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Institutional attributes and parents' contentment with the quality of teaching, care, and safety of pupils in public primary schools

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ABSTRACT

Parents' contentment with their child's education is the subject of a modest but increasing corpus of research. However, little has been done to identify specific school services that attract parents' attention. This study assessed institutional variables and how they influence parental satisfaction with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety. A random sample of parents ($n = 1,413$) participated in the study. Data were collected using questionnaires, admission registers and staff disposition lists. The instruments passed through validity and reliability processes. Cronbach alpha estimates ranging from .81 to .84 provided evidence of internal consistency. Independent t-test and one-way ANOVA were used for analysis after data collection. Significant mean differences were found in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils and pupils' safety based on schools' security, size, proximity and environmental attributes. Parents were more content with schools that provided safety, low teacher-pupil ratio, home proximity, and a learning-friendly environment. This study proved that school attributes are essential in determining parents' contentment with public primary school services. Parents become dissatisfied when their children are not receiving good services and may react by withdrawing them to other schools in search of greener pastures. This implies that parents' continued discontent with services will lead to a decline in future enrolment figures in public primary schools unless something is done promptly. Therefore, the government should provide school facilities for effective teaching and learning to improve public perception and contentment.

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Introduction

This study examines the satisfaction of parents with selected services offered in public primary schools, focusing on the impact of various institutional attributes such as school security, size, proximity, and appearance. The research objectives include analysing variations in contentment associated with school security, teacher-pupil ratio, proximity, and learning environments. The study was prompted by the declining enrolments in public schools, with an increasingly high rates of patronage among parents for private primary schools, even when the Federal Government of Nigeria has made education at this level free and compulsory in public schools. Most parents heap praises on the activities going on in private over public schools (Erickson, 2020; Rhinesmith, 2020). In Nigeria, most parents prefer private schools over public ones because they perceive the former as having good facilities and teachers, achieving

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better results, providing a supportive environment, and offering more remarkable fee concessions and scholarships than the latter (Nayab et al., 2015; Onuka & Arowojolu, 2008).

Consequently, it has become common to see many parents withdraw their children or wards from public to private primary schools to take advantage of these services. Parents withdrawal of their wards from public to private schools has also been reported in different studies and across locations such as: the United States of America (Hess-Homeier, 2018), Pakistan (Ali et al., 2022), Kenya (Maangi, 2014) and Sierra Leone (Dixon & Humble, 2017). In the context of this study (Nigeria), the researchers have observed that the discontentment with public primary schools seems to be very high, as even many parents with average or low socioeconomic statuses now tend to send their children to private schools at the expense of their own/family's well-being. For instance, the systematic review of Rhinesmith (2017) reported that most low-income parents sacrifice a lot to afford private schools and are happier with their children's education, according to all the empirical research reviewed. Consequently, declines in public primary school enrolments in favour of private schools have been reported (Ekaette et al., 2019, 2020). This development is worrisome, especially for Nigeria, where the government has implemented the Universal Basic Education (UBE) framework to expand access to education so that poor parents can have opportunities to give their children a sound education footing (Arop et al., 2018; Owan, 2018).

Parents' contentment with their child's education is the subject of a modest but increasing corpus of research. Tuck (1995) and Griffith (1997) started this early work during the school choice period in the United States. Parent satisfaction was studied further in New York City and Chicago, concentrating more on the school atmosphere (Cooper & Letts, 2002). Progressively, other studies looked at parent satisfaction in Norway (Skallerud, 2011), the United Arab Emirates (Badri & Mohaidat, 2014) and other parts of the world (e.g. Altenhofen et al., 2016; DeAngelis, 2018; Makris, 2018). Previous studies have indicated that parental contentment pervades the academic and non-academic services offered in schools (Hausman & Goldring, 2000; Friedman et al., 2007), including the demographic and environmental attributes of the school (Kaminju, 2017; Libent-Mabagala & Begi, 2020). A model developed by Friedman et al. (2006) highlighted some school-based factors associated with how parents evaluate their children's school choices. These include teachers' effectiveness, quality of the curriculum, communication with parents, location/transportation, school budget, student achievement, adequate nutrition and health care (Owan et al., 2022); teaching and learning situation in school (Lau et al., 2021); the learning load attractiveness; pupils' relationship with teachers; child satisfaction with school; the quality of physical infrastructure and educational resources, as well as the safety and security situation (Silva, 2006).

Furthermore, other factors that influence school enrolment decisions are socio-economic status of parents, the proximity and school setting, the calibre of instructors, the school atmosphere, and the syllabus (Yaacoba et al., 2015) ethnicity (Burgess et al., 2019; Mousumi & Kusakabe, 2019; Ting & Lee, 2019). Additionally, research shows that parents pick schools based mostly on their social networks of family members and colleagues (Altenhofen et al., 2016; Bader et al., 2019; Fong, 2019; Lareau et al., 2021). Although parental contentment with their children's school has been substantially proven to emanate from the characteristics of parents, schools, pupils, economy and environment (Erickson, 2017), little has been done to identify specific services offered in schools that attract parents' attention.

The literature on parents' satisfaction and school choice in Nigeria, has also dwelt on secondary/high schools (e.g. Arop & Owan, 2018; Erickson, 2020; Rhinesmith, 2020; Saeedi et al., 2019; Ukpor et al., 2012), with less attention paid to primary schools. This study bridges these gaps by estimating the extent to which four institutional attributes – school security, size, proximity, and appearance – influence parental satisfaction with public primary school services. With contextual peculiarities in mind, this research offers insights into both the Nigerian landscape and a broader international readership, fostering a better understanding of the complexities shaping parental choices and educational outcomes. The selection of the attributes – school security, size, proximity, and appearance – for the study is justified by their direct relevance to parents' concerns when choosing a school for their children. They hold a substantial impact on parents' decision-making processes, are quantifiable for data collection, and are applicable across various school types and settings. Thus, this study sought to specifically provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the differences in parents' contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety services offered in public primary schools with safe and unsafe school security?
2. What are the disparities in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety services offered in public primary schools with a high, moderate and low teacher pupils' ratio (TPR)?
3. How much variation exists in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety services offered in public primary schools based on their proximity to learners?
4. What are the differences in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety services offered in public primary schools with a learning-friendly and learning-unfriendly environment?

Literature review

Studies on school security

School security and safety are very essential elements in the evaluation of the school environment. Safety and security are two distinct, yet interchangeable concepts (Dantani, 2019; Mubita, 2021). In conceptualizing 'safety', Dantani (2019) referred to it as all the measures developed and put in place in the school to protect staff and students from being endangered or sustaining unnecessary injuries as they interact with school facilities for the preservation of life and health. On the other hand, the author defined school security as the various measures and mechanisms aimed at preventing and protecting the school population and facilities from harmful and dangerous external influences. Hence, school safety refers to the various measures that protect the school environment from internal threats such as fire outbreak, flooding, spread of diseases among other safety hazards which may occur as a result of carelessness, accident or negligence. Whereas security borders on protecting the school from forces outside the school and can sometimes be inclusive of internal challenges. According to Mubita (2021), school security issues could include shootings, bomb threats, kidnappings, theft, vandalism, hostage taking, raping and arson among others. Hence, some physical security measures adopted by schools include the use of fence, locks and keys, safe and strong rooms, burglar proof, electronic equipment, etc. (Alimba, 2018).

Parents may find comfort when they know their children are safe while at school (Babayanzad Ahari et al., 2020). If schools have strong security measures like controlled entrances and watchful staff, parents feel more at ease about sending their kids there (Olhausen-Kaylor, 2019). As stated in a study by Badri and Mohaidat (2014), parents are focused on the safety of the environment offered by an institution, regardless of its type, when considering enrolling their children. A secure setting instils parents with the assurance that their kids are protected within the school premises, allowing them to fully engage in their studies and overall school experience (Cheong et al., 2016). Various studies have been conducted on the prevalence of security challenges in educational institutions as well as its intersection with students performance, staff productivity and overall organizational excellence. Obiekwe and Uwaezuoke (2023) conducted survey research on security measures adopted by principals in the management of safety in secondary schools in Anambra state. The study revealed among others that principals adopted physical security measures such as: installation of perimeter fence round the school, installation of burglary bars on windows in the school blocks, installation of metal doors in offices and classrooms, provision of identity cards for staff and students for easy identification, installation of security lights in and around the school premises to provide vision for guards, installation of security gate to deter unauthorized access into the school premises. Likewise, Gbesoevi et al. (2022) reported that there was a positive and significant relationship between school security planning and effective management of public secondary schools. Their study was conducted on safety and security planning on effective management of public secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Conversely, a study by Obiamaka and Enyi (2017) explored various ways of improving security situations in the North Central Zone public secondary schools. The study concluded among others that some security devices for the improvement of security situations as well as the emergency response plans for managing security in public secondary schools were unavailable in most schools. The respondents used in the study however agreed that it was needful to adopt appropriate security measures. Anho (2022)

conducted a study on school workplace safety and security challenges and lecturers job performance in Delta State colleges of education, Nigeria. Evidence from the study revealed that there was a significant relationship between safety and security challenges and lecturers' job performance. From the foregoing, it is admissible the various studies have been conducted on school security in the context of school management and job performance. However, seemingly little have been done in the the context of parents perception with regards to school security. Hence, this study sought to bridge such gap.

Studies on school size

Parents may have different feelings about the size of schools. Smaller schools may create a close, familiar atmosphere where teachers know every student. On the flip side, bigger schools may offer more activities and resources. How parents feel about the school size can affect their overall satisfaction (Hamlin & Cheng, 2020; Oberfield, 2020). In a study, Alsuiadi (2015) found four determinants of parental school choice: class size, safety, school facilities, and physical education. Class size was predictive, but parents who saw the school as a haven for their children were more inclined to pick a public school. Parents who chose a private school based on school facilities were more inclined to do so (Owan et al., 2023). Other studies have shown that parents choose private schools for their children due to adequate security measures, excellent and committed instructors' work, contemporary technology and superior administrative policies (Akhter, 2017; Billingham & Hunt, 2016). Quality of learning is influenced by the level at which teachers can address the learning needs of all pupils in the class. Thus, a large school size tends to create a high teacher-pupil ratio, which can, in turn, promote ineffective teaching. Ineffective teaching due to large class sizes could affect the school's image in promoting effective learning in parents' eyes. Alsuiadi (2016) showed that parents' school preferences were strongly impacted by factors such as student enrollment, teaching quality, and the quality of the student-teacher connection. Equally, Maangi (2014) found that the teacher pupils' ratio (TPR) is crucial in determining a school's popularity with parents. According to the report, free education was the most critical factor in parents' decision to send their children to a public primary school. As a result, there has been a rise in the demand for private schools, even though free primary education has extended access to education. Waita et al. (2016) report stated that although developing nations have increased literacy to impress the international community, the quality of education offered has been a critical problem due to crowded classrooms and high enrollment. Ukpor et al. (2012) revealed that private secondary schools in the region are popular with parents due to pride of ownership, good supervision of school activities by proprietors, substantial student accomplishment, and low student-teacher ratio.

Studies on school proximity

The geographical location of schools hold a significant importance for parents when determining which school to choose for their children's education (Cheong et al., 2016). In terms of proximity, many parents consider where the school of their children are located before making enrolment decisions (Ekaette et al., 2020). If it is near home, parents can easily drop off and pick up their kids. Also, a nearby school can make parents feel like they are part of a local community (Nikitas et al., 2019), which could add to their satisfaction. Several studies have shown a favourable linear link between school location and pupils' academic achievement (Ebinum et al., 2017; Wangombe, 2018). According to these studies, the most crucial factor influencing children's school enrolment decisions is the distance from home to the closest school. Nevertheless, Ibrahim et al. (2014) revealed that factors such as academic performance, distance, extracurricular activities, location, school environment and school facilities affect parents' contentment and school choice. Another scholar documented that far distances to school impair students' capacity to concentrate on academics owing to lengthy walks or lateness (Mhiliwa, 2015). Similarly, Moyo (2013) found that students who walked long distances to and from school were likelier to be late for class and departure. For pupils who have to go far to school, exhaustion and hunger might make them asleep throughout the teaching process, while students from wealthy homes can arrive at school early without losing much energy. However, Burgess et al. (2019) showed that school preferences did not differ considerably by social background, unlike previous work that depended on fewer and less representative samples of students and parents.

Studies on school environment

The school environment can impede effective learning when it is unsafe and motivating for teachers and students. Yildirim et al. (2011) noted that the learning environment's atmosphere directly influenced perception, pleasure, desire, and focus. Factors such as attention to circulation and sightlines, proximity, roominess/crowdedness and the presence of paintings and plants were observed to affect whether student participants perceived a space positively or negatively. Aina and Akoko (2015) submitted that the modern school environment emphasises establishing a favourable teaching and learning environment, and the elementary schools' terrible circumstances have become a cause for concern. Most parents are often influenced by the availability, relevance and adequacy of facilities such as permanent and good buildings, well-stocked libraries and sufficient instructional materials, and suitable furniture, among others, that contribute to learners' achievement when deciding the choice of schools for children (Muchiri & Kalai, 2018). They were more satisfied with the teachers, teaching methodologies, and school environment, but did not have high expectations from government schools. This implies that parents were unsatisfied with the public schools' physical environment.

Parents also took into consideration the facilities and equipment provided by schools when making decisions about their children's education (Cheong et al., 2016; Owan et al., 2023). Clean, modern facilities and a welcoming atmosphere indicates that the school cares about its students. When kids learn in a pleasant environment, parents tend to be more content with their choice. However, this position needs to be empirically investigated to be proven valid or otherwise in Nigeria. In Nigeria, private schools often seem more attractive. To make public schools better, understanding what parents want is important. If public schools focus on things like safety and a good learning environment, more parents might choose them for their children's education.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on the expectancy-disconfirmation theory of customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1977). Generally, customer satisfaction is defined as a consumer's feeling of fulfilment when comparing their original expectations with the quality of the service or product they received. Post-purchase customer satisfaction is thought to be mediated by positive or negative disconfirmation, which considers consumers' expectations and how well they perceive the quality of the services they get. The theory is relevant to this study because it addresses how the contentment with service(s) provided by schools can influence parents' contentment with the school. As a result, parents who have had good experiences with their children's primary education will be pleased (positive disconfirmation). However, when parents have negative experiences with the school, they will be dissatisfied (negative disconfirmation). This implies that parents' experience with the quality of education and different aspects of school life determine their level of contentment with school, which may, in turn, influence their choice of school regarding their wards' enrolment.

Methods

Design

The descriptive survey research design was used for this investigation. A survey study seeks to gather consistent data on a group of people (sample) with comparable characteristics (Banerjee, 2018). This approach allows using written or oral data-collecting instruments (such as interviews, questionnaires, telephone interviews, emails, and the Internet) to elicit participants' answers on facts, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019). This design was chosen because this research explored the nature of the statistical association between school attributes and parents' contentment with public primary school services in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State within this study.

Context

This study's context is the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. Calabar Education Zone is in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. According to the National Population

Commission, it comprises a population of 1,590,200 as of the 2021 population projection, with a total land coverage of 9,980 km^2 across seven Local Government Areas (LGAs). The people are predominantly farmers and fishermen, with few inhabitants in White-collar jobs. The Zone is dominated by Christians, with sophisticated churches spread around the place (Owan & Agunwa, 2019). The people occupying the Zone have unique cultural practices that seem identical in all the tribes (Asuquo & Ekpoh, 2018). This context was chosen specifically because there is a long history of public schools' patronage in the area (Chuktu, 2021); however, the trend has significantly shifted with the rise in the number of private schools in the area (Bassey & Amanso, 2017). The new development stirred up the desire among parents to send their children to private over public schools, regardless of their financial status.

Participants

The population of this study comprised 14,130 parents who have children or wards in primary three (III) across the 285 public primary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State. Parents with two or more children in primary three in either the same school or different schools were represented by one child who took the instrument home for completion. The cluster random sampling technique was adopted to select the sample. Using this approach, we divided the entire Calabar Education Zone into seven clusters based on the number of Local Government Areas in the Zone ($N = 7$).

Proportionate sampling was used to select 10% of primary three pupils from the public primary schools in each cluster to take the instruments to their parents for completion. This sampling procedure allowed the researchers to give the entire population an equal participation opportunity. Furthermore, the procedure allowed schools to be represented in the same proportion as the number of students in primary three. The sample of this study comprised 1,413 parents of primary three pupils representing 10% of the entire population (see Table 1).

Instrumentation

Four instruments were used for data collection, namely School Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ), Parental Contentment Questionnaire (PCQ), Admission Register (AR) and Staff Disposition List (SDL), were used for data collection. The researchers designed the two questionnaires due to a lack of previously validated and localised instruments. Both instruments were structured into two sections. Section A of SAQ was designed to obtain pupils' demographic data, such as gender and information about their school proximity. Section B of SAQ was designed with eight items on a four-point Likert-type scale measuring school physical security and environment. Each of these two variables was measured using four items. School security contained statements such as *'some pupils have been kidnapped in my school before'*. A sample item for school environment is *'teachers in my school create a conducive environment for pupils to learn well'*.

The second questionnaire, PCQ, was administered to parents through their children/wards. The questionnaire was administered for pupils to take home to their parents for completion. Section A of the PCQ was designed to obtain demographic data of parents such as gender, age and occupation. Section

Table 1. Population and sample distribution of parents with pupils in primary three.

S/N	LGA.	N of primary schools	Population	Sample (10%)
1	Akamkpa	65	3,100	310
2	Akpabuyo	27	600	60
3	Bakassi	20	650	65
4	Biase	61	3,500	350
5	Calabar South	22	1,500	150
6	Calabar Mun.	25	1,580	158
7	Odulpani	65	3,200	320
	Total	285	14,130	1,413

Source: Cross River State Universal Education Board (2021).

B of PCQ was designed with 12 items on a four-point Likert scale to measure parents' contentment with three primary school services: quality of teaching, care for pupils and physical safety.

A sample item for quality of teaching is *'the attitude of my child at home makes me believe that the teachers in his/her school are doing a great job'*. Care for pupils had statements like, *'I am happy because the kind of treatment offered to my ward in school is similar to the one provided at home'*. A sample item for pupils' safety is *'I am very comfortable with the school my ward is attending because pupils are not allowed to roam about anyhow'*. Generally, the items on SAQ and PSPSAQ had four response options ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire items were constructed using ideas from literature related to the variables. The respondents were required to respond objectively based on their degree of agreement or disagreement with the attributes and phenomenon measured. During school visits, the researchers obtained the third and fourth instruments (Admission Register and Staff Disposition List). The information in these two instruments enabled us to compute the Teacher-Pupil ratio of each school for easy classification. The teacher-Pupil ratio was computed using the formula:

$$\text{TPR} = \frac{\text{Total number of teachers in the school}}{\text{Total number of pupils in the school}}$$

The criterion for classification followed the recommended class size ratio of 1:35 (one teacher to 35 pupils), which is mathematically represented as $1/35 = 0.03$. The value of 0.03 served as the average teacher-pupil ratio in each school. Once the number of teachers available in a school was divided by the number of pupils in the same school, values above 0.03 were considered a high teacher-pupil ratio; values equal to it were considered average; those below it was considered a low teacher-pupil ratio. Based on this classification, schools' teacher-pupil ratio was categorised as high, moderate, or low.

Validity and reliability

A draft copy of the instrument was submitted to two Educational Planning and two psychometric experts to vet the items for face and content validity. Some items observed as ambiguous or irrelevant were dropped, with new items introduced to replace them. The Cronbach alpha reliability method was used to ascertain the instruments' reliability. The instrument was administered once to 60 parents in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State who were part of the population but not the sample. After the instrument was administered and retrieved from the respondents, they were coded. The data were subjected to a reliability analysis measure of internal consistency using the Cronbach alpha approach. The reliability coefficient estimates realised from the result were within the range of .81 to .84 (see Table 2).

Ethical consideration

Written informed consent for pupils was obtained from their parents, who filled out the form on their children's behalf. Ethical clearance did not apply to this study as per national regulations. The reason is that this research posed no physical or psychological risk to participation (See Federal Ministry of Health, 2007, pp. 13–14). We assured respondents of confidentiality in the analysis of data. All respondents consented that their responses be used for publication if confidentiality is maintained.

Procedure for data collection and analysis

Permission was obtained from the headteachers of the selected public primary schools. Before the administration, all the copies of the instruments (SAQ and PCQ) were assigned serial numbers beginning

Table 2. Cronbach Alpha reliability estimates for all sub-scales in the instrument used ($n = 60$).

SN	Variable	No of items	*M*	*SD*	α
1	School security	4	10.85	3.41	.81
2	School environment	4	9.68	3.74	.84
3	Quality of teaching	4	10.22	3.67	.82
4	Care for pupils	4	9.92	3.69	.81
5	Safety of the pupils	4	9.95	3.52	.82

from 1 to 1,413. This was done to ease sorting, classification, and coding and to avoid the problem of misallocation. The study's objectives were carefully explained to the school pupils, who were encouraged to respond sincerely to the instruments' items without bias. Copies of the School Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ) were physically administered to primary three pupils, while the Parents' Contentment Questionnaire (PCQ) was sent (in paper forms) to parents through their pupils. Parents completed the questionnaires and returned them to the class teachers of their wards through their pupils. The subjects (Pupils and parents) were given three (3) days to complete the questionnaire independently. Completed copies of the questionnaires were retrieved and used for data analysis. A preliminary data assessment revealed that all the administered copies were successfully recovered, and there was no incomplete response or missing data. Independent t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to test all the hypotheses formulated for the study (Where applicable). All statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS version 26 program.

Results

School security and parents' contentment with selected services

This section was aimed at examining differences in parents' contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety services offered in public primary schools with safe and unsafe school security. An independent t-test statistical technique was performed with the results presented in Table 3.

Table 3 indicates that 441 parents rated the school security situation as safe, while 972 parents viewed the security situation in their children's school as unsafe. Table 3 shows that parents who viewed the school security measures of their children's schools as safe were more contented with the quality of teaching, care for pupils and safety of pupils than those with unsafe views. Significant mean differences were obtained for parental contentment with the quality of teaching and care for pupils in schools viewed as safe and unsafe. However, there is no significant mean difference in parental contentment with the safety of pupils in schools rated as safe and unsafe.

Teacher-pupils' ratio and parents' contentment with selected services

The disparities in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety services offered in public primary schools with a high, moderate and low teacher pupils ratio (TPR) was compared using a one-way ANOVA. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Independent t-test results showing the difference in parents' contentment with services based on the nature of school security.

Services	School security	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*MD*	*t*	*p*
Quality of teaching	Safe	441	11.01	2.65	4.51	34.71‡	.000
	Unsafe	972	6.51	2.06			
Care for pupils	Safe	441	8.35	3.57	1.14	6.10‡	.000
	Unsafe	972	7.21	3.12			
Safety of pupils	Safe	441	9.16	3.73	0.27	1.24	.216
	Unsafe	972	8.89	3.77			

‡Significant at the .001 level; df = 1,411; Crit. $t = 1.960$. *N* = Number of observations; *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard deviation; *MD* = Mean difference.

Table 4. One-way ANOVA results showing TPR differences in parents' contentment with services offered in public primary schools.

Services	Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F-ratio*	*p*
Quality of teaching	Between Groups	2,701.55	2	1,350.78	178.32‡	.000
	Within Groups	10,680.74	1,410	7.58		
	Total	13,382.29	1,412			
Care for pupils	Between Groups	907.62	2	453.81	44.04‡	.000
	Within Groups	14,528.09	1,410	10.30		
	Total	15,435.71	1,412			
Safety of pupils	Between Groups	818.51	2	409.25	30.18‡	.000
	Within Groups	19,118.77	1,410	13.56		
	Total	19,937.28	1,412			

‡Significant at $p < .001$. *SS* = Sum of squares; *df* = Degrees of freedom; *MS* = Mean square.

The descriptive results of the analysis showed that 342, 451, and 620 respondents rated their children/wards' primary schools as having low, moderate, or high TPR, respectively. It was discovered that the mean of parental contentment with the quality of teaching was higher for schools with low TPR ($M = 10.24$, $SD = 3.20$) than for those with moderate ($M = 7.75$, $SD = 2.32$) and high ($M = 6.75$, $SD = 2.77$) TPRs respectively. Regarding care for pupils, it was also shown that the mean of parental contentment was higher in schools with low TPR ($M = 8.75$, $SD = 3.74$) than those with moderate ($M = 7.77$, $SD = 2.96$) and high ($M = 6.76$, $SD = 3.07$) TPRs respectively. The results further indicated that the mean of parental contentment with pupils' safety is higher in primary schools with a low TPR ($M = 10.06$, $SD = 3.79$) than in those with moderate ($M = 9.240$, $SD = 3.34$) and high ($M = 8.19$, $SD = 3.86$) TPRs respectively. Table 4 disclosed a significant difference between schools with high, moderate or low TPRs in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety of pupils, respectively. This result is because all the respective p-values are below the .05 alpha level.

Since the one-way ANOVA is an omnibus test, we cannot tell the group of schools that significantly differed from the other. The Tukey Honest Significant Difference (Tukey HSD) Post Hoc Test of multiple pairwise comparisons was performed to address this weakness. This is a single-step pairwise multiple comparison procedure used to find which means are significantly different from others.

The result of the Tukey HSD test disclosed for parental contentment that mean differences between low versus moderate TPRs ($MD = 2.48$, SE = 0.20, $p < .001$), low versus high TPRs ($MD = 3.49$, SE = 0.19, $p < .001$), moderate versus high TPRs ($MD = 1.01$, SE = 0.17, $p < .001$) are all statistically significant. For parental contentment with care for pupils, the observed mean difference between low versus moderate TPRs ($MD = 0.98$, $SE = 0.23$, $p < .001$); low versus high TPRs ($MD = 2.00$, $SE = 0.22$, $p < .001$); between moderate and high TPRs ($MD = 1.02$, $SE = 0.20$, $p < .001$) are all statistically significant. For parental contentment with pupils' safety, the observed mean differences between low versus moderate TPRs ($MD = 0.82$, $SE = 0.26$, $p < .01$), low versus high TPRs ($MD = 1.87$, $SE = 0.25$, $p < .001$); moderate versus high TPRs ($MD = 1.05$, $SE = 0.23$) are all statistically significant.

School proximity and parents' contentment with selected services

The variation in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety services offered in public primary schools was examined based on the proximity of schools to learners. School proximity in this study was categorised into four levels, including 1–3 km, 4–6 km, 7–9 km, 10 km and above (hereafter 10 km+). A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the mean of parental contentment with the three services across the four categories of school proximity. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 5.

The descriptive statistics results indicated that 337, 427, 508, and 141 parents indicated the distance from their homes to their children/ward school is 1–3 km, 4–6 km, 7–9 km, and 10 km + respectively. The results indicate further that parental contentment with the quality of teaching was higher for schools with a proximity of 1–3 km ($M = 10.18$, $SD = 3.22$) to pupils' homes, followed by schools with proximity of 4–6 km ($M = 7.81$, $SD = 2.395$), 10 km+ ($M = 7.08$, $SD = 2.73$), and 7–9 km ($M = 6.73$, $SD = 2.77$), respectively. In terms of care for pupils, our analysis indicated that parents were more contented with schools of 1–3 km proximity from their homes ($M = 8.78$, SD = 3.770) than those with proximities of 4–6 km ($M = 7.73$, $SD = 2.94$), 10 km+ ($M = 7.28$, $SD = 3.40$) and 7–9 km ($M = 6.70$, $SD = 2.96$) respectively. Parents'

Table 5. One-way ANOVA results of the variation in parents' contentment with public primary schools' services based on proximity.

Services	Source of variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F-ratio*	*p*
Quality of teaching	Between Groups	2,539.96	3	846.65	110.03‡	.000
	Within Groups	10,842.34	1,409	7.70		
	Total	13,382.29	1,412			
Care for pupils	Between Groups	903.49	3	301.16	29.20‡	.000
	Within Groups	14,532.22	1,409	10.31		
	Total	15,435.71	1,412			
Safety of pupils	Between Groups	805.72	3	268.57	19.78‡	.000
	Within Groups	19,131.56	1,409	13.58		
	Total	19,937.28	1,412			

‡Significant at $p < .001$. *SS* = Sum of squares; *df* = Degrees of freedom; *MS* = Mean square.

Table 6. Independent t-test results showing the mean difference in parents' contentment with public primary schools' services based on the school's physical environment.

Services	School environment	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*MD*	*t*	*p*
Quality of teaching	Learning-friendly	762	9.05	3.29	2.47	16.40‡	.000
	Learning-unfriendly	651	6.58	2.16			
Care for pupils	Learning-friendly	762	7.88	3.47	0.69	3.91‡	.000
	Learning-unfriendly	651	7.19	3.06			
Safety of pupils	Learning-friendly	762	8.97	3.70	1.28	7.10‡	.000
	Learning-unfriendly	651	7.69	3.83			

‡Significant at $p < .001$ level; $df = 1{,}411$; *Critical* $t = 1.960$. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard deviation; *MD* = Mean difference.

contentment with pupils' safety was higher for schools with a proximity of 1–3 km ($M = 10.13$, $SD = 3.77$) to pupils' homes; followed by schools with a proximity of 4–6 km ($M = 9.134$, $SD = 3.30$), 10 km and above ($M = 8.70$, $SD = 3.97$), and 7–9 km ($M = 8.16$, $SD = 3.85$) respectively.

The ANOVA results in Table 5 revealed a significant variation in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety with school proximity. This result is because all the p-values are less than the .05 alpha level at 3 and 1,409 degrees of freedom. However, the Tukey HSD test was performed to compare the means of parental contentment with the three public primary school services based on the various school proximities. The Tukey HSD results disclosed for parents' contentment with the quality of teaching that a significant difference exists in the observed mean difference between school proximities of 1–3 km versus 4–6 km ($MD = 2.36$, $SE = 0.20$, $p < .001$), 1–3 km versus 7–9 km ($MD = 3.45$, $SE = 0.19$, $p < .001$), 1–3 km versus 10 km+ ($MD = 3.10$, $SE = 0.28$, $p < .001$), 4–6 km versus 7–9 km ($MD = 1.08$, $SE = 0.18$, $p < .001$), and 4–6 km versus 10 km+ ($MD = 0.73$, $SE = 0.27$, $p < .05$) are all significant at the .05 level. However, the mean difference between 7–9 km versus 10 km+ ($MD = 0.35$, $SE = 0.26$, $p > .05$) is insignificant.

For parents' contentment with the care for pupils, the mean difference between school proximities of 1–3 km versus 4–6 km ($MD = 1.05$, $SE = 0.23$, $p < .001$), 1–3 km versus 7–9 km ($MD = 2.08$, $SE = 0.23$, $p < .001$), 1–3 km versus 10 km+ ($MD = 1.50$, $SE = 0.32$, $p < .32$), and 4–6 km versus 7–9 km ($MD = 1.03$, $SE = 0.21$, $p < .001$) are significant. However, the mean difference in parental contentment for proximities between 4–6 km versus 10 km+ ($MD = 0.45$, $SE = 0.31$, $p > .05$) and between 7–9 km versus 10 km+ ($MD = 0.80$, $SE = 0.31$, $p > .05$) are not significant. For parents' contentment with pupils' safety, the mean difference between school proximities of 1–3 km versus 4–6 km ($MD = 0.10$, $SE = 0.27$, $p < .01$), 1–3 km versus 7–9 km ($MD = 1.97$, $SE = 0.26$, $p < .05$), 1–3 km versus 10 km+ ($MD = 1.43$, $SE = 0.37$, $p < .01$), and between 4–6 km versus 7–9 km ($MD = 0.98$, $SE = 0.37$, $p < .001$) are statistically significant. However, the mean difference in parents' satisfaction with pupils' safety for proximities between 4–6 km versus 10 km+ ($MD = 0.44$, $SE = 0.36$, $p > .05$) and between 7–9 km versus 10 km+ ($MD = 0.53$, $SE = 0.35$, $p > .05$) are not significant.

School environment and parents' contentment with selected services

Differences in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety services offered in public primary schools with a learning-friendly and learning-unfriendly environment were examined. An independent t-test analysis was performed to compare the mean in parents' contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils and safety services between schools with a learning-friendly and those with a learning-unfriendly environment. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 6.

Table 6 shows that of the 1,413 respondents, 762 parents perceived their children's schools' physical environment as learning-friendly, whereas 651 viewed them as learning-unfriendly. Parents who viewed their children or ward schools' physical environment as learning-friendly were significantly more contented with the quality of teaching, care for pupils and pupils' safety than those who viewed them as learning-unfriendly.

Discussion

This study found significant differences in parental contentment with quality teaching and care for pupils in schools with safe and unsafe security. However, no significant difference was recorded in parental contentment with the safety of pupils between schools with safe and unsafe security measures. This finding implies that many parents consider the quality of teaching and care for pupils to be better

in schools that are considered safe than those that are unsafe. This may form a basis for parents to enrol their children into schools with a higher level of safety. One surprise is the non-significant difference in parents' contentment with pupils' safety in both schools perceived as safe and unsafe. This result implies that regardless of whether parents think a school is safe or unsafe, they are likely to hold a similar view about the safety of pupils in all public primary schools. However, since many parents view the school security situation in their wards' schools as unsafe, those who consider their children's schools safe do not trust such schools to offer safety to their pupils besides quality teaching and care for them. This result explains that pupils' safety often transcends school efforts alone. This may be why even schools with a high level of security still witness kidnapping issues, which often occur outside the school premises. From when a child leaves home to the point where he gets to school, a series of activities can occur beyond the ability of a school security network.

The first result supports the finding of other scholars that the quality of educational and co-curricular offerings by a school is the driving force behind parental happiness (Saeedi et al., 2019; Tikkanen, 2019). The result also strengthens the finding of earlier studies (e.g. Akhter 2017; Billingham & Hunt, 2016) that parents choose private schools for their children because of the outstanding and committed work of instructors, the availability of current technology, superior administrative practices, and the provision of instruction for pupils to do well on external assessments. The result, however, disagrees with the finding of several studies (e.g. Alsuiadi, 2015; Friedman et al., 2006) that parents' school contentment was influenced most by their rating of school safety and security during school hours. The disagreement in the results of these two groups of studies is attributable to parental socioeconomic and demographic factors, which have been shown to influence parents' contentment and enrolment decisions (Silva, 2006). This means that some parents may send their children to public schools not because they are unaware of the security situation but because of household income, the number of children, and occupation, among others. Some studies, such as Obiekwe and Uwaezuoke (2023) in Anambra State and Gbesoevi et al. (2022) in Lagos State, support the idea that well-implemented security measures, including physical measures and strategic planning, positively influence safety, school management, and parental satisfaction. However, Anho's (2022) study in Delta State further emphasizes the consequences of inadequate security measures, showing a significant link between safety challenges and educators' job performance.

The second finding of this study established a significant mean difference in schools with high, moderate, and low teacher pupils' ratios in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils, and safety of pupils, respectively. Parents were significantly more satisfied with the services offered in public primary schools with low TPRs than those with moderate and high TPRs. This implies that schools with a high teacher-pupil ratio attract parents' least contentment (most discontentment). This finding is unsurprising because a school with a low TPR will have fewer pupils per teacher than those with moderate or high TPRs. The class size in schools with a low TPR will be relatively small and manageable, promoting effective teaching and learning (Owan & Ekpe, 2018). Such effective teaching and learning in small class sizes could spur desired behavioural changes to be manifested by learners', which parents may also observe at home (resulting in increased contentment with their children's school).

The second finding supports the evidence presented by Maangi (2014) that TPR is the primary factor influencing the parental choice of a school because parents consider quality when making schooling decisions for their children. Other studies (Alsuiadi, 2016; Ukpor et al., 2012) also documented that TPR is a crucial factor influencing students' academic performance and, by extension, parents' contentment, and preference for private schools. This finding builds on the report by Ekaette et al. (2019; 2020), which stressed that high TPR creates severe obstacles for teachers in dealing with overcrowded classes. This becomes a stress factor for pupils struggling to learn in this condition. This explains that parents may prefer private schools with low TPR due to the perceived stress associated with learning in a school with high TPR. Similarly, Waita et al. (2016) showed that TPR impacted students' performance in standardised tests and accounted for decreased enrolment in public schools and increased enrolment in private schools, as parents were not satisfied with their children's performance in public schools. Similarly, Alsuiadi (2015) found that choosing a public school was likelier for parents who saw the school as a safe refuge for their children, and the class size was the best predictor of parental contentment.

Through its third finding, this study discovered a significant variation in parental contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils and pupils' safety with school proximity. Parents were more

satisfied with schools near home than those in distant locations. The position of this finding is not new because schools with distant proximities pose a significant danger to the physical well-being of children. As reported in most previous studies, many children are often kidnapped while walking to distant schools (e.g. Mhiliwa, 2015). Issues of rape truancy, absenteeism, lateness and drop-out are associated with distant schools (Arop & Owan, 2018; Moyo, 2013). Apart from physical attacks on pupils, distant schools also create fatigue in learners who may have exhausted their energies trekking to school such that only a little or no energy is left to learn actively in schools. This way, school proximity could create poor learning outcomes, which could, in turn, promote discontentment in parents.

The third finding of this study aligns with other studies (e.g. Ebinum et al., 2017; Wangombe, 2018) which have shown that students' academic achievement is significantly linked to their school's location. In another study, Mhiliwa (2015) explained that Students who go long distances to school or arrive late to class could not concentrate on their schoolwork. The author maintained that students who travelled short distances to and from school were less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours that resulted from long-distance travel. When schools are located where parents must spend additional money for transport fairs every day for their children to go to school, it raises the cost of education. This leads them to choose a nearby private school for their children or withdraw from attending school as they cannot meet the recurring financial demands.

The fourth finding of this study showed that parents who viewed their ward schools' physical environment as learning-friendly were significantly more contented with the quality of teaching, care for pupils and pupils' safety than those who viewed them as learning-unfriendly. The finding is attributable to parents' comfort with schools that do not allow their children/wards to roam during school hours. The absence of security devices, such as fire alarms and perimeter fences, in a school, could make parents discontented with protecting their children. Schools with suitable classroom structures and beautiful environments attract the interest of many parents. Parents may also be discontented with schools that lack basic infrastructures (like buildings, libraries, play facilities, and a conducive environment for learning). This study agrees with the position of other scholars that a conducive learning environment can affect both the attitudes and achievement of students, as well as the parental inclination to choose the school for their children (Getie, 2020; Reeve & Cheon, 2021). The study of Nayab et al. (2015) also discovered that parents chose private schools over public ones because they knew the former had better resources (such as infrastructure, qualified teachers, supportive school climate, contemporary style of education, and good examination results, among others).

Limitations and future research directions

This provides valuable insights into parental satisfaction with public primary school services. However, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations for future research endeavours. Firstly, the study primarily relies on parental perceptions and responses to questionnaires as a measure of contentment. These perceptions may be influenced by individual biases and subjective judgments, potentially introducing a degree of response bias. To address this limitation, future studies could employ a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative data from questionnaires with qualitative data from interviews or focus groups, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of parental contentment.

Secondly, the study focuses on parental contentment with institutional variables, such as security, size, proximity, and environmental attributes. While these variables are undoubtedly important, there may be other factors beyond the scope of this research that also influence parental satisfaction, such as curriculum quality, extracurricular activities, or teacher qualifications. Future research should consider a broader range of factors to provide a more holistic view of parental contentment.

Thirdly, this study does not explore the long-term effects of parental discontent on enrolment figures in public primary schools. Investigating the correlation between parental satisfaction and enrolment trends over time could offer valuable insights into the sustainability of public primary education systems. Future longitudinal studies could address this gap in the literature. Additionally, the study does not delve deeply into the reasons behind parental dissatisfaction, or the specific improvements parents seek in school services. Conducting follow-up qualitative research or surveys that inquire about the specific aspects of teaching, care, and safety that parents find lacking would help identify actionable areas for

improvement in public primary schools. Lastly, the study does not consider regional or cultural variations in parental contentment. Future studies could explore whether factors influencing parental satisfaction vary across different geographical regions or cultural contexts, which could inform more targeted policy interventions.

Despite the acknowledged limitations, the study's identification of crucial institutional variables influencing parental satisfaction in public primary schools remains robust and valuable. These findings provide a foundation for future research that can address the limitations by adopting more comprehensive methodologies, including mixed-methods approaches and long-term trend analysis. Furthermore, the policy implications derived from this study, emphasizing the potential consequences of parental dissatisfaction on declining enrolment figures, remain pertinent and actionable, transcending the limitations in the study's scope. As such, this research serves as a valuable starting point and calls for further investigation to deepen our understanding of parental contentment in education, thereby contributing to informed policy decisions and improved educational outcomes.

Conclusion

This study was designed to estimate how some school attributes affect parental contentment with three services offered in public primary schools – the quality of teaching, care for pupils and pupils' safety. The study proved that school attributes are essential in determining parents' contentment with public primary school services. Specifically, attributes such as school security, pupils'-teacher ratio, school proximity, and school physical environment contribute to parents' contentment with the quality of teaching, care for pupils and safety. Thus, parents become dissatisfied when their children are not receiving good services and may react by withdrawing them to other schools (especially private schools) in search of greener pastures. This study implies that parents' continued discontent with public primary schools' services (such as quality of teaching, care and safety of pupils) will lead to a decline in future enrolment figures in public unless something is done promptly.

This research result has implications for primary school headteachers to adopt administrative practices that enhance the effective management of primary schools for improved teaching and learning. This study has also provided evidence that can enable primary school administrators to ensure that all resources available in the school system are effectively used to improve teaching and learning for improved parental contentment with public school services. This study has also highlighted the need for teachers to create a warm and interpersonal relationship with pupils, care for them, and ensure that all pupils are given adequate attention in the classroom. The study further informs the need for teachers to develop professional and pedagogical skills to ensure the effective delivery of quality education in public primary schools to boost parents' contentment. Furthermore, this study's result has heightened the need for the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to provide adequate supervision of the basic education programme in public primary schools to ensure that resources are used according to plans in the school system.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the conclusions reached in this study:

1. School administrators should prioritize the enhancement of security measures within the school premises. This includes installing and maintaining perimeter fences, security lighting, and security gates (Lamoreaux & Sulkowski, 2020). They should conduct regular security audits and assessments and allocate funds for security improvements.
2. Parents should support school safety efforts by advocating for and participating in safety drills, security awareness campaigns, and by reinforcing safety precautions at home.
3. Every primary school headteacher should ensure that the pupil-teacher ratio in each class does not exceed 35:1 (a maximum of 35 pupils per teacher) (Owan & Ekpe, 2018). Administrators should ensure lower teacher-pupil ratios by hiring additional qualified teachers and allocating teaching

resources efficiently. This will provide an enabling environment for effective classroom management and individualised instruction that considers learners' differences.

4. The government should consider establishing new schools, especially in rural areas or consider expanding existing ones near residential areas to reduce commute times for students. Improved accessibility can enhance parental satisfaction by making it easier for children to attend school regularly. The Federal government should provide each primary school in the education zone with at least two air-conditioned buses that will help convey pupils residing in distant locations to school daily.
5. Administrators should ensure that school facilities are well-maintained and equipped with modern teaching materials (Ngeno et al., 2021; Owan et al., 2023). They should conduct regular maintenance checks, plan for facility upgrades, and procure necessary educational resources.
6. Policymakers should allocate resources for teacher training programs and professional development initiatives (Asuquo et al., 2023). They should also establish mentorship programs to support teachers in improving their teaching quality and pupil care.
7. Policymakers should encourage and facilitate community involvement in school management and decision-making processes. Collaboration with local communities should lead to improved safety, infrastructure, and overall quality of education.
8. Community leaders should collaborate with schools to identify and address security concerns within the local community (Owan et al., 2022; Owan, 2019). They should support school security initiatives, provide resources, and engage community members in safety efforts.
9. Community leaders should lobby for improved school infrastructure, including the construction and maintenance of school buildings. They should collaborate with local authorities to ensure schools have adequate facilities to provide a quality education.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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