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PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT OF KINDERGARTEN THROUGH FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT OF
KINDERGARTEN THROUGH FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

By

MICHELLE L. MISIANO

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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March, 2022

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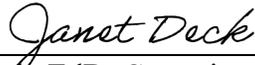
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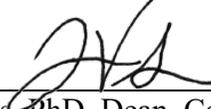
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DEDICATION

When I enrolled in my first doctoral class at SEU, I had no idea all that God would do in my life throughout my years as a doctoral student. It was during my time as a doctoral student at SEU that God brought my husband and three amazing children into my life. Therefore, this dissertation is dedicated to the greatest blessings of my life: my Heavenly Father, my husband, and my children.

First and foremost, I want to dedicate this dissertation to my Heavenly Father. Without Him, I truly can do nothing. I am humbled by the extravagant grace and love He chooses to give over and over again. I give all glory and praise to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Next, I want to dedicate this dissertation to one of the greatest blessings in my life, my husband, Matthew Misiano. I truly would not have been able to complete this study without the constant love, support, and encouragement of my husband. Thank you, Matthew, for praying for me, loving me, and taking on more and more family responsibilities, so I could focus on my writing. I love you forever!

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my three children – Elizabeth, Eliana, and Luke. Lizzy, thank you for your servant’s heart and helping out with the babies so I could work on my paper. To my babies, Eliana and Luke, your births during the dissertation journey have brought so much joy and have inspired me to finish. I cannot wait to see what God has in store for each of you and pray you spend your lives serving Jesus. I love you more than the stars in the sky!

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Second, I want thank Dr. Deck, my methodologist. Dr. Deck was the first person I met when I applied to SEU, and she has inspired me from the beginning. Words cannot express how much I have appreciated Dr. Deck's support, honesty, and genuine care since the time I began my doctoral studies. Thank you, Dr. Deck, for your support, example, and wisdom throughout my time in the program.

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Abstract

Parents compare the costs of sending their children to private Christian schools with the benefits of their children attending the schools. Christian school leaders benefit from understanding the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in Christian private schools. In this qualitative study, the researcher interviewed nine parents from two different Christian private schools affiliated with Christian churches in South Florida to hear what factors influenced them to enroll their kindergarten through fifth grade child or children in a Christian private school. An interview guide developed by the researcher was followed during the phone interviews. In addition, six of the nine were asked additional questions on the interview guide to learn about the factors influencing them to continue reenrolling in the Christian private school. The participants shared their stories about the school choice decision making process and the factors influencing their final decision to choose a Christian private school. The data was cross-analyzed to find similarities among the responses of the participants. Each participant had more than one influencing factor; however, there were three factors common among the participants. Factors influencing their decisions for enrollment were valuing a biblical foundation, dissatisfaction with public education, and previous school experiences. Christian school leaders will find the implications of this study impacts their school enrollment as they capitalize on the factors influencing the enrollment decisions of parents.

Keywords: Christian school, private school, education, school choice, parents, decision-making, enrollment, elementary students

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I. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation study is a case study of the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their elementary children in private Christian schools. The study is based upon interviews with parents who chose to send their children to Christian schools despite the financial obligation required for their children to attend. The participants included parents who enrolled their children in a Christian school for their first year at a Christian school and parents who made the decision to reenroll their children for a second year or more. The first chapter of the dissertation presents the background of the study, the problem of the study, and the importance of the study. In addition, the chapter includes an overview of the methodology, the limitations, and the key terms used in the study.

Background of the Study

Although religion has influenced the development of educational institutions from the times of colonial America, Christian schools defined as private, Protestant Christian schools were not formed until the twentieth century (Slater, 2012). In 1947, the first Christian, private school organization, known as the National Association of Christian Schools (NACS), was organized. The purpose of the NACS was to unite the approximately 150 Christian schools that had formed in the early 1900s. At the time NACS was organized, the primary reasons for enrolling students in Christian schools were to avoid the secular ways of the public school system and to establish educational institutions with biblical values held by the Christian families. Parents were willing

to make financial sacrifices to send their children to Christian schools to avoid the secular values of the public education system. The Christian school movement rapidly spread throughout America during the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Most recently over 15% of private schools were identified as Protestant Christian schools in a study conducted during the 2015-2016 school year (Council for American Private Education, 2020).

Christian schools have become a more attainable option with the expansion of the school choice scholarship system during the early 2000s. Scholarship programs, including tax credit scholarship programs, were developed by state government officials to give parents the ability to choose where to educate their children by providing assistance through financial aid or offering more publicly funded schools, such as charter schools (Logan, 2018). State scholarship programs have enabled students from families of various socioeconomic levels to attend Christian schools. Students who meet the established requirements for the school choice programs have had the opportunity to attend schools approved by the state at no cost or at a substantially reduced cost for the families. Due to the increase of children who have received financial assistance to attend Christian schools, more Christian schools have opened around the country (Davis, 2011).

The factors that influence parents' decisions to enroll their children in Christian schools have expanded beyond the original desire to be separate from the secular values of the public education system. According to data from a grounded theory study conducted by Prichard and Swezey (2016), factors that influenced parents' decisions to enroll their children in a Christian school were (a) Christian environment (b) the parents' own school experiences, (c) financial status, and (d) student satisfaction. However, the parents prioritized Christian values and the support provided to them by Christian school teachers and administrators. In their study,

researchers Pelz and Dulk (2018) discovered that families accepted the financial assistance from the state school scholarship programs and enrolled their children in Christian schools because of the importance they placed on maintaining a religious identity. Warmbier (2018) conducted a correlation study on the factors influencing Christian school enrollment and researched the influence of school facilities and school culture on the parents' decision to enroll their children in Christian schools. The results indicated that school facilities have no significant influence on parents' decision-making and a mild correlation between parents' decisions and the school culture. However, a study conducted by Ava Davis (2011) found the factors that influenced parents' decision on private school enrollment were the same regardless of the school choice. According to the study conducted at private schools with various religious affiliations, parents valued the perceived quality of education the school provided and the overall characteristics of the school. The data from the study revealed that a desire for children to be taught in a religious environment with religious values was not the only motivating factor in parents' school choice decisions. The factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in a private school include the academic quality, as well as the spiritual environment.

Discrepancies have been identified between the study results that have been conducted on Christian private school enrollment factors. The studies reviewed have had contradictory results. The important factors identified by researchers have encompassed academic quality to the religious values of the school. Therefore, a qualitative study focusing on open-ended questions regarding the perceptions of the parents is necessary to really understand what influences parents to enroll their children in Christian schools. In addition, data is not available regarding the factors that keep parents reenrolling their children in private Christian schools. This study fills the gap in research on why parents choose private Christian schools by developing a thorough

understanding of why parents initially choose a private Christian school and the factors which influence reenrollment in private Christian schools.

Theoretical Framework

Social science theories frame the qualitative case study on the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in Christian schools. The Sense-of-Community Theory is based on the belief that people feel a sense of belonging and connectedness when part of a group (Peterson, et al., 2008). A sense of belonging and membership influence the individuals' choice of organizations they choose to join. The influence applies also to choosing schools. Due to the affiliation of Christian schools with local churches, the sense of belonging has the potential to influence one's desire to connect to an education system aligned with the values of their church.

School choice options have expanded for families from different backgrounds with the increased availability of school scholarships. When considering enrolling a child in a Christian school, parents must weigh the cost of the education with the benefits of their child receiving an education in a Christian school. The positive factors influencing their decisions must outweigh the financial sacrifice of sending their children to a Christian school. Even families receiving financial assistance will have expenses, such as fees for uniforms, book fees, and extracurricular activities, they would not otherwise have if their children attended a public school. Therefore, the rational choice theory, also known as the Market Theory (Walberg, 2000), correlates with the purpose of the study.

The premise of the rational choice theory is people should have the ability to make the choice that is best for them and their family (Walberg, 2000). Although individuals have had the freedom to make the choice to spend their money on a private education for their children, with the advancement of the school choice programs, more individuals have the ability to utilize funds

from the government to fund the education they decide is most suitable for their children. This study analyzes why parents choose to send their children to a Christian school despite the cost of the education.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) illustrates the concept of the rational choice theory as it relates to the decision parents make about sending their children to Christian schools. According to the theory, individuals consider the cost of a decision in comparison with the benefits to make the best choice for them and their families (Walberg, 2000). When making a decision regarding Christian school enrollment, parents weigh the benefits of attending a Christian school with the cost of the tuition. The benefits determined by the parents are the factors that influence the parents' decisions to enroll their children in Christian schools.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Decision-Making Process of Choosing a School

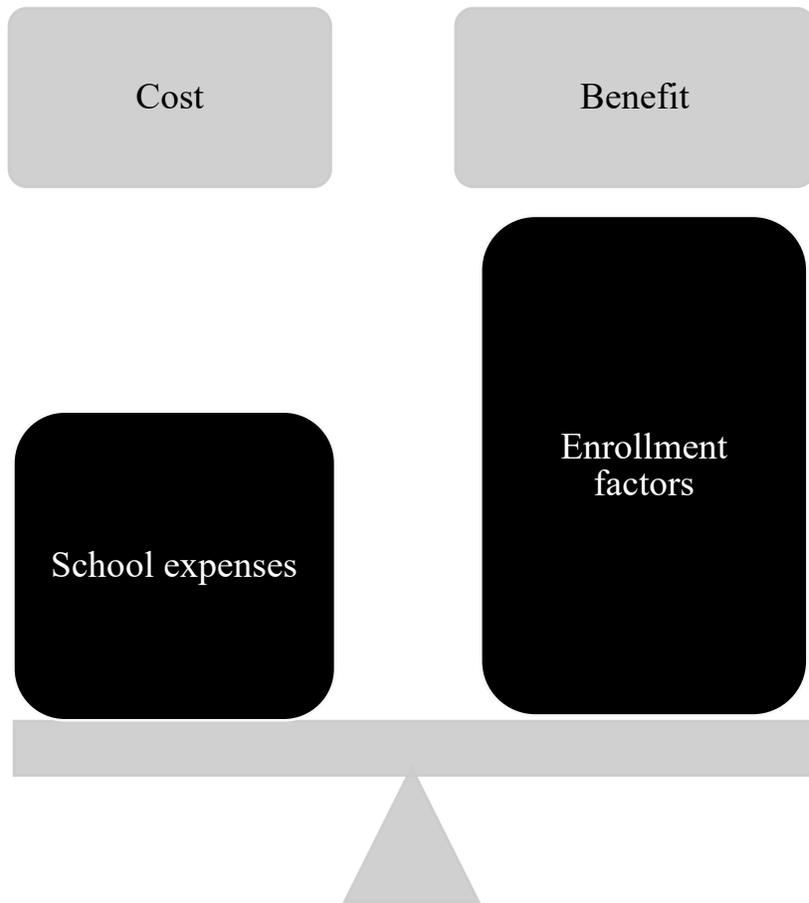


Figure 1 illustrates the concept of rational choice theory when making the decision to attend a Christian school. When deciding on whether to send a child to a Christian school, the first consideration is the cost of the school tuition and expenses, such as book fees and school uniforms. Even if a family receives financial assistance, parents will still incur expenses they are responsible to pay. Parents weigh the cost of the schooling with the benefits of Christian education to determine if the benefits outweigh the financial sacrifice. The benefits are evaluated by first-time parents based on previous school experiences, recommendations from others, and intrinsic values (Prichard & Swezey, 2016). However, the factors valued by re-enrolling families

are based on experiences of their children at a particular Christian school. This study evaluates the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in Christian school through in-depth interviews with new and reenrolling Christian school parents.

Problem Statement

With the expanded opportunities for parents to choose the education system best for their children, more families than ever before have access to Christian schools. The reasons for parents choosing to enroll their children in a Christian school have expanded beyond the desire to separate their children from the secular standards of the public school (Slater, 2012).

Qualitative studies have been conducted on the decision-making process used by parents when choosing the best school for their children (Prichard & Swezey, 2016). However, the options presented to parents in previous studies have included charter, magnet, and public schools.

Researchers have conducted several quantitative studies that focus on private, Christian school enrollment. Researchers surveyed parents about school choice options and analyzed the survey results. One quantitative study focused on how school facilities and culture influenced parents' enrollment decisions (Warmbier 2018). Davis (2011) conducted a qualitative study to gain an in-depth perspective on factors influencing parents' decision to make financial sacrifices to send their children to private schools. However, the study included three groups of participants, including students, parents, and administrators; and the focus of the study was to identify factors that influenced the parents' decision to withdraw their children from public schools to send them to private schools.

The purpose of this study was to investigate parents' perceptions regarding the factors that influenced their decisions to enroll their elementary children in private Christian schools. Unlike previous studies conducted on school choice, this study specifically focused on why

parents choose Christian schools for the education of their children instead of the other school choice options that are available to them. The focus of this study was first-time enrollment in Christian schools and reenrollment in Christian schools. This study provided insight regarding the initial factors in the decision-making process and compared them with the factors influencing continued enrollment in the Christian schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to discover the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll or reenroll kindergarten through fifth grade students in private, Christian schools in Florida. In the research study, the perceptions of the parents were defined as parents' feelings, observations, and thoughts on the factors influencing their decision to enroll or reenroll their children in a Christian school. Two groups of parents were interviewed to collect data in this case study: (a) parents who have enrolled their children for the first time in a Christian school and (b) parents who have chosen to reenroll their children in a Christian school for a second or more year.

Significance of the Study

Due to the financial assistance provided through the school choice program, more children have the financial means to attend private, Christian schools. Parents from varying socioeconomic groups now have the ability to choose where they send their children to school; they can choose public schools, charter schools, or private schools. Although there had been a significant increase in Christian schools opening during the twentieth century, there has been a decline in Christian schools within the past 15 years (Nichols, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative that Christian school leaders are aware of the factors that influence parents' decisions to enroll and reenroll their children in Christian schools. As school leaders learn the factors that contribute

to parents' choice for Christian school enrollment, they can implement changes that address and align with the perspective and values of the parents. Christian schools that capitalize on an understanding of the values of parents may result in increased student enrollment.

This study is also significant because it focused on both first-time and reenrolling parents in private Christian schools. It is important for school leaders to have an in-depth understanding of what influences parents to continue to reenroll their children. A high reenrollment rate of students assists in developing a positive reputation in the community. School leaders endeavor to increase their student population and to maintain school families. Therefore, the study contributed to the professional literature for private Christian school leaders.

Overview of Methodology

To effectively answer the research questions and to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem, the study was designed to be a qualitative case study. A qualitative study was appropriate to explore the factors that influence parents to enroll their children in private, Christian schools. A case study method provided an in-depth study of a program by interacting with participants and acquiring data through multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The structure of a case study allowed the researcher to interact with the families and to hear their stories regarding how and why they decided to enroll or reenroll their children in the school. In addition, a case study design allowed reenrolling families to share stories about their experiences in the school that influenced their decision to continue to send their children to the school. The collective case study approach allowed the researcher to study multiple cases and to analyze different perspectives to answer the research questions.

Research Design

The case study was conducted at two private, Christian schools located in South Florida that have been accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. School A was established in 2000 and has a student body of 1,900 students. School B was established in 1985 and currently educates 600 students each year. Both schools are affiliated with a local, evangelical church in their community. Permission was obtained from the leaders of both schools to conduct the study on their respective school campus. Although the schools are private, Christian schools, the qualifications for enrollment in each school are different. School A is a covenant-Christian school requiring all parents to agree with the school's statement of faith. School B is an evangelistic-based school allowing students of a different or no faith to enroll in the school.

Research Question

What factors influence parents' choice to enroll or reenroll their kindergarten through fifth grade children in Christian schools?

Data Collection

Data was collected during phone interviews conducted with the participants. The researcher asked open-ended questions that correlated with the purpose of the study. The researcher utilized a voice recorder for all interviews; the interviews were transcribed by an application called Otter (Otter.ai., 2021). The transcripts were verified by respective participants. Each participant was asked the same questions from the interview guide (Appendix A), but the reenrolling parents were asked additional questions. The questions were worded to acquire information about students' previous school experiences and their spiritual background. The

interview transcripts were coded and analyzed by the researcher to identify themes related to enrollment factors for enrolling and reenrolling families.

In addition to interview data, the researcher conducted on-site visits and email communication to review enrollment records and foundational documents. Enrollment documents were reviewed, and the relevant data was recorded and organized by the researcher. The researcher also reviewed the foundational records of the schools, including the mission statement and policies of the schools. The school mission statement and policies were analyzed and coded by the researcher, and the data was used to determine if there were correlations between the parents' perceptions and the purposes of the schools.

Procedures

The research process began with the development of interview questions on an interview guide (Appendix A) that correlated with the purpose of the research study. In the second step, the researcher acquired permission from the school leaders of School A and School B to interview school families about their decisions to enroll their children in their Christian school and to analyze enrollment and foundational records related to the purpose of the study.

Once the interview questions were developed and permission was granted, the researcher interviewed school leaders and reviewed demographic data to develop a list of potential families to interview. The researcher then obtained permission on the Participant Information Consent form from parents to participate. The researcher contacted the families to schedule the interviews. After the interviews were conducted, the interviews were transcribed and validated by the respective participants. The data from the transcriptions were coded and analyzed to identify themes.

The next step of the research process was to analyze accreditation reports to obtain enrollment and foundational records from the schools. The available records provided information on the number of new, reenrolling, and withdrawn families from each school year, as well the mission statement and policies of the schools. Data collected from the review of the records was coded and analyzed by the researcher to identify enrollment trends.

Limitations

The purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth perspective on the factors influencing parents' decisions to choose a Christian school for their elementary children to attend. Therefore, a limited number of participants from two different Christian schools were interviewed for the study. The study was limited because it included perspectives of parents of only elementary students. Another limitation of the study was the school selection process. Both schools included in the study were established, credible Christian schools. The factors influencing parents to enroll in these two Christian schools may differ from the factors influencing parents to enroll in Christian schools in general and may be based on the history of the school and its credibility within the community. Although School A and School B held the same accreditation, the academic and spiritual programs implemented in each school were not considered during the school selection process.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of the study, the terms Christian school, public school, and school choice were defined.

- **Christian school** - a private school built on a statement of faith that is affiliated with a Christian organization (Slater, 2012). Both Christian schools in the study are affiliated with Christian churches, which are run by a church board and pastoral staff.

- **Public school** – any school that is governed and funded by the public (Prichard & Swezey, 2016).
- **School choice** – the ability of parents to choose between public school services and private school substitutes (Barrows, Cheng, Peterson, & West, 2019).

Summary

Parents of kindergarten through fifth grade children encounter many educational options for their children. These options include private education, which requires a financial commitment from the parents. Because of the increase of funding available to families due to school choice scholarships, Christian school administrators need to understand the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in Christian schools. Using a qualitative case study, the researcher analyzed enrollment documents and transcripts of the interviews with parents of new and reenrolling students of Christian schools to identify factors influencing their school choice. The next chapter is a literature review of the history of private schools in America and the studies on factors influencing the enrollment decisions of parents.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this case study was to discover the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll or reenroll kindergarten through fifth-grade students in private, Christian schools in Florida. In the research study, the perceptions of the parents were defined as parents' feelings, observations, and thoughts on the factors influencing their decision to enroll or reenroll their children in a Christian school. Two groups of parents were interviewed to collect data in this case study: (a) parents who have enrolled their children for the first time in a Christian school and (b) parents who have chosen to reenroll their children in a Christian school for a second or more year.

Numerous articles on school choice and the factors influencing parents to choose private schools were identified. However, limited research has been done on parents' perceptions of factors influencing their decision to enroll specifically in Christian schools. Although little research correlated precisely to the topic, this chapter contains relevant and recent literature related to the study's purpose. This literature review begins with an examination of multiple sources on the history of private education and school choice in America, followed by a discussion on parent satisfaction and the benefits of attending a private school.

History of Private Education in America

Colonial America

Private, religious education has been a school choice option for families since the founding of the United States of America (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). Local churches operated the first schools, known as independent schools, in America, and local community members and the students' parents were responsible for the educational programs' funding. Students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds could attend the schools due to the community's financial assistance and European missionaries' free educational services. The schools offered both academic and religious education to students, including Bible reading and prayer. Parents chose to enroll their children in the schools because there were no other educational options.

By the mid-1800s, government leaders developed state-run and funded schools (Laats, 2020). Government leaders made laws making it mandatory that children attended school, whether it was a public or independent school (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). Even though the government funded public schools, students still received Protestant religious education and academic education. In the late 1800s, Catholic private schools grew in popularity among Catholic families to protect their children from the public education system's Protestant teachings (Laats, 2020). However, the independent Christian schools began to decline due to the offering of free education and parents' inability to pay school tuition with the increase of taxes (Slater, 2012). Religion influenced students' enrollment in private schools since the beginning of the public education system in America (Glenn, 2018).

Early and Mid-Twentieth Century

Throughout the early twentieth century, conservative Christians questioned common schools' religious teachings (Slater, 2012). The Anglo-Protestant teachings of the public schools

differed from the beliefs and values they held. The public education system's teachings and values began to deviate from religious instruction to replacing it with society's growing secular values. Evangelical Christian leaders believed in the importance of returning to the roots of America's religion. Those leaders felt they could accomplish this goal by establishing private schools defined as private, Protestant Christian schools. Leaders of other religious backgrounds agreed, and private, religious schools began to open around the nation (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012).

Evidence of the Christian school movement's growth in the early 1900s was the establishment of the National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS) in 1920 (Slater, 2012). The organization's purpose was to unite 73 independent Christian schools and provide the teachers with resources, including training and curriculum. The Christian school movement continued to grow throughout the nation during the mid-1900s when the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional for the Bible and prayer to be in public schools in the cases of *Abington v. Schempp* (1963) and the *Engle v. Vitale* (1962). Christian parents desired to remove their children from the secular teachings of the public school system. However, only parents who could afford the school tuition could send their children to Christian schools. Therefore, the number of Christian schools remained small compared to the number of public schools in America.

Late Twentieth Century to Modern Day

Private Christian education became a more feasible option for families with the development and implementation of school choice scholarship programs throughout the United States. The first state school choice program passed by state legislation was the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program in 1998 (Logan, 2018). As of 2019, 27 states and the District of Columbia offered private school choice programs (Olneck-Brown, 2019). The Wisconsin school

choice programs and similar programs across the nation allow parents from various socioeconomic backgrounds to choose where their children attend school, including participating private schools, by providing them with financial assistance. State and tax-credit scholarship programs provide funding to families that meet a list of criteria (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). Participating private schools must meet the state statutes' expectations to qualify to be participants in the school choice scholarship programs. Religious private schools have had higher participation rates in scholarship programs than non-religious private schools (DeAngelis, 2020).

Factors Influencing Parents' Private School Enrollment Decisions

In addition to literature on the history of private education, a review of literature was conducted on factors influencing parents to enroll their children in private education. In a study conducted in Detroit, parents of upcoming kindergarten students visited school options in their communities and shared their findings (Hill, 2016). The research project was a community-based, participatory action research study consisting of 22 participants. Researcher K. Dara Hill collected data using a mixed-method research approach consisting of quantitative methods, including closed-questioned surveys and checklists, and qualitative methods, including open-ended survey questions and interviews. The surveyed respondents visited public, private, and charter schools and completed surveys once they completed the school visits. The researcher coded integrated documentation and excerpt transcripts to identify themes in the data. Based on group discussions and surveys, the parents' desired characteristics were diversity, academic rigor, child-centered practices, community involvement, and parent involvement. The study's findings revealed that the parents believed that all the schools evaluated, the top public, charter, and private schools in the area, met their desired school characteristics. According to the data, parents of kindergarten students in Detroit did not prefer any particular school type, such as private,

charter, or public. The main concern of the parents was whether the school demonstrated their desired characteristics. The study implied that parents were not as concerned about their children's type of school as the school's perceived quality.

In a quantitative study, Krull (2016) analyzed the methods used by newly enrolled kindergarten parents for school choice selection. The study's purpose was to analyze the school selection process of parents with children attending enrollment-rich public schools. Ninety-two kindergarten parents with children enrolled in the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) system participant schools completed surveys on their school selection processes. Krull recoded the Likert survey responses and added weights based on the schools' race/ethnicity. No matter the families' education level or economic status, academics was the leading factor influencing the decision-making process. There was no significant difference between families with different incomes and the importance of academics ($p > .070$), and there was no significant difference between families with different educational levels and the importance of academics ($p > .099$). The responses indicated that most parents did not exhaust their options during the school selection process. Instead, the participants settled on a school choice after considering three or fewer school choices. Although the Krull study focused on public schools, the research was relevant to the literature review since it implies the importance of academic programs during the school selection process.

Prichard and Swezey (2016) conducted a grounded theory study on the factors affecting kindergarten through 12th-grade Christian parents' school choice decisions. The researchers interviewed 13 participants from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and developed field notes. The school types that the children attended included public schools, private schools, and homeschools. The researchers transcribed the interviews verbatim and utilized the open

coding process. The analysis process continued with axial and selective coding to identify themes in the responses. Based on the interview data, participants used the satisficing theory in their school choice decisions. The theory supports that people make a satisfactory decision that solves their problem with minimal effort (Greenwald, 1993). Therefore, the participants did not exhaust their options when selecting a school. Instead, they stopped the search once they found one that seemed sufficient for their needs. The parents' important factors were their own school experiences, financial status, expected enrollment trends, and socioeconomic background (Prichard & Swezey, 2016). The study implied that parents' spiritual goals for their children did not influence their educational decisions for their children despite their identification as Christians.

Sikkink and Schwarz (2018) conducted a quantitative study on the correlation between parents' school experiences and their school choice decisions for their high school children. The researchers randomly selected 1,500 participants in the United States and Canada to complete the Cardus Education Survey (CES) about their childhood school experiences. Sikkink and Schwartz analyzed the parents' school sector's information in relation to the student's school sector by fitting multinomial logistic regression models predicting school sector enrollment using the data from the survey. The researchers also incorporated controls, including parents' education, income, age, and religious service attendance, to isolate the relationship between parents' school experiences and students' school enrollment. Based on the findings, parents tend to send their children to the school type that they attended. More than any other group, parents who graduated from religious private schools were likely to send their children to the same school type ($p < 0.001$). Rather than researching the school choice that best met their children's needs, parents often enrolled their children in the school sector they attended. The study results implied that

parents that attended Christian schools were more likely to send their children to Christian schools.

An online national survey was conducted on behalf of the Fordham Institute to identify schools' characteristics important to parents during the school decision-making process (Harris Interactive, 2013). For the quantitative study, 2,007 parents and guardians of kindergarten through 12th-grade students enrolled in public and private schools completed the survey questions. In the survey, the participants responded to questions using the maximum-difference scaling survey technique. The respondents ranked five random educational goals at a time totaling in the ranking of 30 educational goals. The researchers analyzed the responses based on race, household income, political views, religious service attendance, school type, and location. The researchers analyzed educational goals by identifying the consistent rankings of the educational goals. The data presented the "non-negotiables," "must-haves," and "desirable" characteristics of schools preferred by the parents. Based on the responses, parents had similar preferences no matter their ethnic, financial, or religious background. The most important characteristic for the majority of parents was a strong academic program supported by a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) program. The factors identified as "must-haves" included the teaching of communication skills, study habits, life skills, self-discipline, and critical thinking skills. Parents and guardians also desired that the schools instill a love for learning and prepare students for college. The focus of the study was private schools rather than distinguishing between the different types of private schools; however, the results can be generalized to Christian school parents.

A correlational study on factors contributing to private school enrollment by Warmbier (2018) focused on the importance of school facilities and parents' school culture during the

decision-making process. Warmbier conducted the quantitative study to find the correlation between schools' enrollment and the schools' facilities and culture. Over 200 kindergarten through eighth-grade private school administrators in California responded to a survey by rating the school facilities and culture conditions using a Likert scale. Once respondents completed the survey, the researcher analyzed the responses utilizing descriptive and inferential statistics. The study results indicated no significant correlation between school enrollment and the school facilities ($p>0.05$), and the study revealed a mild correlation between school enrollment and school culture ($p<0.05$). The study results suggested that the school facilities and culture are not factors in the decision-making process when parents select schools for their children.

In a quantitative study conducted by The Friedman Foundation for School Choice, 2,056 parents, consisting of those receiving state funding and those not receiving funding, in Indiana, responded to a survey on why they chose to send their children to private schools (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016). In the survey, parents had to rank the factors for enrollment in the order of importance. Catt and Rhinesmith identified themes in the responses. Both parent groups ranked the reasons for sending their children to a private school in the same order of importance. The school choice parents' top-ranked reason was the importance of their children receiving religious education (38%). Parents ranked better academics (20%) and moral instruction (19%) as the second and third reasons they selected private schools for their children. The study implied that religious education is an important factor for Christian school parents, no matter their socioeconomic backgrounds.

Beabout and Cambre (2013) confirmed the importance of religious and moral education for private school parents. In a qualitative study conducted at St. Thomas Catholic School in New Orleans, the researchers interviewed 16 parents receiving vouchers for their child to attend

the Catholic school. The school principal called school parents regarding their availability to participate in the semi-structured interviews. All the participants were mothers of elementary students and received state funding due to meeting the poverty level requirements. The data analysis process included transcribing the interviews and selectively coding the data to identify emerging themes. The parents reported that they chose to enroll their children in St. Thomas for the religious and moral instruction and small class sizes that were characteristics of the school. The participants reported that they did not have evidence that the school demonstrated the identified factors of importance until their children began attending the school. Therefore, the participants based their decisions on enrollment on the elements they perceived were present at the school. The study's significance is that the parents enrolled their children in the school based on perceptions of the school rather than the school's verifiable factors. The results implied that parent perceptions influence enrollment decisions when parents select schools for their children.

Rodriguez (2014) studied the reasons caregivers in California chose to enroll their children in Christian schools accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). Participants with children enrolled in 39 different ACSI schools completed a survey with pre-determined factors. A total of 297 caregivers completed an electronic survey consisting of three parts. In the first part of the survey, each participant rated each of the 16 factors provided in the survey. The researcher gave the responses numerical values to find the mean and standard deviation utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 22). In the second part of the survey, participants ranked the top five factors in order of importance. The final section consisted of open-ended questions regarding the participants' background and the opportunity to provide additional important information. The researcher analyzed the data using frequency analysis by comparing the factors of all three sections to find

the common factors for school enrollment presented in each survey section. The participants' most highly valued factors were the Biblical instruction and values taught at the school. Unlike studies conducted on school choice options, including public options, the participants rated academic quality (29.6%) below the factors of Biblical teaching (40.4%). The quantitative research supported the importance of religious education on parents' decision-making process.

Another study on enrollment in private schools supported the influence of religion on school choice. An empirical case study on parent religiosity, studied by Reichard (2012), yielded similar results. To complete the study, Reichard surveyed 226 parents of children attending a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve religious school utilizing the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL). The researcher analyzed the statistical data, and 125 of the participants stated they used school choice vouchers to cover the school's tuition expenses. Reichard identified that religious parents preferred sending their children to religious schools. He identified that religious parents chose private religious schools regardless of their affiliated denominations and their financial abilities. However, scholarship programs did make religious private schools more attainable for parents without financial means. The findings supported the implication that religious parents preferred religious education for their children.

Research by Davis (2011) identified contradictory findings. The interpretative qualitative study included a pre-identified list of interview questions. In the study, Davis interviewed participants consisting of three groups: parents, administrators, and students. The participants were all associated with private schools and shared the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in private schools. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed by Davis to identify commonalities among the responses. All three participant groups identified perceived academic excellence as the primary factor influencing enrollment in private

schools regardless of their religious affiliation. Another characteristic of importance identified by the participants was the learning environment. The researcher noted that the parents' perceptions of private schools influenced their factors of significance rather than their actual experiences with their children in the schools. The study implied that private school parents were concerned about a school's perceived academic excellence, making parent perceptions an important factor in the school selection process.

Parent Satisfaction

Parents can choose the education setting that most effectively meets the needs of their children. As previously noted, parents make an initial school choice decision based on their perceptions of the schools. However, they continue to make decisions regarding re-enrollment in a school based on their school satisfaction.

In a mixed-methods study conducted by Shuls (2018), 35 parents participated in a focus group located in St. Louis and Kansas City. During the focus group sessions, the participants partook in group discussions followed by the completion of questionnaires. Descriptive and populations statistics were utilized to analyze the data from the questionnaires. Although some participants did not support publicly funded school choice options for everyone due to political views, they exercised their freedom to choose the educational setting best for their children. More families in the study selected private schools for their children than any other school type. During the study, the researcher asked the parents to rate their satisfaction level with their child's school. Of the parents of private school students, 81.8% of the parents stated they were "very satisfied" with their child's school. The study's private schools' positive ratings were significantly higher than any other school types included in the study. The results of the study implied that private school parents are overall "very satisfied" with their child's private school education.

A survey conducted by the United States (U.S.) Department of Education yielded similar results regarding parents' satisfaction with private schools (Cheng & Peterson, 2017). The American Institutes of Research (AIR) in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education mailed education surveys to school-aged families across the country, and 17,166 families completed their responses to the questionnaire. AIR collected the results and utilized their technology programs to analyze the statistical data. Four school types were included in the study: charter schools, assigned district schools, choice district schools, and private schools. Participants were asked in the survey to rate their level of satisfaction with their child's current school and teacher. Of the four school types represented, parents ranked private schools with the highest percentage of satisfaction. Approximately 80% of private school parents stated they were "very satisfied" with their child's teacher and school. The second-highest ranked school types were charter schools with 63% parent satisfaction. Participants also rated their satisfaction levels with their child's school's academic standards, discipline, and parent communication. Private schools received the highest satisfaction ratings of all the school types. Over 75% of the parents surveyed stated they were "very satisfied" with their child's private school in each of these areas. Charter schools were the next highest-ranked schools with 59%-68% satisfaction ratings in each of the surveyed areas. The results of the study indicated that parents are the most satisfied with private schools compared to other school sectors.

A quantitative companion study was conducted in 2016 by the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance (Barrows et al., 2019). The survey participants consisted of 1,500 randomly selected parents of school-aged children. The parents represented three school types: charter schools, private schools, and district-schools. In the survey, all the participants answered the same questions and provided a ranking from five response options that included a

neutral middle response option. The researchers conducted a statistical analysis of the data following the collection of the results. According to the results, parents of children attending private schools had the highest satisfaction level with their children's schools. Private school parents also expressed less concern about serious school problems than any other school type, including student behaviors and extracurricular opportunities. Although private school parents indicated positive satisfaction with parent-teacher communication, charter school parents indicated slightly higher parent-teacher communication satisfaction. The study parallels previous studies' results on parent satisfaction of schools, with private schools receiving the highest satisfaction ratings.

An evaluation of the Washington D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) yielded information regarding parents' satisfaction with schools and parents' priorities when selecting a school for their children (Dynarski et al., 2016). Low-income parents located in Washington D.C. had the opportunity to apply for vouchers allowing their children to attend private schools through the D.C. scholarship program. At the time of application, parents completed a survey rating their satisfaction level with their children's current school. The 2,200 parent responses were analyzed with statistical analysis software. Private school parents gave the highest ratings when asked to grade their children's current schools. Ninety-three percent of private school parents gave their school an A or B rating. The second-highest rating was for traditional public schools, which received A or B scores from 55% of the parents.

As part of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) evaluation, parents rated their dissatisfaction levels on 12 provided items (Dynarski et al., 2016). Private school parents had the lowest levels of dissatisfaction in all 12 areas surveyed. The highest dissatisfaction percentage (14%) of the private school parents was regarding racial mix in the private schools.

Fifty-two percent of charter school parents and 46% of public-school parents were dissatisfied with their children's lack of opportunities to observe religious observations. The parents' top dissatisfaction issues were class sizes, academic quality, discipline, and racial mix. The results of the research implied that parents valued religious education in private schools and that parents were dissatisfied when private religious schools did not provide perceived quality religious education.

From the 12 provided items on the D.C. scholarship application, parents rated their top priorities for their children's new school (Dynarski et al., 2016). Academic quality had the highest percentage from parents regardless of their children's current school type. The parents' second-highest priority was school safety, and the third highest priority was the school's location in comparison with where the participants lived. Class sizes and special services also ranked in the top five priorities of a new school. Of the ranked dissatisfaction and priority categories, class size was the only factor of importance on each category's top five rankings, indicating class size was important for parents when considering schools. The findings' significance indicated that, although parents value religious education, they did not identify religious education as a top priority in the school selection process.

Effects of Private Education

Researchers have conducted studies to evaluate the actual effects of private schooling on school-aged children's academic achievement and social development (Chingos & Kuehn, 2017). A measure of academic achievement is the educational attainment of students in high school. Chingos and Kuehn conducted a study on the effects of the Florida scholarship program on college enrollment. Propensity Score Matching Design was used to compare and analyze data gathered from Step Up for Students (SUFS), the organization that facilitates the Florida state

scholarship program, and the Florida Department of Education's Education Data Warehouse (EDW). According to the descriptive statistics data, private school enrollment yielded a 43% increase in high school graduation for students enrolled in a Florida voucher program for all four high school years. Also, students that graduated from Catholic or nonsectarian private schools were more likely to enroll in college than any other private school type.

Summary

In the literature review, qualitative and quantitative studies on the factors influencing students' enrollment in private schools, parent satisfaction, and the effects of private education were evaluated. Academic quality and religious instruction were the common factors identified in the studies on factors influencing the decision to enroll in private education (Beabout & Cambre, 2013; Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; Davis, 2011; Harris Interactive, 2013; Prichard & Swezey, 2016; Rodriguez, 2014). Parents' perceptions of schools correlate with satisfaction with their children's schools. According to the studies reviewed, parents with children attending private schools were the most satisfied with their children's school (Barrows et al., 2019; Cheng & Peterson, 2017; Dynarski et al., 2016; Shuls, 2018). The studies implied a positive perception of private schools by most parents. Although limited research was available on factors influencing parents' choice to enroll their elementary children in private, Christian schools, the existing research provided understanding of why parents choose to send their school-aged children to private schools and why they were satisfied with their decisions to enroll their children in private education. The methodology and results of the qualitative study on factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll in Christian private schools are discussed in the following chapters.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study was to discover the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll or reenroll kindergarten through fifth-grade students in private Christian schools in Florida. In the research study, the perceptions of the parents were defined as parents' feelings, observations, and thoughts on the factors influencing their decision to enroll or reenroll their children in a Christian school. Two groups of parents were interviewed to collect data in this case study: (a) parents who have enrolled their children for the first time in a Christian school and (b) parents who have chosen to reenroll their children in a Christian school a second or more year. Chapter three presents the qualitative case study methodology with an extensive overview of the research design, ethical protection methods, and data collection methods.

Research Design

In qualitative research, a researcher gains an understanding of a problem by empowering individuals to share their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of research occurs in a natural setting utilizing various data collection methods. A qualitative study was appropriate to explore the factors that influence parents to enroll their children in private Christian schools. This method of research allowed the participants to share their stories about their private Christian school experiences. To gain a thorough understanding of the research problem, the most effective method of research was conducting in-depth interviews utilizing the qualitative research design.

Five approaches make up qualitative inquiry: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth, a case study is conducted by exploring a real-life case through in-depth data collection utilizing various data collection methods. Of the different qualitative approaches, the case study method, specifically the collective case study approach, was best suited for the purpose of the study. The collective case study approach allowed the researcher to understand an issue by researching multiple sites to learn different perspectives about an issue. This method was most relevant for the study since it allowed for interactions with private school parents to listen to their stories to answer the research question regarding factors influencing the enrollment of elementary students in Christian schools. In this study, two school sites participated. Data were collected during extensive interviews with new and reenrolling parents from both schools. In addition, data from both schools were gathered from school enrollment and foundational documents.

Participants

Two private Christian schools located in south Florida were selected for the study. The participating schools were both accredited by the same accreditation agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and were affiliated with local churches. The schools differed since they represented different demographics and had different criteria for enrollment. Families representing different backgrounds and perspectives participated in the study as a result of the diversity represented in the schools. Purposefully selecting participants from diverse backgrounds strengthened the study results (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

School A was located in a major metropolitan area of South Florida. The school was established in 2000 and was started by a large evangelical church located in the area. During the 2020-2021 school year, 1,900 students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade attended

School A. According to the school's mission statement, the purpose of the school was to teach students to be followers of Christ. The academic program was built on a biblical worldview and followed state academic standards. Different curricula were utilized as tools by the teachers to help students meet and exceed state standards expectations. According to enrollment procedural documents, the school was a covenant Christian school. Therefore, at least one parent was expected to agree to the statement of faith and attend church regularly.

A meeting with two school leaders from School A occurred to discuss the purpose of the study and potential participants. School A provided a list of three parents who were reenrolling for the 2020-2021 school year and four new school parents. All of the suggested parents were contacted and asked to participate in the study. Four of the seven families consented to participate and were interviewed.

Parent A was a single parent who had a fourth grader enrolled in the school since the middle of second grade. Parent A enrolled her child in the school after adopting her child through the foster care system. Parent B had a first and a second grader. Both the children had been attending school at School A since preschool, beginning in 2017-2018. Therefore, the family had been enrolled at the elementary school for three years. Parent C had five children enrolled in School A, with two in elementary school. Parent C identified as biracial, and her family included several children adopted through foster care. In addition to the five children attending School A, the participant had two homeschooled children and one child with special needs enrolled in a local public school. The two elementary students were in first and fourth grade during the 2020-2021 school year, and it was their second year enrolled at School A. The final parent from School A was new to the school during the 2020-2021 school year. Parent D had one child who was in

fourth grade. Before enrolling in School A, Parent D's child had been enrolled in a private Christian school located in a different area. A summary of the participants is provided in Table 1.

School B, located in South Florida, was started by a local church in 1985. The school had an enrollment of 600 kindergarten through grade twelve students during the 2020-2021 school year. According to their mission statement, School B strived to nurture all students' spiritual, academic, and physical aspects to prepare them to be Christian citizen-servants. The school identified as evangelistic; therefore, students of various backgrounds were encouraged to enroll in the program. The school hoped to lead all the students into a relationship with Christ. The elementary academic program followed the scope and sequence of a nationally published Christian curriculum. Teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade used the curriculum in all academic subject areas.

The phone meeting occurred with a leader of School B to discuss the purpose of the study and the expectations for the participants. School B sent a list of potential parents, including four reenrolling families and two new families. All the parents were contacted, and five of the six consented to participate in the study.

Parent E had two children enrolled in School B. The children were enrolled in the first and third grades. The children had attended the church's preschool, which was separate from the K-12 school. Since kindergarten, both children attended the school, with the family enrolled in the elementary division for four school years. Parent F also had two students enrolled in the elementary division of the school. Both had attended the church's preschool and were now in kindergarten and third grade. Parent G had a fourth grader enrolled in the school for the 2020-2021 school year. The child had been enrolled in the school since kindergarten and had attended the church's preschool. In addition, Parent G had a stepchild enrolled in a local charter school

and an older child who had graduated from the public school system. Parent H had one child attending School B who was in kindergarten during the study. The student had been enrolled in the church preschool. Parent H had another elementary student enrolled in a local public school. The final participant also had a kindergartener. Unlike the other participants, the student had not attended the preschool run by the church. In addition to the kindergartener, Parent I had a toddler at home.

Table 1

Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	Elementary Students	Elementary Enrollment Years
School A			
Parent A	Female	4 th Grade	2018-2021
Parent B	Female	1 st Grade 2 nd Grade	2018-2021
Parent C	Female	1 st Grade 4 th Grade	2019-2021
Parent D	Female	4 th grade	2020-2021
School B			
Parent E	Female	1 st Grade 3 rd Grade	2017-2021
Parent F	Female	Kindergarten 3 rd Grade	2017-2021
Parent G	Female	4 th Grade	2016-2021
Parent H	Female	Kindergarten	2020-2021
Parent I	Male	Kindergarten	2020-2021

Role of Researcher

The researcher for this study had 13 years of experience in both public and private Christian education. The researcher had taught elementary students for over nine years in charter, public, and Christian schools. In addition, the researcher had four years of experience serving in administration in private Christian schools. At the time of the study, the researcher worked with a

team of educators to build and open a kindergarten through seventh grade Christian private school located in Florida.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher is the key instrument when conducting qualitative case studies. Therefore, the role of the researcher for this study was to design open-ended questions and conduct interviews in which the participants felt comfortable sharing their stories. The researcher utilized skills and knowledge developed while serving as a school leader to design interview questions and to interact with the participants, private school parents. The critical role of the researcher in this study was to listen to the stories the parents shared during the interviews.

Measures for Ethical Protection

Since this study involved human subjects, a request was submitted for a review by Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct the study. Once the IRB granted permission, meetings were held with the school leaders of the participating schools. Each participant completed a Participant Information Consent form before participating in the interview. The interviews were completed by phone and were recorded and transcribed with an application called Otter (Otter.ai., 2021). The participants gave permission to record the interview and verified the accuracy of the transcripts following the interviews.

The data were protected on a password-protected laptop and the identity of the participants remained confidential. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participating school and parent to maintain confidentiality; all identifiers were translated to codes. All of the collected data were kept on a password-protected laptop that was stored in a locked office.

Research Question

The research question used to guide this study was: What factors influence parents' choice to enroll or reenroll their kindergarten through fifth-grade children in Christian schools?

Data Collection

Instrument Used in Data Collection

An interview guide (Appendix A) was developed with the assistance of the methodologist to collect data. The interview guide was comprised of nine open-ended questions for all participating parents. In addition to the nine questions for all participants, two additional questions were developed for reenrolling parents. All the questions correlated with the purpose of the students and were open-ended to allow the participants to provide thorough responses, being able to share their experiences freely.

Interview questions were provided to all interviewees prior to the interview to allow the participants time to process the questions and develop thoughtful responses. Each interview was conducted over the phone and was recorded utilizing a software program called Otter (Otter.ai., 2021). The Otter application was used to transcribe the interviews as they were recorded. Then, the transcripts were reviewed and verified for accuracy by the researcher and interviewee. Once the participants reviewed the transcripts, the transcripts were analyzed and coded for themes.

Validity

Creswell and Poth (2018) identified validation strategies involving the researcher, the participants, and the reviewers. When researchers engage in the strategies, they maintain the validity of their research. To maintain the study's accuracy, nine participants from diverse backgrounds were interviewed. The corroborating evidence from the different interviews assisted in finding codes and themes in the data. Once the Otter software transcribed the interviews, the

transcriptions were sent back to the participants to be verified. The study's validity was built when the participants checked and verified the content gathered from them. Throughout the study, the researcher worked with a committee, including a methodologist, to examine the research process and the accuracy of the data and data analysis. Incorporating these validation strategies helped to maintain the validity of the study.

Procedures

Before gathering data, the researcher worked with the committee chair and methodologist to develop a research question, receive topic approval, and outline the study's plan. The researcher and methodologist worked collaboratively to develop the interview guide comprised of nine open-ended questions and two additional questions for reenrolling parents. With the committee's approval, two private Christian schools accredited by SACS were selected for the study. The schools were selected from professional relationships the researcher had with the school leaders. After meeting with the school leaders from both schools to review the purpose and procedures of the study, a list of parents from both schools, who were potential candidates for the study, were provided. The school leaders contacted each potential study candidate to inform them of the study and ask for permission to share their contact information. Each potential candidate was contacted through email correspondence. The potential participants received a consent form and the interview guide for the study.

Phone interviews were scheduled with the parents that consented to participate in the study. The interviews were scheduled based on the availability of the interviewees. The phone interviews were conducted using an Apple iPhone and were recorded on an Apple MacBook using the Otter Software program. The interview guide was followed, and researcher feedback about the responses was not provided to maintain the validity of the data. Clarification of the

questions was given when asked by the interviewees. The first-year parents were asked nine questions on the interview guide, and reenrolling parents were asked two additional questions.

The Otter software program transcribed the recordings from the interviews. The transcripts and recordings were reviewed to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. The reviewed transcripts were then emailed to each of the participants. The participants reviewed the documents and then verified the accuracy of the transcripts.

In addition to data collected during interviews, foundational records were gathered from the school leaders. The records outlined the purpose of the schools and the admission requirements for acceptance into the school's programs. Enrollment documents from the admissions department from each of the schools were requested and reviewed. The enrollment documents displayed the number of new and reenrolling families for the 2020-2021 school year.

Data Analysis

The transcriptions from the interviews were coded and analyzed for themes. Each transcription was thoroughly analyzed for common keywords and phrases. The keywords and phrases from each interview were then separated into categories and highlighted using a color-codebook in Microsoft Office. The data were analyzed for keywords and phrases to identify patterns. The codes were compared across the different interviews to identify themes. In addition, foundational and enrollment documents were compared with the interview data to identify correlations between the interviews and the documents. The themes were utilized to conclude the research question.

Summary

This case study examined parents' perceptions of factors influencing elementary students' enrollment in private Christian schools. After designing a research question and selecting the

methodology for the study, the researcher worked with the methodologist to develop the interview guide instrument for this study. Two private Christian schools in South Florida consented to participate in the research and provided lists of potential participants. The parents who agreed to participate were interviewed by the researcher and verified the interview transcripts following the interview. Data were analyzed through codes and categorization to identify themes within the data. After analyzing the collected and coded data, a report was produced on the factors influencing the enrollment of elementary private Christian school students. In the next chapter, the analysis of the interview data is presented and discussed.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this case study was to discover the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll or re-enroll kindergarten through fifth-grade students in private Christian schools in Florida. In this research study, the perceptions of the parents were defined as parents' feelings, observations, and thoughts on the factors influencing their decision to enroll or re-enroll their children in a Christian school. Two groups of parents were interviewed to collect data in this case study: (a) parents who have enrolled their children for the first time in a Christian school and (b) parents who have chosen to re-enroll their children in a Christian school for a second or more year.

Methods of Data Collection

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), conducting interviews is a primary data collection method in qualitative studies. The data for this collective case study were gathered through interviews conducted with nine participants. With the help of a methodologist, an interview guide (Appendix A) was developed containing nine open-ended questions related to the research topic. In addition, two additional questions were designed for re-enrolling parents. All the participants received the questions in advance and gave consent to participate in the study.

One-on-one interviews were conducted by phone with the participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by a computer application called Otter (Otter.ai., 2021).

Throughout the interview process, effective interview procedures were followed, including not offering feedback or comments to the participant responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants validated the transcripts once the interviews were completed. The transcriptions were stored on a password-protected computer in a locked office throughout the research process. The transcripts will be permanently deleted after three years following the completion of the research process.

The data analysis began with reading the transcripts and making notes in the margins of the interview records (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Common phrases and ideas began to emerge during the memo writing process. The next step in the analysis process was to build a codebook. The codebook was created using Microsoft Office. The interview data were thoroughly analyzed for codes during the analysis process. The codes were then placed into categories utilizing the categorical aggregation strategy. During the coding process, three major themes related to the research question emerged.

Findings by Research Question

Research Question

What factors influence parents' choice to enroll or re-enroll their kindergarten through fifth-grade children in Christian schools?

Participant A

Participant A had a fourth-grade son adopted from the foster care system and attended the church affiliated with the school since before she adopted her son. The most important factor for enrollment for Participant A was the values her child was being taught in school. Participant A said,

A significant part has to do with what I'm teaching my son at home. I only have control over that experience, and I very much want to make sure that the values and the way that he's brought up is continued on even when I'm not there.

Participant A chose her son's school because of its mission to disciple students and provide them with excellent academics. The school integrates faith into every subject area, which was important in her school selection. Although the school required her to complete an agreement form to raise her son and live her life with Christian values, she appreciated it and felt confident that they shared the same values she wanted her son to be exposed to and taught.

Participant A's motive for enrolling her son in a Christian school the first year was to surround him with Christian values and to shelter him from distractions that could arise in other schools. However, the motivating factor for re-enrollment was to provide her son with a place to thrive spiritually, academically, and socially. She said,

So, the first year he was there, I was in the mindset of I just don't want him to go through any more damage, and it was like stop the bleeding. And that was my primary focus. I didn't want him to be in an environment where some of the things that he'd been exposed to previously would continue to be prevalent, and he would probably experience and interact with them differently. He was very much drawn to a lot of difficult or bad behaviors and things like that; he's very much drawn to those. And so I just wanted to remove those factors from him, and it was kind of like I was just trying to do damage control at that time. And it was more or less, I just wanted to shelter him really was kind of my number one factor. And that has very much changed from it's not that I want to shelter him anymore is that I want him to thrive. And I see him just becoming, I mean, leaps and bounds, just this incredible child regardless of what his background is

regardless of any of the stories, there are things that he's gone through. He's just an incredible child now, and I know a lot of that has to do with the school that he's been really raised in.

Participant A continues to enroll her child at School A because she loves her child's relationships with the teachers and the classmates. In addition, Participant A is excited about the extracurricular activities her son will take part in, such as mission trips.

Participant B

Participant B had two children in first and second grade enrolled in School A. Participant B attended private schools as a child and attended the church affiliated with the school since she was 12 years old. The most important factor in selecting a school for her children was the school's Christian foundation. She felt that the school was meeting the spiritual needs of her children through Bible class, Bible verse learning, and biblical integration in all subject areas. Although the Christian foundation was the most decisive factor influencing her decision to enroll her children in Christian schools, Participant B was also interested in the school's academic program. She said, "I put them in Christian school because I know that not only is it a great academic institution, but it is also strongly founded in pure Christian principles." Participant B also mentioned concerns about the public education system and the content taught, including gender identity. The factors for enrolling her children in Christian schools have not changed from the first year; however, she has been pleased with the school each year, and her decision has become more solidified.

Participant C

Participant C had two elementary-aged children enrolled in School A, as well as three middle and high school students. Although Participant C had only been enrolled at School A for

two years, they had been enrolled at other private, Christian schools their entire education. However, Participant C had three additional children, with one child with autism enrolled in a public school and two homeschooled. The main factor influencing her decision to enroll her children in a Christian school was her husband's desire for their children to attend a Christian school. She said,

Honestly, the most dominant answer is that it's my husband's wish for his children to go to private Christian school. He grew up with his parents greatly sacrificing to put him and his sister in a Christian school, and so he really felt strongly that you know if there's any way that we can do that, he really wants that for his children.

The second factor was concerns regarding safety and the academic program of the local public schools in her area. Participant C talked to school alumni to determine their academic quality and what opportunities and careers they pursued after graduating high school. Participant C was also interested in the diversity of the school. Four of her children were adopted, and since they were a biracial family, the diversity of the student body and staff was important to her. Although her child with special needs was not enrolled in School A, Participant C also considered whether the Christian school offered educational programs for students with special needs in her decision to enroll her children in Christian school.

Participant D

Participant D had a fourth grader enrolled in School A, and her child was in her first year of enrollment at the school. However, her child had previously been enrolled in a different private Christian school. According to Participant D, the most important factor for enrolling her child in a Christian school was providing her child with a biblical foundation at school. She said,

I wanted her to have the foundation of Christ in her life. I wanted her to learn about Jesus. I wanted her to have that experience that I didn't have that relationship that I didn't have with Jesus from a young age. I found God and became a Christian when I was older, more like college, around 23-24 years old, but I want her to have that relationship on the foundation as young as possible.

Participant D adopted the religious tradition of Christianity later in life, and she wanted her child to have different experiences than she had as a child regarding her faith. Another important factor influencing her decision to enroll her child in School A was the academic program. Participant D considered other Christian schools in her area, but she believed that School A had the best educational program. Regarding School A, she said, "The school has different academic standards that meet and exceed both state and national standards."

Participant E

Participant E had first and third grade students enrolled in the school affiliated with the local church they had attended for many years. Her children were enrolled in the church's preschool before attending the elementary school division. Participant E expressed her concerns about what she had heard about the public education system and had determined before her children were even born that she wanted to protect her children's hearts by enrolling them in a Christian school. She said,

We enrolled them in a private Christian school just because of like the things we've heard going on in public schools, and I wanted to protect their hearts and minds and also have them have a Christ-centered more focused education.

Participant E shared how a Christian school needs to teach students Christian principles and incorporate them in their interactions. In addition, she appreciated that her children participated

in daily Bible lessons and weekly chapel services. Another important factor mentioned by Participant E was the teaching staff and administrators. She knew the teachers and administrators and valued their relationships with the Lord. She said, "I think the only thing that the only other thing I would share is that we know that the teachers and the administration, they really, really love our kids." Participant E's next important factor was academic quality. She felt the school's academic quality was advanced and was pleased with the academic progress of her children.

When asked about her decision to re-enroll her children in the Christian school, Participant E expressed that her enrollment factors have remained the same each year. She said that she feels even stronger about the importance of enrolling her children in Christian schools with recent societal changes. Regarding her initial reasons for enrollment and her reasons for enrollment, she said,

I don't think they've changed at all. I think everything that we wanted and all the reasons that we decided that we would put them in a private Christian school are the still the same reasons now and probably even more so with the change in like society and how people react to things and just all the stuff that you want to protect your kids from.

Participant F

Participant F did not have a spiritual background before sending her children to a Christian private school. The initial reason for enrolling her children in the associated church preschool and kindergarten was due to recommendations from other moms she knew and her dislike of the local public schools. She decided to give private, Christian education a try, and she loved her experiences at the school for four years. She said,

The school has a preschool, where I met a couple moms, and they said that this school was a good school. And I didn't like the other schools around me, so I said, why not just

give it a try... I gave it a try, and I absolutely fell in love with the school and the teachers and everybody else.

Despite her initial factor for enrollment being parent recommendations and dislike of other schools in the area, she said that the most important factor to consider when selecting a Christian school is what the kids learn about religion. Participant F was amazed by her children's love for God and their knowledge about Him. She mentioned that she was not raised as a Christian, so she knew that they have learned everything about God from the teachers at the school.

The factors for re-enrolling her children in the school differ from her initial factors for enrollment. She didn't know what to expect when she enrolled them in the school. However, after her positive experiences at the school, she had higher standards which motivated her to re-enroll her children at School B. She said, "I guess I have more higher standards now. Knowing how much it has taught them and how much better of a person they are, that makes me want to keep coming back."

Participant G

Participant G had her youngest child enrolled in School B since preschool, and the child was in fourth grade. Participant G had a stepson in a local charter school and older children who graduated high school through the public school system. Her disappointment with the public education system influenced her to enroll her elementary-aged child in a Christian school. She said, "I feel that the public school waters a lot of the academics down and that they focus more on the standard of the school and what is better for the school as opposed to what better as a child." Based on her previous experiences with her older children growing up in public schools, she knew she wanted her youngest child to attend a private school; and she chose School B

because of the quality of the teaching staff. She said about School B, "And from the moment I stepped in, I knew it would be just the perfect fit."

Participant G listed the most important factors when selecting a private Christian school: a school that incorporates Christian principles into all they do and the academic program. She stressed the importance of a school genuinely living out the Christian lifestyle. She also considered the academic curriculum an important factor for enrollment. She believed curriculum should mirror the state or national standards. Participant G expressed the importance of children specifically learning to write legibly in cursive and to sign their names. She also appreciates the higher expectations for grade scales at private schools.

Participant G's factors for re-enrolling her child in a private Christian school remained the same from her original factor for enrollment, which was for Participant G's child to have an education with higher academic standards than the public schools. However, the factor influencing her decision to continue to re-enroll her child at School B was the quality of the teachers. Participant G appreciated the longevity, values, and professionalism of the teachers at the school.

Participant H

Participant H was a first-year kindergarten parent at School B; however, her child attended the associated church preschool the previous school year. Participant H had other elementary children enrolled in a local public school where she planned to enroll her kindergartener. At the time for enrollment, Participant H's child asked her to pray about the decision because the child wanted to attend the elementary school associated with the church. Participant H said, "I couldn't bring myself to put her into a public school." After the experience with a Christian preschool, Participant H wanted her child to have a biblical foundation. She felt

her shy child would have a hard time attending a public school after her child's positive Christian preschool experience. Participant H had not considered any other Christian schools in her decision process. Still, Participant H considered the children's happiness and word-of-mouth recommendations important factors to consider when enrolling your child in a school. Although she did not have a preference for any particular academic curriculum, Participant H believed it was important for schools to offer a challenging and advanced academic program

Participant I

Participant I was the father of a kindergarten student at School B, and his child attended preschool at the church affiliated with School B. Participant I had attended School B from fifth to ninth grade and then for the final two years of high school. The most important factor influencing the participant's decision to enroll his child in a Christian school was his Christian beliefs and desire to raise his child in a Christian atmosphere as much as possible. In addition, Participant I wanted to make sure his child received the best education possible, which he felt the public schools did not offer from firsthand experiences as a child and from feedback from his mother, who was a public-school teacher. He said, "The main reason why is because you know my wife and I are Christians, and then also, the education from a private school to a public school is night and day difference." Before enrolling his child in School B, Participant I considered other private schools in the area. However, he was most impressed with the longevity of the teaching staff and the professionalism of the school. Another important factor for enrollment was the financial cost of the school. Despite the financial sacrifice, he believed it was worth the investment. He said,

What I'd like to contribute, kind of just what I've already said is if a family is able to financially send their kids to a private school, I think it is very beneficial. It is a great investment. You see it. You definitely see it as a payoff when your kids come home and

are memorizing Bible verses, writing in cursive and telling me things that I may not even know.

Themes

Creswell's (2018) data spiral analysis was implemented to identify themes from the interview data. The interview transcripts were analyzed for codes, and the codes were categorized into themes. Three themes emerged from the data analysis. The three major themes that emerged related to the research question are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Theme Descriptions

Theme	Description
Biblical Foundation	Foundational knowledge of God and biblical values
Public School Dissatisfaction	Lack of satisfaction with the content and values taught in public education institutions
Previous School Experiences	Past experiences in a school as a child or as a parent

Theme 1: Biblical Foundation

In this study, six of the nine participants shared that their desire for their children to have a biblical foundation influenced their decision to enroll their child or children in a private Christian school. The participants appreciated the connection between home and school regarding the Christian values they strive to instill in their children. Parent A said, "A significant part has to do with what I'm teaching my son at home." Parents wanted their children to continue receiving biblical instruction and be taught biblical values all day rather than just at church and

home. Parents shared how the schools helped build a biblical foundation through Bible classes, prayer, Bible verse memorization, chapel, and daily interactions with Christ-followers living out biblical principles.

Three of the participants from School A considered a biblical foundation the most important factor in their decision to enroll their children in Christian schools. The school is a covenant school; therefore, all the parents must be Christians and agree to the school's statement of faith. All the participants from the school shared about their relationships with God and how that relationship was essential to their lives and families. According to the parents, they wanted their children to be immersed in a biblical foundation as early as possible in life and sending their children to a Christian school was critical in developing the biblical foundation. Participants B and D did not consider any other school options that did not provide biblical instruction. Participant B said, "The main reason is because I believe it's central to their growth, not only academic but spiritual." Participant D said, "I wanted her to have the foundation of Christ in her life."

The primary factor influencing the enrollment decision of the parents from School B, which is an evangelical school, was the parents' Christian beliefs and their desire for their children to have a biblical foundation. Two of the participants from School B, Participants E and I, shared their Christian beliefs and their passion for their children to have a solid biblical foundation. Participant E never considered any other education options because she knew she wanted her children to receive biblical instruction daily at a Christian school. From the time she was pregnant, Participant E knew her children would attend School B. Regarding the other schools considered, she said, "We didn't really (consider other school options). From the time that we found out we were pregnant with our firstborn, we were like they're going to go to

School B." Participant H did not consider a biblical foundation as a factor that would influence her decision regarding the school for her child. However, after her child attended a Christian preschool, Participant H realized she wanted to continue sending her child to a school that strived to build a biblical foundation:

Specifically, I hadn't given it much thought prior to her going to a Christian preschool.

But once she did, I couldn't bring myself to put her into a public school. The foundation, the prayer before meals, the Bible verses, and just the overall foundation, she became so accustomed to it.

Theme 2: Public School Dissatisfaction

In this study, participants expressed their dissatisfaction with public education and shared how it influenced their decision to enroll their children in a Christian school. Christian schools were one of many school choices participants considered when searching for school options other than public schools. Of the interviewed parents, six of them mentioned their dissatisfaction with public education. The reasons for being dissatisfied with the local public education options differed among the participants.

Three of the parents, Participants G, B, and E, stated that they had different values than those taught in public schools. These parents believed that the public education system teaches academic content and values that contradict their Christian beliefs. Participant G did not like that students were not allowed to pray or were pressured to feel ashamed of saying the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools. She said,

I want them to be able to pray and not feel ashamed and to say the Pledge of Allegiance because we live in the United States and to have values, and I feel like that has completely diminished in our public schools.

Participant B specifically mentioned concerns about the topics of gender fluidity and sex ed in public education. Therefore, these three parents felt they could protect the hearts and minds of their children by sending them to Christian schools. Participant E said, "We enrolled them in a private Christian school, just because of like the things we've heard going on in public schools, and I wanted to protect their hearts and minds."

Four of the participants were dissatisfied with the academic quality of the local public schools. Two of the parents, Participants B and F, were not opposed to public education in general; however, they were dissatisfied with the public schools in their specific districts. Regarding public schools in her district, Participant B said, "There are some concerns, especially in middle school for safety and for quality of education. And that also plays a factor and our decision to send our children to a private Christian school." Parent F said, "I didn't like the other schools around me." However, the other two parents who were not pleased with public education were opposed to the quality of public education in general. Participant G did not believe that the academic programs were rigorous enough in the public schools. Participant G said, "I feel that the public school waters a lot of the academics down." Participant I also did not believe that public schools had challenging academic programs. He experienced firsthand the differences in academic quality when he switched from private to public education as a teenager. He said,

When I was in private school, I would have to study at least two to three nights before I would go and take a test, as a freshman. When I went over to public school, I was in all AP classes, which is the most you know, advance classes that public schools offer. I did not bring a book home to study or do any kind of homework from 10th grade. And that doesn't mean that I'm some genius or smart person. But I did see the difference between private school and public school, and it was a night and day difference.

Theme 3: Previous School Experiences

The third theme that emerged from the data was previous school experiences. The experiences that influenced the parents' decisions to enroll in Christian schools were both positive and negative childhood personal experiences and experiences as parents of children enrolled in other school options. Three of the parents shared their experiences with schools and how those experiences influenced their decisions.

Participants B and I both attended private schools as children. Both parents had positive experiences and wanted their children to have the same positive experiences. Participant B and her husband had both attended Catholic private schools. The incidents at the private school influenced her desire for her children to attend a private school and helped her determine the type of private school she wanted her children to attend. Participant B said,

My husband and I went to private school. It wasn't a religious school, but we both went to private school, so that's perhaps you know another reason why public school or just any private school wouldn't be an option for us.

Participant I attended public and private school as a child. However, the experiences helped him to see how advanced the private Christian school program was compared to the public-school academic programs. The negative experiences at the public school and his positive Christian school experiences influenced his decision to enroll his child in a Christian school. When considering schools for his child, Participant I did consider public schools due to the financial aspects of private schools. However, he settled that providing his child with a private Christian education was worth the financial sacrifice.

Although Participant C attended public schools and had positive experiences, her spouse attended private schools and wanted their child to attend them. She said:

He grew up with his parents greatly sacrificing to put him and his sister in a Christian school and so he really felt strongly that you know if there's any way that we can do that he really wants that for his children.

Participant C's husband had negative experiences in public schools that have had a long-term negative impact on him. As a result of the scarring experiences, his parents decided to make sacrifices to send their son to private school. The experiences influenced her husband so deeply that he desired his children to attend private Christian schools despite the financial burden.

Evidence of Quality

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that qualitative researchers implemented at least two validation strategies in their studies. Validation strategies are employed by researchers to make their studies accurate and reliable. Three validation strategies presented by Creswell and Poth (2018) were implemented in this study.

The first validation strategy was triangulation of multiple data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The process of triangulation involved corroborating evidence from multiple sources of data by analyzing the data and finding similarities between the multiple data sources. When a researcher implements triangulation, codes are identified from the multiple data sources. The codes are then utilized to find the themes related to the research question. In this study, two different groups of participants were interviewed at two different private Christian schools. One group of participants were families that had been enrolled in the school for one or more years; the other group of participants were first year private Christian school parents. The data collected from the participants was analyzed for factors for enrollment that were similar among all the participant groups from both schools. Codes were identified based on the factors presented by the participants. Then, the codes were analyzed to identify themes for the research question. Any

codes that did not directly relate to the research question were not used to identify the themes of the study.

The second strategy employed in this study was prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth, researchers immerse themselves in the field and build rapport with the participants in order to make informed decisions about the study and data. Misinformation is minimized when researchers understand the culture and context of the study sites and field of study. The researcher of this study had been immersed in the field of education for 16 years with 12 years working directly in the field of private Christian education. The researcher had been in leadership at School A and had built a rapport with several of the families involved in the study during her time of employment. The schools' mission, the school campus, and educational programs were all familiar with the researcher prior to the study. Also, extensive time was spent at School B to learn the campus and mission of the school. Through interviews with leadership and observing foundational documents, the researcher became familiar with the participating School B. Prolonged engagement in the field of private Christian education resulted in field-based decisions strengthening the validity of the study.

The third validation strategy implemented in this study was a peer review throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this validation strategy, Creswell and Poth recommended researchers involve someone familiar with the field of study into the research process. The peer review is conducted by an external source that reviews the research, asks questions, and assists in maintaining the accuracy of the data. In this study, the researcher worked directly with a committee consisting of three individuals with terminal degrees in the field of education, including a methodologist who worked with the researcher to code the data

and find themes in the study. The study committee provided feedback and worked alongside the researcher throughout the entire research process. The committee challenged the researcher to be consistent, honest, and accurate during the study.

Summary

In Chapter 4, the factors influencing the participants' decisions to enroll their elementary children in private Christian schools was discussed. Nine parents from two different private Christian schools were interviewed following the same interview guide. The participants shared their stories and their hearts regarding the school choice they had selected for their children. The transcripts from the interview were coded, and categories were developed to identify the themes of this study. The three themes were discussed in this chapter in response to the research question. In the next chapter, the results are discussed, the study limitations, implications for future practice, and recommendations for further studies are presented.

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this case study was to discover the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll or re-enroll kindergarten through fifth-grade students in private Christian schools in Florida. In this final chapter, the methods of data collection and the summary of results are reviewed. In addition, the research question is discussed, along with implications of the study for future practice and recommendations for future research.

Methods of Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to investigate parents' perceptions regarding the factors that influenced their decisions to enroll their elementary children in private Christian schools. Unlike previous studies conducted on school choice, this study specifically focused on why parents chose Christian schools for their children's education instead of the other school choice options available to them. The focus of this study was first-time enrollment in Christian schools and re-enrollment in Christian schools. This study provided insight regarding the initial factors in the decision-making process and the factors influencing continued enrollment in Christian schools.

The qualitative approach was used to understand the factors influencing parents to enroll their elementary children in Christian schools. The data were gathered through extensive interviews with two groups of Christian school parents from two different Christian private schools, School A and School B, located in South Florida. The participants included four parents

from School A and five parents from School B, selected with the assistance of the school leaders. Three of the parents were new Christian school parents, and the other six were re-enrolling parents.

An interview guide, developed with the help of the research committee, was followed during interviews with each participant. The interviews were conducted by phone and were recorded and transcribed by an application called Otter (Otter.ai., 2021). The transcriptions were analyzed using codes for meaningful words and phrases. Each transcript was analyzed individually, and all data were cross-case analyzed. The results of the analysis included three themes: Biblical foundation, public school dissatisfaction, and previous school experiences.

Summary of Results

Based on the study results, many different factors influenced the decision of parents to enroll or re-enroll their kindergarten through fifth-grade children in Christian schools. During the interviews, the participants shared more than one factor influencing the decision to enroll their children in Christian schools. Not just one factor influenced the parents' decisions; however, several factors combined resulted in their enrollment decisions.

Although the participants shared several factors influencing them as they considered school choice options for their students, three factors were common among the nine participants. The common factors were rooted in the families' religious values in their homes, and their knowledge of other school options, including what they have to offer based on shared information or experiences. The common factors among the parents interviewed were Biblical instruction and values; dissatisfaction in other school choice options, particularly public education; and personal school experiences.

Re-enrollment participants were asked about the factors influencing the re-enrollment of their children in the school. Each of the six re-enrolling participants shared the same original factors as the factors influencing their decisions to re-enroll. Participant E said:

I don't think they've changed at all. I think everything that we wanted and all the reasons that we decided that we would put them in a private Christian school are the still the same reasons now and probably even more so with the change in like society and how people react to things and just all the stuff that you want to protect your kids from.

However, they added additional factors based on their experiences at the school and the specific characteristics of the school that influenced them to continue enrolling their children each year. The parents specifically mentioned the quality of the teachers, the programs their children have thrived in, and the friendships their children have made with other students. Participant G, whose child had been enrolled in School B for five years, shared,

It's going to be the way it is, and I will re-enroll her throughout her the rest of her schooling because I agree with how they're teaching it and what they're doing. I think they have a good, a good program there.

Discussion by Research Question

Research Question 1

What factors influence parents' choice to enroll or re-enroll their kindergarten through fifth-grade children in Christian schools?

The results from the interview data suggested three common factors that influence parents' decision to enroll and re-enroll their elementary children in private Christian schools. Each participant had more than one factor influencing their school choice decisions; however, the three themes were the common themes shared. According to the data, the three factors

influencing Christian school enrollment of elementary students were the biblical foundations built at Christian schools, public school dissatisfaction, and previous school experiences.

Theme 1: Biblical Foundation

Six of the nine participants stated an important factor contributing to their decision to enroll their children in Christian schools was the biblical instruction and foundation provided in Christian schools. The six participants stated the most important factor they considered during the decision-making process was providing their children with an education that aligns with their Biblical beliefs and instills Biblical values in their children's lives. These participants followed Christian teachings and principles in their personal lives and did not want to separate their children's education from their biblical beliefs.

The mission of School A was to make disciples of Jesus Christ through a biblical school environment that prepares students to glorify God spiritually, academically, and socially. During school observations and interviews, school leaders shared how they are working to provide a strong biblical foundation for their students beginning in preschool. In addition to weekly chapel services, the students follow a discipleship program plan, including disciple groups and spiritual retreats starting in fifth grade. In addition to helping students in their spiritual development, the school required parents to attend a parenting class focused on raising students with a biblical worldview.

Three participants from School A stated they were working to instill biblical values in their children's lives, and they wanted their children to be taught these values at school and home. Because these parents hold firmly to their Christian beliefs, they did not consider other school options. The fourth participant from School A, Participant C, was also instilling Christian values in her children at home and wanted her children to receive an education promoting the

same values. However, Participant C had considered other school choices for her children due to the costs of Christian education and lack of financial resources she had to fund the education of her large family.

The parents' perceptions regarding the biblical instruction their children were receiving agree with the mission of the school and the programs the school leadership is intentionally implementing to achieve their mission. Parents from School A shared how the school worked to immerse their children in a biblical worldview through Bible class, prayer, Bible verse memorization, chapel, and the school's handling of discipline situations. Participant D stated,

So all the research that I did before I made the final decision on what school that I will be enrolling my child in, it's definitely the fact that the everything is Christ based, even when you're learning something like math.

The school is implementing research-based strategies and programs to achieve the mission of helping students develop spiritually.

According to the school's mission statement, School B is working to nurture its students' spirit and prepare them to be Christian citizen-servants. Based on interviews and observations with school leadership, the school is working to achieve the mission through weekly chapel services and daily Bible lessons. School B accepts parents of all belief systems and does not require parents to agree with the school's statement of faith. Therefore, the biblical instruction and training the students received were acceptable to the parents who enrolled their children in the school, since most of the parents interviewed from School B did not instill the same biblical values and principles in their own homes.

Three of the five participants from School B also agreed the biblical instruction and values taught at Christian schools influenced their decisions for Christian school enrollment.

Participants E and I stated they instill Christian values in their homes and wanted the same beliefs to be taught at school. However, Participant H did not say that she taught biblical values at home and stated that she had not considered biblical instruction a factor in school choice before enrolling her child in kindergarten. Participant H's child asked to attend a school that taught the Bible and allowed prayer. Hence, Participant H decided to enroll her child in a Christian private school.

Although the parents from School B stated they value the biblical foundation their children receive, their responses demonstrated a lack of understanding of biblical foundation development. Participant H and three of the participants from School B did not provide biblical instruction for their children at home, reflecting the school's policy to allow parents of all faiths to enroll their children. These three participants were the only ones in the study that did not list a biblical foundation as the main factor that influenced their initial decision to enroll their children in a Christian school. However, they did share that they believe the school is meeting their children's spiritual needs.

The theme supported the theoretical framework of the study. According to the rational choice theory, parents weighed the benefits of sending their children to Christian schools with the costs (Walberg, 2000). The study participants believed the expense of Christian school tuition and fees were outweighed by the benefits of their children receiving a biblical foundation. Parent A said,

It's an absolutely worthwhile investment. And I've been hit with financial items, over and over again, and at the end of the day, just the peace that I have with him on a daily basis is worth every single penny.

The study results aligned with the literature on factors influencing private school enrollment, including all types of private schools (Beabout & Cambre, 2013; Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; Reichard, 2012; Rodriguez, 2014). In the survey conducted by The Friedman Foundation for School Choice, parents receiving financial aid and those not receiving aid had to rank the factors for private school enrollment in the order of importance (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016). Both parent groups ranked religious education (38%) as the primary factor influencing their children's enrollment in private schools. In a qualitative study conducted by Beabout and Cambre (2013), parents of elementary students attending St. Thomas Catholic School also ranked religious and moral education offered at the school as the primary factor for enrollment. In another study conducted at private Christian schools in California, 40.4% of participants ranked biblical instruction as the main factor influencing their school choice decisions (Rodriguez, 2014). Finally, a study conducted by Reichard (2012) on parent religiosity and the impact on education found that religious parents prefer religious education for their children. Parents valued an education that provided a biblical foundation for their children.

Theme 2: Public School Dissatisfaction

The second theme developed from the interview data was dissatisfaction with public education options. One participant from School A and all the participants from School B spoke about their dissatisfaction with public education, specifically the public education options in their county of residence. Although the participants agreed on their dissatisfaction with public schools, they had varying reasons for dissatisfaction. The two main reasons for public education dissatisfaction were the quality of the academic programs and the values taught in the schools that differ from their values.

Three participants stated that they had different values than those taught in public schools. The participants chose Christian schools because they believed the values aligned more closely with their religious values. The values mentioned in the interviews included Christian values, such as prayer, and patriotic values, such as daily pledges to the American flag.

Participant G said,

I want structure, and I want discipline. I want them to be able to pray and not feel ashamed and to say the Pledge of Allegiance because we live in the United States, and to have values. I feel like that has completely diminished in our public schools.

Parent E did not mention anything specific that did not align with her beliefs, but she did share that she has heard things and wanted to protect her children from them. She said,

We enrolled them in a private Christian school, just because of like the things we've heard going on in public schools, and I wanted to protect their hearts and minds and also have them have a Christ-centered, more focused education.

The participants were willing to pay the costs associated with attending Christian schools to teach their children the values they believed to be important.

Participants G, H, and I were disappointed with public school academic programs and believed that the curriculum in Christian schools was more rigorous than the public-school curriculum. Participant G stated the dissatisfaction with the academic quality of public education was the main factor influencing her decision to enroll her child in a Christian school. She said, "I feel that the public school waters a lot of the academics down." Participant I also stated his disappointment with public school academic offerings. He said, "You know, there's a lot of differences between public and private schools, and in private schools, teachers are still teaching cursive handwriting, the numbers, her blends." Participants C and F mentioned they were

dissatisfied with the academic quality of the local public schools in their county of residence; however, they were satisfied overall with public education. Therefore, they felt the local Christian private school would provide a better academic education for their children than the public schools near where they lived.

Participants were not satisfied with their local school options, specifically regarding the academic programs they offered and the values they taught. The participants preferred the programs offered at the Christian schools over those in the local public schools. They held the conviction that it was worth the financial cost of sending their children to Christian schools so their children could receive an education they perceived to be better than the public-school options. Participant I shared in detail about his dissatisfaction with public education. He compared the financial cost with the benefits of the academic quality of his child's education. He said,

If a family is able to financially send their kids to a private school, I think it is very beneficial. It is a great investment. You see it, you definitely see it pay off when your kids come home and are memorizing Bible verses, writing in cursive, and telling me things that I may not even know. They'll say things that I have to ask them what that means. And so, as far as that goes, I definitely see that it's a great investment if you're able to make it happen.

The participants from School B expressed the most dissatisfaction with public education compared with the one parent from School A. School B's participants said the rigor of the Christian private school's curriculum, including teaching cursive handwriting in kindergarten and memorizing facts. However, the quality and rigor of the curriculum were the perceptions of the parents. The curriculum followed by School B for all core subjects is not research based and does

not meet the rigor expectations of state standards. The curriculum content and worksheets are conducive for all students performing well by the curriculum's standards. Therefore, the parents' perception of their student's academic achievements did not align with the research-based grade-level expectations published by the state. Participant F said, "My children have been doing really well in there, they get all A's. Well, most of them, I think that pretty much all the kids do well in the school academically."

The results from the study parallel studies on school choice satisfaction (Barrows et al., 2019; Cheng & Peterson, 2017; Shuls, 2018). The researchers had parents rank their satisfaction with private, public, and charter school education. Studies on parent satisfaction with school choices reported the highest satisfaction rankings among private school parents. Although the private school parents were not specifically from Christian schools, the parents were most satisfied when their children were enrolled in private schools and most dissatisfied when they were enrolled in public education options. The Washington D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) survey yielded similar results, with charter school and traditional school parents reporting the highest levels of dissatisfaction (Dynarski et al., 2016). The literature review results and this study's data confirm that parents are dissatisfied with public schools, both with the values instilled and the academic programs; therefore, some parents, like those included in the study, seek other school options for their children.

Theme 3: Previous School Experiences

Previous school experiences, including personal childhood experiences and previous experiences involving their children, was the third theme that emerged during the interviews. Five of the nine participating parents stated their own personal school experiences, or their older children's school experiences, influenced their decisions to enroll their children in Christian

private schools. The experiences had either a negative or positive impact on their lives, resulting in them deciding that Christian private school education offered the best education for their children.

Three participants expressed how their positive and negative personal school experiences influenced their decision to enroll their children in Christian schools. Participants I and B attended private schools as children and had positive experiences. Participant B and her spouse attended private schools, but they were not specifically Christian private schools. She said they never considered any public education options since their only experiences were in private schools. Participant I also attended public schools and had negative experiences while attending a public school. He spoke on the academic differences between private and public schools' education. He said,

So with all that said, the main reasons why is because you know my wife and I are Christians, and then also, the education from a private school to a public school is night and day difference. I can't really stress that more just because I saw it first hand and looking back now that I have kids, I'm like, yeah, you know what, it was a massive difference. So those were some of the main reasons why we sent her to private school.

Participant C had positive public-school experiences; however, her husband grew up in a family that greatly sacrificed for him and his sibling to go to a private school. Participant C's mother-in-law and father-in-law had scarring experiences during their school years due to desegregation. Therefore, they wanted to shield their children from these negative experiences and found a more welcoming environment in a Christian private school. Therefore, Participant C's husband wanted to do the same for his children by sending them to a Christian private school. Participant C said,

Honestly, the most dominant answer is that it's my husband's wish for his children to go to private Christian school. He grew up with his parents greatly sacrificing to put him and his sister in a Christian school, and so he really felt strongly that you know if there's any way that we can do that, he really wants that for his children. Our parents' generation is honestly the generation that went through desegregation in middle school and high school, and my husband's parents specifically had some scarring experiences with that. So when they moved down to South Florida, they would have their electricity turned off, but their kids were in private school, so that was something that was really important to my husband, and so that is really the biggest reason.

The data from the study supports the rational choice theory (Walberg, 2000). Despite the financial cost of private education, the participants were willing to make financial sacrifices for their children to have the positive school experiences they had as children.

The study results support the findings in the literature regarding the influence of previous experiences on school enrollment decisions (Sikkink & Schwarz, 2018). The study conducted by Sikkink and Schwarz (2018) studied the influence of previous school experiences on parents' school choices. According to the data, parents tend to send their children to the school type that they attended. Parents who graduated from religious private schools were more likely to send their children to the same school type than any other parent group.

Participants G and H had older children enrolled in public education. They had experienced public education from the perspective of a parent. Participant H did not feel that her youngest daughter would do well in a public school due to her shyness. In addition to wanting her daughter to continue receiving a Christian foundation, she also knew a public-school setting would not be the most conducive for her daughter to excel socially and academically.

Participant G had older children that had been enrolled in public school. Participant G saw firsthand the academic differences between the two school types. She said,

Seeing my stepson and seeing the curriculum and seeing what he was learning and seeing how with the SAT the scores now you don't have to score as high, and they made it a little bit easier. It just makes me shake my head, honestly, because I don't want my child to have to be less of a student; I want her to be more of a student.

Participant G continued to share that she believes that the curriculum utilized by School B is more rigorous and prepares the students better for graduating high school. However, the parent's perception is errant since the curriculum followed by School B is not research-based and does not meet state standard expectations.

Study Limitations

A limitation of the study was the lack of diversity. The school leaders of School A and School B selected a diverse group of parents to participate in the study. Participants were chosen to include a diverse group based on ethnicity, race, gender, marital status, and funding source. However, not all parents selected by the school leaders agreed to participate in the study resulting in a lack of diversity. Therefore, the lack of diversity of the participants and the selection process were study limitations. Another limitation of the study was the geographical location. The study took place at two private Christian schools in South Florida. Therefore, the data may not represent Christian private school parents in other regions of the state or country.

Implications for Future Practice

Knowing the factors that influence parents' decisions to enroll their kindergarten through fifth-grade students in Christian schools could help Christian school leaders increase their school enrollment. Christian school leaders are responsible for developing a school environment that meets, not only the learning and spiritual needs of the students, but also an environment pleasing to the parents. Therefore, it is important to understand what influences parents to enroll their children in Christian schools to ensure enrollment remains optimal, which is necessary to fund the school adequately. Based on the findings of this study, parents considered the biblical foundation offered at Christian schools as one of the most important factors for enrollment. Developing effective biblical instruction and implementing an immersive biblical worldview philosophy in the school could increase enrollment for Christian schools.

Although parents from both School A and School B perceived that the school was meeting the spiritual needs of the students, they had different methods of developing the biblical worldviews of the students. The same applied to the academic programs offered by the schools. Both parent groups stated the school was academically rigorous even though the curriculum utilized by School B was not research-based. Therefore, school leaders and educators need to educate parents on research-based methods of immersing students in a biblical worldview and teaching academically rigorous standards to ensure their children receive the education they perceive them to be receiving. It is also imperative Christian school leaders follow through on providing their students with the education they market to school families.

Parents are dissatisfied with the academic programs offered in public education. Therefore, private Christian school leaders should not capitalize on this dissatisfaction by promising an effective education that appears effective but is, in reality, subpar. Christian school

leaders must instead ensure they are providing all of their students a quality education that not only meets but exceeds state standards and makes learning engaging for all students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study addressed factors influencing the decision for parents to enroll their elementary-aged children in Christian schools, the study did not address what factors parents consider when selecting a Christian school for their children. During the interviews, participants mentioned considering more than one Christian school; therefore, a mixed-methods study on why parents choose one Christian school compared to other Christian school options would be beneficial.

Another recommendation for future research emerged during the interviews with the participants. As part of the interview process, parents shared what they perceived to be the strengths and weaknesses of Christian schools. A recurring response to the weakness of Christian schools was the concept of students growing up sheltered and unable to function outside of their school and church environment. Future research on the strengths and weaknesses of Christian school enrollment from the perspective of the students and parents would be beneficial. A qualitative case study would allow Christian school parents and students to share their stories on how school enrollment positively and negatively impacted their lives and the student's life as an adult. Understanding the negative and positive influence of attending Christian schools could help school leaders address the issues and develop programs that better prepare students for functioning with others outside of their school and home environments.

Conclusion

This study was a qualitative case study on factors influencing the decision of parents to enroll their kindergarten through fifth-grade children in Christian private schools. The two

participating Christian schools were located in South Florida. School A was a large Christian school with 1,900 enrolled students in preschool through twelfth grade, and School B was a mid-sized Christian school with 600 students enrolled in kindergarten through twelfth grade. During the research process, nine parents from the participating Christian schools shared their stories and experiences in the school choice decision-making process and their experiences in their children's Christian schools. The interviews were conducted following an interview guide to maintain consistency.

Three themes emerged from the data indicating the main factors were biblical instruction, dissatisfaction with public education options, and previous school experiences. The study results were significant for school leaders as they planned strategies for improving school enrollment when school enrollment is declining across the United States (Nichols, 2016). Although other factors emerged relating directly to re-enrollment and why parents selected the participating schools, the factors were not frequent enough to develop as themes or were not relevant to the research question. However, the additional information recorded from the interviews could be used for future research studies. The results of this study increased the awareness of factors influencing Christian school enrollment in the field of Christian private education and contributed to the professional literature on private Christian schools.

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Appendix A

Parent Interview Guide

Set A - New and Reenrolling Families

1. Why are you enrolling your children in a private Christian school?
2. Tell me about your children and their academic needs.
3. How does this school meet their academic needs?
4. How does this school meet their spiritual needs?
5. Why did you decide to enroll your children in this Christian school?
6. What other school choice options did you consider and why did you eliminate them?
7. What are your most important factors to consider when selecting a Christian school?
8. What are the strengths of Christian schools? What are the weaknesses?
9. What would you like to contribute regarding your choice in enrolling or reenrolling your children in Christian schools?

Set B - Reenrolling Families

10. What is it that keeps you reenrolling year after year?
11. How have the factors for enrolling your children in Christian schools changed since the first year of enrollment?