



**Study of Factors Affecting Parental Choice of Private and Public  
School in Riyadh City, Saudi Arabia**

**Being a Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**By**

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## Abstract

In recent years a preference for secondary private school education over secondary public school education has increased rapidly among parents in Riyadh in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). This study explored why, in the perceptions of 386 participants, private schools were preferred by some parents to public schools, or vice-versa.

The study was conducted through questionnaire survey and Focus Group methodologies in order to identify the factors that influenced parents to be attracted to their preferred school, as well as seeking to understand why and how these factors contributed to their decision-making. For example, some parents identified weaknesses in private schools that they felt had an impact upon their child's academic performance. In some situations they, therefore, withdrew their children and sent them to public school. On the other hand, other parents expressed their dissatisfaction with elements of public school, resulting in them sending their children to private school.

Through determining the effects of independent variables in terms of choice of public or private school, the researcher was able to provide head teachers and administrators of private and public schools with identified negative and positive attributes based upon parental perceptions.

The thesis also places the situation in Saudi Arabia within the wider context of global research results regarding school choice, based upon a review of relevant literature addressing the reasons and circumstances influencing parents' preference for private or public schools. This was achieved by collecting and collating data from a questionnaire survey of 386 public school and private school parents, followed by the results of a semi-structured Focus Group interview involving five parents from each type of school. In line with the literature review, a comparison of results was undertaken to explore the identified factors and the differences in perceptions of public and private schools parents related to the Quality of Instruction; Class Size; Teacher-Student Relationship; Parent-School Relationship; School Facilities; Physical Education and Sport activities; School Rules; Safe Haven.

The result of the Logistic Regression analysis revealed that, in the Saudi context, there are four significant predictors of parental school choice at the  $p < 0.05$  level or below: Class Size ( $W = 35.864$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); Safe Haven ( $W = 19.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); School Facilities

( $W= 6.14$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and Physical Education ( $W= 5.44$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Class Size was the strongest predictor, reflecting that parents who score high (or have higher agreement) on this variable, are more likely to choose a private school, because these parents either have experience of private education and/or appreciate that small class size permits a much more intense nurturing and teaching environment for pupils from the staff. This in turn demonstrated higher academic achievement in pupils. The results from this study also demonstrated, however, that parents who identified the issue of the school as a Safe Haven for their children were more likely to choose a public school. Whereas, parents who identified School Facilities as the most influential factor in their decision-making were more likely to choose a private school. This result was reflected with similar results for Physical Education and Sports.

Equally, the findings of this study indicate that parents who chose a private school demonstrated a more positive perception for the desirability of School Quality than public school parents. Also, the Pearson Correlation demonstrated that higher levels of parental educational achievement and monthly income were associated with stronger preferences for private schools. Conversely, participants who do not hold high education qualifications, and those who have lower monthly incomes, were more likely to choose public schools.

As this study was undertaken only in Riyadh City, KSA, the researcher recommends that future replications of this study, or a similar study, should be conducted in other cities in the Kingdom. Such studies could inform and enhance the overall effectiveness of the National Education System in KSA.

Since, for religious and cultural reasons, this study was conducted with male participants only a further important recommendation is that it would be beneficial to carry out a replication of this study, or a similar study, with female participants. Such a study would permit informative comparison of results, thereby positively contributing to enhancing the existing body of knowledge regarding reasons for parental perceptions and preferences related to school choice in KSA. Such data comparisons will help to inform improvements in the overall effectiveness of the National Education System in KSA.

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This Chapter will locate this study in the context of the current understanding, knowledge and data available about parental choice of public or private school in Riyadh City, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). It will achieve this by giving the justification for conducting this study; and the research problems followed by describing its importance and aims and questions that will be raised and addressed; and by summarising the structure of the study. The Chapter concludes with next step.

### **1.2 The Justification for conducting the study**

Eighty years ago the population of KSA consisted primarily of nomadic and illiterate desert tribes. These tribes were united under the leadership of King Abdulaziz, who led the fight for independence from Turkish-Ottoman rule. After achieving liberty, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932. Initially, these illiterate nomadic tribes did not have access to educational opportunities other than the little education provided in the Mosques (Alothaimeen, 1997). With the discovery of oil and its by-products, however, KSA has now become a rich powerful player in the world. In order that KSA's current and future generations are able to play an active part and make an impact on a global scale by competing successfully in the global market, as well as in neighbouring Arab States, the Government of KSA has had to address the issue of national illiteracy and make efforts to raise the quality of education. Consequently, it spends billions of Saudi Riyal (SR) annually on the provision of education for its citizens, i.e. one fourth of its National Budget is allocated to education, making tuition, textbooks and any other relevant educational equipment free (Ministry of Education, 2009). As independent research cited below demonstrates, however, despite the expenditure of these vast sums on education, the performance of pupils remains modest or even poor (see Section 1.2), thereby failing to prepare KSA citizens adequately to meet the demands of internal and global labour markets. Many of the failures identified in the education system in KSA relate to school administration failing to take parents' views into consideration. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that parental choice can be a positive contributory factor as a part of the solution towards raising the standards of education, and this aspect

will be discussed fully in Chapters Five and Six. The raising of educational standards may be achieved through encouraging competition between schools for pupil numbers, as well as through the provision and use of up-to-date technologies and suitably qualified teaching and administrative staff.

It is important that private school administrators understand that if the quality of education they offer does not match government targets and they are not responsive to parental wishes then this could result in their possible closure due to a lack of pupils. Or, at worst, they will fail to provide quality education. If this happens, KSA will suffer from a lack of school provision, as well as parents either being restricted and/or denied the choice of school they perceive best suits their aspirations for their children.

To assist KSA Government's ambitions for their schools and justify why it is important for schools to respond to parental wishes, lessons can be learnt from the experiences of other countries, since researchers have identified various factors related to parental preferences in school choice. It must be acknowledged, however, that each country may have its own specific reasons, demands and ambitions that may differ from those of KSA.

Given the limitations in using research from other countries, it is clearly necessary for empirical data regarding parental choice to be generated from field study research specific to KSA. Such research will allow the Government to develop effective and long-lasting education policies and, in particular, will inform the KSA National Education Scheme and school administrators (especially of private schools).

In this broad context, this study contributes by investigating factors related to school choice from the perceptions of a sample of male parents living in Riyadh City, KSA (see chapter seven, section 7.7, for an explanation as to why only male parents were included). It is hoped, that the findings of this study will provide a useful addition to the literature on private education and will help the KSA Government in its future policy decisions.

### **1.3 Research problems**

Since the beginning of the 21st century the demand for private schools in KSA has increased very quickly since the government has supported them financially in order to reduce the burden on the KSA public school sector, as well as to provide modern teaching techniques and up to-date global content in the educational field. (Aldoasri, 2009).

Furthermore, the KSA government has granted private schools considerable margins of freedom in several aspects of education, such as the selection of teachers and pupils,

pupils' activities, offering extra-curricular activities, stimulating classrooms and small class sizes. In recent years, therefore, there has been a rapid increase in the number of pupils who have been enrolled in private schools, as the table below shows.

**Table 1 Increase of pupil population in KSA Private Schools**

YEAR	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Number of Pupils	8,306	16,155	17,500	21,996

Source: Department of Statistics at the Ministry of Education (2014)

Although, there has been an increase in the number of pupils who enrol in private schools each year, some research studies, such as Alansuer (2004) and Aljije (2002), have found that parents with children enrolled in private schools are not always satisfied with the performance of their children, despite the high fees they spend on their education. When pupil performance has been very disappointing and does not meet parental expectations, this may result in disaffection among parents about the quality and condition of education available in KSA. These concerns about quality are exacerbated since, although the Saudi government spends billions on education, student outcomes remain disappointing because education does not prepare students for the jobs marketplace and for the modern life. These factors have led to parents removing their children from private school and sending them to a public school that better meets their expectations. Vice versa, parents also remove their children from public schools and send them to a private school that better meets their expectations.

In essence, parentally driven transfer of students from one school type to another is a reflection of the dissatisfaction with the education system in KSA. That this dissatisfaction has a firm basis in fact is indicated by international reports, such as the World Bank (2007), which have demonstrated the poor quality of outcomes delivered by the KSA education system. For instance, in 2003, in a study of education systems in 131 countries conducted by the World Economic Forum, KSA occupied the 8th position for spending a fraction of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education. Despite this high level of spending, however, the report concluded that the performance of pupils was modest or even poor, This result was also supported by the 2003 International Mathematics and Science study Trends (TIMSS), which revealed that in examination results in mathematics for secondary school pupils, conducted every four years, KSA occupied the 43rd position out of 45 countries, while secondary school pupils' science



examination results occupied the 39th place out of 45 countries. These results shocked the KSA government and its citizens as they were extremely low and disappointing, considering the amount of money being invested. (Alissa, 2009)

The World Bank Report (2007), meanwhile, ranked the KSA education system in a very low position when compared with other countries in the Middle East, particularly in terms of the quality of education. These disappointing results were identified as being due primarily to the internal and external inefficiency of the education system. For instance, KSA occupied the penultimate position among the 14 Arabic countries in terms of the Primary Education Level Completion Rate; 7th position in the Integrated Index for Quality and 10th position among the 14 Arabic countries in the Integrated Index for Access, Equality, Efficiency and Quality. As a result, these international reports revealed, through such comparisons with other Middle East countries, that the KSA education system still faces many challenges and highlighted the need to remove the obstacles that prevent pupils from improving their skills in the scientific and academic disciplines.

These consistently poor outcomes have led some educationalists, such as Alminua (1993) and Alansuer (2004), to recommend that studies must be conducted in order to discover the strengths and weaknesses of both private and public school education systems, particularly from the perspective of parents, together with which attributes they consider to be essential for their children to fulfil their full potential.

When commencing this research I was working on plans and curriculum of educational department at Al imam University in Riyadh City which meant this thesis is of personal interest and is not part of my job or official position in Al Imam University. Consequently I was not required to investigate this issue, but I was very keen to undertake this study and take up this challenge to investigate specific issues from the perspective of parents who sent their children to private or public school in Riyadh City: i.e. strengths and weaknesses, as well as identifying essential attributes of successful schools.

#### **1.4 The importance of the study**

The fact that many parents are choosing to pay for their children's education is important since it indicates that despite the government spending huge amounts of money in the public school sector, this is failing to produce acceptable results in the eyes of parents, who are the principal consumers. This apparent failure is also, of course, a matter of

concern for other consumers and stakeholders in education, such as the government itself (as KSA's biggest employer), commercial and trade leaders, and providers of specialist careers in the sciences and medicine.

Further, it is important to school administrators, because stronger competition between private and public schools should help to increase the overall quality of teaching, and help schools become more responsive for modern life by better preparing students for the jobs marketplace.

Conversely, it is essential that public school administrators are aware of what attracts parents to pay for private schools for their children's education when they could receive free public school education. This knowledge will help public school administrators assess and implement some of these attributes, if appropriate, to increase their academic results and popularity. Furthermore, this study will offer policymakers a better understanding of how the education agenda in KSA needs to develop in order to better satisfy parents. A more parent focused policy agenda stands a chance of reversing the decline in popularity of public schools and thereby ensure better value for the government's education expenditure.

Another important contribution of this research is in respect to parents themselves. Since most parents want the best educational opportunities possible for their children, they often spend considerable time and effort researching and balancing the advantages and disadvantages of potential schools, whether in the private or public sector (Alansuer, 2004). By providing insights into why parents choose certain public or private schools in Riyadh, this study may, therefore, assist other parents to understand the issues, to refine their criteria and to choose schools which offer the best value for their money.

### **1.5 Aims of the study**

The aims of this study were to identify factors within two main categories - Academic and Convenience - that significantly influence KSA parents in their preference for public or private schools for their children. Specifically, the study endeavoured to accomplish the following tasks:

- To investigate the factors which (a) attract parents to prefer private or public schools; (b) lie behind the increased aspirations and demands of parents and the reasons offered for their preferred school; (c) inform the KSA Ministry of

Education's endeavours to establish schools which address the demands and ambitions of parents in Riyadh City, KSA.

- To explore whether private schools are superior to public schools or vice-versa in terms of the perceptions of parents in Riyadh, KSA.
- To determine the effect of independent variables on parents in terms of their choice of public or private school.
- To explore the reasons and circumstances behind parents' preference for private or public schools.
- To provide head teachers and administrators of private and public schools with the identified factors and positive attributes.
- To offer relevant recommendations to education policymakers that may assist them to develop the KSA educational system in order to produce highly educated citizens capable of meeting internal and global needs.

### **1.6 Research questions**

The aims cited above were formulated into a set of questions that would help the researcher to generate the data needed to address all the issues outlined above. Therefore, a survey was undertaken using the following main and secondary questions.

- a. Main question: **Which underlying factors did parents identify as influencing their decision to enrol their children in public or private schools in Riyadh, KSA?**

This question is followed by some supplementary questions identifying factors that may have influenced parents' decisions to enrol their children in public or private school.

- Does the strength of academic factors affect parents' decisions to enter their children in public or private school?

- Does the strength of the parent-school relationship affect parents' decisions to enter their children in public or private school?
- Does the strength of the school facilities influence parents to put their children in public or private school?
- Does the strength of the physical education and sport activities factor affect parents' decisions to enter their children in public or private schools?
- Does the strength of the safe haven factor affect parents' decisions to enter their children in public or private schools?
- Does the strength of the school rules affect parents' decisions to enter their children in public or private schools?

The second main question is:

**Do the identified factors that influence parents' choice of private or public school vary based upon the parents' socio-economic, educational and age characteristics?**

This question is followed by some supplementary questions identifying factors that may have influenced parents' decisions to enrol their children in public or private school.

- Do parental qualifications have an effect on the choice of private or public school?
- Does age effect parents' choice of private or public school?
- Does monthly income effect parents' choice of private or public school?

### **1.7 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter One details the justification for the study, which explains the motivation for and the need for this research study. It also identifies the research problems, including a discussion of the importance of the study, and concludes by setting out the research aims, presenting the research questions and providing an outline of the structure of the thesis.

The second chapter presents a brief background of the geography, culture and religions of KSA. It contains three sections: the first concentrates on KSA's location along with

providing cultural and social environmental information, and an overview of the country's economy and population. The second section provides general information about the educational system in KSA, which includes some information about the history of its development, viz. the structure of its general educational system; the aims and the policies of the Ministry of Education. The final section presents information about the growth and development of private schools in KSA, including the aims of private schools and government policies related to private education. This is followed by the main elements that influenced and therefore assisted in the growth and prevalence of the private education sector in KSA. The chapter ends with a brief outline of the impact of the demand by KSA parents for private school education, and how this affects the quality of learning outcomes within this education system.

Chapter Three offers a review of the literature related to the topic of the present study. This also includes three sections. The first presents the distinctions between public and private schools, why these arose and hence, the importance of parental school choice. The second section discusses the academic factors which influence parents' preferences for public or private schools including factors such as quality of academic programmes, teachers' qualifications, the teacher-pupil relationship, and class size. The second section also discusses the relationship between parental involvement, their aspirations and what the school offers. The third section discusses the convenience factors that influence parents' preferences for public or private schools, including school facilities, physical education and sports activities, social status determinants and the school as a safe haven. The previous studies which are presented in this chapter were conducted around the world, and are reviewed in order to provide a broader perspective on the most significant factors influencing school choice, thereby allowing the researcher to compare and contrast these factors with the evidence from KSA.

Chapter Four describes the study's methodology, which includes the research design, sampling, selection of participants for the questionnaire survey, the questionnaire design, the piloting of the questionnaire to ensure the relevance and accuracy of questions, the distribution and collection process, and the focus group interview process, as well as ethical considerations, and, finally, the methods of data analysis used. The Chapter also explains how this methodology supports the validity and reliability of the study. Following this, Chapter Five analyses the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter Six, meanwhile, discusses the findings of the data analysis in relation to the review of literature, identifying the underlying factors affecting KSA parents' choice of

school and how they compare with other research findings. Where these are inconsistent, there is a discussion as to why this might be. Chapter Seven concludes the research by summarising its findings and presenting recommendations based on these findings and outlining the potential contributions of the study, followed by limitations of presents study as well as making recommendations for further research.

### **1.8 The next steps**

Having outlined the justification for the study, the factors that prompted a need for this study and its aims and research questions, the next Chapter will present a brief background of the geography, culture and religions of KSA. This background information is essential to understanding the growth and development of private and public schools in KSA, along with the main elements that influence the demand by KSA parent for private and public school education, and how this affects the quality of learning outcomes within the KSA education sector. The next chapter will also give important information to a non-Muslim reader who may not fully understand and appreciate the context of this study.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Background to the Study**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Whilst some of the content of this chapter is descriptive, the relevance to this study of the material discussed will be demonstrated throughout. This is because KSA, as a middle-income, non-Western Islamic country with unique cultural, social and economic factors that influence all government decision making, may not be readily understood by the reader. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to place this study within its context in terms of its location in Saudi Arabia.

This chapter is organised into twelve sections, consisting, first, of a general background to the country that is presented in Section Two. The cultural and social environmental background is outlined in Section Three, while the country's present economic and demographic environment are detailed in Section Four. The next four sections, i.e. the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth, will review the public educational system, whilst the Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelve Sections will review the policies and aims of private schools in KSA. These include details of the main elements that influence and contribute towards the increasing prevalence the private education in Saudi Arabia, along with the impact of this prevalence on the quality of the education system. The final section summarises the chapter.

#### **2.2 General Background**

##### *2.2.1 Formal name, flag and map*

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia comprises most of the Arabian Peninsula, where it occupies a strategic position between the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe. It is a large country, with a surface area of approximately 2,250,000 square kilometres (868,730 square miles). To the north lie Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait, to the east, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, to the south, Yemen and the Sultanate of Oman; and to the west the Red Sea.

There are five main regions in KSA: the Central Region, the Northern Region, the Southern Region, the Eastern Region and the Western Region, along with thirteen administrative territories: Al Bahah, Al Hudud ash Shamaliyah, Al Jawf, Al Madinah, Al Qasim, Ar Riyad, Ash Sharqiyah (Eastern Province), 'Asir, Ha'il, Jizan, Makkah,

Najran, Tabuk (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2009). Further, it is the birthplace of Islam and it is the Guardian of Islam's most sacred shrine, the birth place of Mohammed the Prophet (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2009). Riyadh is the capital of Saudi Arabia.

In addition to the above KSA is custodian to two holy mosques: one of which is in Makkah. It is to this specific holy mosque that all Muslims all around the world face towards five times a day to perform their prayers. Out of reverence to the Makkah mosque and adherence to Islam, all Muslims are expected to travel on pilgrimage once in their lifetime; a process known as the Haja.

The map below shows the location of Saudi Arabia and many of its important cities, as well as its flag



**Figure 1: Flag and Map of the KSA**

As a result of the huge area encompassed by KSA, it is geographically diverse, with forests in the south, mountain ranges in the west and southwest, and deserts covering more than 50% of its area. The climate also varies from region to region. In the summer, temperatures can exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the desert, while in the winter temperatures can drop well down below freezing (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2009).

### **2.3 Cultural and social environment**

The religion of Islam impacts upon all aspects of the nation's culture and social life, i.e. all aspects of peoples' lives. Consequently, KSA's culture has been strengthened and developed within the framework of the legislation and teachings of Islam, including the



judiciary, regulation of family relations, and, of particular relevance here, its educational provision. For example, Islam views education as a religious duty for all males and females. Alsloom (1995) summarises this fact when he stated:

Islam dictates that learning is an obligation for every Muslim, man or woman. This obligation, which gives education the status of a religious duty, is the cornerstone of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is the foundation upon which the state builds its educational responsibilities, and in light of which, the citizen performs duties towards himself, his community, and his religion. The roots of education in Saudi Arabia therefore, go deep into the Islamic education which started in the mosque and led to the establishment of schools and universities around their pillars. (p. 37)

Whilst Arabic is the official language of KSA, and the language regularly and predominantly, English is also commonly used as a minority language, especially in the health sector, business and International Affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), 2009). Consequently, in relation to the methodology of this study, it was necessary to ensure a careful process of translating the questionnaire into English as well as Arabic, and to carefully check translations of all responses from the Focus Group interviews.

### *2.3.1 The economic and demographic environment of KSA*

The main source of income in KSA is oil and its products, which are estimated to be responsible for more than 90% of its National Income. The eastern region of the country has the richest reservoirs of oil in the world, some 26% of the world's proven oil reserves (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2009; Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2006).

At the time of the 1974 census, the population of Saudi Arabia was just over 7 million. Since then, however, the population has grown dramatically through a combination of a high birth rate and immigration. By the time of the 1992 census the total population was 16.9 million, of which 12.3 million were Saudi nationals. In 2000, the population of the KSA stood at 20.8 million, with 54.3% male and 45.7% female Saudi nationals. By 2007, however, the population was estimated to be 27.5 million (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2009).

Given this high population growth rate (one of the highest in the world), it is expected that the population of Saudi Arabia will double during the next five decades and that, by then, more than 65% of the population will be under the age of 30 (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2009). Such a population growth rate must inevitably raise challenges and new demands for all schools in the existing education system. This study can contribute

to meeting these challenges by providing an understanding of the aspirations and ambitions that parents have for their children, and the reasons why they have a preference for either public or private schools. This will enable the education system better to incorporate the views of parents in its decision-making processes.

## **2.4 The Educational system in KSA**

### *2.4.1 Brief details of the educational system in KSA*

The educational system in KSA is one of the youngest educational systems in the world. Historically, the first formal educational system was established in the 1920s (Alharbi, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2005), but it was not until 1935 that the School of Scholarships Foundation was begun in order to prepare Saudi pupils to study abroad. The Second World War interrupted the development of the educational system, after which the KSA Government made a positive decision to develop the educational system and its facilities. Consequently, the College of Islamic Law, established in 1949, was opened as the first college in KSA, followed in 1957 by the College of Teachers (Alhamid et al., 2007; Alharbi, 2002; Ministry of Education, 1999). The first school for girls was only opened in 1962, after the establishment of the General Presidency of Girls' Education, whose aim was to supervise and open schools for girls (Alhamid et al., 2007; Ministry of Education, 2005).

Considerable changes have taken place in the KSA Educational System since the beginning of the current century. For instance, the general regulation for the education of girls, which was previously completely independent from the KSA Ministry of Education, has been integrated into the Ministry of Education, while the College of Teachers has been transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Higher Education. It is important to emphasise that the educational system in KSA is gender-based, with boys and girls educated separately in all schools and universities that are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education.

In addition to these significant changes, many projects have been established in KSA to develop the educational system. This entails equity between educational opportunities for boys and girls where relevant balanced curricula are offered, in order that all pupils may fulfil their potential to pursue their chosen careers, such as doctors, solicitors, engineers. Each curriculum is designed to encompass global marketing demands in line with Western curricula with high level expectations and challenges, so as to permit KSA citizens to compete favourably with their world counterparts in such professions, while

also ensuring that the social, cultural, religious, administrative and industrial needs of KSA itself are met.

#### *2.4.2 The structure of the general educational system in KSA*

KSA's National General Educational System currently consists of around 34,748 schools, with more than 498,581 teachers and nearly 5,274,205 million pupils. More than a quarter of the national budget is allocated to education. Additionally, all the public educational requirements, such as textbooks, healthcare and tuition, are totally free of charge, regardless of a pupil's age, sex or nationality (Ministry of Education, 2009)

The educational system consists of three stages: (a) six years of elementary school; (b) three years of intermediate school, and (c) three years of secondary school. Pupils start elementary school at 6 years of age, and finish secondary school at 18 years of age. In addition, there is an optional voluntary nursery school stage (Almaghidi, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2009).

The academic year consists of two terms, each of between 15 to 18 weeks, making an academic year normally about 30 to 35 weeks long. Pupils generally study for 25 to 36 hours each week, with subjects lasting 45 minutes. Mid-term and final exams are used to evaluate pupils in Intermediate and Secondary Schools, whereas, a formative evaluation is the only approach used in Elementary Schools.

#### *2.4.3 Aims of the Ministry of Education, KSA*

In the context of the challenges outlined in this chapter The Ministry of Education has developed a series of key aims:

- To provide opportunities for education to every citizen of learning age, according to his or her abilities and inclinations, and to facilitate these opportunities by providing the appropriate infrastructure and services
- To improve the curriculum and renew the general education system in accordance with current industrial and social requirements.
- To provide suitable training courses for teachers to increase the skills which help them to control students in the classroom.
- To develop the educational leadership to assist teachers to embrace change strategies and contribute to the improvement of their professional performance and the achievement of future goals.

(King Abdullah Public Education development project, 2006)

#### *2.4.4 Policies of the Ministry of Education, for public schools in KSA*

In order to meet its objectives of developing, upgrading and continuously improving its educational system the Ministry of Education has identified the following objectives and policies and translated them into national plans and specialized work programmes (Ministry of Education, 2009):

- Enrolling all KSA children old enough to attend primary school.
- Implementing educational and training programmes for Teachers' Colleges and others to improve teachers' skills and enrich their experiences.
- Requiring a Bachelor's Degree as the minimum educational requirement for admission of primary-level teachers to the Teachers' Colleges, thus ensuring that all teachers have attended university.
- Implementing educational and training programmes for society as a whole through the Social Service Centres in the Teachers' Colleges.
- Constructing schools and initiating campaigns and programmes to eradicate illiteracy in all parts of KSA.
- Setting up night schools for elementary and secondary levels of education for adults.
- Enhancing pupils' skills, abilities and interests through scientific, cultural, and social, sports, technical and scouting activities.
- Overseeing and enabling Special Educational Services for the handicapped, including the blind, the deaf and those with other disabilities.
- Working on the early detection of disabilities and publishing information on ways to deal with these.
- Working towards initiating specialized library services, such as talking libraries, publishing talking books, etc.
- Increasing the construction of libraries and museums.
- Working towards the achievement of self-sufficiency by enabling KSA citizens to be capable of teaching at all educational levels.
- Reducing the proportion of failures and dropouts at all educational levels by raising educational standards and instituting appropriate support mechanisms.

- Exchanging industrial and cultural information between KSA, Arab, Islamic and other friendly countries.
- Tracking the progress of curricula and the development of educational plans in Teachers' Colleges to ensure the achievement of the Ministry's aims and the integration of the same with the curricula for general education.
- Participating in international and national exhibitions with a view to promoting the educational and cultural activities of KSA.
- Developing a spirit of national solidarity and national integration through well-designed curricula. (Ministry of Education, 2009: 2-5).

It is possible to see in these aims the desire to prepare KSA children to meet current and future industrial and social requirements and to enable them to compete in the global market. This is part of a continual drive to update and renew education policies, as exemplified in The King Abdullah Project cited above, to ensure that KSA becomes more self-sufficient, employing fewer non-KSA workers while giving its own citizens the best chance to compete worldwide.

## **2.5 Policies of the Ministry of Education for the Private School in KSA**

This section describes the policies of private schools and their influence over the spread of private schools in KSA.

The first private school in KSA was Alnajah School in the Holy City of Makkah, established in 1960. Dar Alhadauth School was the second to be established, in 1962, with Dar Alalome School in 1963, closely followed by the Al Faisal School, established in 1965. After this private schools spread rapidly throughout KSA. The advent of private schools arose out of a perceived need to reduce the burden on public education, and provide for students a new kind of education that was different from public education in regards to curriculum, strategies of teaching, students' activities and school facilities, so as to better prepare students for the jobs marketplace and to create competition with public schools with the aim of driving up standards overall. In this context, the Ministry of Education decided in 1960 to establish a Special Department to oversee private schools in KSA, and to adopt policies to govern private schools and to ensure that the State's objectives were achieved. For instance:

- The owner of a private school has to gain permission from the Ministry of Education before starting to provide education to pupils. The Ministry's role is

to confirm whether the owner of the school has ability to support the school or not.

- Private schools must implement and adhere to KSA Education Ministry regulations whilst retaining their private status. Consequently, Ministry of Education teacher preparation courses are available, along with opportunities for private school teachers to access government designed and approved teaching materials so as to develop their performance and curriculum delivery within their school. Some private schools in KSA, therefore, follow a curriculum comparable to that of the public schools, with similar teaching materials and a curriculum that is relevant and modern, with subjects such as English language, computer science, and sports.
- The owner of a private school has the right to hire and fire teachers and staff in the school.
- The Ministry of Education oversees the financial and technical aspects of private education.
- The head teacher of a private school has to submit a report every year for the Ministry of Education to assess the quality and achievement of teachers, pupils and other staff.
- Private schools must provide education for boys and girls separately in all schools mixed education is forbidden.
- Private schools must promote and enhance Islamic values in pupils, paying special attention to Arabic curricula.
- The requirements for accepting pupils in private education must be comparable to the requirements of acceptance of pupils in public education.
- The head teachers of private schools must to be aware about the rules and systems of the KSA Ministry of Education.
- Supervisors from the Ministry of Education are responsible for the supervision of both public and private schools regarding the teachers, pupils, staff and facilities.
- The buildings and furniture of the school should be appropriate for the educational environment.
- Private schools should create an educational environment which encourages and increases the skills of pupils, using a range of activities to discover the talents of pupils.

- Private schools should offer an equal opportunity for pupils to participate in learning and should take into account individual differences among pupils.
- Private schools must apply a range of means of modern teaching. For example, Individualised Education, cooperative learning, use of technology to convey knowledge.
- Provide the Extra Curricula, such as computer science and English language, should be included in the curriculum to expand the perceptions of pupils and prepare them for the future.
- Private schools must provide modern facilities, such as advanced communications in class rooms, labs, libraries, sport centres and transportation.
- Private schools that do not follow the rules of the KSA Ministry of Education will be closed. (Ministry of Education, 2009).

## **2.6 The main elements influencing the growth of private education in KSA.**

KSA has witnessed the establishment of a number of private schools that have led to a rapid increase in the number of pupils, classrooms, teachers and administrative staff supporting the KSA Government to develop the country's citizens in all aspects of life. According, Alnafa (2008) confirmed that the number of private schools will increase in future because of over-subscription of pupils attending public schools, even though the KSA government allocates a huge budget for public education. For example, in 2007 the government spent 96,700,000,000 S.R. on education (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2009).

Based upon the above, the following are examples of factors that have influenced the development of the private school sector in KSA (Aminua, 1993):

- Private schools are supported financially by the KSA Government, by financial provision for head teachers' salaries and the provision of textbooks, because the government seeks to create an environment that is suitable for teaching and learning, more innovative, and which attracts better teachers, in the belief that this will feed through into improved performance in both private and public schools.
- Public schools are restricted to a specific percentage of non-KSA pupils, unlike private schools where there is no such restriction. This has led to non-

KSA pupils being enrolled in private school due to this flexibility in acceptance conditions.

- The increase in the population has led to overcrowding in public schools, which has encouraged some pupils to be registered in private schools. This in turn provoked the KSA Government to increase the number of private schools in order to provide more high quality school choice in the face of population pressures on public schools.
- KSA is characterised by political stability and security which have encouraged rich people across the world to invest in its educational system. This in turn has led to the establishment of private schools and competition among private schools to attract pupils.
- Another significant factor in the growth of private education provision in KSA is the large numbers of workers from overseas who have come to KSA and who send their children to private school since they cannot find places in public schools due to the limitation on the number of non-Saudi students in public schools. Hence, the number of non-KSA pupils reached 50 per cent of the overall number of pupils in private school. According to Al nafa (2008:3) “the boom in the economy in Saudi Arabia has led to the spread of the private school in big cities which attracts pupils who could not find a place in public school or parents who believe their children will find better care in a private school”.
- The relative wealth of the KSA population encourages parents to explore alternative kinds of education for their children. This means that many parents find that private schools meet their dreams, aspirations and desires for their children, regardless of the impact of tuition fees.
- The increasing level of education of the KSA population also encourages parents to pay more attention to the education of their children, including ensuring that they are taught in a high quality school characterised by teaching quality, a safe environment and modern equipment, regardless of the school fees.
- Private schools provide modern facilities that do not exist in public schools. For example, transportation to collect pupils and deliver them home after school, laboratories, libraries and sport centres, English language teaching in elementary school and the provision of medical services in school.



All these elements contribute towards the demand for private schooling in KSA. In the next section the researcher will present some Tables that illustrate the development of the number of private of school in KSA.

### 2.6.1 Tables demonstrating the rapid growth of Private Education in KSA

The following Tables demonstrate the increase in the numbers of private schools in KSA during the last four academic years.

**Table 2 Increase in the number of schools, and number of classes**

Academic year	Number of schools	Number of classes
2010-2011	414	2,869
2011-2012	437	2,996
2012-2013	442	3,044
2013-2014	462	3,139

Source: Department of Statistics at the Ministry of Education (2014)

Table 2 demonstrates the rapid increase in the number of schools from 2010-2011 to date, i.e. from 414 schools to 462 schools in 2013-2014 (an increase of nearly 3% per year). The number of classes has also risen from 2,869 in 2010-2011 to 3,139 in 2013-2014, i.e. by 270 in four years.

**Table 3: Increase in the number of teachers and administrative personnel**

Academic year	Teacher	Administrative
2010 -2011	5,238	139
2011-2012	5,338	221
2012-2013	5,978	256
2013-2014	6,320	272

Source: Department of Statistics at the Ministry of Education (2014)

Table 3 illustrates that the number of private school teachers in 2010-2011 was 5,238 but this increased to 6,320 teachers in 2013-2014, or 1,082 teachers in four years. Further,

whereas the number of administrative staff was 139 in 2010-2011 it was 272 in 2013-2014, an increase of 133 in four years.

## **2.7 Impact of the growth of private schools on the quality of education**

The establishment and high demand for private education has stimulated and motivated owners, along with head teachers and governing bodies of private schools, to improve programmes of education so that they meet the specific needs of each individual pupil and, thereby, meeting the desires and aspirations of parents (Aminua, 1993). Aldoasri (2009) shows that there are also other reasons that have contributed to the increase in the quality of educational programmes and facilities in private school, such as:

- The Ministry of Education is very keen to develop private schools through comprehensive assessment of the school. For example, the Supervision Educational Committee constantly visits private schools to evaluate: The administration of the school in terms of teacher qualifications, cultural activities and the extent of control over teachers and pupils. The teachers qualified status and effectiveness in terms of general culture, preparation of lessons, and effective use of technological tools in the classroom. The proportion of pupils who graduate each year: class size, scores attained in examinations. The condition of buildings, furniture and facilities, including the library; and, effective use of equipment and educational resources. The school's activities and after school clubs. The provision of safety and cleanliness in the school (Official Guidelines, KSA Supervision Educational Committee, 2010).
- The Ministry of Education also allows private schools a margin of freedom to evolve their own curricula, or add extra curricula that are compatible with the education policy. In this way it encourages private schools to explore and develop more flexible curricula, leading to diversity and excellence.
- The increased number of private schools in KSA has created effective competition among private schools, making private schools overall more attractive to parents when choosing for their children. Thus some private schools employ experts in leadership within school to develop an effective education process. Moreover, resources such as learning centres help teachers with modern techniques, materials and suggested computerised inputs to

benefit both teachers and their pupils. Finally, the increased level of competition between private schools has encouraged some private schools to provide Special Education for pupils as well as older KSA citizens who suffer from learning difficulties.

- Providing specialist education aimed at promoting critical thinking and problem solving skills, using contemporary means of conversation or dialogue and creative thinking.

## **2.8 Summary**

This chapter has presented a brief background of KSA, providing information related to its cultural and social environment, as well as an overview of the economic environment and the increase in the population of Saudi Arabia. The educational system in KSA was discussed, including brief details of its history and structure, along with the aims and the policies of the KSA Ministry of Education. The fourth section presented some information related to private schools in KSA, including details of the Government policies governing private education and the identification of the main elements that have led to the rapid growth of private education and its impact on the quality of the education process.

In the next chapter, a comprehensive Review of Literature related to this study will be undertaken, primarily of prior studies into influences on parental school choice. The chapter starts with a brief discussion of the distinction between public and private Schools, both in KSA specifically, and within the global context, with this being followed by an extended discussion of the factors that influence parents to prefer public or private school for their children in KSA.

# Chapter Three

## Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the existing literature associated with parental preferences and choice of school for their off spring and is comprised, therefore, of distinct but inter-related sections. The review in the first section will identify and clarify differences between public and private schools and the importance of school choice from a global perspective, in order to set the context for this study. This will be followed by a discussion of the various elements that have been identified as influencing school choice: covering the attitudes and factors motivating parents who express an interest in exercising their choice of school. The academic variables comprise academic programme; qualifications of teachers; the relationship between students and teachers; class size, with the relationship between parents and the school as a secondary consideration. This is followed by convenience categories that include several components, such as the quality of school facilities, physical education and sport activities, social status determinants and the ability of the school to act as a safe haven.

These factors are identified as crucial in measuring the quality of the educational process in schools, and are therefore frequently cited in the literature pertaining to school choice. There is a gap, however, between what is known and what researchers wish to find out. Hence, there is a need to identify where and why a gap in knowledge exists, and then decide what research needs to be undertaken to address this lack of knowledge and why it has arisen. For example, very little or no research has been conducted into the rationales behind parental school choices in Riyadh, KSA, or on matching students' socio-economic backgrounds to a variety of elements offered and/or on offer from schools. Acquiring this information is important since it offers an insight into issues of school choice in a different cultural setting such as KSA context. Hence, this study intends to contribute to the 'gap analyses' by investigating academic aspects, as well as by determining the reasons that impact upon the parental choice of either private school or public school, as this has not previously been conducted within a Saudi context. Therefore, this study aims to address this unexplored situation, through an original research analysis of the existing gap in the available literature, showing that answers to this study's investigative question have yet to be addressed.

### **3.2 Distinctions between Public and Private Schools**

Two major factors distinguish public and private schools: (a) funding by the government along with (b) their student admission policies (Lieberman, 1998; 1990). Public schools are funded and in part administered by the government, whereas private schools are usually funded by businesses, and charge school fees. Some private schools, however, are funded by “revenue from tuition, private donations and if applicable, support from their affiliate religious organization” (Dillsa et al. 2010: 438). Moreover, public schools cannot deny admission to any student provided there is a place available for him/her. In other words, they offer the opportunity for all learners to become literate regardless of culture or religious background, since their financial support comes directly from the government. As such, public schools are compelled to adhere to government rules and regulations related to curriculum and education policies (Lieberman, 1998). Private schools, on the other hand, are able to retain the right to reject potential students and to employ whoever they wish as teachers (without recognised qualifications) without interference from government agencies. Furthermore, private school teachers may be less qualified than public school teachers: in particular in regard to the educational aspect and also they tend to have fewer years of teaching experience. Furthermore, private school students appear to differ from public school learners in terms of socio-economic background. Gamoran (1996) stressed that private schools expel fewer students and overall their students are considered to take their education more seriously. In addition, "public schools have a more complicated bureaucratic structure than private schools. Private schools tend to have more focused and coherent goals. Public schools tend to be more flexible" (Taylor, 1996: 69).

### **3.3 Importance of School Choice**

Across the world, disadvantaged children are often assigned within a particular ‘catchment area’ school, often in a poor environment with inexperienced teachers and a lack of advanced equipment. This is because parents usually do not possess the financial capability to provide their children with the transportation to attend a better school further away. A school choice programme is one potential solution to this problem. Introducing more school choice will probably allow such parents to leave the poor school and choose

a better school for their children (Friedman & Friedman, 1980; Moe, 1995). So the choice of school will reinforce equity by providing disadvantaged students multiple options to choose the school that provides them with an appropriate education (Bell, 2009). In addition, studies generally show a positive relationship between the choice of school and the measures used to identify school quality, implying that these factors strongly influence parents when making school choice decisions to benefit their children both academically and behaviourally. Hastings et al. (2007:3) point out that:

School choice plans are intended to improve both education quality and equity by providing incentives for schools to compete on academic achievement and by allowing broader access to quality public schools.

This is in line with Goldring and Hausm (1999: 472), who concluded that “If parents are choosing for academic reasons, then choice may provide the impetus for changes in teaching and learning”, and with Lavy (2009)’s argument that the school choice programme leads to the improvement in certain educational criteria, such as the curriculum, average exam scores and drop-out rates. Weiher and Tedin (2002) also support more school choice on the basis that it can improve behaviour in schools by encouraging a sound relationship between teachers and students, and decreasing the rate of bullying and disruption in the classroom as students will be more likely to accept the advice of teachers directing them to more positive behaviours. Linow (2011: 415) sums up this line of argument:

The majority of choice reforms have a twofold goal: one, to increase the academic achievement, and consequently the chances for success, of the students engaging in the choice option; and two, to induce system-wide change and improvement

In contrast to the above findings, however, Rothstein (2006) found that students’ academic achievement had little effect on parental school choice, and no evidence that school choice improves average school effectiveness. Similarly, Cullen et al. (2006) found that the Chicago Public School Choice Programme had no effect on the academic achievements of students in their study. Others argue that the school choice programme may cause the proportion of outstanding students in poorly performing schools to decline further, increasing the gap between high performing and poorly performing schools, and potentially making the problems of poorly performing schools worse as funding is reduced (Martinez-Vazquez 1985; Hamilton and Macauley, 1991). Marlow (2010: 12),

meanwhile, pointed out that “Private schooling is clearly one option for parents unhappy with public schools and therefore private enrolments may inversely influence public school performance as long as private schools outperform public schools.”

### *3.3.1 Competition and school choice*

Responding to this critique, the proponents of school choice believe that poor quality public schools can overcome this barrier if they take measures to increase their performance and to reduce or eliminate the gap between the high quality school and poor quality schools (Kemerer 2002; Holmes et al. 2003; Goldhaber 2003). For proponents, therefore, the school choice programme was established “in part, on the principles of the open market” (Wohlstetter, Nayfack, Flores 2008). In the USA, 21 school choice programmes have been established in 13 states (Forster, 2008). As Forster (2008: 45) argues, this “school choice provides positive incentives for improvements that are lacking in the traditional monopoly system”. Also, the proponents of school choice programmes suppose that it will make schools more responsive to consumers, for example by encouraging schools to take account of the differences between students in terms of their interests and abilities. Bosetti and Pyryt (2007, 93) point out that:

A public school system that offers a variety of programs based on different philosophic orientations to teaching and learning, or programmatic foci on the arts, athletics, science or traditional education suggests that children with a particular talent or ability can be placed in a program where they will be challenged.

Furthermore, the variety of school choice programmes has also generated competition between schools to attract consumers. According to Wohlstetter, Nayfack, Flores (2008) “By creating competition within the public education sector, schools diversify their educational programs to meet various consumer demands” (p.68). Also, competition between schools will increase the students’ educational outcomes and attract parents’ involvement. Similarly, competition has brought the quality of public education to a level that is closer to the criteria expected by parents (Friedman and Friedman, 1981; Fraser, 1984). This finding corresponds with that of Hoxby (1994:4), who found that:

Greater private school competitiveness significantly raises the quality of public schools as measured by educational attainments, wages, and high school graduation tests of public school students.

Hoxby's later work (Hoxby, 1998, 2000 and 2003) also continues to support the thesis that school choice provokes competition which improves school performance. As Levin (2002: 20) puts it: "Competition will result in improved school effectiveness, productivity, and service, leading to higher quality".

Considering teachers, specifically, Sauter (1994) concluded that teachers become more accountable for improving the quality of education when school choice makes the market competitive. This confirms that school choice imposes on educators and head teachers demands to upgrade the quality of instruction on offer, and to maintain strict criteria to achieve and sustain students attainment at a high standard, thereby encouraging parents to send and retain their children at the school.

Other scholars, both in the USA and UK, are more cautious about the positive effects of competition. Belfield and Levin (2002) argued that competition often improves performance, but that the effects are generally modest. Smith and Meier (1995) and Witte (1996), meanwhile, have opined that competition has no significant positive effect on school performance. In the UK, Burgess et al. (2010: 2) have argued that competition has not significantly improved upon the academic performance of schools for various reasons:

First, failing schools often do not get shut down, which undermines the competitive pressure of the market. Rather they are targeted with a swathe of policies aimed at improving their test results, often with additional financial investment. Second, successful, oversubscribed schools cannot expand to meet demand indefinitely.

Sander (1999: 705) supports this claim, stating "My results do not support the hypothesis that private schools directly raise the quality of public education through competitive pressure".

### *3.3.2 School choice and the role of parents in schools*

The importance of school choice lies not only in the development of the quality of education through competition among schools, but may also be extended to motivate parents to engage in their roles in the educational process as actors in educational policy-making. Some educationalists contend that the participation of parents in the educational process can act as a mechanism for educational reform. For instance, according to Marsh et al. (2009: 33) "The parents' perspective helps the policy makers to identify what the public schools may be missing that private schools are offering". Similarly, Godwin and Kemerer (2002) concluded that the parental perspective could cut through the external controls and rules that may have a negative effect on the educational process.



School choice, therefore, encourages parents to take more interest in the education process. School is not something that just happens, but is something they have taken a conscious decision about, which is both empowering and gives the confidence to continue to get involved. Tonso and Colombo (2006:107), for example, indicate that “parents valued being able to meet with teachers at any time, not just at quarterly grade-report conferences, and this gave them a strong sense that they were part of the school”.

Consequently, researchers have called for the expansion of the right of parents to school choice to include a parental role in school curriculum design and in the appointment of teachers (Johnson, 1990). This would generate the “configuration of education” through school choice, i.e. parents and schools sharing common cultures, values and thoughts could lead to the process of education being more successful (Smrekar, 1996).

One issue here, however, is the extent to which this sharing of common cultures, values and thoughts helps or hinders the achievement of well-rounded education (Coleman, 1988). Pardey (1991) pointed out that parents’ values and the behaviour of families affected their aims in terms of school choice and hence the decisions they take, e.g. parents reinforce their affiliation of religion, personal values, and culture through the school they prefer for their children. One school of thought is that the reinforcement of the familial interest in learning one’s own religion improves the performance of students. Vryhof (2005: 141) confirmed that “the faith-based schools often do it better, that education goes better when children are in the schools where they want to be and their parents want them to be. In such a system, everyone wins”.

Additionally, students interact with similar-minded peers in terms of dimensions of culture and values. In other words, as Aljaji (2002) concluded, the school becomes representative of the family’s background, which means the parents can promote their community’s attitude within the education process through the school choice system.

### **3.4 Priorities and major issues in school choice**

One theme in the literature on school choice is the attempt to identify the issues that influence parents who valued school choice by asking them to consider the most significant criteria for their choice of school for their children. Many of these studies are located in the USA and United Kingdom, but there have also been some in developing countries, such as Jordan and Kuwait. One of the earlier examples of this kind of study,

Coldron and Boulton (1991), identified 30 reasons for parental school choice, summarising them into four main categories:

- Academic/educational.
- Safe school
- Organisation
- Source (sibling of student)

Whilst Taylor (1996) provided a list of four main categories that attract parents to choose a particular school:

- Academic Factors (Quality of curriculum, quality of instruction, commitment of teachers, high achievement).
- Convenience Factors.
- proximity of the school
- Religious/Moral Factors.

According to Charles (2011), however, there are five main categories that attract parents to choose a school:

- Quality of the instruction
- Support for students' learning
- School climate/environment for learning
- Parent/school relationship
- Resource management

While for Yi Hsu and Yuan-Fang (2013) there are six main categories:

- Educational environment.
- Educational philosophy.
- Campus and facilities
- Curricular Activities.

- School specialties.
- Location and transportation.

This study uses factor analysis to combine the main categories of factors listed above into eight primary factors to explore the most important influences on parents' school choice decisions. The academic factor is divided into four variables: (A) academic programme; (B) the qualifications of teachers; (C) the relationship between students and teacher; (D) the class size. The second factor is the school/parent relationship. The third factor: the convenience factor (suitability) was divided into four variables: (A) the school facilities; (B) physical education and sport; (C) social status determinants; (D) the safe haven.

### *3.4.1 Academic factor*

#### *3.4.1.1 Importance of quality of Academic Programmes*

According to Bauch and Goldring (1995) the vast majority of parents prioritise academic quality in their choice of school as they believe their children will receive a better education. Overall, data shows that academic quality is at the top or close to the top of the priorities US parents cite as important when evaluating a school. This is because high quality education encourages learners to do their best work and to have high expectations of increasing attainment. Woods et al. (1998: 163) reported that “the academic progress and examination performance” of students seems to be the leading factor in the attractiveness of a school in the school choice process. Whilst, Charles (2011) and Morgan et al. (1993) found that the quality of education and geographical proximity of the school were important reasons for the selection of a particular school. Denessen et al. (2005: 352) supported the contention that “choosers may also select a school for its high quality of education, high standards of academic achievement or strong emphasis on social education”. Numerous other researchers, such as Kleitz et al. (2000); Martinez et al. (1995); Vanourek et al. (1998) concluded that concern for academic quality figured very high on the list when parents were asked their criteria for school choice. Furthermore, recent researchers found parents set considerable store by academic quality when choosing schools. So, Burgess et al. (2007:33) found that:

Parents, almost universally in our data, have a strong preference for schools with high academic attainment. This supports the idea that competition to meet those preferences should help to raise standards

Similarly, Angeloni (2012) concluded that parents rank the quality of academic and innovative teaching very highly when choosing a school, while Collins and Snell (2000) indicate that 64% of parents in the UK choose a school on the basis of the school's good examination results, making this the most important factor in school choice.

#### *3.4.1.2 Importance of Academic Programme related to students' achievement*

A lot of the research into the distinctions between public and private schools in terms of student attainment has shown that a high quality academic programme leads to high student achievement. Bosetti (2004) claimed that the academic element contributed to a successful academic outcome of students. One of the earliest studies into this topic was carried out in the USA by Coleman et al. (1982), who compared outcomes in standardised test scores in mathematics, reading and vocabulary across a sample of 900 US private Catholic high school students, 64 non-Catholic private schools and 13,508 public schools.

Overall, students in non-Catholic private schools showed higher levels of achievement than those in public schools. Coleman et al. (1982:178) suggested that the reasons behind this are:

First, private schools create higher rates of engagement in academic activities, school attendance is better, students do more homework, and students generally take more rigorous subjects. Second, students' behaviour in school has strong consistent effects on students' achievement.

Nevertheless, this study has been criticised by Anderson and Resnick (1997) as it did not include some of the key variables that distinguish private schools and public schools, such as the type of academic courses they offer. It is also important to take family income into consideration to make an accurate comparison between the students' achievement at private schools and public schools (Anderson and Resnick, 1997). Later studies, therefore, have attempted to factor a range of other variables into the comparison. For example, the National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) Report (2003) examined differences between public and private schools by comparing mean National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and mathematics scores, taking into account selected characteristics of students and/or schools, with a sample of over 6,900 public schools and over 530 private schools. The NCES results showed that grade 4 and grade 8 students attending private schools reached a higher level than public school learners. In emerging nations, meanwhile, the consensus in studies into the effectiveness of public

versus private schools is that the performance of children in private schools is better than of their counterparts in public schools.

In the KSA context, Alghamdi and Asiri (1992) carried out a study in Taif City to compare public and private schools in terms of the educational attainment of their students. Conducting standardised tests in reading, mathematics, history, geography and religion, they found that, generally, the private school students were more proficient than the public school students. They attributed this mainly to the private school teachers being better qualified than their counterparts in public schools. Alghamdi and Asiri (1992) did not take into account other variables that could affect students' achievement, e.g. demographics of the students and family income. Moreover, the sample in the study was very small: only two private schools and two public schools.

To summarise, the studies discussed in this section compared private schools and public schools in terms of the outcomes of students. These studies measured student achievement and mostly showed that private school students achieved better results than public school students.

On the other hand, proponents of public schools argue that private schools choose students who only meet academic standards that are higher than public school criteria (Shanker, 1993), and Marlow (2010: 11) supports this argument, suggesting that the reason for Californian private school students achieving higher marks in tests is "that public school test scores are inversely related to private enrolments, thus supporting the view that private school enrolments partly reflect exiting from public schools due to poor academic performance". In addition, these studies indicated some of the elements that contribute to the academic success of private schools, viz. suitable educational environment, attention given to the aspirations of students, a focus on improving students' skills, school attendance, students doing more homework, improving teachers' performance by training courses, and schools' emphasis on a good relationship between students and teachers.

#### *3.4.1.3 Academic Programme and school choice*

Parents, when making decisions about both types of school (public and private), cited their academic quality as an important reason for their choice. Most researchers, however (Bauch, 1988; Erickson, 1986; Greeley et al. 1976; Kraushaa, 1972; NCES, 2003), have agreed that those US parents who enrol their children in private schools believe that they are of better academic quality than public schools. The Department of Education School

Finance project in the US (1983) indicated that parents choose a private school for three main reasons: (a) academic quality (42%); (b) religious instruction (30%) and (c) discipline (12%). Public school parents prefer public schools for the availability of transportation (24%) and the academic quality (17%), while private school parents emphasise academic quality as the most important reason that attracted them to send their children to private school. Sullivan (1989) conducted a study in schools in Fayette County, Kentucky, USA by phoning all parents who had withdrawn their children from public school in 1981-1982, having selected only parents who had transferred their children in mid-year. The study showed that the parents had transferred their children for reasons relating to academic quality, such as “teachers did not assist the children during the learning” and “dissatisfied with teaching methods”. Sullivan (1989) found some other reasons that influenced parents to withdraw their children from public school, e.g. 35 parents sent their children to a private school because their siblings were already there. Hence, Sullivan (1989) concluded that the quality of the academic education programme in school is a significant reason that influenced parents who had withdrawn their children from public school and sent them to private school. The results of this study correspond with prior studies, such as that of Schwartz (1986), who carried out a study of 246 US families who applied for 36 private schools, in an attempt to explore the reasons that influence parents to transfer their children from public schools to private schools in Montclair, USA. Parents were asked to rate issues in order of importance: the feature that attracted 85% of parents to choose a private school was teaching staff, while academic standards was rated by 73% of parents; other features such as discipline, civic and moral values and so on were considered less important. This finding is reinforced by Taylor (1996), in a study carried out in Miami, Florida, USA, in which parents who already sent their children to private schools were asked to list the reasons from academic factors (quality of curriculum, Quality of instruction, commitment of teachers, high achievement), convenience factors, (proximity of the school’s location, school’s operating schedule) and religious/moral factors. The researcher aimed to determine the main factors that influenced them to choose the specific type of private school. He found the top-ranked reasons were the quality of the curriculum, quality of instruction, emphasis on morality, commitment of teachers, and well-defined academic and instructional goals. These “were also the variables most often mentioned in the ranking procedure” (Taylor, 1996: 171). In addition, Laudermilk (1994) interviewed parents who had chosen public schools, private schools and home-schooling in Kansas City, USA. His results indicated that the main reason most of the parents chose a private school for their children was academic

quality, since they expected the private school setting to provide academic rigour, individual instruction, and a productive pace of instruction. The second most important reason was superior quality education leading to success in college. The parents who chose a private school wanted their children to receive a high quality education and to continue to make successful decisions in their lives (Laudermilk, 1994). This is consistent with Wolf's (2002) study, in which 828 parents in three selected private schools in urban, rural and suburban Georgia, USA, were asked to rank the most important factor in their decision put discipline, religion, academic quality, proximity, good teachers, safety, good facilities, and moral and ethical values. The result of the study indicated that the vast majority of parents in the three areas preferred a private school for the quality of education, with parents emphasising the strong academic curriculum, a good programme that was responsive to the demands of the children, good teachers and good facilities (Wolf, 2002). The most recent study from the USA reviewed here is that of Bukhari and Randall (2009) who surveyed 209 parents to identify the reasons that prompted them to take their children out of public schools and enter them in one of 28 private schools in Utah County. Parents were asked to rank the significant factors that influenced them to prefer private school to public school. These were quality of curriculum, moral values, religious values, quality of instruction, class size, school climate, discipline, environment, safety issues, commitment of teachers, high achievement, responsiveness to parents, preparation for secondary school/college, well defined academic goals, social/economic background of students, proximity of school, extracurricular activities, ethnic background of students, quality of school facilities and equipment. Similar to the other studies, their findings were that the main reasons were the quality of the curriculum and the quality of instruction (p, 258). Consequently, Bukhari and Randall (2009:263) state that:

Almost half of the group (61.48%) left public education as a result of built-up frustration over a lack of adequate education for their children. Thirty-three parents (54%) in this group believed their children were in some way gifted and his or her needs were not being met in public education.

In the United Kingdom, Wood et al. (1998) conducted a study on 1000 parents to determine the factors that influenced them to send their children to secondary schools located in three areas Marshampton rural area, East Greenvale—a semi-rural area and Northern Heights—an urban area in northern England. Parents were asked to rank factors such as the head teacher, the school staff, pupils' behaviour in the school, the school

atmosphere, uniform, facilities (rooms, equipment ,books, etc.), the class sizes, the standard of academic education, whether the school is a single sex school, exam results, discipline policy, the school's reputation, whether the child's friends will be there, the school's attitude to parents, its closeness to home/convenience for travel, whether the child has special educational needs, whether it is the child's preferred school and the child's happiness at the school. The results of the study differed between the case areas. In one of the urban schools, parents were influenced by whether the child's friend would be at the school and the school's nearness to home/convenience for travel. In another school, however, parents were influenced by the standard of academic education and exam results. In the third school academic factors were also important, with the school's reputation and the standard of academic education being ranked most highly. However,

The top three most important influences, cited by around a fifth or more of parents and indicated as influential by a majority of parents: standard of academic education, nearness to home/ convenience for travel and child's happiness at the school. (p. 124)

In Holland, Denessen et al. (2005) investigated the reasons for school choice by collecting data from more than 10,000 parents of students attending 700 Dutch private schools. The parents were asked to rate 17 reasons for choosing their school, for instance, "school environment, social background of most of the pupils, no other school available, order and discipline, reputation of the school, pupils attending this school get ahead in society, the school pays attention to each child, other parents are our kind of people, extra-curricular activities, denomination of the school, school is within easy reach, possibility of coming into contact with other cultures, quality of education, attractive school building, advice of friends, class size and school is considerate of our religion." (p.34). In this study, quality of education was the most important reason that attracted parents to select a school, with other reasons for school choice related to academic quality, environment, order and discipline. This finding is consistent with a study was carried out in Switzerland, where MacKenzie et al. (2003) conducted a survey of 283 parents of secondary school children with the aim of exploring the main factors stimulating them to choose one of three possible schools. The parents were asked to respond to eleven questionnaire items: a desire for my child to be educated in the English language, a good impression when visiting the school, the curriculum used in the school, the reputation of the school, a desire for my child to have an international education, the existence of the IB Diploma programme in Grades 11 and 12, the quality of the school facilities, the unsuitability of local Swiss schools, the recommendation of existing or previous [school] parents, the



school's record of examination results, previous good experience of an international school.

The researcher found the parents from the three schools gave very similar responses. The three top factors cited were a desire for my child to be educated in the English language, the curriculum used in the school and the school's record of examination results. Each of these responses indicated that it is the academic factor which encourage parents to prefer one school over another.

One of the few studies in this area outside of Europe and the USA is that of Almutawa and Alwatfa (2007) in Kuwait. Aiming to identify the reasons that attracted parents to send their children to private international schools, they found that parents almost all agreed that the educational standards were higher than in public schools and that the education kept pace with modern theories to deal with students and solve their problems, in addition to having sophisticated technological means to transfer knowledge to the students. It does need to be noted, however, that the large expatriate community from the Indian sub-continent and other countries in the Gulf region and North Africa makes it necessary for there to be private schools that cater for this school age population who are not entitled to attend Kuwait public schools. The Ministry of Education does oversee private schools and are responsible for their supervision, however, and classifies the private school in three categories A, B, C based on the qualification of teachers, small classroom number and quality of facilities. Aldaheh (2012) considers the standards of the Kuwait international schools (category A) were higher than in public schools because they are characterised by some qualities, the first of which is that all such schools are bilingual which makes them attractive to parents who wish to see their children's use of English improved. In addition there are some charity organisations which financially support poor people to sending their children to private school which means they have increased in number and created effective competition, thus making some private schools overall more attractive to parents when choosing for their children and subsequently increasing the rank of school.

A considerable number of studies, however, did not agree that parents chose private schools for academic reasons. For instance, the Carnegie Foundation (1992: 12) stated that "many parents who decide to send their children to another school appear to do so for non-academic reasons". Similarly, Hunter (1991) found that 39% of British parents in his sample emphasised good examination results, 18.2% qualified teachers, 16.8% placed particular emphasis on practical areas of the curriculum, while 88% stressed

discipline. 40% of the sample of parents in other studies (Minnesota House of Representatives, 1990) cited convenience of proximity, while 20% cited extra-curricular academic reasons. Maddaus (1990), meanwhile, found that transportation, proximity and discipline were the main factors influencing parents' choice of school. Overall, however, the consensus among researchers is that a very high proportion of parents consider high quality academic programmes and convenience as reasons affecting their choice of school.

### **3.5 Teachers qualifications and quality of delivery**

Teachers play a critical role in the success of the school as they are able to develop strategies that address the educational needs of every student and implement varied learning styles to convey the knowledge from the textbook to students successfully. Adeogun (2001) argued that the quality of the education system is dependent on the quality of its teachers and that a school with inadequate human resources may not be able to meet the objectives of the education system. Croninger et al. (2005: 313) consider that "teacher quality is more strongly related to student achievement than other kinds of investments, including reduced class sizes, overall spending on education, and teacher salaries". Rivkin et al. (1998) reached similar conclusions concerning the significance of teacher quality. Their analysis of 400,000 students in 3000 schools showed that, although school quality is a crucial determinant of student achievement, teacher quality is the most important predictor. Similarly, according to Sanders and Rivers (1996), the most important factor influencing student achievement is teacher quality, with the impact of teachers on student achievement being both additive and cumulative. Some researchers, however, argue that teachers should be seen as just one variable among several overlapping variables in respect to academic outcomes. For instance, family and society can have either a positive or negative effect on students and on this basis teachers do not represent the most crucial variable in students' achievement (Jensen, 1969, 1973; Hebb, 1970). Popham (1971) also argues in a study he conducted with two groups of students that a teacher's experience does not represent a crucial element in students' achievement. In Popham's study, the first group of students had been taught by unqualified teachers, while the second group had been taught by qualified teachers. No statistically significant differences between the two groups were found, implying that the experience of the teachers had no effect on the teaching/learning process.

Other scholars, exploring the role of teachers in more detail, argue that there are many ways in which teachers' attitudes, behaviour and qualities can have a positive impact on

student outcomes and school choice. For instance, Vanderbrook (2006) states that teachers must be motivated in order to teach very able students, employing creative and student-centred methods, without prejudice against either girls or boys, or ethnic minorities. Similarly, Kyriacou (1997:56) argues that:

Taking account of pupil differences is a key factor in thinking about effective teaching. It enables the teacher to be more sensitive to the context of the educational experience to be set up and the issues involved in ensuring that this experience will facilitate the desired learning by a particular group of pupils.

Gazda-Grace (2002) argues that teachers should have a broad cultural focus, including and welcoming various linguistic options and other cultural elements that reflect regional needs and interests. Jacob and Lefgren (2005:33) found that:

On average, parents strongly prefer teachers that principals describe as best able to promote student satisfaction, and place relatively less value on a teacher's ability to raise standardised math or reading achievement.

Whilst, Eggen and Kauchak (2001) viewed the main criteria for successful teaching as enthusiasm, caring, firmness, fairness, promotion of students' responsibility, using lesson time effectively, having established efficient routines, interacting freely with students, and providing motivation for them.

### *3.5.1 Teachers qualifications and school choice*

The preceding discussion has focused on the evidence for teachers' impact on the quality of academic outcomes. This section develops this to consider how the interaction between teachers and academic outcomes influences parental school choice.

Clearly, teachers impact all aspects of the education process. Thus, it is important to investigate the performance of teachers in schools because they represent one of the most important reasons that may attract parents to value the school. According to Ferraiolo et al. (2004: 220), "The future and impact of the school choice movement may be affected by the makeup of the teacher workforce, the environments in which teachers work, and teachers' familiarity with competition".

Gibson's (1993) discussion of the main reasons for US parents' choice of a private school found that the main reasons were the qualifications of teachers and the quality of teaching, followed by the quality of the curriculum. He also explored the reasons behind the US parents taking their children out of public school and found that lack of attention from

teachers was the main reason, followed by large class sizes and perceived poor quality of instruction.

In the KSA context, Alansari (2004) carried out a study in Dammam City to explore the reasons that encourage parents to send their children to private schools. He found the most important reason to be the high qualifications of teachers, who (a) educated the students by means of advanced technology, (b) had the ability to understand the problems of students and help them to overcome the challenges, and (c) used modern theories to develop social values. Similarly, in the context of Kuwait, Alghanim (1990) estimated the achievements of students through their test scores and found that the private school students' scores were better than those of their counterparts in public schools. This result led him to explore the main reasons that enhance the outcomes in private schools and found that in private schools the preparation of teachers was better. This is consistent with Gaitor (2006), who conducted a study of US parents to determine the reasons that would influence parents to move their children if they were to move from the child's assigned school to having school choice. He surveyed 200 parents from schools which he chose randomly and found that among the reasons most commonly cited were: being involved in a child's education; having the ability to choose the child's school; having highly qualified teachers; having good parent/teacher relationships; easy to contact/communicate with the principal; an active PTA in the school; a fully-functional computer lab; keeping abreast of the reading curriculum; a safe school environment; small class size; friendly and competent staff, and child's test scores. This shows that highly qualified teachers are a reason cited by parents as a very important influence on them when choosing a school for their children.

Goldring and Phillips (2008: 224) indicated that Nashville Public Schools parents favour private schools since they perceive the teachers as more flexible and responsive to the demands of parents:

We assume a 61% probability of a parent considering a private school if they 'strongly agree' that teachers and parents communicated openly about their child's needs and that such a collaboration was helpful.

This leads the parents to become involved in the school and improve the performance of students in the classroom. A similar study was conducted in Arizona State by Lacireno-Paquet and Brantley (2008), identifying the influences on parents engaging in school choice. They found that academic quality was the key influence on these parents, regardless of ethnicity or social background, because all the parents paid great attention

to the quality of teachers, a good curriculum and high test scores. Consistent with this, Bukari and Randall (2009), who conducted study in Utah, argued that the reasons behind parents sending their children to private school were that they found that the private school teachers met the children's needs and were better at eliminating fighting and bullying among students.

Ajuwon and Bradshaw (2010), meanwhile, surveyed 116 parents in southwest Missouri to identify the type of school they sent their children to (i.e., public or private). Their findings showed that 52.6% of parents chose public schooling for three reasons: curricular offerings; affordability, and services for children with special needs. Whilst, 31% of parents had five criteria when choosing a private school: "optimal learning experiences, appropriate social atmosphere, teaches civic responsibility, quality teachers, and effective teaching methods" (Ajuwon and Bradshaw, 2010: 49). This is consistent with Bosetti (2004), who surveyed 1,500 parents of students in 11 private, 8 public and 10 alternative elementary schools in Alberta, Canada. The aim was to reveal the reasons that influence parents to send their children to private or public schools. The conclusion was that 90% of parents sent their children to private schools for academic excellence, which was the choice of 76% of private school students' parents, and that teachers in these schools really cared about students and parents. The teaching strategies used at this school are innovative. 51% of private school parents valued the school for that, while 50% of public school parents cited school choice for 'proximity to their home' as the most important reason for selecting a school, followed by 48% of parents who preferred the school for its safety. This indicates that the public school parents concentrated on the proximity factor since the cost of private school was prohibitive. Given the cost constraints public school parents tend to focus on other advantages of public schools rather than on pure academic results.

Some researchers focus on the impact of matching students to teachers and the effect of this on mathematics and reading examinations. Teske and Marschall (2000) found qualified teachers and high test scores to be the two most important reasons that attract parents to choose a school. Jacob and Lefgren (2005) conducted a study in the western United States to identify parents' preferences for their children's education. They collected 251 parental requests for public elementary school teachers during the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years. They found parents from ethnic minorities were more likely to request teachers who were highly rated by the head teacher in terms of increasing student outcomes in exams in reading and maths in grades 1-8, after the results were provided to

the parents, teachers and students. Conversely, parents who were not from an ethnic minority preferred teachers who had a high level of ability to make their children satisfied in the classroom. This finding is congruent with Metzler and Woessmann (2010), who examined the effect of teachers' subject knowledge on students' achievement in two subjects. This sample consisted of 1,200 6th grade students attending 900 primary schools in the USA. Metzler and Woessmann (2010) found an innovative way to explore the effect of teachers' academic performance on student achievement at the schools. They chose teachers' knowledge of mathematics and reading and the commensurate achievement in these subjects by their individual students, limiting the sample to students who were taught by the same teachers, as well as in schools that had just one classroom for each grade. This perhaps helped to avoid bias by the exclusion of some students or from variables of teachers. They reported that "teacher subject knowledge exerts a statistically and quantitatively significant impact on student achievement and the teachers' quality had a considerable effect on students' achievement" (Metzler and Woessmann, 2010: 20)

It can be seen from the above discussion that teachers' qualifications; their knowledge of their academic subject; the ways in which they impart information to their children - preferably using modern technologies, along with interesting, stimulating problem-solving methodologies are important to parents, and therefore influences their school choice are. Equally, it is important to parents that the chosen school and its teachers have a sound reputation for addressing individual children's concerns/needs, build their self-confidence and self-esteem, and ensure pupils' safety. Parents consider teachers to have a very considerable lifelong effect on pupils' personal and academic achievements. It is very important to parents who value teachers, therefore, that they use varied teaching methods, care for their children's well-being, help their children to overcome the challenges that face them in education by nurturing the whole child, i.e. his/her intellectual potential, respect for others, behaviour, religious beliefs, physical development, self-awareness, encouraging good citizenship. This leads on to the importance of teacher-children relationships.

### **3.6 Teacher-student relationship**

Pianta (1999: 62) defines student-teacher relationships as "Emotions-based experiences that emerge out of teachers' on-going interactions with their students". As Hargreaves (1994: 835) advocates:

Good teaching is charged with positive emotion. It is not just a matter of knowing one's subject, being efficient, having correct competencies, or learning all the right techniques. Good teachers are not just well oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy.

Kyriacou (2007: 74), meanwhile emphasises the importance of the relationship between students and teachers in terms of creating an educational climate in the classroom.

A positive classroom climate very much depends on the type of relationship you establish with your pupils. Pupils' learning is most likely to flourish in a climate where this relationship is based on mutual respect and rapport between yourself and your pupils.

He also indicates some elements that help to develop a rapport between teachers and students, such as, mutual respect and rapport, the use of humour and enhancing pupils' self-esteem. Some researchers, however, such as Richmond and Gorham (1996), considered that teachers must promote positive relationships with students, because learners look to educators for more than knowledge. Students need to succeed within their classroom, as well as in everyday life. They therefore want teachers to help them feel good about themselves by building their self-esteem, and to feel secure and in control of their environment. Hence, Burleson and Samter (1990) invited teachers to identify some positive attributes that characterised the development of a relationship with students. For instance, "...calling students by their first name, asking students about themselves, and asking for students' opinions. Non-verbal immediacy consists of behaviours, such as smiling at students, making eye contact, moving about the classroom, and using vocal variety" (p.10). In addition, Good and Brophy (1995) identified further attributes of the teacher that can enhance strong teacher-student relationships as likability, consideration, positivity and patience. They postulated that these attributes may promote students' academic performance and behaviour by providing a positive climate of support and emotional freedom where students feel confident and not threatened. Thus, according to Knoell (2012:10):

The close emotional bond between teachers and students led students to recognize the school as a home away from home. The teachers' dedication to students' growth helped inspire students to meet the school's requirements, both academic and behavioural.

The above suggests that the relationship between students and teachers is very important in assisting students to overcome the educational challenges that they may face in their school lives, e.g. stress, self-esteem, difficulty in understanding some topics in a variety of lessons. This has led Lee (2007) to conclude that a positive relationship between teachers and students will motivate students' exploration of and enthusiasm for knowledge, and thereby improve their educational attainment. He adds Therefore, "A trust relationship has been found to function as a motivational resource when students are faced with difficulties in school because trust relationships help adolescents develop positive psychological and emotional perceptions of themselves" (ibid. p. 210).

Supporting this, Sauter (1994) found that there were a considerable number of parents who believed that a positive relationship between teachers and students can affect their academic performance primarily through encouraging positive motivation. Thus, the parents valued private schools based on the good relationship between the teachers and students. Sauter (1994: 148) highlighted that "competent and superior teaching staff" is the parents' preferred option, after selecting a good education system that implements high standards of behaviour, politeness and expectations.

Buttrum (1994) also found, from results obtained from a range of schools, that a positive relationship between teachers and students had very significant effects upon the students and their achievements and their parents' attitude towards the school. The importance of the relationship in terms of school choice was also considered by Woods et al. (1998), who found it to be one of the primary considerations of parents. Similarly, Cheng (1994:59) found that the manner and attitude of school staff was "strongly related to social climate and student-affective performance leadership styles on use of power, social climate and perceived physical environment, and student affective performance" indicating that good leadership by teachers was very important for effective learning. In KSA, Albiker (1994) found that parents (a) prefer private schools since they are characterised by positive relationships between teachers and students, and (b) they believe that a trust relationship between the teachers and learners/students probably improves the positive behaviour of students and promotes their confidence, respect for self and others, and motivates them to achieve their best.

The benefits of teacher-student relationships in terms of the academic performance and behaviour of students will be discussed in the next sub-section.



### *3.6.1 The importance of the teacher-student relationship in terms of academic performance.*

“The relationship between teachers and students is a major factor in the affective learning that occurs in the classroom” (Frymier and Houser. 2000: 208), hence it is one of the most important factors contributing to learners’ success in school and academic performance. Based upon the above assertions, a solid and mutually respectful relationship between teachers and students can positively affect academic performance of students through stimulating and supporting their motivation. Similarly, Birch and Ladd (1998) and Noddings (1988, 1992) emphasised that such a relationship can influence learning. Hence, they advocate that if teachers care, they must make an effort to show that they value students’ work ethics and learning, which can in turn promote the students’ own exploration of knowledge and cognitive development. “Increases in teacher–child relationship quality are associated with improvements in teacher-reported academic skills” (Maldonado-Carrenõ and Votruba-Drzal 2011: 601). This is supported by Liu (2013: 22), who claims that “A positive relationship between teachers and students may contribute to the positive feelings of students about the educational process, which should lead to enhancing the quality of both teaching and learning”.

For instance, Song and Liu (2007) examined the teacher-student relationship among 867 students in 18 classes selected from three elementary and three middle schools. The three main characteristics examined were collaboration, closeness and encouragement to take the initiative. Their results show that the students rated collaboration the highest and taking the initiative the lowest with closeness in the middle. They concluded that this implied that whilst students followed their teacher's directions to complete academic tasks (an influence of the traditional model of teaching/learning) they were less likely to take the initiative by asking questions or seeking additional assistance. Burchinal et al. (2002), meanwhile, found that positive teacher–student relationships had a stronger impact upon the development of reading skills among African-American students than among Caucasian students. As a consequence of mutual respect, strong teacher-student relationships, Miller (2000) pointed out, obviously play an important role in helping reduce the chances of future poor outcomes, i.e. dropping out of school.

### *3.6.2 The importance of the teacher-student relationship in terms of students' behaviour.*

A number of studies conducted in the past thirty years have argued that a positive relationship between teachers and students does not have an effect on students' behaviour, such as Deutch (1971) and Hurt, Scott and McCroskey (1978) argue that students inherit their behaviour from their parents. Hence, they dismiss the assertion that a positive relationship between teachers and students is in any way effective. They believe that the home atmosphere and environment shape students' behaviours, so teachers have no positive effect on students' behaviour. Jenks et al. (1972) conducted an investigation into the influence and importance of early childhood, finding that 50% of the cohort's patterns of behaviour were shaped before they began school. As a result, they concluded that while the quality of the relationship between teachers and students may be one variable among several other more important variables, it is not a crucial factor in changing the behaviour of disruptive, undisciplined students.

Contrary to these findings, however, some researchers' studies such as those of Copeland-Mitchell et al. (1997); Fallu and Janosz, (2001); Hamre and Pianta, (2001), have suggested that a positive teacher–student relationship can help insulate children from the effects of known risk factors and thereby promote positive behaviour.

Similarly, Aldial (1999) invited teachers to be a good example for students by establishing a strong relationship characterised by compassion, respect, fellowship, friendship and actions that reinforced positive behaviour and practice within students, in order to inculcate sound values and good morals. Griggs et al. (2009: 562) summed this line of argument up by stating that “student–teacher relationships matter... (and) may reduce the risk of negative behavioural outcomes...”. Further, Hamre and Pianta (2001) believe that a good quality of relationship between teachers and students impacts positively on their behaviour, more than academic performance: “the quality of teacher–child relationships is a stronger predictor of behavioural than of academic outcomes” (ibid. p. 634).

Other researchers (cited below), meanwhile, maintain that the quality of the relationship between teachers and students is enhanced by creating learning environments that are secure in several aspects. Firstly, it assists a school to recognise the significant risk associated with students' aggression. For instance, Hughes (1999) examined the influence of supportive teacher–student relationships on aggressive behaviour within a sample of highly aggressive children. Their results, rated by teachers and peers, revealed a

significant correlation between enhancing positive relationships with a reduction in the levels of aggression. This finding was confirmed by Hamre and Pianta (2001), who tested a similar model of moderated risk. They found that strong, mutually respectful teacher-student relationships were characterised by low levels of conflict and dependency; predicted fewer disciplinary infractions; a lower risk of suspension from school and; more positive teacher assessments of work habits through the eighth grade for children who had high teacher-rated behaviour problems in school.

Secondly, Taylor and Tricket (1989) concluded that strong teacher-student relationships developed an ethos of deference and respect between students and their teachers. Howes et al. (1994) confirmed these findings, adding that when students established positive relationships with teachers, they became more accepted by their peers. Howes et al. (1994) attribute this impact on students' peer relationships solely to the good relationship between teachers and students.

Consequently, numerous researchers, such as Frymier et al. (2000), have identified the quality of the relationship between teachers and students as enhancing trust and confidence in students, thereby allowing them to ask personal questions or questions perceived as stupid.

When teachers communicate with students as individuals and utilize skills, such as ego support, they make it easier for students to ask risky questions. Students avoid asking questions, because they fear being seen as stupid or foolish: when a trusting and caring relationship develops between teachers and students, a safe learning environment is created" (ibid. p.217).

This finding is consistent with that of Tafesh (2008), who conducted a study involving secondary schools in Egypt. He found positive relationships between teachers and students freed students from fear, thereby enhancing their confidence. This is achieved within a safe, secure atmosphere within the school.

### *3.6.3 Importance of Teacher-student Relationship in terms of school choice*

The discussion in the preceding sub-sections has shown that there is a considerable body of scholarly evidence to suggest that teacher-student relationships is an important influence on students' academic performance and behaviour. In this section this discussion is advanced by considering how this perception feeds through to influence parental school choice.

In the context of factors affecting school choice, Sauter (1994: 148) highlighted as an important reason: “competent and superior teaching staff who implemented strong student/teacher relationships”, together with a good education system and standards. Buttrum (1994), meanwhile, stated that the second most important criterion when the US parents were making decisions on school choice was a positive relationship between teachers and students. Similarly, in the UK, Woods et al. (1998) identified this relationship in terms of school choice to be one of the primary considerations of British parents, while Cheng (1994: 54) found that the ethos of school staff and the way they encouraged sound student-teacher relationships is “strongly related to social climate and student-affective performance”, along with good leadership to produce effective learning.

In KSA, Albiker (1994) found that parents prefer private schools since they are characterised by positive relationships between teachers and students, which is felt to improve the behaviour of students and promote their confidence. Equally, he postulates that parental and close family behavioural standards were respected and reinforced. In a subsequent study in KSA, Al shimri (1999) surveyed 1,043 parents and determined that the reason that influenced 81% of these parents to prefer private schools was the strong positive relationship between teachers and students (particularly where teachers encouraged students to express their points of view, and dealt with students equally and fairly).

In conclusion, therefore, the beneficial aspects embedded in solid teacher-student relationships are fundamental to school choice, especially when they nurture self-esteem, positive behavioural outcomes, and self-confidence and uphold the existing family standards of behaviour, making the school very attractive to parents. This attribute will be explored further in this study to confirm the above and produce up to-date findings in KSA.

### **3.7 Class size**

There are various definitions of class size. For instance, for Scheck et al. (1994), small classes can contain as many as 38 learners, while Gibbs et al. (1996) define classes as “small” if they contain a no more than 30 pupils and “large” if they contain more than 70 students. In contrast, Nye et al. (2000) define classes as small if they contain between 8 and 15 pupils.

Some studies, such as Finn and Achilles (1990), Krueger (1999), and Nye et al. (2000a) consider small classes to have an average size of 15, and describe these as being much more effective and with more positive learning outcomes for students than regular classes (i.e. those with 22 students on average). It can be seen that one of the challenges facing research on class size is the lack of a consistent definition of small and large classes, and this can make it difficult to compare the results of different studies.

Considering the differences between public and private schools in terms of attitudes to class size is also instructive. Statistics from countries such as Kuwait, Jordan and the US have shown that private schools have smaller class sizes than public schools, as well as being more selective of the students whom they enrol, and this leads to their claim to enhance the potential of all of their students. Based upon this premise, in the USA (from the 2008-2009 academic year) there has been a deliberate policy to reduce non-private school class sizes, as the average private school had 478 pupils with the class size average being a maximum of 16 students (NAIS, 2009). As a result, the State of Tennessee, for example, changed and expanded its finance policy to include incentives to reduce class sizes to a maximum of 20 students in the primary grades (Tennessee Department of Education, 2009). In the KSA context, meanwhile, private school enrolment was found to be on average 20 students per class, whereas the public school class size was 45 students on average, resulting in teachers spending a longer time having to exercise discipline as each class size increased (Department of Statistics at the Ministry of Education).

### *3.7.1 Importance of class size in terms of academic achievement and reform of behaviour*

There is a continuing debate among both teachers and scholars regarding the relationship between class size and academic achievement. There are two main approaches. The first taken by researchers such as Ayrault and Crosetto (1982:43), who argue that:

The central point is that with a reduced class size, students are given opportunities to practise interpersonal skills and to see themselves as significant individuals, with a sense of personal power, whose actions and opinions have ensured that each student perceives that he is known by important adults who care for him, thereby enhancing self-esteem

Cooper and McIntyre (1996), meanwhile, believe that small class size is an important parameter influencing teachers and students to develop effective learning outcomes

across several aspects of the educational process. In this respect, Kharman (2005:101) indicated that:

Having smaller classes is advantageous in many ways to both teachers and students, because it makes the teaching/learning atmosphere more interesting and enjoyable; teachers have more time to become familiar with their students' abilities, interests and problems

Similarly, Pedder (2006: 215) pointed out that “there may be more or better opportunities for learning in smaller classes where teachers act in certain ways”. Recent studies conducted by researchers, such as Ball and Forzani (2007: 532), highlight some particular ways in which the teacher’s help is enhanced in a small class:

The types of instructional activities that teachers are able to plan for and enact when working with only a relatively small number of students, or the extent to which smaller class size allows for more productive interactions among students

Other researchers, such as Nye et al. (2000b), found there are both improvements in literacy abilities (as evidenced by higher examination results when they reviewed 100 class-size research studies carried out between 1950 to 1985, using a related cluster analysis approach that grouped similar kinds of studies together) and identifiable statistical relationships between students in small classes and their achievement, particularly with primary stage students and disadvantaged students. They concluded that:

The effects of smaller classes on student learning, attitudes, and behaviour decreases as grade level increases” and “the clearest evidence of positive effects is in the primary grades, particularly kindergarten through third grade, and that reducing class size is especially promising for disadvantaged and minority students” (ibid. p,24).

Similarly, Finn and Achilles (1999) confirmed that the benefits of class size can be most advantageous for disadvantaged students.

In a subsequent study, Shin and Chung (2009) investigated 192 class size research studies carried out from 1989 to 2008, using category analysis to evaluate the overall impact of size. In this meta-analysis, the researchers aimed to examine other impacts on size and whether the effect was homogenous. They used category analysis of such elements as the characteristics of each study (whether published or not), grade of student attainment, school academic subject, and location. Shin and Chung (2009:16), concluding that:

In this meta-analysis, the effects of smaller classes on student achievement decreases as grade level increases. CSR effect on achievement is better in the early stage of studentship, especially in grades K3. Therefore, policy makers should focus on this critical time period. If they have limited educational funds, elementary school students would be a better investment.

Furthermore, significant numbers of recent studies, e.g. Finn and Achilles (1999), Krueger and Whitmore (2001), Molnar et al. (1999), Mosteller (1995) and Nye et al. (2000b), have found advantages in smaller class sizes in children's early years at school and with minority students.

Some of the statistics cited in research above, along with the study by Tracey and Morrow (1998), serves to confirm that private schools have smaller average class sizes than public schools. Tracey and Morrow, therefore, concluded that a small class size environment presents better opportunities to offer a stimulus, particularly in literacy activities, helping the development of reading and writing skills. Furthermore, behavioural control of the students in a small size class was achieved with little or no effort.

Correspondingly, Blatchford et al. (2002) reported that the results of a longitudinal study of 9,330 reception year pupils from a group of randomly selected schools from English Local Education Authorities demonstrated a significant effect of class size on both academic attainment in literacy and mathematics, and in respect to low baseline achievers and socio-economically disadvantaged students. This is clearly indicative that small class size tends to positively impact upon the examination results of students. Similarly, Maxwell (1995) noted a significant relationship between class sizes and high test scores, which he attributed to students in small classes enjoying more interaction and more activities and personal engagement with their teacher. Supporting this finding, McKeachie (1990) offers other reasons for the high test scores due to small class sizes, such as that "students are actively processing material rather than passively listening and reading" (ibid. p.190).

One issue in assessing the influences on student performance, of course, is that there are a lot of potential variables. For instance, Pedder (2006: 216) stated that:

With so many variables involved in the teaching-learning process it is difficult to be certain that the findings are attributable to class size alone, rather than to the cumulative and aggregative effect of other variables in the teaching learning process and school environment working in association with each other

Further, Bourke (1986) concludes from his findings that the effect of class sizes varied in ways that were related to other variables, such as the practice of teaching and how it is applied to small classes leading to develop students' achievement.

A small class size allows the teacher to support and help students individually by having the time and opportunity to answer each question or offer suggestions, whilst students are more involved in problem solving activities. Similarly, La Paro et al. (2004: 412) believed that student-teacher interactions, within the context of small class size, are very important in the development of students' performance: "interactions between children and teachers are a primary mechanism through which classroom experiences affect development". Cassidy et al. (2005: 511) confirmed that when measuring classroom quality, by analyses of structural variables, "characteristic[s] of the environment that [are] independent of human interaction" can be identified, such as stimulating, interesting topic-based materials, the positioning of classroom furniture, formal and informal stimuli encouraging 'ownership' of educational development and study, problem solving mechanisms through provision of scaffolding materials available for students to explore and experiment.

In addition, small class sizes allow improvements in non-academic attainment by reducing some undesirable social phenomena, such as sexual activity and criminal behaviour in the school since the small number of students in the classroom helps teachers maintain control (Figlio and Ludwig 2000). This finding agrees with that of Rivkin et al. (2005: 51), who demonstrated "that one characteristic of teachers that does affect student academic success is years of experience, especially in the first year of schooling.....(Hence) By placing more experienced teachers in small classes of well-behaved students, private schools invest more resources in developing a small number of high-quality students" and as a consequence make their school more attractive to parents in respect to their choice of school.

On the other the hand, some studies that have adopted current statistical methodologies have produced different conclusions. For instance, Nye et al. (2000b) found only weak evidence that small class size had large benefits for disadvantaged students. The researchers noted significant achievement only in reading, one of the academic subjects which the authors examined. This is consistent with Bourke (1986), who found very little relationship between class size and classroom activities, and very little relationship between class size and pupils' attainments. Similarly, Kennedy and Siegfried (1997) pointed out that there was no impact of class size upon students' performance tests,



despite it seemed obvious to parents that the class size is a significant factor impacting upon the effectiveness of the learning outcomes and what students are able to achieve.

Indeed, researchers from as far back as Edmondson and Mulder (1924) through to Johnson (2010) have argued that class size does not affect student academic achievement. Edmondson and Mulder (1924) found when they compared large classes, (that included 109 students), with smaller class sizes, (that included 49 students) studying similar courses, the outcome of the two samples was almost equal. Similarly, Johnson (2010) stated that after a thorough review of the empirical studies and reviews of research involving class size effects since 1924, that the overall picture is inconclusive.

Further, results from Pascarella and Terenzini (1991: 87) also indicated that “class size is not particularly an important factor when the goal of instruction is the acquisition of subject matter knowledge and academic skills”. Similarly, the findings of Nye et al. (2002); Konstantopoulos (2008) found no evidence that the small class size led to lower-achieving students becoming higher achieving. Nevertheless, one significant flaw in these findings has been that a variation in average small class size was not correlated with differences in students’ improvement. None of these studies used the variable student motivation or willingness to learn. Consequently, Hanushek (1986) pointed out that there was no positive impact on students’ school achievement related to the size of the class and concluded that it was more probably the work ethic, or the students’ self-determination to learn, that impacts most on the learning outcomes, rather than how big or small the class is.

The inconclusive findings of scholarly research related to the importance of class size in terms of academic achievement and reform of behaviour that have been explored above, encourages consideration of the parental perception of the importance of class size in terms of academic achievement and reform of behaviour, and how this influences school choice.

### *3.7.2 Parental perceptions of the importance of class size in terms of school choice*

Notwithstanding the inconclusive research findings discussed above, there are significant numbers of studies that demonstrate that parents base their preference for a specific school upon class size. For instance, Taylor (1996) surveyed 560 parents, who had already enrolled their children in private schools in Miami, Florida, to establish which important factors influenced parents to select a private school. He found that the criterion that influenced parents most was the private school’s class size. Taylor (1996) indicted the

reason behind parents' preference for small class size was they believed there would be a positive correlation between the small class and the achievement of students. This assumption was based upon teachers' ability to be more responsive to the individual needs of students (ibid. p, 165).

Similarly, small class size was identified by Alansari (2004) in his research survey of 214 parents who already sent their children to private school in Dammam City, KSA. Whilst exploring the reasons influencing parents to prefer private schools over public schools, Alansari (2004) asked parents to rank nine factors, i.e. extracurricular social background; understanding of the students' problems and help to solve them; small class size; reduction of the burden on parents at home; qualifications of teachers; reputation of the school and the use of innovative teaching strategies. The findings showed that 75% of parents preferred the private school primarily because of the smaller classes, on account of a perception that "Small class sizes assist teachers to take account of the different abilities of students because it makes it easier to use modern of strategies teaching according to the abilities of students. As a result, it increases the students' educational attainment as the students are interesting to raise their skills in the classroom" (ibid. p.9).

This result is consistent with the study of Bosetti (2004), who surveyed 1,500 parents of students in eleven private and eight public schools in Alberta, Canada, in order to determine the three reasons that most affected their decision. She asked both parents of private school pupils and public school pupils to rank seven goals: "my child enjoys school; the school is a safe place; teachers in this school really care about students and parents; school provides a challenging learning environment for my child; school helps students achieve their potential; the teaching strategies used at this school are innovative; school provides sufficient extracurricular activities for my child" (p.21). Bosetti (2004: 22) found that the principal selection criteria were that "Private school parents are seeking a school that addresses the individual needs of their child", along with class size, shared values and beliefs and teaching style. She also found that public school parents were more focused on the moral development of their children, and good work habits along with self-discipline. In respect to the choice of public school Bosetti showed that well over half of her sample chose public school due its close proximity to their houses, followed by its academic reputation and the teachers, but none emphasised class size.

Aljaji (2002), meanwhile, indicate that in KSA parents consider class size as a powerful reason behind their choice of school. Despite the fact that the KSA government provides free education for all its citizens, including all textbooks, relevant teaching materials and

equipment, nevertheless, parents in his study still preferred to pay for private education, citing overcrowding in public school classes as the main reason.

Similarly, Almutawa and Alwatfa (2007) surveyed 674 parents in Kuwait, with the intention of identifying the reasons that influenced parents to switch their children from public to private schools. The eight most important reasons were: relationships between parents and school, small class size, increase in the skills of students, social background, students learning a foreign language, students' positive learning outcomes, the school was a safe place, and the use of modern teaching theory and current electronic equipment. Almutawa and Alwatfa (2007) also found that the extent of overcrowding in public school classes was an important primary factor in parental decision-making.

Bukari and Randall's (2009) research into parents' decision to switch their children from public to private schools in the State of Utah, USA came to similar conclusions. They found that most parents were influenced by factors such as "class size, quality of curriculum, moral values, religious values, quality of instruction, school climate, disciplined environment, safety issues, commitment of teachers, high achievement, responsiveness to parents, preparation for secondary/school/college, well-defined academic goals, social/economic background of students and the close proximity of the school to their home" (p. 262).

Again, the main reason that influenced parental decision-making was class size: "parents were dismayed by the large class sizes and the lack of a good gifted and talented programme in the public schools" (Bukari and Randall 2009: 259). Likewise, this finding was reinforced by the recent results found by Charles (2011) when he surveyed 336 US parents in Tennessee State whilst researching into the comparison between public and private school in terms of the quality of their instruction programme, support for students' learning, school climate /environment for learning and parents/school relationship. The most significant result from this study showed small class size and its effect upon parental decision making favoured private schools which they perceived as offering smaller enrolment numbers, smaller average class sizes and, as a consequence, superior learning and teaching environments. Similar outcomes were found by Howell (2006) in a study in the State of Massachusetts into public school parents' knowledge of and interest in alternative schooling options. He investigated the following nine issues: "quality of teaching, discipline, safety and order, class size, programmes such as physical education, reputation of school, extracurricular programmes (sports teams), distance from house, racial/ethnic composition of school, and friends at school" (p. 168). It was found that the

quality of teaching and class size were the most important qualities parents wished for their children, with the two linked through the assumption that small class sizes result in enhanced quality of teaching. Interestingly, Howell (2006) found that location, racial-ethnic composition, and the prevalence of friends were the least important reasons behind parental school choice decisions.

Based upon the discussion above it can be concluded that class size is a very important element in parental considerations when deciding upon which private or public school to choose. Furthermore such parental decisions are based on the assumption that a smaller class equates to a more suitable and better quality learning environment in which the student's achievements and development will be enhanced through a constructive relationship between teachers and learners in which teachers have more time to devote to supporting each individual learner.

In summary, the impact of class size is a controversial issue in that there is no clear consensus among scholars as to whether class size has any real impact on student academic performance. In terms of parental school choice, however, it is clear that (notwithstanding the mixed research picture) parents are convinced that smaller classes lead to better academic results and, therefore that class size is a significant determinant of school choice.

### **3.8 The relationship between parents and school**

Outstanding schools emphasise communication between parents and school as very important, citing parents as part of the success of the educational process. Thus, schools should plan to reduce the gap between the school and parents by making parents feel welcome, improving the relationship of trust between school and teachers and opening a discussion regarding morals and faiths (Adams, Forsyth, Mitchell, 2009). Collaboration between school and parents is necessary to achieve the school's educational objectives and to increase the awareness of parents of their duty/role in educating children (Rahim, 1987).

Some studies have emphasised the importance of parents' contributions to the educational process at school by demonstrating the importance of communication between the school and the parents. For instance, Mathews (2009) recommended improving the relationship between school and parents by sending an invitation to parents to attend annual celebrations; to meet with teachers to discuss curricular and teaching strategies used in the school, particularly in maths, as well as to help solve problems facing the learner.

Simon & Mercy (1975) suggested that the school communicate with parents by visiting students' homes and encouraging parents to visit the school; the school sending letters to parents about a particular student's problems asking them to assist the school to solve them, and the participation of parents in certain school activities. Downs (1993) also suggested some ways to develop the relationship between school and parents, e.g. the school should interview parents to benefit from their experience in terms of evaluating the educational procedure in school and the impact of school activities in improving students' attainment levels.

The majority of studies of parental involvement follow a similar structure, including inviting them to offer lectures and training courses for students or participating in school activities or decision making (Mohammad, 1997). Christenson, Godber and Anderson (2005) called for parental participation in the Parent-Teacher Organisation, e.g. involvement in volunteer activities and participation in teachers' meetings. Epstein et al. (2009) also suggested some ways in which parents could be encouraged to become more involved in school, through inviting them to participate in making important decisions, volunteering at school, and teaching at home.

Barrera and Warner (2006: 74), meanwhile, confirmed that whilst the school should establish some channels of communication with parents "This sharing of information can be accomplished through newsletters, school handbooks, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, informal messages, and telephone calls. Schools can work through community-based organizations to develop relationships with parents from diverse backgrounds". And although some parents are interested in participating in their children's schools, some lack a sense of engagement with the school primarily because they believe their involvement is seen as only to pick children up at the school punctually (Barnard, 2004).

### *3.8.1 Parental involvement and student achievement*

Certain researchers, such as Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) and Sheldon (2003), have found a correlation between parental involvement and students' achievement in many aspects of education, including grades, attendance and test scores. Indeed, Henderson (1987: 1) concluded that "The evidence is now beyond dispute: parent involvement improves student achievement. When parents are involved, children do better in school, and they go to better schools". Similarly, according to Ostrom (1996: 1079) "If students are not actively engaged in their own education, encouraged and supported by their family

and friends, what teachers do may make little difference in the skills students acquire”. Furthermore, the USA Department of Education (2002) highlighted the importance of a partnership between parents and school, as this leads to the creation of an educational environment in the home by parents encouraging their children to do their homework. Thus, parents should be encouraged to visit the school frequently to know what their children are learning and to co-operate with teachers to solve any problems in respect to their children and facilitate the education process. Earlier studies showed a similar relationship between parental involvement and students’ academic performance. For example, Corner (1986) found that parental involvement in diverse aspects of a school leads to improved outcomes, as well playing an important role in building an attractive environment for teaching and learning.

Catsambis (1998) conducted a study of 13,500 parents to evaluate six categories of parental involvement: parental obligations; communications; supporting the school; learning activities, decision making and community. He concludes that parents who are actively involved in their child’s school tend to have children who are academically successful and go on to attend college. Similarly, other researchers have found that involvement of parents in school is highly significant when associated with academic achievement, in particular in reading, which is a very important skill, leading to understanding of other academic subjects (Yunusa, 1989). Hence, the improvement of students’ reading skills may be attributed to the involvement of the parents in school. Topping (1987: 13) noted that:

Massive gains on a variety of reading tests have been documented, and baseline and control group data confirm without question that parental involvement, in children's reading has a significant effect on attainment in both short and long term

Equally, Twillie et al. (1991), who conducted a study on 30 parents to identify the impact of the relationship between parents and school on students’ academic achievement, as well as the attitude of teachers towards the involvement of parents in the school, supports this evidence, since his results showed that the level of achievement of students rose in maths and English after the sample participated in teaching their children at home.

These studies confirm that parental involvement can help develop reading skills and other academic outcomes. According to the USA National Assessment of Education Report (2006a) on private and public schools, the mathematic scores of private school students were higher than those of public school students, because the parents of the private school

students provided support for academic achievement. It was concluded that a sound partnership between parents and school extends the effect on students until young adulthood. Supporting this assertion Barnard (2004) found in his study of 1165 students (aiming to investigate the influence of an early intervention, the Chicago Child-Parent Centre Programme) that, as of January 2000, “there is a significant association between parent involvement in early school and long-term school success. Therefore, efforts to involve parents in their child’s education early in the educational process appear to have positive benefits lasting through age 20” (Barnard, 2004: 57).

Other studies, however, have provided less compelling results regarding the impact of parental involvement in high school. For instance, Keith et al. (1993:4), found high school students’ accomplishments were not impacted by the engagement of parents in school activities. They claim that:

The effects of parental involvement may vary with the definition used of parental involvement, the respondents used in the research, the outcome studied, and the age of the student. Although parental involvement may be an important influence on the learning of elementary children, its effects on high school youth are inconsistent

Further, Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) reported some negative effects of frequent communication with high schools, especially in respect to the student achievement and problematic behaviour. Consequently, they advocated the need to include more detailed measures of behavioural and learning difficulties in order fully to account for this negative effect. Thus, both positive and negative effects are reported by different researchers for parental communications with the student or school, and for parental monitoring of students’ behaviour.

The impact of a sound relationship between parents and students in terms of behaviour as will be discussed in the next section.

### *3.8.2 Importance of the parents’ relationship with school in developing positive behaviours*

A number of authors have emphasised how successful co-operation between the school and the parents can have a positive effect on the process of education, in terms of both academic achievement and students’ behaviour (Rutherford, 1979). Brody et al. (1999) found that parents’ involvement also impacted on students’ behaviour, since the parents

intended their contribution to increase their child's social skills and enhance their moral values; therefore, to stimulate teacher-parent co-operation is to enhance the educational chances of the child. In addition, parental involvement creates a social relationship among the parents, which can help them to overcome family problems (Coleman, 1991).

Similarly, Smith, et al. (2011) found that while disruptive behaviour could spread among students, making them aggressive, parental involvement in the school programme was associated with an improvement in students' attitudes. Alkhchina (1992) studied 197 secondary school parents in Jordan, with the aim of revealing the impact of the relationship of parents with schools in terms of eliminating students' undesirable behaviours. His findings showed that the relationship between parents and the school was very weak, which led to the spread of the undesirable behaviour among students and increased the disputes between teachers and students. A number of studies, therefore, report that improved relations between school and parents is perhaps one way to assist schools in addressing undesirable behaviour among students and to improve discipline in schools.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) conducted a study in 47 schools in Maryland and Ohio to determine the impact on behaviour of the relationship between parents and school. They concluded that "The results suggest creating more connections and greater consistency within school, family, and community contexts may be one way for schools to improve student behaviour and school discipline" (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002: 24). Furthermore, other researchers have demonstrated that schools' implementation of parental involvement activities (e.g. volunteering at the school, being involved with important decision making and helping with learning at home) reduced instances of undesirable behaviour and improved discipline in the school. Ma (2001:367) points out that:

Parents can do even more to discourage sibling building and relate it to school building in an education way. Therefore, the importance of collaboration between school and family to combat bullying in school is warranted.

Overall, therefore, prior studies have shown that a good relationship between parents and schools has a positive effect on students behaviourally and academically. The next section will discuss how this impacts on school choice.



### *3.8.3 Parental involvement and school choice*

Much of the literature indicates that parents who exercise school choice are interested in participating in school activities, as well as expressing their opinions regarding important school decisions, compared to parents who do not participate in school choice (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Martinez et al., 1996; Smrekar, 1996; Smrekar and Goldring, 1999).

Several elements that encourage parents to participate in schools are also mentioned in the literature. For example, parents are happy to offer assistance to the school that they have chosen, and were committed to helping their children become successful students at their chosen school (Archibald, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995, 1997). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) also highlighted various kinds of parental involvement in schools: parents can help their child at home or at school; they can communicate with their child about school; participate in celebratory events and cooperate with schools in order to achieve a good outcome for students.

Researchers have found that parents tend to choose schools which perform better, are welcoming and inviting, and have high levels of parental involvement both in school and out of school (Armor and Peiser, 1997; David et al., 1994; Godwin, Kemerer and Martinez, 1998; Lee, Croninger and Smith, 1996; Wells, 1996). A growing number of studies focusing particularly on private schools have shown that they have higher rates of parent involvement than public schools. Therefore, parents are likely to prefer private school, as they offer more opportunities for them to participate in the school activities.

In a study in the USA, Goldring and Phillips (2008) found that 88% of parents preferred a private school because they were satisfied with communication between the school and the home, such as parents being able to communicate with their children about school frequently, participate in events and make decisions. They point out that “Parents who communicate very frequently with their children about school and are more involved in school, are more likely to consider private schools; and parents who felt that the level of collaboration between teachers and parents was not adequate, were also more likely to consider private schools” (p. 227) This finding agrees with that of a study conducted in Jordan by Kharman (2005), who found a significant number of parents favoured a private school since they had the opportunity to become members of school committees and be involved in activities. In contrast, Dunk et al. (1998) carried out a study in Milwaukee, finding that parental involvement was not an essential issue in terms of making decisions to choose either public or private school:

The interview data indicated that parental involvement was not a major factor that parents mentioned when they were choosing a school for their children. Only 19 of the 153 parents we interviewed, indicated that they looked at parental involvement issues when choosing a school (ibid. p. 6).

Smith et al. (2011), on the other hand, found that some schools had realised the importance of a parental involvement programme in achieving improvement. So, in order to try to facilitate parental involvement schools would use various technological means to communicate with parents easily and save time and money. Websites and other technology are used by some schools to allow parents to follow up their children's homework, alert them to any emergency, or if the school is looking for parents to volunteer to participate in some school activity or event (see sub section below for a fuller discussion).

In contrast, various obstacles may stand in the way of parents' involvement in schools. For instance, Smith et al. (2011) reported that certain parents' circumstances deprived them of involvement in schools: viz. some parents are poor and therefore struggle to make a living, or are so busy with work they cannot find the time to help their children. In addition, there may be some differences between the school and parents, such as educational level, ethnicity, income, and language, each of which can hinder parental involvement in school (Yunusa, 1989). Moreover, some parents are reluctant to become involved in schools as they are afraid they may not be accepted because of their culture or for other reasons (Barrera and Warner, 2012). The school should take responsibility for overcoming any challenges that form a barrier to parental involvement in school through the provision of advanced technological tools, such as those noted above (Albana, 2010). The school should in particular address issues related to making immigrants feel welcome in the school, responding to their needs and encouraging their involvement (Smith et al. 2008).

### **3.9 Convenience factors – School Facilities in School Choice**

Governments across the world are spending huge amounts of money to establish contemporary schools that meet the needs of the modern generation. For instance, 21% of USA schools are more than fifty years old, with another 50% at least thirty years old, investments of hundreds of billions of dollars are now needed on new construction and retro-fitting of this school stock (USA Office of Education Research and Improvement, 2000; NEA, 2000). In KSA, there were 40% of schools rented in 2010. Thus the teachers and students were suffering from lack of some facilities such as a stadium, sciences labs

and libraries because the buildings were not prepared for educational environment. In 2012, the government realised the importance of the school building as an attraction factor for the parents. Thus, the government took a strict decision to overcome this challenge which meant the government paid 19 billion Riyal Saudi to build 2500 modern schools characterised by high quality good lighting, comfortable chairs in all classrooms, libraries, laboratories for the computers and sciences, theatres, suitable air-conditioning and huge playgrounds. Also the modern school include specialist classrooms such as a Literature class room, Sciences class rooms, Geography class room, History class room, Computer Sciences. The modern school represent the sophisticated environment for the teaching and learning because the students are moving from classroom to other classroom rather than stay in one classroom all the day. In 2014 the rented schools were not such a great challenge like in past as the number of the rented school has reduced to 22% (Riyadh Journal, 2014)

The above implies that school buildings represent a significant factor relevant to parental school choice. This is not only for parents, but also for policymakers, because they know that whilst modernised buildings in themselves do not make for an outstanding school, the ambiance encourages students to want to attend and learn. Students take a pride in their surroundings and the fact that they belong to a prestigious institution that they can be proud of. As such, parents are more likely to select modernised schools than those that are antiquated.

### *3.9.1 The quality of school buildings and its importance in the educational process*

As stated, the quality of school buildings is very important in creating an appropriate, attractive and welcoming environment for teaching and learning. This has resulted in various national and international conferences, such as early 1957 in Geneva, where it was recommended to establish schools consistent with the requirements of contemporary life, and to provide a suitable environment for all students regardless of differences of social classes or race. The outcome of the conference recommended that head teachers, teachers and parents should participate in the design of future schools. A similar international conference was held in Baghdad in 1964, where in addition to the above suggestions, it was suggested that development of the building of schools would increase students achievement by helping students in artistic, cultural, sports and social education activities. This has resulted in a growing body of studies generating evidence that indicates a relationship between the design of school buildings and learners' attainments. For instance, Christopher (1991) believed that the school building design impacts

positively on the educational process and students' achievement. Further, he took into consideration the ideas, suggestions and perceptions of teachers regarding appropriate designs of schools. Similarly, Dressler (1911) agreed with Christopher (1991) in terms of taking on board the points of view of teachers in the developmental process of school designs.

Some researchers, such as, Aloude (2000) exploration was to change the concept of school by transforming school from a building where knowledge and information is delivered to an interactive exciting stimulating teaching and learning centre. From this viewpoint, school is a place where the learner and the teacher produce relevant, realistic resources relevant to teaching, learning and the practice of the cultural and social activities within attractive welcoming rooms designed to cater for the needs of gifted, less able, disenfranchised and disabled students. The Amayreh (2011) conference confirmed many of the above, demonstrating that modern school buildings provide exciting welcoming high quality laboratories, libraries, resource rooms, theatre equipment, with the latest technologies and adequate staff support to allow and encourage students to develop their confidence and self-esteem, whilst exploring fact finding knowledge, improving their skills and increasing co-operative working.

More recent reviews have consistently found positive significant relationships between building quality and academic outcomes (Earthman, 2004; Earthman and Lemasters, 1996, 1998; Higgins, et al and Schneider, 2002). For instance, several studies focussed on building attributes of schools that may affect student achievement, and which in turn influenced parents in their choice of school. These attributes will now be discussed and will be grouped under four categories – age and design of the building, air conditioning and lighting, advanced technology and sport activities.

### *3.9.2 Influence of age and design of buildings on students achievement*

McGuffey and Brown (1978) studied the influence of building age on Grade 4, 8 and 11 students in Georgia, USA. They found a significant correlation between the age of the building and many interior facilities, such as light, acoustics, colour, temperature, and lack of resources that together were associated with academic outcomes. Equally, McGuffey (1982) identified a number of studies that examined the possibility of a relationship between the structural condition of buildings and student performance in standardized tests. Indeed, there are a number of studies that link student achievement with building quality, newer buildings, improved lighting, thermal comfort and indoor air

quality, as well as specific building features such as science laboratories and libraries. For instance, Darder & Apshur (1992) found Latino children in Boston schools were affected by the poor condition of the school buildings, the lack of bright well-lit classrooms, dismal bland brown tiles on the walls, and a lack of books and other teaching materials. O'Neil and Oates (2001), meanwhile, investigated the impact of school facilities on student achievement, behaviour, attendance and teacher turnover. They found that better school building conditions were positively associated with outcomes in standardised tests. Evans and English (2002) supplement this by showing that children living in poverty are at higher risk of experiencing socio-emotional difficulties, and that this risk can be partially explained by the exposure to sub-optimal environments. Consequently, children living in poor urban environments may be particularly affected by the condition of their school buildings. Whilst this aspect has been identified in a variety of studies to date, it has not been investigated as a sole entity, viz. students matched into groups with an exciting modern building compared against drab, uninviting, miserable rundown buildings. Thus, the age of school building can be accurately measured to ascertain the extent of influence school buildings have on how students feel about themselves, teachers, loyalty to the school community, the importance they place on respect, appreciation and their psychological and mental potential. On the other hand, poor school facilities have been identified as probably affecting students negatively, resulting in high levels of absenteeism or dropping out of school due to the lack of a welcoming ambiance, modern classrooms, laboratories or sports grounds, all of which have come to be seen as obstacles to achievement.

### *3.9.3 Effects of air conditioning and lighting on student achievement*

There are a considerable numbers of studies investigating the effects of lighting and air conditioning in the classroom on student achievement. For example, Amayreh (2011) postulated that schools should provide various kinds of learning environments, such as, choosing welcoming colours for the walls of classrooms, shaded and spotlight lights, quiet corners or areas with large, bean-filled brightly patterned cushions for quiet reflective thought, modern work stations and large conference type areas for group work. Cash (1993), meanwhile, found that comfort factors appeared to have more of an effect on student achievement than modernising or modern structural factors, while Earthman (2004) added other factors to those seen as enhancing learning: temperature rates, heating and air quality. Earthman (2004) and Heschong Mahone Group (1999) each reported high achievement associated with schools that were air conditioned, were less noisy external

environments, less graffiti, and classroom furniture and with student lockers in good repair. They postulated that this was the result of students working in well-lit conditions with fresh air. Hence, they ranked lighting next in order of criteria that had positive effects on student learning outcomes, as optimal levels of natural daylight offered the most positive effect (cf. Mayron et al. 1974, Dunn et al. 1985).

Supporting this assertion, Jago and Tanner (1999) cited the results of seventeen studies from the mid-1930s to 1997, showing that the consensus was that appropriate lighting improves test scores, reduces off-task behaviour, and plays a significant role in student achievement. Similarly, Luskiech and Moss (1940) determined that lighting and its quality related positively to student test scores. Veitch (1997), however, argued that regardless of the quality and quantity of lighting it had no effect on the mood or performance of students. In a different but related study, Knez and Kers (2000) explored the effect of lighting and gender to find that females were more perceptive to light than males. Whilst there is contradictory evidence, all the elements of the school environment must be designed to assist students to fulfil their ambitions and fulfil their potential in an unthreatening, pleasant, welcoming environment. This leads us to consider the role of modern technology in providing and supporting pleasant active environments and safe havens for students.

#### *3.9.4 Information Technology and associated equipment (Modern technology)*

As stated above, websites and other technologies are used by some schools to allow parents to follow up their children's homework, alert them to any emergency, or if the school is looking for parents to volunteer to participate in some school activity or event. Numerous studies have found that the use of modern technology to communicate with parents encourages the US parents to become involved in their children's studies and motivated them to do their homework as it is very convenient for parents to contact teachers directly. Tobolka (2006:26) concluded that:

Communication improves students' interest in their coursework and provides their parents with more knowledge about daily class activities. I found that parents felt more involved in their student's school activities and more connected to me.

These ideas have had a big influence on Arab states. For example, the Conference of E-learning for Gulf Countries (2005) recommended modern technology for all schools in the Gulf Arab States, and that computer education should be integrated into a new

curriculum at all stages of public education, in order to produce an active learning environment which will enhance conventional education

Furthermore, Mohammed (2008) defined an ideal school as one that complements traditional teaching methods with the implementation of very sophisticated modern technology. Thus, ideal schools encourage students' self-learning, as well as giving them the opportunity to connect into a variety of different learning sources (local/global), and to access information in its various forms (audio/visual) through specifically designed laboratory rooms. Goulding and Kyriacou (2008: 93) confirmed that:

With increased use of teacher controlled whiteboards it will be important to ensure that pupils still have the opportunities for the autonomy and experimentation afforded by technology such as graphics calculators and computers and that personal constructions are discussed and shared with the whole class.

Fakhruddin et al. (2006) explored the potential of E-learning technology, such as computers, projectors, white boards, interactive boards and televisions, aimed at assisting teachers to effectively deliver academic subject matter. He found that students reported this educational process to be more interesting, much easier, more rapid and more successful in assisting them to retain information, compared to traditional teaching methods, while teachers reported a visible increase in students using and developing their logical deductive thinking processes. Supporting these findings, Mahmoud and Abdul Rashid (2009) argued that technology is very important in the educational process, enhancing students learning capabilities, logic and interest in learning. Moreover, another positive aspect of E-learning takes into account students' individual differences and needs, by providing diverse sources and assistance, thereby, helping students to learn at their own pace and according to their own abilities, personal traits and potential. This includes students experiencing learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, or physical disabilities: i.e. "technology plays a crucial role in all types of disabilities particularly in the education of students who suffer from writing difficulties. Therefore, there should be many ways in which technology can overcome these difficulties and improve the skills of students" (Faramaw, 2003: 12).

Similarly, Robert (2005) claimed that the collaborative element of E-learning provides an effective learning environment as it provides opportunities for students to share learning experiences, whilst building knowledge through discussions and interacting with peers

and teachers, together leading to an improvement in communication skills, along with the promotion of essential thinking skills.

In addition, Robert (2005) highlighted the importance of collaborative E-learning in terms of psychological aspects, such as a decrease in anxiety; encouraging acceptance of help and supervision from peers, parents and teachers. Abdul qadir (2008) confirmed that E-learning enabled learners to be more active and more independent in their collaborative learning through the establishment of communities with other learners around the world, thereby expanding students' understanding and tolerance of different cultures, customs and religions.

Fakhruddin et al. (2006) also reported their findings that E-learning contributed to rapid teaching and learning, thereby, saving time and effort compared to learning by traditional means. These researchers concluded that E-learning saved 40% of time compared to traditional teaching methods by promoting effective communication between home and school; parental monitoring of children's progress; enhanced relationships between students, schools and members of their society, as well as boosting students learning. Kosakowski (1998) noted that parents, businesses and community members can use technology as a springboard to become more involved in the activities of neighbourhood schools. All can help through technical support, helping parents to use e-mail to facilitate communication with teachers and administrators, reducing unnecessary distractions by parents. Equally, businesses can also utilise email to help mentor students and prepare them for the workplace.

In contrast, there are various identified negative aspects of E-learning through computer usage that may have adverse effects on students, such as the weakening of social relationships through addiction. Students spend many hours in front of their computer screens immersed in the internet, and the computer culture may serve to disconnect them from the real world and inhibit the development of conventional friendships characterised by physical interaction. Thus, Almousa (2003) reported that students suffered from loneliness, weak social skills, and lack of a sense of humour and of essential conversational skills. He also found that teachers and students become dependent upon technological tools rather than textbooks, papers and pens because, as stated, technology makes teaching easier for the teachers and allows students easy access to a massive store of knowledge. Almousa concluded, though that, education has managed to create an information-rich environment contributing to the enrichment of learners' knowledge, and



that it has also been able to transform learners from mere recipients of knowledge to active participants, and from consumers to shrewd critics.

### *3.9.5 Implications of the use of modern technology on student attainment*

A number of research studies compare E-learning with other forms of learning environments, such as classroom instruction. For instance, Almasloh (1992) conducted a study of secondary school students in Medina, KSA. The sample of the study was two groups with each group including 25 students who were in separate classrooms. One of classrooms was equipped with advanced computer equipment, but the other classroom was not. The researcher's aims was to determine the effect of the use of computers on the academic attainment of students in science. He found there is statistically significant positive differences between students who studied science using computer programs compared to students who studied science in the conventional method.

Similarly, Almutairi (1998) conducted a study of secondary school students in Riyadh, KSA. The sample was two groups, each comprising 15 students, who were in two different classrooms. One of the classroom was equipped with computers, but the other classroom was not. The researcher's aim was to test the effect of using computers on the student achievement. He found that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between the test results and the use of E-learning.

Nevertheless, other studies conducted across the world have shown no statistically significant differences between conventional instruction and modern technology teaching. For instance, Alda'alj (2003) examined the effect of technology on secondary school students in mathematics and found no statistically significant differences between those who had been taught conventionally and those who had been taught with the aid of modern technology. His findings correspond to those of Altwaim (2000), who tested the effect of technology on secondary school students of Arabic language. Altwaim found no statistically significant differences between students who studied Arabic using computer programs and those who studied by the conventional method. Similarly, in Nigeria, Yusuf & Afolsbi (2010) conducted a study aimed at determining the impact of technology on the attainment of 120 private school students in the Alahia model. The researcher analysed the examination results using a T-test technique to compare between the two groups, but found no statistically significant differences between students who studied

the Alahia model via the computer and students who were subject to conventional instruction.

Almoussa (2003) suggests that one reason for these mixed outcomes may be that teachers are sufficiently qualified in the use of computer technology to deliver subject matter and knowledge effectively. Alternatively, it could be that students may not have the abilities to assimilate the subject matter and knowledge via technological means. Additionally, not all subject matter or curricula content is conducive to being delivered via technology tools. Large or very large class sizes will probably weaken the impact of technology due to a lack of sufficient computers and/or white board usage due to students being too far away to be able to read that which has been written or transferred onto the screens. Furthermore, Stearns et al. (1991: 73) stated that "From failures we have learned that implementation without thoughtful planning or sustained support is nearly always futile". That is, where school management has invested in technology to revolutionise education it frequently fails to have a policy in place to use this technology effectively in the classroom, or adequate support systems.

### **3.10 Physical Education and Sport**

Physical education and sport are seen as very important in students' education and thus parental school choice. Aweys (2006) argued that illiteracy is not confined to the person who is not able to read or write or use the computer, but must include the person who fails adequately to exercise. This fact was highlighted in Thailand during a conference in 1999, at which it was highlighted that over 100,000,000 students worldwide are deprived of fail to participate in any form of physical education. Consequently, Jomtien (1999) stated that whilst institutes of education focus upon the mental developmental aspects of students, they tend to ignore aspects concerning physical activities despite physical activities having a significant impact upon academic achievement. Supporting this, Aweys (2006) posits that the increase in the status of physical education is an indicator of the enhancement of the civilising progress of communities to contemporary human society, while Sibley and Etnier (2003:243) highlight that:

The mind and body are one entity, and that anything that happens to one will affect the other. Physical educators therefore believe that the "whole child" comes to school to be educated and that this requires both mental and physical training.

Bailey (2006: 399) cites the adage that a “healthy body leads to a healthy mind,” and that physical activity can support intellectual development in children”, and Talbot (2001) holds that physical education assists students to gain respect for the body - their own and others’, as well as contributing to the combined improvement of brain and body, that in turn increases an understanding of the role of aerobic and anaerobic physical activity in health. The following sub-section, therefore, will discuss the implications of physical education on students in terms of health and aspects of educational attainment, since there is a large body of literature demonstrating that school is an appropriate environment in which to encourage students to participate in physical activities.

### *3.10.1 Importance of Physical Education in aspects of the health of students*

The World Health Organization (1991) highlighted that schools have a significant contribution to make in effecting an improvement in students’ health and behaviour. Parallel to this, Armstrong and McManus (1994: 26) found that managers of physical education departments considered that health-related fitness "was the second most important objective of physical education" with happiness of students rated as their prime objective. Martens (1996: 303) has strongly emphasised that practitioners’ major aim should be to "turn young people on to physical activity for a lifetime" Alexandrov’s (1988) findings, meanwhile, confirmed the statistically significant positive effects physical education has on blood cholesterol, thereby, reducing blood pressure and heart diseases, while Strong et al. (2005) argue that as school becomes increasingly the centre for promoting physical activities, physical education has an important role in improving psychological health and mood, and in reducing blood pressure and thereby preventing or reducing various diseases. The UK Department of Health (1998), meanwhile, pointed out that educational environments are ideally situated as key settings for the development of the health of the whole local community. In support of these findings, Daley (2002) advocated that educational environments can nurture a lifetime of physical activities, thereby sustaining the health of the nation, and reducing the impact of some modern diseases, such as diabetes, blood pressure, skeletal health (cf. Malina et al., 1999).

On the other hand, a study conducted in Kuwait City by Alamari and Zilab (2012) assessed the perceptions of school students regarding their knowledge about physical education and the role of health education. The researchers found that physical education did not make a significant impact in the promotion of students’ health, because “students did not want to do P.E. Increasing evidence of less interest to participate in school physical education and, even more alarming, concern that students have stopped caring

about physical education as they have not found progress in terms of health aspect” (ibid. p. 310)

Primarily, these researchers attributed this lack of interest or concern to physical education teachers not being specialists; frequently lessons were conducted by inexperienced non-specialist teachers, and schools do not possess appropriate equipment or facilities. Thus, Alamari and Zilab (2012) concluded that physical education had no effect on students’ health due to a lack of enthusiasm on the part of students.

According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2004:11)

In the United States, between 1980 and 2002, obesity prevalence doubled in adults aged 20 years or older and overweight prevalence tripled in children and adolescents aged 6 to 19 years 3-5 by 2020

Despite these findings some researchers, such as Green and Riley (2012) believe that there is no single solution that can protect students from obesity unless schools provide health programmes, preferably shared by several groups. “Treatment Programmes have evolved in many school settings and reports have indicated a great deal of success. These programmes coordinate efforts among administrators, guidance counsellors, nurse-teachers, food service personnel, classroom teachers, parents, and perhaps more importantly, physical educators” (ibid. p. 917). Parallel to the above, youths in KSA are living in a world made easy by affluence that has led to the prevalence of obesity, which is spreading rapidly, with rates among students aged 6- 18 years increasing from 18% in 2001 to 21.8% in 2005. Fouad Niazi, who carried out the study from which these figures are drawn, indicated the main reasons that contribute to the spread of obesity among Saudi students as being television programmes that encourage students to eat, along with the fact that they did not practice sports activities which lead to a loss of weight (Saudi Press Agency, 2006).

This is another factor which parents will take into consideration as they strive to choose schools, particularly favouring ones where there are high standards of physical and sports activities, in order to protect their children from diseases and the onset of obesity. This is in line with Brownell and Kaye (1982), who argued over 30 years ago, when parental participation was not widespread as it is currently, that parents should play a significant role in terms of the design and development of academic schemes of work; school selection and the design of appropriate physical activities and a sensible selection of food for their children, particularly those who attend school dinners.

### *3.10.2 Relationship between Physical Education and Academic Achievement*

Some research has demonstrated the importance of physical education in the promotion of student achievement. Thus, Kirkendall (1985: 59) highlights that:

Physical educators were grasping for ways to justify exercise and physical education programmes. If it could be shown that activity programmes contributed to intellectual development then they would gain credibility and be justified.

Based upon the research cited above and below, there has been a parallel development in the belief that physical education contributes to intellectual development and hence academic achievement, because the functions of the mind and the physical body are one entity. Whatever happens to one automatically has some effect on the other through the body's chemical reactions. Human and animal studies (Jensen, 1998) have demonstrated that the areas of the brain involved in movement and learning are inextricably connected, and that physical activity could increase those neural connections. Consequently, those who support physical education advocate the need for long-term strategies since quality physical education will positively contribute to cognitive thought processes and concentration levels, leading to improved academic achievement. Sallis et al., (1999) explored the outcome of increased physical education on academic scores. They assessed 759 US children, testing them before and after involvement in standardised controlled physical activities. They concluded that because of the acknowledged importance and mental health benefits of Physical Education activities, school administrators must be encouraged to incorporate effective health-related Physical Education programmes into their school timetable. Equally, it is important to dispel any concerns and the false belief that students' academic performance will be adversely affected by 'wasting' valuable time on Physical Education activities when they could be spending this time more profitably on academic subjects.

Thus, the result of this study is consistent with studies that have investigated the impact of physical education on academic outcomes of US students. Sibley and Etnier (2003:253) asserted that:

Physical activity may actually be related to improved cognitive performance and academic achievement and provides evidence for the argument that physical activity should be a part of the school day for both its physical health and cognitive benefits.

In Saudi Arabia, Aljaji (2002) concluded that the parents certainly give a great deal of consideration to the provision of physical education in terms of school choice in the expectation of increasing their children's academic achievement. Further, when he examined the reasons that stimulated parents to select a particular school, participants cited the most important factors that influenced them as being physical education, a friendly caring administration, extra curricula activities, examinations results, teachers, and facilities within the school buildings.

Not all research supports the contention that there is a strong relationship between physical activity and academic performance. For instance, Fisher et al. (1996:333), when studying 88 students in New York City High School, stated that:

We found no specific relationships between sports involvement and academic performance. Apparently, spending time at sports did not specifically detract from homework or studying, nor did it enhance motivation or single out those who might be performance oriented in a more general way

Similarly, Carlson et al. (2008) reported that there were positive social effects from being involved in physical education, but no evidence of any benefit to academic performance. As a consequence, they concluded that physical education was not a significant factor for parents in their choice of school.

Collins and Snell (2000: 808), meanwhile, found from their study in Hampshire, England, that the most important reason for selecting a school was its reputation. "Parents did not consider child mix, sports facilities, access or building quality to be determinants of a school's reputation. These parents would seem to have a more academic view of what constitutes a reputation". The result of this study corresponds with the research findings of Alshimri (1999), who carried out a study involving private school parents in Riyadh, KSA. Participants were asked to rank factors that influenced their choice of a specific private school. Physical education was not identified as a reason, therefore, they concluded parents did not view it as important.

In summary, from the findings of the studies cited above, some researchers advocate spending more time in physical education as it has positive impact on concentration, health, and academic outcomes, while other studies concluded that physical education did not play any pivotal role in students' academic attainment. As a result, parents are much less likely to identify a preference for physical education as they do not perceive it as likely to raise their children's academic achievement.

### **3.11 Social Status Determinants**

This section cannot claim to be a full review of all of the studies that address the topic of social status or class, since such a task would require a thesis in itself. The researcher, however, attempts to review a representative selection of the literature concerned with various aspects that are influenced by social status, in order that the impacts of social status on parental selection can be considered in the empirical part of this study since one of the most serious issues related to school choice is the disparity in the social status of parents (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Fuller et al, 1996).

Briefly, a conventional definition in Social Sciences and Political Theory is that social status is a set of concepts in which people are grouped into a set of hierarchical social categories. There is no consensus, however, on the best definition of the term social status/class, other than the significance of wealth and income as indicators of position in a social hierarchy. Hence, social status is generally defined as a person's prestige, wealth, social position, social honour or popularity within a society.

Research demonstrates that personal social status has a significant impact upon educational opportunities. For instance, Goh (2007:19) claimed that: "Parents of a higher social demographic are more likely to exercise their choice option and send their children to a school of similar social class". Hence, generally, rich upper-class parents will endeavour to send children to exclusive private fee paying schools (Govinda and Varghese, 1993), since such schools are perceived to offer high quality education leading to better employment prospects. In addition, their children will integrate with children of similarly wealthy parents. Supporting this claim, Gerwitz et al. (1995: 189) demonstrated that, in the context of the UK, parents' choice of school was based on the "class and racial composition of the school". Likewise, in the US context Goldring and Phillips (2008: 211) contend that "Family socio-economic status is another factor which has been related to school choice". Bast and Walberg (2004: 432) explained that private schools are favoured because "Parents choose schools for their children based on costs and benefits (incentives), the availability of information, and the presence of opportunities (choices)". Similarly, Nichols (2010) stated that private schools are favoured as they are considered to be academically better than public schools that are government funded and where the children are generally those whose parents are less well-paid or unemployed. Overall, public schools are, rightly or wrongly, perceived as not as good as private schools in

social as well as academic terms. According Raveaud and Zanten (2007), however, when a society is organised by social class, it is theoretically possible for people to attain a higher status from the status into which they were born. Raveaud and Zanten (2007) believed that social status and social classes are not based on birth, but on education and professional success. For example, someone born into a low-income family can achieve a higher status through education, talent and work. This may be due to parental aspiration, or parents ensuring their children are given a similar or better quality of education than themselves. Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that it is much more difficult for anyone from a low-income background to achieve such success, than it is for a person born to wealthy parents, i.e. wealth allows them to be sent to top private schools attended by students from a similar social class, and who also mix with them socially. Being part of the 'Old Boys' network prohibits others who have not attended such private schools to gain access to this exclusive club where advantage and access to high grade jobs and promotion are awarded through friendships rather than academic achievement or ability (Govinda and Varghere, 1993).

Consequently, numerous studies have shown that the professional background and/or social status of parents, together with parental income and education, and ethnicity, are important in shaping their decision-making related to their children's education especially in the US context (Goldring et al., 2009; Lacireno-Paquet and Brantley, 2008; Yang and Kayaardi, 2004 and Smrekar and Goldring, 1999). Some of these studies focused on the level of the parents' education, particularly mothers, since in some cultures they are the key decision-makers; family social status, level of family income; the level of parental involvement in their child's learning together with time spent with their children in school-related activities, as well as their values and beliefs about the goals and purpose of schooling. Supporting these assertions, Yang and Kayaardi (2004:233) noted that:

Parents with higher educational attainment better understand the importance of education, what different kinds of schools offer and what they want their children to acquire, and therefore are in a better position to make an informed decision

In other words, unless parents have such experiences, whilst they may have aspiration, they do not have the essential intrinsic understanding and knowledge. Thus, the school choice system has been affected by the behaviour of families, because the education process is influenced by society and the social class of the family (Coleman, 1988). Consequently, Pardey (1991) concluded that parental values, social standing and the



behaviour of families affected their aims and decisions related to school choice. For instance, the British parents may ensure that their children attend a school with children of a similar social class. So they are able to reinforce their affiliation to religion, values, and culture through the school choice. In regard to religious affiliation, “faith-based schools often do it better, education goes better when children are in the schools where they want to be and their parents want them to be. In such a system, everyone wins.” Vryhof (2005: 141).

Furthermore, Glazerman (1998) argues that US parents are less concerned with academic outcomes *per se* than they are with whether their preferred school is relatively close to home and whether or not their children will feel “out-of-place” ethnically and racially. For instance, empirical evidence has consistently shown that a child’s ethnicity/race is a significant indicator of school choice as they generally live within their own communities. As a result, Goldring and Phillips (2008) found that a minority of US parents do not exploit the school choice system to improve their children’s outcome. This may be due to close ‘ghetto-type’ communities and an unstable social network (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). Hence, Coleman and Hoffer (1987) found that white students represented the greatest number of students in private schools in the USA. This is consistent with Lacireno Paquet and Brantley (2008), who report that white students made up around 76% of private school students with 24% of mixed race or black. It appears that minority and low-income families usually choose the school that is in closest proximity to their homes, or they focus on the school’s location rather than the high performance of the school (Kleitz et al., 2000). On the other hand, some scholars argue that the cues that parents use to identify good schools are strongly correlated with characteristics of the students attending those schools, such as their socio-economic status. This leads to increasing the segregation among schools in terms of social status, as some families are able financially to send their children to schools that provide high quality education (Bifulco and Ladd 2007; Goldhaber 1999; Henig 1994; Levin 1998; Smith and Meier, 1995; Holme, et al., 2013). Moreover, this may lead to an increase in the segregation of teachers themselves; as Poder et al. (2013) argue “The better teachers tend to accumulate in the better schools, fostering the segregation and increasing the effect of background characteristics even more.” This can also lead to increasing social and racial segregation in communities (Almutawa & Alwatfa, 2007; Nishimura and Yamano, 2008). Consequently, Gorard et al. (1999: 31) argued that these factors can strongly influence parents to make a choice of school based on its “current social class, gender or racial

breakdown”. Through such a selection of school, other families are deprived of a good quality education, which leads to a continuation of bias on grounds of social class, religion, ethnicity and ability, since schools frequented by the children of wealthy parents prepare them to gain high social positions through educational advantage, thus perpetuating the disadvantage through another generation (Henig 1994). Other educationalists, however, argue that school choice will be used as a vehicle for parents to overcome residential segregation, and ultimately will result in more diverse schools (Greene 2005; Teske and Marschall, 2000; Zimmerman and Vaughan, 2013). In addition, there are some countries attempted to overcome this challenge by providing a variety of programmes for communities, regardless of their education level or socio-economic status. For instance in the USA, in particular in some states, such as Minnesota, programmes have been set up to provide choice options for low-income parents and minority parents. These include Minnesota’s Open Enrolment and Milwaukee’s voucher and inter-district choice programmes. Witte and Thorn (1996) conducted a survey on Milwaukee’s voucher and inter-district choice programmes, both of which aimed to expand educational options for minority parents and low-income parents. They found that minorities/low-income parents represented 73% of participants in Milwaukee’s voucher programme and 75.9% of participants in the inter-district programme.

The above findings are consistent with Ford (2011:182), who found that:

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) is the oldest and largest urban school voucher program in the United States In the 2009–2010 school year, more than 20,000 low-income Milwaukee students used publicly funded scholarships to attend religious and nonreligious private schools of their choice

Proponents of the privatization of education by voucher programmes believe it will create a new society where parents prefer the schools are strongly according to characteristics of the students and less according to capacity level of their children as Harrison (2005:205) noted:

A market system provides more diversity so that less emphasis is placed on socioeconomic status and race. In fact, it helps bring together new communities. Parents will choose schools where other parents have similar tastes

This is borne out by Jacob and Lefgren (2005:33) who found:

Our findings suggest that what parents want from school is likely to depend on family circumstances, as well as parent preferences. Thus,

we might expect advantaged and disadvantaged parents to exhibit systematic differences with regards particular educational policies or Programme, even if both sets of parents have the same underlying utility functions.

Further, Orefield and Lee (2007) argued that segregation in South Africa and other countries, is still widespread among a significant number of school systems in the absence of choice programmes. Hence, persistent problems of residential segregation, along with judicial rulings that have overturned many attempts at social class/race-conscious enrolment, result in many schools becoming increasingly segregated by race, social class and income.

Furthermore, as Schneider et al. (2000) claim, parents who exercise school choice vary in terms of socio-economic and ethnic background which in turn means they have different values concerning the preferred attributes of schools. For instance, parents from ethnic minorities and who are of a lower socio-economic class, want something different from schools than parents who are of a higher socio-economic class and have higher educational levels. Therefore, there are plausible arguments for and against the influence of social class influence.

### *3.11.1 Education as an Indicator of Social Status Determinants*

Fuller and Elmore (1996) indicated that US parents who are interested in school choice tend to be more highly educated than those who do not exercise their school choice. Further, they found that financially poorer parents are not advised about the benefits available for their children of school choice alternatives. This is supported by Smrekar and Goldring (1999), who reported that US parents who exercise their right to choose tend to be from a higher social class, have a higher income and are better educated than those who do not exercise their right to school choice. Moreover, according to Foster (2002: 321) “Parents in a low social class and with a low educational level tend to be poorer choosers, while parents in higher social class and with a high level of education tend to be better choosers”. This is confirmed by Bosetti (2004: 391) “parents who actively choose schools are better educated, have higher levels of income, and are less likely to be unemployed than non-choosing parents”. Therefore, parents who are from higher social classes and who attended higher education institutions are significantly more likely than other parents to select a high-performing school for their children.

Thus, numerous studies have found that parents with a high level of education tend to prefer schools that have higher educational attainment, thereby indicating that these parents are more likely to carry out research to identify options for educational choices and will try to make well-informed decisions about their children's school. Hence, there is a positive correlation between parents with higher education and private schools (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Long and Toma, 1988). In support of this assertion, Yang and Kayaardi (2004: 233) noted that:

Parents with higher educational attainment better understand the importance of education, what different kinds of schools offer and what they want their children to acquire, and therefore are in a better position to make an informed decision.

Likewise, Martinez et al. (1996) pointed out that parents who select private schools for their children have higher socio-economic status and higher levels of education than those who choose public school. Buddin et al. (1998: 123) highlighted that "family characteristics, such as income and tastes for education, that affect the amount of education desired per child, should be important factors in the private school choice decision". This implies that parents of low educational level and low income want something quite different from the school than parents who have enjoyed higher education level and higher income. Hence, the personal education of parents has been identified as an important factor that impacts on parents in terms of their school choice.

### *3.11.2 Income and ethnicity - indicators of social status determinants*

Family socio-economic status is another aspect that has been related to school choice (Goldring et al., 2009). High family income increases the opportunity to afford higher performance schools by the mere fact of parents' ability to pay for individual tuition and school fees (Coleman, 1988). Consequently, there is a consensus among researchers that high-income families, consisting of well-educated parents, are attracted by private schools: unlike low-income families, consisting perhaps of lower educated parents, who are unable to consider private education because of low incomes that do not cover the high tuition fees (Goldring et al., 2008; Bosetti, 2004; Lacireno-Paquet & Brantley, 2008; Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Goldring and Hausman, 1999). Therefore, as mentioned previously, students from high income families represent the vast majority of learners at private schools. By way of example, Goldring and Phillips (2008:211) reported that for a US family:

Earning between \$60,000 and \$79,999 per year increases the probability of considering a private school to 82%. Thus, this group of parents has a 51% better chance of considering a private school for their child than the lowest-income group \$29,999 or less.

Goldring and Phillips' (2008) findings are consistent with those of Buddin et al. (1998: 125) who found that for "high school students ... the predicted probability of attending private school rises by 50 percent as income rises from \$20,000 to \$80,000".

However, this was contradicted by a survey conducted by Statistics Canada (2001) designed to determine the social class of students who attended a private school in Canada from 1987 to 1999. They indicated that:

About 43% of children (15 years of age or younger) attending public schools had family incomes of less than \$50,000, and only 12% had family incomes over \$100,000. The proportion of children who come from households with an annual income of \$50,000 to \$100,000 was about the same in the case of both private and public schools, 45%" (ibid, p.1).

In this respect, Almutawa and Alwatfa's (2007) study of private schools in Kuwait found that the great majority of parents of children in private schools were of high socio-economic status, although many of them made sacrifices to pay the tuition fees, which were around US\$2,562 annually. In contrast, in the KSA context, a study conducted in Dammam City by Alansari (2004) found that the majority of parents who send their children to private schools, were on a low income. This result was unexpected. Alansari (2004) attributed the reason for this decision-making to the perception of high quality education and suggested that it indicated that some private schools rely heavily upon this perception to make a profit, thereby sustaining their status quo for remaining in business.

Ultimately, according to Goldring and Hausman (1999), to understand fully the complexities of the choice system, researchers need to investigate the ways in which the choice programmes are relevant and suitable for the community and identify the way in which they accomplish their demographic goals.

### **3.12 Safe haven**

As demonstrated above, there are considerable numbers of reasons that impact upon the quality of the education process, either in public school or private school. There are some undesirable phenomena, however, that have spread in the education setting that have a

negative influence on schools across the world, such as violence among students, attacks on teachers by students, deliberate destruction of school property, taking drugs, smoking, carrying weapons and drinking alcohol. Carney et al. (2005) identified the most common of these as abuse viz. verbal threats (43%) and bullying (36%), which often, but not exclusively, occur among teenagers in schools. Nansel et al. (2001) indicated that one of the countries suffering from an increase in violence in schools is the USA, where almost 30 % of grade 6–10 learners were involved in frequent bullying.

Regarding violence and bullying in schools in the USA, the National Centre for Education Statistics NCES ( 2009: 66) stated that:

A total of 767,900 serious disciplinary actions were taken during the 2007–08 school year. The largest number of disciplinary actions was taken for insubordination (327,100 actions) and physical attacks or fights (271,800)

In the UK, Oliver and Candappa (2003) found that half of all primary age school children and more than one in four secondary school children said they had been bullied in the term under review. Similarly, Hayden (2009:29) indicated that:

Monitoring data on the nature and prevalence of deviance and violence in schools is plentiful in England. In particular there are a plethora of self-report surveys from school pupils. Overall the evidence suggests that some forms of behaviour are very common.

In the context of KSA, Alalsamih (2010) reported that the number of private school students suffering from some form of violence had grown in schools, along with an increase in fighting, weapons, and attacks on teachers. For example, he reported that, in 2008, 14.8% of teachers in Riyadh had been attacked by students. In contrast, however, some studies identified that certain forms of school violence had decreased in prevalence (Robers et al., 2010). This result reinforces the US Department of Health and Human Services (2010) findings, which indicated a reduction of the proportion of school learners engaged in bullying from 36.6% in 1997 to 33.3% in 2010, along with students involved in binge drinking in the previous fifteen days from 32% in 1998 to 11% in 2010.

Violence in schools makes students anxious, causing them to lose concentration on their tasks and studies, because they feel the school is an unsafe, threatening, environment. This means that the concept and perception of school as a safe haven is very important in terms of the teaching and learning as well as a reason seriously considered in parental

school choice. The importance of the safe haven in education is discussed in the next section

### *3.12.1 Importance of the safe haven for students' achievement and emotional well-being*

A number of studies have emphasised the importance of the status of the school as a safe haven in terms of teaching and learning, based on the contention that any instance of violence at school impacts not just on students, but also disrupts the educational process at school (e.g. Henry 2000). Echols and Willms (1995) examined the motives of 290 parents behind their choice of a non-local school for their child and found parents preferences identified good discipline in the school and well-behaved pupils to be the most significant motives.

Stein et al. (2003) supported the claim that learners exposed to violence are more likely to have a higher number of school absences, poorer school performance, a lower grade point average, and lower IQ and reading abilities, whilst, a safe educational environment, along with secure sense of care and well-being, often results in higher student achievement. According to Protheroe (2007: 50) "In a caring school, a critical connection has been made between students' academic achievement and their need to feel safe, accepted and valued". The benefits of a safe school environment extend beyond education to impact upon the development of students' emotional well-being. Osofsky (1999) considers a safe educational setting as likely to protect students from several negative effects, such as emotional withdrawal, depression, lowered self-esteem, feelings of fear, increased aggression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a sense of danger in the school. A report from the Children's Society (2012) confirmed that the climate in school is a key element affecting students' emotional well-being and behaviour. For example security, tolerance and understanding are all noted as significant in enhancing the sense of safety in education.

Parents, therefore, are likely to realise that a safe educational environment assists the school to develop in all aspects of education. In this respect, as Hsu and Yuan-fang (2013:40) noted:

Parents prioritized the safety of the campus, the community to which the school belongs, and whether the school is a new one or not. Parents' consideration of a good learning environment could serve as a reference for schools that intend to make improvements

A number of studies have proposed programmes to enhance discipline in schools by implementing effective school-based intervention efforts to reduce the violence currently prevalent in schools. It has been suggested that the rate of bullying is likely to fall if a peer support system is introduced in schools. For example, Cowie and Oztug (2008) conducted a study to examine the effect of the peer support system in terms of creating security in school. They carried out their research in four secondary schools: two with a peer support system and two without, with a sample of 931 pupils. The conclusion reached was that a peer support system makes students feel comfortable and safe in school, particularly in the toilets, on corridors and on the stairs, as peer supporters have an impact on the behaviour of some older students towards younger students, which is likely to make them friendlier.

Other researchers consider that the teachers and administrators of a school play a major role in decreasing the rate of violence in school. Duers (2000) pointed out that “Each school must have tailor-made solutions for its specific needs in order to successfully eradicate or at least decrease the amount of youth violence” Gastic (2010: 269) asserted that “school staff can also serve to prevent or de-escalate violence as active bystanders to act to defuse violence. As bystanders, students and school staff can reduce school violence if they intervene”. Therefore, teachers and administrators should take a positive approach to dealing with students, in order to reduce aggressive behaviour among students. In other words, the elimination of bullying in school depends on the approach of the school towards the treatment of the culprits. For instance, the administrators of schools sometimes mete out harsh punishment on guilty students, which can lead to an increase in the aggressive behaviour of these students. Thus, administrators should develop a punishment system geared to address and change undesirable behaviour among students in a more rational constructive manner. Teachers should also have conversations with students and listen to them and their opinions must be weighed, considered, respected and given importance when implementing appropriate strategies to combat violence in school (Alzuhairi, 2008). Similarly, Kyriacou et al. (2010) carried out a study in Spain on 176 secondary school student teachers aiming to develop teachers’ understanding of how to deal with undesirable behaviour. The teachers were asked to rank the best strategies to reduce the poor behaviour among students in secondary school in Spain. For example, “Have a conversation with the pupil after the lesson in which you try to counsel the pupil towards understanding why doing the work and not misbehaving is in their best interests; establish clear and consistent school and classroom rules about the behaviours that are



acceptable and that are unacceptable; investigate the misbehaviour in a sympathetic and non-threatening manner; try to get the pupil re-engaged in doing their schoolwork with as little fuss as possible; speak to the pupil in a firm and assertive manner; have a conversation with the pupil after the lesson in which you issue a firm warning to the pupil not to misbehave again” (p. 254). The results of the study revealed that the best strategy for eliminating misbehaviour and achieving discipline in school was to have open and honest conversations with misbehaving students. As the researchers conclude:

“Although there is a tendency for this sample to express a more pathognomonic view of the factors accounting for pupil misbehaviour, and a greater tendency to view having a conversation with pupils as definitely a good discipline strategy” (P, 423)

This study is consistent with a similar study in which 141 Japanese teachers were surveyed to discover the best strategy for dealing with misbehaviour (Kyriacou, 2010). Here, the researcher also found that the teachers who used constructive dialogue to deal with misbehaving students were the most effective, while threatening to punish the pupil (e.g. with a detention) if the misbehaviour persists was given a very low rating. As the author points out “The most effective disciplinary strategies reported focused on undertaking a constructive dialogue with pupils. Whilst this finding is broadly in line with the research reported elsewhere” (p. 255). Indeed, Kyriakou (2010) shows some striking similarities between Spain and Japan people in terms of strategies to reduce misbehaviour, despite the apparent significant differences in culture between these two countries.

Bucher and Manning (2005: 57) asserted that “educators are able to create an environment that fosters the development of resiliency by helping students preserve relationships, control their behaviour, and resolve conflicts peacefully”. Some researchers believe that the school should utilise a combination of a number of procedures to reduce bullying and other violence in school, such as sophisticated alarms, telephones in classrooms, staff trained in security procedures, cameras at the school gates, in the school toilets and buses, students being required to pass through metal detectors daily, badges or picture identification for students, and visitors being required to sign in, as all could contribute to reducing bullying and fighting in school (Potter 2003). Addressing in a positive manner the elimination of violence in a school would attract parents when choosing a school.

In the light of the above discussion I reached the surprising result which is that it is the safe haven of environment at school which was considered a very important issue for the

most of social cultures, even in Saudi Arabia where Alsamih (2010) points out to some processes that can reduce violence in schools. For example, advanced alarms, CCTV camera in classrooms, CCTV cameras at the school gates, in the school toilets and buses all help to create the safe environment at school. The safe environment at school thus becomes a common denominator between most of the cultures of people as the researchers found significant positive points in terms of student's achievement such as the students who feel safe in school are more likely to have low number of school absences and higher school performance. Also, there were fewer cases of student emotional depression, lowered self-esteem, feelings of fear and increased aggression. Consequently some scholars from different cultures tried to find solutions that eliminate or reduce the violence that are currently prevalent in schools, a factor that was important in parental choice of school.

### *3.12.2 Safe haven and school choice*

A considerable amount of research has shown that the overwhelming majority of parents consider discipline and a safe haven as priorities when choosing a school and that they have an influence on students' achievement, resulting in supportive of teaching and learning. For instance

Duers (2005: 15) pointed out that "School should not be a frightening experience and kids should not attend school with a fear of mental or bodily harm being inflicted upon them". Protheroe (2007: 50) also claimed that "In caring schools, a critical connection has been made between students' academic achievement and their need to feel safe, accepted and valued".

The USA Government Report NCES (2009d), concerned about school violence in private schools and public schools, focused on bullying, weapons, drugs, and fighting, stated that in 2007, 5% of students who attended public schools had been victims of violent crime within the last 6 months, compared to 1% of private school students. Bullying was more prevalent among public school students (32%) compared to those at private schools (19%). Moreover, between 2007 and 2008 8.1% of teachers in public schools were subjected to abuse from students, as opposed to 2.6% their counterparts in private schools (NCES, 2009). This result is in agreement with earlier work by Figlio and Stone (1997:33) who found that:

Private schools were 24.5% more likely than public schools to expel students for possession of alcohol, 70% more likely to expel students

for injuring others, and 62% more likely to expel students who bring weapons to school

These outcomes were supported by other empirical studies in the USA, for example, Crawford and Freeman (1996), who carried out research to determine the reasons that led to parents withdrawing their children from public school to send them to private school in Millard School District in Omaha. A survey was administered to 1,107 private school students and the results showed that school safety and the school's discipline policy were the main reasons cited for leaving public school and private school. This result is consistent with Bukhari and Randall (2009), who found that 'discipline' was rated as an important aspect in parents' decisions to leave the public school system and enter their children in a private school. Parents perceived that discipline is important to create a comfortable situation for each student, since it supports students in learning, usually yielding high academic achievement. Kennedy et al. (2011) noted that parents favoured private schools in Utah County, USA, because the public schools were unsafe environments that had a negative effect on the achievement of children in school. When Kennedy et al. (2011) surveyed 896 parents who had sent their children to private schools, asking them to rank some reasons that encouraged them to choose a school, e.g. location of school, religious denomination of school, affordability, school reputation, teaching quality, discipline, values, size of school, care, and outside school hours care, they found that parents rated the safety aspect very highly when they chose a school for their children. This finding is supported by the results of Carter's (2011) survey, which found that 10,000 urban African-American parents switched their children from public school to private school annually. He used mixed methods to determine the reasons for this phenomenon, showing that, (Carter, 2011:106):

The number one variable for urban African-American parents' decision are the discipline policies of the school of choice; relying on a discipline system to secure the safety of their child. This overwhelming fear for the safety of their child, a direct result of the constant pressures of urban violence, is somewhat calmed with the knowledge that the chosen school has a consistently enforced discipline policy that will protect their child

In the UK context studies have been conducted in Scotland, London and Sheffield, which each agree on the importance of a safe environment in school choice. The first study was carried out by Adler et al. (1989), based on interviews with 619 parents in three Scottish

Educational Authorities. The researchers examined factors such as, the school assessed pupils more regularly, the school offers a wider range of courses, the school gives its pupils more freedom, the school has a reputation for better discipline and it is more caring school. The researchers found that parents who participated in choosing a school ranked the disciplinary climate and the school's policy on homework as important factors which influenced their choice.

The authors indicated that:

In the first three places overall were the judgment that the child would be happier at the chosen school, the avowal by the child that he or she would prefer the requested school, and the assessment that the selected school offered better discipline. (ibid. p. 132)

These results were supported by Hunter (1991) who held interviews with 289 parents in London, who favoured private schools for their children, and found that the most important criterion cited by the majority of participants was good discipline at school, with the parents explaining that "discipline produced an orderly environment where the children would be able to learn" (ibid. p.39). This finding is similar to Coldron and Boulton (1991) who surveyed the 222 parents in and interviewed 16 parents in Sheffield City to examine the factors influencing parents to choose a particular school. They found the majority of the sample preferred a school on account of discipline and a safe environment because they believed there to be a strong relationship between a secure environment and the happiness of students. The researchers point out that:

Parents made the point that discipline is very strongly related to the happiness of child in that a disciplined environment is one where a child's vulnerability is they are constantly afraid or frustrated. Whilst there is a connection between discipline and school work, parents in this study were reluctant to make it. They were, however, very ready to regard discipline as a necessary basis for happiness. (ibid. p.174)

Similarly, Echols and Willms (1995) found that a disciplined school environment and good behaviour on the part of students were vital criteria when he investigated the criteria of 290 Scottish parents when choosing a school for their child. Parents demand assurance and want the school to be safe for their children whilst they receive a good education, with no fighting or weapons. Thus, personal safety is an essential reason for the parents when choosing a school for their children. This is why some parents prefer to send their children to private schools, since they consider them to be much safer environments than

public schools. Hence, parents make safety their main criterion in selecting a private school.

The majority of relevant studies proved that parents value a safe place for teaching and learning, which implies they prefer private schools because they consider them to be safer than public ones. For example in Canada, Bosetti (2004) surveyed 1,500 parents of students in 11 private schools in Alberta, to investigate the reasons that influenced them when choosing a school, with the aim of identifying implications for policy and educational reforms. Parents were asked to rank in order of importance six reasons that motivated them to send their children to private school. The second most important criterion was found to be safety.

On the other hand, Goldring and Phillips (2008) interviewed 748 parents whose children attended private schools in Metropolitan Nashville, however, they found that safety was not a significant reason for parents sending their children to private school “Safety is also not likely to be an issue for either set of choosers, based on the relative affluence of both those who choose magnet schools and private schools when compared to the average families” (ibid. p.241).

Overall, however, it is possible to conclude that safety is an important reason that impacts on parents’ school choice as they believe that students’ will attain better results if they find themselves in a safe environment. Therefore, the school staff should work to ensure that their school is a safe haven with no culture of violence, in order to keep students secure, as well as attract parents to send their children to it.

### **3.13 Summary**

In conclusion, therefore, research into the effects of school choice, particularly class size, which has been one of the most investigated areas in the field of education and educational studies, demonstrates that it is essential for a constructive, positive climate for learning that in turn will enhance student achievement in the school and the impact of positive learning experiences for the learner from their teachers, who are enabled to give much more concentrated, individual tuition.

Ultimately, however, to comprehend the school choice system researchers must explore how and if the choice programmes are suitable for a particular community and whether they accomplish their demographic goals in that community (Goldring and Hausman, 1999). Consequently, as can be seen and has been shown from the discussion above by

exploring and discussing the various studies over time, the current research study can contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining the factors that influence parents in their choice of school, as very little such research has been conducted in KSA. It is intended, therefore, to investigate this using a survey and focus group methodology areas, in order to ascertain the disparity in the 'gap analysis', thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore a variety of factors related parental perceptions of the differences between private and public schools in Riyadh, KSA.

As the categories listed on sub section 3.4 are identified as crucial in measuring the quality of the educational process, the principle reason for the current research study conducted in KSA schools, is that very little or no research has been conducted into the reasons and rationales behind parental school choice in Riyadh, KSA. This therefore represents an opportunity for original research and to make an important contribution to the existing body of knowledge from a different cultural setting, such as the KSA context, by providing original research analyses of the existing gap in the available literature and answers to investigative questions that have yet to be fully addressed.

And so there are the questions that have arisen which the researcher is going to investigate in Riyadh, based upon educational studies classified into several categories based upon Coldron and Boulton (1991); Taylor (1996); Charles (2011). As discussed above, this study divided the main categories of issues listed above into eight variables to explore the most important factors that influence parents in making their decision to send their children to private schools, or vice versa in KSA. The academic category is divided into four variables: (a) academic programme; (b) the qualifications of teachers; (c) the relationship between students and teacher; (d) the class size. The second category is the school/parent relationship. The third category: the convenience factor (suitability) was divided into four variables: (a) the school facilities; (b) physical education and sport; (c) social status determinants; (d) the safe haven. Based upon the above, is there a case for permitting or encouraging the expansion of the private school sector in KSA?

The next chapter will detail the methodology used in this study and justify its choice in preference to other possible methodologies.

# **Chapter Four**

## **Research Methods**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study. As stated in Chapter One, the aim of this study is to investigate the main factors that influence parental choice of private or public school for their children. In other words, it aims to measure academic factors, parent-school relationships, school facilities, physical education and sport activities, and the educational environment, in order to evaluate the significance of these factors in the perception of parents.

This chapter is divided into seven sections: it begins with a description of this study in detail including the research design. The second section discusses the research aims and questions; the third section details the target population and sampling, while the fourth and fifth sections discuss the research instruments, data collection process and ethical considerations. The Focus Group interview is presented in the sixth section, while the final section summarises the content of this chapter.

### **4.2 Research Design**

A descriptive approach to research has been taken to describe the parents' perception of public and private schools in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. A descriptive research approach can be broken down into two categories:

1. Survey study
2. Correlational research (Alassaf, 2010)

A survey design was judged to be the most appropriate for the present study for a number of reasons. According to Wisker (2007) and Gilbert (2008), survey studies allows researchers to obtain information about the case, facts, activities, phenomena, moral, personal experiences, behaviour and answers to events. In other words, it describes qualities, opinions or perspectives of a population by the use of a targeted sample. In addition, a survey study allows the researcher to apply the study to one or more one groups, unlike correlational research (Alassaf, 2010). Moreover, the researcher is able to obtain data about the sample using several approaches, such as face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, postal or hand-delivered questionnaires and online surveys. Cohen et al (2011:421) confirm that obtaining data typically involves "structured or semi-

structured interviews, self-completion or postal questionnaires, standardized tests of attainment or performance, and attitude scales". Finally, using a survey study is commonly used in educational studies to describe what exists without asking about the reasons: Cohen et al (2011:256), "the most commonly used descriptive method in educational research". In this study two methods were used to collect the data: questionnaires and Focus Group interviews.

### **4.3 Research Aims and Questions**

Alassaf (2010) points out that a specific aim needs to be formulated before outlining the research questions, which should comprise sub-topics related to each of the issues under exploration. Accordingly, the aims of this research, as indicated in Chapter One, are:

- To investigate the factors which (a) attract parents to prefer private or public schools; (b) lie behind the increased aspirations and demands of parents and the reasons offered for their preferred school; (c) inform the KSA Ministry of Education's endeavours to establish schools which address the demands and ambitions of parents in Riyadh City, KSA.
- To explore whether private schools are superior to public schools or vice-versa in terms of the perceptions of parents in Riyadh, KSA.
- To determine the effect of dependent variables on parents in terms of their choice of public or private school.
- To explore the reasons and circumstances behind parents' preference for private or public schools.
- To provide head teachers and administrators of private and public schools with the identified factors and positive attributes.
- To offer relevant recommendations to education policymakers that may assist them to develop the KSA educational system in order to produce highly educated citizens capable of meeting internal and global needs.



Consequently, it is necessary to recall the research questions that are being used to guide the research. These research questions are as follows:

The first main question is:

**Which underlying factors did parents identify as influencing their decision to enrol their children in public or private schools in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia?**

This question is followed by some supplementary questions identifying factors that may have influenced parents' decision to enrol their children in public or private school.

- Does the strength of academic factors affect parents' decisions to enter their children in public or private school?
- Does the strength of the parent-school relationship affect parents' decisions to enter their children in public or private school?
- Does the strength of the school facilities influence parents to put their children in public or private school?
- Does the strength of the physical education and sport activities factor affect parents' decisions to enter their children in public or private schools?
- Does the strength of the safe haven factor affect parents' decisions to enter their children in public or private schools?
- Does the strength of the school rules affect parents' decisions to enter their children in public or private schools?

The second main question is:

**Do the identified factors that influence parents' choice of private or public school vary based upon the parents' socio-economic, educational and age characteristics?**

This question is followed by some supplementary questions identifying factors that may have influenced parents' decision to enrol their children in public or private school, which identify the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables.

- Do parental qualifications have an effect on the choice of private or public school?
- Does age effect parents' choice of private or public school?
- Does monthly income effect parents' choice of private or public school?

## 4.4 Research Instruments

### 4.4.1 Introduction

Rea and Parker (2005) strongly advocated that researchers should be aware that a variety of elements play a role in determining the instrument for the data collection, such as cost, time, and size of population. Furthermore, of equal importance are the research questions to be addressed, research purposes and the types of information that researchers intend to collect. Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) recommended, therefore, that the researcher answer the following questions before selecting the instrument:

Where will the data be collected?

When will the data be collected?

Who is to collect the data?

How often will the data be collected?

The methods that were utilised in the present research study were selected after a thorough review of previous studies where a high level of validity and reliability had been obtained. Hence, two methods were decided upon to obtain the primary data, viz. a questionnaire and Focus Group interviews after this study's aims and research questions were taken into account in accordance with the goals of this study.

### 4.4.2 Qualitative and quantitative methods

It is important to establish the advantages and limitations of using qualitative and quantitative research methods. According to Mertens (2009: 3) the quantitative method is used in "one of many different ways of knowing and understanding". In contrast, Van Maanen (1983: 9) defined qualitative methods as:

an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meanings, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.

The collection and analysis of information via a quantitative approach may be time-consuming and subjective elements may affect the validity and reliability of the study. Thus, it may be difficult for a researcher to avoid bias in the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data (Bryman, 2012). It is possible, however, to conduct quantitative

research by mail, e-mail, or third-person distribution and this may reduce the potential for bias as there is no direct contact between the researcher and participants. Conversely, qualitative research is most often carried out by face-to-face contact with individuals or groups. Further, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1994: 83) indicate that the quantitative approach "focus on what is, or what has been recently; they make it hard for the policy-maker to infer what changes and actions should take place in the future". Therefore, researchers must recognise this and make an attempt not to affect the research process (Cohen et al, 2011).

The epistemological underpinnings of quantitative research are a view of the world as "being hard, real and external to the individual" (Cohen et al 2011: 42), implying that numerical data is able itself to illustrate the cause or the result of phenomena (Bryman, 2012). Conversely, the qualitative approach sees the world as "being a much softer, personal and humanly-created kind" (Cohen et al., 2011: 30). Here, methods such as Focus Groups, interviews, participant observation, and group discussions, in which participants are recruited from non-random samples, are used. Since qualitative research aims to obtain information from specific groups of the population, this often indicates a small sample whose results are likely to be difficult to generalise (Key, 1997; Huysamen, 1997; Cohen et al. 2011; Bryman, 2012).

Coldeway (1989: 2) asserts that descriptive statistics obtained by quantitative methods can "describe a mass of numbers in terms of general trends, to tabulate data, and to present data in graphic form". Quantitative methods also use statistics to assist in investigating the phenomenon. Also, frequency distribution bar graphs and tables illustrating data on factors influencing parental choice of school are used to determine the related strength of each variable. Questionnaires, however, cannot always provide in-depth information about a subject, hence this method may not present a solution to complex problems (Key, 1997; Huysamen, 1997; Cohen et al. 2011; Bryman, 2012). In addition, a quantitative study may not have sufficient flexibility to comprehend complex human behaviour and to deal with sensitive matters (Johnson, 1994: 7, 18). This is why in educational research quantitative approaches are often complemented by the use of qualitative approaches.

As Maxwell (1996) indicates, qualitative research generally achieves one or more of the following objectives. Firstly, it is a method that helps the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding, and a sense of events, situations, and the actions of participants in a study. In other words, the in-depth interviews used in a case study provide greater insights than a survey and also provide "well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes

occurring in local contexts" (Miles and Huberman, 1984: 15). Secondly, it facilitates consideration of the particular context within which the participants operate. Thirdly, it identifies unexpected phenomena and effects which might create new grounded theories in relation to the phenomena.

Moreover, qualitative methods "provide a way of gathering data which is seen as natural rather than artificial" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1994: 83). Similarly, it has been argued that qualitative data are "far more convincing to a reader - another researcher, a policy-maker, a practitioner - than pages of numbers" (Miles and Huberman, 1984: 15). Consequently, qualitative data from this study are considered more appealing to decision makers, and therefore, the Focus Groups in this research act as a basis for further empirical study of the research questions and to balance the shortcomings of quantitative methods described above.

The research problem, i.e. parents' choice of school, requires an examination of a current phenomenon in a real-life context as there are no clear borders between the phenomena, parents' choice of school, and the demographic characteristics of parents. Therefore, several sources of evidence and two methods were used to investigate the significance of choice of school in the context of various groups of parents (Yin, 1994). In this study, a qualitative method was employed for the Focus Group interviews, as will be discussed in greater detail later. In the following section, the derivation of the particular research methods chosen will be further discussed in the context of methods used in previous studies in this area of research.

#### *4.4.3 The paradigms adopted from prior studies*

Based on a review of previous studies where quantitative and qualitative approaches were used the researcher adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches to address the research questions of this study, as each approach had different advantages in addressing the study questions.

Specifically, the research designs in Jane (1998), Bosetti (2004), Bukhar and Randall (2009) and Tam (2002) informed the decision making process.

The qualitative paradigm was used by Jane (1996) to examine the influences on parental choice of public primary school. In his study, the data collection strategy involved a series of in-depth interviews with 138 parents from eleven primary schools in the UK. This was because the purpose of his study was to investigate the most important factors that

influenced parents in sending their children to a particular primary school and the implications of that for the educational process.

Bosetti (2004), meanwhile, adopted a quantitative paradigm in a study which revealed factors that impacted upon parental decisions to send their children to a particular type of school. The sample in Bosetti's study was 1,500 parents of students in 11 private, 8 public and 10 alternative elementary schools in Alberta, Canada, exploring the influences on parents' decision making and the implications of a school choice programme for the educational process.

Bukhar and Randall (2009) used a mixed method approach (qualitative and quantitative) to examine the influences on parental choice of public or private school for their children's education. The study compared the factors that attracted parents to select a particular type of school through a data collection strategy involving a series of questionnaires with 209 families from each type of education system, viz. private/public. To expand the finding of the questionnaire, the researcher then used Focus Groups to discuss the research questions with participants, in order to make comparisons with the questionnaire findings, so that the quantitative questionnaire data was supplemented by rich qualitative data from the Focus Groups.

Tam (2002: 2) focused on "the factors that are affecting Chinese parental decisions to enrol students in private primary schools in Hong Kong", using qualitative and quantitative methods, viz. questionnaire and interviews, to measure the interaction between the school and the perception of parents. 1,379 parents were surveyed and 128 interviewed to confirm the findings from questionnaires.

Kharman (2005) also used mixed qualitative and quantitative approaches in a study on parental perceptions concerning their choice of private and public schools a sample of 720 parents located in Amman, Jordan, with a questionnaire being distributed by both types of school and Interview data confirming the results of the questionnaire, and shedding more light on the findings of the investigation.

Overall, it is argued that the mixed approach offers the best combination of data for this kind of study – both "hard" quantitative data and "soft" qualitative data through the Focus Groups. The quantitative data mean that it is possible to draw strong statistical conclusions about correlations between different variables in parental choice but it does

not in itself allow an understanding of why or how these variables interact. This is where the qualitative Focus Group data helps: in that the fuller and richer data collection possible in the discussion format of the groups allows a more comprehensive understanding of the perceptions and attitudes which underpin the statistical data. Therefore, the qualitative method was complementary to the quantitative method, which was dominant in this study. The quantitative method, on the other hand, was used to obtain representative samples of the population by the random selection of sizeable samples to generate sufficient data to facilitate the generalisation of the findings (Johnson, 1994; Yin, 1994). This was because the questionnaire was assumed to be able to provide inferential statistics for the generalisation of the research results to all public and private schools in Riyadh.

#### **4.5 Limitations**

As indicated in Chapter One this study has limitations other than the one described below. These other limitations are discussed partly in Chapter Four and fully in Chapter Seven. This study was limited to a population of Saudi Arabian parents, who were sending their children to private or public secondary schools at the beginning of 2012. So it may not be valid to generalise the findings from this study to another nationality population, because they are characterised by a specific cultural background that leads them to choice of school that meet their qualities. As indicated in Chapter Seven, there are some other limitations to this study which was discussed in details

#### **4.6 The target population and sample population**

David and Sutton (2004) defined population as “every possible case that could be included in the study”. The target population of this study, from which the sample was drawn, consists of all parents who were sending their children to private or public schools in Riyadh, KSA, during the period when this study was conducted in 2012.



Figure 2: Saudi Arabia

Due to the time and financial limitations of this study, it would not have been practical to conduct this research throughout the whole of Saudi Arabia, therefore the researcher selected Riyadh as it is a city within Saudi Arabia with similarity between its population and the general population of Saudi Arabia although it is not claimed to be representative of all schools in Saudi Arabia. For example, the Riyadh population is conservative unlike, the Jeddah city population which is characterised by a much more liberal approach to social behaviour. Equally, Riyadh is the home and place of work of the researcher and familiarity with the region under investigation is advantageous when obtaining the necessary data.

There are two other reasons for choosing these parents as the target sample for this research. Firstly, a variety of decisions have been taken by the KSA Ministry of Education to reform the educational process, such as the Comprehensive Evaluation of Education project and the King Abdullah project to reform education. Alalissa (2009) argues that these reform projects, however, have not produced the desired improvement in students' performance, since they did not include parental school choice as part of the education reform process. Thus, some KSA educationalists, such as Alajaja (2002) have advocated that educational reform projects must give greater attention to the school choice system, as it can be a powerful driver of educational reform. It has also been argued that student results will not improve until new actors emerge in the decision making process, with parents being the most important and potentially powerful of these new actors. Further,

in order to develop students' performance, a number of scholars in various countries recommend that parents be involved in the educational procedure (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Schneider et al., 2002). Supporting this assertion Bukhari and Randall (2009) stated that "parental choice has become one of the most controversial educational reform movements of the past 25 years" (ibid. p. 243).

The second reason for choosing this sample is that researchers, as well as prospective parents, will benefit from the result of this study by learning what participants in this study identified and viewed as important reasons for their choice of private and/or public schools. Generally, parents seek to provide their children with the best education possible. Therefore, they are constantly seeking information on which schools offer best value for money. This study will provide data as to why parents selected certain public or private schools in Riyadh, KSA.

#### **4.7 The Sample**

Burns (2000: 83) defined a sample as "any part of the population, regardless of whether it is representative or not", while David and Sutton (2004) advocated that a sample is "every possible case that could be included in the study." Thus, sampling is a very significant step in any study, because the targeted sample is part of entire population (Alduhayan and Ezat, 2002). Similarly, according to Vogt (1993: 202) a sampling frame is "a list of the population from which all sampling units are drawn". In other words, researchers should choose a research population that is representative of the characteristics of the entire population.

Such a sample has a considerable number of positive aspects, such as saving time and money, and because using a sample may lead to a higher response rate and greater cooperation of respondents in the sample than would be obtained from the total population. Finally, a carefully selected sample can provide data that are equally accurate as, data obtained from a survey of the entire population (Bailey, 1983).

##### *4.7.1 The first stage: selecting the schools to determine the sample*

The researcher obtained a list of the public and private schools in Riyadh City from the KSA Ministry of Education. Eight private and seven public schools were randomly selected by choosing schools from each list, starting from the number ten, then selecting number twenty, then thirty and so forth. These represent approximately 9% of both types of school in Riyadh.



**Table 4: Random Selection of Schools**

<b>Type of School</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Sample</b>
Public schools	76 schools	7 public schools
Private schools	87 schools	8 private schools
Private and public schools	163 schools	15 schools

The primary determinant of each element in every category is that it represents the population and is convenient to provide data. After schools were chosen in which to conduct the study, the researcher moved to the second stage; the determination of the targeted sample from each school.

#### *4.7.2 The second stage: selecting the target sample*

The size of a sample that should be chosen to be representative is controversial among researchers. For instance, Alassaf (2010) and Alashari (2007) believed that the proportion of the sample to the population should be 1%, 5% and 10% in respect to confidence levels of 99%, 95% and 100%, respectively. On the other hand, Oppenheim (1992: 43) claimed that choosing large samples can be a waste of time and money while too small a sample would probably not be sufficiently reliable. "A sample's accuracy is more important than its size. A properly drawn sample of fewer than 2,000 adults can give us more reliable estimates on a population of many millions, for election polls or other types of social research, than a huge sample of a quarter of million which is poorly drawn". Kerlinger (1986) indicated other elements that determine the size of the sample, e.g. the study topic, aims, and the nature and economic situation of the study population. He concluded that there is no clear-cut answer for standardizing the sample size, although he advocated that a large sample percentage assists in reducing sample errors in terms of the selection procedure. Thus, a researcher should do their best to use as accurate a sample as possible.

In the light of the above discussion, the present study has used a proportional sampling strategy of 10% of the population, because according to Neuman (2006: 241), "the smaller the population, the bigger the sampling ratio has to be for an accurate sample. Larger populations permit smaller sampling ratios for equally good samples". Therefore, in this study, random sampling was adopted for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it is widely employed by educational researchers as it allows every one of the identified population

an equal chance of inclusion within the research sample. This aspect is confirmed by Cohen et al. (2011:153)

Each member of the population under study has an equal chance of being selected and the probability of a member of the population being selected is unaffected by the selection of other members of the population, i.e. each selection is entirely independent of the next.

Similarly, Bryman (2012: 190) defined a random sample thus: “each unit of the population has equal probability of inclusion in the sample”. Secondly, a random sample is free from sampling bias, which may have a tendency to favour a section of units, viz. Ross (2005: 9) “self-weighting samples in which the simple arithmetic mean obtained from the sample data is an unbiased estimate of the population mean”.

Overall, therefore, the researcher’s aim was to be able to generalise the result of this study to the entire population of Riyadh schools and to do this it was essential to ensure that the data was as free from bias as possible. Bias was minimised by ensuring that the sample of schools was chosen randomly; the number of the sample of public and private schools was equal; the sample population was almost equal in term of private and public schools. Each was achieved by ordinal position selection. The researcher also used third parties, as well as mail and e-mail in distributing the questionnaire.

The target sample for the final questionnaire was for parents with children in their first year of secondary schooling (private or public). Since the research questions involved the perceptions of parents regarding factors they believed to be significant in their school choice, these questionnaires were distributed after the parents of children in their first year of secondary education had chosen their schools. In other words, this study was primarily interested in the parents' reasons for preferring particular schools at the time they were making their decisions, i.e. prior to their children attending secondary school. The study focused on secondary school students at this stage of their education, because they are still under the direct control of their parents, thereby ensuring that the choice of school was genuinely a parental choice. Also the majority of research into parental choice focuses on secondary school choice (Bell, 2009; Woods, et al., 1998; Michael Adler et al., 1989); Coldron and Boulton, 1991; Hunter, 1991; Bastow, 1992; MacKenzie et al., 2003) .

This study also concentrates on just the father because in the Saudi context there is strict separation of males and females in education for cultural and religious reasons. This mean that a mother could not enter a boys' school to gain information. Also the father is considered to be responsible for his boy's education in terms of the education fee and following their progress at the schools. Furthermore, Saudi fathers are concerned about children outcomes because they want their children have similar or higher educational levels than them.

Hence, the student population from the selected eight private schools and seven public schools was a total of 6,554. Lists of parents were obtained through the head teachers in both types of school, being representative of the various groups of parents. For each list, one of the first, or second, names was chosen as the starting point, followed by every tenth name after that to form the research sample. If a sibling, or a non-Saudi student, appeared in the selection process, the next name on the list was taken instead, with the count recommencing from that point.

The following Tables: Table 5 for public schools and Table 6 for private schools, show the number of questionnaires distributed and returned during the course of the investigation.

**Table 5: Return rates for public school parental questionnaires**

<b>Name of school</b>	<b>Surveys sent</b>	<b>Surveys returned</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
School (A)	52	50	96.15%
School (B)	50	30	60%
School (C)	40	21	52.5%
School (D)	34	20	58.8%
School (E)	30	25	83.3%
School (F)	54	31	57.4%
School (G)	43	17	39.4%
Total	303	194	64%

**Table 6: Return rates for private school parental questionnaires**

<b>Name of school</b>	<b>Surveys sent</b>	<b>Surveys returned</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
School (A)	40	24	60%
School (B)	42	24	57.4%
School (C)	32	22	69%
School (D)	44	23	52.2%
School (E)	30	29	96.6%
School (F)	47	24	51%
School (G)	43	26	60.4%
School (L)	44	20	45.4%
Total	322	192	60%

Co-operation was initially sought by sending a letter from the KSA Ministry of Education to the head teachers of the 15 selected secondary schools in Riyadh. This letter outlined the purpose and general concept of the study and requested the head teachers' co-operation in the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. The selected schools were responsible for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires although, in some cases, the schools did not release parents' contact details to the researcher, requiring instead that the parents' names be selected from lists in the school offices. In return, each head teacher was assured of receiving a complete set of the data results for their school, as well as copies for all 654 parents involved in the survey. The researcher used email to send the 100 copies and he also posted 70 copies to a selection of addresses. Finally the schools delivered 440 questionnaires to the parents and followed this up if they had not been returned within the requested timeframe.

#### **4.8 Focus Group interview sample**

In parallel to the above process, two Focus Groups were set up: one for parents who had selected a private school for their child and one for parents who had selected a public school for their child. Interviews for each group were conducted at different times in the research process.

Parallel to the debate about optimum sample size, there is a similar debate in regard to sample sizes for Focus Group interviews. Cameron (2000) claimed that the optimum Focus Group size is between six and twelve participants, whilst Crang and Cook (2007) believed that ten to twelve participants was too large a group and Kitzinger (1995: 301) states that “The ideal group size is between four and eight people” Further, Hopkins (2007) argued that it is difficult to recruit a large sample that can be present at the same time and in the same place for the Focus Group interviews and “large groups can create an environment where participants do not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and experiences” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009:3). Consequently, the sample size for the Focus Group element of this study was ten. This number was then divided equally between the two groups, i.e. five public school parents and five private school parents. They were identified by randomized selection, after which the Focus Group interviews were conducted during the course of two separate events.

During the distribution of the questionnaires parents had an opportunity to indicate if they were willing to participate in the Focus Group interviews. A total of 78 parents expressed an interest: 48 from private schools and 30 from public schools. Winlow et al. (2012: 295) indicated that:

Focus Groups can be selected in several ways: they may be arranged around a random sample drawn from a broader population, or could be selected on the basis of specific demographic characteristics.

The researcher decided to randomly select each Focus Group by randomly choosing every fifth person, who had indicated a willingness to participate. The researcher then telephoned all the selected participants to inform them of their selection and the venue and the time of the Focus Group interview.

Having briefly outlined the selection process conducted in obtaining a research sample for each Focus Group used for the present study, the research instruments and their development are discussed below. The researcher decided to randomly select each Focus Group by randomly choosing every fifth person, who had indicated a willingness to participate.

## 4.9 Questionnaire

### 4.9.1 Introduction

Red and Parker (2005) stated that the formal use of questionnaires began to emerge in 1935 when George Gallup carried out a weekly survey for business purposes, Wiersma (1986: 179) defines a questionnaire as “a list of questions or statements to which the individual is asked to respond in writing; the response may range from a checkmark to an extensive written statement”. Cohen et al. (2011: 256) advocated that questionnaire research is "the most commonly used descriptive method in educational research". As Alassaf (1998) shows, questionnaires can also be of many different types: closed, open, closed and open, and photo-questionnaires, as every type is used in specific conditions and for a particular aim. In this research, a closed questionnaire was used consisting of a list of questions answered by the participants on a 5-point Likert Scale. The Likert scale is composed frequently of five-point choices for each item to reinforce participants' responses. This is achieved through each item having a range of five choices, e.g. usually the scale is designed from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Also, researchers can utilize a scale of frequency, e.g. from “never” to “always”, or of evaluation, e.g. from “very poor” to “very good” (Bryman, 2012). The Likert scale is widely used in this area as it offers the participants the freedom to choose across the five ratings. The layout of the questionnaire also means that the questionnaire is easy to complete quickly, and with increased reliability (Gay and Airasian, 2000; Oppenheim, 1992).

**Table 7: The Likert Scale used in the questionnaires**

<b>Strongly Agree (S A)</b>	<b>Agree (A)</b>	<b>Disagree (D)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (S D)</b>	<b>Don't know (D K)</b>
5	4	3	2	1

This type was selected as it facilitated the research process which was limited by financial constraints, lack of time and travel to attend to distribution, collection and follow up. In addition, the Likert scale is widely used in this area and it offers the participants the freedom to choose across five ratings. The layout of the questionnaire makes completing it easy and not time consuming (Gay and Airasian, 2000; Oppenheim, 2009)

## *4.9.2 Advantages and disadvantages of using questionnaires*

### *4.9.2.1 Advantages*

As with any other method, there are both advantages and disadvantages in using questionnaires. Bryman (2012) highlights several positive aspects of the questionnaire. For example, it is quicker to administer; the answers that respondents give will not be affected by possible interviewer bias, and it is convenient for the respondents. Whilst, Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) indicated that being able to send the questionnaire to a large sample at the same time assists researchers in generating data. A further advantage of using a questionnaire to obtain data in social research is the ability to study problems in a realistic setting (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000), with Black (1999) believing that questionnaires are generally used to explore attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and opinions.

In addition, the amount and variety of data that can be gathered through a questionnaire are greater than that which can be obtained by other instruments, such as interviews or observations (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000). According to Sekaran (1992: 201), this applies to mail questionnaires in particular:

The main advantage of a mail questionnaire is that a wide geographical area can be covered in the survey” along with other advantages, such as, participants can fill in the questionnaires "at their own convenience, in their homes, and at their own pace

Consequently, the questionnaire can obtain demographic information; information on attitudes, motives, and intentions, thus offering wide coverage economically. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1994: 83) indicate that it "can provide wide coverage of the range of situations; they can be fast and economical; and, particularly when statistics are aggregated from large samples, they may be of considerable relevance to policy decisions".

Each of these reasons informed the researcher’s decision to choose a questionnaire. Because some parents expressed a preference to respond via the Internet, the questionnaire was also sent online, with the researcher e-mailing the link of the survey to some parents located far from Riyadh, where travel arrangements would have been problematic and some questionnaires were posted to a selection of addresses. Although their children attended schools in Riyadh, numerous parents lived or worked some distance away. Berg (2007) claimed that survey research has benefited from the

emergence of the Internet, as it allows researchers to take advantage of the geographical reach offered by Web-based research and the data that can be gathered. Consequently, the researcher uploaded an electronic version of the questionnaire onto the survey monkey website, along with an introduction to the study to ensure that participants clearly understood

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=ZrLuqUS1xqinCWuQo6d%2fBg%3d%3d>

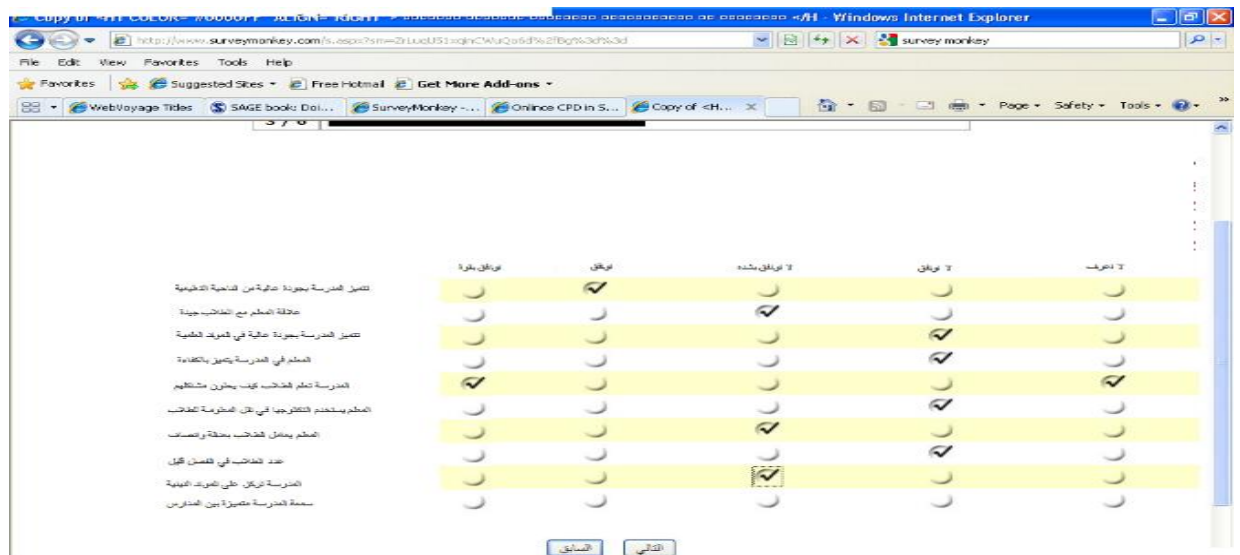


Figure 3: Print screen of the online questionnaire – Arabic Version

Since questionnaires also offer the advantage of allowing sufficient time for the respondents to reflect on their answers, this increases their accuracy, hence, their validity is arguably enhanced (Gay and Airasian, 2000; Oppenheim, 1992.)

In respect to data analysis, it is easy to enter data from a questionnaire into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), to analyse the raw data and interpret the results (Khalil et al., 2011).

Sekaran (1992: 200) holds that the questionnaire method is "an efficient data-collection mechanism when the researcher knows exactly what is required and how to measure the variables of interest." Therefore, this study's quantitative element of the questionnaire was analysed using Factor Analyses and Logistic Regression to determine the most important factors influencing parents to choose private or public school.

#### 4.9.2.2 Disadvantages

Despite the questionnaire having many advantages, it also has many disadvantages. It is important, therefore, that a researcher should be aware of these negative aspects before



administering a research questionnaire. For instance, the researcher in this study could not ask further questions in order to gain an in-depth understanding as he did not personally administer the questionnaire. Therefore, it was essential to conduct follow-up Focus Groups to explore important issues in further detail. Furthermore, there is also a possibility of missing data because by not personally administering the questionnaire it was not possible to prompt or ensure participants did so appropriately (Bryman, 2012). Wimmer and Dominick (2000) believe that there is a high cost for using such instruments, particularly with a sample that is geographically widely dispersed. For this study, however, the researcher considered that such a cost was reasonable and acceptable given the large amount of data generated through using this instrument.

Further disadvantages, particularly with a large population, are the time needed to distribute and collect the questionnaire, and the fact that a failure to return the questionnaire or to have non-responses to some items on the questionnaire can lead to bias in the findings, which would damage the overall validity of the results. Hoinville and Jowell (1978: 186) claimed that "if the research subject matter is related in any way to the characteristics associated with non-response the results will contain some element of bias". Sekaran (1992: 201) confirmed this, adding that "the return rates of mail questionnaires are typically not as high as might be desired; sometimes they are very low". Therefore, in order to minimise research bias due to low returns or non-response, the researcher arranged for questionnaires to be collected by principals and class-teachers in the sample schools, as well as providing a contact telephone number for parents to raise questions, should they experience any confusion or misleading items. As a consequence of taking these precautions the overall quantitative response rate to the survey was 60% ( $n = 386/654 \times 100$ ).

Further disadvantages indicated by Adas et al. (2005) are that the information is provided by the respondents according to their experiences, which can vary considerably according to their level of education and interaction with the topic. Also there is a risk that some participants may not take the questionnaire seriously, resulting in them maybe simply putting any answer down quickly and carelessly. The above can lead to the result being seriously affected.

The researcher acknowledges the disadvantages of using questionnaires but notwithstanding this, he considered it the most effective method to survey a large sample in the present study. Further, it was deemed the most suitable way to present the research questions, hence using it as the main instrument to gather data. It should be

noted, however, that the researcher tried to minimise, if not avoid entirely, the disadvantages of the questionnaire, in the following way.

1. By conducting an online survey to reduce the time required to distribute the survey and collect replies, as mentioned above.
2. By conducting follow-up Focus Group interviews in an attempt to understand the problems in greater depth.

This section has justified the choice of a questionnaire as a main instrument for this study. The following section will give more information about the instrument design.

#### **4.10 Questionnaire Design**

In light of the above discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the questionnaire as a research instrument, it is clear that this specific tool used for this research had to be constructed carefully. This section discusses the process of designing the research tool.

From the preceding discussion it is evident that the researcher had to ensure that the questionnaire fulfilled the criteria of standard questionnaire designs, in order to avoid participants spending too much time and effort, and to ensure the reliability of the data obtained by this means (Oppenheim, 1992). Further, Wimmer and Dominick (2000) stated that the researcher should be aware of the most effective qualities in questionnaire design. So they suggested ways in which questionnaire design may be improved: (a) a clear and interactive introduction is a significant feature affecting the response rate; (b) it is important to add instructions where required; (c) do not include too many questions; (d) pilot the questionnaire and (e) use an attractive layout. In addition, Alassaf (2010) advised avoiding several kinds of questions, such as negative, double-barrelled questions asking about two things, vague, threatening and sensitive questions.

Adas et al. (2005) point out that it is important to ensure that every question is linked to specific research problems contributing to achieving the aims of the research. Cohen et al. (2011: 403) suggested “Avoid leading questions, intersperse sensitive question with non-sensitive questions, ask more closed than open question for ease of analysis”. Furthermore, several studies have suggested that an introduction must comprise some information about the aim of the research. For instance, Alassaf (2010) recommended that a general introduction should include (a) the importance and purposes of the study, assurance of confidentiality; (b) the importance of the role of participants in achieving

the objectives of the study, and (c) the time and the means for returning the questionnaire to the researcher.

Other researchers advise the opposite, however. For instance, Wimmer and Dominick (2000) argued that there was no need for the participants to have any information about the aims of the research. They believed that if participants did know the research aims they may feel obliged to give answers which they perceived as pleasing or assisting the researcher rather than what they truly felt. This could bias or corrupt the honesty of their answers offered and invalidate the whole of the study.

Despite the above, the researcher felt strongly that it was advisable to provide a general introduction, to be included with the paper copy of the questionnaire, that included the aims of the study, the nature of the study, some important information about the study, information about the researcher, a guarantee of confidentiality, and the means to return the questionnaire to the researcher. This resulted in the participants seemingly being very enthusiastic about answering to the extent that some of sample provided the researcher with their e-mail to obtain the study result once analysed.

A questionnaire's length is another important concern in terms of questionnaire design. So, according to Khalil et al. (2011), researchers must avoid designing too long a questionnaire, because this takes too much time and effort by the participants to complete. Further, it can also lead to participants getting bored and disinterested, thereby, probably increasing the risk of their answers not being as accurate or carefully thought through and thus resulting in wrong or missed data. In other words, a short questionnaire increases the percentage of completed answers, while to the contrary, a long questionnaire may cause a decreased percentage of completion.

Despite this, there is disagreement among researchers about the precise length for an ideal or acceptable questionnaire. Balnaves and Caputi (2001) believed that the length of a questionnaire should be around a maximum of 12 pages or 125 items. Whereas, Wimmer and Dominick (2000) held that the appropriate length of any questionnaire depends very much on the percentage of participation and completion. They proposed some elements that they felt would assist researchers to control the length of any questionnaire: viz. the research budget, the purpose of study, nature of the research, attributes of population, area of the research, and time to carry out the research.

Because the layout of a questionnaire was identified as one of important steps that can increase the questionnaire response rate, Alassaf (2010) emphasised that an attractive

layout plays a key role in developing the rate of participation and completion. Furthermore, Bryman (2012) highlighted that a clear presentation with clear instructions might encourage participants to respond more readily to the questions. Consequently, he recommended that some instructions, such as “choose only one answer” or “you can choose more than one answer” were very important in reducing the risk of missing data, hence keeping question and response together. The response format must be vertical throughout the questionnaire, because if it is horizontal this was found to increase confusion. Equally, Bryman (2012) advocated that questionnaire designers should leave enough space between questions, in particular open-ended questions.

Based upon the above, in this study the researcher ensured that the layout of the questionnaire was clear and was as appropriate as possible. For instance, the researcher provided guidance comprising information that might be needed to assist participants to respond to the questions, by offering examples that explained and clarified how to answer the questions. Furthermore, the researcher carefully placed easy questions at the beginning of the questionnaire to encourage completion, as well as choosing an attractive colour and numbering the pages (See Appendix, 1).

#### *4.10.1 The purpose of the questionnaire*

Summarising the above discussion, a questionnaire was applied to elicit the perceptions of the study sample in order to identify the factors that influence parents to prefer public or private schools in Riyadh, KSA. In particular, the final questionnaire was formulated to achieve the following aims:

- To collect general demographic information about all participants, such as their age, level of education and annual income.
- To save time and money, only Riyadh was used since it is the largest city in KSA containing a large proportion of the population of the country. The cost of paying interviewers to conduct 386 interviews (each interview requiring approximately one hour) was prohibitive and far beyond the financial means of this research project.
- To determine the factors involved in parents’ choice of particular schools, it was important that a reasonable number of secondary schools and a reasonable number of parents choosing each of these schools, was involved. Somewhere in the order of fifteen secondary schools, with a total of three hundred and eighty-six parents

was deemed suitable to obtain sufficient responses to the questions that had been posed. The need for a large sample made the questionnaire an appropriate data collection method.

- To identify the attributes of the sample participants, who exercised the school choice programme?
- To determine which is better, public schools or private schools, in the perception of parents.

#### *4.10.2 The Content of the Questionnaire*

The first version of the questionnaire was developed by the researcher after an extensive review of the related literature, as well as by drawing on the researcher's personal experience of teaching in public schools and his informal discussions with principals and teachers in both public and private schools. In order to ensure that the constructed questionnaire was relevant and fulfilled its purpose and the aims of this research, a pilot study was conducted and subsequently designed with the intention of achieving the aims of the study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, which, although they are not completely separate within the questionnaire, are relatively easy to identify.

The first section of the questionnaire sought to elicit demographic information about the participants, such as their age, level of education, and monthly income, since these factors may influence the decisions that parents make regarding which type of school to send their children to. Therefore, questions 1 to 3 in the first section, relating to parents' demographics, can be found on the third page of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1).

The second section posed questions relating to the factors that parents considered to be relevant and important when making their decisions about a school for their children. This section of the questionnaire is directly related to the main purpose of the study. It covers questions in parts A, B, C and D of the questionnaire so comprises the majority of the questions.

##### *4.10.2.1 Section 1: Parents' Background*

The questions in the first section of the questionnaire, dealing with demographic information, were formulated after an extensive review of previous studies which provided many social indicators, all of which could have a bearing on the probability of

the parents' choosing a school because of academic factors, or which school factors they ranked highly when exercising their choice. In addition, these questions were important since they aim to examine if there is any relationship between parental school choice behaviour and parents' background. They were also important because they sought to reveal the characteristics of parents who send their children to public schools and to private schools. The section contained three questions that sought to gather information about respondents' backgrounds. These included the educational level of parent respondents, parents' income and parents' ages. The two most commonly used indicators of social status are education and income. In the Saudi context (Aminua 1994) the categories for educational level in Question 3 represent standard exit points from education in Saudi Arabia around the period when participating parents would have attended school. Parents' income has a more direct influence on school choice, as this often determines the amount of money the family can afford to spend on their children's education. The income levels of parents were then categorised into six groups, in order to identify which financial group was most representative of the majority of parents and to determine whether it is only parents with a high income who are willing to send their child to a private school. Also in the first section is Question A.3. This provides data on the age of the parents in order to identify whether this influences selection of secondary school in Riyadh.

#### *4.10.2.2 Section Two - Academic Factors*

The questions relating to school choice in the questionnaire were designed to determine which academic factors influenced the parents' selection of a secondary school for their children. Questions A1, A2, A3, and A4 were designed to provide information in order to determine the academic factors that encourage parents to prefer a particular type of school for their children. Questions A6, A8, A9, A10, A11, and A12 sought to gain information about perceptions of the teachers' experience in using teaching strategies in the classroom, and the relationship between teachers and students in the school. Questions A13 and A14 sought to obtain information about the importance of class size in terms of school choice. Questions A15, A16, A17, and A18 sought to gain information about minor academic variables that could attract parents to choose a school. The items in this part of the questionnaire were designed to answer the first sub research question, as it was very important to ask whether the parents chose a school because of academic factors.

#### *4.10.2.3. Section Three - The relationship between the parents and school factors*

The head teachers in some schools attract parents to prefer their school by either engaging parents in a school committee or asking for their opinions when important decisions are made. Also, some principals used technology, such as the Internet, to communicate with parents about the progress of their children at the school along with other school activities. So, Questions B19, B21, B 23 and B 24 were intended to provide information about parents who expressed an interest in aspects of administration at the school as part of the process of selecting a school for their child. . The items in this part of the questionnaire were designed to answer the second sub research question, as it was very important to ask whether the parents chose a school because of administration factors.

#### *4.10.2.4. Section Four - Convenience Factors*

The questions for the fourth part of the questionnaire were divided into two parts. The first part aimed to determine factors concerning school facilities that parents considered important when making their choice of school, as some parents preferred the closest school to home, while this was of less importance to others. It was necessary to ask those who preferred a school other than the closest one to their home, to say what they did not like about the local school. Whilst those parents who preferred their nearest school were asked to say why this was so. As Aloude (2000) stated, and as was further confirmed during The Amayreh (2011) conference and by the detailed objectives in the USA Office of Education Research and Improvement (2000), most parents focus on desirable elements, such as classroom furniture, computer services, library services, or sports halls, when they choose a school for their children, since they believed that such facilities play an important role in improving educational attainment for their children (Earthman, 2004; Earthman and Lemasters, 1996, 1998; Higgins, Hall, Wall, Woolmer and McCaughey, 2005; Schneider, 2002). The second part of this section posed questions relating to the educational environment factors that parents considered to be important when making their decisions about a school for their children. They believe a safe haven is significant in the educational process since it stimulates the students to learn well, as advocated by Protheroe (2007: 50) who claimed that “In caring schools, a critical connection has been made between students’ academic achievement and their need to feel safe, accepted and valued”. This is because it is impossible for students to learn if they do not feel secure in school. Kennedy et al. (2011) supported this assertion when noting that parents favoured

private schools in Utah, USA, because the public schools were unsafe environments that had a negative effect on the achievement of children in school. Similarly, Bosetti (2004) concluded that safety is an important reason that impacts on parents' school choice since they believe that students will achieve better results if they learn within a safe environment. These two parts are covered by Questions C 27, C 28, C35, D 37, D40, and D 44. The items in this part of the questionnaire were designed to assist directly with answering sub Research Questions 3,4,5,6.

#### **4.11 Translation**

Translation is a demanding procedure because of the cultural differences of each language group, as well as the task of determining the correct match for concept and grammar. As the language of the participants was Arabic, the researcher had to get the questionnaire translated from English to Arabic. This process was carried out in several steps. First, after the consent of the supervisor had been obtained, the questionnaire was first translated from English to Arabic by an Arabic native speaker in the Faculty of Languages, Imam Mohammed ben Saudi University, Riyadh, KSA. It was then translated back into English by an English native speaker in the Faculty of Languages, Imam Mohammed ben Saudi University, Riyadh, KSA: with each translation being performed independently of the other to ensure non-contamination or interference. This process allowed for comparisons to be made to ensure the accuracy of the translation. This procedure is in line with Brislin et al. (1973), who advocated that if a questionnaire requires to be translated it should be translated at least twice by different translators. These versions were then combined into one version that was nearest to the original meaning, i.e. its 'face' validity because, according to Bulmer & Warwick (1993:174):

Validity thus requires that questions in one language be translated into another language in such a way as to retain their meaning. Where systemic interferences are serious, very non-literal translation may be needed to achieve validity.

After the above, in order to develop and design the final questionnaire, it was again sent to two different expert translators in the Faculty of Languages, Imam Mohammed ben Saudi University, Riyadh, KSA, from the original translators used initially, to obtain their final approval to confirm the accuracy of translation and to specify precisely clear coherent questions addressing the factor under investigation. To verify the appropriateness of the final versions of the 'face' validity of the questionnaire (Arabic



and English), they were sent to an Academic Committee at Imam Mohammed ben Saudi University, Riyadh, KSA, where the researcher was working. This happened when the researcher arrived back in KSA in October 2012 to conduct his fieldwork. All of the members of the committee confirmed the accuracy of the translation. Experts were consulted at each step, from the initial formulating of the questionnaire and during all its modifications, until the final distribution of the paper version of the questionnaires by head teachers to the participants and the electronic version available for download on the website. Furthermore, because one mode of delivery was online, the researcher attached an introduction indicating the topic of the study; the manner of answering the questions, and requesting participants to cooperate by responding quickly, along with detailing how to return the completed questionnaire to the researcher. This was to ensure participants understood clearly what was expected of them. Also, included was an assurance that all responses would be treated with total confidentiality whilst only being used for the academic purposes of this investigation. Furthermore, participants were thanked for their cooperation in advance. These details were also placed in a covering letter forwarded with the paper copy of the questionnaire, since Cohen et al. (2011: 259) highlighted that the aims of the covering letter were to “indicate the aim of the survey, to convey to respondents its importance, to assure them of confidentiality, and to encourage their replies”.

#### **4.12 Pilot Study**

It is important for researchers to test any tools they adopt to obtain data before employing them so as to explore the problems and benefits related to the application (Balnaves and Caputi, 2001). A considerable number of scholars recommend conducting a pilot study of research instruments. For instance, Bell (1999: 84) claimed that “All data-gathering should be piloted. to check that all questions and instructions are clear and to enable you to remove any items which don't yield usable data”.

Since the aim of the pilot study was to ensure a high correlation between the clarity of questions asked and participants' responses in the selected format for the study, before continuing to apply main tools, questionnaire must be tested for its validity and reliability as a tool to confirm its appropriateness for the sample, the accuracy of its meaning and to identify the level of participants' interest (Converse and Presser, 1986). Moreover, piloting an instrument assists the researcher to benefit from the opinions of the

participants in terms of questionnaire design, thereby reducing bias and possible mistakes (Alassaf, 2010). Bryman (2012) indicated some of the purposes of the pilot study, such as ensuring that the study instrument operates well, and to discover any question which is not clear to avoid misunderstandings and non-response, thus allowing the researcher to determine the adequacy of the instructions in the tool.

The first version of the questionnaire developed for use in this study was sent to a sample of 20 Saudi parents, who were not among the final sample of study participants. This approach is in line with Bryman (2012: 264), who stated that the “Pilot Study should not be carried out on people who might have been members of the sample that would be employed in the full study” The participants in the pilot study were asked to respond to all items, evaluate all items, and assess the questionnaire’s suitability for achieving the aims of the study. As a result of some of the comments, the questionnaire was modified and adjusted, and a few items were deleted because it was identified that some questions were ambiguous and could lead to misinterpretation, whilst other questions, that had been included, were not important or relevant in terms of Saudi culture. Also some questions were at risk of not being fully understood by the KSA sample, so these were either deleted or restructured.

In addition, the pilot study gave the researcher confidence in the instrument. When the pilot study was completed, the researcher entered the data into the SPSS software program using Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha, and the Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient, to measure reliability and validity. These allowed the researcher to ascertain if there was a high correlation of understanding by participants. So questions which did not meet these parameters of being fully understood were deleted, for instance, any element which is outside the Moslem cultural understanding of participants in KSA. Hence, the questionnaire was assessed for its ‘content’ validity by ensuring clarity of the language used. This introduction to the design and development of the statistical tools, leads onto the following section where issues of reliability and validity will be discussed.

#### **4.13 Validity and reliability of the questionnaire**

The validity and reliability of questionnaire are considered the most significant matters associated with any study design and process (Alduhayan and Ezat, 2002), since reliability and validity can be described as two sides of one coin. In the following sections,

the procedure that the researcher used to examine the quantitative validity and reliability of the main research questionnaire is presented.

#### *4.13.1 Validity*

Fraenkel and Wallen (2008: 153) define validity as “the appropriateness, meaningfulness and usefulness of the specific inferences researchers make based on the data they collect”. In other words “validity is the extent to which a research fact or finding is what it is claimed to be” (Basse, 1999: 75). Similarly, Balnaves and Caputi’s (2001) offer a definition of validity as the extent to which the instrument is successful in measuring the phenomenon to which it applies. Furthermore, Bryman (2012: 170) confirmed these prior definitions of validity, by stating that “The issue of measurement validity has to do with whether a measure of a concept really measures that concept”.

To confirm that the present research instrument was valid, the researcher followed two processes:

- Firstly, to establish accurate concise language usage, the questionnaire was sent to two expert professors at Imam Mohammed ben Saudi University, Riyadh, KSA, who had much insight into private and public schools in Riyadh, KSA for verification. In addition, the questionnaire was sent to two randomly selected parents in private and public schools in KSA, who were not part of the main study, requesting them to assess its the content validity in terms of measuring the phenomenon that the research required. And to assess to what extent it would assist in answering the research questions. Therefore, both the Arabic and English versions of the questionnaire were sent to professors and parents to assess the language used and the relevance of its quantitative content.
- Secondly, the researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program to test the reliability of each section of the questionnaire. A Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient was conducted to assess the concurrent validity of the questionnaire by calculating the correlation between each individual item of the score of each scale and the total scores of the scale.

**Table 8: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient result for the academic factor (items 1-18)**

NO		Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)
1	The education offered to students at our school is of high quality.	0.628** 0.000
2	The school is doing a good job teaching mathematics and sciences	0.597** 0.000
3	The school is doing a good job teaching other subjects.	0.635** 0.000
4	The teaching strategies used at this school are innovative.	0.679** 0.000
5	Teachers are efficient (well prepared and highly qualified)	0.714** 0.000
6	Teachers challenge students to do their best work.	0.641** 0.000
7	The school is preparing students to deal with issues and the problems they will face in the future	0.628** 0.000
8	Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies and learning activities to help students learn	0.720** 0.000
9	The teachers use advanced technology to deliver knowledge for students, such as computers, smart board, and projector.	0.689** 0.000
10	The relationship between the teachers and students is very good	0.663** 0.000
11	Teachers at our school treat my child fairly	0.587** 0.000
12	Teachers are friendly and sincere with students.	0.646** 0.000
13	Class size at our school is appropriate for effective learning	0.583** 0.000
14	Student numbers in classrooms are ideal	0.496** 0.000
15	The school emphasises religion	0.538** 0.000
16	The children have been enabled to learn the English language	0.605** 0.000
17	The reputation of the school is excellent	0.614** 0.000
18	The school provides extra-curricular activities such as English and computer sciences.	0.587** 0.000

Table 8 shows the relationship between the individual score of each item in the first part of the questionnaire used in this study, the academic factor scale and the total score of the scale. The results of the Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient illustrates that the scores of the items fluctuated between 0.496 and 0.720. This result revealed that all the correlations are statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  level, which is interpreted as a high

level of concurrent validity on this scale and that, therefore, the items in the dimension are internally homogeneous.

**Table 9: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient result of the relationship between parents and school scales (items 19-24)**

NO		Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)
19	Parents accept voluntary membership in school committees and organised assignments	0.752** 0.000
20	The school provides sufficient opportunities for parental involvement in the school development	0.790** 0.000
21	Parents are invited to the school frequently.	0.713** 0.000
22	Parents co-operate with the school administration.	0.747** 0.000
23	The school use technology to provide parents with information about progress of students at the school	0.710** 0.000
24	Parents' opinions are considered when important decisions are made	0.808** 0.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed).

Tables 9 shows the relationship between the individual scores of each item in the second part of the questionnaire aimed to measure the relationship between parents and school, and the total score of the scale. The Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient showed that the scores of the items fluctuate between 0.710 and 0.808. This result revealed that all the scale items have a high level of validity as the correlations are significant at  $p < 0.01$  level. This indicates a strong and positive relationship between the dimension and the items.

**Table 10: Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient result with school facilities scales (items 25-35)**

NO		Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)
25	The classrooms have a good environment (enough lights, comfortable tables, nice carpet, air conditioning)	0.678** 0.000
26	The school has computer services	0.712** 0.000
27	The school has a good Internet service	0.740** 0.000
28	The school has good library services.	0.622** 0.000

<b>29</b>	The school has good laboratories for computer sciences	0.742** 0.000
<b>30</b>	The school has a good theatre	0.689** 0.000
<b>31</b>	The school has a good swimming pool	0.625** 0.000
<b>32</b>	The school has good indoor games.	0.690** 0.000
<b>33</b>	The school has outdoor games	0.645** 0.000
<b>34</b>	The school has a good playground including swing and slides	0.656** 0.000
<b>35</b>	Proximity of the school	0.232** 0.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed).

Table 10 above shows the relationship between the individual scores of each item in the third part of this questionnaire, which aimed to measure the school facilities in private and public school in perception of parents in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, and the total score of the scale. The Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient result showed that the scores of the items fluctuated between 0.232\*\* and 0.742\*\*. This result revealed that all the scale items have a high level of validity as the correlations are significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.

**Table 11: Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient with Educational Environment scales (items 36-44)**

NO		Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)
36	School rules apply equally to all students.	0.692** 0.000
37	The school has procedures to avoid substance abuse (drugs, alcohol)	0.729** 0.000
38	The school provides a safe and orderly environment for learning.	0.764** 0.000
39	Cheating is strongly discouraged at the school	0.749** 0.000
40	There are no problems with bullies at the school	0.765** 0.000
41	My son's social status is comparable to the rest of his peers.	0.668** 0.000
42	The siblings of my child are welcome in the same school	0.541** 0.000
43	There is no physical abuse (e.g., knives, guns) at the school	0.732** 0.000
44	The school provides safe transportation for the students	0.526** 0.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed).

Table 11 illustrates the relationship between the individual score of each item in the last part of this questionnaire, which aimed to measure the educational environment in private and public schools according to the perception of parents at Riyadh in KSA, and the total score of the scale. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient result shows that the scores of the items fluctuated between 0.526 and 0.765. This result revealed that all the scale items have a high level of validity as the correlations are significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.

#### 4.13.2 Reliability

The second attribute required for acceptable questionnaires is their reliability. Reliability is defined as “consistency of measure, to repeatability, to the probability of obtaining the same result again if the measure were to be duplicated” (Oppenheim, 1992: 144). A reliable questionnaire leads to the same findings when it is reapplied to the same participants. Hence, Cohen et al. (2011: 200) noted that “A reliable instrument for a piece of research will yield similar data from similar respondents over time”. Cronbach's Alpha

Correlation Coefficient was run, and the results proved to be consistent and hence viewed as reliable.

Table 12 shows the level of reliability of each section of the questionnaire. For the first part, the fifteen items dealing with academic factors, the result was 0.890, which is the highest reliability of all the dimensions in the questionnaire.

**Table 12: Results of the Reliability Test**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>N of Items</b>
Academic factors	0.890	15
Parent-school relationship	0.845	6
School facilities	0.867	10
Educational Environment	0.846	9

The second dimension of the questionnaire consisted of six items dealing with parent-school relationships. The results for this dimension showed that it was highly reliable since Cronbach's Alpha test was 0.845. Although this is less reliable than the other dimensions of this questionnaire, it can still be considered to have a high level of reliability. The third dimension of the questionnaire was composed of ten items concerning school facilities, with the results showing that it had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.867 – again highly reliable, while the last dimension of the questionnaire comprised nine items dealing with the educational environment in the school; here the result of the Cronbach's Alpha test was 0.846, again, highly reliable.

#### **4.14 The Statistical Data Analysis**

The following section will now describe the statistical techniques that were used utilising SPSS. For example:

- Simple descriptive statistical tools comprising frequencies, proportions, standard deviation and means were calculated to illustrate the sample demographic



information. They were also used to measure the effect of the factors on parents in terms of school choice.

- Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, and Pearson product-moment Correlation Coefficients were run to examine the validity and reliability of the research tool.
- Factor analysis was used to check the structure of the dimension of the questionnaire to see whether the result of the Factor analyses supported the intended dimension or not. Factor analysis also allowed the initial set of factors to be reduced to form a smaller number of coherent sub-dimensions prior to using them in logistic regression.
- Sample T-tests were run to determine the statistically significant differences between perceptions of public and private schools in terms of eight factors: the quality of instruction, class size, student-teacher relationships, parent-school relationships, school facilities, physical education and sport activities, safe haven and school rules.
- Logistic regression was used to determine the significance of the influence of the dependent variables on the independent variable in terms of school choice.
- Pearson Correlation was used to determine the correlation between the independent factors and the perceptions of parents about school choice.
- The qualitative data were coded and analysed using Thematic Analyses. The data were used to verify the questionnaire findings.

#### **4.15 Ethical Considerations**

To address the ethical issues related to this study, several steps were followed.

Firstly, in KSA, as in other countries, one must gain permission to conduct any research at schools before collecting any data. Bell (1999:37) confirms that:

Permission to carry out an investigation must always be sought at an early stage. As soon as you have an agreed project outline and have read enough to convince yourself that the topic is feasible, it is advisable to make a formal, written approach to the individual and organisations concerned, outlining your plan.

Consequently, before the researcher started distributing the questionnaires, he obtained ethical approval and permission to proceed with the research from the Ethics Committee at Hull University (see Appendix,3). A letter was then sent to the Saudi Cultural Bureau in London, which issued a letter in Arabic to the Ministry of Education to explain that the researcher was intending to conduct research in some private and public schools in Riyadh, KSA

Ethical approval and permission was then issued by the KSA Ministry of Education, which was directed to the head teachers of the selected private and public schools (see Appendix,4).. After this, the researcher travelled to the schools in the sample to submit the ethical approval letter to the school head teachers, which enabled them to proceed with the distribution of the questionnaires to their students, who in turn delivered them to their parents. Issues of informed consent and confidentiality were addressed in the covering letter accompanying the final questionnaire in line with De Vaus (2002: 62), who claimed that confidentiality was important for three reasons: “To improve the quality and honesty of responses, especially on sensitive issues and encourage participation in the study and thus to improve the representativeness of the sample; also to protect a person's privacy”. This process, also, ensured that participation would be totally anonymous. All schools involved in this study agreed to participate.

#### **4.16 Focus Group interviews**

For the purpose of this study, a code number was designated to each participant followed by a school number, e.g. S.3. To support the objectives of and rationale for conducting Focus Group interviews carried out in this study, a brief discussion of the literature on Focus Group interviews will be provided here.

Morgan (1997: 12) defined Focus Group interviews as involving:

Interviewing a number of people at the same time, the emphasis being on questions and responses between the researcher and participants. Focus Group interviews, however, rely on interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher.

As Morgan emphasises, interaction among the participants is vital for Focus Groups to work. This is also highlighted by Cohen et al. (2011:436), who described a Focus Group as:

A form of group interview, though not in the sense of a backwards and forwards between interviewer and group, rather, the reliance is on the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher.

Further, as Liamputtong (2011:2) points out:

The Focus Group method has now been regaining more popularity among academic researchers in the health and social sciences. Many of these researchers have been developing the method and steering it to suit their research needs.

As Focus Group interviews can be conducted at various phases of research, the researcher can use them either in exploratory phases of research to explore the aims of a study (Kreuger 1988), or within the research to enhance the programme of activities (Race et al 1994), or after completing a programme to evaluate its effect (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). One of the most important aims of Focus Group interviews is, therefore, to provide an opportunity to participants who are unable to articulate their ideas easily, thereby, offering empowerment to excluded individuals (Liamputtong, 2011). Focus Group interviews can also be used to develop or examine hypotheses, e.g. Stewart & Shamdasani (1990: 41) claimed that:

Focus Groups also have a place as a confirmatory method that may be used for testing hypotheses. This latter application may arise when the researcher has strong reasons to believe a hypothesis is correct and wants confirmation by even a small group.

Equally, Focus Group interviews have been used to allow the researcher to explore the attitudes of respondents for, as Kitziinger (1995:299) pointed out:

The Focus Group method is particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way.

Although for the religious and cultural reasons already stated, this study was conducted with male participants only, it is important to acknowledge that the Focus Group method can be utilised with mixed groups of participants and/or, as in this study's case, with single sex groups. Consequently, Focus Group methods have been widely used by female researchers studying female participant responses. This is because where religious and cultural restrictions are demanded it can develop a safe and comfortable relationship between female researchers and female participants, thereby, encouraging the latter to reveal their points of view to a greater extent than in individual interviews. This is

particularly so for minority groups, such as women of a low socio-economic class, and women of colour because, as Bryman (2012) has advocated, the constitution of Focus Group interviews provides a chance for them to offer their experiences of vulnerability and subjugation. Supporting this supposition, Liamputtong (2010: 7) asserted that “Focus Groups have been used to ‘give a voice’ to marginalised groups such as ethnic minority groups, poor women and men, or people affected by stigmatised illnesses”. As one of the aims of this study is to inform and contribute to the existing knowledge and literature, reinforcing that fact that the relevance of Focus Group method is applicable for use with both male and female participants is important, albeit Focus Group method is conducted separately in specific religious and cultural circumstances.

In this study, Focus Groups were used in the expectation that they would enrich the validity of the questionnaire by developing an understanding of factors that attract parents to make a particular school choice. Kitzinger (1995: 300) supported this sentiment when he stated that “Focus Group discussion of a questionnaire is ideal for testing the phrasing of questions and is also useful in explaining or exploring survey results”. Consequently, the Focus Group method can assist the researcher to explain the findings of the quantitative survey, as indicated by Bloor et al (2002: 11) “Focus Groups may also be used to interpret survey results, to provide meaning to reports of attitudes or behaviour”. In addition to the above, they permit the researcher to study the phenomenon from several angles.

#### *4.16.1 Advantages*

The Focus Group method provides a number of advantages to the researcher. First, it permits the researcher to assess data from several groups of participants (Cohen et al., 2011). Moreover, the researcher can conduct Focus Group interviews and obtain data in less time and at less cost than with other methods. It also offers a flexible instrument with which the researcher is able to test a wide range of issues with several individuals and in a diversity of environments. Hence, the Focus Group method is a flexible research tool, because it can be applied to elicit information on any topic. Furthermore, one of the great advantages of the Focus Group method is that the researcher can gather information from the people who are not literate as well as from children. An advantage provided by few other research instruments.

The interview format of a Focus Group enables the researcher to obtain a large amount of information in the participants' own words while also providing the opportunity to reach a deeper level of meaning, as the researcher is engaged with the participants face-to-face, which allows him or her to clarify meaning verbally. Moreover, the Focus Group method enables the researcher to verify that the responses originate from the participants. The Focus Group interview is characterised by reliance on interaction between the moderator and the respondents, leading to an increase in understanding between them. As a result, it offers the researcher the opportunity to clarify answers and confirm responses. Finally, the findings of the Focus Group method facilitate a fuller understanding of the response the majority of participants in the quantitative data collection (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Liamputtong 2011).

#### *4.16.2 Disadvantages*

Although the Focus Group interview has a considerable number of advantages, it also has some disadvantages. The most important of these is that there may be a negative interaction between the participants in that some of the participants could influence the opinions of others and then coerce them into agreeing with their point of view, hence generating data which does not reflect the views of the entire sample (Cohen et al. 2011). Another of the disadvantages of the Focus Group method the researcher can encounter is the challenge of recruiting participants, who need to be in the same place at the same time. In addition, there is generally a relatively small number of respondents in a Focus Group, so the use of convenience sample for most Focus Groups significantly limits generalisation to a larger population (Stewart, 2006). In this vein, Breen (2007: 467) argued that "Data obtained are very context-specific and, therefore, not generalizable to other institutions or contexts".

Several other disadvantages cited by Bryman (2012) are:

- The moderator has less control over the discussion than over the individual interview.
- The researcher may obtain a considerable amount of data but face difficulty in analysing it.
- Transcribing the recordings is very time-consuming as the researcher needs to be able to recognise the various voices of the participants.

- The Focus Group in some situations is not a suitable method because of its potential for causing discomfort or unease in the respondents.
- The respondents tend to speak at same time, which makes it difficult to discern what they are saying, unlike in an individual interview.

In the present study, the Focus Group interviews saved time and expense, as they allowed the researcher to explore broadly the main factors that influence the selection of private or public schools from the perspective of parents. Also, the Focus Group interviews offered the researcher the opportunity to confirm that the responses of the participants were original. After overcoming its disadvantages, the researcher carried out the Focus Group interview successfully, although the follow-up procedure took a long time. All participants offered their full co-operation, so they appeared to make an effort to speak and express their points of view clearly.

#### *4.16.3 The procedures in the Focus Group interview*

After the Focus Group interview was chosen as a suitable instrument, the style of applying it had to be considered in terms of the research. The researcher used the Focus Group interviews after the questionnaire data had been analysed so that this analysis could be used to determine areas that should be covered through the interviews and thus to develop suitable questions. To obtain a sample for the Focus Group interviews, on the first page of the questionnaire, the researcher offered the opportunity for the participants who were interested in the result of study to provide the researcher with their telephone number and e-mail address in order that he could inform them of the result and interview them to confirm some aspects of the questionnaire results. As a result, a considerable number of participants expressed their desire to know the result of the questionnaire and were willing to participate in a Focus Group interviews. This willingness to participate in the Focus Group interviews allowed ten participants to be randomly selected, with five participants who had sent their children to public school and five who had sent their children to private school. The random selection was simply by choosing every third participant in each category.

E-mails were sent to the selected sample to inform them about the aims, agenda, questions, suggested venue, date and duration of the Focus Groups. They had one week's advance notice to prepare themselves for the event and they were e-mailed again and phoned to avoid any conflict with other appointments (Winlow et al., 2013).

Two sessions were organised at a convenient venue for the majority of the Focus Group participants, with a short break in between. One session was for the public school parents with the second session for private school parents. According to Winlow et al. (2013: 298):

Focus Group management includes consideration of setting or environment, the role of the moderator(s), group dynamics and power-relationships. To help put participants at ease, it is generally recommended that Focus Groups take place in familiar surroundings.

The researcher prepared a comfortable setting, refreshments were provided, and sitting in a circle on the floor produced a relaxed atmosphere in keeping with Saudi culture, in the home of one of the participants, who volunteered to hold the event. Further, the researcher gained permission from participants to record the sessions and take notes in order to have an accurate record of exactly what was discussed. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009:4) emphasise that “the moderator is responsible for taking notes that inform potential emergent questions to ask”.

It is necessary to provide a relaxed, non-threatening environment to overcome any psychological obstacles participants may have and to enhance their confidence by following certain protocols. Firstly, the researcher thanked the participants for joining the discussion about private and public school issues. He then introduced himself as the moderator of the session, with the task of leading discussions when needed. It was emphasised, however, that as the moderator he must not dominate discussion. It was explained that the purpose of the discussion was to stimulate participants to speak to each other instead of addressing themselves to the moderator (Kitzinger, 1995). The researcher requested that the interviewees introduce themselves to one another in order to create a solid mutually respectful relationship between one another. All instructions were given to the participants before the Focus Group interviews started.

Crang and Cook (2007) suggested that the moderator should build a strong relationship with the interviewees to encourage participation from every member of the group. Furthermore, the researcher also explained that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions because the researcher expected the interviewees to have different points of view. He initially focused on discussing the nature of topic and the purposes of the study and then moved to debatable questions (Longhurst, 2003). The participants were

informed that only one person should talk at a time and that the data would be confidential (Bryman, 2012). The researcher, also, emphasised to the interviewees that they must feel free to share their opinions, even if these differed from what others had said. He also asked them to feel free to agree or disagree with the points of view of other whilst discussing the questions with their co-interviewees. The researcher emphasised he was only the coordinator of session to ensure that each participant had the opportunity to respond to each question if they so wished. So the researcher would intervene if anyone spent a long time expressing his point of view he would request that other participants were given the opportunity to speak.

In line with Winlow et al. (2013: 298), who pointed out that “Some participants may feel under-confident in expressing their views, and moderators must actively encourage inclusivity and participation” and thus if the researcher noticed that a participant had not contributed he would invited them to contribute. Lastly, before commencing the Focus Group, interviewees were encouraged to feel free to have refreshments if they wished and they had the ‘right to withdraw’ from the session at any phase of the discussion without being obliged to give a reason. Furthermore, as body language could be very informative, the researcher used a phone camera to record the sessions. He felt that body language is very important as it can reveal to the researcher hidden emotions in the participants, such as facial expressions, tones of voice, hand movements, gestures and eyes all displaying emotion (Winlow, 2013). Without physical evidence such nuances would be lost.

In line with Winlow et al.’s (2013: 296) suggestion that Focus Groups should last “between 1 and 2 hours (maximum)” this study’s Focus Group interviews lasted two hours, which included an half hour break, during which refreshments were provided. At the end of the sessions, the researcher thanked all the participants, as recommended by Krueger and Case (2000).

#### *4.16.4 Transcription of the Focus Group proceedings*

After the Focus Group sessions were completed, the researcher transcribed the contents of the recording, although it took a long time to produce a full transcript. The transcripts were read several times to remove superfluous words and interruptions which had no significance and did not contribute towards the data. The researcher focused on the verbal information in participants’ responses related to the research questions, in order to identify key themes within and between the two groups.



Based on this, colour-coding was applied to transferring the data, particularly identifying the main topics related to themes. The data were then collated to facilitate classification and harmonisation with the answers, by using a cut and paste facilitate. With this technique, every part of the coded material could be cut out and sorted so that all data relevant to a specific topic was placed together. This was performed by computer to organise the data into several categories and to allocate a number to every category (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Kitzinger, 1995).

There are a variety of approaches to analysis: such as conversation analysis and discursive psychology; induction analysis; logical analysis; pragmatic content analysis; semantic content analysis and sign vehicle content analysis (Janis, 1965; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990; Bloor et al. 2002; Puchta and Potter, 2004). In the present study, thematic analysis was used since themes were recognised from the literature review and these were identified and coded into relevant categories from the interviewees' answers. These themes were then checked against the survey data to confirm the results of the study. In addition, themes were identified according to the similarities and differences in interviewees' answers that were not represented in the literature.

Briefly, therefore, the second stage of the research field work comprised carrying out Focus Group interviews, transcribing, coding, and finally analysing the data collected in order to determine whether the answers were similar to or different from the results of the questionnaire and how far they informed the aims of the research.

#### **4.17 Summary**

This chapter has presented the methodologies used to carry out the present study. The research method: a questionnaire survey completed by 386 parents was the primary tool in this study. Semi-structured Focus Group interviews were also conducted in order to obtain the points of view of randomly selected participants representing public and private schools in parental school choice.

The chapter comprises information related to the construction of the questionnaire detailing ways in which it was piloted and modified before being distributed. This was followed by details of the process utilised to select the sample and determine the appropriate sample size. The final questionnaire was analysed by Factor analyses and Logistic Regression to determine the most important factors that influence parents to

choose private or public school. The statistical methods used in this study to obtain the results were described, together with problems and challenges encountered as the study was being conducted. The process for using Focus Group interviews with ten parents (five from public school and five from private school), along with ethical issues related to this research, were indicated.

The next chapter provides the findings of both the questionnaire and the Focus Group interviews.

# Chapter Five

## Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

The methodology utilized in this study has been discussed in detail in the fourth chapter. As mentioned in Chapter Four, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed to obtain appropriate data and this was supplemented by Focus Group interviews. The questionnaire data was analysed using SPSS and the statistical results were supported by participants' expressed through the Focus Group. This chapter will address the aims of the study separately by presenting analyses of the results from the data collected from the questionnaires and Focus Group interviews. It will be divided into eight separate but inter-related sections. After the introduction, the second section will present Figures and Tables from the results which have been collated from the variables investigated in this study, viz. demographic and background analyses of participants covering percentages of parental preferences for private/public school; level of education; income; age. The third section presents the factor analysis, conducted to reduce the items and check the dimensions of the questionnaire. The factor analyses grouped the questionnaire into eight principal factors: quality of instruction; class size; relationship between teacher and students; relationship between parents and school; school facilities; physical education and sport activities; safe haven, and school rules.

The fourth section presents the descriptive statistics used for each of the eight factors, with the mean and standard deviation and rank for each item. These are followed by the analysis of the focus group interviews, which are set out in relation to each factor. After this, the overall average of the eight factors will be presented to make comparisons and contrasts between the factors in terms of the influences on parents in their preference for public school.

Section five comprises an independent-samples t-test to compare the mean scores identifying the significant differences between public and private schools in terms of all the factors is presented. The sixth section presents a regression analysis to identify the categories parents cited as being the most important factor influencing their school choice. In section seven Pearson correlations are computed and presented to assess the relationships between the independent variables (qualifications, income and ages) and

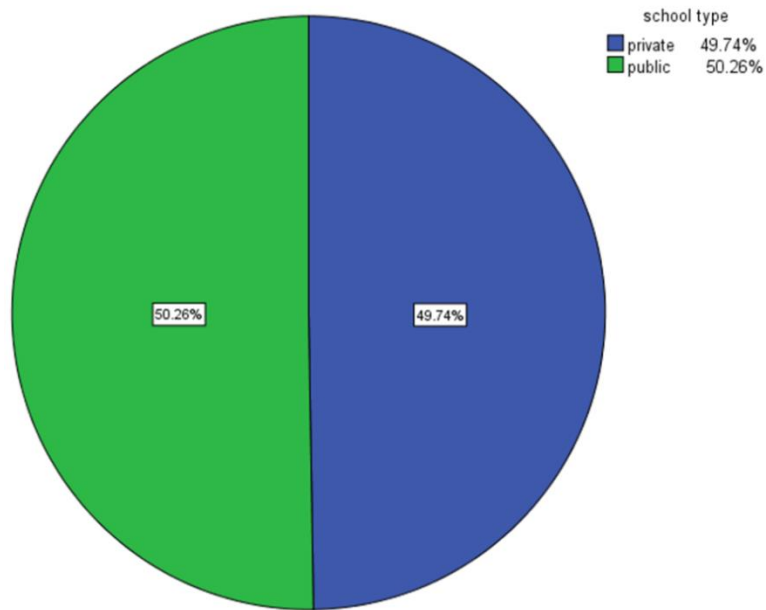
their association with school choice perceptions. The final section summarises the chapter as a whole.

## **5.2 Demographic and Background Findings**

The first section of the questionnaire survey obtained data related to the participants' demographic characteristics. These were examined and compared with the three sets of independent variables related to the parental school choice process. The demographic data comprised the participants' own educational level (cf. Table 14 and Figure 5) and parental level of income, as these helped to identify characteristics of participants which could be related to their preference for public or private school (cf. Table 15 and Figure 6). Finally, the age of the parents was also collected. The results demonstrated that the vast majority of the sample were mature with most aged over 41 years. The remainder of the participants' ages fluctuated between 30 up to 36 years (cf. Table 16 and Figure 7 below).

### *5.2.1. Participants' school choice*

The population in this study was 386 parents, each of whom sent their children to either private and public schools in Riyadh, KSA (cf. Chapter Four). As indicated in Table 13 below, from the dataset, 194 participants (50.3%) indicated that their preference was for public school education for their children, whilst 192 participants (49.7%) indicated a preference for private school education. Consequently, this study revealed that there is no clear consensus between the participants, who identified their preference for public or private school education systems, as the difference between the two elements was only 0.6 % (cf. Figure 4 and Table 13).



Legend: Private = 50.3 % Public 49.7 %

**Figure 4: Parental preference for public or private school for their children**

**Table 13: Participants' preference for public or private school for their children**

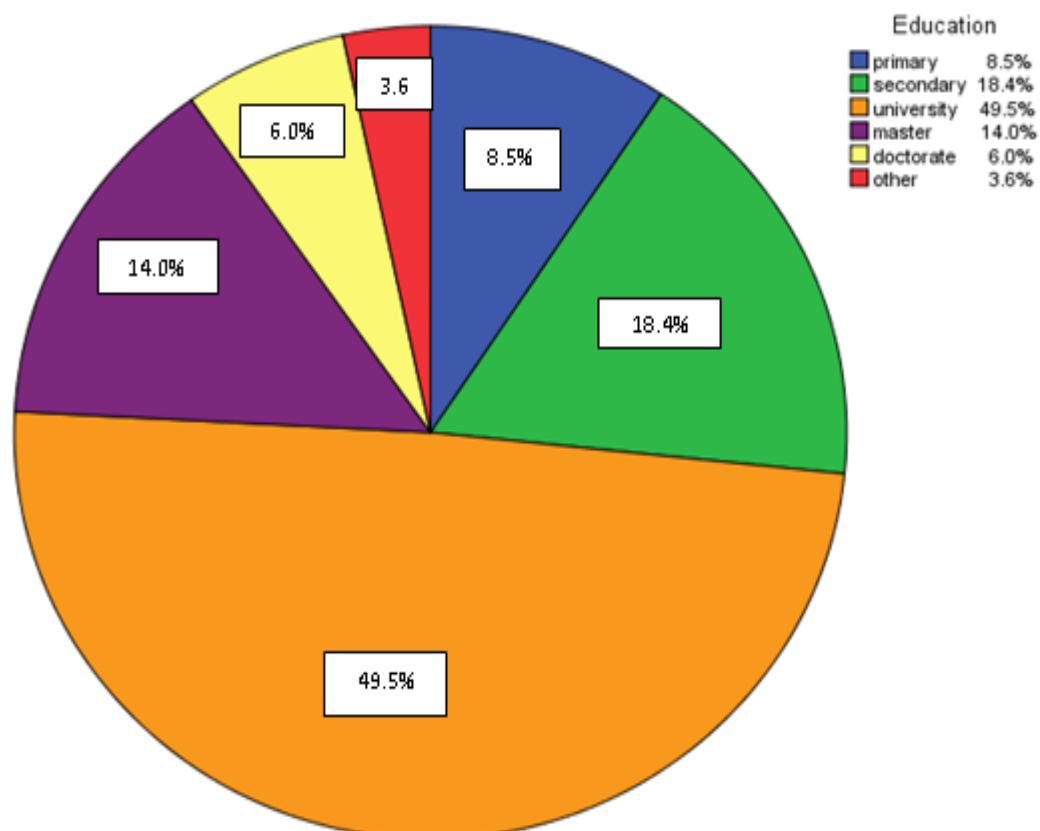
Number of participants					
Public		Private		Total	
N	%	N	%	F	%
194	50.3	192	49.7	386	100

### 5.2.2 Qualifications of Sample

The educational attainment level of participants within the sample related to the second independent variable (parental qualifications) in this study. This showed that the majority of the participants, regardless of school choice, had achieved university bachelor's degree level education or above. Whilst, adding primary and secondary school certificate responses together, it was found that a total of 104 (26.9 %) participants had successfully completed only primary and secondary education. Table 5.2.2 revealed that when university bachelor's, postgraduate and doctoral degree responses were added together 282 (73.1%) of participants in this study held such educational qualifications. More

precisely, 49.5% participants reported bachelor's degrees as their highest qualification, 14% master's degrees, 6% doctoral degrees and 3.6% other higher education qualifications.

Thus, in this sample it can be concluded that the majority of participants were highly educated: (73.1 % - 282 out of a total of 386). As such they had extensive experience of the importance and administration of education systems (Figure 5 and Table 14) Consequently, having achieved good quality education, an appreciation and understanding of the importance of effective teaching and learning outcomes, this result identified that these participants may be judged as having extensive personal experiences to draw upon when making decisions for their children's education. Such positive experiences may, therefore, influence their wish for their children to have opportunities to gain similar experiences.



**Figure 5: Distribution of Participants' Level of Education in the Sample**

**Table 14: Distribution of Participants' Level of Education in the Sample**

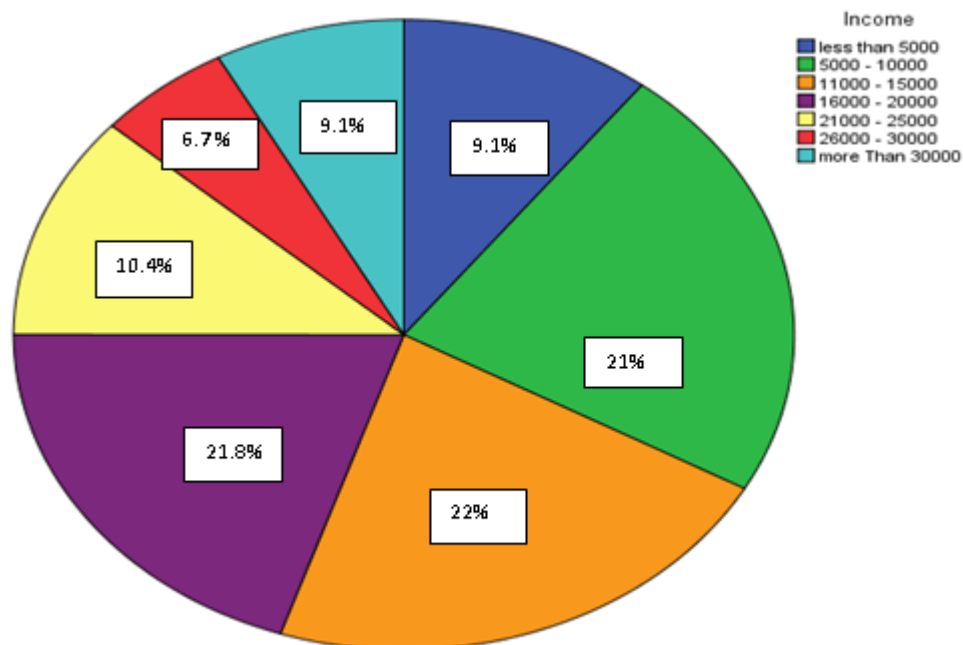
<b>Table (8) Educational level</b>						
<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Public</b>		<b>Private</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
primary school level	22	11.3	11	5.7	33	8.5
secondary school level	38	19.6	33	17.2	71	18.4
bachelor level	101	52.1	90	46.9	191	49.5
master level	21	10.8	33	17.2	54	14.0
doctoral level	7	3.6	16	8.3	23	6.0
others	5	2.6	9	4.7	14	3.6
<b>Total</b>	194	100	192	100	386	100

### 5.2.3 Financial Income of Sample

It can be reasonably assumed that participants who have a preference for private school education for their children have the financial means from which to pay school fees and hidden additions, such as school trips. Thus, their level of income is an important aspect in their decision making (Figure 6 and Table 15). Similarly, with further analysis it will be possible to ascertain how many participants, although having the financial means to pay for their children's education to enrol them in private school, still preferred public school education.

Although the overall income spread ranges from less than 5,000 Saudi Riyals (SR) to more than 30,000SR per month (cf. Figure 6) the majority of the sample's participants had an income in the range of 5,000 to 20,000SR per month. This means that out of the 194 participants in this sample who identified a preference for public school, 143 (73.8 %), had an income in the range of 5,000 to 20,000SR per month. Out of 192 participants who expressed a preference for private school, however, 107 (55.7%) were in this same income range. In total (combining public and private preferences) 250 out of 386 (64.7 % cent) were in the 5,000-20,000SR range. Turning to those with salaries over 20,000SR, of those who expressed a preference for public school, 30 out of 194 (15.5 %) were in this range, but 71 out of 192 who expressed a preference for private school were in this

range (37 %), meaning that a total of 101 (26.1%) had an income of over 20,000SR per month. Finally, of those in the lowest income band (less than 5,000SR per month) those with a preference for public school numbered 21 out of 194 (10.8 %), whilst participants with a preference for private school numbered 14 out of 192 (7.3 %).



**Figure 6: Distribution of Participants' Income in Saudi Riyals (SR)**

**Table 15: Distribution of Participants' Income in the Sample**

Income	Monthly Family Income					
	Public		Private		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
under 5000 RS	21	10.8	14	7.3	35	9.1
5000- 9999	50	25.8	31	16.1	81	21.0
10000- 14999	49	25.3	36	18.8	85	22.0
15000 - 19999	44	22.7	40	20.8	84	21.8
20000- 24999	13	6.7	27	14.1	40	10.4
25000- 29999	4	2.1	22	11.5	26	6.7
30000 or more	13	6.7	22	11.5	35	9.1
<b>Total</b>	194	100	192	100	386	100

Legend: Riyal Saudi (RS)

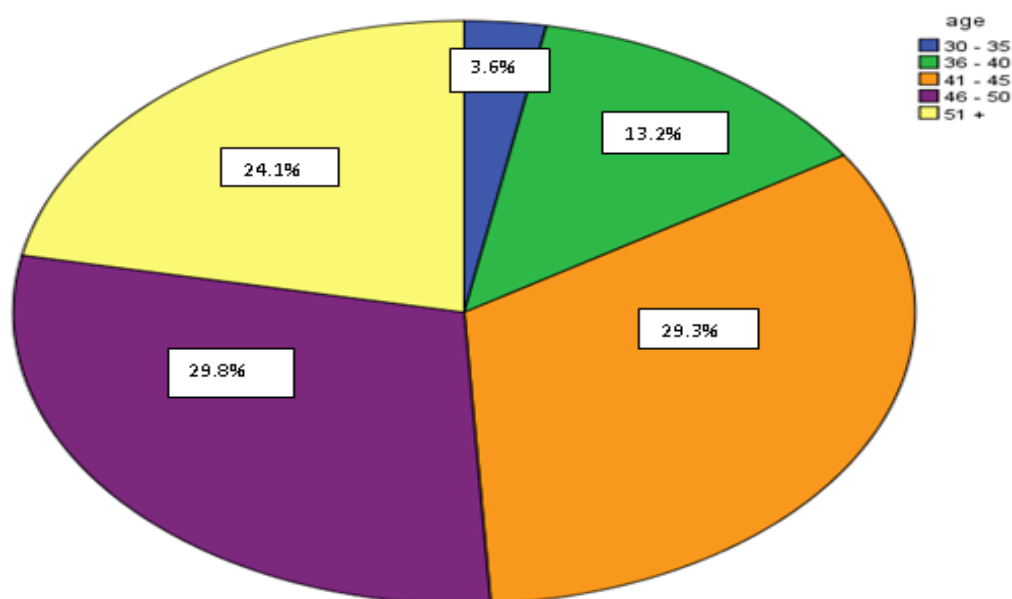


These results show that the majority of the participants earned between 5,000 to 20,000SR per month: 250 out of 386 = 64.8 % viz. 143 out of 194:73.8 % (public); 107 out of 192: 55.7 % (private) respectively. 37% of parents who sent their children to private school earn more than 20,000SR per month, compared to just 15.5% of parents who sent their children to public school. The much higher proportion of high earning parents among the private school cohort strongly suggests that richer parents have a preference for private school.

#### *5.2.4 Age range of sample*

It was seen as important to ascertain the age of participants and to correlate this with the other dependent variables in order to ascertain if age was a significant influence upon decision making (Figure 7 and Table 16).

As can be seen in Figure 7 and Table 16 below, the majority of the participants' ages were in a range from 41 to more than 50 years of age. Out of the 194 participants who expressed a preference for public school, 158 (81.5 %) were in this age group. Similarly, out of the 192 participants who expressed a preference for private school, 163 (85 %) were in this age group. Meanwhile, 36 (18.3 %) of those who expressed a preference for public school were in the 30-40 years age range of 30-40, with 29 (15.1 %) of those who expressed a preference for private school being in this age range. It is significant, therefore, that a total of 321 out of the 386 participants (83.1 %) were in the 41- over 50 age range.



**Figure 7: Distribution of Participants' Age in this sample**

**Table 16: Distribution of Participants' Age in this sample**

Table – Age Range						
Ages	Public		Private		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
From 30 -35 years	9	4.6	5	2.6	14	3.6
From 36-40 years	27	13.9	24	12.5	51	13.2
From 41-45 years	61	31.4	52	27.1	113	29.3
From 46-50 years	55	28.4	60	31.3	115	29.8
More than 50 years	42	21.6	51	26.6	93	24.1
<b>Total</b>	194	100	192	100	386	100

### **5.3 Factor Analysis**

This section reports the results from factor analyses used to check the structure of the questionnaire. Questionnaire items were included in this analysis to identify any possible underlying dimensions that might be associated with different patterns of participants' responses. The factor analysis was also conducted to reduce the number of the items into a more manageable size, whilst the questionnaire was reconstructed where the variables seemed to group together in a meaningful way. The Factor Analysis was conducted using a varimax rotation. All the items in the survey as in appendix 1 were entered in the factor analysis. Those with a factor loading greater than 0.5 were retained and four were dropped. These items could be grouped into eight categories according to the literature review. Therefore a process of confirmatory factor analysis was used whereby initially 18 items were entered for analysis because these were assumed to be related to the category 'Academic'. This resulted in three factors, which are 'Quality of Instruction', 'Relationship between teachers and students' and 'class size'. Then a further 6 items were analysed on the basis that they reflected the 'relationship between the parents and the school'. This resulted in just one discrete factor. This process was continued with a further 11 items relating to school facilities. The analysis of these produced 2 factors, 'education facilities' and 'physical education and sport activities'. The final group of 9 items related to the school environment. The analysis of this suggested that there were two underlying factors, 'safe haven' and 'school rules'. In the following sections, the factor analyses are reported in four parts where in each the variance explained related only to that part. (Field, 2009).

#### *5.3.1 Academic programme*

In the first of the factor analyses, 18 items relating to 'academic' matters were entered into the analysis. This produced 3 factors, 'quality of the instruction', 'relationship between the teachers and the students' and 'class size'. The rotated component matrix for this is shown below in table 17.

**Table 17: Academic Issues: Rotated Component Matrixa**

	Component		
	1	2	3
A8.Teachers use the variety of teaching strategies and learning activities to help students learn	.674		
A2.The school is doing good job teaching(mathematics-sciences)	.664		
A18.The school provides extra curriculums. Such as, English and computer sciences	.630		
A3.The school is doing good job teaching other subject.	.629		
A1. The education offered to students at our school is of high quality.	.624		
A16.The children have been enabled to learn English language	.621		
A7.The school is preparing students to deal with issues and the problems they will face in the future	.611		
A5.Teachers are efficient (well prepared and highly qualified)	.607		
A9.The teacher use the advanced technology means to delivery the knowledge for students, Such computer, smart board ,projector.	.510		
A4.The teaching strategies used at this school are innovative.	.510		
A6.Teachers challenge students to do their best work.			
A17.The Reputation of school is excellent			
A15.The school emphasises the religion			
A12.Teachers are friendly and sincere with students		.771	
A11.Teachers at our school treated my child fairly		.770	
A10.The relationship between the teachers and students is very good		.718	
A14.Student numbers in classrooms are ideal			.867
A13.Class size at our school is appropriate for effective learning			.812

Table 18 illustrates that there are ten items loaded in the first factor. These items reflected teaching and learning in school and is named here ‘The Quality of the Instruction’. The combined Eigenvalue of the first factor was 7.136, and the proportion of variance explained was 39.644 %, with Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  0.846. This factor included the ten most important items in relation to parents’ perception of the ‘Quality of Instruction’. Individually, the components received the following factor loadings; Teachers use the variety of teaching strategies and learning activities to help students learn received a loading of 0.674, The school is doing a good job teaching (mathematics-sciences received a factor loading of 0.664, The school provides extra curriculum, such as English and Computer Sciences, which received a factor loading of 0.630. The school is doing a good job at teaching other subjects which received a factor loading of 0.629. The education offered to students at our school is of high quality and received a factor loading of 0.624. The children have been enabled to learn English language received a factor loading of 0.621. Teachers are efficient (well prepared and highly qualified) received a factor loading of 0.607.

**Table 18: Quality of Instruction: Factor and variables**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Eigen values</b>	<b>Accumulated interpretation variation amounts</b>	<b>Cronbach’s <math>\alpha</math> value</b>
<b>Quality of the Instruction</b>	The education offered to students at our school is of high quality	<b>0.624</b>	<b>7.136</b>	<b>39.644 %</b>	<b>0.846</b>
	The school is doing good job teaching (mathematics-sciences	<b>0.664</b>			
	The school is doing good job teaching other subject	<b>0.629</b>			
	The teaching strategies used at this school are innovative	<b>0.510</b>			
	Teachers are efficient (well prepared and highly qualified)	<b>0.607</b>			

	The school is preparing students to deal with issues and the problems they will face in the future	<b>0.611</b>			
	Teachers use the variety of teaching strategies and learning activities to help students learn	<b>0.674</b>			
	The teacher use the advanced technology means to deliver the knowledge for students, such as computer, smart board, projector	<b>0.510</b>			
	The children have been enabled to learn English language	<b>0.621</b>			
	The school provides extra curriculums. Such as, English and computer sciences.	<b>0.630</b>			

### 5.3.2 Relationship between teachers and students

Table 19 identifies three items that were loaded on the second factor: ‘Relationship between teacher and students’. The Eigenvalue of the relationship between the teachers and students factor was 1.518, with the proportion of variance explained as 8.432 %, and Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  0.795. This factor included three items: ‘teachers are friendly and sincere with students’ received a factor loading of 0.771; ‘teachers at our school treated my child fairly’ received a factor loading of 0.770; ‘the relationship between the teachers and students is very good’ received a factor loading of 0.718. These items measured parents’ perception of the relationship between the teachers and students in their school of choice.

**Table 19: Relationship between teacher and students: Factor and variables**

Factor	Variables	Factor Loading	Eigen values	Accumulated interpretation variation amounts	Cronbach's $\alpha$ value
<b>Relationship between the Teachers and Students</b>	Teachers are friendly and sincere with students	<b>0.771</b>	<b>1.518</b>	<b>8.432</b>	<b>0.795</b>
	Teachers at our school treated my child fairly	<b>0.770</b>			
	The relationship between the teachers and students is very good	<b>0.718</b>			

### 5.3.3 Class Size

Table 20 shows that there were two items loaded on the third factor named 'Class Size'. The Eigenvalue was 1.203, with the proportion of variance explained as 6.681 %, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  0.820. This factor included two important items: 'Student numbers in the classroom are ideal' received a factor loading of 0.867; 'Class size at our school is appropriate for effective learning' received factor loading of 0.812. These items were a measure of parents' perception of the importance of class size in school choice.

**Table 20: Class size: Factor and variables**

Factor	Variables	Factor Loading	Eigen values	Accumulated interpretation variation amounts	Cronbach's $\alpha$ value
<b>Class Size</b>	Class size at our school is appropriate for effective learning	<b>0.812</b>	<b>1.203</b>	<b>6.681</b>	<b>0.820</b>
	Student numbers in classroom are ideal	<b>0.867</b>			

### 5.3.4 Relationship between Parents and School

In the second factor analysis, six items relating to relationship between parents and school were analysed. The component matrix for this is shown below in table 21

**Table 21: Relationship between Parents and Schools: Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component
B24.parents' opinions are considered when important decisions are made	.808
B20.The school provides sufficient opportunities for parents involvement in the school development	.806
B19.Parents accept voluntary membership in school committees and organized assignments.	.767
B22.Parents co - operate with the school administration.	.753
B21.Parents are invited to the school frequently.	.703
B23.The school use technology to provide parents with information about progress of students at the school.	.681

Table 22 shows that there are six items loaded on the fourth factor: 'The relationship between school and parents'. The Eigenvalue of the fourth factor was 3.417, with a proportion of variance explained as 56.957 %, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  as 0.845. This factor included six items: 'parents' opinions are considered when important decisions are made' received a factor loading of 0.808; 'the school provides sufficient opportunities for parents' involvement in the school development' received a factor loading of 0.806; 'parents accept voluntary membership in school committees and organized assignments' received a factor loading of 0.767; 'parents co-operate with the school administration' received a factor loading of 0.753; 'the school uses technology to provide parents with information about the progress of students at the school' was 0.681. The above were measures of the perception of parents related to the importance of the relationship between parents and the school.



**Table 22: Relationship between school and parents: Factor and Variables**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Eigen Values</b>	<b>Accumulated interpretation variation</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> value</b>
<b>Relationship between parents and school</b>	Parents accept voluntary membership in school committees and organized assignments	<b>0.767</b>	<b>3.417</b>	<b>56.957</b>	<b>0.845</b>
	The school provides sufficient opportunities for parents involvement in the school development	<b>0.806</b>			
	Parents are invited to the school frequently	<b>0.703</b>			
	Parents co-operate with the school administration.	<b>0.753</b>			
	The school use technology to provide parents with information about progress of students at the school	<b>0.681</b>			
	Parents' opinions are considered when important decisions are made	<b>0.808</b>			

### *5.3.5 School Facilities*

The third factor analysis dealt with items relating to school facilities, 11 items were entered and this produced 2 factors, 'educational facilities' and 'physical education and sport activities'. This is shown in the rotated component matrix below in table 23

**Table 23: School facilities: Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component	
	1	2
C29.The school has good laboratories for the computers, Sciences	.800	
C26.The school has computer services	.760	
C28.The school has good library services	.745	
C30.The school has good theatre .	.623	
C27.The school has a good internet services	.579	
C25.The Class rooms have a good environment ( enough lights , comfortable tables and nice carpet. air condition )	.542	
C33.The school has out door games		
C35.Proximity of the school's location		
C32.The school has good Indoor games.		.815
C34.The school has good Play ground include swing and slides		.805
C31.The school has good swimming pool		.796

Table 24 demonstrates that there are six items loaded on the fifth factor: 'School Facilities'. The Eigenvalue of the fifth factor was 4.758, with a proportion of variance explained as 43.253 %, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  as 0.846. This factor included six items: 'the school has good laboratories for computers and sciences' received a factor loading of 0.800; 'the school has computer services' received a factor loading of 0.760 ; 'the school has good library services' received a factor loading of 0.745 ; 'the school has a good theatre' received a factor loading of 0.623. These items were measures of parents' perception of the importance of school facilities in school choice.

**Table 24: School facilities: Factor and variables**

Factor	Variables	Factor Loading	Eigen values	Accumulated interpretation variation amounts	Cronbach's $\alpha$ value
<b>Education facilities</b>	The classrooms have a good environment (enough lights , comfortable tables and nice carpet. air conditioning)	<b>0.542</b>	<b>4.758</b>	<b>43.253</b>	<b>0.846</b>
	The school has computer services	<b>0.760</b>			
	The school has a good internet service.	<b>0.579</b>			
	The school has good library services.	<b>0.745</b>			
	The school has good laboratories for computers and sciences	<b>0.800</b>			
	The school has a good theatre	<b>0.623</b>			

### 5.3.6 Physical Education and Sport Activities

Table 25 shows that there are four items loaded on the sixth factor: 'Physical education and sport activities'. The Eigenvalue of the sixth factor was 1.280 with the proportion of variance explained as 11.639 %, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  as 0.785. This factor included three items: 'the school has good indoor games' received a factor loading of 0.815; 'the school has a good playground including swings and slides' received a factor loading of 0.805; 'the school has a good swimming pool' received a factor loading of 0.796. These items were the measures of parents' perception for importance of physical education in school choice.

**Table 25: Physical Education and Sport Activities: Factor and variables**

Factor	Variables	Factor Loading	Eigen values	Accumulated interpretation variation amounts	Cronbach's $\alpha$ value
<b>Physical education and Sport Activities</b>	The school has a good swimming pool	<b>0.796</b>	<b>1.280</b>	<b>11.639</b>	<b>0.785</b>
	The school has good indoor games	<b>0.815</b>			
	The school has a good playground include swings and slides	<b>0.805</b>			

### 5.3.7 Safe Haven

In the fourth and final factor analysis, the last 9 items were entered. The factor analysis of these produced 2 factors, 'safe haven' and 'school rules'. The rotated component matrix for these is shown below in table 26

**Table 26: Safe Haven and School Rules: Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component	
	1	2
D37.The school has the procedures' to avoid the substance abuse (drugs, alcohol)	.821	
D38.The school provide safe and orderly environment for learning.	.795	
D36.School rules apply equally to all students.	.788	
D40.There are no problems with bullies at the school	.718	
D44.The school provides safe transportation for the students	.713	
D39.Cheating is strongly discouraged at the schools		0.820
D42.The sibling of my child are welcome in the same school		.672
D41.my son's social status is comparable to the rest of his peers		.652
D43There are no physical abuse ( knife, gun) at the school		.649

Table 27 shows that there were five items loaded on the seventh factor: 'Safe Haven'. The Eigenvalue of the seventh factor safe was 4.377 with a proportion of variance explained of 48.638 %, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.878. This factor included five items: 'he

school has procedures to avoid substance abuse (drugs, alcohol)’ received a factor loading of 0.821; ‘the school provides a safe and orderly environment for learning’ received a factor loading of 0.795; ‘there are no problems with bullies at the school’ received a factor loading of 0.718; ‘the school provides safe transportation for the students’ received a factor loading of 0.713; ‘here is no physical abuse (knife, gun) at the school’ received a factor loading of 0.649

**Table 27: Safe Haven: Factor and variables**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Eigen values</b>	<b>Accumulated interpretation variation amounts</b>	<b>Cronbach’s <math>\alpha</math> value</b>
<b>Safe Haven</b>	The school provide safe and orderly environment for learning.	<b>.795</b>	<b>4.377</b>	<b>48.638</b>	<b>0.878</b>
	There is no physical abuse (knife, gun) at the school	<b>0.649</b>			
	The school has procedures to avoid substance abuse (drugs, alcohol)	<b>0.821</b>			
	There are no problems with bullies at the school	<b>0.718</b>			
	The school provides safe transportation for the students	<b>0.713</b>			

### 5.3.8 School Rules

Table 28 demonstrates that there were four items loaded on the eighth factor: ‘School Rule’’. The Eigenvalue of the eighth factor was 1.149, with a proportion of variance explained of 12.772 and Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  0.666. This factor included four items: ‘cheating is strongly discouraged in the school’ received a factor loading of 0.820; ‘school rules apply equally to all students’ received a factor loading of 0.788 ; ‘the siblings of my child

are welcome in the same school’ received a factor loading of 0 .672 ; ‘my child’s social status is comparable to the rest of his peers’ received a factor loading of 0.652

**Table 28: School Rules: Factor and variables**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Eigen values</b>	<b>Accumulated interpretation Variation amounts</b>	<b>Cronbach’s <math>\alpha</math> value</b>
<b>School Rules</b>	School rules apply equally to all students	<b>0.788</b>	<b>1.149</b>	<b>12.772</b>	<b>0.666</b>
	My child’s social status is comparable to the rest of his peers	<b>0.652</b>			
	The siblings of my child are welcome in the same school	<b>0.672</b>			
	Cheating is strongly discouraged in the school	<b>0.820</b>			

From the above factor analysis, it can be seen that every item was loaded on one factor and there were no items loaded on more than one factor (cross-loading). Further, there was a high degree of similarity between the number and the structure of the dimensions and the items presented within them on the questionnaire and the results of the factor analysis. The factor analysis can therefore be said to support the structure of the questionnaire and to demonstrate that the dimensions were robust. The way in which this will be achieved is that descriptive statistics for each factor (and its items), mean, standard deviations and the rank will be calculated, as shown in the following tables. After this has been completed a T-test will be conducted in order to determine the statistically significant differences between the public school factors and private school factors because it is extremely important to identify the main factors that influence parents in their decision to

prefer public school or private school. Then logistic regression will be run to identify the most important factors parents cite for choosing private schools or public in Riyadh City, KSA.

## 5.4 Descriptive Analyses

### 5.4.1 Quality of the Instruction Factors

This section records participants' answers to the sub-question: Does the strength of academic factors affect parents' decisions to enter their children into public or private school in Riyadh, KSA?

The results are divided into three dimensions, in order to distinguish between the parents' perceptions of school choice in respect to the academic factors. Each dimension contains a table of the participants' ratings followed by a comparison of the results for each.

Table 29 offers a record of participants' ratings of their perceptions about the Quality of the Instruction in terms of choice school, and is followed by a detailed comparison of the responses received.

**Table 29: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank for each item related to Quality of the Instruction Factors**

Factors	Public		R	Private		R
	Mean	S.D		Mean	S.D	
1. The education offered to students at our school is of high quality	3.75	0.864	2	3.72	0.826	4
2. The school is doing a good job teaching mathematics and sciences	3.83	0.825	1	3.81	0.784	2
3. The school is doing a good job teaching other subjects	3.66	.856	3	3.70	.864	5

4. The teaching strategies used at this school are innovative	3.49	.993	5	3.47	0.992	9
5. Teachers are efficient (well prepared and highly qualified).	3.62	.910	4	3.74	.889	3
6.The school is preparing students to deal with issues and the problems they will face in the future.	3.24	1.036	8	3.39	0.942	10
7. Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies and learning activities to help students learn	3.25	1.009	7	3.53	0.965	7
8. Teachers use the advanced technology to deliver knowledge for students, such as computers, smart boards, projectors	2.98	1.194	9	3.61	1.157	6
9. The children have been enabled to learn English language	2.89	1.195	10	3.48	1.058	8
10. The school provides extra curricula. Such as English and computer sciences.	3.27	1.255	6	3.92	1.007	1

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**Legend: M = Mean. S.D = Standard Deviation. R = Rank. .**

Table 29 demonstrates the most important Quality of the Instruction items for participants, who sent their children to public school - the mean score of the majority of items came above 3.48. The highest placed, in terms of dimension order, was item number 2: the school is doing a good job teaching mathematics and sciences. This was rated at 3.83 with a standard deviation of 0.825. Very close to this, ranked second by mean score, was item number 1: the education offered to students at our school is of high quality, which was rated at 3.75 with standard deviation of 0.864. In third place, respectively, came item number 3: the school is doing a good job teaching other subjects, rated at 3.66 with a



standard deviation of 0.856. Less important items included item number 9: the children have been enabled to learn English language. This was rated at 2.89 with a standard deviation of 1.195. Very close to this, ranked penultimate by mean score was item number 8: the teacher used advanced technology to deliver knowledge for students, such as computers, smart boards, projectors, which was rated at 2.98 with a standard deviation of 1.194. Finally, item number 10: the school provides additional subjects, such as English and computer sciences, was rated at 3.27 with a Standard Deviation of 1.255.

Regarding parents who sent their children to private school the most important factor in their perception in terms of quality of the instruction was item number 10: the school provides additional subjects, such as English and computer sciences, which was rated at 3.92 with a standard deviation of 1.007. The second most important item was number 2: the school is doing good job teaching mathematics-sciences, rated at 3.81 with a standard deviation of 0.784. The third most important item was number 5: teachers are efficient (well prepared and highly qualified), rated at 3.74 with a standard deviation of 0.889. On the other hand, less important items were number 6: the school is preparing students to deal with issues and the problems they will face in the future, rated at 3.39 with a standard deviation of 0.942. This is followed by item number 9: the children have been enabled to learn the English Language, rated at 3.48 with a standard deviation of 1.058. The last item was number 7: teachers use the variety of teaching strategies and learning activities to help students learn was rated at 3.53, with a standard deviation of 0.965.

#### 5.4.2 Class size

The following details Table 30 which relates to the second of the academic related dimensions: participants' responses to items that were designed to discover their perceptions about the importance of class size in terms of school choice

**Table 30: Mean, Std. deviation and Rank for each item related to Class size factors**

Factors	Public			Private		
	Mean	S.D	R	Mean	S.D	R
1.Class size at our school is appropriate for effective learning	3.53	1.222	1	4.18	0.864	1

2. Student numbers in classrooms are ideal	3.02	1.267	2	3.91	1.042	2
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Legend: M = Mean. S.D = Standard Deviation. R = Rank.

For participants who sent their children to public school the most important of the class size issues was number 1: class size at our school is appropriate for effective learning, which was rated at 3.53 with a standard deviation of 1.222. This was followed by number 2: student numbers in classrooms are ideal, which was rated at 3.02 with a standard deviation of 1.267.

Regarding parents who sent their children to private school, the most important class size item was again number 1; this was rated at 4.18 with a standard deviation of 0.864. Number 2, meanwhile, was rated at 3.91 with a standard deviation of 1.042.

#### 5.4.3 Student/teacher relationships

The third academic related dimension (student/teacher relationships) revealed a higher level of agreement between participants (Table 31).

**Table 31: Mean, Std. deviation and Rank for each item related to Student/teacher relationships**

Factors	Public			Private		
	Mean	S.D	R	Mean	S.D	R
1. The relationship between the teachers and students is very good	3.63	.968	3	3.64	.922	3
2. Teachers at our school treated my child fairly	3.93	1.008	1	3.89	.882	2
3. Teachers are friendly and sincere with students	3.73	1.013	2	3.90	.825	1

Legend: M = Mean. S.D = Standard Deviation. R = Rank.

Table 31 illustrates the most important perceived factors for participants who chose public school for their children. The highest ranked item was Number 2: teachers at our school treated my child fairly, which was rated at 3.93 with a standard deviation of 1.008. Second place was held by item number 3: teachers are friendly and sincere with students, which was rated at 3.73 with a standard deviation of 1.013. Finally, number 1: the relationship

between the teachers and students is very good, which was rated at 3.63 with a standard deviation of 0.968.

For parents who sent their children to private school, number 3 was ranked as most important, with a mean response of 3.90 and a standard deviation of 0.825. The second most important item was number 2, which was rated at 3.89 with Standard Deviation of 0.882. The last item was number 1: rated at 3.64 with a standard deviation of 0.922.

In summary, the three dimensions: quality of the instruction, class size and teacher/student relationships, have been identified as the most important academic related issues in respect to school choice. This is because parents give high priority, even to the extent of either considering or actually sending their children to a more distant school, in order to be assured that their children would be taught by qualified committed teachers. More specifically, overall parental perceptions of the preferred public school in terms of the Academic Factor aspect included:

- The school is doing a good job teaching mathematics and sciences
- The education offered to students at our school is of high quality.
- Teachers are friendly and sincere with students
- Teachers at our school treated my child fairly

The most important factors that had an impact upon parents' choice of private school, however, were:

- The school provides additional subjects, such as English and Computer Sciences
- The school is doing a good job teaching mathematics and sciences
- Class size at our school is appropriate for effective learning
- Teachers at our school treated my child fairly
- Teachers are friendly and sincere with students

It is important to compare and contrast these questionnaire findings with parents' comments offered during the Focus Group interviews, in order to ascertain if they agree to the responses to items on the questionnaire.

#### *5.4.3.1 Focus Group Results: Parents who stated a preference for public school*

After the survey data was analysed the researcher conducted focus group interviews comprising both parents who chose public school for their children and parents who chose private school. A number of the questions in the focus group were concentrated on the academic factors behind school choice, and these were used to expand on the survey responses (as explained in Chapter Four).

#### *5.4.3.2 Quality of teaching and teachers' justice*

The results revealed that four out of five parents acknowledged the importance of teaching when choosing public school.

Parent 1.1 stated that

*Parents are keen to send their children to public school, because it has the excellent reputation in terms of the quality of teaching and safe environment as it leads to developing students' performance*

Whereas, one of the five parents in the group gave their priority for a school as the head teacher's effectiveness in developing the process of teaching within the school.

Parent 1.5 claimed that:

*The head teacher plays a very important role in increasing the level of teaching in public school. For instance, with my son, he was helped to overcome some challenges that faced him in school and he helped also eliminate the bad social phenomena*

Further, Parent 1.2 identified the way in which public school teachers deliver justice and fairness as important, stating the following:

*I consider the way justice is delivered by teachers when I choose a public school for my son. Because the student has to feel his efforts are recognised and encouraged as this is a marked advantage more than other students who are lazy, rude. So the teacher does not treat them equally. Also, the teacher has to be fair and just when dealing with lazy students and active students in the classroom*

Parent 1.3 confirmed that:

*I chose public school for my son because the teachers take account of individual differences among their students. So, this encourages the outstanding students, as well as they help students who have weak development even in matters of behaviour: teachers try for treat the unacceptable behaviour and enhance the positive behaviour in students: this leads to create a secure environment at the school*

Parents 1.5 indicated that good relationships between teachers and students helped learners to develop values:

*I noted that there are some good values that increased in my son and his behaviour, such as honesty and generosity. Also, because most of the teachers in public school are Saudi citizens, they were very friendly with my son. This means teachers and students have a good relationship with my son because they are agreed in one culture and there are shared values between them. As a result this led to the promotion of these values with students, unlike the private school teachers where there are many different nationalities in the teaching staff and different cultures. Therefore, the private school do not focus so much on improving religious values and the behaviours of learners. This is what made me prefer public school rather than private school to send my son.*

#### 5.4.3.3 Class Size (private school themes)

All of the participants who chose a private school did so because of the small numbers in the classes.

Parent 2.5 mentioned the following in this regard:

*I have preferred a private school because studies have proved that small classes offer and grant learners opportunities to interact more with teachers and friends, to ask questions, discussion the use of technology to convey knowledge and things. Also, small classes assist the teacher to control the class better, unlike large classes where teachers cannot make as much difference between active willing learner student and lazy students. Therefore, the private school tries to provide small class. So that is why I think it is to be preferred.*

Parent 2.2 agreed with him and commented:

*I selected the private school for my son because the number of pupils in the classroom was between 12 to 18, which meant my son will have a chance to interact with teachers and with his friends in the classrooms and to ask any question or discuss any matter with teachers. Therefore, the private schools in Riyadh City focused on the*

*reduction of the number of pupils in each class, because parents take their children out of the public schools due to the large numbers of pupils in public school classes. Moreover, it helps the teachers to manage the class better in terms of teaching and learning as well*

#### 5.4.3.4 Extra Curricula Activities

Three out of five parents believe the private school is characterized by extra curricula activities.

Parent 2.1 indicated that:

*I transferred my son to a private school as it provides extra curricula activities, such as English language, which means it will prepare my son for the market place in the future, also it will be giving my son several options to choose either scientific disciplines at a domestic University or to choose international universities.*

Parent 2.3

*The private school provides extra curricula help, for example, Maths, English language. This helped my son to keep in touch with modern knowledge, giving him a chance to get into several disciplines in University.*

#### 5.4.3.5 Relationship between teachers and students

Relations between teachers and students were seen as important in the choice of private school. Three out of the five parents, however, considered that despite this positive aspect, private schools suffer from some teachers who cannot deal with students fairly nor effectively address bad behaviour among students.

Parent 2.4 mentioned that:

*“The reinforcing of positive effects and values on students depends on the relationship of teachers with students. Some teachers do not have enough experience to deal well with my son or have an effect on him to enhance religious values. While some teachers are very careless and have no caring or give consideration about this issue. This means private schools do not have a clear mechanism for teachers to rely upon to enable them to address and cure improper behaviour, by enhance the relationship between the teachers and students”.*

Parent 2.5 admitted that:

*I sent my son to a private school, but I did not note how or if the teacher contributes to the positive behaviour, because this function falls on the family, not the school therefore I don't put the blame on the teachers. because I believe the parents are responsible to unacceptable behaviour in school and they must enhance the good behaviour in their children.*

#### 5.4.4 Relationship between parents and school factors

This section reports participants' answers to the sub-question: Does the strength of the parent-school relationship factors affect parents' decision to enter their children into public or private school in Riyadh, KSA? Table 32 offers a record of participants' ratings of the relationship between parents and school. It is followed by a detailed comparison of the responses received

**Table 32: Mean, Std. deviation and Rank for each item related to the relationship between parents and school**

Factors	Public			Private		
	Mean	S.D	R	Mean	S.D	R
1. Parents accept voluntary membership in school committees and organized assignments	2.80	1.054	4	2.94	1.004	5
2. The school provides sufficient opportunities for parents' involvement in the school development	2.68	1.049	5	2.90	0.882	5
3. Parents are invited to the school frequently.	3.39	1.156	3	3.82	0.972	2
4. Parents co-operate with the school administration	3.68	1.054	1	3.91	0.848	1
5. The school uses technology to provide parents with information about progress of students at the school	3.58	1.286	2	3.80	1.071	3
6. Parents' opinions are considered when important decisions are made	3.21	1.142	4	3.33	1.064	4

Legend: M = Mean. S.D = Standard Deviation. R = Rank.

Table 32 illustrates that the most important parent-school relationship factors for parents who chose public school for their children was number 4: parents co-operate with the school administration, which was rated at 3.68 with a standard deviation of 1.054. The second most important item was number 5: the school uses technology to provide parents with information about progress of students at the school, which was rated at 3.58 with a standard deviation of 1.286. This was followed by item Number 3: parents are invited to the school frequently, which was rated at 3.39 with a standard deviation of 1.156. Less important items were number 2: the school provides sufficient opportunities for parents' involvement in the school development, rated at 2.68 with a standard deviation of 1.049. This was followed by number 1: parents accept voluntary membership in school committees and organized assignments, which was rated at 2.80 with a standard deviation of 1.054. The least highly ranked item was number 6: parents' opinions are considered when important decisions are made, which was rated at 3.21 with a standard deviation of 1.142.

Parents who sent their children to private school also identified number 4 as their most important consideration, rated at 3.91 with a standard deviation of 0.848. Their second important item, however, was number 3: parents are invited to the school frequently, which was rated at 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.972. Closely after this was number 5: the school uses technology to provide parents with information about progress of students at the school, rated at 3.80 with a standard deviation of 1.071. Less important items were the same as with public school parents: number 2, rated at 2.90 with a standard deviation of 0.882; number 1, rated at 2.94 with a standard deviation of 1.004; and, number 6, rated at 3.33 with a standard deviation of 1.064.

In summary, therefore, the most important parent-school relationship factors that influenced parents to choose public school or private school are:

- Parents co-operate with the school administration
- The school uses technology to provide parents with information about progress of students at the school
- Parents are invited to the school frequently and parents' opinions are considered when important decisions are made



#### *5.4.4.1 Focus Group results for parents who stated their preference for Public or Private school.*

The survey data has identified a range of parent-school relationship factors that appear to influence parent' school choice decisions. These were explored further in the focus group discussions, the results of which are reported below.

#### *5.4.4.2 Using Technology to Communicate with Parents*

The use of technology to communicate with parents was very important to both private and public school parents.

Public Parent 1.3 mentioned the following:

*“I'm satisfied with public school, because I have been informed by the school about the status of my son in the school by means of technological communication, such as text messages, Electronic Email”.*

Private school parent 2.1 confirmed that:

*I'm so busy with my business in the life, which mean I do not have enough time to visit the school physically, thus I prefer the school that communicates with parents by the advanced technology tools. This means I sent my son to the private school because they allow me access online to follow up my son homework. Also, I can find out the school activities, list of the names of outstanding students, list of the names of aggressive students. I usually ask my son to do his homework as it is very convenient for me to contact tutors directly and the school inform me of any emergency case for my son. This service indeed improved the relationship between the parents and school, because it encourages parents to become involved in their children's studies.*

#### *5.4.4.3 Parental invitation to school and participation in decision making*

The focus group results are also compatible in respect to how parents who sent their children to different types of school perceive the ability to visit the school frequently and to participate in school decision making activities.

Three out of five participants agreed with one public school parent 1.5, who commented that:

*I usually receive invitations from the school to attend school events, especially the festival where the head teacher gives awards to the*

*outstanding students and students of merit. This makes me happy to see my son among the outstanding students. I think this is important evidence demonstrates the superiority of the school”.*

Also, private school parent 2.3 assured that:

*I have spent much money to develop my son’s skills, therefore, I’m very keen to be responsive to all school invitations, especially Parents Meetings to identify his weaknesses and how to treat them, as well as, his strengths to develop in my son.*

Moreover, the result of the questionnaire and the focus group results illustrated that parents prefer a school that gives parents opportunities to participate in formulating decisions.

One public school participants 1.4 reported the following:

*Public school gave the parents the chance to participate in creating and helping in the decisions of school that resolve any issue regarding the students, such as, the bad society phenomena that can spread in a neighbourhood. The parents have opportunities to explore good experiences to eliminate unacceptable behaviour, because I believe any bad phenomena will negatively affect my son.*

Whilst, a private school parent 2.5 confirmed that the value parents place upon involvement in school decision making when he stated:

*I felt very important man in the society of parents in school when I was invited to be involved in the decisions of the school. Therefore, I preferred a private school, because it makes me feel close to the environment of education and importantly to my children’s learning*

## **5.5 Convenience Factors**

The convenience factor related to non-academic factors that include the school facilities, physical education and sport activities, safe haven and school rules. The convenience factors, however, are considered complementary to academic factors in terms of developing the students’ achievement, as will be discussed in detail later.

### 5.5.1 School Facilities

This section reports parents' answers to the sub-questions: Does the strength of the school facilities factor affect parent's decisions to enter their children into public or private school in Riyadh City, KSA? This sub-question reports participants' answers to four dimensions, in order to distinguish between the parents perceptions of school choice and factors of learning environment. Each dimension contains a table of the participant's ratings followed by a comparison of the results for each item in tables and a detailed comparison of the differences between the ratings of different items.

**Table 33: Mean, and Std. deviation and Rank for each item related to school facilities**

Factors	Public			Private		
	Mean	S.D	R	Mean	S.D	R
1. The classrooms have a good environment (enough lights, comfortable tables and nice carpet, air conditioning)	3.23	1.217	4	3.78	1.091	2
2. The school has computer services	3.38	1.138	2	4.01	0.943	1
3. The school has a good internet service	2.65	1.101	6	2.91	1.172	6
4. The school has good library services	3.41	1.135	1	3.32	1.048	5
5. The school has good laboratories for computers and sciences	3.25	1.106	3	3.67	1.075	3
6. The school has a good theatre.	2.95	1.102	5	3.44	1.201	4

Legend: M = Mean. S.D = Standard Deviation. R = Rank.

Table 33 illustrates that the most important items in respect to school facilities for parents who sent their children to public school were, first, number 4: the school has good library services, which was rated at 3.41 with a standard deviation of 1.135; second, number 2: the school has computer services, which was rated at 3.38 with a standard deviation of 1.138; third was number 5: the school has good laboratories for computers and sciences, rated at 3.25 with a standard deviation of 1.106. On the other hand, the less important items were number 3: the school has good internet services, rated at 2.65 with a standard

deviation of 1.101 and number 6: the school has a good theatre, rated at 2.95 with a standard deviation of 1.102.

In regard to parents who sent their children to private school, the most important item was number 2: the school has computer services, which was rated at 4.01 with a standard deviation of 0.943. The second most important item was number 1: the classrooms have a good environment, rated at 3.78 with a standard deviation of 1.091. While the third important factor was number 5: the school has good laboratories for computers and sciences, rated at 3.67 with a standard deviation of 1.075. Number 6, the school has a good theatre, follows this, being rated at 3.44 with a standard deviation of 1.201. The less important items were number 3: the school has a good internet service, rated at 2.91 with a standard deviation of 1.172 and number 4: the school has good library services, rated at 3.32 with a standard deviation of 1.048.

In summary, the most important educational facilities factors that influenced parents to choose a public school are:

- The school has good library services
- The school has computer services
- The school has good laboratories for computers and sciences

While the most important educational facilities factors that influenced parents to choose a private school are:

- The school has computer services
- The classrooms have a good environment (enough lights, comfortable tables and nice carpet, air conditioning).
- The school has good laboratories for computers and sciences.
- The school has a good theatre.

### *5.5.2. Physical Education and Sport Activities*

This section reports parents' answers to the sub-question: Does the strength of the physical education and sport activities factor affect parents to enter their children into public or private school in Riyadh City, KSA?

Table 34 details the results for this sub-question and reveals a high level of agreement concerning physical education and sport activities. Participants' responses are tabulated below with a detailed comparison of differences between their ratings for the various different items.

**Table 34: Mean, standard deviation and Rank for each item related to Physical Education and Sports Activities:**

Factors	Public			Private		
	Mean	S.D	R	Mean	S.D	R
1. The school has a good swimming pool	1.95	0.988	3	2.51	1.116	3
2. The school has good indoor games.	2.61	1.234	1	2.98	1.158	1
3. The school has a good playground including swings and slides	2.37	1.118	2	2.68	1.093	2

Legend: M = Mean. S.D = Standard Deviation. R = Rank.

Table 34 illustrates that there are three important aspects of physical education and sport activities for parents who sent their children to public school: the first was number 2: The school has good indoor games, rated at 2.61 with a standard deviation of 1.234. This was followed by number 3 The school has a good playground including swings and slides rated at 2.37 with a standard deviation of 1.118. Less important items were number 1: the school has a good swimming pool, which was rated at 1.95 with a standard deviation of 0.988, and number 4: the school has a good playground including swings and slides, which was rated at 2.37 with a standard deviation of 1.118.

In regard to the parents who sent their children to private school, the ranking of items followed the same pattern as for public school parents: number 2, rated at 2.98 with a Standard Deviation of 1.158; number 3, rated at 2.68 with a standard deviation of 1.093, number 1, rated at 2.51 with a standard deviation of 1.116.

In summary, the most important physical education factors that influenced parents to choose a public school or a private school are similar:

- The school has good indoor games.
- The school has a good playground including swings and slides

#### 5.5.2.1 Focus Group results

The survey data, therefore, has identified a range of physical education and sports activities factors that appear to influence parents' school choice decisions. These were explored further in the focus group discussions, the results of which are reported below

#### 5.5.2.2 School amenities and furniture – (public schools)

Four out of five participants considered classrooms that lacked appropriate furniture and computer service to be important, with parent 1.4.saying that:

*“I have not seen the technology used by the teachers in public school, because there are some challenges facing them. For example, the classroom has a large number of students; the classroom is very tiny; school building is not prepared to use the communication technology because of electrical issues. Also, the support of the KSA Ministry of Education for public school is very weak. For example, some schools have only one smart board that has to be used by all teachers”.*

Parent 1.3 confirmed that:

*Some public school building were rented, therefore, the infra-structure of the building did not assist in the use of technology in the school therefore the teachers use the old style of teaching that does not develop the students' performance because it is not in line with modern times, thereby this create big gap between private school students and public school students in terms of the outcomes.*

#### 5.5.2.3 Outdoor games

In addition, the focus group results do not agree with the result of the questionnaire in terms of choice school in respect to outdoor games. Five of the participants choose public schools, although they did not find suitable stadiums or halls in which to practise physical education. Parent 2:4 stated

*Unfortunately, some of the public school buildings are rented, which means they don't have halls or stadiums for sports activities; in other*

*words these buildings were not built for teaching and learning. On the other hand, private schools pay a great deal of attention to physical education and sports activities and they provide appropriate stadiums and modern sports halls. In addition, they employ expert tutors, who help the pupils to develop their sports skills.*

#### *5.5.2.4 Classroom furniture, equipment and amenities (Private school)*

All of the participants in the private school parents focus group indicated that the importance of the classroom environment is enhanced by modern furniture. Thus, they sent their children to private schools. For example, Parent 2.3 asserted that:

*I sent my son to school characterized by advanced furniture, such as excellent coloured, comfortable chairs and appropriate air conditioning for the summer time and heat for the winter time. These qualities are very important in classrooms, because its make the classroom educational environment welcoming, so successful. For example, my son spends six hours every day in there, so if he is not satisfied and happy he will not learn, because he will feel uncomfortable, want to be at home and bored.*

Further, four out of the five participants considered the importance of equipment in the school, which had to be modern equipment, such as, an electronic library and laboratories for computers to facilitate the conveyance of knowledge to the students. Parent 2.5 stated:

*Use of technology by the teachers in classrooms is much better than the traditional manner. For example, the teacher who explains an earthquake for the students will use just static images to describe it to them, but when they use computers to explain it through a documentary programme they will attract students to the lesson and it will reinforce the information in them, unlike the traditional manner that made students bored also using technology allows me online access to follow up my son's homework and I can also find out about the school activities, see the list of the names of outstanding students, lists of the names of troublesome students. I usually ask my son to do his homework as it is very convenient for me to contact tutors directly and the school informs me of any emergency with my son. This service has indeed improved the relationship between the parents and school, because it encourages parents to become involved in their children's studies.*

### 5.5.2.5 Physical Education

All the participants agreed on the importance of physical education in the school as a means to increase the health of students; and on this matter private schools outperformed public schools. Parent 2.3 stated that:

*I believe the private school is superior to the public school in terms of sport activities because the private school is supported financially and they have flexibility in decision making. Thus unlike the public school due the instructions of the Ministry of Education, which were a major cause of failure of the public school in this respect, Thus, the Ministry of Education should increase the financial support and give the head teachers authority to develop sport facilities in schools to compete with the private schools.*

### 5.5.3. Safe Haven

This section reports parents' answers to the sub-question: Does the strength of the safe haven factor affect parents' decisions to enter their children into public or private schools in Riyadh, KSA? Table 35 presents a record of participants' ratings of what they perceived to be the most important aspects of a Safe Haven in terms of school choice, and this is followed by a detailed comparison of the responses received.

**Table 35: Mean, Std. deviation and Rank for each item related to Safe Haven**

Factors	Public			Private		
	Mean	S.D	R	Mean	S.D	R
1. There is no physical abuse (knife, gun) at the school	3.77	1.139	4	3.96	1.050	3
2. The school has procedures to avoid substance abuse (drugs, alcohol)	4.12	1.019	1	4.04	0.981	2
3. The school provides a safe and orderly environment for learning.	4.06	.956	2	4.10	0.829	1
4. The school provides safe transportation for the students	2.64	1.352	5	3.35	1.322	5



5. There are no problems with bullies at the school	3.90	1.006	3	3.86	0.928	4
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Legend: M = Mean. S.D = Standard Deviation. R = Rank.

Table 35 illustrates that for parents who sent their children to public school, the most important item was number 2: the school has procedures to avoid substance abuse (drugs, alcohol) was rated at 4.12 with a standard deviation of 1.019. Very close to this was item number 3: the school provides a safe and orderly environment for learning, which rated at 4.06 with a standard deviation of 0.956. This was followed by item number 5: there are no problems with bullies at the school, rated at 3.90 with a standard deviation of 1.006. Less important items were number 4: the school provides safe transportation for the students, which was rated at 2.64 with a standard deviation of 1.352 and number 1: there are no physical abuse (knife, gun) at the school, which rated at 3.77 with a standard deviation of 1.139.

For parents who chose private school for their children, the most important item was number 3: the school provides a safe and orderly environment for learning, rated at 4.10 with a standard deviation of 0.829. The second most important item was number 2: the school has procedures to avoid substance abuse (drugs, alcohol), rated at 4.04 with a standard deviation of 0.981. The third most important item was number 1: there are no physical abuse (knife, gun) at the school, rated at 3.96 with a Standard Deviation of 1.050. The less important items were number 4: the school provides safe transportation for the students, rated at 3.35 with a standard deviation of 1.322, and number 5: there are no problems with bullies at the school, rated at 3.86 with a standard deviation of 0.928.

The important safe haven factors identified as having an effect upon parents in their preferred public school choice were therefore:

- The school has procedures to avoid substance abuse (drugs, alcohol).
- The school provides a safe and orderly environment for learning.
- There are no problems with bullies and bullying at the school.

While, the most important safe haven factors that influenced parental choice of private school were:

- The school provides a safe and orderly environment for learning.
- The school has procedures to avoid substance abuse (drugs, alcohol).
- There is no physical abuse (knife, gun) at the school.

#### 5.5.4 School Rules

This section reports parents' answers to the sub-question: Does the strength of the school rules factor affect parents' decisions to enter their children into public or private schools in Riyadh, KSA? Table 36 presents a record of participants' ratings of their perception about what they perceived as the most important aspects of school rules in terms of choice school, and this is followed by a detailed comparison of the responses received.

**Table 36: Mean, Standard deviation and Rank for each item related to school rules**

Factors	Public			Private		
	Mean	S.D	R	Mean	S.D	R
1. School rules apply equally to all students	3.97	1.015	1	3.88	0.899	1
2. The siblings of my child are welcome in the same school	2.96	1.191	4	2.84	1.176	4
3. My child's social status is comparable to the rest of his peers	3.82	.929	3	3.85	0.962	2
4. Cheating is strongly discouraged at the school	3.86	1.043	2	3.79	0.993	3

Legend: M = Mean. S.D = Standard Deviation. R = Rank.

The most important item was number 1: school rules apply equally to all students, which was rated at 3.97 with a standard deviation of 1.015. This was followed by item number 4: cheating is strongly discouraged at the school, rated at 3.86 with a standard deviation of 1.043. Very close to this was item number 3: my child's social status is comparable to the rest of his peers, rated at 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.929. On the other the

hand, the lowest item was number 2: the siblings of my child are welcome in the same school, which was rated at 2.96 with a standard deviation of 1.191.

For parents who sent their children to private school, the most important item was again number 1, which was rated at 3.88 with a standard deviation of 0.899. Very close in second place was number 3: my child's social status is comparable to the rest of his peers, which was rated at 3.85 with a standard deviation of 0.962. In third position was number 4: cheating is strongly discouraged at the school, rated at 3.79 with a standard deviation of 0.993, while the least important item was item number 2: the siblings of my child are welcome in the same school, which was rated at 2.84 with a standard deviation of 1.176

Consequently, some important school rules factors identified as having an effect upon parents in their preference for either public or private school were:

- School rules apply equally to all students.
- Cheating is strongly discouraged at the school.
- My child's social status is comparable to the rest of his peers.

#### *5.5.4.1. Focus group results*

The survey data, therefore, has identified a range of safe haven and school rules factors that appear to influence parents' school choice decisions. These were explored further in the focus group discussions, the results of which are reported below:

#### *5.5.4.2. School discipline (Public school)*

The focus group interview demonstrated that all of the participants emphasized the importance of the school being a safe haven for their children when choosing a public school.

Parent 1.5 mentioned that:

*The first factor that encouraged me to send my son to the public school was the discipline, he was not exposed to physical abuse or verbal abuse, because the school building is huge which means it assists the administration of the school to control the students. Also, the teachers are strict with students, which has led to eliminate common problems that spread rapidly among students, such as gun or knife. I found presence of my son in a safe environment leads to academic excellence and he will be happy and satisfied at school.*

Whilst Parent 1.4 asserted that:

*I believe the teacher is very important to reduce the violence at the school as I noted that there are some good values that increased in my son and his behaviour, such as honesty and generosity. Also, because most of the teachers in public school are Saudi citizens, they were very friendly to my son. This means teachers and pupils have a good relationship with my son because they are agreed on one culture and there are shared values between them. As a result, this has led to the promotion of these values with pupils, unlike in private schools, where there are many different nationalities and cultures among the teaching staff. Therefore, the private school do not focus so much on improving religious values and the behaviours of learners. This is what made me prefer public school rather than private school to send my son.*

#### 5.5.4.3 School discipline (Private school)

There is no consensus between the questionnaire results and focus group interview in terms of the impact of the school being a safe environment on the choice of a private school.

Parent 2.2 claimed that:

*The private schools lack of the strict teachers reduces or eliminates the harassment or bullying among pupils, means this impacted badly on my son in terms of the academic achievement. Thus, I have left the private school in order to protect my son from the physical abuse.*

Parent 2.3 confirmed that:

*The parents are very worried about the disasters that came through modern communications, such as smoking, rape. All of which threaten the values of our community. Thus, I prefer public school, because it is able to create the disciplined environment that's needed to protect my son from erotic disgraceful behaviours*

## 5.6 Comparison of the factors between public and private schools

The comparisons offered below considered the overall average for the eight factors that influence parents to prefer public school or private school. Table 37 presents the differences between the factors.

**Table 37: Comparison between the factors in the two types of education**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Public school</b>	<b>Private school</b>
Quality of Instruction	3.39	3.63
Class size	3.27	4.00
Teacher student relations	3.76	3.81
Parents school relations	3.22	3.45
School Facilities	3.14	3.52
Physical Education	2.59	2.87
Safe Haven	4.43	3.86
School Rules	3.65	3.95
All factors	3.43	3.63

Table 37 illustrates that there are no differences between the factors and in the final results since the two groups of parents rated public school at 3.43 and private school at 3.63 and the overall average of the answers were similar between public and private schools. To support this comparison, therefore, an independent t-test also was conducted, the results of which are presented in next section.

### **Inferential statistics:**

#### **5.7. Independent samples t-test**

The independent samples t-test was used to explore if there are statistically significant differences between the two groups of parents in terms of the eight factors and school choice decisions (quality of instruction, class size, student-teacher relationship, parent-school relationship, school facilities, physical education and sport activities, safe haven and school rules).

##### *5.7.1 Quality of Instruction Factors*

Table 38 shows the independent samples t-test results for the quality of instruction factor. The results revealed that there is a significant difference between parents who chose private schools and parents who chose public schools  $t(384)=3.91$ ,  $p=0.000$  ( $p<0.001$ ). The private school group showed a higher mean score of 3.65, compared to the public

school category who had a mean score of 3.39. This suggests that the relative emphasis that parents place on the quality of instruction in a school has a significant effect on their school choice.

**Table 38: Results of an independent t-test regarding the difference between private and public school choice in respect to the quality of instruction factors**

school type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
private	192	3.6557	.64132	.04628
public	194	3.3877	.70211	.05041

Quality of the Instruction Factors	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.525	.113	3.913	384	.000	.26793	.06847	.13331	.40254
Equal variances not assumed			3.915	381.560	.000	.26793	.06843	.13337	.40248

\*\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.

\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.05$  level.

### 5.7. 2 Class Size factor

Table 39 show the independent samples t-test in respect to the class size factors. The results revealed that there is a significant difference between parents who chose private schools and parents who chose public schools  $t(355.7)=7.49$ ,  $p=0.000$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). The private school group showed a higher score of 4.04 compared to the public school category who had a mean score of 3.27. Parental views about the importance of class size, therefore, significantly affect the type of school they choose.

**Table 39: Results of an independent t test regarding the difference between private and public school choice in respect to the class size factors**

school type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
private	192	4.0469	.85179	.06147
public	194	3.2758	1.15057	.08261

Class Size	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	28.219	.000	7.477	384	.000	.77110	.10313	.56834	.97386
Equal variances not assumed			7.489	355.716	.000	.77110	.10297	.56860	.97361

\*\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.

\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.05$  level.

### 5.7.3 The relationship between teachers and students

Table 40 illustrates the independent samples t-test in respect to the relationship between teachers and students. The results showed that there was not a significant difference between parents who chose private schools and parents who chose public schools  $t(374.6) = 0.530$ ,  $p = 0.596$  ( $p > 0.05$ ). The private school group showed a score of 3.80, compared to the public school category who had a score of 3.76. The parents' views on the importance of a good relationship between teachers and students, therefore, has no significant effect on their school choice decisions.

**Table 40: Results of an independent t test regarding the difference between private and public school choice in respect to the relationship between the teachers and students factors**

school type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		Std. Error Mean				
private	192	3.8090	.72155		.05207				
public	194	3.7663	.85529		.06141				
Relationship between the Teachers and Students	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	4.446	.036	.530	384	.596	.04270	.08058	-.11574	.20115
Equal variances not assumed			.530	374.627	.596	.04270	.08051	-.11561	.20102

\*\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.  
 \* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.05$  level.

#### 5.7.4 Parent-School Relationships.

Table 41 shows the independent samples t-test in respect to the parent-school relationship. The results revealed that there is a significant difference between parents who chose private schools and parents who chose public schools  $t(384)=2.776$ ,  $p=0.006$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). The private school group showed a higher score of 3.37, compared to the public school category, who had a score of 3.15. The parents' views about the importance of the parent-school relationship, therefore appears to have a significant effect on their school choice.



**Table 41: Results of an independent t test regarding the difference between private and public school choice in respect to the relationship between the school and parents factors**

school type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		Std. Error Mean				
private	192	3.3792	.75056		.05417				
public	194	3.1505	.86307		.06197				
<b>Parents and School Relationship</b>									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	3.812	.052	2.776	384	.006	.22865	.08236	.06671	.39059
Equal variances not assumed			2.778	377.763	.006	.22865	.08230	.06682	.39048

\*\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.

\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.05$  level.

### 5.7.5 The School Facilities factor

The Independent Samples t-test revealed that there is a significant difference between parents who chose private schools and parents who chose public schools in respect to attitudes to school facilities:  $t(384)=4.425$ ,  $p=0.000$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). The private school group showed a higher score of 3.52, compared to the public school category, who had a score of 3.14. The parents' views about school facilities therefore appear to have a significant effect on their school choices.

**Table 42: Results of an independent t test regarding the difference between private and public school choice in respect to the school facilities factor.**

school type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
private	192	3.5200	.79082	.05707
public	194	3.1452	.87090	.06253

School Facilities	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	3.454	.064	4.425	384	.000	.37478	.08470	.20824	.54131
Equal variances not assumed			4.427	381.193	.000	.37478	.08466	.20832	.54123

\*\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.

\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.05$  level.

### 5.7.6 The Physical Education and sport activities factor

The t-test results in respect to physical education and sports activities showed that there is a significant difference between parents who chose private schools and parents who chose public schools:  $t(384) = 4.273$ ,  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). The private school group showed a higher score of 2.72, compared to the public school category, who had a score of 2.31. This explains that the parents' view of Physical Education and sport activities had a significant effect on their school choice.

**Table 43: Results of an independent t test regarding the difference between private and public school choice in respect to the physical education and sport activities factors**

school type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
private	192	2.7205	.92913	.06705
public	194	2.3127	.94563	.06789

Physical Education and sport activities	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.071	.791	4.273	384	.000	.40777	.09543	.22014	.59541
Equal variances not assumed			4.273	383.980	.000	.40777	.09542	.22015	.59539

\*\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.

\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.05$  level.

### 5.7.7 Safe Haven Factor

The t-test results revealed in respect to the status of the school as a safe haven revealed a significant difference between parents who chose private schools and parents who chose public schools:  $t(384) = 2.450$ ,  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). The public school group showed a higher score of 3.50, compared to the private school category, who had a score of 3.29. The parents' views on safety in a school therefore appeared to significantly influence their school choice, with those rating safety as very important being more likely to choose public schools.

**Table 44: Results of an independent t test regarding the difference between private and public school choice in respect to the safe haven factors**

school type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		Std. Error Mean				
private	192	3.2964			.83838				
public	194	3.5000			.79411				

Safe Haven	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.000	.997	2.450	384	.000	.20361	.08311	.04020	.36702
Equal variances not assumed			2.449	382.406	.000	.20361	.08313	.04015	.36707

\*\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.

\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.05$  level.

### 5.7.8 The School Rules factor

The t-test results in respect to school rules revealed that there were not a significant difference between parents who chose private schools and parents who chose public schools  $t(384)=0.582$ ,  $p=0.561$  ( $p > 0.05$ ). The private school group showed a score of 3.93, compared to the public school category who had a score of 3.98. Parents' views on the importance of school rules, therefore, have no significant effect on their school choice decisions.

**Table 45: Results of an independent t test regarding the difference between private and public school choice in respect to the school rules factor**

	school type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
The School Rules	private	192	3.9344	.77044	.05560
	public	194	3.9814	.81722	.05867

The School Rules	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	3.186	.075	-.582	384	.561	-.04707	.08086	-.20605	.11191
Equal variances not assumed			-.582	383.099	.561	-.04707	.08083	-.20600	.11186

\*\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.

\* The mean difference is significant at  $p < 0.05$  level.

Overall, therefore, five factors were statistically significantly more likely to provoke a choice of private school: the quality of instruction, class size, school-parent relationships, school facilities, physical education and sport activities. One factor, however, was significantly likely to provoke a choice of public school, namely the safe haven factor. The other factors, however, showed no statistically significant effect on the choice of private and public school. Logistic regression will now be used to identify the most significant factors influencing parents' choice of public or private school.

## 5.8 Regression Analysis

This section will attempt to answer the question: What are the most important factors parents cite for choosing private schools or public in Riyadh City, KSA?

To this end a stepwise binary logistic regression test was conducted to determine whether the dependent variables (quality of the instruction, class size, relationship between teachers and students, the parent-school relationship, school facilities, physical education and sports activities, safe haven and school rules) can explain/predict participants' choice of schools (1=Private or 2=Public). A stepwise regression allows for models automatically to include predictive variables, adding or eliminating a predictor in each step to provide a final model including the significant predictors. The W (Wald) value in regression will be used to explain the size of the regression coefficient for each predictor along with the significant value. When conducting this test, the logistic regression resulted in four steps (models). All models were significant in predicting the school choice, however the main and final model led to a result of  $\chi^2(4) = 81.60, p < 0.001$  (Table 42). This explains that the regression model is a significant one and can be used for predicting the dependent variable: i.e. the model significantly fits the data.

**Table 46: Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients**

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	52.456	1	0.000
	Block	52.456	1	0.000
	Model	52.456	1	0.000
Step 2	Step	8.466	1	0.004
	Block	60.922	2	0.000
	Model	60.922	2	0.000
Step 3	Step	15.134	1	0.000
	Block	76.056	3	0.000
	Model	76.056	3	0.000
Step 4	Step	5.540	1	0.019
	Block	81.596	4	0.000
	Model	81.596	4	0.000

The results of the logistic regression indicated that there are four significant predictors ( $p < 0.05$ ) of school choice. From table 43, it can be seen that parents school choices can be significantly predicted by class size ( $W = 35.864$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), safe haven ( $W = 19.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), school facilities ( $W = 6.14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and physical education ( $W = 5.44$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The class size was the strongest predictor, reflecting that parents who score high (or have higher agreement) on this variable are more likely to choose a private school (odds ratio of 0.456). On the other hand, those who score high on safe haven are more likely to choose a public school (odds ratio of 2.30). Participants who score the importance of school facilities highly are more likely to choose a private school (odds ratio of 0.62), as with those who rate physical education as important (odds ratio of 0.71).

**Table 47: Results of the Regression Analysis**

		<b>B</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
<b>Step 1<sup>a</sup></b>	Class Size	-0.757	0.115	42.962	1	0.000	0.469
	Constant	2.807	0.447	39.435	1	0.000	16.563
<b>Step 2<sup>b</sup></b>	Class Size	-0.866	0.125	47.937	1	0.000	0.421
	RS	0.435	0.152	8.145	1	0.004	1.545
	Constant	1.487	0.626	5.645	1	0.018	4.425
<b>Step 3<sup>c</sup></b>	Class size	-0.778	0.129	36.439	1	0.000	0.459
	School facilities	-0.668	0.177	14.187	1	0.000	0.513
	Safe Haven	0.798	0.184	18.882	1	0.000	2.221
	Constant	1.970	0.647	9.254	1	0.002	7.169
<b>Step 4<sup>d</sup></b>	Class Size	-0.786	0.131	35.864	1	0.000	0.456
	School facilities	-0.483	0.195	6.139	1	0.013	0.617
	Physical Education	-0.338	0.145	5.441	1	0.020	0.713
	Safe Haven	0.834	0.188	19.685	1	0.000	2.301
	Constant	2.100	0.660	10.119	1	0.001	8.169
<b>Legend: negative numbers indicate a propensity to choose a private school, positive numbers indicate a propensity to choose a public school.</b>							

## 5.9 Results of correlation the analysis

Question 2: Do the identified factors that influence parents' choice of private or public school vary based upon the parents' socio-economic, educational and age characteristics?

After reporting the results of the T-test and logistic regression analysis, this section presents correlation panels showing the relationship between the independent variables of parental educational level, income level and age and dependent variables that represent the perceptions of parents related to school choice. The aim of the analysis is to explore whether the independent variables had a direct, or indirect, impact on the dependent factors. The independent variables were divided to three categories: Education, comprising four levels (primary school, secondary school, university bachelor's, post-graduate, doctorate, others); Income, comprising six levels (under 5000 RS, 5000-9999, 10000-14999, 15000 -19999 , 20000-24999 , 25000-29999, More than 300000) Finally, age comprising five levels (30 -35 years, 36 40years, 41-45years, 46-50years, more than 51 years). The Pearson correlation was used to determine the correlation between the independent factors and the perception of parents about school choice as detailed in the tables in the following sub-sections.

### *5.9.1 The result of correlation between level of education of parents (public: private) and dependent variables*

Table 48 shows that there are no a significant correlations between the level of education of public school participants and their perception of school choice in terms of the quality of instruction factor. Table 49, however, demonstrates that there was a significant positive correlation between the level of education of private school participants and their perception of school choice in terms of the quality of instruction factor  $r(192)=0.209$ ,  $p=0.004$  ( $p<0.01$ ); the class size factor  $r(192)=0.165$ ,  $p=0.022$  ( $p<0.05$ ), the parent-school relationship factor  $r(192)=0.216$ ,  $p=0.003$  ( $p<0.01$ ), and finally, the safe haven factor recorded  $r(192) =0.220$ ,  $p=0.002$  ( $p<0.01$ ).



**Table 48: Pearson's r result of correlation between level of education of parents (public) and dependent variables**

<b>Education Public</b>	Quality of Instruction	Students Teachers Relation	Class Size	Parents school Relation	School facilities	Physical Education	School Rules	Safe Haven
<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	-0.003	0.056	0.157	-0.009	0.118	0.102	0.043	0.006
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.962	0.438	0.428	0.898	0.101	0.159	0.551	0.939
<b>N</b>	194	194	194	194	194	194	194	194

Legend: \*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 49: Pearson's r result of correlation between level of education of parents (private) and dependent variables**

<b>Education Private</b>	Quality of Instruction	Student Teacher Relation	Class Size	Parent School Relation	School facilities	Physical Education	School Rules	Safe Haven
<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	0.209**	-0.128	0.165*	0.216**	-0.036	-0.004	-0.140	0.220**
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.004	0.076	0.022	0.003	0.618	0.951	0.054	0.002
<b>N</b>	192	192	192	192	192	192	192	192

Legend: \*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In summary, private school participants, who have higher education degrees, are less likely to send their children to public school due to perceived lower standards in the quality of instruction, larger class sizes, no or little parent-school relationship and safe haven concerns.

### 5.9.3 The result of correlation between incomes of Parents (Public: Private) and dependent variables

Tables 50 and 51 (below) illustrate that there was a significant negative correlation between the public school participants' income level and their perception of school choice in terms of the quality of instruction factor  $r(194) = -0.158, p= 0.027 (p<0.05)$ ; the parent-school relationship factor  $r(194)=-0.167,p=0.020(p<0.05)$ ; the school facilities factor  $r(194)=0.157,p=0.029,(P<0.05)$ ; physical education  $r(194)=0.175, p= 0.015 (p<0.05)$  and the safe haven factor  $r(194) =0.171 p=0.017, (p<0.05)$ .

**Table 50: Pearson's r result of correlation between incomes of Parents (public) and dependent variables**

Income Public	Quality of Instruction	Students Teachers Relation	Class Size	Parents School relation	School facilities	Physical Education	School Rules	Safe Haven
<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	-0.158*	0.004	-0.013	-0.167*	-0.157*	-0.175*	-0.113	-0.171*
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.027	0.957	0.858	0.020	0.029	0.015	0.118	0.017
<b>N</b>	194	194	194	194	194	194	194	194

Legend: \*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 51: Pearson's r result of correlation between the income of parents (private) and dependent variables**

Income Private	Quality of Instruction	Relation Students Teachers	Class Size	Parents School Relation	School facilities	Physical education	School Rules	Safe Haven
<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	0.111**	0.202**	0.067**	0.189**	0.163*	0.000	0.221**	0.255**
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.007	0.005	0.009	0.009	0.024	0.996	0.002	0.000
<b>N</b>	192	192	192	192	192	192	192	192

Legend: \*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

On the other hand, there was a significant positive correlation between private school parents' income and their perception of school choice in terms of the quality of instruction factor  $r(192)=0.111$   $p= 0.007$  ( $p<0.01$ ); the teacher–student relationship factor  $r(192)=0.202$ ,  $p=0.005$  ( $p< 0.01$ ); class size  $r(192)=0.067$ , $p=0.009$  ( $p<0.01$ ), the parent-school relationship factor  $r(192)=0.189$ ,  $p=0.009$  ( $p<0.01$ ), the school facilities factor  $r(192)=0.163$ , $p=0.024$  ( $p<0.05$ ); the school rules factor  $r(192)=0.221$ , $p=0.002$  ( $p<0.01$ ), and the safe haven factor  $r(192)=0.255$ , $p= 0.000$  ( $p<0.01$ ).

Thus, participants who have low incomes are more likely to choose public school for the following reasons: quality of instruction; the parent-school relationship; school facilities; physical education and a perception of the school as a safe haven. Similarly, private school participants who have high incomes, are more likely to choose private school due to the quality of instruction; teacher–student relationship; the parent-school relationship; school rules and; class size and safe haven.

**Table 52: Pearson correlation result of correlation between age of parents (public) and dependent variables**

Age Public	Quality of Instruction	Student Teacher Relation	Class Size	Parent School Relation	School Facilities	physical education	School Rules	Safe Haven
<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	0.015	0.077	0.009	0.084	0.090	0.083	0.097	0.064
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	.831	0.283	0.899	0.246	0.211	0.250	0.177	0.377
<b>N</b>	194	194	194	194	194	194	194	194

**Table 53: Pearson correlation result of correlation between age of parents (private) and dependent variables**

Age Private	Quality of Instruction	Students Teachers Relation	Class Size	Parents School Relation	School Facilities	physical education	School Rules	Safe Haven
<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	-0.011	0.012	-0.031	0.034	0.024	-0.062	0.080	0.072
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.883	0.863	0.672	0.641	0.739	0.396	0.271	0.320
<b>N</b>	192	192	192	192	192	192	192	192

There are no significant correlations in the above tables.

### **5.10 Summary**

This chapter has presented and described the data obtained both through the questionnaire and the focus group discussions. Demographic information about the participants was set out and factor analyses were run to reduce the total number of items from 44 to 40, and to help group the items surveyed in the questionnaire into eight principal factors: quality of instruction; class size; relationship between teacher and students; relationship between parents and school; school facilities; physical education and sport activities; safe haven; school rules. Then, the results of the first research question, with all its related sub-questions, were set out in descriptive data. This was then followed by an analysis of the focus group interviews, which are set out in relation to each factor, revealing that there are no differences between the order of the factors between public school and private school participants and that the overall average of the factors were consistent between the public school and private school responses.

Independent t tests, however, were able to show statistically significant differences between private and public school responses in relation to the quality of instruction; class size; the school-parent relationship; school facilities; physical education and sport activities and the safe haven factor. In addition, the results showed that there are no statistically significant differences between the private and public school in other factors: i.e. teacher-student relationship and school rules.

Logistic regression was then used to identify the most significant factors influencing parents to choose public or private school. The regression results confirmed that there were three significant factors influencing parents to choose private school: class size; school facilities and physical education and sport activities. The safe haven factor, however, was most significant factor influencing parents to prefer public school for their children.

The chapter then analysed the impact of variables related to parental status on perception of school choice. The analysis showed that the higher educated participants and those who earned higher monthly incomes were less likely to choose public school. Participants who did not have higher education degree and who earned lower incomes, meanwhile, were more likely choose public school.

Chapter six will now discuss this study's findings in greater depth, relating them to previous studies cited in the literature review in order to ascertain whether or not this study's results confirm or reject the findings of previous research studies, with the reasons for this confirmation or rejection being explored and discussed. In this way the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this research area.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In this study, two tools were used to collect the data that was presented in Chapter Five: a questionnaire and a follow-up semi-structured focus group interview. Here, these results of the questionnaires with focus group interview presented in Chapter five will be discussed in relation to the literature review.

This chapter will discuss the significant factors that encourage parents in their choice of private or public school, or reasons given by parents as to why they withdrew their children from public or private school. This will be followed by the rationale for the selection of factors to be discussed and why other factors were rejected. Hence, this chapter will contain five major sections: an examination of the correlation between the independent factors and the perception of parents in terms of school choice according to the results of the second research question. The influence of class size, safe haven, physical education and school facilities are then addressed. Other factors that were investigated were rejected, primarily because they were not found to be influential within the Saudi Arabian context. For example, the existence of alternatives for parents in this modern era, e.g. the use of technological tools that allow parents to follow their children's progress and behaviour without personally visiting their children's school makes the factor of a strong relationship between the parents and the school unimportant in the view of KSA parents; while the low cost of fuel and the use of a private driver by almost every family in Saudi Arabia makes the proximity factor insignificant from the perspective of KSA parents.

Because of the impact and obvious influence of parental demography upon school choice, it is important to discuss this relationship, before addressing the above sections.

#### **6.2 The relationship between family demographics and private school or public school choice**

As parental educational backgrounds and income are very important factors that affect KSA parents when selecting a school for their children, this section will focus upon these two dependent variables identified from the demographic data.

For instance, the findings of this study identified that 73.1 % of parents who demonstrated a preference for private school held university bachelor or higher degrees, whilst, the other 26.9 % of participants had successfully completed secondary level education. This suggests that parents with higher education were more likely to choose private school for their children. Higher levels of education appeared to correlate with higher ratings for class size; quality of instruction, the parent-school relationship and safe haven status as reasons for private school choice. These Pearson correlation results confirm those in previous studies that revealed that more highly educated parents in the US choose private school for their children (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Kleitz et al., 2000). Similarly, Lacireno-Paquet and Brantley (2008) found that 24 % of minority ethnic, mixed race or black parents, selected public or private schools that were in closest proximity to their homes, regardless of their income, whereas 76 % of white pupils in his cohort attended private school regardless of parental income. Similar to the results of this current study, parents perceived private schools as providing relevant activities and high quality programmes of study that actively supported, prepared and enhanced their children's spiritual values, in addition to developing the knowledge and skills required for the future demands of modern life, such as foreign languages and computer science. This was perceived to be achieved through offering high quality instruction and small class sizes, which is equally perceived as allowing for their children's educational and psychological needs to better addressed.

Moreover, the quality of instruction was identified by parents as an important element in their choice of school. In this study, the Pearson correlation in respect to quality of instruction was found to be highly significant at  $r(192)=0.209$ ,  $p=0.004$  ( $p<0.01$ ). Reasons offered by parents for identifying this specific factor were primarily that it is seen as one of the essential qualities of a "good" school. Hence, a sound quality of instruction meets parents' high expectations in terms of preparing their children for the future demands of the employment market. From the results in this study, this factor was relevant to parents who chose a private school, most of whom directly cited it as essential to their children's future needs (cf. Table 49). Class size was also an important factor relevant to parental choice of private school, with a highly significant correlation at a level of  $r(192)=0.165$ ,  $p=0.022$  ( $p<0.05$ ).

This study's findings in respect to the influence of academic factors were consistent with several previous studies were conducted in the US, such as Coleman and Hoffer (1987) and Long and Toma (1988). In addition, Yang and Kayaardi (2004) revealed that parents

who held higher education degrees had a better understanding of the importance of educational aspects and their influences in terms of school choice. Based on the above research evidence, this study supported their results by demonstrating that there was a positive correlation between parents who have pursued higher education, and their preferred choice of private schools. This is also consistent with other studies that were conducted in the US, for example, Buddin et al. (1998), who reported correlations between parents who had achieved high levels of education and their preference to choose private school for their children . Similarly, Martinez et al. (1996) found that parents who select private schools for their children had higher levels of education than those parents who choose public school.

Interestingly, although this study found that there was a highly significant correlation between higher levels of education and the choice of private school, parents with lower levels of educational attainment indicated a preference for their children to attend public schools. The reason for this was that these parents were much less interested in schools' academic achievement, primarily because they usually represent the more menial professions in a Saudi context. For example handymen will not pay much attention to the importance of education in the modern age, and therefore are less likely to exercise school choice for their children.

The demographic data also demonstrated significant correlations in respect to parents with higher monthly incomes. 78 % had a monthly income between 10,000 and more than 30,000 S.R (cf. Table 51 in Chapter Five). These parents were more likely to select private school for their children than those on lower incomes. This was primarily due to low-income parents being unable to consider a private school due to the inability to cover tuition fees and unseen costs. As such, they are far less likely to select a private school. These results correspond with several previous studies which proved that rich parents in the US tended to select private schools for their children (Goldring and Phillips, 2008; Bosetti, 2004; Lacireno-Paquet and Brantley, 2008; Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Goldring and Hausman, 1999).

Furthermore, the results of this study revealed that academic factors were the most important factor in influencing wealthier parents to prefer private school over public school. For example, among these academic factors were the quality of instruction at  $r(192)=0.111$   $p= 0.007$  ( $p<0.01$ ), the teacher–student relationship at  $r(192)=0.202$ ,  $p=0.005$  ( $p< 0.01$ ) and class size at  $r(192)=0.067$ , $p=0.009$  ( $p<0.01$ ). This study's results are, therefore, consistent with a variety of previous studies from the US context such as



Bauch (1988), Erickson (1986), Greeley et al. (1976) and NCES (2003). Similarly, Tam's (2002) study revealed that in Hong Kong, most Hong Kong Chinese parents with children attending private schools identified the qualification of teachers as well as class size as essential academic influential factors. This was because parents perceived that attendance at private school was essential for their children's future career prospects. Moreover, because of the expectation of high quality learning outcomes leading to perceived excellent career prospects, private schools were perceived as providing the best value for money. Similarly, Wolf (2002) in the US found clear evidence of significant correlations between wealthier parents and private schools, which were attributed directly to the academic education factor of good quality teachers.

Further, the details within the focus group interviews also supported the above results. When asked about the top three reasons for the choice of school, four out of five private school parents answered that academic performance was one of the three most important considerations. For instance, one participant stated:

*I transferred my son to a private school as it provides high standards of curricular subjects and activities, such as English language, and computer science, which means it will qualify him to choose scientific disciplines at University (2.1).*

Thus, quality of academic opportunities was an important priority when evaluating private school. In contrast, the proximity factor did not attract them or influence their school choice, with one of the parents stating that:

*I sent my child to a distant school because the proximity factor does not represent a significant priority in terms of school choice. In addition, a study that was conducted in my children's school showed that 40 % of pupils attended from areas far away (2.5).*

Furthermore, where a private school offers a modern programme of education in alignment with the international education system, this appears to encourage high income parents to choose private schooling for their children. For instance, one of the parents confirmed that:

*I plan to send my son abroad to complete his studies. Therefore, I selected a private school for the academic factors, such as Quality of Instruction, Class Size, qualifications of teachers, extra curricula and*

*advanced facilities. These will prepare my son to study in developed countries, such as the USA and the UK, in future. (2.5)*

This study, however, did reveal that for some high income, well-educated KSA parents, private school was perceived as lacking in the implementation of strict guidance and rules to ensure that pupils behaved and conducted themselves in a culturally acceptable manner. These parents felt that pupils were being evaluated simply on the basis of their success in examinations and not for nurturing overall personal development. This was because such school's targets are to make a profit for their business by attracting and encouraging other parents to send their children to private school, based primarily on examination results. Equally, these parents expressed strong feelings that in their perception, there was a lack of discipline in private schools that could threaten their Islamic culture, family values and principles. The main reason offered for this perception was because teachers failed to address any undesirable ideas not in accord with Islamic culture that pupils may express. Therefore, they removed their children and enrolled them into a public school where there was stricter adherence to Islamic culture.

Supporting the above in the focus group interviews a participant mentioned that:

*I did send my child to private school whilst financially able, but because the character of the teachers was very weak, I withdrew him. In addition, there were some overseas teachers, which means there may have been a conflict with our culture, unlike the public school teachers, who instil our religious values in my son (1.5).*

Although these represent the minority of participants in the survey and interviews, this result supported the findings of Albaker (1994) who found that that some parents avoided sending their children to private school, primarily because the teachers are unqualified and the educational ethos was seen as being inappropriate. Hence, although this present study confirmed the findings of the previous studies reviewed in the literature review, it also raises the question of what influenced the participants in the study who did not send their children to private schools, or who withdrew their children from public schools and sent them to private schools and vice versa. These issues are explored in the following section, in which each factor will be addressed separately in sub-sections, although not in any order of priority.

### **6.3 Underlying factors that influence KSA parents to choose private or public school**

A considerable number of research studies across the world have been undertaken to ascertain the perceptions that influence parental choice of school, such as Bukari and Randall (2009), Alansari (2004), Bosetti (2004), Almutawa and Alwatfa (2007) and Charles (2011). Parental preferences for a particular kind of school can be related to the interaction between a variety of factors, such as proximity, administration, reduction of the burden on parents at home and reputation of the school, which were identified in this study as being highly significant. In the present study, parents seemed most concerned about the general atmosphere in the school, giving greater emphasis to the convenience factors rather than the academic factors.

Therefore, in the following section, the researcher will discuss the effect of these identified factors on parents in terms of choice of public or private school and their impact upon pupils' performance at the school, comparing this study's results with previous research findings.

### **6.4 Main Factors that influence KSA parents to choose private or public school**

#### *6.4.1 Class Size*

Before detailing and discussing the study's results related to the impact on parent's perceptions of class size, it is important briefly to outline the debate as to what actually constitutes a small class size. This is relevant to the study insofar as it influenced the researcher's decision for the purposes of this research that a class size of 15 or fewer (preferably 10-12 pupils) would be the limit. What constitutes the accepted number in respect to "a small class", along with the importance of small class size in pupils' performance, are controversial issues; these will now be discussed in order to establish a consensus on class size.

As stated in the review of the literature, there are various definitions of class size. For instance In the US the Scheck et al. (1994) stated that small classes can contain as many as 38 learners, whereas Gibbs et al. (1996) defined classes as "small" if there was a maximum of 30, with "large" classes defined as containing more than 70 pupils. In contrast, however, Nye et al. (2000b) define classes as small if they contain 8 to 15 pupils. In the UK, education legislation defines "small" as being a maximum of 30 pupils per class in the primary school sector. This is because of the belief that the lower the ratio

between teacher and pupils, i.e. a maximum of 1:30 and the more concentrated the interaction between the teacher and each pupil, the better the quality of education each pupil receives through adequate individual professional support and assistance. In line with acceptability to KSA parents, for the purposes of this research, the measure of “small” class size will be 15 or less (preferably 10-12 pupils) as in Aljaji (2002).

The independent samples T-test showed that the mean of the class size factor in the responses of parents who had chosen public school was 3.27, while the mean among private school parents was 4.046. This result illustrates that there were significant differences between public schools and private schools in the impact of class size factors, at  $t(355.7)=7.49$ ,  $p=0.000$  ( $p<0.001$ ).

These results, which are detailed in full in Table 39 (Chapter Five), demonstrate that for most participants whose preference was for private school, this was due to the class size, as private school parents strongly held the view that a smaller class allowed more effective pupil learning. Therefore, small numbers in a classroom were ideal for this to happen. This result was confirmed by the Logistic Regression results. Table 47 (Chapter Five) demonstrates that the most significant predictor of school choice was class size, viz. ( $W= 35.864$   $p < 0.000$ ); hence participants, who score highly on Class Size are more likely to choose private schools. This is in agreement with the findings of previous studies conducted across the world, which have found that small class size is a significant factor influencing parents to choose private school: cf. for example, US parents’ tendency to choose private school on account of class size (Taylor, 1996; Bosetti, 2004; Denessen et al, 2005; Bukari and Randall, 2009 and Charles, 2011). Furthermore, among the Gulf countries, a study found that Kuwaiti parents’ choose private school due to concern about class size (Almutawa and Alwatfa, 2007).

In addition to the above, statistics confirmed that, in general, private schools have smaller class sizes than public schools, besides being much more selective of the academic ability of the pupils whom they enrol, whilst claiming to enhance the potential of all of its pupils, viz. NAIS (2009), Tennessee Department of Education (2009) and Department of Statistics at the Ministry of Education in KSA

Consequently, Class Size represents a very important attribute in the Saudi context as a major choice factor. This was borne out in both the questionnaire survey and the Focus Group interviews, and substantiated by the fact that in Dammam City, KSA, 60 % of the employees at the Ministry of Education send their children to private school specifically

due to small class sizes (Alansari, 2004). Similarly, the parents participating in this study believed that small class size has multiple advantages as detailed in the focus Group interviews.

For example, when the Focus Group responses were analysed it was evident that all of the participants had chosen private school specifically for small numbers in classes. They reported:

*I have preferred a private school, because studies have proved that small classes offer and grant learners opportunities to interact more with teachers and friends to ask questions, discuss the use of technology to convey knowledge and things. Also, small classes assist the teacher to control the class better, unlike large classes where teachers cannot make as much difference between active willing pupils and lazy pupils. Therefore, the private school tries to provide small class. So that is why I think it is to be preferred” (2.5).*

These results support the findings of previous studies, conducted in the UK. such as Goldstein and Blatchford (1998), and in the US, for example, La Paro et al. (2004) and Cassidy et al. (2005), each of which argued that a small class size allowed teachers to interact more effectively with pupils. This effective interaction was, in turn, perceived to develop and enhance pupils’ performance.

In addition, some parents indicated two very important qualities that are advantageous when pupils are assigned to a small class: (a) students are more easily assisted to understand and comprehend the content of their lessons and (b) teachers are able to use modern technology more easily during the lessons. One of the participants stated that:

*The private school is characterised by providing small classes for pupils. Thus, I have selected a private school for my son because the tutors take into account individual differences among pupils which mean, as well as keeping the attention of pupils during the lesson, also the small class size, which helps my son understand the lessons very well. Also, it allows the teachers to use the communication tools to convey the knowledge from the textbook to the pupils Also I noticed the effect of small classroom on the exam results of my son unlike large classes where teachers can spend a long time disciplining pupils at the expense of keen learners. (2.3).*

These findings are consistent with studies conducted in the US, such as Nye et al. (2000b), McKeachie (1990), Maxwell (1995) and in the UK (Blatchford et al., 2002). Each of these

found a significant relationship between class size and high scores in exams, which they attributed to there being more time and more room for pupils to discuss a wide variety of activities with their peers and teachers.

Thus, one parent pointed out that:

*I have chosen a private school for my child because the number of pupils in the classroom does not exceed 20. This will enable the teachers to deal better with pupils and apply a good strategy of teaching, such as co-operative learning, unlike the public school classroom where the pupil numbers reach 45 – this makes it difficult for the teacher to deal with a large number in the class”.*

He continued by indicating some obstacles that the teacher encountered in the large class:

*“For example, the teachers cannot correct the exams and homework accurately. In addition, the teacher cannot take into account individual differences among pupils due the intensity of the pupil numbers in the classroom. Thus, they face difficulty in delivering the knowledge to the pupils. Finally, widespread bullying is caused by the huge number in the classroom (2.4).*

Alansari (2004) confirmed that class size significantly influenced teachers and enabled them to apply new, innovative methods of teaching that in turn stimulated pupils to utilise creative thinking skills. This finding is consistent with both Goldstein and Blatchford’s (1998) and Tracey and Morrow’s (1998) UK based studies and is confirmed by another participant in KSA who remarked that:

*Class size is a very important factor that influenced me to choose a private school because the class size is not more than 15/20 pupils in the private school. This makes the teaching easier and the teacher familiar with pupils in every aspects. The class size in public schools can be as high as 40/45 pupils, which leads to creating some challenges for the teachers in terms of delivering the knowledge to the pupils, correcting the homework for the pupils and writing reports about the lesson. It is difficult for any teacher to do all of this within 45 minutes (2.1).*

This result has similarities with the findings of studies conducted in the US such as those of Finn and Achilles (1999), Krueger and Whitmore (2001), Molnar et al. (1999), Mosteller (1995), Nye et al. (2000b) and Figlio and Ludwig (2000). Each found many positive aspects of small class size, with the most important aspect identified as the development and nurturing of the performance of pupils in terms of their academic attainment. This result also corresponded with a study was carried out in Jordan by

Kharman (2005), who states that small class sizes are very important in order for teaching and learning to be delivered in such a way as to be interesting and enjoyable for the learners. It also allows teachers to have sufficient time to become familiar with pupils in terms of solving problems and developing positive thinking skills and work ethics.

One participant claimed that one of the advantages of having a small class size was the increase in the interaction between teachers, pupils and pupils with pupils:

*I selected the private school for my son because the number of pupils in the classroom was between 12 to 18, which meant my son will have a chance to interact with teachers and with his friends in the classrooms and to asking any question or discussing any matter with teachers. Therefore, the private schools in Riyadh City focused on the reduction of the number of pupils in each class, because parents take their children out of the public schools due to the large numbers of pupils in public school classes. Moreover, it helps the teachers to manage the class better in terms of teaching and learning as well. (2.2)*

The claim that small class numbers increased the interaction between the teachers with pupils and between pupils with one another is supported by the findings of Goldstein and Blatchford (1998), LaParo et al. (2004) and Cassidy et al. (2005). Each advocated that small class sizes allowed teachers to interact with pupils much more effectively and frequently, resulting in a more positive development of pupils' performance.

Nonetheless, these findings are not consistent with the following US based studies by Edmondson & Mulder (1924), Bourke (1986), Hanushek (1986), Nye et al. (2002) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991). These all found that either there was only a very slight relationship between small class sizes and pupils' learning outcomes, or that there was no significant impact of class size on pupils' performance. For instance, Johnson (2010) compared large numbers in a class with small numbers in a class, where the pupils were studying similar courses. He found that each factor was approximately equal: there was no significant difference between small or large class sizes when compared with one another.

In addition, although the majority of the research detailed in the literature review stressed the importance of small class size in terms of academic and non-academic attainment, in this study some public school participants were of the belief that small class size did not influence or improve academic attributes, or contribute to the development of positive behaviour, or eliminate undesirable behaviour among pupils. Therefore, they did not consider class size when choosing schools. One of the parents mentioned that:

*I don't believe that a small class size improves behaviour in pupils; the school does not have an effect on pupils in terms of behaviour because pupils learn their behaviour from their family or their peers without censorship therefore I did not pay much attention for the class size in terms of the school choice (1.1).*

Another participant asserted that:

*I consider the modern technology is rapidly developing the academic attainment in students rather than teachers or class size, even the behaviour aspect the children acquire their behaviour by other means, such as the media, parents and social networks, rather than small class sizes because children spend a long time with their families and friends and using the media, while they spend only a short time in class each day (1.3).*

The above findings are, therefore, inconsistent with the studies conducted in the US by Nye et al. (2002) and Figlio and Ludwig (2000), who indicated that small class sizes enabled teachers to develop a variety of non-academic attributes and attainments in pupils' learning outcomes and personal development and to eliminate undesirable social behaviours and phenomena, such as inappropriate sexual activity and criminal behaviour in or out of school.

In light of the above discussion, it is determined in the findings of this study, compared with the details in the literature cited, that, in the perception of KSA parents, private schools are superior to public schools. Consequently, it was found that the majority of KSA parents withdrew their children from public school to send them to private schools based simply on their perception that the class size was much more effective and offered numerous advantages. As a result of these findings in this study, class size is a highly significant issue that is taken into consideration when KSA parents make their choice of school. It is equally important to emphasise, however, that there was a minority of parents who identified smaller classes as having no influence or impact upon pupils' performance, and that, therefore, class size did not influence their decision to enrol their children in private school. This is an area for further investigation and study.

The perceived impact of class size naturally leads to investigations into the influences upon the learning environment, which will be dealt in the next sub-section related to the safe haven factor, which is no less important than class size in terms of the perception of parents who sent their children to public schools.



#### 6.4.2 Safe Haven

A further factor that demonstrated significant results in this study was parents' demands that the school of their choice had to ensure that their children would be kept safe and free from fear of bullying and violence. Their demands included not only protection from bullying, violence, substance abuse, unacceptable behaviour and transport issues, but that there also needed to be adequate implementation of school rules to guarantee an orderly and disciplined safe haven learning environment.

The independent samples T-test revealed that the mean of the safe haven factor responses among parents who preferred public school was 3.50, while the mean among private school parents was 3.29. This shows that there were significant differences between the perception of parents from public schools and private schools in respect to the safe haven factor,  $t(384)=2.450$ ,  $p=0.000$  ( $p<0.001$ ). These results, which are detailed in full in Table 44 demonstrate that most participants whose preference was for public school stated that this was due to it being a safe haven. This result was confirmed by Logistic Regression (see Table 47 Chapter Five), which revealed that the second most significant predictor of school choice was the safe haven factor ( $W = 19.685$ ,  $p< 0.000$ ). Parents who scored this factor highly were more likely to choose a public school. These results support a number of studies claiming that any incident of violence at school impacts not just on pupils, but also disrupts the educational process, resulting in parents identifying good discipline and well-behaved pupils as significant motives for school choice (e.g. Henry, 2000; Echols and Willms, 1995). In the focus group interviews in this present study, one of the parents supported this by asserting that:

*The first factor that encouraged me to send my son to the public school was the discipline, he was not exposed to physical abuse or verbal abuse, because the school building is huge which means it assists the administration of the school to control the students Also, the teachers are strict with students, which have led to eliminate common problems that spread rapidly among students, such as gun or knife. I found the presence of my son in a safe environment leads to academic excellence and he will be happy and satisfied at school (1.5).*

In contrast, the majority of relevant studies found that parents value a safe place for their children's teaching and learning, which implies they prefer private schools because they consider them to be safer than public schools. These studies, however, were conducted in the US context and prove that Saudi parent's perspectives are quite different to those of

US parents in terms of the security of public schools (Schwartz, 1986; Hunter, 1991; Echols & Willms, 1995; Crawford and Freeman, 1996; Bosetti, 2004; Bukharl and Randall, 2009; Kennedy et al., 2011; and Carter, 2011). All these studies found that parents transferred their children from public school to private school due to the spread of bullying and the lack of a safe haven. For instance, Schwartz (1986) investigated the reasons that impacted upon parents' decisions to transfer their children from public school to private school and found that among these were parental dissatisfaction with the quality of education, low academic standards and lack of the discipline in school.

When the safe haven issue is considered within the Saudi context there are numerous significant factors that contribute to creating a learning environment that is safe in public schools. Firstly, it was found that teachers have practical experience of how to deal positively with the phenomenon of violence in schools, along with the fact that public schools have established strict systems to prevent pupils from being bullied. Secondly, public schools focus upon building strong relationships between teachers and their pupils, as well as amongst the pupils, which helps to eliminate violence and criminality at the school. Finally, public schools have moderators for students, part of whose function and duty of care is to supervise students at the school, especially during the break time. As a consequence, their presence probably prevents students from being subjected to physical or verbal abuse. Private schools lack a number of the factors that contribute to creating a safe environment. For example, break-time supervisors for students are rare because the costs of employing these are prohibitive for private schools. Private school teachers also do not have enough experience to deal with violence in school. The above findings are contrary to that which was found in this present study related to private school and the role of their teachers. This could be attributed to national and cultural differences, however, since the majority of the aforementioned studies were conducted in the context of developed countries such as the USA.

However, this study's results of focus group interview confirmed that there are undesirable worldwide phenomena that have spread into the education setting, which are having a significant negative influence on schools, viz. bullying and violence among pupils, attacks on teachers by pupils, deliberate destruction of school property, taking of drugs, smoking, carrying of weapons, and drinking alcohol. In this study, Parent 1.2 confirmed that:

*Children become violent through learning violence from several sources such as, peers, horror films and the games, which encourage*

*the child to avenge themselves on other players, which means that the parents are very worried about.....the increase in bullying, bad behaviour, smoking, rape. All of which threatens the values of our community.....disciplined environments are needed to protect my son from disgraceful behaviour this make me pay attention for the security in the educational environment.*

This study supports the findings of other studies that identified and proved the prevalence of the many types of violence in school and the increased rates of crime among pupils (cf. Nansel et al. 2001; Olive & Candappa 2003). Carney et al. (2005) demonstrated the spread of some unacceptable behaviour, such as verbal threats and physical bullying among students and between students and teachers in some Florida elementary schools. The above results are very concerning, especially when considered within the context of KSA, where the present study supports the findings of Al Samih (2010), who reported that the number of pupils suffering from some form of violence in schools had grown significantly in KSA private schools. Such violence involved an increase in verbal insults, fighting, weapons, and attacks upon teachers. For example, in 2008, 14.8 % of teachers had been attacked by pupils in Riyadh, whereas Al Samih (2010) found a significant increase to 18.1 % just two years later. Such unruly behaviour and disrespect for authority is of deep concern, and there would need to be further investigations to identify the reasons why pupils' behaviour has changed in such an unacceptable manner and to such an extent. Such investigations would also provide a base to institute effective interventions before such behaviours become established, since 'prevention is better than cure'.

This study is not consistent with some studies that have identified that certain forms of school violence have decreased in prevalence (Roberts et al., 2010). For example, the Department of Health and Human Services in the US (2010) findings, which indicated a very slight reduction (over 13 years) in the proportion of school learners engaged in bullying, from 36.6% in 1997 to 33.3% in 2010, along with a significant reduction of pupils involved in binge drinking (over 12 years) from 32% in 1998 to 11% in 2010. Whilst a reduction, no matter how small, is welcome, the fundamental underlying problems must be addressed and eliminated for the good of all society if any country is to nurture their children by offering them every opportunity to fulfil their potential and to ensure that their pupils are nurtured to be the best citizens they can be.

This aspiration is crucial because obviously pupils who view school as an unsafe and threatening environment, where violence and intimidation is tolerated or, worse, is

ignored, will be anxious and distressed, resulting in lack of concentration, thereby seriously affecting their learning tasks and quality of study. This in turn informs parents' reluctance to allow their children to be subjected to such violent conditions, because as stated above, it is not possible for any pupil to reach his/her full potential and give of his/her one's best under such negative, frightening conditions and circumstances. In addition, equally importantly, parents wish for their children to maintain a high standard of manners and familial and socially accepted behaviours. Subsequently, parental and pupil concepts and perceptions of school as a safe haven are very important in terms of pupil well-being, safety, and capacity for positive long-term learning outcomes. Consequently, these facts are significant issues, which are seriously considered in parental school choice, because the parents believe that the social, behavioural and emotional changes of pupils must be positive for long-term gains.

In this regard, during the focus group interviews, a parent stated:

*The private schools lack the strict rules that reduce or eliminate the harassment or bullying among pupils. This impacted badly on my son because he exposed to some abuse verbal and he feels unwelcome among the poor this leading to decrease achievement and absence to avoid the problems they suffer from (1.4).*

These results support the findings of previous studies conducted in several contexts across the world for example, in the UK (Echols and Willms, 1995) the US (Bosetti, 2004; Duers, 2005; Bukharl and Randall, 2009) and in Taiwan (Hsu and Yuan-Fang, 2013). Similarly, for instance, Stein et al. (2003) claim that learners exposed to violence are more likely to have a higher number of school absences, poorer school performance, a lower grade point average, lower IQ and reading abilities. In contrast, a safe educational environment, along with a secure sense of being cared for, often results in higher academic achievement. Further to these fundamental demands for a safe haven, Protheroe (2007: 50) claimed that "In caring schools, a critical connection has been made between pupils' academic achievement and their need to feel safe, accepted and valued". This confirms the perceptions of parents, who considered that ensuring a safe haven for their children would impact positively upon their academic achievement. Hence, some parents identified their preference to send their children to private schools as they consider them to be much safer environments than public schools, with other parents having the opposite perception, viz. public school under Government control are more likely to enforce acceptable behaviours.

Moreover, this study's findings are also indicative of the negative effects identified through pupils being subjected to intimidating violence in schools. Such pupils display emotional withdrawal, depression, lowered self-esteem, feelings of fear, increased aggression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a sense of fear and danger whilst attending school. Parent 2:1 asserted that:

*The spread of violence in private school has an effect on the dealings of my son with his family and probably leads him to be deprived of sleep; this means that the unsafe school can impact badly on the feelings and emotional of pupils this phenomenon makes me thinking to leave the private school and send my son to public school next year.*

Similarly, the results of this study supported the findings of other studies in terms of the elimination of bullying and violence in school depending very much upon the approach taken by the school towards the treatment of the culprits. For instance, the administrators of schools sometimes mete out harsh punishments to guilty pupils. However, this could lead to an increase in the aggressive behaviour of these pupils. Consequently, administrators need to develop a punishment system geared to address and change undesirable behaviour among pupils in a more rational, constructive and positive manner. Supporting this method, the school administration and teachers would also need to involve parents by offering guidance and support; thereby, working together, parents can help the school (cf. Duers, 2000; Zuhairi, 2008; Bucher and Manning, 2005; Kyriacou, 2010). For example a study conducted in the US by Gastic (2010: 269) asserted that "school staff can also serve to prevent or de-escalate violence as active bystanders to act to defuse violence. As bystanders, pupils and school staff can reduce school violence if they intervene". Supporting this stance, Parent 1.3 emphasised that:

*The head teacher plays a very important role in reducing the violence in school by follow strict rules that punishes the guilty students and awards the ousting students, meeting weekly with staff to discuss the unacceptable behaviour that spread between students and requesting teachers to monitor students during the break time will lead to increasing the level of safety at the school. For instance, the head teacher helped my son to overcome some challenges that faced him in school and he helped also to eliminate bad "social phenomena.*

By setting and establishing a high moral stance and a good work ethos, above and beyond the quality of teaching provision, head teachers effectively dictate the tone and culture of

the school. Similarly, in this very complex situation, it is essential that teachers listen to pupils and their opinions, which must be weighed, considered and respected, as this will give important indicators when implementing appropriate strategies to combat violence in school by valuing the contribution that pupils can make. Implementing positive appropriate strategies involving staff, pupils and parents can result in the provision of a safe learning environment that can lead to the creation of an ideal educational environment. With this concept in mind, this study's results revealed that parents considered that the teacher is an important element with regard to increasing positive discipline in school. By way of example, Parent 1.2 stated:

*I consider the way justice is delivered by teachers when I choose a public school for my son. Because the pupil has to feel his efforts are recognised and encouraged, as this is a marked advantage over other pupils who are lazy and rude. So the teacher does not treat them equally. Also, the teacher has to be fair and just when dealing with lazy pupils and active pupils in the classroom.*

Parents 1.4 confirmed that:

*I believe the teacher is very important to reduce the violence at the school as I noted that there are some good values that increased in my son and his behaviour, such as honesty and generosity. Also, because most of the teachers in public school are Saudi citizens, they were very friendly to my son. This means teachers and pupils have a good relationship with my son because they are agreed on one culture and there are shared values between them. As a result, this has led to the promotion of these values with pupils, unlike in private schools, where there are many different nationalities and cultures among the teaching staff. Therefore, the private school do not focus so much on improving religious values and the behaviours of learners. This is what made me prefer public school rather than private school to send my son.*

Both of these statements have much in common in terms of reasons for a choice, although each parent preferred a different school system.

It can be concluded from the results of this study that a safe haven was a high priority in the parents' deliberations when choosing a school, since the overwhelming majority of parents considered a safe school to be where balanced, sensible discipline is implemented. Consequently, it was found that of those parents who had sent their children to public school this was based upon their perception that they could guarantee a more effective safe haven. As a result of these findings in this study, it can be concluded that the school

as a safe haven was a highly significant factor that is taken into consideration when KSA parents make their choice of school.

Whilst the previous studies cited above emphasise the importance of the safe haven as being attractive to parents in their deliberations when selecting a school for their children, what was not directly addressed was whether the constructive involvement of parents, pupils and school staff in combating bullying and violence in school reinforces the school as a Safe Haven for all children. It would appear in the research cited above that this approach is 'taken as read', as it is often automatically assumed that parents are naturally involved, although the extent of this involvement and their influence is not measured. This would be an area for further investigations to ascertain whether or not parents are or wish to be involved and if they are involved, to what extent it is practical or feasible for them to intervene in school discipline and policies, and to what extent home and school behaviours could be nurtured to ensure acceptable levels of behaviour from pupils in KSA. The next significant factor identified was School Facilities, which was rated third in the priorities cited by parents.

#### *6.4.3. School Facilities*

School facilities represent an important factor that is relevant when considering parents and their reasons for school choice in the KSA context. Parents perceive that the education process cannot achieve their ambitions and aims for their children unless pupils are taught in modern, well-equipped buildings where modern technology is utilised. Supporting this assertion, is the need for qualified knowledgeable teachers, who are experienced in the use and delivery of modern technology to disseminate appropriate factual knowledge to pupils, as well as ensuring pupils are correctly taught in its use to permit independent study at home and in the school or public library.

The findings demonstrated that parents perceived this to be one of the essential qualities of schools if they are to stimulate and encourage pupils to attend and effectively learn through taking a pride in their learning environment. Moreover, most parents believed that if such high quality school facilities were made available they would engender a good work-ethic in their pupils, leading towards outstanding academic results. For instance, parents demonstrated a preference for a school that offered specialist classes: Theatre, internet Wi-fi, computer labs, science labs, smart boards, medical care and meeting rooms.

Whilst the factors identified above are considered essential, some parents considered that when evaluating a school in terms of its school facilities, pupils' performance in non-academic aspects was of equal importance. Therefore, cognitive development and human values must also be taken into account in order to nurture the pupil as a whole and not just their academic ability. Therefore, schools with old buildings lacking in modern equipment and a welcoming learning environment, must have elements of risk and disadvantage that can affect pupils' performance, willingness to learn and attendance at school.

The independent samples T-test revealed that the mean of the school facilities factors among parents who chose public schools was 3.14, while the mean in private schools was 3.52. This result also shows that there were significant differences between public schools and private schools in the school facilities factors, at  $t(384) = 4.425$ ,  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). Table 42 in Chapter Five reveals the importance of school facilities as a very relevant factor that impacted upon the perceptions of private school parents. This result was confirmed by the Logistic Regression (see Table 47 Chapter Five) which revealed that the third most significant variable predictor of school choice was school facilities ( $W = 6.139$ ,  $p < 0.013$ ). Consequently, parents who scored this factor highly were more likely to choose a private school for their children. In the focus groups interviews, this was supported by Parent 2:1, who stated that:

*I have chosen the private school for my son for several reasons: the most important one was the furniture in the school and the technology equipment, because it gives students comfort in the classroom and it help students to involve and participate in the lesson. It also supports tutors to manage the students. I visited the school, and I found the students very active in learning. In fact, the school furniture reflected the excellence of school.*

Additionally, the results of this study showed that KSA parents are concerned about the quality of furniture and the general welcoming environment available in school, because these parents believe that these environmental qualities influence the quality of children's learning attitudes. Hence, these results illustrate that it is perceived that pupils' willingness to respond positively to the teaching was because of feelings of safety and of being in a 'home from home'.

Findings from the survey and focus group interviews supported one another. For instance, Parent 2.3 indicated the importance of the facilities in the school when stating:



*I sent my son to school characterised by modern furniture, such as excellent coloured, comfortable chairs and appropriate air conditioning for the summer time and heat for the winter time. These qualities are very important in classrooms, because it makes the classroom environment welcoming and so successful. For example, my son spends six hours every day in there, so if he is not satisfied and happy he will not learn, because he will feel uncomfortable, want to be at home and be bored.*

Parent 2.4 emphasised the importance of other factors related to the way his son was influenced by some facilities in school, stating that:

*My son was very shy and he was afraid of meeting people, therefore I sent him to a school that paid specific attention to some facilities, such as the theatre and the science labs. This means that the tutor in school can encourage him by providing some exciting, stimulating activities on the stage in front of the students. After that I found that the theatre facility was used to develop attributes of my son, such as encouraging and stimulating him to work creatively, leading to freedom of expression. And he loved the teamwork so he became very keen to gain knowledge by working with others in the labs in school. I really found that some of the facilities in school were necessary to encourage parents and assist their children to improve and develop some positive accepted behaviours, or reduce the negative behaviours of students. Also the facilities in school for example the labs, theatre, and libraries are important to develop their knowledge and skills.*

Such findings as those cited above are consistent with the findings of studies conducted in the US by McGuffey and Brown (1978); Christopher (1991); Jago and Tanner (1999); Dressler (1911); Cash (1993); Earthman (2004); Darder and Apshur (1992); and O'Neil and Oates (2000). For instance, Christopher (1991), who found that school building design impacts positively on the educational process and pupils' achievement. Furthermore, he took into consideration the ideas, suggestions and perceptions of teachers regarding appropriate designs of schools. These results are supported by a study conducted in some other Arab countries such as Egypt. For example, Amayreh (2011) identified positive significant relationships between building quality and academic outcomes, when stating that modern school buildings provide exciting, welcoming high-quality laboratories, a library, resource rooms, theatre equipment with the latest technologies and adequate staff support to allow and encourage pupils to develop their confidence and self-esteem, whilst exploring fact-finding knowledge, improve their skills and increasing co-operative working.

On the other hand, the present study and other previous studies disagree with Veitch's (1997), findings that the quality of furniture and general environment within a school in

Canada had no significant effect on children's educational attainment. So, while there is contradictory evidence, all the elements of the school environment must be designed to assist students to fulfil their ambitions and potential in an unthreatening, pleasant, welcoming environment and atmosphere.

Moreover, in the present study it was found that technology is one of the most important of the school facilities factors which stimulate KSA parents to choose a private school. The results of this study revealed the importance of two aspects of technology: first, the importance of using technology in classrooms so that students had more motivation and interaction with teachers during lessons, and, second, the importance of using technology to communicate with parents. For example, some schools allow parents to follow up their children's homework, alert them to any emergency, or if the school is looking for parents to volunteer to participate in some school activity or event.

In the Focus Group interviews, when asked about the top three reasons for the choice of private or public school, four out of five of private parents indicated that the school facilities factor was important, as well as identifying modern technology as important elements that influenced and attracted them to choose a private school. Hence, the findings from both the survey and the focus group interviews support one another. For instance, Parent 2:5 indicated the importance of using technology during the lesson. He stated that:

*Use of technology by the teachers in classrooms is much better than the traditional manner. For example, the teacher who explains an earthquake for the students will use just static images to describe it to them, but when they use computers to explain it through a documentary programme they will attract students to the lesson and it will reinforce the information in them, unlike the traditional manner that made students bored also using technology allow me online access to follow up my son's homework and I can also find out about the school activities, see the list of the names of outstanding students, lists of the names of troublesome students. I usually ask my son to do his homework as it is very convenient for me to contact tutors directly and the school informs me of any emergency with my son. This service has indeed improved the relationship between the parents and school, because it encourages parents to become involved in their children's studies.*

Parent 2:3 confirmed that:

*I noted that my son was very clever in terms of dealing with the sophisticated technology, but I was shocked from his exam result as the last year was disappointing. Thus, I left the public school and sent him to the private school which is equipped with an advanced computer lab and internet service, because I aimed to encourage him to attend school and get good quality learning. This means my son has achieved autonomy in learning; he overcame some challenges that faced him during study, and interacting with peers and teachers leading to an improvement in communication skills. In fact, technology played a key role in developing the performance of my son in school, therefore, I would like to invite the Saudi Ministry of Education to support the provision of technology in school, because the technology has become part of the life of the current generation. So the teachers should ensure that they have a sound knowledge and knowhow to use this technology in school to facilitate the learning process of the students*

Tobolka (2006: 26) supported these findings, stating that:

Communication improves students' interest in their coursework and provides their parents with more knowledge about daily class activities. I found that parents felt more involved in their students' school activities and more connected to me.

These results are also consistent with several previous studies: in the US by Schutte (1997); Blackerby (2004); Robert (2005); Tobolka (2006); in Egypt by Algebraic (2007); Mohammed (2008); Abdul qadir (2008); Mahmoud and Abdul Rashid (2009), and in Jordan by Kosakowski (1998) and Fakhruddin et al. (2006).

Specific to mathematics, Almasloh (1992) conducted a study with two groups of secondary school pupils in Medina, KSA, to determine the implications of the use of computers in the academic attainment of students in mathematics. He found that statistically significant differences distinguished pupils who studied mathematics using computer programs from pupils who studied mathematics using the accepted conventional method. The above notwithstanding, the result of this current research contradicts those studies that found no statistically significant differences between pupils who had studied mathematics by conventional instruction and pupils who had studied mathematics using modern technology (Al twaim, 2000; Yusuf and Afolsbi, 2010; Al da'alj, 2003). Some of the explanations and reasons offered for any decrease in the effectiveness of technology tools upon learner's attainments are primarily related to

teachers not having sufficient expertise and experience to use technology in the classroom to deliver knowledge to pupils, in comparison to the knowledge of computers that most pupils have. In addition, is the reported frequency of computer and internet servers crashing, resulting in a loss of valuable work. Similarly, some activities are better delivered through a variety of methods, and/or through what could be termed traditional methods. The onus, therefore, must be upon the school's administration and the teachers to identify which method, or combination of methods, best suits a specific element of teaching and learning. It is equally important to state that some pupils do not have the mental capacity or capability to receive knowledge from delivery through technological means. Hence, there again has to be much flexibility and continuous monitoring to ensure that the most appropriate method, or methods, of delivering teaching are identified for pupils, along with ensuring that teachers gain the appropriate level of expertise and on-going training. It is essential, therefore, that the content of the curriculum is conducive to being delivered via technological tools.

It can be concluded, therefore, that school facilities were the third most important factor to influence parental school choice in this study. As such, a variety of reasons were given as to which aspects were the most important, such as a welcoming, stimulating learning environment to encourage pupils to attend and want to learn; pleasant working conditions; colourful, comfortable chairs and tables; air conditioning and heating during the colder months; computers with a good internet service and appropriate use of modern technologies, with the acknowledgement that for some academic subjects more traditional methods or a mixture of both methods are more appropriate and effective; ensuring on-going monitoring of individual pupil's progress and that teachers are up-to-date in their training and expertise to keep abreast with pupils and to enable them to choose the most appropriate teaching and learning method; classrooms that are good, sound learning environments through having sufficient appropriate lights, clean pleasant carpeting; a theatre, as well as support from good library services; and good laboratories for computers and the sciences.

In line with the above and previous studies related to pupils' positive learning outcomes is the important role that Physical Education and Sports Activities play in the overall enhancement of the learning process. This then leads on to the last significant factor identified in this study.

#### 6.4.4 Physical Education and Sports Activities

Physical education in school represents a very important element in the educational process and parents pay great attention to this factor in terms of school choice because it has both mental and physical benefits (Sallis et al., 1999). The independent samples T-test revealed that the mean of the physical education and sports activities factors among parents who chose public school for their children was 2.31, while the mean in private school was 2.72. This result also shows that there were significant differences between public school and private school in the Physical Education and Sports Activities factors, at  $t(384) = 4.273, p = 0.000 (p < 0.001)$  in favour of private schools (cf. Table 43 Chapter Five). This means that the private school parents selected a private school because they believed that there should be a balance between academic attainment and the physical and mental well-being of pupils. This result was supported by the logistic regression. Table 47(Chapter Five) shows that one of highly significant predictors for school choice was the physical education and sports activities factor ( $W = 5.441 p < 0.020$ ). This demonstrates that participants who scored this factor highly were more likely to choose a private school; with participants who chose private schools being 0.713 times more likely to score higher on school physical education than those who chose public schools. Consequently, the most important physical education and sports activities factors that impacted upon parents, influencing their choice of school, were that the school offered good indoor games and outdoor facilities, such as a playground that had a swing and a slide. Thus, the Physical Education and Sports Activities factor has a significant effect on KSA parents' sending their children to private school rather than public school.

The focus group interview results support these findings, all of the participants had chosen private school specifically because of physical education and sports activities in the school. For instance, Parent 2.3 stated that:

*I believe the private school is superior to the public school in terms of sport activities because the private school is supported financially and they have flexibility in decision making. This unlike the public school due the instructions of the Ministry of Education, which were a major cause of failure of the public school in this respect, Thus, the Ministry of Education should increase the financial support and give the head teachers authority to develop sport facilities in schools to compete with the private schools*

In addition to this sentiment, one of the parents indicated one of the reasons that make public schools less attractive is the fact that public schools are lacking in sport activities. Parent 2:4 stated:

*Unfortunately, some of the public school buildings are rented, which means they don't have halls or stadiums for sports activities; in other words these buildings were not built for teaching and learning. On the other hand, private schools pay a great deal of attention to physical education and sports activities and they provide appropriate stadiums and modern sports halls. In addition, they employ expert tutors, who help the pupils to develop their sports skills.*

These results of this study correspond with prior studies, such as Aljaji (2002), who found that parents certainly gave a great deal of consideration to the provision of physical education and sport in their choice of private school in the KSA, in the expectation of increasing their children's academic achievement, along with the practice of sports activities, which are considered to be very helpful in developing positive qualities in children and protecting them from ill-health. The above notwithstanding, the result of this present study disagrees with some previous studies, especially that of Collins and Snell (2000:808), who found that the most important reason for selecting a school in the UK was its reputation:

Parents did not consider child mix, sports facilities, access or building quality to be determinants of a school's reputation. These parents would seem to have a more academic view of what constitutes a reputation

Similarly, the result of this present study do not correspond with the findings of Al shimri (1999), who carried out a study involving private school parents in Riyadh City, KSA. Participants were asked to rank factors that influenced their choice of a specific private school. Physical Education was not identified as a factor that influenced their decision making; therefore, it was concluded that parents did not view it as important.

This present study's results indicate the importance of sporting activities in the school in terms of health, as children need to practice sport in order to ensure that they reduce the incidence of diseases like obesity and high blood pressure. In addition, the practice of sporting activities in school was perceived as being very helpful and supportive of children in terms of their physical and psychological health. For example, giving children sound sporting activity experience offers them an opportunity for self-expression and the building of their self-confidence, along with a sense of accomplishment whilst interacting

socially with team members and the wider community. Thus, KSA parents rank physical education as a very important factor in choosing a school, because they believe the mind and body are one entity, and that anything that happens to one will affect the other. As such, physical education and sports activities must be of importance.

In the focus group interviews, some of the parents emphasised the role and hence the importance of sport activities in preventing some diseases, especially diseases which are common in KSA. Parent 2.5 mentioned that:

*I'm striving to select a school that has a strict sports programme to enhance the sports culture in my son, because I realise there are a significant number of diseases threatening Saudi children such as high blood pressure, diabetes, blood pressure, osteoporosis and so on. Schools have an important contribution to make in effecting an improvement in pupils' health and preventing my son from suffering from these modern diseases.*

Other parents indicated another common disease that is no less dangerous than high cholesterol and diabetes, and is of equal concern, i.e. obesity, which is rapidly increasing among KSA children.

*My son was suffering from obesity. He was exposed to ridicule from friends and one of the challenge that faced him was not being able to find suitable clothes easily; also he had a tendency to laziness and he suffered from difficulty of movement. You feel tired quickly when you make little effort, and in addition obesity generates some diseases such as pain in the spine and discs, heart disease and hardening of the arteries, and high blood pressure. Thus, I'm very keen to select a school that pays great attention to sports activities, because I believe the educational environment contributes to reducing or eliminating some modern diseases, such as obesity. (2.1)*

These results and parental observations are in line with previous research in the US (Alexandrov, 1988; World Health Organization, 1991; 1994; Martens, 1996; Sibley & Etnier, 2003; Talbot, 2001; Strong et al., 2005 and Green and Riley, 2012), and in the UK (Armstrong & McManus, 1994; Daley, 2002 and Bailey, 2006). However, Alamari and Zilab (2012) in Kuwait City found that physical education did not make a significant impact on the promotion of pupils' health. They concluded that the reason for this was that

Pupils did not want to do P.E. There is increasing evidence of little interest in participating in physical education at school and an even more alarming concern that pupils have stopped caring about physical

education as they have not made progress in terms of health” (ibid. p. 310).

Based on the above and this present study’s results, the school is seen as an appropriate environment to encourage pupils to participate in physical education activities, because of the impact upon health as well as the enhancement of educational attainment.

This current study also found that there was a relationship between sports activities, and academic achievement, whereby the practice of sports activities in school increased the ability of pupils in their learning, and thus helped pupils to achieve academic excellence. In addition, it found that sports competitions in school were perceived as having a positive effect on the cognitive abilities of children since sports activities developed critical thinking and problem-solving skills, created dialogue among pupils and encouraged pupils with their acquisition of knowledge. For example, pupils are very keen to know the history of the game, the importance of the game and how their performance in the game can be enhanced.

Three out of five private school participants in the focus group supported the perception that physical education and sports activities impact positively on pupils in terms of educational aspects. By way of example, Parent 2:3 stated that:

*Sports activities became important in school as they stimulated my son in his learning activities and developed some fine qualities in him. For example, they develop leadership, confidence through being taught the basic principles of tolerance, cooperation and respect which are instrumental in strengthening ties and social networks, and promoting peace and justice, and they helped my son to integrate socially and enabled him to be healthy and strengthened his resistance to disease.*

Similarly, Parent 2:1 asserted that:

*Physical education does not just reduce common diseases but also it has other benefits such as tolerance. This led my son to build strong relationships with his friends in the classroom, along with learning cooperation. This quality led him to cooperate with peers to do homework or study for his exams. As a result, my son achieved full marks in most of the modules last year. Therefore, I call on the Education Ministry to support schools’ developing stadiums and sport halls, because sport plays a great role in improving the pupils physically and mentally.*

In the results of this study, the most frequently cited reason parents offered was that physical education would increase their children’s academic achievement. These findings reinforce previous studies conducted in the US by Kirkendall, (1985); Jensen, (1998);



Sallis et al. (1999); and to illustrate the above point, Sibley and Etnier (2003: 253) asserted that:

Physical activity may actually be related to improved cognitive performance and academic achievement and provides evidence for the argument that physical activity should be a part of the school day for both its physical health and cognitive benefits.

Despite the strong relationship between physical activity and cognitive performance suggested in the present study and by some previous researchers, however, some prior studies disagree, including Collins and Snell's (2000) UK study, and that of Fisher et al. (1996:333), of 88 pupils in New York City High Schools. The latter stated that:

We found no specific relationships between sports involvement and academic performance. Apparently, spending time at sports did not specifically detract from homework or studying, nor did it enhance motivation or single out those who might be performance oriented in a more general way.

Thus, they concluded that there was no significant enhancement of academic attainment from involvement in physical education.

In summary, this section has discussed the study's findings and compared them with the findings of related previous research conducted in the field of physical education and sports activities. This study corresponds with some prior studies which found that parents perceive that private schools are superior to public schools, because they believe that physical education and sport activities play a key role in the prevention or reduction of modern diseases that are rapidly spreading among children in KSA, viz. high blood pressure, obesity and high blood cholesterol. Further, it established that consideration must be given to the perception that sports activities assist children to develop their cognitive performance and academic achievement.

Physical education and sports activities are very important factors which are taken into consideration when KSA parents select a school for their children. On the other hand, it is equally significant to stress that it was also found that a minority of parents found no specific relationships between physical education and academic performance. In other words, they perceived it as having no influence or impact upon pupils' performance. Thus, the physical education and sport activities factor did not affect their decision to send their children to private school rather than public school.

## 6.5 Summary

This chapter has analysed the results from the investigation into parental choice of public schools and private schools in Riyadh City, KSA. The data was analysed to identify the factors that influenced parents' preferences for public or private schools for their children.

This study corresponds with previous studies that also found that the parental demographic qualities of level of education, i.e. elementary to degree level, and family monthly income play a highly significant role in determining parental choice. For instance, parents who held a Bachelor's or higher level university bachelor's degree and who also had a high income were more likely to choose a private school for their children. A variety of influential factors were identified: class size, quality of instruction, school facilities, qualification of teachers, and the teacher–pupil relationship. Consequently, the criteria of KSA parents who chose private schools included the perceived qualities of the teaching staff, i.e. that they are qualified and capable of meeting children's individual and personal needs. Furthermore, this study's findings agreed with most of the previous studies that identified that the motivation for parents to choose a public school was associated with their dissatisfaction with the quality of safety and well-being and care of their children in private school. Similarly, parental dissatisfaction was associated with the some aspects of the quality of the public school related to class size, school facilities, and physical education and sports activities.

It was also considered important to create an appropriate attractive, welcoming learning and teaching environment in order to nurture and encourage pupils to fulfil their potential by working hard to increase their skills and academic performance.

The above discussion of results allows the study's contribution to the existing body of knowledge to be clearly delineated. It is worth noting that none of the previous research studies in KSA conducted a comparison between private and public school from the perspective of parents. Furthermore, it must be stressed that all previous studies into parental school choice in KSA focused upon the context of the primary school. Therefore, school choice issues still need to be addressed with more exploratory research into the situation at other school levels, i.e. Junior High, Secondary, and High School in both private and public schools.

Due to this lack of specific research, there is a clear gap in the current literature related to this element of investigation. Hence, this present study offers some research findings that can help to fill this gap in the national literature of school choice.

The following chapter concludes this thesis by presenting the summary, principal findings and recommendations of the study.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion and Recommendations

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter will offer a brief summary of the conclusions from the data analysis, together with some recommendations based upon the stated aims; describe the rationale for the selection of instruments used, sample selected, the data collection and the responses to the research questions. After outlining the contributions of this study, the limitations of this study will be detailed before the recommendations and suggestions for several areas of future research will complete the final section of the chapter.

#### 7.2 Aims, Participants and Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether private school education provision is superior to public school education provision in the perception of parents in Riyadh, KSA. The focus of this study was to explore and identify significant factors contributing towards parental choice and perceptions. These factors were divided into two distinct, but related, categories, with each category being sub-divided into significant factors, e.g. academic factors were sub-divided into quality of instruction, class size and teacher-student relationship, while convenience factors were sub-divided into school facilities, physical education and sports activities, safe haven, and school rules.

##### *7.2.1 Aims of the Study*

The aims of this study were to identify the factors within the two main categories - academic and convenience - that significantly influenced KSA parents in their preference for public or private school for their children. Specifically, the study endeavoured to accomplish the following tasks:

- To investigate the factors which (a) attract parents to prefer private or public schools; (b) lie behind the increased aspirations and demands of parents and the reasons offered for their preferred school; (c) inform the KSA Ministry of Education's endeavours to establish schools which address the demands and ambitions of parents in Riyadh City, KSA.

- To explore whether private schools are superior to public schools or vice-versa in terms of the perceptions of parents in Riyadh, KSA.
- To determine the effect of independent variables on parents in terms of their choice of public or private school.
- To explore the reasons and circumstances behind parents' preference for private or public schools.
- To provide head teachers and administrators of private and public schools with the identified factors and positive attributes.
- To offer relevant recommendations to education policymakers that may assist them to develop the KSA educational system in order to produce highly educated citizens capable of meeting internal and global needs.

#### *7.2.2 Participants and Data Collection*

The sample consisted of 386 randomly selected participants, who were asked to complete the main data collection instrument, i.e. the questionnaire survey. This data was complemented by a follow-up focus group interview, in which the researcher questioned ten participants who send their children to private or public school in Riyadh.

The data was collected from participants' responses to a five-part survey (cf. Appendix, 1). Part one consisted of demographic information. Part two consisted of 18 items designed to measure academic factors in public and private schools. Part three, consisting of six items, and was designed to measure the parent-school relationship. Part four, consisted of eleven items designed to measure parental perception of the quality of school facilities in public and private schools, while part five consisted of nine items designed to measure the quality of the educational environment.

### **7.3 Main findings**

As stated earlier, the results of this study answered two main research questions and eight supplementary questions (cf. Chapter Five).

## **What are the underlying factors influencing parents' choice of a public or private school?**

The findings from the questions in part one related to the underlying factors that influenced parental choice of public or private school. Only the identified significant factors that influenced parental choice were detailed, i.e. class size, safe haven, school facilities and physical education and sports activities.

Taking each significant factor separately, the results indicated that:

### *7.3.1 Class Size*

In terms of ranking the dominant factors in public and private school choice, class size came first. Parents generally made class size their top priority when considering which school to select, a finding which is in line with those of previous studies carried out not only in KSA, but also in other Arab countries. For instance, Kharman (2005: 101) found in his research in Jordan that:

Having smaller classes is advantageous in many ways to both teachers and students, because it makes the teaching/learning atmosphere more interesting and enjoyable; teachers have more time to become familiar with their students' abilities, interests and problems

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Blatchford et al. (2002) found a significant effect of the influence of class size on academic attainment in literacy and mathematics. Pedder (2006) analysing his set of data collected in the United States of America, found that small class sizes offered a good opportunity for the teacher to develop and use a wide variety of practices and several teaching strategies in the classroom to address individual pupils' needs and potential. This was also found by Alansari (2004) in his study in KSA, where the data analysis demonstrated that a smaller class size assisted teachers in taking into account the different abilities of their pupils, as well as assisting them to deal effectively with poor behaviour from some pupils. Thus, based on the findings of a number of studies, it is evident that the small class size was perceived to offer great advantages. This was not just within the KSA context, but across the world. As a consequence, the findings of this study are in agreement with the findings of previous studies, such as Alminua (1993); Taylor, (1996); Bosetti (2004); Denessen et al (2005); Almutawa and Alwatfa (2007); Bukari and Randall (2009); and Charles (2011). Each of these researchers found that small class size is a highly significant factor which has a strong influence on parents'

choice of private school as opposed to public school, where class sizes are considerably larger. It should be noted, however, that the results of this present study are in conflict with those of Nye et al. (2000b) and Bourke (1986), who concluded that the size of the class was not the dominant factor, but that, rather, the quality of the teaching and the qualifications the teacher were the dominant factors.

### *7.3.2 Safe Haven*

The second most significant factor that this study revealed as a priority in parental choice is whether or not the school environment was a safe haven for the child in terms of his/her safety and well-being.

It can be seen from a review of the previous international research conducted by, for instance, Echols and Willms (1995), Osofsky (1999), Stein et al. (2003), Protheroe (2007) and Hsu and Yuan-Fang (2013), that ensuring that the selected school offers a safe haven for their children is an extremely important factor in parents' decision making, since parents perceive that ensuring a safe haven would not only allow their children to fulfil their potential, but would contribute to solving some of the issues that a school may face. For example, fear of violence and intimidation will lead to pupils' absence, poor performance, low grade averages, emotional withdrawal, depression, lowered self-esteem, along with constant feelings of fear.

As a consequence of the above, the KSA parents demonstrated a preference for the public school as a safe haven compared to private school. This was because of KSA government interventions and because, in the main, public school teachers are KSA citizens. As such, these teachers are more likely to enforce the cultural, religious and familial behaviour KSA parents demand. This was supported by the results from the Focus Group, where parents repeatedly commented upon the fact that private schools employed teachers who were not KSA citizens and who may therefore not appreciate the need for the continuity of home and school behaviour.

Hence, the present study result disagreed with various studies conducted around the world, e.g. Schwartz (1986), Hunter (1991), Echols & Willms (1995), Crawford and Freeman (1996), Bosetti (2004), Bukharl and Randall (2009), Kennedy et al (2011), and Carter (2011). These studies found the opposite effect, i.e. parents withdrew their children from public school to enter them into private school primarily due to the widespread bullying,

bad classroom behaviour, and teachers' inability to assert discipline leading to a lack of a safe haven for their children. The researcher has attributed this conflict of results to the parental demand for the continuation of the family religious and cultural values being reinforced within the public school environment in KSA.

### *7.3.3 School facilities*

The third most important factor identified related to school choice in this study was the variety and quality of school facilities. The reasoning behind KSA parental choice was that many participants considered it essential for pupils to be exposed to modern technologies, stimulating teaching methods, and learning within a pleasant well-resourced environment in order to improve their performance within the classroom and resulting in pupils being willing to work in partnership with their teachers and peers to develop a good work ethic, achieve better grades and fulfil their true potential.

This study result disagrees with some previous studies, such as Alda'alj (2003), but corresponds with other studies, e.g., Fakhruddin et al. (2006); Schutte (1997); Blackerby (2004); Robert (2005); Tobolka (2006); Algebraic (2007); Mohammed (2008); Abdul qadir (2008); Mahmoud and Abdul Rashid (2009); Kosakowski (1998). The findings of these cited studies, that were carried out the across the world, highlighted the positive effect of using modern technological advances that influence pupils' academic achievements. This fact is substantiated in research conducted in developing countries, such as Algebraic (2007), who conducted his study in Palestine where he found technology being extensively used in the classroom by teachers to convey knowledge to pupils. In addition, it is very important for pupils to be very actively involved and integrate modern technologies with traditional teaching methods in order to stimulate willingness and interest in receiving the information their teachers are imparting.

As a consequence of the acknowledgement of the ways in which modern technologies can enhance traditional teaching and learning methods, together with the need for their children to be educated to the highest level to compete and keep up-to-date with other countries in the global economy, parents in KSA demonstrated a preference for private schools due to the wide range and quality of school facilities offered. Since private schools pay more attention to facilities to develop students' skills, and in expanding the perceptions of students, this helps to make students more independent in terms of learning, and more helpful in sharing their knowledge with their peers. All of which encourage



students to attend school. The focus group interview results support these assertions identified from the questionnaire survey results, viz. parents prefer private schools specifically because of their school facilities.

#### *7.3.4 Physical Education and Sports Activities*

The final important factor in school choice identified in this study is physical education and sports activities. KSA parents believe that participating in physical activities would have a positive effect on pupils' health, helping to reduce the chance of developing diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease, which can be related to obesity and a lack of physical exercise.

Furthermore, it has been established globally that physical exercise assists in maintaining not only good physical health but also good mental health. Hence, ensuring that pupils participate in physical education will not only have positive effects on pupils' physical well-being but also positively enhance their psychological health, which improves their cognitive performance and educational achievement.

The findings of this study correspond with those of previous studies conducted in several countries, identifying the importance of Physical Education and Sports Activities in school in terms of parents' school choices and all aspects of health and educational attainment. These include Alexandrov (1988), World Health Organization (1991), Armstrong and McManus (1994), Martens (1996), UK Department of Health (1998), Daley (2002), Sibley and Etnier (2003), Talbot (2001), Strong et al. (2005), Bailey (2006), Kirkendall (1985), Jensen (1998), and Sallis et al. (1999). Based upon such awareness and wishing to ensure the best for their children, parents in KSA selected private schools because of their perception that such schools give special attention to pupils participating in physical education and sports activities for the reasons cited above. Taking part in such activities not only enhances the sense of being a team member, but more importantly, pupils' physical health and psychological well-being combine to enhance their academic achievement. Commensurate with this parental desire to ensure that their children are given every possible opportunity to compete effectively in modern life, some asserted that participating would fulfil the desires of ambitious pupils. Similarly, the data from the focus group interviews demonstrated strong support for the results obtained from the questionnaire survey. Hence, the results of this study results agreed with some previous studies, such as Aljaji (2002), but are in conflict with other studies such as Collins and

Snell (2000) and Al shimri (1999), who advocated that there was no significant relationship between pupils' abilities in Physical Education and Sports Activities and their academic achievement.

**Do the identified factors that influence parents' choice of private or public school vary based upon the parents' socio-economic, educational and age characteristics?**

#### **7.4 Influences of parents' socio-economic and educational characteristics on their school choices**

This section of the questionnaire survey was designed to discover any effect of demographic variables on parental choice of public or private school. It contained supplementary questions to identify whether these independent variables may have influenced parents' decision to enrol their children in public or private school.

##### *7.4.1 Parental education qualifications*

The questionnaire addressed the question of whether parents' personal educational qualifications had an effect upon their school choice. This was because parents who had achieved high educational qualifications would have personal knowledge of effective and non-effective teaching and learning methods. As such, they would naturally wish to expose their children to the same or similar advantages of effective teaching and learning environments. In contrast, parents who had not had such opportunities, such as attending university bachelor, whilst still very much wishing to enable their children to advance themselves, are at a distinct disadvantage because wishes are no substitute for knowledge gained through personal experience.

Consequently, the Pearson correlation result demonstrated that there was a significant positive correlation between highly educated parents and a preference for private school. This correlation was identified as applying across all the other influences, such as class size; parent-school relationship, quality of instruction, physical education and sports activities. Conversely, there was a significant negative correlation between a choice of public school, and participant's education level, which applied across the quality of instruction, parent-school relationship, school facilities and physical education and sports activities factors.

These results correspond with previous studies, such as those of Coleman and Hoffer (1987), Kleitz et al (2000), and Lacireno-Paquet and Brantley (2008),

As a consequence, these results indicate that highly educated parents perceive private schools as providing educational opportunities that public schools do not or cannot offer for a variety of reasons.

#### *7.4.2 Parental Monthly income*

The Pearson correlation result showed a significant positive correlation between high monthly income and the choice of private school. This would support an assertion that highly educated parents earn more money and that this, therefore, combines with their wish and ability to pay for what they perceive as advantages for their children. Consequently, a variety of reasons were offered by participants who were able to afford private school fees, as to why they wished to purchase the best education opportunities possible for their children: these included: quality of instruction, teacher-pupil relationship, class size, parent-school relationship, school facilities, school rules and safe haven. These findings are consistent with the results of several previous studies, such Goldring and Phillips (2008), Bosetti (2004), Lacireno-Paquet and Brantley (2008), Coleman and Hoffer (1987) and Goldring and Hausman (1999).

Conversely, the Pearson correlation demonstrated a significant negative correlation between the public school participants' income and their perception of school choice in terms of the quality of instruction, parent-school relationship, school facilities, physical education and safe haven.

### **7.5 Contributions of this Study**

No similar research has been conducted focussing upon the factors that influence parents in their preferences for public or private primary schools in KSA. This research, therefore, makes a significant contribution to offer support to KSA educationalists, by enhancing their understanding of reasons and perceptions influencing parental school choice. There is a need, however, to undertake further research in order to obtain data concerning parents' decision processes and influences in their selection of secondary school.

This study reveals significant data related to parents' school choice by exploring the main factors that influence parents to choose public or private school. It also analysed their attitudes towards various factors which revealed their reasons behind their school choice, private or public. Alansari (2004) is an example of the many researchers who recommend

that exploring parent's attitudes towards specific factors in private schools and public schools is a vital step forward, as this will contribute to information available to parents who are still deciding which school to send their children. Consequently, this study makes a positive contribution by identifying not only the factors that influence parents to send their children to public school, but also the factors that influence parents to send their children to private school.

#### *7.5.1 Contributions of this Study*

Because of the highly significant results, this study can also positively contribute to inform and enhance the overall effectiveness of the National Education System in KSA. As a result, there is a need to undertake further research in order to obtain data concerning parents' decision processes and what influences them in their selection of a secondary school, as well as a duplication or similar study conducted with female participants.

More specifically, new and comprehensive data was collected regarding the correlation between demographic data, such as the influence of parents' educational qualifications, income and age. These were complemented by new data related to the factors that influence parents when choosing what they perceive as the most appropriate school for their children; for instance, academic achievement levels, school facilities and physical education. The exploration and analysis of these correlations was very helpful and enabled the effect and influence of the parental demographic data, in terms of their selection of school, to be identified. This was used to provide a more comprehensive picture of the factors that integrate to influence parents in their eventual decision of which school to send their children to.

Furthermore, unlike previous studies that used a single method in this field in KSA, this study used a mixture of methodologies, viz. quantitative and qualitative elements, which enriched the data set. This was achieved by the researcher utilising a questionnaire survey in order to obtain more controlled consistent data from the sample. This was then complemented by collating participants' personal opinions by means of focus group interviews in an attempt to gain a better in-depth understanding of the parental school choice phenomenon. Further, using a mixture of methodologies allowed the researcher to make a more comprehensive interpretation of the outcome of the questionnaire survey and the focus group interviews, as well as to analyse the ways in which they agreed and disagreed.

A further contribution is the use in the methodology of the distribution and collection of the questionnaires, viz. online, posted, hand-delivered, and face-to-face interviews with the Focus Group. This allowed the researcher to reach a wider population to be given the opportunity to participate, as well as to clarify any confusion and/or explore in-depth further points made by participants during the interview. The above, therefore, offered opportunities to increase the percentage of participants willing to take part in this study.

Fortuitously, the timing of this study is another of its strengths in terms of contribution, because it is a topical research area which is compatible with the KSA Ministry of Education's current aims to improve both public and private education systems in the country. The Ministry is interested in determining the attitude of the education process in terms of parents perception probably this will lead them to identifying strong points that effect on students attainments to develop those points especially the Ministry of education has been supported financially through the King Abdullah Project, which was established recently and is funded with 10 billion Saudi Riyals to develop the education process in KSA.

Hence, this study can claim to make a considerable contribution to the body of knowledge in the field of influences on parental school choice specific to KSA. Equally, it will narrow the gap in the literature in this field, as well as indicate suggested further research strands in the investigation of the perceptions of parents into other aspects of effective educational systems that influence parents in their selection of a school for their children.

## **7.6 Recommendations**

### *7.6.1 Recommendations for the Ministry of Education (MoE)*

As stated above, fortuitously, the timing of this study has coincided and is very much compatible with the KSA MoE's 10 billion Saudi Riyals funding intentions (a) to fulfil its aim to provide effective 21<sup>st</sup> Century educational teaching and learning processes by developing its existing education provision and (b) by determining and identifying ineffective teaching methods and learning outcomes, and effective teaching and learning outcomes utilising modern technologies.

The following recommendations, based on this study's results, are therefore made to support and contribute towards the MoE's enhancement of the educational opportunities currently being offered, based upon this study's findings of parental perceptions of the

needs of their children. As stated, significant results related to four out of the eight factors were obtained. So the recommendation is that specific attention is given to strengthen provision in the four areas that parents identified as most influencing them in their school choices, especially in public schools:

- Class size was identified as the most dominant factor for choosing private schools. So it is a top priority for parents based upon their perception that the smaller the number of pupils per teacher the more individual tuition could be offered. Also, the positive aspects of smaller class sizes were supported by the results from the focus group, in which parents firmly believed that reducing class sizes in schools enhances the learning outcomes of pupils, making these schools more attractive to parents. This is because, as stated in the literature review. In addition to the above, small class sizes offer opportunities for teachers to develop and use a wide variety of practices and teaching strategies to address individual pupils' needs and potential, which allows teachers to take into account the different abilities of their individual pupils. As a consequence of this study's finding, there is a need to build more public schools in order to meet the current overcrowding caused by the recent population explosion in KSA, as well as to employ more teachers in order that the student-teacher ratio can be reduced from the existing levels in public schools, making them more attractive to parents. There is also a need for more research on appropriate class sizes in KSA.
- It is recommended that the MoE should work to enhance safety in private schools because the percentage of the crime is increasing among the private school students. Parents, therefore, believe that private schools should establish serious rules to help eliminate the misbehaviour that has spread among students, such as verbal abuse and bullying. Also head teachers and teachers carry a responsibility to employ effective means to reduce unacceptable behaviour. Private schools should, therefore, institute in-service training programmes to increase the awareness of teachers of methods for dealing with misbehaving students. In addition, the owners of private school should employ KSA citizens teachers because they are more likely to be able to enforce the cultural, religious and familial behaviour KSA parents demand. As stated this was supported by the results from the focus group, where parents repeatedly commented upon the fact that private schools employed teachers who were not KSA citizens and who may

therefore not appreciate the need for the continuity of home behaviour in school. Equally, the establishment of an Ofsted type system would ensure a standardised quality of education throughout KSA, as well as identifying schools that are failing.

- The next recommendation to the MoE is ways to address the third important factor identified in this study, viz. the variety and quality of school facilities. This was based upon many participants identifying that it was essential for KSA pupils to be exposed to modern technologies, stimulating teaching methods, and learning within a pleasant well-resourced environment to fulfil their potential. Introducing such facilities in all public schools could be achieved by establishing in-house personal development schemes; in-service courses; sharing of ‘good practice’ between pyramid collaborative working groups of local schools; judged ‘outstanding’ schools mentoring ‘failing’ schools by teachers collaborating. Also, since the effectiveness of the use of modern technologies was identified, these should be established in all schools because (a) in order to ensure that KSA students, our future work force, will be enabled to compete favourably in global markets, (b) to allow parents access to all aspects of their children’s educational progress, as well as the ability of the school to contact parents swiftly as and when needed. If all aspects of their children’s educational progress are made available, say every month, to parents as well as teachers, this will help identify achievement or lack of achievement, along with weak and strong administrative points, plus the availability of opportunities for parents to be involved in school activities. Offering such facilities will expose any problems and issues before they become serious or out of hand. The above will encourage a positive partnership between parents and school to overcome them quickly, easily and effectively, along with helping to eradicate unacceptable behaviours and weaknesses in administration/teaching culture. In order for the above to occur it would be necessary for MoE to give financial support to improve the facilities of public schools, which lack modern laboratory facilities and equipment, well-stocked libraries, modern sporting stadiums, and attractive, comfortable learning environments.
- As detailed earlier in the literature review, it has been established globally that physical exercise assists in maintaining not only good physical health but also good mental health. Both are essential and desirable, therefore, the Saudi parents

surveyed here encourage the MoE to ensure that all public schools are furnished with high quality well-equipped gyms, swimming pools and playing fields. These facilities need to be supported by highly qualified specialist teachers bringing them in line with many facilities offered by private schools. In addition to these essential requirements, it is recommended that local, regional and national sporting leagues and competitions are established to encourage student involvement. This is because ensuring that students participate in physical education will not only have positive effects on their physical well-being, but also positively enhance their psychological health, which can improve their cognitive performance and educational achievement. Therefore, physical education and sports activities (the final important factor affecting school choice identified in this study) is recommended because KSA parents believe that participating in physical activities would have a positive effect on pupils' health, viz. helping to reduce or eliminate the chance of developing some diseases, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease, which can be related to obesity and lack of physical exercise. Further, parents believe that taking part in these activities not only enhances the sense of being a team member, but is commensurate with these parental desires and ambitions to ensure their children are given every possible opportunity to compete effectively in modern life.

#### *7.6.2 Recommendations for Head teachers*

Since one of the main aims of this study was to inform private and public school head teachers by identifying the strengths and weaknesses perceived by parents, the following recommendations are offered.

- Since parents are very keen to enhance their school's performance since this will affect their children, it is recommended that head teachers should increase the number of meetings with parents by meeting with them monthly or twice per term in addition to holding class progress meetings (Parents' evenings), along with a variety of other meetings addressing a range of subjects, such as introducing a new strategy utilising modern technologies to ensure parents understand the rationale behind such an introduction. By involving them in the elimination of undesirable behaviour, or allowing them to participate in the making of important decisions.



- To complement established teaching strategies and subject content, and to encourage parental involvement within school, the researcher recommends that parents' personal education qualifications are identified. Then, if appropriate, parents could be invited to participate either in class discussions involved in their expertise, or to give a formal talk/lecture expressing their personal expertise and experiences. This is because parents who have achieved high educational qualifications or expertise in their chosen career path have personal knowledge that will enrich young people and contribute to their development. For example, an architect could be invaluable in practical and pure mathematics classes; structure, stress factors and weight load science experiments, as well as learning and understanding the perspective of three dimensions on a two dimensional piece of paper in art classes. Furthermore, it may be possible for on-site visits with the architect giving pupils first-hand practical experience of theoretical formulae, which may stimulate their thinking skills into creative problems and solutions. Also, interacting with 'hands on experience parents' will contribute to the quality of knowledge on offer; stimulate personal interest in the chosen career whilst having an effect upon the generally respectful behaviour demanded from the pupils.
- The above is more likely to happen in private schools since the results of this study indicate highly educated parents perceived private schools as providing more and better educational opportunities than public schools. If private schools are encouraged to work in collaboration with public schools, however, such enrichment of the curriculum could take place in public schools as well. Of course, the same inter-exchange could happen if public school parents visit private schools as the results of this study demonstrated that highly educated or highly qualified parents withdrew their children from private school and enrolled them in public school. So this two-way process could prove very productive to schools that joined a recommended collaborative working group, such as a pyramid scheme.
- Whilst identifying weaknesses within each head teacher's schools and working towards eliminating these weaknesses, based on the result of the 44-item questionnaire survey in this study, head teachers should also focus on improving their personal abilities to enable them to reach the optimum level of administrative competence. By doing this they will be assisting in addressing any weaknesses in

their own operational procedures and weaknesses that are preventing opportunities for teachers to gain further professional experience. Equally, another recommendation to meet the results identified i.e. the wide differences in the quality of education offered between some private and public schools perceived by parents, head teachers should be encouraged to develop joint working relationships between other schools, and KSA Government education support agencies, to improve the existing National Education Services provided.

- Based upon this study's findings of the need for public and private schools to be more equal regarding the quality of education they offer, the above recommendations can be extended further to encourage co-operation between public and private schools through seminars, meetings, and supervision programmes, in order to encourage a culture of co-operation and awareness as a means of confronting the challenges facing education in KSA. This is because public and private schools should learn from one another to identify and overcome their weaknesses and enhance their strengths.

### **7.7 Limitations of this study**

This study has several limitations which must be taken into consideration at all levels of the research and analysis. For instance, this study focused only on parents who had chosen public schools or private schools for their children in Riyadh, KSA.

Whilst the research sample was selected randomly from parents who were representative of all areas in Riyadh, the researcher made a deliberate decision to exclude all non-Saudi parents as well as Saudi parents who chose to send their children to either public or private schools in other cities in KSA. This was because of limited time, access, and resources. This decision was based upon the fact that the sample came from a very large city covering more than 1,435,000 square kilometres and home to the full range of social classes. It must be acknowledged, however, that there may well be specific local characteristics in other cities, towns or rural areas within KSA which could produce very different results if his study was replicated. These specific local characteristics, if they exist, cannot be identified within his sample. It is accepted that the researcher had to select a representative sample that would be seen as acceptable and reasonable for the reasons he gives, as well as that the sample selected should be able to be replicated if the study was conducted elsewhere, in order to make contrasts and comparisons.

Furthermore, another acknowledged limitation is the fact that only male participants were asked to respond to the survey questionnaire and participate in the focus group interviews. The reason for this exclusion of female participants is because of the strict separation of males and females in public environments in KSA, for cultural and religious reasons. This means mean that a male researcher could not conduct a study with female participants (i.e. mothers), if this involved interacting or interviewing female participants (Ministry of Education, 2009). For instance, the Islamic religion demands that females must not be alone with males other than their husband or male family members. The need for all females to be accompanied by others would cause additional time and financial problems, together with the difficulty in obtaining permission from families, employers and the Education Department. There are also obvious difficulties and complications in organising indirect interviews with female participants. Even if these types of permission were agreed, there could be a skewed sample due to the likely refusal of husband or family to allow participation despite permission from the KSA Ministry of Education and/or employer, in which case the sample would not be representative. Similarly, this study was conducted on just boys' schools, with girls' schools being excluded because male researchers are not allowed to enter girls' schools in any circumstances (Ministry of Education, 2009).

In addition, this study focuses only on the factors that influence parents to choose public or private schools. Any other issues were not included or considered; for instance, international school parents were excluded from this study because their inclusion could again have resulted in skewing the results as not all parents who select international schools are KSA citizens or of the Muslim religion and culture. As such, their views may not be in line with Islamic religious beliefs related to education and the aims of the King Abdullah Project.

A further limitation of this study is the process of translating the perceptions of parents in their choice of private or public school from Arabic into English, which was sometimes problematic. This was primarily because of the different cultural beliefs and customs involved. In addition, as detailed and discussed in the Methodology Chapter, translations can be open to misinterpretation or misunderstanding of what the participant is actually meaning by someone from a very different cultural background. Similarly, set within their everyday accepted cultural understanding, there are the difficulties of nuances or fine distinctions between an Arabic word and its English translation, and it is not always possible to make a direct translation, consequently the translation does not capture the

full meaning of the use of the word. Of course, it is the same when translating from English to Arabic.

As detailed previously, because of the potential difficulties involved in translation, several steps were taken to determine a correct match for concepts and grammar, following Brislin et al.'s (1973) concept of 'face validity'. The questionnaire was translated from English to Arabic by an Arabic native speaker in the Faculty of Languages, Saudi University, Riyadh, KSA, and then translated back into English by an English native speaker in the Faculty of Languages, Saudi University, Riyadh City, KSA. To verify the appropriateness of the final versions of the 'face' validity of the questionnaire (Arabic and English), they were sent to an Academic Committee at Imam Mohammed ben Saudi University, Riyadh City, KSA where the committee agreed the accuracy of the translation. It is felt that this was sufficient to minimise translation bias.

Because of these potential difficulties the data analysis may be limited in terms of the answers obtained from the survey questionnaires and the focus group interviews. This was because it was necessary for the researcher to spend a great deal of time in the transcription of the focus group interview answers in order to ensure that the translations were as accurate as possible. In addition, another limitation was the short duration of the time designated for carrying out this study, compounded with the large amount of time that had to be spent loading the results of the questionnaire surveys into the SPSS programme, prior to analysis of the raw data.

## **7.8 Recommendations for Further Studies**

Together with the findings of this study, the researcher suggests the following areas for further research:

- This study was applied only in Riyadh. It would be beneficial to carry out this study, or a similar study, in other KSA cities in order to obtain comparisons of findings and to highlight specific needs or issues related to other KSA cities. Such studies could inform and enhance the overall effectiveness of the National Education System in KSA.
- This study was conducted with males only, so it would be beneficial to carry out this study or a similar type of study, with females. Subsequently, an informative comparison of results could be made, again with a view to enhancing the overall effectiveness of the National Education System in KSA.

- This study offered parents a chance to evaluate some of the educational aspects prevalent at the present time in KSA public and private schools. It would be beneficial to consider educational aspects other those which have been addressed or mentioned in this study, for evaluation by KSA parents.
- This study focused on parents to assess KSA secondary private and public school. It would be beneficial to carry out this study, or a similar one, focussing on a sample exclusively of head teachers of public and private school to evaluate aspects of education in both systems from their perspectives. This would assist in enhancing the overall effectiveness of the KSA National Education System.
- As the average age of the participants was over 41 years it would be interesting to replicate this study, but restricting it to various age ranges, such as 25-35 years; 36-45 years; 46-55 years. Once the data set has been collected then these sub-sets could be compared and contrasted to ascertain what the similarities and differences are.
- As there were no schools which specialised in Special Educational Needs, this could be a further area for exploration and research into what the preferred factors are for parents of Special Educational Needs children. This aspect would be in line with the overall objectives of the King Abdullah Project where the Ministry of Education is interested in determine and identify weaknesses and ineffective teaching and learning methods along with strong effective teaching and learning methods utilising modern technologies as and when appropriate, and how such methodologies can enhance the special educational needs of SEN diagnosed children.
- Following on from the above a research study could incorporate the results of all these methodologies, i.e. comparing and contrasting the research results of (a) various age ranges of parents and their decision making, (b) the results of the perceptions of principals' regarding the weakness and strengths in their schools, (c) secondary public and private schools results versus primary public and private schools, and (d) special educational needs provision not only for educationally sub-normal but also gifted children. All such data would make a great contribution towards a clear in-depth understanding of the current KSA educational provision and ways in which it can be enhanced to meet the challenges of the 21st century global economy.

## 7.9 Conclusion

In summary, therefore, and based on this study's findings, the following conclusions were drawn by the researcher.

In this study, the majority of the participants were highly educated, which means they had extensive experience of a variety of education systems. Consequently, this result can be attributed to these participants being likely to have had personal experiences to draw upon from their own education and therefore having an appreciation and understanding of the importance of effective teaching and learning outcomes, particularly those that incorporate modern technologies. Such positive experiences may, therefore, influence their wish for their children to have the opportunity to gain similar experiences.

Furthermore, this study revealed that:

The majority of the age of sample was over 41 years. This means that most of the sample had experience of secondary and/or higher education, hence they were very keen to allocate the school which meet their desired wishes for their children's education.

- Public school is perceived by parents as being better than private school in terms of providing a safe environment.
- Private school is perceived by parents as being superior than public school in terms of aspects such as class size, school facilities and physical education and sports activities.
- The correlation between parents who enjoy a high income and their preference for private school, held true across other factors which influence school choice, such as quality of instruction, teacher-student relationship, class size, parent-school relationship, school facilities, school rules and being a safe haven.
- A number of factors were identified for the correlation between the highly educated parents and their preference for private schools. These include Class Size, Parent-school Relationship, Quality of Instruction, Physical Education and Sports Activities.
- There were areas which could have contributed significantly to the overall results had they been included, such as various age ranges of parents; training; principals' perceptions of weakness and strengths in their schools; secondary compared to primary public and private schools; special educational needs provision for both educationally sub-normal and gifted pupils.

All data cited in the conclusions would make a considerable contribution towards a clear, in- depth understanding of the current educational provision in KSA and the ways in which it can be enhanced to meet the challenges of the 21st century global economy.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: The Questionnaire - English Version**

#### **A Study of Factors Affecting Parental Choice of Private and Public School in Riyadh City, Saudi Arabia**

The follow information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher or the University of Hull.

#### **Purpose of the study:**

- To investigate the factors which (a) attract parents to prefer private or public schools; (b) lie behind the increased aspirations and demands of parents and the reasons offered for their preferred school; (c) inform the KSA Ministry of Education's endeavours to establish schools which address the demands and ambitions of parents in Riyadh City, KSA.
- To explore whether private schools are superior to public schools or vice-versa in terms of the perceptions of parents in Riyadh, KSA.
- To determine the effect of independent variables on parents in terms of their choice of public or private school.
- To explore the reasons and circumstances behind parents' preference for private or public schools.
- To provide head teachers and administrators of private and public schools with the identified factors and positive attributes.
- To offer relevant recommendations to education policymakers that may assist them to develop the KSA educational system in order to produce highly educated citizens capable of meeting internal and global needs.

In this research, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods will be used in the form of Mixed Method research. Data will be collected by questionnaires and focus group interviews.

Please feel free to ask questions regarding this study, either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I will be happy to share our findings with you after the research is completed. However your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as a participant will be known only to the researcher.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study.

**Confidentiality:**

Much of the data I wish to collect and use for research purposes in this study will be private. However, in using this data for the purposes of research all names will be removed in order to preserve anonymity. The recorded data will be stored in the researcher's recorder, and the data will be stored securely. The researcher will look careful for the meaning when he translates the interviews and the questionnaire.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the study. Copy of the consent form will be given to you to keep.

**Note:**

I would be grateful if you would kindly return the questionnaire to the head teachers or the researcher by 20th of August. The researcher will arrange a meeting with some of the parents to discuss the results of the study, if you wish to participate in that meeting put a mark in ( ) and write your mobile number or any other means of contacting you. I appreciate your cooperation with us in this study.

Signature of participant

Date

Faisal ALSuiadi

0752544703

## Personal information

Kind of education :

Public school ( )

Private school ( )

Your estimated monthly family income

Under 5000 ( )

Between 5000- 9999 ( )

Between 10000 – 14999 ( )

Between 15000 - 19999 ( )

Between 20000-24999 ( )

Between 25000-29999 ( )

More than 30000 ( )

1.5 Highest education level of parent or guardian (either father or mother )

(Please tick one box only)

Primary school level ( )    secondary school level ( )    technical college level  
( )

bachelor level ( )    post-graduate level ( )    doctorate level ( )

Ages

From 30 -35 yeas ( )

From 36-40years ( )

From 41-45years ( )

From 46-50years ( )

More than 51 years ( )

## Academic Factors :

This section seeks to measure the academic factors which you prioritise when making a choice about which school to send your children to. It includes, teachers, the relationship between the teachers and students, curriculum, and the use of technology.

Please put a ✓ in the  of your choice:

For example,

NO		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	strongly Disagree	Don't know
1	Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies and learning activities to help students learn		✓			

### A. Academic factors

NO		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	strongly Disagree	Don't know
1	The education offered to students at our school is of high quality.					
2	The school is doing a good job teaching (mathematics and sciences)					
3	The school is doing a good job teaching other subjects.					
4	The teaching strategies used at this school are innovative.					
5	Teachers are efficient (well prepared and highly qualified)					
6	Teachers challenge students to do their best work.					
7	The school is preparing students to deal with issues and the problems they will face in the future					
8	Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies and learning activities to help students learn					
9	Teachers use advanced technology to deliver knowledge to students, such as computers, smart boards, projectors.					



10	The relationship between the teachers and students is very good					
11	Teachers at our school treated my child fairly					
12	Teachers are friendly and sincere with students.					
13	Class size at our school is appropriate for effective learning					
14	Student numbers in classrooms are ideal					
15	The school emphasises religion					
16	The children have been enabled to learn the English language					
17	The reputation of the school is excellent					
18	The school provides extra curriculums. Such as, English and computer sciences.					

## B- The relationship between the parents and school

The section measures the relationship between the parents and school

Please put a ✓ in the □ of your choice:

NO		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	strongly Disagree	Don't know
19	Parents accept voluntary membership in school committees and organized assignments					
20	The school provides sufficient opportunities for parents involvement in the school development					
21	Parents are invited to the school frequently.					
22	Parents co-operate with the school administration.					
23	The school uses technology to provide parents with information about the progress of students at the school					
24	Parents' opinions are considered when important decisions are made					

## Convenience Factors

This section seeks to measure the priority you assign to convenience factors when making a choice about the appropriate school to send your children to.

### A. School facilities

Please put a  in the  of your choice:

NO		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	strongly Disagree	Don't know
25	The classrooms have a good environment (enough lights, comfortable tables and nice carpet. Air conditioning)					
26	The school has computer services					
27	The school has good internet services					
28	The school has good library services.					
29	The school has good laboratories for computers and the sciences					
30	The school has a good theatre.					
31	The school has a good swimming pool					
32	The school has good indoor games facilities.					
33	The school has outdoor game facilities					
34	The school has a good playground include swings and slides					
35	Proximity of the school's location					

**B. Environment for learning**

<b>NO</b>		<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<b>36</b>	School rules apply equally to all students.					
<b>37</b>	The school has procedures to avoid substance abuse (drugs, alcohol)					
<b>38</b>	The school provides a safe and orderly environment for learning.					
<b>39</b>	Cheating is strongly discouraged at the school					
<b>40</b>	There are no problems with bullies at the school					
<b>41</b>	My son's social status is comparable to the rest of his peers.					
<b>42</b>	The sibling(s) of my child are welcome in the same school					
<b>43</b>	There is no physical abuse (knives, guns) at the school					
<b>44</b>	The school provides safe transportation for the students					

## Appendix 2: The Questionnaire - Arabic Version

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

المملكة العربية السعودية

وزارة التعليم العالي

جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية

مبتعث - جامعة هال - المملكة المتحدة

استبانة للكشف عن العوامل المؤثرة في إحقاق الوالدين لأبنائهم في المدارس الحكومية أو الأهلية

(The questionnaire)

المحترم

عزيزي ولي أمر الطالب

سلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته. أما بعد:

فأقوم بدراسة علمية في مرحلة الدكتوراه بعنوان: (( العوامل المؤثرة في إحقاق الوالدين لأبنائهم في المدارس الحكومية أو الأهلية )) ، وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى ثلاثة أبعاد:

أولاً: تسليط الضوء على أبرز العوامل التي تجذب ولي الأمر لاختيار المدرسة، وهذا في حد ذاته يحفز مديري المدارس بعد اطلاعهم على نتائج هذه الدراسة إلى تلبية متطلبات أولياء الأمور وتنفيذ رغباتهم؛ لأن إقبالهم المتزايد على المدرسة دليل لا ريب فيه على نجاح كادر الإداريين والمعلمين في قيادة العملية التعليمية في المدرسة.

ثانياً: معرفة نقاط القوة ونقاط الضعف في كل من المدارس الأهلية والمدارس الحكومية من وجهة نظر أولياء الأمور، مما يساعد المسؤولين عن التعليم الحكومي والتعليم الأهلي على تعزيز مواطني القوة ومعالجة مواطن الضعف.

ثالثاً: يسعى الباحث عبر هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم بعض التوصيات إلى صناع القرار في وزارة التربية والتعليم، لإحاطتهم بواقع العملية التعليمية في كل من المدارس الحكومية أو المدارس الأهلية من وجهة نظر أولياء الأمور.

هذا وتتألف الدراسة من قسمين: القسم الأول: يضم البيانات الأولية أو الشخصية لولي الأمر، والقسم الثاني: يضم ثلاثة عوامل ربما تؤثر في اختيار المدرسة من قبل ولي الأمر، وهي:

أولاً: العوامل التعليمية.

ثانياً: عوامل علاقة ولي الأمر بالمدرسة.

ثالثاً: عوامل الرضا والراحة في المدرسة، وتنقسم إلى محورين:

أ- التجهيزات المدرسية.

ب- البيئة التعليمية.

وإيماناً من الباحث بأهمية وجهة نظركم، حيث وقع عليكم الاختيار للمشاركة في الإجابة على أسئلة الاستبانة في هذه الدراسة - وذلك بصفقتك أحد أفراد العينة - لذا أرجو التكرم بتعبئة هذه الاستبانة، علماً بأن رأيكم سيكون له الأثر الكبير في نتائجها، آملاً قراءة الاستبانة بتمعن ووضع علامة (√) أمام الفقرة التي تعبر عن وجهة نظركم، مع العلم أن إجاباتكم لن تستخدم إلا في تحقيق أغراض الدراسة.

والباحث لا يسعه إلا أن يزوجي لكم جزيل الشكر وخالص الدعاء وأصدقته على تخصيص الجهد والوقت الذي بذلتموه في الإجابة على أسئلة الاستبانة، كما أرجو من سعادتكم تزويدي بكافة ما ترونه من ملحوظات تساعد في تحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة. ولكم وافر تحياتي.. والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته.

الباحث

فيصل بن عبدالله السويدي

alsuiadi@gmail.com البريد الإلكتروني:

رقم الجوال: 0547779764

تنبيه: سيعقد الباحث اجتماعاً مع بعض أولياء الأمور لمناقشة نتائج الدراسة فإذا رغبت في المشاركة أرجو وضع علامة صح بين القوسين ( ) وكتابة رقم جوالك أو أي وسيلة اتصال ترغب أن أتواصل معك عبرها.

الجزء الأول : المعلومات الشخصية لولي الأمر.

• المستوى التعليمي لولي الأمر:

- ( ) أقل من الثانوية العامة  
( ) ثانوي  
( ) جامعي  
( ) ماجستير  
( ) دكتوراه  
( ) غير ذلك \_\_\_\_\_

• نوع المدرسة التي يدرس فيها ابنك/أبناؤك حالياً :

- ( ) مدرسة حكومية  
( ) مدرسة أهلية

• الدخل الشهري للأسرة :

- ( ) أقل من 5000 ريال.  
( ) أقل من 5000 ريال إلى أقل 9999  
( ) من 10000 ريال إلى أقل من 14999  
( ) من 15000 يال إلى أقل من 19999  
( ) من 20000 ريال إلى أقل من 24999  
( ) من 25.000 ريال إلى أقل من 29999  
( ) أكثر من 30.000 ريال.

• العمر:

- ( ) من 30 - 35 سنة  
( ) من 36 - 40 سنة  
( ) من 41 - 45 سنة  
( ) من 46 - 50 سنة  
( ) أكثر من 51 سنة

• مثال على كيفية الإجابة:

( في المربع الذي تختاره ✓ضع علامة )

أمامك عدة اختيارات تبدأ من (موافق بشدة) وتتدرج إلى الإجابة الأخيرة (غير موافق بشدة).  
الرجاء الإشارة عند الاختيار المناسب لك.

الرقم	العوامل	موافق بشدة	موافق	لا أعرف	غير موافق بشدة	غير موافق
1	ألحقت ابني بالمدرسة التي يدرس فيها حالياً؛ لأن المعلمين يستخدمون الأساليب الحديثة في التربية.		✓			



## أولاً:العوامل التعليمية

وهذه العوامل تتمثل في كل من (المدرسة، المعلم، علاقة المعلم مع الطلاب، المناهج ) وهذه العوامل لها دور في حفز ولي الأمر لاختيار المدرسة من أجلها، لذا تهدف الدراسة إلى قياس تلك العوامل التعليمية التي تشجع ولي الأمر لاختيار المدرسة.

### ■ ألحقت ابني بالمدرسة التي يدرس فيها حالياً؛

الرقم	العوامل	موافق بشدة	موافق	لا أعرف	غير موافق	غير موافق بشدة
1	لأن المدرسة تقدم للطلاب تعليماً ذا جودة عالية.					
2	لأن المدرسة تهتم بتدريس المواد العلمية بشكل جيد.					
3	لأن المدرسة تهتم بتدريس المواد الأخرى بشكل جيد.					
4	لأن عملية التعليم تتم من قبل المدرسين في المدرسة بشكل إبداعي وخلاق .					
5	لأن المعلمين يُدرّسون بكفاءة عالية.					
6	لأن المعلمين يتابعون تنفيذ الواجبات المدرسية بدقة.					
7	لأن المدرسة تعد الطالب إعداداً جيداً للتعامل مع المشكلات التي قد تواجههم في المستقبل.					
8	لأن المعلمين يستخدمون وسائل متنوعة من الاستراتيجيات التعليمية وطرق التدريس التي تساعد الطلاب على التعلم الجيد.					
9	لأن المعلمين يستخدمون التكنولوجيا المتقدمة بصفتها وسيلة لإيصال المعرفة للطلاب، مثل جهاز الحاسوب، اللوحة الذكية ، جهاز العرض المرئي.					
10	لوجود علاقة وثيقة بين المعلمين والطلاب.					
11	لأن المعلمين يتعاملون مع ابني بعدالة ولا فرق بينه وبين الطلاب الآخرين.					
12	لأن المعلمين ودودن مع الطلاب.					
13	لأن عدد الطلاب في الفصل مناسب وله أثر على ابني من حيث التعلم.					
14	لأن عدد الطلاب في الفصل الدراسي قليل.					
15	لأن المدرسة تهتم بالتربية الدينية التي تنمي في ذواتهم القيم النبيلة.					

					لأن المدرسة تمكن ابني من إتقان اللغة الانجليزية.	16
					لسمعة المدرسة الجيدة في المجتمع.	17
					لكون المدرسة توفر مواد إضافية وأنشطة تعليمية :	18
					مثل اللغة الإنجليزية وعلوم الحاسب الآلي.	18-أ
					تتسم المواد المضافة للمناهج بالجودة.	18-ب
					تتسم تطبيقات المناهج بمجارية قضايا العصر.	18-ج
					قدرة محتوى المناهج على التكيف مع وسائل التكنولوجيا المستخدمة في المدرسة.	18-د
					وجود أنشطة تعليمية ساعدت على بناء ثقة ابني بنفسه والاعتماد على ذاته في مختلف جوانب الحياة.	18-هـ
					توفر أنشطة تعليمية تنمي قدرات الطلاب ومواهبهم مثل (موهبة التفكير وموهبة النقد).	18-و
					وجود أنشطة تعليمية تمكن ابني من التواصل الاجتماعي مع الآخرين .	18-ز
					وجود أنشطة تعليمية تحرر شخصية ابني من نزعات التعصب والانغلاق، وتبني روح التسامح والتعاون .	18-ح

## ثانياً: علاقة ولي الأمر بالمدرسة

العامل الثاني من العوامل المؤثرة لاختيار أولياء الأمور للمدرسة: العلاقة بين ولي الأمر والمدرسة. وهذا العامل يقيس مدى علاقة أولياء الأمور بالمدرسة.

### ■ ألحقت ابني بالمدرسة التي يدرس فيها حالياً؛

الرقم	العوامل	موافق بشدة	موافق	لا أعرف	غير موافق	غير موافق بشدة
19	لأن المدرسة تتيح لأولياء الأمور فرصاً للمشاركة ليكونوا أعضاء متطوعين في بعض لجان المدرسة.					
20	لأن المدرسة توفر فرصاً كافية لمشاركة أولياء الأمور في اتخاذ قرارات تسهم في تطوير المدرسة.					
21	لأن إدارة المدرسة تقدم دعوات لأولياء الأمور إلى زيارة المدرسة بشكل متكرر كحضور الاحتفال ببعض المناسبات .					
22	لوجود تعاون بين أولياء الأمور وإدارة المدرسة فيما يخدم مصلحة الطالب .					
23	لأن المدرسة تستخدم تقنيات حديثة مثل (البريد الإلكتروني ورسائل الجوال) لتزويد الآباء بمعلومات عن أداء أبنائهم في المدرسة.					
24	لأن وجهة نظر أولياء الأمور تؤخذ بعين الاعتبار عند اتخاذ القرارات المهمة .					

### ثالثاً: عوامل الرضا والراحة

عوامل الرضا والراحة هي من العوامل التي تجذب ولي الأمر لاختيار المدرسة. وهذا العامل ينقسم إلى محورين المحور الأول : التجهيزات المدرسية . الثاني: البيئة المدرسية.

#### أ - التجهيزات المدرسية.

#### ■ ألحقت ابني بالمدرسة التي يدرس فيها حالياً؛

الرقم	العوامل	موافق بشدة	موافق	لا أعرف	غير موافق	غير موافق بشدة
25	لأن الفصول الدراسية تتميز بتجهيزات أساسية كافية مثل: (إضاءة جيدة، وطاولات مريحة، وسجاد جيد، وتكييف).					
26	لأن المدرسة يوجد فيها خدمة الحاسب الآلي.					
27	لوجود خدمات إنترنت جيدة.					
28	لتوفر مكتبة مناسبة لمستوى الطلاب.					
29	لتوفر معامل مجهزة بتجهيزات جيدة كمعمل الحاسب الآلي، ومعمل العلوم والرياضيات.					
30	لوجود مسرح جيد.					
31	لتوفر مساح جيدة للطلاب.					
32	لتوفر صالات جيدة للألعاب الداخلية.					
33	لأن المدرسة تضم ملاعب مفتوحة في الهواء الطلق.					
34	لتوفر أنواع مختلفة من الألعاب مثل طاولة تنس، أرجوحة، ترحلق.					
35	لقرب المدرسة من موقع سكني.					

(Educational Environment in School)ب- البيئة التعليمية في المدرسة

■ ألحقت ابني بالمدرسة التي يدرس فيها حالياً؛

الرقم	العوامل	موافق بشدة	موافق	لا أعرف	غير موافق	غير موافق بشدة
36	لأن القوانين والأنظمة تطبق على جميع الطلاب دون استثناء أو تمييز .					
37	لأن المدرسة تستخدم وسائل حازمة لمنع تفشي السلوكيات السيئة مثل: التدخين، المسكرات والمخدرات بين الطلاب.					
38	لتوفر بيئة آمنة ومناسبة للتعليم .					
39	لوجود أنظمة حازمة تحارب الغش في المدرسة.					
40	لحزم المدرسة في القضاء على التسبب والفوضى بين الطلاب.					
41	لتقارب المستوى الاجتماعي لابني مع باقي الطلاب.					
42	الذين وجدوا ترحيباً وتقديراً من لإلحاق ابني مع أقاربه قبل المدرسة .					
43	لضمان سلامته من الاعتداء الجسدي .					
44	لتوفر النقل الآمن للطلبة من البيت إلى المدرسة والعكس .					

### **Appendix 3. Approval letter From School of Education for the Field Trip**

Mr Faisal Alsuiadi

18 Caledonia Park

Hull

HU9 1TE

7 September 2012

19th July 2010

Dear Faisal

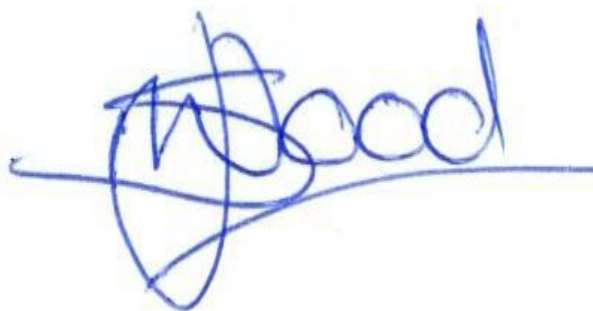
Approved Authorisation for Leave of Absence

I am able to confirm that the Head of the Centre for Educational Studies has given you permission to be absent from the University from 1st October 2012 until 1 February 2013 so you may return to your home country to collect data for your thesis.

It has been asked that you remain in regular contact with your academic supervisor during this period.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely



Samantha Wood

Postgraduate Office

**Appendix 4. Letter from the Ministry of Education to Private and Public School Requesting Consent to Carry out the Field Study English Version**

Branch of **AL-QABAS HOUSE**  
For **Certified Translation**



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
المعتمدة للترجمة



*In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*

**Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**  
**Ministry of Education**  
General Department of Education for Boys  
in Riyadh Region  
Department of Planning and Development

No.:  
Date:  
Incl:

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

<b>Student's Name</b>	<b>Passport No.</b>
ALSUIADI, FAISAL ABDULLAH A	K002592

May Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon you!

In response to the request of the student belonging to the above given particulars, the Department of Planning and Development under the Department of Education in Riyadh Region has no objection to the implementation of his study titled:  
(The Reasons behind the Choice of Public or Private Schools from the Perspective of Parents).

*Allah, the Almighty, is the Grantor of Success!*

Department of Planning and Development

**Seal**

**Department of Planning and Development**  
**General Department of Education in Riyadh Region**  
**Ministry of Education-K.S.A**

**Translation done by: Branch of Al-Qabas House for Certified Translation.**

**On: 14/05/1436A.H., 05/03/2015**

We certify that this is a fair and accurate translation of the attached text

**certified true translation from the original**

**AL-Qabas Translation House assumes no responsibility for the contents of the document**

دار القباس للترجمة مسؤولة عن صحة الترجمة فقط



**Appendix 5. Letter from the Ministry of Education to Private and Public School Requesting Consent to Carry out the Field Study Arabic Version**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

  
وزارة التربية والتعليم  
Ministry of Education

المملكة العربية السعودية  
وزارة التربية والتعليم  
الإدارة العامة للتربية والتعليم بمنطقة الرياض  
إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

الرقم : \_\_\_\_\_  
التاريخ : \_\_\_\_\_  
المشروعات : \_\_\_\_\_

إلى من يهمه الأمر

رقم الجواز	اسم الدارس
K002592	فيصل بن عبدالله علي السويدي

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته وبعد :

تلبية لطلب الدارس الموضحة بياناته أعلاه ؛ فإنه لا مانع لدى إدارة التخطيط والتطوير بإدارة التربية والتعليم بمنطقة الرياض من تطبيق دراسته والتي هي بعنوان :

(الأسباب الكامنة وراء اختيار المدارس العامة أو الأهلية من وجهة نظر أولياء الأمور)

والله ولي التوفيق

إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

