

“Why Choose Private? Exploring the Shift from Public to Private Secondary Schools in Somaliland’s Education Sector”

Abstract

This study investigates the growing preference for private secondary schools in Somaliland despite the continued availability of low-cost public education. In recent years, Somaliland’s education sector has experienced a steady expansion of private schooling, accompanied by a noticeable increase in parental enrollment choices favoring private institutions. This trend is particularly striking given that public secondary schools remain more affordable and more widely available across regions. The central concern of this study is to understand why parents increasingly opt for private secondary schools and what factors shape this decision-making process in the context of Somaliland’s education system.

Education is widely recognized as a key driver of individual development, social mobility, and national progress. In Somaliland, the education system is jointly provided by both public and private institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science. While public primary education is officially free, secondary education is low-cost but not fully free, lasting four years and culminating in national examinations. Despite this provision, enrolment statistics show a consistent and significant shift toward private secondary schools, particularly in urban areas where private enrolment exceeds public enrolment in several regions. This paradox between affordability and parental preference raises important questions about the determinants of school choice beyond economic access.

The purpose of this study is to explore the underlying social, cultural, economic, and symbolic factors influencing parents’ preference for private secondary schools in Somaliland. It also aims to understand how parents perceive differences between public and private schools in relation to academic quality, discipline, learning environment, and future opportunities for their children. Furthermore, the study seeks to explain how both structural conditions and individual decision-making processes interact in shaping school choice behavior.

The study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Pierre Bourdieu’s Theory of Social Reproduction and Rational Choice Theory. Bourdieu’s theory

explains how cultural capital, social capital, economic capital, and habitus shape educational preferences and contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities. In this study, these concepts are used to understand how parents' educational background, social networks, beliefs about education, and perceptions of prestige influence their school choices. Rational Choice Theory, on the other hand, views parents as rational actors who make decisions based on cost-benefit analysis. From this perspective, parents evaluate factors such as school fees, academic performance, discipline, safety, and future employment opportunities when selecting schools for their children. By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, the study provides a comprehensive framework that captures both structural influences and rational decision-making processes in school choice.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative case study design, which is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena within their real-life context. The study focuses on parents of students enrolled in private secondary schools in Somaliland. Fifteen participants will be selected using purposive sampling to ensure rich, detailed, and relevant data. Data will be collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, allowing participants to express their experiences, perceptions, and reasoning in depth. All interviews will be audio-recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis will be both inductive and theory-driven, guided by the integrated framework of Bourdieu's social theory and Rational Choice Theory. This dual-theoretical lens will enable the study to capture both structural influences (such as social class, cultural expectations, and symbolic capital) and rational considerations (such as cost, quality, and outcomes). NVivo software will be used to assist with data management, coding, and organization to ensure a rigorous analytical process.

Ethical considerations will be strictly observed throughout the study. Participation will be voluntary, and informed consent will be obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by removing identifying information, and all data will be securely stored to ensure privacy and ethical integrity.

The expected findings of this study suggest that parents' preference for private secondary schools is influenced by multiple interrelated factors rather than cost alone. It is anticipated that perceived academic quality, discipline, English language instruction,

teacher commitment, and school reputation will emerge as key determinants of parental choice. In addition, social status and symbolic value associated with private schooling are expected to play a significant role in shaping decisions. The study also anticipates that parents' educational background and social networks influence how they interpret and evaluate school quality. Furthermore, rational considerations such as perceived return on investment, future university access, and employment opportunities are likely to interact with social and cultural expectations in shaping final decisions.

This study contributes to the existing literature by extending school choice research into the underexplored context of Somaliland. While previous studies have largely focused on factors such as cost, quality, and access in other global contexts, this study integrates sociological and economic perspectives to provide a more comprehensive explanation of school choice behavior. By combining Bourdieu's theory with Rational Choice Theory, the study offers a deeper understanding of how social structures and individual agency interact in educational decision-making. It also contributes empirical evidence from a fragile and under-researched education system characterized by growing public-private disparities.

In conclusion, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of why parents in Somaliland increasingly prefer private secondary schools despite the availability of public education. It emphasizes the importance of examining both visible and hidden factors influencing school choice and contributes to broader discussions on educational inequality, parental decision-making, and school governance in developing contexts.

Keywords

School choice; Private secondary schools; Parental decision-making; Educational inequality; Somaliland