

ABSTRACT

The concept of equality of educational opportunity as it relates to parental choice of primary schools in the ward of Arima.

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This study attempted to examine the way in which factors relating to the four facets of the concept 'equality of educational opportunity', namely educational provision, educational access, educational utilization and educational output influence parental choice of primary schools in the ward of Arima.

Method triangulation or a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies informed the use of a structured, close-ended questionnaire which was administered to 225 parents of children attending the 14 primary schools in Arima, and a semi-structured open ended interview to six of these surveyed parents.

Research questions and a set of hypotheses were formulated to investigate parental choice as it relates to and was influenced by factors related to the concept, equality of educational opportunity. Some of the data produced by the survey questionnaire formed the basis of the construction of the interview schedule which data were then used to confirm or refute the quantitative findings. As a consequence, both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data were done.

The quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics using marginals or percentages, correlational analysis using Kendall's tau B correlation coefficients and

Pearson's chi square analysis. These latter measures were applied to a limited number of research questions.

The qualitative analysis consisted of transcription of interviews into verbatim reports and their subsequent content analysis.

The findings derived from method triangulation indicate that six factors are considered important by parents in selecting schools. The first of which being the location of the school, followed by the general atmosphere of the school and the classroom skills of the teachers. These were followed by the social background of the other children attending the school, the physical layout of the school and finally the qualifications of the teachers. Generally, parents gave priority to non-instructional issues over instructional issues, this is not to say that the latter was not emphasized.

Further quantitative analysis using the statistical package for the social scientist (SPSS) correlated factors relating to equality of educational opportunity and other demographic factors. These revealed eleven statistically significant coefficients, few of which, when assessed through Pearson's chi-square analysis, indicated statistically significant relationships in parental choice based on the three (3) demographic factors used, these being religion, ethnicity/race and income levels of parents, and the other variables identified in the study.

The qualitative data collected were also restricted to those research questions which were analyzed using descriptive statistics and generally concurred with the quantitative findings.

Further, the qualitative data suggested that parents developed a perception of the quality of the schools, based mainly on the educational output of these schools, that is, results at common entrance examinations, and they generally felt that broader curriculum purposes should be served, beyond that of pure academic rationalism.

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