thoughts come out with different factors which cannot be generalized to all the parents everywhere. It is for this reason that the issue of parental choice of school is still a complex and debatable issue that this work sets out to explore parental choice of primary schools in the North West region of Cameroon with reference to the two different social communities of Nkum and Kumbo subdivisions.

2.2. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework that is used in this study is Rational Choice Theory which posits that, out of a set of possible actions, a person will choose the one that benefits him or her most. According to Scott (2000), rational choice theory was pioneered or championed by sociologist Homans (1961) who laid the basic or set out a basic framework for exchange theory, which he grounded in assumptions drawn from other behavioural psychologists. Scott (2000), goes further to explain that although later writers rejected his formulation of exchange theory, Homans’ formulation still remained the bed rock of all subsequent discussions about rational choice.

Rational choice theory, also known as choice theory or rational action theory is a theory for understanding and often modelling social and economic as well as individual behaviour and actions. It is the main paradigm in the currently-dominant micro economics
school of thought. It is also central to modern political science, as well as other disciplines such as sociology and philosophy.

Elster (1989), explains that the essence of rational choice theory is that people usually do what they believe is likely to have the best overall outcome and benefits. According to Friedman (1953), ‘rationality’ as defined by the rational choice theory simply means that each individual acts as if balancing costs against benefits to arrive at action that maximizes personal advantage or benefits.

Scott (2000) also explains that during the 1960s and 1970s, other theorists like Blau (1964), Coleman (1973), Cook and Emerson (1978) extended and the framework that Homans had developed earlier and helping to develop and reformulate it into a more formal model of rational choice as mathematical models of rational action. In explaining rational choice theory, Coleman (1990), states that it is an attempt to explain all (conforming and deviant) social phenomena in terms of how self-interested individuals make choices under the influence of their preferences with a view of reaping some benefits.

Coleman (1990) explains further that the rational choice theory treats social exchange as similar to economic exchange where all parties try to maximize their advantage or gain, and to minimize their disadvantage or loss. The basic premises and assumptions of the rational choice theory are that:
- All human beings base their behaviour on rational calculations.
- All human beings act with rationality when making any choices.
- All human choices are aimed at the optimization of their pleasure or profit.

According to Coleman (1990), this concept of the rational choice theory also has applications in economics, marketing, criminology and international relations and even in politics. In short it is applicable in many facets of life situations. Rational choice theory is in other words is the view that people behave as they do because they believe that performing their chosen actions has more benefits than costs. That is, people make rational choices based on their goals, and those choices govern their behaviour. Some sociologists use rational choice theory to explain social change.

Scott (2000) expresses further the implications of rational choice theory as seen by other sociologists by explaining that in rational choice theories, individuals are seen as motivated by their wants or goals that express their preferences or what economists may term as scale of preference. He further explains that according to rational choice theorists, human beings act always within specific given constraints and on the basis of the information that they have about the conditions under which they are acting.
At its simplest, the relationship between preferences and constraints can be seen in the purely technical terms of the relationship of a means to an end. According to rational choice theory, it is not possible for individuals to achieve all of the various things that they want since man has unlimited wants and yet limited means. As such they must also make choices in relation to both their goals and the means for attaining these goals. In economics we are told that human beings have unlimited wants but have limited means. In order to utilize these limited resources; they make scale of preferences which entail rational choice.

Rational choice theorists maintain that individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculate that which will be best for them. Rational individuals choose the alternative that is likely to give them the greatest satisfaction and the greatest benefits. Heath (1976) Carling (1992) and Coleman (1973) all explain that before any decisions human beings always calculate the ones that will maximize their gains and minimize their cost.

According to the above sociologist therefore, social change occurs because individuals have made rational choices. Generally, in the philosophical context of the word, ‘rationality’ means a sane way of doing things in a clear and level headed manner. Friedman (1953), explains that ‘rationality’ in the context of the Rational Choice Theory has a narrower definition. He explains in page 15 of his work in the following words:

An individual acts as if balancing costs against benefits to arrive at action that maximizes personal advantage. In rational choice theory, all decisions, crazy or sane, are postulated as mimicking such a "rational" process. Thus rationality is seen as a property of patterns of choices, rather than of individual choices: there is nothing irrational in preferring fish to meat the first time, but there is something irrational in preferring fish to meat and preferring meat to fish, regularly.” (Friedman, 1953)

In order to grasp what the rational theory is all about certain assumptions made by rational choice theorists must be understood. Abell (2000) explains further that there are three assumptions made by rational choice theorists. These basic founding principles which the rational choice theorists make use of are as follows:

Individualism: According to rational choice theorists, individualism sets is when an individual ultimately take actions. Abell (2000) explains further, that individuals are seen as actors in the society and everywhere, behave and act always as rational beings, self-
calculating, self-interested and self-maximizing, these individual social actions are the ultimate source of larger social outcomes. This means that a combination of individuals make up the general social action in society. As each individual in making an effort to carry out rational actions, the general society too is also making the rational social actions.

Closely related to individualism is self-regarding interest. The assumption here by rational choice theory is that the actions of the individual are concerned entirely with his or her own personal welfare. Abell (2000) also noted that in as much as this is a key assumption in the rational choice approach, is not as essential to the approach as the assumption on optimality. He also noted that various types of group sentiments could exist, such as cooperation, unselfishness, charity, which initially may seem to be contrary to individual optimality. Rational choice theorists may argue that these sentiments can be incorporated into the rational choice model by observing that such sentiments may ultimately be aimed at pursuing some form of self-interest. For example, charity movements or efforts could ultimately be aimed at making an individual feel good or could be a means of raising one’s social esteem in the eyes of others.

Optimality is one of the assumptions of rational choice theorists. By optimality the rational choice theorists explain that, individuals choose their actions optimally, given their individual preferences as well as the opportunities or constraints with which the individual faced. This could be likened to the scale of preference in economics by which the individual first ranks his or her needs in order of preference or priority and starts treating them from the most important in the scale of preference. Abell (2000) explains further that optimality takes place when no other course of social action would be preferred by the individual over the course of action the individual has chosen. This does not mean that the course of action that the actor adopts is the best in terms of some objective, and outside judgment. Rational choice theory therefore assumes that individuals always strive to do their best out of the opportunities and circumstances at their disposal.

Furthermore, Abell (2000) further argues that structures and norms that dictate a single course of action are merely special cases of rational choice theory. In other words, the range of choices in other circumstances differs from choices in a strong structural circumstance, where there may be only one choice. Put differently, individuals will often find a way to exercise action optimally; hence the rational choice model may not necessarily show harmony, consensus, or equality in courses of action. Again, structures, as we know them,
may not be optimal from the viewpoint of an individual with few resources, however, the rational choice approach tries to explain how such situations are solved through rational choices.

As highlighted earlier by Abell (2000) rationality is the most predominant assumption of the rational choice theory. All individuals, according to this assumption act in ways that would benefit them more; every individual is most like to undertake courses of actions that they perceive to be the best possible option and one that would immensely be to their own advantage. According to rational choice theory therefore, no human action is undertaken by chance but by rationally calculated evaluations. This is because as they explain, all human actions are based on rationality that takes into consideration the benefits and losses that will accrue from the said action. Generally these are the general principles under which the rational choice theorists operate.

Max Weber, one of the founders of sociology, also argued that sociological explanations should be used to explain the rational actions that human beings carry out daily. Being one of the strong advocates and proponents of the rational choice theory, he defined sociology as that science that concerns itself with interpretation of human action with causal explanation of its course and consequences (Weber, 1922). He further explained that rationality is the driving social force especially in modern society. Sociology according to him is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects. Furthermore, action is social when it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby orientated in its course. (Weber, 1922).

For Weber as we have already seen above, rationality was a driving social force in society, especially modern society. Holton (1995) notes that Weber’s principal meaning of the rational choice theory centres on the calculability, intellectualization, and impersonal logic of goal-directed action. The instrumental approach to action takes values as given and focusses instead on the efficient choice of means to reach such goals (Holton, 1995, p. 43).

In such individual actions, the primary focus for Weber is on conscious action by the individual social actor attempting to achieve particular goals in some sort of logical manner. Weber regarded this as characteristic of modern society, and tended to regard rationality as an overpowering social force that increasingly affects all aspects of society.
Rational choice theory according for Weber is the view that people behave as they do because they believe that performing their chosen actions has more benefits than costs. He explains further by asserting that people make rational choices based on their goals, and those choices govern their behaviour. He uses the rational choice theory to explain social change which begins from individuals and then continues to groups or communities. Following his thoughts then, we can conclude that social change occurs because individuals have made individual rational choices.

While most sociologists working in the light of Weber’s thought some sociologist adopted a more complex view of meaning and interpretation and how social actors interact, the rational choice theory provides one possible way of explaining the orientation and conscious consideration of the actor in taking any social action. Rational choice theory provides an interpretation for individual action, it shows what the effects of this are, and it certainly focuses on goals and orientation. It therefore satisfies Weber’s conditions for social explanation. It can lead to an interpretive understanding of social action, a causal explanation of its course and effects can be expanded to include social interaction and interdependence among social actors (Abell, 2000)

Weber (1978) on his own part proposed four kinds of ways of interpreting social action or the way human beings go about the choices they make in life. These four kinds of interpretations of social actions are explained thus:

- The first type of interpretation for Weber is Purposive or Instrumental rationality. For Weber; this kind of interpretation is related to the expectations about the behaviour of other human beings or objects in the surrounding environment. These expectations serve as means for a particular actor to attain ends; ends which according to Weber are rationally pursued and well calculated. This type is also referred to as Practical rationality. This type concerns individuals who consider ends, and on some systematic basis decide what is the best means or course of action to pursue in order to achieve these ends. This form of rationality can be considered to be pragmatic in that it provides individuals with a way of pursuing practical ends.

- The second type is Value or Belief-oriented interpretation. For Weber, every action is undertaken for what one might call reasons intrinsic to the actor or the author of the action. He explains further that these reason that justify every human action could be either: ethical, aesthetic, religious or other motives. This kind of rationality is also referred to as Substantive rationality. Weber explains further that individuals might consider a range of possible values or actions, and attempting to make them consistent.
He explains that this kind is problematic in modern society in that rationalization of social life makes it difficult for people to pursue particular values. He explains for example that the economic pressure from society and dominance of bureaucratic organizations may tend make pursuit of family or religious values difficult in modern society.

- The third type which he calls ‘Affectual’, is determined by an actor's specific affect, feeling or emotion. According to him, this kind of interpretation of social action is the borderline of what he considers "meaningfully oriented". He explains further that various kinds of reasons above are independent of whether they will lead to success or not. He explains that this kind of interpretation involves abstract concepts which form an essential part of logical reasoning or theoretical models. These attempt to describe, explain, or understand the world in terms of models that are constructed from observation and reasoning. Here actions of an individual are determined by the emotional state of the individual at the particular point in time.

- The fourth type of interpretation for Weber is Traditional or Conventional, determined by ingrained habituation or habits that have been developed and practiced for a long time that turn to influence human action. According to Ritzer (2005), this type leads to "universally applied rules, laws and regulations that characterize formal rationality in the West ... particularly in the economic, legal, and scientific institutions, as well as in the bureaucratic form of domination" (Ritzer, 2005). Rational-legal forms of authority such as the contemporary legal and judicial systems are examples of formal rationality.

Weber (1978) emphasizes that it is very unusual to find only one of these orientations in a particular human action. He explains that a particular action may be influenced or inspired by a combination of two or more of the above fourfold types of orientation. According to him the first two are more significant than the last two others. Some other sociologists are even of the opinion that the third and fourth are subtypes of the first two types of orientation. Max Weber therefore remains one of the strong proponents of rational choice theory. According to him every human action is taken with some rational thinking before the action is carried out. Looking critically at Weber’s postulations, we can affirm that only the first two ways of interpreting social action, fall in line with the general principles of rational choice theory. Only the first two has to do with what in general could be termed rationality. The third and the fourth type of interpreting social action are not necessarily rational as they
are driven by emotions or social pressure. Rational choice theory has continued to develop in different aspects as the time passes. Rational choice theorist all agree on the basic principles but sometimes their deeper interpretations tend to differ.

For the purpose of this research work, we shall use the general principles of rational choice theory (- All human beings base their behaviour on rational calculations. - All human beings act with rationality when making any choices. - All human choices are aimed at the optimization of their pleasure or profit) to analyse the data instead of basing analysis on the private interpretations of individual sociologists. We shall analyse the data with the general principles that rational human actions are guided by costs and benefits, and the fact that human beings reason also in terms of means and ends before carrying out any actions. In general we shall analyse the data with the assumption that human actions are rational and well calculated before being carried out as highlighted above.
CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology for this particular study on parental choice of primary schools in the North West region of Cameroon. It accounts for the ontological and epistemological position of the study as well as research design and methods used to collection of data from the research site. It also presents the level and unit of comparison presented in the study. The chapter ends with presentation of some ethical considerations applied in the research.

2.1. Research Approach

A research approach or strategy simply refers to an orientation which a researcher uses in order to carry out his or her study. Different research strategies are employed depending on the purpose of a particular study or research. According to Bryman (2012) there are two main research strategies that are employed in social research. These two dominant research strategies are; qualitative and quantitative approach. The nature of the issues that are under investigation, directs the researcher on which type of research approach that is to be employed.

Blanche, Durrheim, and Painter (2006) explains the two types of research approach (qualitative and quantitative) as follows:

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative research marks a series of differences in approach to research. At the most surface level, quantitative and qualitative researchers base their conclusions on different kinds of information and employ different techniques of data analysis (Blanche et al., 2006).

In his book on Social Science Research, Bryman (2012) explains that quantitative research strategy pays attention on the collection of numerical data. He explains further that quantitative research approach uses the deductive method which is similar to the approach employed by natural sciences. He explains further that quantitative research concerns itself with objectivism which “implies that social phenomena confronts us as external facts that are beyond our reach of influence” (Bryman, 2012). For Charles (1998), if the research approach bases itself on numerical data or scores and measures then it is quantitative research approach.
On the other hand Bryman (2012) explains that quantitative research is a research approach ‘that usually emphasizes words rather than quantifications in the collection and analysis of data’. This research strategy according to him employs the inductive approach of the relationship between theory and research which leads to the creation of theories. (Bryman, 2012, p.16) The qualitative researcher for him uses the interpretivist approach which ‘requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action’. For Charles (1998), qualitative research strategy relies on verbal data that is mostly based on descriptions and stories as narrated by the interviewees. According to Patton (2000) qualitative researchers generate rich verbal and textual data to represent the social environment by using observations that yield detailed, thick description inquiry in depth; interviews that capture direct quotations about people’s personal perspectives and experiences; case studies; careful document review, etc. (Patton, 2000)

Another research approach strategy is the mixed-method. This is another method that is employed by researchers in social science research. Through the use of this method, both the quantitative and qualitative research strategies are used to conduct a single research project. According to Bryman (2012) the term mixed method is nowadays used to refer to research that combines methods associated with both quantitative and qualitative research. I am going to use the qualitative research method in this work. Nevertheless, some data in the form of statistics will appear in the work.

2.2. Why Qualitative Research Approach?

The purpose of this study as already indicated in the introduction is to make an analysis of parental choice of primary schools in the North West region of Cameroon with special attention to Kumbo and Nkum subdivisions. Since we are dealing with school choice from a parental point of view, the qualitative research method is to be employed here. As the emphasis is to investigate the perspective of the parents and hear their reasons and subjective views and detailed explanations.

In an attempt to explain clearly and simply the purpose of qualitative approach in social science research, Patton (2000) in page 13 of his book explains:

Some questions lend themselves to numerical answers; some don’t. If you want to know how much people weigh, use scale. If you want to know if they are obese, measure body fat in relation to height and weight and compare the results to
population norms. If you want to know what their weight means to them, how it affects them, how they think about it and what they do about it, you need to ask them questions, find out about their experiences, and hear their stories. (Patton, 2000)

Thus, the qualitative approach is chosen to uncover the subjective understanding and experiences of the parents in their choice of primary schools for their kids. According to Bryman (2012), qualitative research entails an inductive exploratory approach; which requires social scientists to understand the subject meanings held by actors and hence to interpret their actions and social world from their points of view (interpretivist epistemology); and embodies a constructivist view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individual’s creation. For Yin (2009), a qualitative approach is explained as an action plan for getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and there some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions. Between ‘here’ and ‘there’ may be found a number of major steps, including the collection and analyses of relevant data.

2.3. Research Design

According to (Bryman, 2012), “a research design provides a frame work for the collection and analysis of data” It is the overall plan for connecting the conceptual research problems to the empirical research to be carried out. In other words, a research design articulates what data is required for a particular research project, what methods are going to be used to collect and analyse this data in relation to one’s study, and how all of this is going to answer the research question that are set for one’s study. According to Yin (2003) there are five important components of a research design: Study questions, its propositions, its unit or units of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings.

Gleaning from the ideas above, a research design requires both data and methods, and the way in which these will be configured in the research project; need to be the most effective in producing the answers to the research questions taking into account practical and other constraints of the study. A detailed outline of how an investigation will take place must be presented. A research design will typically include how data is to be collected, what
instruments will be employed, how the instruments will be used and the intended means for analysing data collected and coming out with the results.

2.4. Data collection Method

Bryman (2012), in his work explains what a data collection method should be in the following words:

To many people, data collection represents the key point of any research project, and it is probably not surprising therefore that this book probably gives more words and pages to this stage in the research process than any other. Some of the methods of data collection covered in this book, such as interviewing and questionnaires, are probably more familiar to many readers than some of the others. Some methods entail a rather structured approach to data collection—that is, the researcher establishes in advance the broad contours of what he or she needs to find out about and designs research instruments to implement what needs to be known implement what needs to be known (Bryman, 2012, p.12)

In this research project, semi-structured interviews have guided the collection of relevant data from the field. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) explain that an interview is a conversation initiated by the interviewer for a specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information and focus by him on content specified by the research objectives of specific description. An interview can be seen as a special type of conversational interchange, where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions which has to be planed and prepared for like other research activities. He explains further that an interview guide should be prepared with the research questions in mind, knowing that at the end the interviews should be able to give relevant answers to the research questions.

Bryman (2012) states that, “interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research” (Bryman, 2012, p.381). In order to make the interviews easier, at the initial level, an interview guide was prepared to guide and facilitate the interviews. This interview guide was prepared taking into consideration the research questions. Bryman (2012), defines an interview guide as:

...a brief list of memory prompts of areas to be covered that is often employed in unstructured interviewing or to somewhat more structured list of issues to be
addressed or questions to be asked in semi-structured interviewing. What is crucial is that the questions allows interviewer to glean the ways in which research participants view their social world and that there is flexibility in the conduct of the interviews… (Bryman 2012, p.473)

Cohen et al. (2011) also describes an interview guide as a specific outline of topics and issues to be covered in a research work, which the interviewer decides the sequence and the order the questions take in the course of the interview. He explains further that the research can ask the questions in the guide in the order he wants but making sure that all the interviewees should have the same questions to answer no matter the order in which the researcher decides to ask the question.

A semi-structured interview was employed this research project. Bryman (2012) explains what a semi-structured interview is in the following words:

This is a term that covers a wide range of instances. It typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference from that typically found in a structured interview schedule. Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies (Bryman, 2012, p.212)

Bryman (2012) explains further that in carrying out a semi structured interview, a researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered called the interview guide but that the interviewee can chose the way and order to answer them. He explained further these questions may not necessary follow the same order as put in the guide. In such an interview, questions that are not even included in the guide may be asked in order to get more detailed and clearer explanations of events from the interviewee.

A multi-question guide was prepared. While conducting the interviews, there were spontaneous leading and prompting questions that made the interviewees to be more detailed about the information they were ready to give. To facilitate the data collection process, an interview guide with a voice recorder was used as the main apparatus to record all the interviews. As a backup in case there was a problem with the recorder, the researcher also used the voice recording option in the mobile phone just to be double sure that there was not
going to be any disappointment. Immediately after each day of interview, the data collected from the interviews was then transferred to the laptop in order to create more space in the recorder for next interview material. While making use of the voice recorder, some notes were being taken, noting down some of the salient points that were mentioned by the participants.

2.4.1. Research Site

The research site for this investigation is Nkum and Kumbo subdivisions of the North West region of Cameroon. Kumbo Subdivision is an urban area and capital of Bui division while Nkum subdivision is a rural area. The administration division of Cameroon is as follows: The country is divided into 10 regions (administered by governors), and these regions are further divided into Divisions (administered by Divisional officers), the Divisions are divided into Subdivisions (administered by subdivision officers). The ministry of Basic Education is also administered thus: Ministry of basic education (headed by the minister) then we have regional delegation of basic education, (headed by regional delegates) and then sub divisional delegations (headed by sub divisional delegates). The three maps below are going to give the exact location of the research site.
Figure 2. Map of Cameroon indicating the ten regions

Source: Cameroon Atlas 2013
Figure 3 Map North West Region indicating the seven divisions

Source: Cameroon Atlas 2013

Figure 4. Map of Bui division in the North West Region indicating the six subdivisions

Source: Cameroon Atlas 2013
Figure 5: Primary schools in Kumbo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Primary school</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government (Public)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo Arabic (Islamic)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Private</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>78</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Divisional delegation of basic education for Bui Division (2013)

Figure 6: Primary schools in Nkum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Primary school</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government (Public)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo Arabic (Islamic)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Private</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>78</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Divisional delegation of basic education for Bui Division (2013)

Figure 7. Total number of primary schools in Kumbo and Nkum combined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Primary school</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government (Public)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo Arabic (Islamic)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Private</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>156</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Divisional delegation of basic education for Bui Division (2013)

Although the total number of schools is the same, for Kumbo and Nkum, the population of pupils in Kumbo is much more than the total number of pupils in Nkum Subdivision given their population differences.
2.4.2. Research Participants

The topic of this research work is an analysis of parental choice of primary schools in the North West region of Cameroon. The interviews were conducted in Kumbo and Nkum subdivisions. The participants were specifically parents because when it comes to issues of the primary schools in the localities under study, only parents take decisions. The kids have little or nothing to contribute with regard to which schools they want to attend. It is basically an affair of the parents. The purpose was to get from the world view of the parents, the factors that actually influence their choice of primary schools for their kids. It therefore follows logically that the participants are the parents.

Initially, I set out to interview 20 households from Kumbo Subdivision and 20 households from Nkum subdivision, but due to some unforeseen contingencies, I ended up interviewing 15 households from Kumbo and 15 households from Nkum subdivision making a total of 30 households. I recruited my participants by visiting various households beforehand and explaining to them the purpose of my research. After explaining the purpose of the research, I asked them the convenient time, they thought, I could interview them. I had to allow them give me a time which is convenient for them. Once they suggested the time, I made sure that I respected it while at the same time making sure that two households should not give me a rendezvous at the same time.

After discussing with each household, I asked them if they knew other parents around who had kids in the primary school and they help me to get to other households. After the initial contacts, I then had to respect the various times for appointment. The field work was carried on between the 20th of September and the 29th of October 2013. After the necessary contacts with the household concerned, there was an assurance from almost the household that the interviews could only be possible and best in the evenings. The reason the parents interviewed gave was that during the days of the week they are very busy with their farm work and other occupations. Most of them then expressed the wish to participate in the evenings as from 07:00 pm (19:00) local time and I had to respect their wish.

Most of the interviews too place between 07 pm and 10 pm local time. Each of the interviews lasted approximately an hour. Some of the interviews took more than an hour while some lasted for less than an hour. A few of the households preferred Sundays after their Church services since in the two communities, Sundays are holy days and not meant for any
manual work or hard work. So this made me to be a bit flexible with my schedule taking a longer time than I had previewed.

Some of the participants responded to the interview questions in English language, while others responded in “Pidgin English” but a majority responded in “Lammso” the local language that is spoken in both communities which happens to be the same local language I speak, write and understand perfectly well.

2.5. Data Analysis Procedures

According to Bryman (2012), data that is gathered from qualitative interviews is usually in the form of a large amount of unstructured textual materials. He explains further that such data at this stage is not straightforward and so not yet suitable for any analysis. According to him, there usually are no clear-cut rules or laws about how qualitative data should be analysed although he makes it very clearly that the best process in approaching qualitative data analysis is by what is termed ‘coding’ By coding he explains that it is a situation, whereby the raw data from the interview is broken down into component parts with similar themes. These parts are then given names and categories are generated in the process.

After the collection of the data from the field, then came the data analysis procedures. The initial stage of data analysis was listening to the audio tapes from the recorder and reading the notes I took along and transcribing them and putting them into written form. Bryman (2012) explains this in the following words:

Because qualitative data deriving from interviews or participant observation typically take the form of a large corpus of unstructured textual material, they are not straightforward to analyse. Moreover, unlike quantitative data analysis, clear-cut rules about how qualitative data analysis should be carried out have not been developed (Bryman, 2007, p.538)

As earlier indicated, the data was collected in three languages (English, Pidgin English and Lammso). Then came the arduous task of transcribing the data and translating it at the same time from “Pidgin” English and Lammso into English. The audio tapes were carefully listened to for several times and then combining it with the notes taken alongside the interviews into written form. At this stage of transcription, everything said by the participants was put down in the form as a sort of raw data from which the useful and necessary material was still to be sorted.
At the second level the data from the interviews already transcribed into written form was read over and over sorting similar material and coding it under the various themes thereby reducing the bulk of the raw data at the beginning. The various themes were then generated and the relevant data used to fit into the relevant themes that served as answers to the four research questions that guided the study. The analysis of the finding was then done using the general principles of rational choice theory as the bases of analysis.

2.6. Reliability and Validity of Data

Bryman, (2012) identifies three widely used criteria that researchers use in evaluating social science research viz: reliability, replication and validity. According to him, some people argue that the three criteria are used mostly in quantitative research but that qualitative research also uses these criteria (reliability, replication, validity) with little alteration of their meanings. Bryman (2012) explains validity thus: “The issue of reliability and measurement validity are primarily matters relating to the quality of the measures that are employed to tap the concepts in which the researcher is interested, rather than matters to do with a research design”. He explains further that reliability looks at the results of a research work in relation to the fact that if the same research is repeated, the same results can be gotten again.

In relation to replicability Bryman 2012 states that:

Replicability is likely to be present in most cross-sectional research to the degree that the researcher spells out procedures for: selecting respondents; designing measures of concepts; administering research instruments (Such as structured interview or self-completion questionnaire); and analyzing data (Bryman, 2012)

Validity is another important criterion of research. According to Bryman, (2012) it is concerned with the ‘integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research’ (Bryman, 2012, p.60) he explains that there are two aspects of validity in qualitative research: ‘internal validity’ which looks at whether there is a good match between researchers’ observations and the theoretical ideas they develop; ‘External validity’ is concerned with the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings (Bryman, 2012, p.60)

Patton (2002) on his part explains in the following words:

There is no formula for determining significance. No ways exist of perfectly replicating the researcher’s analytical thought processes. No straightforward tests
can be applied for reliability and validity. In short, no absolute rules exist except perhaps this: Do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002, p.433).

The selection method of research participants from both Nkum and Kumbo already constitutes a limitation to the external validity of this study and influences the extent to which the findings can be generalized beyond the specific research context (Bryman 2012). That is, we cannot generalize the findings to another areas or country that do not share the same realities as Kumbo and Nkum. It therefore indicates that the factors that influence parents in a particular community depends too on the nature of that community and a wrong impression may be gotten if the factors are being generalized from one community to the other.

2.7. Ethical Consideration

According to Cohen, Manion, and Keith (2000), dealing with human beings is a very challenging issue for researchers in general. Researchers, he explains are usually in search of the truth, but the quest of these truths should not violet the rights of the participants the researcher is dealing with. In dealing with human beings therefore, Bryman (2012), also explains that ethical issues should not be ignored since they relate directly to the integrity of a piece of research and of the disciplines that are involved in the research.

In relation to ethical principles of conducting social research Diener and Crandall (1978) propose four aspects that any researcher must take into consideration to avoid before venturing into interviews. These for aspects that are to be evaded by all researchers are: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. Being conscious of these ethical issues highlighted above, I was morally bound to respect the rights and privacy of my participants. Generally, conducting interviews is a matter of mutual trust and as Lewin (1990) argues: “it would be a short-sighted researcher that did not exercise discretion sensitively” (Lewin, 1990 p. 141).

Before leaving for my fieldwork, I had to get the reference letter from the University of Oslo indicating that my research was for purely academic purposes that I had to present wherever necessary. I also got permission from Norwegian Social Science Data Protection Services assuring them that all personal data gotten during the interviews was to remain anonymous. While on the field it was coincidentally, the period of parliamentary and
municipal elections in Cameroon and many of my participants at first site took me for a political figure. Given the kind of dirty politics that had been taking in the two communities in the previous years, people became very sceptical about my study out of fear of the unknown.

Because of these negative political experiences which are definitely negative, many people would rather prefer to turn down any interviews for fear that politicians may one day use the same information against them. So I had to take a lot of time and energy to explain to my participants the purpose of my research while showing the reference letter especially to those who wanted to be double sure. I had to guarantee their confidentiality while assuring them that their names were never going to appear anywhere in the work and that in case need be, I would rather put pseudo-names. I had to convince them that my work had nothing to do with politics at all. But after explaining everything to them, they all understood and were willing to cooperate with me in the data collection process.

**Conclusion**

The various aspects of methodology that are employed in this research work have just been presented with the various facets therein. These aspects presented facilitated the data collection procedures and the final study is thanks to the use of these methodological aspects.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction
This chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of findings from the fieldwork. The findings are presented in line with the four research questions that guided the data collection process. The analyses are done alongside the presentation of findings under the research questions. The analyses are done using the general principles of rational choice theory which in summary states that every rational human action is guided by the evaluation of costs and benefits from that particular action. It also takes into account the fact that human rational action are taken after a deep reflection about ends and means of achieving those ends before the actions are being undertaken.

4.1. How Parental Life Experiences and Desired Future Life for their Kids Influence the Educational Decisions they make for their Children

Parents while growing up had their own experiences either as primary school pupils (which are either be positive and some negative), while others who did not have the chance of acquiring formal education also have their own stories to tell that either left a positive or negative impact on them. Parents who had good and memorable experiences may wish to see their own kids have such moments or experiences. Those parents who had certain negative experiences will certainly not want to see their kids go through the same experiences. These life experiences tend to influence parents greatly on the kind of education they want their kids to acquire which then dictates the kind of primary schools they should send their kids to. Both the parents of Nkum and Kumbo shared their own experiences which were to analyse below.

4.1.1. Parental Life Experiences and Choice

During the data collection process, there was an encounter with a generation of parents who were either deprived of the opportunity of attending a primary school at all, or of dropping out without completion, and those who did not have the chance to further their education to a higher level. A majority of these parents interviewed made it very clear that their personal life experiences as kid play a great role in the way they perceive education in general, hence their choice of primary schools for their kids. Generally, most of the participants expressed some kind of regret in their educational life experiences as if to say that...
if they were given another chance, they would choose better schools and make the most out of education than they did during their own time. According to many of them, the present day kids have a lot of choices and opportunities which they never had in their own days. Some of them lamented over the fact that some of the kids are not even making use of the great opportunities they have at hand.

In Nkum subdivision, the first participant in the first household explained that he did not have the chance of attending any school at all as his parents refused to send him to school. He narrated his experience as a kid thus:

I remember how I used to work with my parents on a daily basis in the farms. There was no school in our own village but the kids needed to trek to another nearby village with a Catholic school in order to attend the primary school. Other kids left from my village to attend school but my own father thought that was a waste of resources. He felt that sending us to school was going to deprive him of the labour force to work in his farms. While the other kids were busy learning in school, were busy in my father’s coffee farms harvesting coffee or other crop. During market days of the week, we transported the farm produce to the market for my father to sell. Now when I look at my age mates who had the opportunity, I feel that I should have been living a better life than I do now had it been I went to school. For this reason, my wife and I do everything possible to give our kids the best education we can so that they will not have the same sad experiences we had. We therefore send our kids to the best primary school we have around (Nkum 23-09-2013).

Looking at the experience above, we can say that members of this household while choosing a school for their kids, are exercising their rationality. In exercising this rationality, they examine their own experiences and evaluate how these experiences helped them to be what they are today or failed to become based on experiences as kids. With these experiences, they are able to calculate the benefits that will accrue from their choice of certain primary schools in the lives of their kids. From the lenses of the members of this household, it is evident that they wish their kids to be successful in life and so their choice of primary schools depend a lot on their personal experiences
Another participant in expressing his regret of being deprived of the opportunity to attend and pursue primary education shared his own experience emotionally in the following words:

*My father was a trader and used to carry goods to go and sell in Nigeria and after selling them, he buys other goods from Nigeria to bring back to Cameroon. He involved us in the business right from our tender ages. We carried transported tobacco to Nigeria on our heads while our lone donkey carried other heavier items. We spent nights on the road and you can imagine the harsh climate of the northern part of Nigeria. It was a bitter experience for us the boys as my sisters were the ones who went to school. I was longing for the opportunity to study too but my father did not give me the chance. Now my sisters are better off than me because of the education they received. I feel ashamed when I compare myself with them. I have therefore taken that as a challenge to send my kids to the best possible schools even if it means toiling day and night. I do not want them to spend the lives regretting like me.* (28-08-2013)

According to this participant therefore, in making choice for his kids, he recalls his sad experiences as a kid which then influences him in the kind of education and school he chooses for his kids. He rationally chooses the primary school which he thinks will give his children the best so that they become successful adults in the future.

In expressing how his experiences as a kid shapes the primary school choices he makes for his kids, another participant explained that honestly, his parents were not viable to send all of them to school in the following words:

*We are ten kids in number from my parents. My parents were willing to educate us but their poor financial background could not permit them to send all of us to school. They decided who to go to school and who to help them in their farms. I happened to have been amongst the unfortunate ones who had to toil in the farms and help my parents to raise school fees for the others and money for other family provisions. My brothers and sisters who happened to have gone to school are better off than me. I know I have a lot of farm products because of what I learnt while working with my parents. I can support my own family but I strain a lot when I compare with my other brothers and sisters. Some have good jobs and some are happily married and living in the cities. I feel if I had education, I*
should have been better off than I am. My wife and I are doing our best to give our kids good education. (Nkum, 23-09-2013)

The parents of Kumbo subdivision also shared their own lessons from their own experiences as kids which turn to play a part in the kinds of choices they make for their children. In one of the households, one the parents shared her own experience as kid expressing that she was not deprived of the opportunity to study but that she rather did not make use of the opportunity that she had at her disposal. She narrated her experience in the following words:

My parents though not very rich were ready and able to send me to school. I actually started schooling but due to bad company and peer influence, I ended up as a dropout due to an early pregnancy from my present husband. In our days we went to the primary school as matured people already. Through my friends, I learnt about sexual intercourse and was so excited to practice it. I tried it for several times and unfortunately in one of those moments I got pregnant. I did not even know I was pregnant until my mum noticed some changes in me and insisted that I should tell her what happened. I had to leave school and became the laughing stock of the whole village! My parents were so ashamed of me. My age mates continued their education while I raised my baby. Now they are better off in life. I do not want my daughters to have such an experience. So my experiences continue to influence my choice with regard to the kind of schools my children attend. I make sure I choose a school that will give my kids the best education. (Kumbo, 01-10-2013).

One of the parents also lamented the fact that he did not take education seriously as a kid and that it has affected him very negatively. And so do not wish that his kids go through the same kind of ordeal in the following words he narrated:

As a kid, the image I had of a school was a place where kids are beaten mercilessly by their teachers. I had very bitter experiences with teachers beating me up with a cane. Early in the cold mornings the teachers had us beaten and I still have a scar on my back from one of such beatings from my class five teacher. I was not motivated at all to like school given the kind of treatment I got from my primary school teachers. There are many days I actually left our house and finally ended somewhere else for fear of being beaten. This affected me seriously in my
academic performance. If not because my parents forced me daily to go to school, I should have been a drop out in class five. Finally since I did not perform so well, I did not like proceeding to a secondary school. I ended up learning carpentry at a tender age. Now when I compare myself with my mates I regret because many of them have better paid jobs than I do. These experiences continue to influence me in choice making about the primary schools my kid attend. (Kumbo, 02-10-2013)

Still, another parent even lamented that the kind of character she developed from her primary school helped to ruin her life. According to her she should have been a better person if she attended another primary school rather than the one she attended. She expressed her experiences thus:

If I had the chance of attending a religious primary school, I should not have made some of the errors I made. In religious schools the kids are taught morals, discipline and religious matters that shape the lives of the kids. I happened to have been in a public school that did not help me much in terms of my character. My primary school was full of bullies. We fought at any given opportunity something that was unheard of in catholic schools. We learnt to insult each other, show disrespect to elders. I regret some of the things I did and said through the influence of peers. That is why I send all my kids to the Catholic primary school so that they should learn good manners and not spend the life lamenting like sometimes I do (Nkum, 28-09-2013).

One parent in one of the households also explained that during their own primary school days, the school he attended had only three classrooms which were supposed to host a class seven school. He explained further that formerly in the English speaking section of Cameroon, the primary school used to last for seven years. Due to lack of infrastructure, classes one and two were put in the same classroom. Classes three and four were hosted in another single classroom, while classes five and six were in a single classroom and then class seven was hosted in one parent’s house beside the school campus. He lamented what they had to go through. He explained that there were only three teachers and one headmaster. Amongst the four teachers only two were trained teachers while the other two were employed by the parents’ teachers association. He explained that learning was really difficult and ended up concluding “If I passed through the primary school, it is thanks to God. Before choosing a
school for my kids, I make sure that they do not suffer the way my generation did” (Kumbo, 05-10-2013)

Notwithstanding the negative experiences that were gathered that ended up with regrets, there were also some participants who had some wonderful experiences that are positive in certain schools that continue to influence their choice of primary schools for their children. One of the participants mentioned that his kids still attend the same primary school he passed through since it played an important part in his life. In his own words:

_I happened to have passed through the St Theresa’s catholic primary school that was run by the Mill Hill missionaries. Besides the academic subjects like arithmetic, English and others, there was great insistence on crafts and handwork. That helped me a lot and when I eventually found myself in the technical secondary school, I found it easy to adapt since I learnt a lot from my primary school teachers. I am now an architect and I earn a lot of money thanks to the foundation I had in the primary school. Though the school may not still be the same, but I believe that if my kids pass also pass through it they will also become successful parents like I am today. I am greatly influenced to send all of them there with that hope that they become as successful in life as I am (Kumbo, 05-10-2013)_

Gleaning from all the parental experiences above, we can say that they all are exercising rationality in making educational decisions for their kids. From their own experiences, they just imagine that if they make certain choices with regard to the kind of education and kind of primary school, their kids may become a success story. Those experiences in a way help them in making educational decisions for their kid. They evaluate the experiences and then calculate their means to send their children to those primary schools which they think can equip their children well for better and successful lives in future.

These parents do not just send their kids to any school by chance. They do so bearing in mind their means and the fruits that will be ripped from the choices they make. They take into consideration, ends they want their kids to attain and their means of choosing particular primary schools and means of achieving those ends. As to whether these kids actually achieve the kind of future life their parents wants for them
through their choices is another story that needs to be researched into so as to determine if parental choices are actually the right choices.

4.1.2. Desired Future Life for Kids and Choice

In order to express the kind of desired future they expect for their kids, the parents of both Kumbo and Nkum subdivisions all stressed the importance of education in the life of any human being. Some of them expressed the fact that if they are what they are today, it is thanks to the education they received. Many mentioned the fact that if they are living comfortable lives today, it is thanks to the fact that they took their education seriously right from the primary school level. The parents from both Nkum and Kumbo in one way or the other expressed the importance of education. Besides expressing the importance and the value of education, the participants also revealed what they perceive as an emergent future for their kids which will depend on the kind of education they receive.

One of the parents after sharing his personal experience and in an attempt to link education and the future used following expression: “A head that is not ready to carry books now should be ready to carry stones in the future” (Kumbo, 01-10-2013). He explained further that a kid who is not ready to study hard will certainly not have a bright future while the one who studies hard will certainly have a bright future. For many of the parents, in Nkum and Kumbo, the world is being ruled and controlled by educated people. Some even regretted the fact that they at not educated to a certain level and for that reason, they feel that if they give their kids a solid education right from the primary or basic level, they can possibly become more successful people in life than they the parents are. So the choice of school for their kids takes into consideration what they want or desire them to be in future. One of the parents expressed the kind of future they desire for their kids in the following words:

The world is ruled by educated people and we regret we did not have an opportunity to be educated to a certain level. We always want our kids to be educated to the highest level possible, so that in future they can have a lot of money to help themselves and other family members. We feel that education will make our children very wealthy in future. It will also help them to behave very well in society. We believe that education will certainly equip our children to become responsible adults in future. We also want them to be influential figures in society tomorrow. We want nothing but the best for our children and so we make sure we choose the bests primary schools for them. (Nkum, 23-09-2013)
Many of the participants expressed the wish to see their kids become rich through education in order to help themselves first and then to assist them at their old age. They also want them to acquire the financial means to help their other brothers and sisters as well and those who are less fortunate in society. For them this kind of future can only be possible through a solid education whose foundation is laid in the primary school. With this in mind the kind of school the kids attend is so important if they must reach that end that parents perceive.

For one of the parents, they perceive that education will help their kids to secure better jobs in future. It will also help their kids to speak English and French which they are not very versed with. They want their kids to acquire education and move to the cities where there is better life and also to in turn develop their own area. For members of another household, they asserted: “We always believe that giving our children education is the best way to prepare for their future. We believe education will help them to be successful people in society. Education is the key that opens every door! We therefore do everything possible to give our kids the best education we can afford”. (Nkum, 23-09-2012).

From the findings, it became evident that all the interviewees perceive education as the only way that can help their kids live better lives in society. Some of the parent strongly believed that uneducated children usually end up as misfits in society and they do not wish that to happen to their own kids. For another participant, education shifts the attention of the kids from committing crimes and as such they do everything possible to give these kids good education with the hope that it will give them the opportunity to get better jobs in future. They also hoped that education will help their children by moulding a character that will prepare them for societal living. Education as expressed by many of the participants will help their children to grow up, with the potentials of integrating fully into society; that is morally, socially, economically and otherwise. They explained further that it is only through education that their children can be equipped financially so that when they eventually get older; their children will be able to take good care of them. In the words of one of the participants:

*Without education, my kids will end up as criminals. If you look at a few people around this village who are not educated, you will see the kind of lifestyles they are living which is not the best at all. My experience in this community with uneducated kids and school dropouts is not the best. So education of my kids is a top priority for me. Though my husband died a few years ago, I still do everything*
possible to see to it that my kids should receive good education in a school that will instil discipline in them. (Nkum, 26-10-2013)

Generally these parents see education as a source of empowerment which will help their children get jobs in future and consequently get a lot of money and material resources. According to one of them, education will help his kids to be “responsible citizens and responsible parents too when they eventually get their own kids” (Kumbo, 30-09-2013) Some explained that whatever they are today is thanks to education and so they wish to see their kids succeed in life. They see education as the only thing that can make their kids successful persons in the future.

Another parent described education and its perceived benefits in the following beautiful words:

Education is a right which is God given and therefore we as parents have that Divine duty to educate our children. We consider education as the greatest investment and inheritance a parent can offer to a child. This investment can never be taken away like the case of landed property parents leave for their children. No one can take away education from another and so we spend a lot of our resources in investing on education of our kid. If some of our children are a success story today in life, it is thanks to education that we took seriously knowing that with it their future is guaranteed! (Kumbo, 03-10-2013)

They explained further that the world is developed today, it is thanks to education and anyone who fails to acquire this education will certainly not fit in society. Furthermore these parents perceive education as being very important for the future of their kids. They believe that the quality of their children’s future depends on the quality of education they get. For them, a good quality education is a guarantee of a successful future, while a poor quality education also guarantees an unsuccessful future. As such as these parents explained, they do everything to educate their children. In their words of one of them: “Education should be the best investment one could ever venture” (Kumbo, 06-10-2013)

The importance of education for the future of the kids as gathered from the data could be summarized beautifully in the words of Plato in the Republic Book 111 thus:

And once we have given our community a good start, 'I pointed out', the process will be cumulative. By maintaining a sound system of education you produce
citizens of good character and citizens of sound character, with the advantage of a good education, produce in turn children better than themselves and better able to produce still better children in their turn, as can be seen with animals... It is in education that bad discipline can most easily creep in unobserved, he replied. 'Yes', I agreed, 'because people don't treat it seriously there, and think no harm can come of it.' 'It only does harm', he said, 'because it makes itself at home and gradually undermines morals and manners; from them it invades business dealings generally, and then spreads into the laws and constitution without any restraint, until it has made complete havoc of private and public life.' 'And when men who aren't fit to be educated get an education they don't deserve, are not the thoughts and opinions they produce fairly called sophistry, without a legitimate idea or any trace of true wisdom among them?' Then don't use compulsion,' I said to him, ' but let your children's lessons take the form of play. You will learn more about their natural abilities that way…” (Plato, 1955 )

Looking at the findings responses from the participants above, they are all pointing out the importance of education and the kind of perceived future that parents desire that their kids have. These expectations then serve as a driving force for parents to calculate the means through which they will achieve those ends. These expectations then determine the means through which the desired ends can be achieved and the means of achieving them will depend on the kinds of schools they choose for their children which according rational choice theory are rationally pursued and well calculated. This can be seen a practical rationality that is employed by parents which according to rational choice theorists always influence any decisions or actions that human beings undertake. These calculations by parents could be economic, religious and other wise. These parents have values they want their kids to acquire and they know schools that are reputed for imparting such values and so they go for such primary schools which they think can meet their aspirations for their kids.

Generally we have seen all the parents of both Nkum and Kumbo expressing regrets and then looking forward to a brighter future for their kids. In this light, the end is the successful future they want for their kids. The individual parents consider the end and on some systematic basis decide what is the best means or course of action to pursue in order to achieve these ends which in our case is the kind of primary schools they choose for their kids. The end is a bright and successful future for their kids while the means is the kind of school they thing will provide their kids the best education that will help them to achieve this end.
One may only determine if the kids actually achieved the kind of future life their parents intended for them through their choices of certain primary school. This can only be done if after a certain number of years another research work is carried out and the same parents interviewed in order to ascertain if these kids actually got a future life that matched the aspiration of their parents when they made the primary school choices.

4.2. How Perceived Quality of Education Influence Parental Choice of Primary Schools

Interviews from both Nkum and Kumbo subdivisions, revealed a good number of factors that come into play whenever parents want to send their kids to a primary school. These findings revealed that the quality of education is so influential in parental decisions regarding primary school choice. According to UNICEF (2000) many definitions of quality in education exist, testifying to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept. The terms efficiency, effectiveness, equity and quality have often been used synonymously (Adams, 1993). Considerable consensus exists around the basic dimensions of quality education today, however. UNICEF (2000) suggests that quality education definition should take into cognizance of the following elements:

- Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities.
- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;
- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace;
- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities;
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

For this particular research purposes and findings gathered, from the parents about the perceived quality of education will be presented under the following headings: performance in public and official examinations, quality of teachers, reputation of the school in discipline and moral issues, which also has a close connection with religion and the school physical
environment. According to the findings quality of education is one of the most important factors that play a major role in the parental choice of primary schools besides the other factors.

4.2.1. Performance in Public and Official Examinations

The issue of performance of the school in public and official examinations is the most significant point that was mentioned by almost all of the parents of the 15 households, I interviewed in Nkum subdivision. It was very clear that all of them want their kids to be part of the ‘success story’. Many of them acknowledge the fact that they want their kids to succeed and as such they choose primary schools that have been reputed for always having good results in the common entrance examinations (CE) and First School Leaving Certificate Examinations (FSLC). Performance in official examination can only be determined by a number of contributing factors which shall be examined.

Some expressed the fact that certain schools have been reputed for always having 100% in public and official examinations. According to one of the parents “The Catholic School has always scored 100% and only in very rare cases have one or two candidates not succeeded in the examinations. I therefore do not hesitate sending my kids there for I know they will succeed. (Nkum, 23-09-2013).

Another participant expressed that they got so disappointed with the previous primary school their kids were attending and therefore decided to remove them from the government school and send them to the Catholic school in view of having better results. We can therefore glean from the participants that success in official examinations play the most important influence in the choice of parents from Nkum.

In Kumbo subdivision, all the households that participated in the interviews mentioned the issue of performance in public and official examinations as the first factor that determines their choice of primary schools for their children. Performance in public/official examinations is of utmost importance when it comes to parental choice of schools for their kids. No parents want their kids to be a failure. So these parents carefully choose those primary schools that perform well in official examinations.

According to the parents in the first household interviewed, the first thing that they check before sending their kids to the primary school is the performance of the school in the previous official and national examinations. They explained further that their kids need to
study and succeed as they will not want to send their kids to any primary school that has been reputed for performing poorly in official examinations given the kind of future they want and desire their kids to have.

For one of the households, they prefer to send their kids to a lay private primary school. Of recent there have been a lot of lay private primary schools springing up in the country and especially in Kumbo subdivision. They expressed their choice that is linked to performance in official examination in the following words:

*We send our kids to a Lay private primary school because although it is still a young primary school, they perform very well in official and final examinations (Government common entrance examinations and First school Leaving certificate examinations), springing from the fact that they follow the curriculum specified by the ministry of basic education meticulously. They have been performing extremely well in the official examinations and so we believe that our own kids can also succeed in their studies through this particular primary school” (Kumbo, 01-10-2013)*

From experience and from the knowledge gathered from the past examination results from the Inspectorates of Basic education for both Nkum and Kumbo, private schools have always performed better than public schools in official examination. Sometimes one finds more teachers in government schools than private schools but the same private schools with fewer teachers still do better in public and official examinations and one begins to wonder how with a few teachers they still out perform public schools with more teachers in official examinations.

The quality of the curriculum was mentioned by one of the parents in Nkum. This aspect is closely connected to the issue of performance. In the course of the interview, I realized that this particular person was a government worker who is well educated himself but living in this rural community. Being an educated person himself, he said he is always curious about the quality of the curriculum that is being taught in each primary school around where he lives or wants to send his kids to school. He expressed this in the following words:

*From my personal experience working in many rural communities, I have come to realize that there are schools where teachers just teach what they feel is good without paying attention to the curriculum and syllabus that is prescribed by the*
ministry of basic education. This attitude has been very disastrous to some rural schools I know. At the end of the course, these kids all over the national territory are expected to write the same examination. Can you imagine the consequences for those who did not follow the curriculum and syllabus that the ministry prescribes? A school that does not follow the right syllabus will certainly be on the disadvantage. Their results in official and public examinations will obviously be disastrous! (Nkum, 29-09-2012)

He explained further by saying that he makes sure he checks the quality of the syllabus and the curriculum before sending his kids to a primary school. This point could also be linked to the quality of teachers, because good and qualified teachers worth the name will certainly try to teach the pupils based on the right curriculum. So if he finds a school that does not take the curriculum and syllabus of the ministry seriously, then he will definitely not want to send his kids to such a primary school for that will not help his kids to succeed in their examinations in particular and life as a whole.

The issue of class sizes was also highlighted by some participants in Kumbo as a determining factor in their choice of primary schools. Class sizes also determine the learning process. Some of the participants mentioned the fact that they prefer certain private schools because the class sizes are small and easy to manage. One of the participants explained this issue in the following words:

In public schools around Kumbo, there are always so many pupils in class. You find more than three kids sharing a small bench and desk. Sometimes there are more than 70 kids in a single classroom that makes it difficult for teachers to handle. In some other cases the classrooms are not even enough to handle the number of pupils in school. I feel bad when I see the kids in such situations. I do not want my kids to be part of overcrowded classes and that is why I send all my kids to the Catholic primary school which has small class sizes. I believe that small class sizes makes for more effective learning while overcrowded classes may retard effective learning. (Kumbo, 08-10-2013)

Although this point was not mentioned by many, it very evident from the interviews that educated parents are becoming very interested in knowing what their kids study or learn in the primary school. They do this by acquiring the policy documents, syllabuses provided by the ministry of basic education and studying them and comparing to what the teachers impart
on their kids. They get involved by going through the exercise books of their kids trying to compare if it falls in line with the textbooks they are expected to have. Gleaning from the interviews, parents who happened to have been educationists or teachers were particularly concerned about this factor. This point was mentioned by only one of the parents in the Nkum, while in the Kumbo it was mentioned by more than one parent. So according to the parents who mentioned it they like to send their kids to a school that has a good quality curriculum that is being followed. They further explained that they do not want to fall prey to the kinds of schools that are not serious with the curriculum and syllabus and the kids end up failing examinations.

The introduction and use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) facilities has become part of the quality of education. Gleaning from the interviews, it is clear that the introduction of ICT it very important for primary school kids. Parents especially those in urban areas are becoming more and more aware of the need and importance of ICT studies. This goes a long way to influence the choice of primary schools that parents make for their kids. These parents believe that a kid who doesn’t acquire this ICT knowledge will definitely face serious challenges and difficulties while furthering their education.

In Cameroon the Ministry of basic education through the national reforms on basic education has introduced information and communication technology in the primary school syllabus and curriculum. According to the reforms, primary pupils are supposed to be introduced into computer and internet usage from the basics. In the theory and policy documents, the reforms are clearly spelt out with very lofty ideas, but when it comes to practice, much is left to be desired! The story on the field is completely different in some schools.

In some primary schools in certain parts of the national territory, it is evident that some pupils graduate from primary school without ever having seen a computer except in the textbooks. They may see pictures in their text books but never seen them physically or touched them. This is very common in rural areas, especially those without any electricity. Yet these kids are expected to write about it as part of the official examinations that is written throughout the national territory. Even in some of the urban areas, some schools do not have at all or have them but they are never being used. Sometimes one wonders if the computers in some schools are meant for decorations. For one of the parents, he preferred a certain private
primary school for his kids because it has computers and the kids are being drilled on how to use them on a daily basis. He highlighted this important factor thus:

As an elderly person, I am challenged daily by the way my kids operate the computer at home. This means that a child who attends a primary school that those not offer such subjects or does not possess such facilities will be on a great disadvantage especially if they wish to further their education to a certain level. I always feel for kids in certain areas who attend primary schools without such facilities, talk less of even seeing or touching them. I wish all the kids in Cameroon were given the same kind of opportunities (Kumbo, 01-10-2013)

For one of the participants, since we are living in the computer age, any primary school that does not offer ICT subject and services, is bound to fall below standard as the kids are expected to be tested on that as part of the national examinations which includes computer studies. So a good number of parents in Kumbo subdivision acknowledged the fact that the availability of ICT subjects and services plays an important part on their choice of schools for their kids. They will prefer such schools that offer the kids the opportunity to practically learn ICT subject than the ones that do not offer these subjects at all.

4.2.2. Quality of Teachers

The quality of teachers is directly linked to academic performance and outcomes. According to some of the participants, before they choose a particular primary school for their kids, they first of all check the quality of teachers. One may naturally be tempted to think that qualified or trained teachers with teacher training certificates have the capability of bringing out the good and best results in examinations. On the contrary from the interviews, I realized that the quality of teachers does not only depend on the certificates and training but also on the ability to guide the kids to grow up as fully and balanced persons in the various aspect of life. According to a majority of participants, there is more to quality of teachers than certificates. In one of the households, the issue of quality of teachers was expressed and explained by one of the parents in the following words:

From our judgment, the Catholic school has good quality teachers who are not only good at imparting academic knowledge on our kids but they are also God fearing and take care of other’s children as if they were theirs. If your child for example has a weakness or limitation in studies or even in behaviour, they will approach you the parents and inform you, so that together the particular child
can be helped both at home and in school. This is not very common in public or
government schools and some private lay school. Because of such qualities that
Catholic school teachers posses, we are always being moved to send our kids to
Catholic school. (Nkum, 23-09-2013)

On the contrary there were some of the participants who felt that the public or government
schools had more qualified and better teachers than private school teachers. According to one
of the participants most of the private schools just employ teachers without certificates to
teach the kids. One of them expressed this in the following words:

The government school has well trained teachers than private schools, and one is
never sure about the quality of teachers in private schools. It is also very easy to
gain admissions into public schools than private schools. The teachers of the
government school can speak more French and English than those of private
schools because in order to teach in a government primary school, you must go
through the teachers training college. For this reason we choose and send our
kids to the government school. There are always more teachers in the government
school than those in the private schools, so we like also to send kids there because
of the presence of many teachers, and the school administration does not worry
parents like those of private schools calling parents time and again to attend
meetings (Nkum, 25-09-2013)

Another participant expressed the fact that they will not send their kids to a school that
does not have teachers who have passed through the teachers training colleges and obtaining
the necessary certificates to teach. She explained further that according to her, most private
schools just employ people from the streets to teach without any formal or proper training.
For this reason, we keep sending our kids to the public school where we know there are grade
one trained teachers who will impart proper knowledge to our children (Nkum, 25-09-2013).

Another aspect that could be linked directly to the quality of teachers is reputation of
school administration and staff. A good number of parents in Nkum were of the opinion that
they only want teachers who have an upright and descent characters to teach their kids. They
do not want teachers who will not teach their kids by their own character and example. So if a
primary school has teachers or members of staff who have a good reputation, then they will be
influenced to send their kids in such schools. In the words of one of the parents:
We have had experiences of some teachers who misbehave in public. We have had teachers who after leaving the school premises end up drinking till late hours of the night. Sometimes they even get drunk and fight in drinking spots. We wonder when they prepare their lesson notes. Some even spend their break time drinking beer beside the school campus while our kids watch them doing so. What character lessons are they passing to our kids? Even if they teach our kids well, the kind of character they want our kids to possess is a bad one. We are aware that kids learn more by observing what the elders do. Kids believe more in what their teachers teach than what the parents tell them. We therefore shun sending our kids to schools that have teachers of such negative repute that can eventually destroy the future of our kids. (Nkum, 27-09-2013)

In Kumbo subdivision, the interviewees highlighted other aspects of quality of teachers just like those of Nkum. The definition of quality here, involves a lot of things according to the environment or social community in which the school is situated. The quality of teachers here does not only imply the certificates the teachers possess but also the ability to transmit the knowledge into the kids that can help them grow as balanced personalities.

According to these parents, this quality of teachers is also reflected in the moral and spiritual upbringing of the pupils. The quality of teachers can also be judged from their ability to instil discipline in the children. In the words of parents in one of the households:

*The good quality of teachers in Catholic primary schools also pushes us to send our kids there. These teachers are so dedicated and the school authorities and Managers are also serious when it comes to control of teachers and the result of this is reflected in the official and end of course examinations. The quality of discipline in mission schools also influences us to send our kids there. There is much importance paid to discipline which is not always the case with other schools especially in public schools. The teachers of mission schools are very approachable and they are ready to even contact the parents in case their kid is having particular problems with regards to studies and even character. This good relationship that parents have with teachers moves these teachers to take extra care of their children and even go an extra mile by helping their kids even out of normal school working hours.* (Kumbo, 03-10-2013)
One of the participants explained further that by quality of teachers, they do not only mean teachers who have the necessary academic certificates, but teachers who are able to teach and produce the good results in the final and end of course examinations. This wish for qualitative teachers was expressed thus: “We want teachers who take teaching as a vocation and not just as a fast and easy way of making money” (Kumbo, 03-10-2013).

Generally, a majority of parents are so concerned about the quality of teachers who in turn produce good results. One of the participants concluded by asserting that “…it is easier to bend a stick to take the shape you want when it is still young. So too it is easier to help the kids become what you want in the primary school. So we ha have to be careful about the teachers who handle our kids…” (Kumbo, 05-10-2013). The quality of teachers should be closely linked to the performance of the kids in examinations. So this makes the issue of choice for parents more complex. In this case even the definitions of quality of teachers remain more complex issue. It is through rational decisions that parents evaluate the quality of teachers knowing what they want for their kids that parents end up choosing one school and not the other for their kids.

4.2.3. Reputation of the School in Discipline and Moral Issues

One of the factors that a great number of parents mentioned as having an influence on their choice of primary schools for their kids is discipline and moral issues. According to a great number of participants certain primary schools have a good reputation in discipline and moral issues. Many agreed that an environment has an influence on individuals. Some primary schools in Nkum as gathered from the interviews have a good reputation when it comes to discipline and morals, while others do have a bad reputation.

There is a general belief that once pupils graduate from certain or particular school, they will have a particular way of behaving. This point also has a link with religious reasons, where it is believed that pupils from mission schools behave better in moral and disciplinary issues more than those from private schools. But paradoxically some religious primary schools too are reputed for very poor discipline and character formation. As such some parents want to send their kids where they think they will grow and be disciplined and have a sound moral repute. One of the parents narrated a sad situation that happened in the government school that scare them from sending their kids to such a school thus:

*Three years ago we had a case in the government school where two kids were fighting and one hit the eyes of the other with a stick. The eye was wounded and*
up till now, that child does not see well. Similar issues have also occurred in the same school. One will definitely not think that the school is lacking in discipline and morals. Only a parent who does not have the future of the child at heart will send kids to such a school noted for such kinds of acts (Nkum 28-09-2013)

Generally, most of the participants expressed the fact that all primary schools in Kumbo have a certain kind of reputation which is either positive or negative. When it comes to discipline and morals, some primary schools have a positive reputation while others have a negative reputation. None of the parents want their kids to be to be indiscipline or to live immoral lives. With this at the back of their mind they try to send their kids to primary schools they think and believe they will get a kind of education that is backed by discipline and morality.

According to one of the households, they send their kids to the Catholic primary school because Catholic schools are reputed for their insistence on morals and disciplinary issues. For them, sometimes the government schools are too loose and allow the kids to behave the way they want and attention is only paid to academics while relegating morals and discipline to the background. This parent concluded: “I do not want my child to be a misfit in society! So I take a lot of precautions when I want to send my kids to the primary school” (Kumbo 07-12-2013).

The general picture gathered is that discipline and moral reputation of a school plays a major influence in the choice of primary schools in both Kumbo and Nkum is that private primary schools are more discipline than public schools. Religious reasons are closely associated with discipline and moral reputation of a school. A good number of participants highlighted religious reasons as playing a very important influence in their choice of primary schools. In order to understand why this point plays a very important point in the decisions of the parents with regards to primary schools, we must first of all understand the development of education in this area of the country, and then situate it within the context of parental school choice.

In this part of the country, the first primary schools that saw the light of the day were religious primary schools. While the early missionaries did their work of evangelization, they also opened a good number of schools. As such public schools appeared later on in the course of history and the convictions of some parents about these missionary schools still remains. In Cameroon as a whole and the North West region in particular, a significant percentage of the
private schools are run by Catholic organizations or other religious denominations, and religion often plays an important role in family’s choice of primary schools.

These religious primary schools especially the Catholic schools had a very good reputation and continue to have that good reputation in many aspects. Some parents therefore do not see why they should not choose other primary schools. They prefer choosing schools where the faith they uphold can be transmitted to their children. In expressing the influence, religion has in their primary school choice, one of the participants asserted.

As a Catholics, we want our kids to grow in the faith which we profess and that can only be possible in Catholic schools. No one cares about the things of God in public schools. There is also the aspect of moral upbringing of the children, which is a priority in the Catholic primary schools and that is we continue to cherish educating our children in Catholic schools. This is certainly not the case in the government schools around (24th-10-2013)

In some other household, the parents explained that they send their kids to the Catholic school so that the faith they profess and practice should be imparted on their kids. In mission schools, there are religious lessons which at least help the children grow in moral and religious ways. “This opportunity is not given in public schools” (Nkum, 26-09-2013). A great number of parents attach serious importance to their faith. They believe there should be a balance between education and faith. Some explained that if their kids acquire academic knowledge without the fear of God and “Allah” then the knowledge should be considered as useless. For many of them the two must go together and as such they choose those schools that can take care of the two together.

In one of the typical Muslim household, their faith is a top priority and the first factor that determines their choice of a primary school. They expressed this strong influence of faith in their choice of schools as follows:

We want our kids to grow up with the fear of “Allah” and this fear of Allah can only be instilled on their kids in the Islamic primary school. So the first thing we consider is our religion. We want our children while acquiring western education, to also acquire education about the ‘Koran’ and the fear of ‘Allah’ Any western education that is not backed by knowledge of the ‘Koran’ is “haram”(sinful) (Nkum, 28-09-2013)
This family was so particular about their faith and went as far as asserting that even if there were even a primary school which is the most beautiful with the best buildings and best teachers one can think of, but without the transmission of the Islamic faith, then that for them is not a school to be chosen. I got the impression that even if their kids acquire the knowledge of Allah and even do not do well in other subjects that are part of official examinations, then that will still be a good sign for them.

Interviewees in Kumbo subdivision also revealed the fact that religious reasons have a great influence on the parental choice of primary schools. A good number of parents also raised the issue of religion determining their choice of school for their kids. Some of the participants highlighted the importance of religion as part of the quality of the curriculum or education. One of the participants asserted:

We send our kids to Catholic schools because we want them, while growing intellectually, they should also grow in the faith which we profess. There is a lot of insistence on morals in Catholic primary schools, and if society is the way it is today, it is due neglect of religious and moral values. So we want our children to grow in an upright way with the fear of God. If our opinion could count, then religious studies should be part and parcel of the primary school syllabus and should be compulsory for all the kids. (Kumbo, 30-09-2013)

Some other parents in stressing the importance of religion and how it is one of determining factor in their choice in the following words.

We send all our kids to the Catholic primary school, for various reasons: Catholic primary schools help in bringing up our children not only intellectually but also morally and equally imparting the faith we profess to our children. As catholic Christians, we wish to see our children grow up both intellectually, morally and spiritually. This is not possible in other primary schools around especially in public and lay private primary schools since religious studies are not taken seriously in these other schools (Kumbo, 02-10-2013)

Generally a good number of parents wished that their faith they profess be transmitted to their kids and this is only possible in religious primary schools where besides the academic subjects, religious studies is also given a top priority. For this reason they also consider religious reasons as part of the quality of education before
sending their kids to the primary schools. Looking at this aspect of quality in relation to
the analytical framework, we can conclude that parents are making good use of rational
choice theory by first evaluating the quality of life they desire for their kids. Once they
have that at the back of their mind, they also compare the various options they have
available, and then choose the schools which they think that will meet up with the
aspirations they have for their kids. Thus, these parents are putting their rationality into
practical use.

At the same time given some of the ideas of some participants, one may wonder if
all parents are actually putting rationality into practice while making choice of primary
schools for their kids. Some are apparently being influenced by what other members of
the community think about certain schools. Some parents may just choose certain
schools, without practically and rationally evaluating them especially when issues of
religion step in. Some may just send kids to certain religious schools just to keep the
flag of their religion flying high even if those schools are not the best in a lot of aspects.

4.2.4. School and Physical Environment

Another important factor which according to the parents plays a significant influence
in their choice of primary schools is the school physical or material environment. The school
material or physical environment in this context refers to the infrastructure; the buildings, the
sporting facilities and the equipment that enhance balanced education of the whole human
person. Many of the participants expressed the fact that a school that does not have good
buildings, good classrooms and teaching aid material cannot facilitate good learning. Many of
them expressed the fact that a school with good and attractive buildings and good sporting
facilities, with a big and airy environment attracts them to send their kids to those kinds of
schools. As such they will definitely want to send their kids.

One of the participants expressed what he thought a good school should be in the
following words: “Nowadays I see schools without a good environment. You just find
buildings without a football field, a handball court, or other sporting facilities. Can you call
such schools good schools? I wonder!” (Nkum, 24-09-2013). Many of the participants
therefore expressed the fact that a good schooling environment should have ample space that
offers the kids the opportunity to grow up intellectually and physically. This point came up so
seriously because there is a lot of land in Nkum unlike the cities with little land that does not
permit schools to have ample space for certain facilities.
Of recent in Cameroon as a whole and the North West region as a whole, there has been a lot of private primary schools of all kinds being established both public and private. When one looks at the infrastructure and school physical or material environment in general, some are not really attractive. Some have good and modern buildings but in very limited spaces. Some of the participant wished that their kids should be in schools that have physical environments that can permit them to play, practice agriculture and be able to do certain practical school subjects. One of the participants expressed this desire thus: “We do not want our kids to be in a school as if they are in prison. Some schools do not have ample space for recreation. Some do not have a clean environment, and good toilet facilities. Without these necessary facilities that enhance the learning process, we are not attracted by such schools.” (Nkum, 26-09-2013).

In expressing the general worry about the infrastructure of some primary schools one of the participants, said that the proliferation and liberalization of the opening of private primary schools is a call for concern in the whole country. She explained further that many schools now are being opened in towns and cities with very limited land and buildings. She lamented further that some schools are being opened now in very crowded and busy areas of the town with no breathing space that can allow the kids to feel free and to study in a quiet environment void of too many distractions. She went further to lament that some primary school buildings are a death trap and cited one of the primary school buildings that collapsed in Douala some years ago.

With regard to this issue of the physical nature of the school, one of the parents had this to say:

*We also consider the buildings and the facilities that are found in the primary schools around. We check the play grounds and the facilities in the school for practical subjects, especially the ICT facilities which are now very important for any kid who wants to succeed in life. So if these facilities are present, we are then attracted to send our kids to those kinds of schools whereas if the school has poor infrastructure, we will shun sending our kids to such school. We know primary schools that do not even have good toilets. So, we cannot choose such schools for our children.* (Kumbo, 03-10-2013)

Still, another parent in an attempt to express what they consider as a good school for their kids said that without a good and conducive physical environment, the kids may not
study well and as such they cannot send their kid or choose that kind of school for their kids. In appreciating one of the schools where her kids are schooling one of the participants said “The primary school that my two kids attend has just recently been built with new buildings and a very clean environment. The sporting facilities are awesome and that creates a very friendly learning environment that brings about integral development of the kids” (Kumbo, 07-10-2013). For this reason, some of the parents while considering other aspects prefer schools that have smaller class sizes that encourage effective learning. This point came out very strongly from those who are financially viable and can afford to pay fees in private schools that usually have fewer pupils per class even if they charge very high fees.

Considering the various factors that have been highlighted or mentioned by the parents above, it is evident that parents in making primary school choice for their kids apply rationality which rational choice theory postulates. Here the parents do a lot of calculations with regard to the various options of schools, they have at their disposal. They spend a lot of time and energy evaluating the various opportunities and options they have from which to make a choice. They strive to look for the one that will give them the greatest satisfaction depending on what they want for their kids.

We can conclude by highlighting the fact that no single factor determines the choice of primary school. A number of factors come into play and once parents have made their own analysis, they then rationally take action bearing in mind the consequences of each action that is taken. This falls in line with rational choice theory. These factors do determine parental choice but the evaluation as to whether the kids actually succeed in life based on the choices of the parents still needs to be researched into in order to see if actually the choices are the right ones by checking whether the kids eventually end up having the kind of desired future their parents had in mind.

4.3. How Family Socio-Economic Status (Defined By Parental Education Level, Rural Versus Urban Residence and Income) Affect the Primary School Choice Parents Make for their Kids

One of the most important choices facing parents is whether to send their child to a public school or to a private school. Another dimension is when there are two or more private primary schools in the same locality or equally when there are two or more public schools in the same locality. The main distinguishing feature, from an economic point of view, is that public schools are free while private schools charge tuition fees and hence are costly to attend.
One may naturally feel from the economic point of view that families are likely to send their children to private schools only if they believe that the benefits of private schooling outweigh the price they are willing to pay as tuition fees for such schools. These benefits might be related to academic proficiency, or other non-cognitive or even non-tangible factors like; discipline, safety, focus on discipline and moral and sometimes religious values, etc.

In line with the thought of Davis-Kean (2005), family income plays a very significant role in the education of kid in general and so too it does for choice of schools in particular. Generally one will be tempted to think that parents with a lower income will more likely send their kids to free public schools while the wealthy will in turn send their kids to private primary schools that charge tuition fees.

The findings from this study also revealed that the economic and social statues of the various households play a very important influence in their choice of primary schools. In the light of this study, parents are aware of the value of education for their children and what they want their kids to acquire and the kind of desired future they want for their kids. In making up their minds to send their kids to school, they first think above the fruit of education and then after taking stock of their means (cost), they choose those schools which they think can bring maximum benefits to their kids and the ones they are able to afford the expenditures.

The economic situation of families as gathered from the findings show that parents from the high economic classes tend to choose certain schools that have certain qualities because of their ability to pay high school fees especially in the schools viewed as those of the elites. With the abolition of fees in the government primary schools as one of the education for all goals, some parents tend to be greatly influenced by this move in their choice of primary schools. This issue of fees could be seen clearly in such responses from some of the households such as this:

*We send all our kids to the government primary school first of all because we have many children and since there are no fees in the public school, we send all of them there. We are just mere farmers and our means are so limited to be able to afford the fees in private primary schools. At least in the public schools we can manage to send all of them to school as opposed to Catholic schools and other private schools which though are very good, charge school fees which we cannot afford (Nkum, 23-09-2013)*
According to another household, they send all their kids to the government school because they are not financially viable to pay the high fees that are charged in private primary schools. In their own words they expressed it thus: “We send our kids to the government schools because there are no school fees. I am just a small business man in the village and my wife is just a housewife. We may like to send them to other schools but how can we do that when we do not have much money? Anyway, all we desire is to see to it that our kids have education no matter the kind of school they attend” (Nkum, 24-09-2013)

According to another less financially viable household, it is not easy for them to send kids to private schools because of their limited financial resources and as such they take advantage of the free education in public schools. They expressed how their choice is dictated by their financial means in the following words:

*Education is very expensive, so we do not have any choice to make. We are told the government schools don’t charge any tuition fees and so we send all our children to the government school. The other primary schools demand a lot of money from parents which we cannot afford. Another problem is that we have many children and that alone makes it difficult for us spend money in educating them. We cannot afford the means to send them to private primary schools although we are aware that they provide better quality education (Nkum, 27-09-2013)*

Looking at the responses above from the various households, one may be tempted to draw a conclusion that wealthy parents or those of the higher social class will obviously send their kids to schools that charge school fees while the poor parents or those of the lower economic class will definitely tend to make choices of public schools that charge no fees. Paradoxically, some of the findings also revealed that on the other hand, a good number of parents from the lower economic class are still able to brave the rigours of destitution and make sure that they sponsor their kids in private primary schools which they think can be most beneficial for their kids. According to one of such parents,

*We have many children and we are all local farmers with little financial means. In spite of our financial situation and the number of kids we have, we still work very hard and pay fees for our kids in the catholic school. It is not easy for us but we are aware that our children will benefit most from the catholic school. The*
government school is free and even closer to our house but we prefer to send our
kids elsewhere (Nkum, 25-09-2013)

Another household in Kumbo raised a similar concern about their financial means and
ability to pay fees in the following words:

Though we have very meagre salaries, we still sent our kids to the private primary
school. Paying school fees is not easy for us but we still choose the private school
because we know our kids will get the best and quality of education we want for
them. We do not like public schools because there are many pupils and learning is
not as effective as in private schools. We want the best for our kids. (Kumbo, 08-
10-2012)

In another household the parents also expressed their concern about fees through a
rhetorical question “How can you expect us to spend money somewhere else whereas there is
a place that is free? Only a fool can do that!” (Nkum, 26-09-2013). According to this
household therefore, they are interested in educating their kids but they want to spend the
least possible amount of money they can and that is why they go for public schools where
they will spend little.

For some of the participants, school fees play a major influence in their choice. In one
of the households, school fees were cited as the most determinant factor in their choice of
primary schools in the following words:

We reflect first about the cost of the school fees and if the fees are less, we prefer
to send kids to such schools. We have many children and with the meagre income
we get, we cannot afford to pay house rents, provide for our daily needs and still
afford very high fees in most of the best schools around town. We have no option
than to send our kids to the government school where there are no fees and little
expenditure (Kumbo, 02-10-2013)

In the course of the interviews, there were parents in certain households who made it
clear that fees are not any problem for them and as such doesn’t play any major role in their
choice. They explained in other words that they are able to pay the fees in private schools
provided these private schools provide the kids of education which they want their kids to
acquire and which will equip them for a bright future. On the contrary some of the
participants indicated that they have very limited financial resources, but they still go an extra
mile to do everything possible to get the fees paid because they value the education in private primary schools.

Another dimension of social disparities and the choice of schools related to school fees are distance and or proximity to the school. Many parents expressed that they always have a great task of making sure that their kids are safe both at home and at school. Given the fact that this study is dealing here with parental choice of primary schools, bearing in mind that kids in primary school are still so tender. Distance and proximity to and fro school becomes very significant in parental choice. Some of the parents explained that even if there are better schools far away, they will still send their kids to the primary schools nearest to their home because they cannot afford to pay transportation means to and fro school. Proximity and nearness to the home also helps them to avoid certain risks like trekking for long distances or crossing streets to reach school at the risk of their children.

On the contrary some other participants did not have any problem with distance especially those who are in a higher income earning class. Some parents explained that they are able to afford transportation means for their kids. One of the parents explained; “I own a motorcycle and before I go for work, I carry my two kids to school and by the time they close from school it is my break time and I rush to transport them back home. On days that I am not available, I give them money to pay public transport to and from school” (Nkum, 28-08-2013)

Other indicators of how social disparity influences parental choice is the provision of transport services by certain primary schools. One of the parents of one of the households explained that they have chosen a lay private school in Kumbo which charges very expensive school fees because they provide door to door transportation services for their pupils. They explained that this school is actually for the rich who can afford the means to pay the high school fees. The school provides a lot of facilities which many poor parents are not able to pay for as these services go along with cost.

According to another household, their kids are being picked from their door by the school bus to and back from school. So they do not worry about transportation of the kids to and fro school. This gives them the advantage to go about their own activities and businesses. They explained that this availability of transportation services saves them a lot of time which they should have been worried about transporting kids to and from school. Another aspect that was pointed as one of the things that influence primary school choice was the provision of food and snacks in the same primary school that offer transportation services.
... besides the other factors we have mentioned already like performance of the school, quality of teachers ..., we also choose this particular primary school because the school provides some snacks for the pupils while in school. This provision spares us the precious time of having to prepare food at home for our kids to take to school. Since we are also busy with our own jobs, this gives us an advantage to worry less about the welfare of the kids. This does not happen in other primary schools around ... (Kumbo, 01-10-2013)

Generally such costly services can only be paid for by those in the higher income level of the society. From the views of the participants, the issue of distance and proximity to the school seems to be linked with financial means, the ages of the pupils and the other factors too. Parents who can afford to pay transportation for their kids have no influence from distance or proximity if a distant or far away school has other qualities which they think can benefit their kids.

For some other parents, they admire the discipline, morals, academic performance in some of the primary schools around and would love to send their kids to such schools but their financial means and limited resources do not permit them to do so. It is therefore evident from the findings that the financial status of the families does play a major role or influence in the choice of primary school by parents. As stated by rational choice theory, each family or household takes into account their financial capabilities before engaging in sending their kids to certain primary schools. They may the choices by evaluating the cost of educating their kids in certain schools and then equally check their means to reach their desired goals.

The findings also revealed that there are some parents who are rich but not necessarily educated. Some simply send kids to certain prestigious schools simply because they have the money. They do not actually thing about the benefits or future of their kids. Some expressed the fact that the children of other rich parents are in particular schools and their own children also have to be there. In that case, they go contrary to rational choice theory. They simply follow or imitate others without any rational thinking before making primary school choices for their kids.
4.4. How Community Norms Influence the Primary School Choice that Parents make for their Kids.

The data collected revealed that community norms play an important role in the primary school choices of some of the parents. According to rational choice theory, when individuals in a community or society strive to make rational decisions or carry out rational actions, the whole community ends up carrying out certain rational actions as a community. Although these social actions turn to be true for the whole community or society, they spring from each individual’s efforts to make rational decisions and rational actions. These social actions in turn help to influence other individuals in taking certain decision and carrying out certain actions without any pre-reflections by some individuals.

One of the participants from Nkum was unable to tell me what he thought education could do for his kids in future. According to him, no one sent him to school and so he sends his own kids to school simply because everyone else is sending their own kids to school and if he does not do same, he will be the laughing stock of the village. For this parent therefore, he just sends the kids to school without any future plans for the kids. He is being influenced by the fact that every other parent in the village is sending their own kids. According to this participant he just sends his kids to the nearest government school but does not care about if the kids are actually studying or not; whether they are succeeding or not. He went further to express the fact that if the kids do not study, it is none of his business as he will not be there to live the lives for them.

According to one of the participants, being a Muslim, he cannot send his kids to other schools when there are Anglo-Arabic primary schools around. He even said doing that will be tantamount to “Haram” or sin. (Nkum 24-10-2012) It is therefore likely that those who live in Muslims communities will choose Islamic schools for their kids in spite of the how better the other primary schools around are. This logic also holds same for Catholics, Presbyterians and Baptists that operate primary schools in the areas under consideration.

In Kumbo subdivision as well, community norms also play a part on the school choice. For one of the participants who happened to have been one of the very wealthy businessmen in Kumbo explained that most of his business colleagues send their kids to the most expensive school in Kumbo. For this reason, he explained that he sends his own kids to the same school so that he too can be ranked amongst the rich in town. If he does not do so, then he may become a laughing stock among his colleagues.
One of the examples of how community norms influence parental choice of schools mentioned by one of the participants was like to gender issues. The responses from some of the interviewees revealed the traditional perceptions about gender roles. Sometimes ago it was believed that men have particular roles to play while women have theirs as well. The conception was that the education of girl children was a waste of resources whereas the education of boys was seen as an investment. According to these misconceptions of gender roles, men are supposed to work and earn income for the family while the women take care of household chores and bringing up of children. This directly or indirectly also influences the choice of schools as boys are given ‘better chances and choices’ than girls. In one of the households it came out very clearly as the parents affirmed in the following words:

*We do not mind spending much money on fees for our boy children. We know for sure that they are the ones who will eventually take care of us when we are old. The girls will all go and marry maybe outside of the village. For that reason, our two girl children are in the government school while the boys attend the Catholic school. We know that in future the boys will pay back in a way what we are spending on them* (Nkum, 29-10-2013)

Looking at the views of this particular household we can say they are making rational decisions based on community influence. Generally while taking into account the other factors that influence rational decisions of school choice, we also find that in both communities highlighted, community norms also play a great part which to an extend may not be in line with the rational choice theory. We have cited cases where some parents just follow the crowd or what other members of the community are doing in their choice of schools.

We also find parents who are being influenced by friends or other relatives to choose certain schools. It is also clear and evident from the analysis that the influences that come into play when making primary school choices vary from family to family depending on the family situation. The environment or social communities in which the families live have a great influence on their choices. Nevertheless, similar factors could be attributed to families in a certain community or area as cultural, traditional and religious beliefs may influence members of certain communities generally

Contrary to what rational choice theory upholds, not all community norms and influences may necessarily be rational. Some parents are just being forced to make certain choices by the community in which they find themselves without actually thinking and
evaluating the costs and benefits from the choices they are about to make. Community norms may prescribe or entail what may not necessarily be beneficial to the kids given the kind of future that the parents aspire for their kids. This brings to mind what Marx Weber refers to Affectual action, which is determined by one’s specific feelings, or emotions which do not make use of rationality per se. This goes to confirm the fact that choice is a very complex issue.

**Conclusion**

Looking generally at the findings from the field, it is evident that no single factor suffices to influence parents to make a choice as to which primary school they want their kids to attend. A combination of factors as discussed above make for reasonable choice of schools by parents. No matter the factors that come into play in any parent’s choice, the pushing factor is always the kind of emergent future which the parents want for their kids. Parents want their kids to succeed in life but defining success is another story depending on what each parent sees a successful life.

In the light of rational choice theory which posits that ‘out of a set of possible actions, a person will definitely chose the one that will benefit him or her most’, we can conclude that each of the parents make their decisions based on what they feel will benefit them most. Future research needs to evaluate and see if these choices which are supposed by rational choice theory to be rational actually end up meeting the aspirations of the parent.

When one looks critically at rational choice theory and its assumptions as presented above, one gets the impression that all human actions are rational and in our case of primary school choice, one may be tempted to think all choices are rationality made. The theory has its own limitations and weaknesses. Parents may not receive adequate information about the schools from which they want to make choices for their kids. This may make it difficult for individual parents to make rational decisions as to which school their kids may attend. As a result, parents may turn rely on other ways of making decisions order than rational decisions.

Generally, human social actions and interactions are complex. Rational choice theorists argue that social actions may be interpreted from the models of individual social actions. But there are problems faced by different individuals which may not be generalized to everyone. Societal norms and habits may guide much action as presented above, and once these take root people may tend not question them but use them to pursue meaningful social action without a second thought. In our case, some parents may be driven by norms in their choice making of primary schools which may not necessarily be rational.
Rational choice theory also argues that almost everything humans do is rational. By expanding to include all forms of action as rational, action that is non-rational or irrational becomes part of the same theory. By including every possible form of action in rational choice, it is not clear how the standard of what is rational and what is not is determined. When applied to parental choice of primary schools the point of focus in relation to the various factors discussed above, one cannot but conclude that choice is a very complex issue. It becomes difficult to make general statements and conclusions about what parents consider before making primary school choices for their kids.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has explored primary school choice from a parental perspective in North West region of Cameroon with special reference to Nkum and Kumbo subdivisions. The overall results of this study found out that factors generally associated with school choice did present themselves as suggested by the existing literature already examined above. It will be a mistake to take the general factors about school choice presented in existing literature about the developed world and some developing countries to apply to all parents everywhere. Existing literature about primary schools choice, in the developed world paints a general picture that while making school choices, parents are driven by performance in official national and international tests scores. A very glaring example is that of Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test that is organized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. This factor is presented as the most important factor that drives parents in their choice of primary schools.

The quality of education systems are evaluated in the developed world based on such test scores obtained from PISA tests. As such the general impression is that parents will likely choose those schools whose previous or ex-pupils have done well in those test results with the hope that their kids will have better chances in gaining admissions into certain tertiary institutions that select the candidates they admit based on PISA test scores. The study reveals that there is more to quality of education than test scores. The findings reveal that parental choice of school is more complex than the existing literature presents. It is evident that most parents want their kids to further their education in tertiary institutions. They value performance in examinations but other factors also come into play. This confirms the fact that there is still a huge debate as to what quality of education should actually include.

Existing literature about the developing world also seems to suggest that with the advent of free education for all instituted by the community of nations in the year 2000, parents especially those of the lower economic class of society shifted attention from private to public schools in order to benefit from the free education instead of wasting more resources in private schools. It paints a wrong picture, that since the institution of free education for all and the abolition of tuition fee in public primary schools, many parents tend to choose public schools at the detriment of private school. It became clear from the findings that some poor
parents do actually make use of the free education in public schools. But at the same time no parents as gathered from the interviews wished they should have sent their kids to a government school instead of a private school. On the contrary parents with children in the government schools wished they had a chance and opportunity to send their children to private schools. Some parents mentioned that due to the concept of free education, most of the government schools end up having very large class sizes which do not encourage effective learning. This influences some parents to opt for private schools with small class sizes.

The findings also supported the view by the Probe Team (1999) that low quality education is common in government schools thus leading parents to prefer private schools for their kids (Oketch et al., 2010). Most of the parents even those who had children in the government schools lamented the fact that the government schools do not provide them with the kind of education they should have wanted their kids to acquire. From the findings, it is clear that most parents in the North West region of Cameroon have more confidence in private schools than in government or public schools. This goes contrary to the view that private schools usually have less qualified teachers which is then linked to low quality education. In spite of the fact that the government schools have well trained teachers, those of the private schools who are supposedly of low standard turn to transmit more quality education as this is reflected in the national statistics. Pupils from private primary schools have always out-performed those from government schools in CE and FSLC examination at the completion of primary school. The study also revealed the fact that parents even those of a generation that did not have the chance of receiving formal education are also aware of the quality of education that is offered in the different schools around them which enables them to choose the schools they think are good for their kids.

In the analysis of the data, we used rational choice theory with the basic assumptions as follows:

- All human beings base their behaviour on rational calculations.
- All human beings act with rationality when making any choices.
- All human choices are aimed at the optimization of their pleasure or profit.

Through the lenses of rational choice theory, it was realized that parental life experiences have a great influence in their choice of primary schools for their kids. According to the findings, the parents reflect on their personal life experiences and then rationally make decisions with the hope that their kids will not pass through the negative experiences they passed through while at the same time desiring that the kids should have the same or similar
good experiences they had in their generation in certain schools. This is reflected in the choices they make with regard to the schools they want their kids to attend.

The study also revealed that perceived quality of education by parents has a lot of influence in their choice of primary schools for their kids. Parents will prefer those primary schools that meet the kind of quality education they desire their kids to acquire. Parents want their kids to succeed in life and so they make all sorts of rational judgments about the various primary schools available in their area. They then send their kids to those schools that have a good reputation not only in the quality of academics, but also moral, religious, discipline and physical formation of the children. Once they discover the school that provides the kind of quality education they expect or desire they do everything to send their kids to such schools.

The study also found out that the socio-economic status of the various families that is defined by parental education level, rural versus urban residence and income play a great influence in the choice of primary schools. Following one of the assumptions of rational choice theory that all human choices are aimed at the optimization of their pleasure or profit and minimizing cost, it became very clear that most household with a high income level tend to choose private primary schools that provide perceived good quality education although they charge high tuition fees. At the same time, some low-income households, inspite of their financial situation still sacrifice a lot to send their kids to private primary schools which they believe provide better quality education than public schools. These parents calculate rationally according to their means and the final outcome which they will get from spending money on their kids before making their choices.

Community norms also came up as one of the factors that play a great role in the parental choice of primary schools. The study found out that some parents choose certain primary schools not because they have rationally calculated the kind of benefit that particular schools will give to their kids but simply follow what the other members of the community are doing. Community norms may be rationally thought about but some parents as revealed by the findings do not give a second thought to those norms before making their choices. They simply choose schools because others are doing so and in that case we cannot in the light of rational choice theory say they are acting rationally.

In the study, two communities were highlighted; Kumbo and Nkum subdivisions of the North West region of Cameroon. Kumbo is an urban community while Nkum is a rural community. The two subdivisions represent two social communities and the study revealed that certain factors that influence parental choice depend on the community in which parents find themselves. From the interviews also, it is evident that parents in Kumbo
have more factors that determine their choice. Most parents of Kumbo are educated
themselves to a certain level, but a good number of parents in Nkum were found to have little
or no formal education and so their level of education also played a significant role in the
choices they make. The general factors that came up from the semi-structured interviews in
order of significance in Nkum subdivision that influence parental choice of schools were as
follows:

- Performance of the school in public and official examinations
- Quality of teachers.
- Religious reasons.
- Reputation of the school in discipline and moral issues
- School physical environment
- School fees
- Distance and proximity to the school
- Parental participation through Parents Teachers Associations (PTA)
- Quality of the curriculum
- Presence of extra-curricular activities in the school timetable

Similarly factors that came across from Kumbo from the most significant to the least were
as follows:

- Performance of the school in public and official examinations
- Quality of teachers
- Reputation of the school in discipline and moral issues
- School physical environment
- Religious reasons
- Availability of ICT services
- Quality of the curriculum
- Parental participation through Parents Teachers Associations (PTA)
- Class sizes
- School fees
- Distance and proximity to the school
- Presence of extra-curricular activities in the school timetable
- Provision of food and snacks in school
- Availability of transportation services

These factors were then classified in the categories already highlighted in the analysis of
the findings. These factors actually show how parents of a rural and urban community may
give different value to the various factors that influence the primary school choice for kids in
one way or the other. It also reveals the fact that the community in which one finds his or
herself plays a role in the choices that he or she makes.

The most significant factors that the parents of Kumbo revealed as having a strong
influence in their choice are: academic factors, quality of teachers, school environment, and
reputation of the school in relation to discipline. Being an urban area also, parents of Kumbo
are more concerned about issues of ICT than those in Nkum. Maybe this is due to the
availability of electricity supply in Kumbo which facilitates the use of ICT facilities whereas
that is not the case in Nkum where a majority of primary schools do not own any computers.
On the other hand, the most important factors that influence parental choice of primary
schools in Nkum are academic factors, school fees, the quality and number of teachers, the
reputation of the school in discipline and moral issues, and religious reasons.

Given the analysis made above, it becomes necessary that governments who are
responsible for the education of its citizens, need to take a number of factors into
consideration before creating schools in any locality. If as we have seen, some private
individuals or the private sector in general has been offering good quality education, then it
becomes necessary for the government to work hand in hand with the private sector so that
they may offer what the government or public schools are not able to offer. This can be done
through government subsidies or subventions to private operators. This will enable them run
their services at a low cost and as such the fees they charge will become minimal thus making
it possible even for the poorest of society to have access to those schools. The government too
needs to copy the good standards from the private operators. Parents make their choices from
the schools available and the standard of education can be improved by always taking into
consideration a number of factors which are not only intellectual, but also moral, spiritual and
physical which makes for integral development of the whole human person.

Further research could be done in the same areas to see whether after some years, the
choices of parents actually met the aspirations they had for their kids. Without further
research, we may not be able to ascertain if parents are actually making the right choices for
their kids. We may not be able to ascertain if the parents actually achieve the ends which they
desire for their kids. Further research on parental choice of schools still needs to be done in
other areas of the North West region and Cameroon in general that will paint a better picture
of what primary school choice entails. It will also give a clue as to whether parents are
making the right choices by referring to the results which is the future of their kids.
References


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Appendix 1. Interview Guide Questions.

1. How many children do you have all together?
2. How many of them have completed their primary education?
3. Can you recall the primary schools they completed from?
4. How many of your children are presently enrolled in primary schools?
5. Have all your children been attending the same primary school?
6. In which classes are they?
7. Generally, do you prefer to send your children to Public or Private primary schools?
8. Do you have any particular or specific reason why you choose particular primary schools for your kids?
9. How have your children been performing in the primary school you choose?
10. How do you look at the teachers of the school you children attend?
11. What means of transport do your children use to go school?
12. Can you recall some of your primary school day experiences if any?
13. Do you pay any school fees, contributions or do you pay for school uniforms, books etc
14. Do you find it easy doing paying school fees, buying books and other school needs?
15. How much do can you approximately spend on pay per child per annum?
16. Besides the school fees, do you pay any PTA (Parent Teachers Association) levies?
17. What do you do for a living? Or do you have a job?
18. How do you finance the children’s primary education?
19. Do you receive any external financial assistance to pay for children’s education?
20. What do you feel is the most important purpose of primary education?
21. What are your hopes for your child’s future?