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Magdalene Uwadiogbu Okobah

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2018

Abstract

The Influence of Parental Perceptions on Early Childhood Educational Choices in
Nigeria

by

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M Ed, University of Nigeria, Nsukka 1992

B Ed, University of Benin, Benin City 1987

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Early Childhood Education

Walden University

January 2019

Abstract

The influx of women of childbearing age into the labor force, family dynamics of dual working parents as a result of economic factors, and weakening of extended family supports have increased demand for early childhood care and education programs in Nigeria. Consequently, a problem emerged in increased enrollment in ECCE programs that are deficient in terms of structural and process factors of child-caregiver ratio, group size, staff qualifications, health and safety practices, curriculum implementation, and parental engagement. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that influenced parents' in their decision process for ECCE placement for their children aged 6 months to 1 year in Asaba education zone of Delta State, Nigeria. Epistemological constructivism was employed as the conceptual framework for this inquiry. A qualitative design together with one-on-one interviews of 9 parents of children enrolled in selected public, mission, and private ECCE programs was employed to answer four research questions on parents' decision making for ECCE selection. The resulting data were analyzed using both a priori and open coding to generate themes and patterns. The study revealed that parents relied on personal priorities over quality indicators. This study may contribute to social change by providing policy makers and other stakeholders with information on factors parents consider in their selection of ECCE programs, including factors that incline parents to choose quality-deficient programs. This information may lead to program improvements that increase enrollment of children into quality programs, reduce gaps in achievement and opportunity between the low and middle income groups, and enhance social equity and success for children enrolled ECCE programs.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my children Onyeogali, Chiedu, and Obichukwu, who gave me all the encouragement and support that propelled me through my study. This work is equally dedicated to all my grandchildren: Bryan, Jason, Nathan, Joeachin, Shan and Olorooluwalashare, who were delivered during the course of my program, thereby giving me the privilege to experience the joy of being a grandmother.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The enactment by the Nigerian government of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act number 66 in 2004 resulted in the expansion of the scope of the UBE to incorporate programs and initiatives for early childhood care and education (ECCE). Consequently, the UBE program has provisions for every public primary school to designate an ECCE program serving children aged 3 to 5 years to serve as feeder to the school's primary 1 classes. The children enrolled in these designated programs eventually transit to linked primary school by age 6 years. These efforts attest to the government's commitment to its 2003 endorsement of the Child Rights Convention (CRC), Education for All (EFA) 2000 Declaration at Dakar World Education Forum, and 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Before the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtien, Thailand in March, 1990, ECCE was not recognized as a distinct level of education by the stakeholders in the field. However, the adoption of ECCE as a key component of the UBE at Jomtien, Thailand in 1999 and the rapid ratification of the Child Rights Convention gave recognition to ECCE. Subsequent adoption of the EFA 2000 Dakar Framework for Action gave ECCE the recognition as a distinct tier of education system globally (UNESCO, 2000). Since then, ECCE has been globally acknowledged as a distinct level of education (UNESCO, 2000). The recognition by stakeholders in education of ECCE on the education global agenda was considered a necessary component of future economic and social development in both developed and developing countries (Jenkins, 2014; Jones, 2015; Lynch & Vaghl, 2015).

Even though the Nigerian government has shown its commitment to the attainment of UBE and EFA goal 1 by revising the National Policy on Education in 2004 to include ECCE under the expanded scope of UBE, provision for ECCE programs for the 0 to 3 age cohort is largely driven by the private sector. Consequently, there has been a proliferation of ECCE services without regard to the 2007 government approved minimum standards. This has given rise to the existence of ECCE programs for the 0-3 age cohort that are deficient in terms of process and structural factors, including in child-caregiver ratio, group size, and professional qualifications of staff, and in health and safety practices, implementation of curriculum, use of instructional materials, and parental engagement (Ibhaze, 2016; Oluwafemi, Nma, Osita, & Olugbenga, 2014). The issue is further compounded by the haphazard supervision of ECCE programs for the 0 to 3 age cohort by the responsible government agencies, such as the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and the State Ministry of Education (Adegbami, 2013; Amadi, 2013).

However, the continuous influx of women of childbearing age into the labor market has necessitated the demand for ECCE programs, so enrollment in programs that are deficient has increased. The enrollment of young children into deficient programs has been widely reported to have a detrimental impact on language, social development, and later school performance that is difficult to remedy (Krieg, Curtis, Hall, & Westernberg, 2015; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). High quality care is essential as it has the greatest impact on promoting children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, especially children of low social economic status (Burchinal, Magnuson, Powell, & Hong, 2015;

Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Gialamas, 2015; Krieg et al., 2015; Li et al., 2016). However, ECCE policy initiatives have overlooked the factors that influence parents' decision-making for ECCE choices. It seems important to explore parents' thinking as they make ECCE choices and identify the factors that heretofore have encouraged enrollment into deficient programs. The remaining part of this chapter will discuss the background of the study, problem statement, research questions, conceptual framework, purpose and nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study as well as the summary of the chapter.

Background

In compliance with the Jomtien EFA Framework of Action 1990 and Dakar Framework for Action 2000, the Federal government of Nigeria revised the National Policy on Education in 2004 to reflect the added components of the expanded UBE, including functional literacy and life skill training for adults and special programs for nomadic populations. However, the revised policy encouraged private efforts in the provision of ECCE. Also, the National Policy on Education in 2004 had no provision for children 0 to 3 years, and this left the provision of ECCE for this age bracket completely in the hands of private proprietors.

Nevertheless, the current economic downturn has necessitated the demand for couples to work to fulfill the financial obligations of family. Consequently, working mothers are compelled to resume work while their children are still very young. Under such circumstances, the child needs care, and ECCE programs are essential for filling this void. Choosing an ECCE program is a critical task confronting working families with

young children (Ahin & Shin, 2013). However, factors that influence the parental decision-making process in selecting ECCE programs are unknown. Limited information about the factors that influence the parental decision-making process for ECCE choices creates a vacuum in the knowledge required by the policy makers for the development of an all-embracing set of childcare policies. Such knowledge is needed to promote policies that can lead to positive outcomes for families and children through supporting parental choice of programs. This study was intended to contribute to bridging the knowledge gap by investigating the factors that influence parental decision-making processes in choosing ECCE programs in Nigeria's Asaba education zone.

Problem Statement

ECCE in Nigeria is private sector-driven. Data provided by the National Teachers Institute and Central Bank of Nigeria indicate that the government and government agencies provide only 10% of the ECCE facilities in the country (Adegbami, 2013; Ibhaze, 2016). ECCE programs in Nigeria are characterized by a dearth of professionals and poor physical structures (Ighalo, 2015; Oluwafemi et al., 2014). Obiweluzor (2015) and Sooter (2013) cited inadequate resources and lack of conformity with minimum standards as issues common to private-sector ECCE programs. Federal government minimum standards established in 2007 regarding room dimensions, caregiver-child ratio, use of government approved curriculum, and basic qualifications for teachers are absent in many ECCE programs (Eze, 2016; Gabriel, 2013; Matthew, 2015; Salami, 2016). Despite these systemic shortcomings, parents continue to enroll their children in deficient

programs. Little information exists on the factors that influence parents' ECCE decision-making processes.

There are significant cultural variations in the perceived purpose of early childhood education across both low and middle income countries, such as Cambodia, Colombia, India, and Germany (Gertler et al., 2014). Gertler et al. (2014) found that while Cambodian parents emphasize interaction with strangers through social pleasantries and other speech conventions, parents in Colombia advocate play, exploration, and arts as basic activities in ECCE. Yoshikawa (2017) found that urban Indian and German parents emphasize self maximization together with individual achievement. Rural Indians and the Cameroonian parents consider connectedness, social cohesion, and pro-social behaviors essential components of ECCE (Yoshikawa, 2017). However, how these factors and structural factors such as class size and teacher qualifications are weighted and prioritized by parents in the decision-making process is unknown, even though several authors have suggested research is needed to investigate parents' decision-making process for ECCE choices (Canada & Bland, 2014; Coley et al., 2014; Joshi, 2014; Navarro-Cruz, 2016). Since parents are the key stakeholders in ECCE placement decisions, greater understanding of their decision-making processes is necessary in designing programs to promote more equitable access for children to high-quality ECCE services (Forry, Simkin, Wheeler, & Bock, 2014; Manfra, Carlo & Coggeshall, 2013; Navarro-Cruz, 2016; Vesley, 2013). The apparent lack of knowledge by the policy makers regarding the factors that influence parents' decision-making processes for ECCE choices, which has encouraged enrollment of children aged 6 months

to 1 year in ECCE programs that are deficient in structural and process variables, is the problem that shapes this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to understand parents' perceptions of early childhood education and how these perceptions influenced their decision-making processes for early childhood education choices. I used a case study design to draw on the insights of parents, who have made ECCE placement decisions recently for their children aged 6 months to 1 year.

Research Questions

The following four research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do these parents describe the task of constructing a decision about an early childhood education placement for their child?

RQ2: How did these parents source information to guide their construction of a decision for an early childhood education placement for their child?

RQ3: How did parents use quality indicators in deciding on an early childhood education placement for their child?

RQ4: How did these parents synthesize the generated alternatives in constructing a placement decision with regards to their child?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework for this study is epistemological constructivism. Constructivists believe that knowledge does not exist outside the mind; truth is relative, and knowledge is not discovered but built by individuals in agreement with their

experiences (Crotty, 1998; Fosnot, 1996). Constructivism rejects the idea of the truth as the appropriate representation of the outside world and upholds the notion that knowledge is constructed and imbued with meaning in specific contexts and in ways that are unique to the perceiver (Von Glasersfeld, 1995). The constructivist perspective, therefore, is that knowledge is constructed by individuals or groups according to their views of their experiential worlds (Ertmer & Newby, 2013).

Constructivism includes meaning making and knowledge construction as key principles (Crotty, 1998; Fosnot, 1996). Consequently, knowledge is seen as ephemeral, subjective, internally built, developmental, and socially and culturally reconcilable (Fosnot, 1996). However, meaning-making and understanding are constructed by individuals, a process believed to entail interdependence between existing knowledge and beliefs as well as new knowledge and experiences (Richardson, 1997). In this study, I focused on how parents' individually constructed meaning of quality in ECCE programs and how their understanding of quality indicators influenced their early childhood educational choices.

Gregory (1980) emphasized that perception is an active and constructive process in which top-down processing is a vital component along with the influences of knowledge, expectations, or metacognition. Gregory (1980) proposed that knowledge is a process of actively interpreting and constructing individual knowledge representation. Human understanding is situational, concealed, interpersonally created, and essentially limited (Niemeyer, 1993) because perception is not concerned about understanding the real world, but rather the world as perceived by the perceiver (Demuth, 2013). Because

my aim in this study was to explore the perceptions of parents as they construct knowledge to make decisions with regard to early childhood educational choices, I selected epistemological constructivism as the conceptual framework for this study.

The framework suggests that participants represent ideas in a personal context that is unique to their experience (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Therefore, the qualitative approach with a case study design was employed to explore parents' decision process for early childhood educational choices. Qualitative inquiry involves vivid descriptions and quotations meant to transport the reader into the setting (Patton, 2015). Consequently, one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions were engaged for data collection to allow parents of children aged 6 months to 1 year to provide open-ended responses concerning how they sourced information and decided on quality indicators, as well as how the indicators were prioritized in making the final choice regarding ECCE program placement for their child.

The essence of an interview is to gain access to what is in and on an individual's mind and hear their experiences (Patton, 2015). In consonance with this idea, parents whose child was aged 6 months to 1 year and enrolled in a public, mission and private ECCE programs for a minimum period of 6 months were asked to provide their perceptions of the entire process of ECCE selection for their children. The conceptual framework for this study facilitated my understanding of parental perceptions, in that I analyzed data through the use of constructivist constructs of explanation-building and meaning making. Therefore, with epistemological constructivism as a conceptual framework, this study explored how parents perceived the entire process of ECCE

selection as well as source information, employ quality indicators, and synthesize generated alternatives in constructing placement decisions for their children, which has encouraged increased enrollment into ECCE programs that may be deficient in structural and process factors.

Nature of Study

A case study design was adopted for this investigation. The case study is a research technique that involves exploration of a phenomenon within its context by engaging different data sources (Creswell, 2013). The case study approach entails the investigation of a case within a contemporary situation or setting (Yin, 2013). Stake (2010) defined the case study as a choice of what is to be studied; that is, a case within a bounded system, bounded by time and location. Crotty (1998) and Fosnot (1996) argued that truth is relative and dependent on an individual's perspective.

Constructivism is built upon the premise of the social construction of reality (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). According to Mutepa (2016), the benefit of this strategy is the collaborative relationship between the inquirer and the participant, which allows the participants to tell their stories. Participants can describe their perceptions of reality through stories, thereby allowing the researcher to gain better insight into their actions (Mutepa, 2016). The case study approach is recommended when the study is directed at answering how and why questions, variables cannot be altered, contextual conditions are to be included and considered relevant to the concept being investigated, or there is no distinctive evidence of boundaries between the concept and the context (Yin, 2013).

According to Yin (2013), a case is defined by the parameters under consideration in the study. For this study, the unit of analysis was parents' decision-making processes, as received in answers to 10 open-ended interview questions. A single holistic case study was adopted together with an instrumental case study for me to gain insight and understanding of the decision process of ECCE placement choices. A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a technique that enhances data credibility (Yin, 2013). Data collection for this study was conducted through the use of open-ended one-on-one interviews. Yin (2013) argued that every study should have a general analytic strategy to direct decisions concerning what will be analyzed and for what reason. Consequently, data for this study were analyzed through the application of explanation building, a form of pattern matching that requires an analysis of the case study by building an explanation of the case. This analytic approach is considered appropriate for explanatory case studies as well as exploratory case studies, because it allows a researcher to make an initial proposition that can be compared with the findings. Propositions can be revised and compared with other details of the case in an iterative process of revision. Revision of propositions may be conducted severally as many times as required (Yin, 2013).

Definition of Terms

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child: A declaration on the rights and welfare of the African child made by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and heads of state and governments (Organization of African Unity, 1999).

Child Rights Convention: The UN convention on the rights of the child, which encompasses a human right treaty and sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health, and cultural rights of children. (UNICEF, 2015).

Constructivism: Theory that knowledge does not exist outside minds, truth is mutable, and knowledge is constructed by individuals based on experiences (Ertmer & Newby, 2013).

Constructivists: Theorists offering epistemological alternatives to objective theories of knowledge (Ertmer & Newby, 2013).

Decision making: A process of choosing from some alternatives to achieve a desired result (Eisenfuhr, 2011).

Early childhood: The period between birth and 8 years of life (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2012).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): Processes and mechanisms provided by adults to support development in the early years of life. These include physical, social, and emotional care, cognitive development, and attention to children's health, safety, and nutrition (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2012).

Education For All: The provision of basic education for all children, youths, and adults (Haddad, Colletta, Fisher, Lakin, & Sutton, 1990).

Universal Basic Education (UBE): Education to meet learning needs, including early childhood education for children as well as literacy education, general knowledge, and life skills for older children and adults (Haddad et al., 1990).

Assumptions

I assumed that the nine participants who were interviewed in this study answered the interview questions with sincerity. Their answers were based on their experiences in selecting ECCE programs depending on their beliefs, values, and their choice of program. I also assumed that the participants reflected a heterogeneous group of parents using ECCE services and were representative of all parents of young children aged 6 months to 1 year enrolled in public, mission and private ECCE programs in Asaba urban.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study involved the experiences of Nigerian parents in Asaba urban, with a child 6 months to 1 year old and enrolled in an ECCE program, in evaluating and choosing childcare for that child. The study was delimited to experiences of parents whose children were 6 months to 1 year old enrolled in the public, mission, and private ECCE programs in the Asaba education zone of Delta state for a minimum period of 6 months. The choice of Asaba urban as the location of the study was based on my residency in the town. Furthermore, I am familiar with the geography of the city.

Limitations

Because I was the sole researcher in this study, the data collection and interpretation may have been influenced by my personal perspectives. My concern for quality in ECCE may have interfered with the conduct of the study, thereby leaving unknown gaps and biases in the study. Another methodological shortcoming of this study is its small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of its findings. Because the subjects of this case study were selected based on my consideration of the research

questions and purpose, the findings of the study are likely to be meaningful only to the participants in this particular case study.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it focused on decision-making processes for choices that set the tone of a child's entire life. In addition, this study may bridge the gap in the literature regarding parental decision-making processes of ECCE choices. Third, factors influencing parents' decision-making processes for ECCE hitherto were unexplored, and so ECCE policies have overlooked parental perspectives as a factor in early education choice; this gap in information is resolved by this study. This study revealed this context and provided information about systemic problems associated with the selection of quality ECCE programs and the nature of family priorities and considerations in making ECCE placement decisions. The study also provided an understanding of the decision processes of ECCE choices by parents to the education stakeholders, which might initiate greater regulatory attention or reform of low quality programs. It is hoped that the study will contribute to social change by generating information that is essential to ECCE policy makers in the country of study for designing equitable quality programs that will be relevant in providing the foundation for future learning, responsive in supporting parents' participation in the labor force, and realistic in creating a fairer and more equitable society.

Summary

Even though the Nigerian government has made various efforts to reflect their commitment to CRC, EFA, and AU charters on the rights of African children regarding

the provision of ECCE programs, these programs remain private sector-driven. For this reason, incidences of noncompliance with regulations regarding structural and process factors have been observed by monitoring agencies. Also, there has been continuous enrollment into some public, mission, and private ECCE programs for the 0 to 3 age cohort that are lacking in basic requirements such as ventilated classrooms, instructional materials, hygiene, and adequate personal space for each child. Therefore this study was focused on exploring the factors that influenced ECCE decision making, which has encouraged this trend of continuous enrollment in ECCE programs that are deficient in structural and process factors. A literature review on previous approaches in the discipline to this problem is in Chapter 2. Methods and methodology are explained in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The entry of women of childbearing age into the labor force has necessitated parents to demand ECCE as an alternative form of childcare for their children while they are at work (Marshall, Robeson, Tracy, Frye, & Robertson, 2013). Also, the family dynamics of dual-working parents and single parenting (Ahin & Shin, 2013) and the weakening of the extended family structure (Crosnoe et al., 2016) have drastically increased the demand for out of home childcare (Del Boca, 2015). Parents with children of 0 to 4 years old are confronted with challenging decisions associated with enrolling their children in ECCE programs including selecting the type of program to use (Coley et al., 2014). The economic recession experienced in Nigeria for five quarters from 2015 to 2017 has put families under pressure to become dual working households to fulfill their financial obligation to the family. Consequently, there was increased financial pressure on nursing mothers in Nigeria to return to work after childbirth, while their children are still very young.

ECCE programs provide critical employment support for working women as well as important supports for child development (Boyd, Walker, & Thorpe, 2013; Del Boca, 2015; Dussaillant, 2016). Early experiences of children through quality care and educational provisions are vital to their development. Access to quality early childhood education is a privilege rather than a right as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2015), a human rights treaty, which set out the civil, political, economic, social, health, and cultural rights of children. Quality early childhood education is considered a positive start for a child's development, which is not only

beneficial to the child but for the society in general (Good Start Early Learning, 2015; MacEwan, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to understand parents' perceptions of ECCE and how these perceptions influenced their decision-making processes for early childhood education choices, including enrollment of their children in programs deficient in process and structural factors such as staff-child ratio, number of trained staff, curriculum implementation, health and safety practices, and instructional materials.

Chapter 2 includes the literature search strategy and the discussion of the following: conceptual framework, approaches to the problem according to researchers in the discipline. Furthermore, parental perceptions of ECCE quality and selections are all part of chapter 2. Attention was also given to literature related to the research questions. This chapter ends with a summary.

Literature Search Strategy

Literature and research considered and selected for this review primarily were scholarly materials published between the years 2013 and 2017, except for seminal works. Search engines were accessed, including the Walden Library, Google Scholar, Education Research Complete, and Social Science Direct. The keywords included *parental perception, decision making, decision process, educational choices, educational selection, educational preferences, early childhood care, and education, early childhood education placement, ECCE choice, and quality indicators of early childhood education.* Also, UNESCO and UNICEF websites were visited for information related to ECCE.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative research plan is constructivism, which is associated with knowledge construction directed at a person's actions towards meaning-making (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). The principal argument of constructivism is that the human world is distinct from the natural, experiential world and as such should be studied differently. However, people are imbued with the ability to interpret and construct reality; hence, human perception is not absolute. It is built and organized by cultural and linguistic constructs (Patton, 2015).

The central idea of the constructivists is the existence of multiple realities created by individuals and the consequences of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others (Patton, 2015). I employed a case study strategy to elicit the multiple realities associated with ECCE that are constructed by parents and have an effect on their ECCE selections. Furthermore, the constructivists like Glasersfeld, Vygotsky, and Piaget believed that individuals perceive the world as constructed by information gained through the senses in relation to prior information in the brain. Gregory (1980) proposed an indirect theory of perception that takes into consideration an individual's prior knowledge and expectations as essential parts of meaning making. According to Ertmer and Newby (2013), this process of meaning making requires a dynamic interpretation of the available data that exceeds what is apprehended through the senses. Gregory (1980) further argued that perception is a series of hypothesis-testing activities in which people engage the most accurate schema they can in interpreting their life experiences. In accordance with this thinking, for this qualitative study, participants were asked to provide a thoughtful

reflection of their experiences in the selection of early childhood education programs, including how they gathered information ahead of their decisions and how this information was weighed in making enrollment choices for their children.

In this study, the framework allowed participants to represent their ideas in the context of their lives. The participants, who were parents of children aged 6 months to 1 year enrolled in ECCE programs, were given opportunities to tell their stories and describe their reality of constructing a placement decision for ECCE program for their child. Current literature pursuant to this plan will be presented next in the section, including parental perceptions of ECCE quality, factors in decision-making, the task of selecting an ECCE program, sources of information for ECCE program choice, quality indicators for generating alternatives, literature related to the methodology of this study, summary, and conclusions.

Parental Perception of ECCE Quality

Perception is a process through which individuals receive and process information from their surroundings. Consequently, information about the environment and the stimuli that influence actions are processed through perception. Canada and Bland (2014) said that parents' perceptions of ECCE programs are based on their views of the quality of teaching staff as well as the level of interaction between teachers and children. Canada and Bland (2014) identified six essential indicators of high-quality ECCE programs visible for parents: quality of teachers, retention of teachers within the program or school, multicultural setting, enriched curricula, support for parental engagement and involvement, and safety and security within the ECCE facility. Bauchmuller, Certz, and

Rasmussen (2014) outlined another set of indicators of structural quality: staff-child ratio, number of male and female staff members, number of trained staff, proportion of ethnic minority staff members, and level of retention of staff. The strength of these five quality indicators is in their potential for being objectively measurable and comparable across ECCE programs.

Even though parents' definitions of quality ECCE programs differ, parents tend to overestimate the quality of ECCE programs, compared with the evaluations of ECCE professionals (Forry et al., 2013; Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2013). However, the difference in evaluation of ECCE programs by parents and professionals has been attributed to parents' expectations of the quality of teaching staff and interactions between staff and children, which affect the way parents believe care and education should be provided to their children (Grammatikopoulos, Gregoriadis, Tsigilis, & Zachopoulou, 2014).

Furthermore, Rentzou and Sakellariou (2013) reported that parents of infants and toddlers associated quality with observable ECCE experiences like the relationship between child and caregiver, instead of with structured components such as staff-child ratios, group size, and qualification of staff. Parents' perception of high-quality ECCE programs reflects both cultural and socio-economic differences (Ansari, 2017; Petitclerc et al., 2017). Parental perception about ECCE is considered of great importance because parents shoulder the responsibility of making several important decisions associated with children enrollment in ECCE programs (Scopelliti & Musatti, 2013; Weng-Yan Wong, 2013). Lack of attention to objectively measurable benchmarks may be a factor in parents' selection of deficient programs for their children.

Nevertheless, what happens inside the ECCE classroom is essential in determining a high quality program. Therefore, the quality of an early childhood program is dependent on three key factors: interpersonal interactions, physical environment and program support structure (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). These three factors are important for ensuring quality. In other words, a well-resourced classroom is not sufficient without an effective teacher to coordinate the resources. Also, an effective teacher is not sustainable without a support system to manage the business , support instructions and provide developmental expertise (Kivunja, 2015). In addition, there are limited means of determining the quality of care a child is receiving in a program. It is equally difficult to ascertain whether a child is engaging sufficiently and participating in the developmentally appropriate activities (Workman & Ullrich, 2017). Lack of skills for evaluating program quality may have encouraged enrollment into deficient programs.

However, quality in ECCE is assessed based on how well a program promotes children's development (Anderson, Raikes, Kosaraju, & Solano, 2017). Nevertheless, a number of tools exist that are widely employed to assess and report the quality of early childhood programs. These are the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS), the Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS), the Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale (FCCERS), Class Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and the Program Administration Scale (PAS). In as much as each program's roadmap to quality has the tendency of being distinct, programs can use national accreditation to demonstrate to parents their level of compliance to state regulations. Eventually, the issue of definition

of quality for ECCE programs has been resolved with a consensus that the definition of quality should incorporate locally associated expectations for children's development. The expectations must be scientifically validated across children's language, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Anderson & Raikes, 2017).

Factors in Decision-Making

Decision-making is seen as a process that requires making a choice out of some alternatives with the intention of attaining a set objective (Androniceanu & Ristea, 2014). According to Roy (2016), decision-making contains three principal elements: options from which a decision can be made are available; consideration of contextual factors in addition to making a choice from a set of alternatives; and mental engagement of the decision maker in arriving at a final decision. Dewey (1978) suggested five sequential stages of decision-making, including identification of the problem, analysis of the problem, generation of possible solutions, evaluation of each option, and final decision-making. Simon (1960) recommended three phases of decision making: the intelligent phase (a period to gather information); the design phase (a time to make tentative decisions); and a choice phase (a course of action is selected).

Witte (1972) advocated for a model that permits different aspects of the decision process to come in diverse sequence for various decisions. Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret (1976) argued that a decision process happens in phases that have no sequential relationship. Even though they applied the same steps as Simon (1960), they referred to them as identification, development, and selection. Decision-making, according to Spetzler, Winter, and Myer (2016), is a process of identifying and selecting alternatives

in agreement with the values and preferences of the decision maker. Making a decision is an indication that choices can be made from alternatives. Consequently, only options that satisfy certain criteria are selected by a decision-maker such as the alternative with the highest probability of satisfaction or effectiveness and the alternatives that are most suitable to the objectives, wants, needs, and values of the person making the decision. The implications of these two conditions are that there must be some valid alternatives from which to make a decision and specific conditions must be in place for every decision determined by the interest and the choice of the decision maker. (Spetzler et al., 2016).

Decision-making is all about the reduction of uncertainty and doubt associated with alternatives, thereby allowing a meaningful choice to be made from among alternatives (Hussung, 2017). This definition emphasizes the role of information collection in decision making. However, uncertainty is reduced but not eliminated. It is worthy of note that decisions made with absolute certainty are rare due to unavailability of information concerning all the alternatives. In other words, every decision entails a degree of risk (Hussung, 2017).

There are two basic models of decision making: the rational model and the bounded rationality model (Lombardo, 2016). Because the bounded rationality model admits that rational decisions may be elusive in some situations, in this study I focused on the rational, or analytical, model as a better fit in the situation in which parents did indeed make a rational decision. Rational decision making is a critical skill that is considered an aspect of everyday family life, and is engaged in various aspects of our behavior as well

as completing tasks all through the day (Smayda, Worthy, & Chandraskerana, 2017). By implication, parents make decisions concerning ECCE under certainty, which is to say they seem to be familiar with and aware of the outcome of their options. They are conversant with their decision criteria, and they have the potential to maximize their choice together with the implementation of their choice.

In the rational decision-making model, decision makers employ the analysis of different alternatives from various contexts before deciding on a choice. Subsequently, the situations are evaluated for risks to allow the decision maker ascertain the expected outcome for each option. Eventually, selections are made based on the option that presents the most desired expected outcome and with the optimal probability of that outcome (Hermann, 2017; Spetzler et al., 2016). Even though rationality has been defined as the comparability between choice and value, rational behavior attempts to maximize the value of the outcome, thereby focusing on the process of selecting instead of emphasizing the chosen alternative (Todt & Lujan, 2014).

The rational decision-making model allows for the examination of the relationships between and the weight of the individual and family factors that drive parents' ECCE choices together with the tradeoffs involved in the selections. The rational model allows the decision-making process to be analyzed in separate steps of problem identification; generation of alternatives; evaluation of choices; selection of an alternative; implementation of the decision; and evaluation of the effectiveness of the decision (Leslie, 2014). Furthermore, the rational decision-making model is capable of

providing scientifically testable hypotheses about variations in ECCE decisions with individual, family, market, and policy factors (Glava & Glava, 2015).

Both the decision and decision-makers' behavior could be considered principle components of the decision-making phenomenon. The process of decision making involves human thought and reactions concerning the external world that accommodate earlier events as well as the likely future events together with the psychological consequences to the decision maker of those events (Leslie, 2014). The essence of decision making appears to combine both the beliefs relating to specific incidents and the subjective reaction to those events. Decisions are responses to situations that may comprise three aspects of considerations: more than one possible course of action may be under consideration; the decision makers' expectations about future events may be expressed as probabilities or degrees of confidence; and the resultant effects of the outcome can be assessed regarding reflection on personal values and current objectives (Kremer-Asaf, 2015; Parson, 2016; Spetzler et al., 2016). Consequently, analyzing the decision process requires breaking down of a choice dilemma into a group of smaller problems, and resolving each issue separately.

Altogether, external and internal surveillance of the environment is required for identification of issues that demand attention in a decision-making situation (Kraja & Osmani, 2015; Parsons, 2016). Through this search process, alternative means of achieving the target are identified and information collected on each of the alternatives (Brighthouse, Ladd, Loeb, & Swift, 2016). In evaluating the generated alternatives, the following questions must be asked: how feasible is a particular alternative? how

satisfactory is the chosen option? and what is the likely impact of the alternative? (Hermann, 2017). In selecting one of the alternatives, the decision maker must consider its feasibility, satisfaction, and acceptability to the stakeholders (Zhou, Zheng, & Ma, 2014). These imply that the rational decision-making model has the potential to reveal or stimulate the impact of market and policy changes on early childhood education choices. Nevertheless, a decision may fail when a problem is not correctly identified or when alternatives are poorly evaluated and implemented. The rational decision model is characterized by policy makers as entirely reasonable (Kremer-Asaf, 2015). How this reasonable process might be applied to parents' choice-making in early childhood education decisions is the focus of this study.

The Task of Selecting an ECCE Program

For most families, ECCE is a necessity, and as a result, parents are confronted with the challenge of choosing ECCE programs that meet their needs; this is a tremendous responsibility (Child Action, 2013). There is a tendency for parents to take cognizance of multiple works, care, and family factors that apply concurrently so that alternative options are highly constrained (Choo, 2015; Forry et al., 2014; Johnson, Padilla & Votruba-Dizal, 2017; Spiers, 2015). The ECCE market is quite diverse together with a broad range of arrangements that differ significantly in both processes and structural factors. The alternatives available to every family have limitations and may not meet the exact requirements of the family (Family and Childcare Trust, 2013). Tronto (2013) stated that ECCE is a practice that demands a close examination of the needs and skills of everyone involved in the context.

Parents are challenged to select from programs of various qualities within their communities. Some programs are licensed, which is an indication that they are bound to adhere to the state health and safety regulations. The licensed programs follow specifications regarding staff-to-child ratio, which determine the number of children each adult may care for and limits the total group size (Child Care Solutions, 2016). The second category of programs is license-exempt care, such as that provided by a nanny, a drop-in care program at a health club, recreation programs and day camps, care by family members, friends and neighbors, parenting groups and parents' after school enrichment programs. Furthermore, among the factors that determine ECCE choice are family needs, and resources, cultural norms, and parental preferences as to the availability, affordability, and accessibility of ECCE alternatives (Coley et al., 2014; Weng-Yon Wong, 2013). Five significant factors that determine parents' preference for early childhood care and education are safety, trusting and loving staff, parents' involvement, strong curriculum and small pupils to teacher ratio (Forry et al., 2014; Navarro-Cruz, 2016; Rothenberg et al., 2013).

Parents' and children's characteristics that influence parental preference of ECCE have been reported as parents education, family income, the age of the child, and family structure (Laughlin, 2013; Petitielerc et al., 2017). Also, identified are race, ethnicity, culture, and English language proficiency (Coley et al., 2014; Miller, Votruba-Dizal, Coley, & Koury, 2014; Vesley, 2013; Zachrisson et al., 2013). Similarly, the aspects of programs that influence the parental decision making of ECCE most are the activities and the teaching methods engaged by the staff. Some other elements of programs that affect

decision are the reputation of the center, indoor and outdoor play equipment, the size of the playground and the physical structures (Bauer, 2014; Boyd, 2014; Forry et al, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Rothenberg et al., 2013).

Furthermore, parents' choice of ECCE programs may be partially determined by the options available and the previous experience of having had another child in a program; these factors tend to affect parents' priorities (Citizen Advice, 2015). Also, ECCE program choices are made on account of parents' perceptions of opportunities, constraints, and barriers (Coley et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2014). Parents are pressured into accommodating employment demands and flexible ECCE arrangements in their routines and for finding the best alternatives to meet the diverse needs of all the children in the family (Rothenberg et al., 2013).

Consequently, managing multiple programs could be tasking and whatever decision that is made must take cognizance of the needs of every member of the family holistically (Rothenberg et al., 2013). ECCE program selection is not a one-time action. An original ECCE decision may become less attractive due to parental factors like a change of job or work schedule, the increasing age and development of the child, or a change in subsidy policy or income. Each of these changes may require parents to reconsider their child ECCE decision, thereby restarting the decision-making process (Coley et al., 2014; Lipscomb, 2013). At the same time, the outcome of a previous decision-making process has the potential of altering family characteristics by limiting or enabling a parent's acquisition of expanded work responsibilities or additional educational qualifications. Besides, positive and negative experiences associated with an

earlier decision could affect future ECCE selection for subsequent children or following a move to a new neighborhood (Citizen Advice, 2015).

ECCE is considered a simple matter of choice, but the ability to pay is a principal factor in accessing the appropriate program (Spiers, 2015). In one study, parents ranked the following criteria in order of priority when making ECCE choice: qualified and experienced staff, warm, caring environment, “good Ofsted report”; and cost (Day Care Trust, 2010). Some other investigations have rated excellent staff, friendly, caring environment, and quality of physical structures, health, and safety as priorities. Trust ranks high with most parents (Forry et al., 2014; Rothenberg et al., 2013).

There is a consensus among researchers and policy makers that the ECCE decision process is laborious and represents the outcome of interactions among parental preferences, opportunities, and limitations (Forry et al., 2013; Goodstart Early Learning, 2015). Even though researchers in the discipline have generated information related to factors and processes associated with ECCE selection, a knowledge gap exists about parents’ perception of the task of locating care for a child. How parents gather information upon which to base an ECCE decision, what quality indicators are used or are ignored in making an ECCE decision, and how parents collate all this information to choose ECCE placement for a child, including placement in a program that has been identified as deficient. Bearing in mind that decisions are made based on the optimal value of choice, ECCE choice can be expected to conform to perceptions of optimal value. In other words, insight about what influences the process of selection will

contribute in guiding parents to make their decision primarily on obtaining optimal value in their chosen alternatives.

Sources of Information for ECCE Program Choice

Another challenge confronting parents in their decision-making process for an ECCE program is the accessibility of quality information concerning ECCE facilities (Citizen Advice, 2015). Even though many states operate a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), available information is restricted to some ECCE programs. Investigations have revealed that social networks are the principal source of ECCE program information (Vesley, 2013). In other words, parents' decision making is primarily influenced by information obtained from members of their network or suggestions received from the community members (Joshi, 2014). The quantity of the available and accessible consumer information as well as how important parents regard the information vary according to communities (Hopkins, Lorains, Issaka, & Podbury, 2014). Parents' priority of ECCE facilities in their community is determined by their perceived quality, recommendations by friends and neighbors, previous experience of the parents, and the educational values and priorities of the parents (Bauchmuller et al., 2014; Beckett, 2014).

Information concerning ECCE facilities in many locales can be accessed online through the phone and the Internet (Bauer, 2014). Parents in one study reported that the most common method of searching for a child care provider is through the word-of-mouth while information about child care subsidies and other financial assistance are often obtained through personal networks (Altenhofen, Berends, & White, 2016; Beckett,

2014). Moreover, social networks have the likelihood of influencing ECCE related decisions and actions by making members knowledgeable about the type of facilities that are considered appropriate and acceptable in a locality (Altenhofen et al., 2016). In other words, social networks by their normative effects expressed on members contribute in creating the set of alternatives seen as reasonable by parents.

There are two ways of planning a decision process: heavily planned decision process and the lightly planned decision process (Bauer, 2014). A heavily planned decision process entails collection of information over a period as well as embarking on center tours, talking with others, web based searches and checking for locations in the phone book. On the other hand, a decision process is said to be lightly planned when a choice is swiftly made based on minimal information search. Also, selection of an ECCE program is determined by the closest, most convenient and the most famous center among the people (Bauer, 2014). Moreover, parents enrolling their first child in an ECCE program tend to collect a large amount of information and undertake a tour of several centers to ensure that they make a most informed decision (Bauer, 2014).

Nevertheless, sourcing for information for ECCE selection can be made with certainty by obtaining first-hand information through the adoption of certain procedures. These procedures include (a) procure a potential shortlist of ECCE programs; (b) arrange for a visit and book an initial appointment with the program director to acquaint yourself with the environment and the staff; (c) ask questions about the curriculum and discuss the needs of your child and find out how they intend to meet the needs; (d) ascertain the environmental safety that will guarantee your child's happiness; (e) ask questions

concerning staff qualifications and experiences and observe interactions between employees and children; (f) inquire about communication and the frequency between the center and parents; (g) demand for the daily routine of the program and ask a question on how staff provides positive and responsive interactions to the children; (h) note the availability and the quality of resources in the center; and (j) if satisfied with what you have seen, make a second appointment to visit with your child (Good Start Early Learning, 2015).

It is worthy of note that availability of ECCE programs that are stable, reliable, affordable and of high quality encourages parents to enlist in the labor force to achieve self-sufficiency, and meet families goals for their children's care and early education (Marshall et al., 2013). Every parent hopes that she has made the right choice and as a result, the child is expected to have a fulfilling day, supported by warm and affectionate caregivers (Workman & Ullrich, 2017). Such a feeling is considered universal about parents as they drop their children in the facility each morning and proceed with their daily routine.

Quality Indicators for Generating Alternatives

The quality of ECCE in recent times is given more attention by parents than was previously done, because the quality of care influences child care outcomes in various dimensions (Lopez Boo, Araujo & Tome, 2016; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Strong programs quality is associated with the higher education level of infant/toddler teachers and caregivers (Ecliker, Wen, Kwon, & Sprague, 2013). However, infant/toddler teachers and caregivers with a high school diploma or less tend to respond promptly to babies/

toddlers' distress than teachers with higher educational qualifications (Honig, Kim, Ray & Yang, 2013; Ji Young, 2016). However, a formal rating of ECCE programs for quality can be conducted by employing standardized rating scales such as the ITERS (Harms & Cryer, 1990), ECERS-R (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998), and FDCRS (Harms & Clifford, 1989). In addition, researchers have identified seven essential elements of a high-quality ECCE program thus: the quality of teachers and the retention of teachers in the program every succeeding year. Also included are the physical characteristics of the ECCE facility; quality curricula; parental engagement and involvement with the program. The safety and security of children within the ECCE facility; and efforts to create a multicultural setting are all aspects of high-quality (Bauchmuller, et al., 2014; Canada & Bland, 2014; Child Action, 2013).

Both structural and process factors have been emphasized as components for measuring early childhood education quality. The structural aspects of ECCE programs are the child to teacher ratio and the qualification of the teacher educators. Structural elements have the benefits of ease of measurement and regulation. These structural factors are believed to indirectly influence children by dictating their daily experiences in the classroom (McGinnity, Murray & McNally, 2013).

Bauchmuller et al. (2014) presented five structural ECCE quality components together with their rationales, including the staff-child ratio, the number of male staff, the number of trained teachers, the number of ethnic minority staff, and the retention of staff from year to year. Other authors supported the importance of these factors. Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, and Barnette (2010) in a meta-analysis of 123 comparative studies of early

childhood interventions found support for the benefit of small-group teacher directed instruction. More staff in the classroom translates to more individual time for instruction, conversation, and guidance and, by implication, more attention to the child's specific needs and development (Bauchmuller et al., 2014).

The idea of male ECCE staff came to prominence following discussions associating increasing school problems of boys to the absence of male role models in ECCE (Dee, 2006; Sumsion, 2005). Burchinal et al. (2014) emphasized that boys by their nature require particular care that only male staff can offer, but most ECCE teachers are females. As described by Bredekamp and Copple (2009), staff with specialization in ECCE and greater levels of educational achievement and training have the skill to understand and handle the specific needs of the child correctly as well as emphasize learning and school readiness

According to the theory of passive student responses (Villegas & Jordan Irvine, 2010), minority children accept a minority teacher either as a role model or as evidence of integration with the majority group. Consequently, diversity among the staff is an indication that minority children will experience greater self-efficacy and all children will be better prepared for diversity in the larger society (Villegas & Jordan Irvine, 2010).

Retention of staff is a reflection of the number of employees that remained employed in the program year in and year out. Earlier studies argued that low rates of job turnover in an ECCE staff are a strong indication of program quality (Cassidy, Lower, Kinter-Duffy, Hedge, & Shim, 2011).

Another set of quality indicator process measures includes processes to record children's daily encounters and interactions. These measures require the observation of children in the classroom and rating of various dimensions of their activities. Three established measures of process quality is the aforementioned ECERS and its companion rating scales, the ITERS and FDCRS. The ECERS contains 37 items with six subscales that measure the quality of personal space and furnishing, routine care of the individual, opportunities for reasoning and language use, interactional activities, and facility structure (Harms et al., 1998). Process quality has to do with the relationship between children and teachers, as well as the content of instructions within the classrooms together with instructional materials. The components of effective teaching such as positive social and emotional atmosphere of the classroom and relationships between teacher and child are all aspects of the process quality. Altogether, higher staff to child ratio, an increasing presence of male staff and increase number of staff with preschool professional training are associated with children significantly improved performance (Bauchmuller et al., 2014).

Consequently, the child's social and emotional development has the potential of being supported in the ECCE programs through the behavior and interaction of responsive and supportive providers. By providing activities and schedules that are predictable with a structure for the team and individual interactions with peers and caregivers. Also, through providing ample space for every child and interaction with peers; and well-trained staffs that are knowledgeable about social, emotional developments of children and teaching learning (Krieg et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the

gender of the caregiver notwithstanding children tend to exhibit a similar level of secure attachment with both male and female caregivers (Polanen, 2017).

Moreover, the Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI), a new measure of global quality, has been found to provide a promising and efficient measure of universal quality in infant and toddler ECCE context (Perlman, 2017). Another tool for measuring quality is the Performance Administrative Scale (PAS), developed to assess the overall quality of leadership administrative practices of center-based early care and education. Also, national accreditation is voluntarily employed by programs to improve their level of quality as well as demonstrate to parents that a program has gone beyond state regulation and has attained a specified level (Early Childhood Community Development Centre, 2014; Tout, Epstein, Soli, & Lowe, 2015).

An aspect of the quality indicators of ECCE facilities is family sensitivity, which functions as a resource for supporting families in their effort to acquire parenting skills, balance work, and family needs, and enhances their children's development (NAEYC, 2014). Some parents consider cultural responsiveness as a dimension of quality for ECCE program. It refers to a variety of ways of honoring and supporting children's home culture in the classroom and home care settings. Evidence of cultural responsiveness can be included in the structure of the curricula, interactions, and activities within the care context (Allen & Steed, 2016; Ritchie, 2013).

Mothers are said to be emotionally attached when selecting ECCE program; therefore, they often settle for the options that are capable of serving the needs of the child as well as providing the intimate, complex, and interdependent nature of a caring

relationship (Yuen, 2014). Studies have shown that parents rank safety, child-teacher interaction and support to learning in ECCE program high when choosing a facility (Matei, 2014; Natsiopoulou & Vitoulis, 2015). Contrary to the above idea, parents reported selecting a program for their children based on the experience of the caregivers, type of curriculum offered and the academic qualification of the staff (Matei, 2014; Rose, Vittrup & Levenidge, 2013). Also, program proximity to home has been identified as one of the top three reasons for selecting a program (Canada & Bland, 2014; Joshi 2014; Matei, 2014).

Cleveland et al. (2013) reported that parents ranked developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) as an essential element, followed by family sensitivity practices when considering a program for selection. Child Care Solutions (2016) suggested the following six directives to consider when hunting for a program: seek for staff that is passionate about caring for children. Search for programs with small group size with professional caregivers. There is a need to watch out for the warm and nurturing environment. Rate the center on general cleanliness, supervision, and proper hygiene. Search for opportunities for parent involvement and request for evidence of registration, license and accreditation. The questions posed by this study are intended to determine whether and to what extent parents are aware of any of the quality indicators suggested by research or by popular guides, and how that awareness contributes to parents' choice of an ECCE program for their children. Also, this study may be able to determine if these indicators are valued sufficiently to overcome other factors like facility location and program cost in making ECCE decisions.

Literature Related to the Methodology of this Study

The process of managing children's education commences with the choosing of an early childhood care and education program and the choice of quality program has the potential to set the child on a path of lifelong success (The Urban Child Institute, 2013). Empirical studies exist on the parental selection of ECCE programs based on socioeconomic status (Yuen, 2014). Social class is essential in any consideration of parental choice, experience, and perception of ECCE (Laughlin, 2013). In a quantitative study of patterns of childcare use across 31 developed economies, Wim and Joris (2016) reported that individuals' process of arranging non-parental care for their children is considered an aspect of their widespread perception of their identity and location within the social world. Many studies have investigated low-income families' selection pattern of ECCE programs using both quantitative and qualitative method (Lipscombe, 2013; Miller et al., 2014; Vesley, 2013; Yuen, 2015; Zachrission et al., 2013).

Researchers have conducted inquiries on the influence of subsidies and vouchers on parental preference for ECCE programs. The findings of the investigations reflected growing attention to how subsidies may relate to the characteristics of ECCE programs chosen by low-income families (Kraft, Davis & Touts 2017; Lipscombe, 2013; Markowitz et al., 2013; Vesley, 2013; Yuen, 2015). Also, the studies revealed information regarding the impact of subsidies on the parental selection of early care. Specifically, grant receipts increased the tendency for the use of center-based care by low-income families significantly. It was equally observed that the receipt of subsidies encouraged the use of higher quality child care settings (Lipscomb, 2013; Markowitz et

al., 2013). Second, the studies showed a unique pattern of a consistent choice of formal care arrangement irrespective of household structure, which is capable of informing child care subsidy policy and administration (Kraft, Davis, & Tout, 2017). Raikes et al. (2013) suggested that appropriate recognition of government grants is an essential policy tool for promoting parental choice and resources and therefore demands more research on both parental preferences and the quality of the child care market in satisfying these preferences.

Researchers also have examined the predictors of parents' choices of ECCE programs in the context of affordability and availability for most children (Cleveland et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2014; Zachrission et al., 2013). Ahn and Shin (2013), in a quantitative study with a survey design, used national data to examine the placement timing and the factors that influence dual working parents' selection process of early childhood education program for their child. The study revealed that the developmental age of the child and the mother's employment were critical factors in the decision process of family ECCE program. Laughlin (2013) and Petitclerc et al. (2017) reported the influence of maternal education on enrollment in ECCE programs and indicated that highly educated mothers seem to understand the advantages of high-quality programs on child development. They equally have the means to pay for high-quality care and as such have an edge when choosing care arrangements.

Studies have also been conducted on parental perception of ECCE with attention to the quality characteristics and satisfaction of ECCE programs. Inquirers have assessed various principal components to ascertain ECCE quality (Vermeer, Van Ijendoorn,

Carcamo, & Harrison, 2016). Even though efforts have been made by scholars and educators to identify principal elements of high-quality ECCE, parental perception of high quality is yet to be acknowledged. Parents' multi-faceted views about ECCE quality validates the need to integrate their understanding in analyzing the quality of early childhood education programs since parents are responsible for making decisions associated with their children's enrollment in ECCE programs (Scopelliti & Musatti, 2013).

The existing literature on ECCE selection is concentrated on the influence of socio-demographic, family and child predictors, and access to subsidies and vouchers as determinants of parental choice of ECCE programs. A significant effort has not been directed towards an ECCE decision process that encourages consistent enrollment in programs below national guidelines for established ECCE programs. Even though there are studies on parental perception, they are focused on the quality of ECCE. Second, while the literature on ECCE preference is on low-income, subsidy and voucher-eligible parents, and these studies have found an extensive set of correlates of ECCE program choices, inquiries have not confirmed whether these associations hold in the general population. In other words, there is no comprehensive study of ECCE selection process among the general population. Consequently, this study was aimed at providing a better understanding of the factors that influence the decision process among the general population that is encouraging consistent enrollment into deficient programs.

Summary and Conclusion

The literature has revealed that decisions are made based on the alternatives that seem most favorable to the values and preferences of the decision maker and decision about ECCE selection is not an exception. Studies in the discipline have shown that ECCE choices are determined by social status; maternal education and employment; the developmental age of the child; socio-demographic factors and access to subsidies. Also, inquiries indicate that parents associate quality with observable behaviors and pay less attention to structural factors as an aspect of quality. However, consensus exists that ECCE selection is tasking and consists of the outcome of some interactions among parental preferences, opportunities, and limitations.

In the light of the above assertions, this study explored the interactions among parental preferences, opportunities, and constraints that influence the ECCE decision making, which has encouraged continuous patronage of ECCE programs that are deficient in fundamental quality indicators. And to this end, the case study design was adopted. Moreover, the one-on-one interview was employed to allow for the multiple facets of these interactions to be discovered and understood.

In Chapter 3, detailed information was provided on the method and methodology of the inquiry: a case study approach and the rationale for its choice for the study. Also, the role of the researcher was presented. The participants selection logic was discussed together with the data collection technique and data analysis method. Moreover, the instrumentation for the study, the issue of trustworthiness and ethical procedures were equally provided.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this case study was to understand parents' perceptions of early childhood education and how these perceptions influenced their decision-making processes for early childhood education choices. The increased entry of women of childbearing age into the labor market has necessitated the regulation of ECCE programs all over the world and increased the effect of parents' ECCE decisions making on the future of children (Matei, 2014).

In this chapter, attention is focused on the adoption of the qualitative case study design and the rationale for the choice. A detailed explanation of the role of the researcher in the study was provided. Also, an in-depth description of the methodology was given including selection of participants and instrumentation for the study. Furthermore, the procedure for the recruitment of participants and data collection strategies are discussed, together with data analysis measures. Issues of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability follow.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do these parents describe the task of constructing a decision about an early childhood education placement for their child?

RQ2: How did these parents source information to guide their construction of a decision for an early childhood education placement for their child?

RQ3: How did parents use quality indicators in deciding on an early childhood education placement for their child?

RQ4: How did these parents synthesize the generated alternatives in constructing a placement decision with regards to their child?

Attention in this study is focused on parental perceptions of ECCE and the decision making process for its selection by parents whose children were between 6 months and 1 year of age and enrolled in public, mission, or private ECCE program for a minimum duration of 6 months. Characteristics considered to enrich early childhood education environments include low child/teacher ratio, small group size, professional development opportunities for the workforce, and positive attitude of the staff towards the children (Bauchmiller et al., 2014; Child Care Aware of America, 2015). High-quality early childhood education programs provide more than safe settings for children; they have a positive effect on children's development and also provides the foundation for positive relationships between children (Child Care Aware of America, 2015). Decision-making is the act of constructing selection criteria and employing them in making a choice from a set of possible alternatives (Brighouse et al., 2016).

Research Tradition and the Rationale

The qualitative approach using a case study design was considered appropriate for answering the research questions for this study. Qualitative methods are engaged to address people's experiences, understand various perspectives of individuals regarding a concept or phenomenon, and ascertain the impact of experiences, attitudes, and life context on people's needs and actions (Grossoehme, 2014). The case study design was

employed to obtain the answers to how and why questions about the parents decision process for ECCE choices.

A case study is an empirical investigation concerning a contemporary phenomenon (a case) situated in its real world setting, particularly when the boundary between the phenomenon and the context are not distinct (Yin, 2014). In this study, the case is parents' decision-making processes regarding early childhood educational choices bounded by program selection for three ownership types: public (government funded) programs, mission programs (funded by religious organizations), and private ECCE programs (for profit) programs. The case study design enhances the exploration of a phenomenon within its context through engaging more than one data source.

Furthermore, to obtain the depth of insight required for various facets of early childhood education decision-making, one-on-one interviews were engaged for data collection to allow the participants to express their views using words and expressions.

Moreover, the choice of a qualitative method is necessitated by its flexibility in terms of spontaneity and adaptation between the researcher and the study participants. Secondly, using a qualitative approach allowed the generation of data in the form of words, not numeric data, which provided rich content for the purpose of analysis. Also, a quantitative method was not considered because of the partial flexibility as a result of compulsion of respondents to select response options to the questions from predetermined options. Also, there are restriction on the mode of presentation of questions in the same order to all participants without room for further explanations to the respondents where he/she does not understand the questions or the response options

clearly. Furthermore, qualitative methods permit in-depth investigation through collection of detailed data regarding situations and specifics of the issue of inquiry (Patton, 2015).

The option for case study design for this qualitative inquiry was based on characteristics of the design, including emphasis on exploration over and above prescription or prediction, thereby allowing the researcher to be at liberty to discover and address problems as they emerge in a study. Attention is focused on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. In-depth data are collected in relation to a single individual. Another characteristic of a qualitative case study is that it focuses on a unit for analysis. Consequently, other qualitative methodologies are not likely to provide rich descriptions or insightful explanations associated with case study strategy, because they employ interviews as primary sources of data, while case study engages multiple sources of data: interview, observation, documents, and artifacts (Creswell, 2013). The case study focuses on the study of a phenomenon within its real-world context. Also, a level of flexibility, which is lacking in other qualitative designs exists with case study research, because a researcher can choose a topic and decide the boundaries of the topic (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Other qualitative methods do not have this flexibility, since they either tell a story of an individual experience, describe the essence of a lived phenomenon, ground a theory in the views of participants, or describe and interpret the shared pattern of peoples' culture (Creswell, 2013). The case study design is considered most appropriate for analyzing a limited number of cases, because it provides an in-depth understanding of a case or cases.

In addition, the case study provides an understanding to the researcher and descriptions of individuals' private experiences regarding the phenomena of inquiry. Consequently, an understanding of parental experiences regarding construction of ECCE placement decisions were attained in this study through engaging participants with children aged 6 months to 1 year in one-on-one interview. In other words, they were allowed to tell their stories, thereby giving me a better insight into parental actions and final decisions regarding early childhood educational choices. The subject matter of phenomenological inquiry is what individuals experience and their interpretation of the world (Patton, 2015). By implication, phenomenology deals with people's experiences with some phenomenon, including how they view, recall, make meaning, and relate it to others (Patton, 2015). Phenomenology was considered an inappropriate strategy for this study, because the purpose of this research was directed at accessing multiple realities as created by participants, which diverges with the aim of phenomenology. Besides, the aim in this study was to explore parents' ECCE decision processes and to identify how those encouraged enrollment into ECCE programs that are lacking in structural and process factors.

Grounded theory was not chosen for my study because it is a qualitative design targeted at generating a universal explanation of a process, an action, or an interaction tailored by the significant number of participants (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory concentrates on the process of discovering theory in place of a specific theoretical content (Patton, 2015) and that is contrary to the goal of this study. The purpose of this case study was to understand parents' perceptions of early childhood education and how these

perceptions influenced their decision-making processes for early childhood education choices. Furthermore, explore how these perceptions influenced their decision-making processes regarding early childhood education choices including enrollment of their children in ECCE programs that are deficient in structural and process factors and not to discover any specific theory.

Ethnography is another qualitative method with interest in an entire culture-sharing group that may be small but in most cases of a significant number of people who have been interacting over time (Creswell, 2013). As a qualitative technique, it entails description and interpretation of shared and learned patterns, values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group by the inquirer (Lopez-Discastillo & Belintxon, 2014; Marcen, Gimeno, Gutierrez, Saen, & Sanchez, 2013). Nevertheless, the present study was focused on multiple meaning making of realities and does not align with ethnography as a research design.

The Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher is expected to reveal essential aspects of professional roles, personal biases, assumptions, expectations, and experiences that may affect his or her eligibility to conduct the inquiry (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I have served as a teacher trainer for the past 20 years, and there was the tendency for me to come across some parents and educators who were my students at one time or another. However, this did not in any way interfere with the objective selection of the participants. Moreover, the researcher in a qualitative investigation should disclose whether his or her role is emic -- an insider and full participant in activity, program or phenomenon -- or the function is

more of etic--from an outsider perspective (Patton, 2015). Nevertheless, my experience as a parent was entirely bracketed, and I operated as an objective viewer from the outside. Consequently, I employed both guiding questions and probes to explore the decision process of early childhood education program selection and data obtained were interpreted within the context of study and findings reported objectively.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Population and setting. The setting of this study was the Asaba Educational Zone of Delta State, Nigeria. The city of Asaba serves as both the administrative and the political headquarter of the state as well as the administrative headquarter of Oshimili North local government area. The residents of the city were mainly civil servants, politicians, and businessmen. Three different ownership types of programs exist side by side in this educational zone: Government (public) programs, mission (not for profit) programs, and private proprietor (for-profit) programs. One of each licensed program ownership type was randomly selected to comprise the multi sites for the inquiry. The list of licensed programs was available in the office of the chief inspector of education for the zone. The population of the study was parents of children enrolled in all of the program types indicated above.

Sampling strategy. I applied the maximum variation sampling strategy in selecting the sample for the study. Consequently, the sample was drawn from multiple sites comprising public programs, mission programs and private programs through the adoption of random selection from the list of programs in Asaba educational zone. The

sample was selected from the population of parents whose children were enrolled in any of the three programs identified above. The choice for maximum variation sampling strategy was based on the need to ensure that the sample is credible in capturing the principle demographic variables that have the tendency to influence the participant's perceptions of the phenomenon of interest. Secondly, the choice of maximum variation sampling strategy was to gain insight of how the phenomenon of the inquiry was perceived by various people in different settings and assess it from various perspectives. Also, the adoption of maximum variation strategy was to allow the identification of the basic experiences and the shared characteristic that transcends various contexts of early childhood decision making. Maximum variation sampling strategy produces a valuable detailed description of each case essential for documenting exceptions as well as vital themes that transcend cases and derive their significance by emerging out of heterogeneity (Patton, 2015).

Participant selection. Participants for the study were drawn from among parents whose children were currently enrolled in any of the three identified categories of early childhood education programs for a minimum of 6 months and are aged between 6 months and 1 year at the time of data collection. The reason for this criterion was determined by the recently made decision by the parents in selecting a program. The confirmation of the eligibility of parents to participate in the study was authenticated through a selection of participants from among members of the Parents Teachers Forum of the programs.

Sample size. It has been argued that sample size should be determined by the intention and the objectives of the study together with how the results will be utilized and the resources available for the study (Patton, 2015). Winterbottom (2013) explored the Japanese immigrant's decision making not to enroll their children in ECCE programs across the United States using nine immigrant Japanese mothers. Therefore, the sample size for this study was set at 9 participants for the one-on-one interview to allow the gathering of detailed information and increase the depth of insight into the cases and contexts of study (Patton, 2015). The decision for my sample was based on the need to dig deeply into the factors that affect parents' choice of an early childhood care and education setting and the context of the inquiry within the time and resources available.

I requested and obtained the list of parents whose children have spent a minimum of 6 months in the programs from the program administrators. The list was further pruned down to parents whose children were 6 months and 1 year respectively. Parents that met these criteria were contacted through an e-mail requesting them to indicate interest to participate in the study (see participant recruitment for details of the invitation). Recruitment was from the first five people to respond from each program type.

Saturation and sample size. The concept of data saturation is considered vital due to its potential in revealing that a study is based on an adequate sample to demonstrate content validity (Saunders et al., 2017). Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2015) argued that neither the number nor size of a sample, the time expended on each person, group, scene, event nor document should determine when to adjudge data saturation. Rather, the information power that indicates the amount of information hold

by the sample, and it is determined by the aim of the study, sample size, use of established theory, quality of conversation and the strategy of analysis. In other words, an intensive one session of 45 minutes duration of interview with each of the 9 participants resulted in 6 hours 75 minutes field work which yielded enough thick description that culminated in saturation.

Instrumentation

The researcher in a qualitative study is the principal instrument for data collection (Yin, 2011). Consequently, I developed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) that was utilized for data collection in this study, based on the research questions and on construction of knowledge described by the conceptual framework. The protocol comprised 10 open-ended questions derived from the research questions. It was hoped that the use of open-ended questions provides opportunities for the participants to express diverse views thereby opening up their views of their world. Moreover, open-ended questions tend to provide avenues for the researcher to learn the terminologies and judgments of the participants together with the intricacies of their personal views and encounters (Patton, 2015).

The 10 interview questions and their relationship to the four research questions are as follows:

1. What was the early childhood education placement experience like for you? (Can you tell me how it happened? Where there specific incidents you can share with me?)

This question addresses RQ1: How do these parents describe the task of constructing a decision about an early childhood education placement for their child?

2. What were your sources of information for constructing your child's placement decision and how did you choose them?

3. Did the information gathered from these sources help you make a decision?

Questions 2 and 3 address RQ2: How did these parents source information to guide their construction of a decision for an early childhood education placement for their child?

4. What were the things you considered as priorities that guided your search for an early childhood education program for your child?

5. Which of these elements of high quality ECCE did you engage to generate alternatives? Quality of teachers and rate of retention each succeeding year; physical characteristics of the program facility; quality curricula; parental engagement and involvement with the program; safety and security of the child within the program facility; and effort to create a multicultural setting.

6. How did you order your quality indicators in evaluating various placement options?

Questions 4, 5, and 6 address RQ3: What were the quality indicators parents used in deciding on an early childhood education placement for their child?

7. Were some quality indicators more important to you than others?

8. Apart from the quality of service your child is going to receive, were there any other major factors that influenced your choice of program?

9. How did the things you considered as priorities actually guide you in making a final decision for your child's placement?

10. Is there anything that I have omitted that you would like me to know concerning your decision making process for your child?

Questions 7 through 10 address RQ4: How did these parents synthesize the generated alternatives in constructing a placement decision with regards to their child? These 10 interview questions may be supplemented with follow-up questions in the course of the interview as necessary to fully understand parents' perspectives about their construction of a solution to their need for child care services. Furthermore, I added explanation to clarify the participants understanding if they were answering off the topic I asked before asking them a probe. Consequently, giving them the opportunity to fully answer my questions the way I intended and therefore obtained more meaningful data.

The issue of content validity might be raised in association with these questions. However, according to Kuzmanić (2009), an interview is a joint venture engaged by the interviewee and the interviewer, so that the questions posed form merely the opening gambit in a conversation both parties engage. Interpretations of the questions by the interviewee, additional information offered though not asked-for, and follow-up probing questions by the interviewer all contribute to the construction of knowledge that is situated in the interview experience, according to Kuzmanić. In fact, the interview is an example of epistemological constructivism, since knowledge of a phenomenon is constructed by the interviewer over the course of the interview itself and in data analysis (Kuzmanić, 2009).

Kuzmanić (2009) suggested that “one cannot really determine a specific stage when validity should or could be assessed in an interview. Instead, it should be addressed throughout the entire research process” (p. 46). Therefore, I assert that the interview questions employed in this study presented content validity to the extent that I myself

understood the issues I addressed and my ability in the interview situation to convey those issues to participants, and participants' ability to communicate to me their understanding of those issues. Other researchers may ask other questions, but these questions, derived from the research questions, this study's conceptual framework, and a review of the literature, were used to construct knowledge about parents' decision-making process. Moreover, content validity was confirmed through review by the dissertation committee, establishing sufficiency by alignment among the research questions and interview questions. Literature search provides information on how the key variables in a study can be measured and serve as guides on how the instrument might be developed (Korb, 2015). Consequently, the interview questions for this study were derived from different literature sources together with using the conceptual framework as the basis. All the same, I established the sufficiency of the data collection instrument to answer the research questions by interviewing the participants until no new answers were obtained, which was an indication that saturation of the data has been attained. In other words, conducting more interviews will not elicit any new response. Therefore, reaching saturation suggested that I have achieved data sufficiency from the interview to answer the research questions. I accomplished this with the 9 participants.

Procedure for Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection

Participants were recruited from parents whose child were between 6 months and 1 year in age and have spent a minimum of 6 months in the program at the time of data collection. The comprehensive list of all the licensed programs were collected from the office of the Chief Inspector of Education of Asaba Education Zone. Then I grouped the

programs according to ownership types and randomly select one each from the three groups of the program. Furthermore, I requested and obtained the list of parents who met the above criteria together with their e-mail addresses from the managers of the selected programs. An e-mail was sent to the parents in the chosen programs who met the above criteria. The e-mail contained the following information: an introduction of myself; the purpose of the study; voluntary nature for participation and the liberty to withdraw from the study at any point. Also, data collection procedures; measures to protect the identity of participants; confidentiality of information provided; data usage and storage procedures was part of the information (see Appendix B for Invitation to Participants).

The recruitment was conducted on the basis of first come first serve from the first 5 to respond from the different programs. The Human Subjects Consent-to-Participate form was mailed to the volunteers, and they were advised to read and digest the content of the form. A note was attached to the form informing them that they will be required to confirm their indication of interest further to participate in the study by signing and retaining a duplicate copy of the consent form for their records on the day of the interview. Furthermore, a call was put across to the recruited participants to organize for a mutually convenient date, time, and venue for the interview. A day before the interview, a call was put across to the participants to remind them of the interview.

The data source for this study was one session of 45 minutes interview conducted with each of the 9 participants. The interview event was an in-depth 45 minutes one-on-one interview with each participant focusing on the 10 open ended questions as well as reflecting issues that came up in the course of the interview (see Appendix A for

Interview Protocol). Data collection for the four research questions was conducted by using 10 open-ended questions in a mutually agreed location, time, and date to ensure confidentiality and privacy. I was responsible for conducting the interview. The interview session was to collect data using the standardized questions as well as ask probing questions as a follow up on new key factors that emerged in the course of the interview session which I did not consider in constructing my protocol.

The data collection sessions was audio recorded with an electronic voice recorder, since the exact statements of the interviewee were the target of the qualitative researcher (Patton, 2015). However, in an event where the recruitment failed to yield full participation consequent upon unavoidable circumstance, an entirely new recruitment process would have been conducted to allow for full participation. Nevertheless, to conclude the interview session and exit the study, I thanked the participants for honoring my invitation to participate in the study and reassured them once more of utmost confidentiality of their responses to the interview questions. I asked the participants to feel free to reveal any information he or she considered necessary for me to know which I may have omitted. I also informed them that they will be given an opportunity to review the transcript of their interview to confirm its accuracy.

Data Analysis Plan

My earlier intention was that the interview recordings will be professionally transcribed. However, I did not use these services; rather, I transcribed the interview recordings manually. Data analysis in qualitative research has different stages: preparing and arranging the data; coding and reduction of the data into themes and presenting the

data in figures, tables or as a discussion (Creswell, 2013). On the other hand, Miles and Huberman (1994) provided a more detailed procedure of data analysis that entails writing marginal notes, preparing summaries of field notes and recognizing relationships among classifications. Patton (2002) argued that documenting and tracking ideas that emerge while gathering data are all aspects of field work and the qualitative analysis begins with it.

My analysis plan for the data for this study involved the following: preparing the data by transcribing the interview scripts and adopt member check to confirm, modify and verify the interview transcripts. I organized the data by grouping and connecting the data to specific research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994); reading freely and closely the transcribed interview texts to familiarize myself with the content and make notes (memos) (Thomas, 2003). A sample of the data was coded using a priori codes (see Appendix C) as well as coding the entire data set, taking cognizance of the emergence of new themes and concepts as new data were collected and needed to be added to the existing coding scheme. More codes were created as new concepts emerged and text segments marked into each code as well as rechecking the coding consistency to prevent the influence of human fatigue and errors (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Subsequently, themes and patterns were determined by doing the following as recommended by Ryan and Bernard (2003). I searched for word repetition, and I looked for words used by the respondents with a particular meaning and significance in their setting. Also, I searched for the range of uses of keywords in the phrases and the sentences in which they occur, and constantly compared and contrasted preceding and

subsequent statements. A search was conducted for information that was expected but was not available. Furthermore, I engaged the explanation of conditions, actions, interactions and consequences of phenomena as well as located and identified significant central beliefs about things that may indicate peoples' feelings about things. Data were examined for unmarked texts. I did search for patterns and significance among and across the marked words, circled and underlined texts and used colored highlighting to indicate different meanings and codes and organized all the transcripts coded in the same way into folders and re-read them to ascertain their themes or pattern.

Since, the use of software quickens the process of identifying coded themes, putting data into categories and comparing passages in the transcript (Patton, 2015), I intended to employ NVivo9 software program for my data analysis. The choice of NVivo 9 was primarily because of its potential in facilitating data storage, coding, retrieval, cross analysis and connecting. The idea was abandoned due circumstances beyond my control. However, I applied both a priori codes and inductive coding in analyzing the data in this study. By implication, as I examined the data codes were continually assigned to the meaningful segments of the data to create coding categories.

Subsequently, I conducted a search for regularities in the data to identify patterns that were grouped into categories. Even though identifying patterns and themes is an outcome of the analysis, discovering varieties, probability and ambiguities are another (Patton, 2015). Also, the need for critical appraisal and integrity demands that the researcher in a qualitative study explore alternative explanations, discrepant data, and examine bias (Noble & Smith, 2015). Therefore as a means to ascertain integrity of my

study, I carefully and thoughtfully scrutinized the data for both supporting and discrepant evidence and negative cases. However, the discrepant cases that cannot be accounted for by the established themes or categories were analyzed and reported in research narrative. Reporting identified discrepant data serves as a means of authenticating the inductive qualitative analysis (Patton, 2015).

All data collected were connected to specific research questions, as described in the Instrumentation, above. Answering the research questions that guided this study was accomplished through review of the themes that emerged from analysis of data. Moreover, to minimize the influence of researcher's judgement, intuition and bias external audit trial was engaged. The essence of external audit trial is to authenticate whether the findings, interpretations and conclusions of the study are supported by the available data ((Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Different strategies to qualitative inquiry revealed that issues of quality and credibility intersect with the audience and the objectives of studies (Patton, 2015). On the other hand, Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) noted that a constructivist inquirer engages different criteria from those applied by a researcher in the traditional social sciences. They believe that the problem of trustworthiness in qualitative studies can be addressed through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. However, the constructivists argue that the social world, contrary to the physical world, is "socially, politically and psychologically" (Patton, 2015, p. 546) built just like the human understanding and interpretation of the natural world. Consequently,

triangulation is employed by the constructivists to report and paint a vivid picture of multiple views instead of searching for specific truth.

Credibility in qualitative research is directed at ascertaining that the findings of a study are an accurate representation of the participants' point of view in the research. A notion derived from the idea that the essence of qualitative study is to gain insight of the concept of investigation from the participants' perspective (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). I adopted member checking, also called analytic triangulation, as a constructivist inquirer to ensure the credibility of my work. The use of member checking was accomplished by inviting the participants to comment on the accuracy of the interview transcripts and whether the final themes and concepts generated were the accurate reflection of their perspectives of the phenomena being examined. The engagement of member checking allows the researcher to learn more concerning the accuracy, completeness, fairness and the perceived internal validity of his data (Patton, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015). Also, Guba and Lincoln (1989) considered member checks as the single most essential provision that has the potential to establish a study's credibility. In addition to member checks, I also solicited perspectives from parents who enrolled children in one of three distinct program types (private, mission, or public). Doing this adds to the credibility of my findings.

Transferability as a criterion for trustworthiness is associated with the degree to which the results of a study can be employed in other contexts or settings. The concern is mainly focused on demonstrating that the findings of a study can be transferred to a wider population (Merriam, 1998; Noble & Smith, 2015). Furthermore, constructivists

encourage dialogue among perspectives and pay less attention to identifying a singular truth and series of connected events that will occur (Patton, 2015). In order to ensure transferability of my study, a multi-site design was adopted in the data collection. Data were collected from three categories of early childhood education programs namely: a government (public) ECCE program, a mission (not for profit) ECCE facility, and a private (for profit) ECCE program. The analysis of data from multiple settings and finding common themes across the sites may indicate to readers that the results apply to different contexts (Anney, 2014).

Also, dependability as a criterion for trustworthiness in qualitative research concentrates on obtaining the consistent result of a study when repeated in the same setting with the same method and the same participants (Billup, 2014). Dependability in qualitative research is equivalent to reliability in a quantitative study. Establishing dependability in qualitative research is not targeted at the possibility of obtaining the same findings by different researchers, rather it is intended to confirm whether the results are reasonable about the data collected (Anney, 2014). Consequently, I conducted a code-recode procedure on my data during the analysis stage of the inquiry. By implication, segments of the data was coded at a time, and I returned to it after a minimum duration of two weeks to recode the same segments and compare the two results. According to Anney (2014), the semblance of the coding results increases the dependability of the study, grants the inquirer a better insight of the data categories, and enhances the presentation of the participants' views. Furthermore, confirmability in qualitative research is concerned with ensuring that the findings of the research are the accurate.

report of the experiences and ideas of the participants and not the beliefs and biases of the researcher (Elo et al., 2014). It is a means of establishing whether the conduct of the research was influenced by the researcher's bias, because of the assumption that qualitative study permits the researcher to accommodate his unique perspective in the study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that a criterion for conformability is the degree of acceptance of the researcher of his or her predisposition. It is imperative for the researcher to reconsider the limitations of his choice of research design and the influence on the data available for analysis in his interpretation of the findings (Patton, 2015). Conformability was established in this study by acknowledging the beliefs underpinning decisions taken concerning the methods employed in the research report. Also, reasons for the choice of approach over and above others was explained, and the limitations of the strategy adopted was equally admitted. Therefore, to establish conformability of the study, I clarified my biases as a parent and teacher trainer and ensured that I kept the findings of the study in the context in line with the cardinal principle of qualitative analysis.

Ethical Procedures

In conducting the qualitative study, some ethical issues may emerge about the treatment of the human objects. Consequently, I arranged for a meeting with the Chief Inspector of Education (CIE) of the Asaba Educational zone before applying for IRB approval from Walden University. The essence of the meeting was to explain the purpose of the study as well as indicate that the decision to participate was voluntary and that the

participants were at liberty to discontinue from the study at any point during the study. Furthermore, I explained the likely data sources, measures to protect the identities of the participants, data usage, and storage procedures. Moreover, I sought for a letter of cooperation/agreement from both the CIE and the management of the programs to select programs from the educational zone and contact information of the participants respectively. Approval of Walden's IRB was granted (approval # 02-13-18-0256801). The consent form was sent to the participants ahead of the interview for them to read and understand what the interview session was all about. The consent form contained details of the study such as voluntary participation and the liberty to discontinue from the study at any point. Also, all identifications associated with the participants was confidentially handled and referred to in the report with pseudonyms. I invited questions from the participants on any aspect of the study they needed clarifications as well as informed them that signing the consent form was an indication of their agreement to participate in the study.

Summary

The case study processes for this inquiry have been discussed in this chapter regarding the research design and rationale, ethical protection of participants, participant selection logic, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis. The results obtained from this case study were analyzed in Chapter 4, and in Chapter 5, I presented the interpretation and implications of the study. In addition, the issue of trustworthiness in this qualitative study, achieved through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability, is discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this case study was to understand parents' perceptions of early childhood education and how these perceptions influenced their decision-making processes for early childhood education choices. I used a case study design in drawing on the insights of parents who have made childcare decisions recently for their children, who are between the ages of 6 months and 1 year. The apparent lack of knowledge, as described in previous chapters, of the factors that influence parents' decision-making processes for ECCE choices, which have encouraged enrollment in ECCE programs that are deficient in both structural and process factors, is the problem that shapes this study. Four research questions guided my exploration of how parents perceived their ECCE placement decisions, described their sources for information, described their engagement of quality indicators of ECCE programs, and indicated how they synthesized these factors to generate a placement decision for their children. This study is important because participating in high quality ECCE programs benefits children significantly in terms of their cognitive, social, and emotional development, particularly children of low socioeconomic status (Yoshikawa, 2013). Insufficient information concerning the factors that parents consider in ECCE selection has left a gap in the knowledge concerning the placement decision for ECCE needed by policy makers to promote policies that can lead to positive outcomes for families and children through supporting parental choice of programs. In this chapter, I will present the setting of the study, participants' demographics, data collection and analysis, and results.

Setting of the Study

The setting of the study was public, private, and mission programs located in the Asaba education zone. Asaba is both the administrative and political headquarters of one of the South-South states in Nigeria as well as a local government headquarters. The residents of the town are mainly civil servants and political office holders together with businessmen and traders. During the time the study was conducted, from 29th May, 2015 to 30th June, 2018 the country was passing through economic recession. The major source of revenue for the government, crude oil, was experiencing drastic price reduction per barrel. Consequently, civil servants in the state were not regularly paid their salary and the situation adversely affected the financial life of every citizen. The participants drawn from the population of parents with children enrolled in ECCE programs in Asaba education zone were not shielded from the economic issues that were affecting the country at the time of the study.

Demographics of the Participants

In accordance with the Walden University ethical framework, the identity of the participants was kept confidential through use of pseudonyms. The study had nine participants comprising of eight mothers and one father. Six of the mothers were teachers, one was a nurse, and one was a civil servant. The only male among the participants was a civil servant. There were four National Certificate of Education (NCE) graduates among the participants, one Higher National Diploma (HND) graduate, one West African School Certificate (WASC) graduate, two University degree holders, and one registered nurse/midwife. The subjects were between 30 and 45 years of age. One of

the participants was within the age range of 40-45, four were within the age range of 35-40 and another four were between 30-35 years. All participants were married. Three participants represented each of the three center types.

Table 1

Summary of the Demographics of the Participants

Participants*	Schools	Gender	Age	Education	Marital Status
Maria	Private	Female	30-35	Nurse/Midwife	Married
Tracy	Private	Female	30-35	Degree	Married
Mary	Private	Female	30-35	NCE	Married
Patty	Mission	Female	30-35	NCE	Married
Nkechi	Mission	Female	35-40	NCE	Married
Sophia	Mission	Female	35-40	HND	Married
Nkoli	Public	Female	35-40	NCE	Married
Mercy	Public	Female	35-40	WASC	Married
Jesse	Public	Male	40-45	Degree	Married

*Names are pseudonym

Data Collection

I sought and obtained a list of parents within Asaba education zone, whose children were between 6 months and 1 year and were enrolled in one of the target programs: public, mission, or private programs. A total of 27 parents from the selected public, mission and private programs were identified to have met the criteria of having enrolled their child of 6 months to 1 year in an ECCE program of the three types

indicated above for a minimum of 6 months. Thereafter, I sent an email (see Appendix B) with the consent form inviting parents to participate in the study. They were expected to read the consent form and understand what the study was about and be aware that participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any point in the study. Subsequently, 17 parents volunteered to be part of the study. Three parents were randomly selected from the first five volunteers who responded from each of the programs. Consequently, a total of 9 participants took part in the study. These were contacted through phone calls to decide upon the day, location, and time that was convenient for them for the interview session. All participants opted to be interviewed in their offices on weekdays. One interview event was scheduled for each of the participants for 45 minutes at their chosen location, time and date.

I gathered data by asking every participant 10 structured and open-ended questions, as well as supplementary questions as needed to clarify their answers. Before the commencement of the interview session, each participant was thanked for finding time to participate in the study. Furthermore, I explained the purpose of the study to the participants and assured them of the utmost confidentiality regarding their responses to the interview questions. Also, participants were informed that the interview session would be recorded with an electronic voice recorder. Upon expression of satisfaction and understanding the purpose of the study, the interviewee was assured that he or she was at liberty to withdraw from the study whenever he or she considered it necessary before I gave out the consent form for signature. Subsequently, the interview session commenced and was recorded with an electronic voice recorder and clearly labeled by assigning a

number and a pseudonym as a means of identification. At the end of each interview session, the participant was thanked for accepting my invitation to participate, as well as their patience and time. The participants were informed that the verbatim transcription of the recordings would be made available to them for review and confirmation. The entire data collection process was conducted as planned and described in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research comprises preparing and arranging the data, coding and reduction of the data into themes, and presenting the data in figures, tables, or as a discussion (Creswell, 2013). Upon the completion of the interview sessions, the recordings were played back and transcribed by listening to the recordings several times and pausing intermittently to ensure that participants' expressions were adequately captured and transcribed. Subsequently, the transcriptions were printed out in hard copies and personally presented for participants to read through and confirm that the transcriptions were the true reflections of their views concerning the interview questions. None of the participants made corrections.

Furthermore, the data were organized by arranging and assigning them to particular research questions. I then read through the transcriptions freely and closely several times to be acquainted with the content and made notes. The coding was manually conducted; I indicated in Chapter 3 my intention to use NVivo 9, but this was not possible due to circumstances beyond my control: The system I installed the NVivo 9 I purchased earlier got crashed. Initially, a portion of the data was coded using a priori codes (see Appendix D). Subsequently, the coding of the entire data set was conducted

through open coding, being mindful of the emergence of new themes and concepts since new data were collected and needed to be joined to the already existing scheme.

Consequently, more codes were created as fresh concepts emerged. I double-checked coding consistency to avoid the influence of human fatigue and errors. Miles and Huberman (1994), argued that rechecking coding consistency should be undertaken to prevent mistakes.

I searched for generally used words, keywords in phrases, and sentences together with identifying words used by participants with specific meaning and importance in their environment. Also, I compared and contrasted preceding and subsequent statements and equally searched for expected concepts that were missing. I engaged explanations of conditions, actions, interactions and outcomes of phenomena. The data were examined for unmarked texts as well as search for patterns and significance among and across the marked words. I used colored highlighting to distinguish meanings and codes and grouped the transcripts coded in the same way into folders. I re-read the content of the folders to validate their themes or patterns.

Codes were considered necessary when participants expressed the same view using similar statements or phrases in the course of the interview. Analysis of the data revealed 125 codes which were later compressed to 40 codes that transcended four to seven participants. However, frequent and prominent statements were assigned codes and were later organized into themes. Frequent appearance of specific category during the comparison of the data reflected the relative importance of a specific theme. Statements that were considered significant in relation to the research questions were extracted and

grouped under the appropriate research question. Consequently, these statements were read over and over in search of common themes across them. Similar categories were collapsed, thereby allowing the most frequent categories to provide the answers to the four research questions.

Discrepant Cases

It is not unusual for some discrepant data, which may not sound reasonable or may contradict other data to occur in a study. However, reporting discrepant findings is considered an essential aspect of accuracy and quality. In this study one key discrepancy emerged and it is the emphasis on unhindered access to the child in the crèche by participants. Two of the participants, Patty and Sophia, insisted that unhindered access to their child while at the program facility is a key determinant for selecting a program. Patty stated, “I know that because I am here I have access to my child, but when we are going outside we can’t have that access. Just like I explained before I want to be seeing my child.” Sophia said, “access to my child at any time is a priority.” It is surprising that parents would consider unhindered access to their child a priority that cannot be compromised in constructing early childhood care and education placement for their child. However, this desire may be connected to baby friendly practices expected by nursing mothers, for a minimum duration of the first six months after birth.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Lincoln et al. (2011) stated that a constructivist inquirer adopts various criteria that are at divergent from those utilized by a researcher in the traditional social sciences. Their argument is that the issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research can be achieved

through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Consequently, credibility in qualitative research is considered a means of confirming that the findings of a study were the true account of the participants' perspectives in the research. A notion derived from the idea that the essence of qualitative study is to gain insight of the concept of investigation from the participants' perspective (Lincoln et al., 2011). Therefore, I adopted member checking, a method of analytic triangulation, to confirm the credibility of my work. The use of member checking was accomplished by taking the interview transcripts to the participants to confirm the accuracy of the reflection of their perspectives as regards the concept of study. By applying member checking, the researcher is allowed to understand better the accuracy, completeness, fairness and the perceived internal validity of his data (Patton, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015).

Another criterion for trustworthiness is transferability, which is the extent of applicability of the results of a study to various settings. In other words, the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to a wide population is determined by the potential of its transferability to different contexts (Merriam, 1998; Noble & Smith, 2015). Therefore, constructivists advocate for dialogue among perspectives and deemphasize the identification of an absolute truth as well as the likely associated occurrences (Patton, 2015). The transferability of my study was achieved by engaging a multi-site design for data collection. Data were collected from three categories of early childhood care and education programs namely: a government (public) ECCE program, a mission (not for profit) ECCE facility, and a private (for profit) ECCE program. The

analysis of data from multiple settings and identifying common themes that cut across the sites tended to indicate that the results are applicable to different contexts (Anney, 2014).

Establishing dependability in qualitative research is directed at authenticating the result of a study in relation to the available data (Anney, 2014). By implication, to ascertain dependability in my study, I conducted a code-recode procedure on my data during the analysis stage of the inquiry. Consequently, segments of the data were coded at a time, and I later recoded the same segments after two weeks and obtained similar results. In the words of Anney (2014), the semblance of the coding results increases the dependability of the study, grants the inquirer a better insight of the data categories, and enhances the presentation of the participants' views.

Conformability as a criterion for trustworthiness in a qualitative research is targeted at ensuring that the findings of the research are the true representation of the views and ideas of the participants and not the personal values and biases of the researcher (Elo et al., 2014). Consequently, it serves as a means of ascertaining whether the conduct of the research was influenced by the researcher's bias, because of the assumption that qualitative study allows the researcher to accommodate his unique perspective in the study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that a criterion for conformability is the degree of acceptance of the researcher of his or her predisposition. It is imperative for the researcher to reconsider the limitations of his choice of research design and the influence on the data available for analysis in his interpretation of the findings (Patton, 2015). A qualitative approach with case study design was considered suitable for answering the

research questions for this study. Qualitative methods are adopted in addressing people's experiences and views concerning a concept based on their experiences, and contextual requirements (Grossoehme, 2014). Consequently, case study design was engaged to elicit responses to the "how and why" questions about the decision process for early childhood educational choices.

On the other hand, the option for case study design for this qualitative inquiry is based on the characteristics of the design, in that other qualitative methodologies are not likely to provide the rich descriptions or the insightful explanations associated with case study strategy. The case study focuses on the study of a phenomenon within its real-world context, in other words, data were collected in the natural setting as against derived data. Also, a level of flexibility exists with case study research, which is lacking in other qualitative designs. Case study design is considered most appropriate for analyzing a limited number of cases in-depth because it provides individual case information. In addition, case study provides understanding and description of individuals' private experiences of phenomena. All these were attained in this study through engaging the participants in one-on-one interview for them to tell their stories, thereby giving the researcher a better insight into their actions and final decision for early childhood educational choice. However, I served as the sole instrument for data collection for the study, therefore, the data interpretation was based on my personal interpretation and inferences. In other words, my personal integrity, sensitivity, and personal prejudices as the researcher may have affected the conduct of the study thereby leaving unknown gaps and bias in the study. Another methodological shortcoming of this study is the inability to

make any scientific generalization of the findings because of its small sample size. Since the participants in the study were selected based on my consideration of the research questions and purpose, the findings of the study are likely to be meaningful only to the participants in this particular case. Also, my experiences as a parent and teacher trainer for twenty three years was bracketed and the findings restricted to the context in accordance with the cardinal principles of qualitative analysis.

Results

In this section, I will present results in response to each of the research questions. These results are based on the findings.

RQ1

RQ: How do these parents describe the task of constructing a decision about an early childhood care and education placement for their child? Data from interview questions 1a and 1b were used to answer this question.

The task of constructing early childhood care and education placement decision was differently described by the participants. Their descriptions included reflections on their reasons for searching for ECCE, the criteria they engaged, and how these influenced their choices by either making it easy, confusing, or worthwhile. The descriptions seemed to be influenced by their individual experiences in the course of the task of constructing a decision for their child's placement in an ECCE program. While seven of them agreed that the task of selecting an ECCE program for their child was easy, one of them said his experience was confusing ("hazy") and another described her experience as worthwhile. Tracy said, "it was very, very easy for me to choose a program." Mary responded, "it was

not that difficult for me.” Also, Patty stated, “We work here, so we don’t search much.” Sophia equally responded, “it was easy for me.” Nkoli, a mother of five, explained, “most of my children passed through this program.” Nkechi stated, “My first child passed through here.” However, Jesse, a male participant, had this to say: “my experience was a bit hazy,” while Mercy, a female civil servant, described her experience thus “ Yes I will actually consider it as an experience that is worthwhile, because at that early age you put them in the school it helps them to grow.” Even though the participants perceived their experiences of ECCE placement from three different perspectives: easy, confusing (hazy) and worthwhile, they were all open in expressing their individual experiences regarding the early childhood education placement for their child.

Moreover, their descriptions showed that they attached importance to the events they encountered that were either encouraging or discouraging, which included structural and physical characteristic issues, personal challenges, and individual attractions. Out of the nine participants, only five of them recalled incidents that occurred and were memorable to them. Maria, a nurse, and Tracy, a teacher, witnessed process and structural issues, which they described with the word “overcrowding.” Sophia also said, “there was no separate room for crèche. They put together the infants, toddlers and preschoolers.” All these incidents reflect process and physical structure issues. Also, Jesse recounted the issue of proximity to the program; he said, “because I was living far away from the program location there were occasions when there was rush,” an expression that indicated a personal challenge. Mercy narrated the incident that encouraged her to take her child to the crèche while at work: “I remember a lady that

normally takes her child to the crèche whenever she is going to work; the baby was small then. I said even while she works she was lively, she was not stressed up carrying the child up and down. So I now said I will put my child in that crèche too.” Her narrative revealed her personal attraction based on her observation of another’s experience. In other words, the reasons for engaging the services of ECCE and the criteria employed, as well as the importance attached to the memorable incidents which occurred during the decision process, may have contributed to the enrollment of their child in deficient programs.

RQ2

RQ2 was: How did these parents source information to guide their construction of a decision for an early childhood education placement for their child? Findings from interview questions 2 and 3 helped to answer this question.

The data revealed that information was sought and obtained from various sources such as social networks, family members, religious affiliations, and personal search, as well as previous experience of having had a child in an ECCE program. The participants disclosed various sources through which they obtained information that assisted them in the construction of their ECCE placement for their child. Maria indicated that she sourced for information from her neighbor and friends: “I asked from my friends and neighbor too.” Tracy said: “It was a friend that directed me.” Mary stated, “I have a friend that worships at Winners church, so she said they were always giving out adverts that the advert is there and that they were always calling the name of the school.” Nkechi recounted, “A friend told me about it.” Jesse stated, “I got my information through

communication with friends and other people.” It is worthy of note that five of the participants used the terms “friend and neighbor” to indicate their sources of information for making decision regarding ECCE choices. The use of these terms as sources of information showed reliance on social network as a source of information for constructing decision for early childhood education selection.

Sophia and Jesse said they obtained the information they engaged in making an ECCE placement from their “husband” or “sister,” thereby making family members their source of information. Mary and Mercy explained that they received information about the ECCE program they chose for their child from the “church” and a “school teacher,” respectively, thereby making religious and school sources their basis for information for ECCE placement. Patty and Nkoli had no need to source information aside from their previous experience with the programs, which they expressed thus: “my first child passed through this place” and “every information was already here.” In other words, their earlier knowledge about the programs was enough information for making a placement decision for their child. Consequently, every participant had a source through which they obtained information from among these categories: social network, family source, religious and school sources and personal experiences.

Also, parents acknowledged that the information they obtained from these sources was not specific to any aspect of ECCE programs, rather it was more of general information which guided the participants in making placement decisions for their children. They expressed the usefulness of the information obtained with the following expressions: “it helped me in making decision” (Maria), “the information I obtained

helped me” (Tracy), “yes, it really helped me” (Mary), “my first child passed through the crèche, it helped me to make the placement decision” (Sophia), “I was already conversant with the program” (Nkechi), “they helped me make a decision” (Mercy), and “It guided me”(Jesse). All the participants agreed that the information gathered was useful to them in constructing an ECCE placement decision for their child, even though the information obtained was not about any specific aspect of the ECCE program but was general information. Consequently, information obtained were not detailed enough about various aspects of ECCE programs to allow this information to specifically support selection of quality programs over deficient ones.

RQ3

RQ3 asked: How did parents use quality indicators in deciding on an early childhood care and education placement for their child? Findings from interview questions 4,5, and 6 were included in answering this question.

Data analysis revealed that participants engaged certain priorities in their search for ECCE programs for their child. The words that resonated among the participants on their priority list were “environment,” “neat,” and “people taking care of the child.” Maria declared, “I wanted somewhere that was neat... somewhere I know I could drop my child and come back and find her and she will be okay.” Tracy said, “I will take my child there provided it is neat and the people taking care of her are good people.” Mary insisted that “the first thing should be a conducive environment.” Nkechi had this to say: “what I considered was the people that will take care of the child.” Nkoli said, “I will say the environment: closeness and the security.” Jesse responded, “These are the things I say

must be there: the bed space, the big foam, and the neat environment.” Mercy said, “the caregivers, they are neat and they take good care of the children... my child is in safe hands.” Patty stated, “I considered the environment first then the people taking care of the child.” Invariably these requirements were aspects of safety, comfort, and security.

Moreover, participants had on their priority list words and phrases like “number of children,” “room,” “how many people caring for them,” “classroom,” “windows,” and “floor and tiles,” which reflect process, structural, and physical characteristics as priorities that guided parents’ search for ECCE programs for their child. Maria, a nurse, said, “I wanted to see the number of children in a class of a crèche, like a room that is being cared for and how many people are caring for them.” Jesse used the phrase “they are few.” Mercy, on the other hand, emphasized the physical characteristics of the programs: “it was a standard classroom,” and “the windows were big” and “what about the floors? They are tiled and I like that.”

In addition, four out of the nine participants stressed the importance of religious belief as a key priority in their search for an ECCE program. These words featured in the course of the discussion of their priorities: “Christian,” “God fearing,” “spiritual,” “mission and spirituality.” Maria applied the words “Christian crèche,” “God fearing,” “pray,” and “Christian CD’s.” Sophia equally used terms like “spiritual,” “spirituality,” and “mission crèche.” Patty consistently applied the words “spirituality,” and “Godly.” Mercy also emphasized the words “God fearing” and “fear of God” as an indispensable qualities. These words were indicative of parental values and beliefs engaged in constructing ECCE placement decisions.

Apart from parental beliefs, participants had financial implications as one of the considerations they applied in their search for an ECCE program. Participants' responses concerning their priorities while searching for ECCE for their children revealed that parents were conscious of the cost of child care in constructing a placement decision about early childhood education for their child. They avoided sending their children where the cost could not be accommodated by their income. In addition, they preferred facilities where they can pay with credit as needed or be allowed to make staggered payments. One of the participants, Jesse, said, "I want to go to where I can be comfortable and pay anytime; they ask me to pay I will be able to pay." Another participant, Nkechi, explained, "the first thing I considered before I brought my child was the cost - that is the fee if it is something I will be able to afford too." Nkoli stated, "followed by the fees/cost we are civil servants and me that is working here if the money is not readily available they cannot send my child away." Maria responded thus: "the program was comfortable for me to pay; even though it was expensive they made it easy for me to pay at my own pace." Sophia said, "so I had to go and meet the head teacher one on one to explain to her the money is not there for now...I asked her if we can be given time, she accepted." In other words the ability to pay was a key deciding factor in the search for ECCE programs by parents.

Two of the participants emphasized proximity as a component of the priorities that guided their search for an ECCE program for their child. Nkoli has this to say: "I mentioned closeness first because I am working. I don't want to walk up and down. When they say 'madam' your child is not feeling fine,' I can just walk there and see it."

Patty said, “like some of us do baby friendly and they do it successfully; why? Because we are here with the children.” Even though different reasons were advanced for having closeness to the program as a priority, these reasons were considered of utmost importance to the participants, hence they see proximity, along with cost, the spiritual tone, and the physical space of the center, as a priority in their search for ECCE.

Even though parents had priorities they employed in constructing an ECCE placement decision for their child, they equally engaged quality indicators which they ordered according to their degree of importance to them. Almost all the participants agreed they used some of the recognized high quality indicators in generating alternatives for their child’s early education placement. Five of the participants engaged safety and security as important, and the following terms were used to express it: “safety and security” (Maria), “environment”(Tracy), “environment” and “security” (Patty), “safety and environment” (Nkechi), “environment” (Nkoli), and “no mosquitoes that comes there to harm the child,” “secured, “security,” and “first aid” (Mercy). Three participants confirmed using physical characteristics as a quality indicator and expressed it thus: “physical characteristic” (Maria), “[not a] batcher [a makeshift wooden shelter]” (Nkoli), “standard classroom” and “ventilated windows” (Mercy). Two of the participants applied parental engagement by using these terms: “listening ear” (Jesse) and “parental engagement” (Maria). Also, the rate of retention of teachers was utilized by two participants. Maria used the terms “quality of teachers and rate of retention,” while Nkechi applied the word “teachers.” The quality of curriculum was suggested by Jesse, which he described thus: “they teach them little by little how to make some

pronunciations,” and for multicultural setting Jesse used the term “cultural aspect.” In other words the high quality indicators of rate of retention of teachers, parental engagement, safety and security, quality curricula, physical characteristics, and effort to create a multicultural setting were employed by parents to generate alternatives for their child’s ECCE placement decision.

The quality indicators employed in generating alternatives for ECCE placement were not systematically ordered; rather individuals ordered the indicators in a descending order of importance to them. However, some participants provided the order of importance of both their priorities and the quality indicators. Maria ordered the quality indicators thus: “safety and security number one, physical characteristics, parental engagement, quality of teachers, and rate of retention.” Tracy stated, “the area of cleanliness of the environment first, followed by friendliness by the teacher to the child.” Patty said, “spirituality first. Number two security of the children. Thirdly, I think is their experience, and four the environment.”

Nkechi gave her list thus: “the first thing is safety of the child, followed by the environment, and the teachers.” Sophie responded that, “the first one that I don’t want to compromise is the spiritual level one. Secondly, my being there as a teacher having access to them.” Nkoli said, “environment, that is number one. I can’t take my child to batcher. The person taking care of the child must be friendly.” Jesse, the male participant, explained, “first is the listening ear they gave to us and secondly the cultural aspect. Thirdly, the learning process, how to make pronunciation.” Mercy provided her order in this manner: “first there must be bed, ventilated windows, [the]caregiver must be friendly

and approachable. Security is the first thing: is there any first aid box? These things are just sufficient.”

The evidence revealed that participants evaluated the various options of ECCE programs available to them by engaging both quality indicators and some of their personal priorities to evaluate the alternatives they engaged to make placement choices for their child. However, there was no consistency among the participants with regard to the order of factors, and quality indicators did not take precedence over personal priorities.

However, the ordering was not systematic, so that personal priorities and program quality indicators were considered separately, and did not seem to contribute to a unified notion of what might be the best placement choice, for themselves personally and for their child developmentally. Parents ordered the quality indicators they adopted for constructing ECCE placement decisions, based on their personal interests and the elements of the ECCE programs, but the order of these indicators seemed disconnected from each other and without regard for the effect of any quality-compromising indicators on their child’s development.

RQ4

RQ4 was: How did these parents synthesize the generated alternatives in constructing a placement decision with regards to their child? Findings from interview questions 7 through to 10 were used to answer RQ4.

Two things contributed to the synthesis of alternatives that parents employed in the construction of their placement decision for their child: priorities parents considered

indispensable and quality indicators parents considered important. The responses obtained from the participants showed that they did consider some quality indicators more important than others. Five of the participants indicated that safety and security were most important to them. Maria said, “safety and security is most essential for me.” Patty responded, “yes, security. The environment is okay and the security is there.” Nkechi stated, “the safety of my child that is more important to me.” Nkoli said, “I mentioned the place must be secured and they are neat. When the security is not there I will not take my child to the school.” Mercy mentioned that “the place must be secured; that is the most important thing for me.”

Moreover, Maria, Tracy, Nkoli, Mercy, Nkechi, and Jesse considered relationships in a program setting as an essential element that cannot be compromised. The relationships are at different levels: child-caregiver, child-child, and parents-program staff; these levels of relationships were of special interest to parents. Maria, a nurse, said, “I wanted someone that is motherly and has passion for children.” Also, Tracy stated, “my major interest was the relationship between the caregiver and the child.” Nkoli said, “the person taking care of the child must be friendly.” Mercy has this to say: “I think the caregivers must be God-fearing; I think that one is also important.” Besides, Nkechi did say “here he will have friends to play with. It will even help the child to interact when he goes out.” Jesse stated, “they listen to you and hear your own view or suggestions.” Parents considered various levels of relationships that exist in an early childhood education programs as an essential component in constructing an ECCE placement decision for their child. However, both Nkoli and Mercy attached importance to the

physical characteristics of programs. Nkoli said, “first, I can’t take my child to batcher even if it is free; you know batcher now, ehe?” Also, Mercy talked about “ventilated windows,” “standard classrooms,” and “tiled floors.”

Even though, some parents were contented with the quality of services their child would receive, they were also further influenced by other factors such as interactions between parents and the program (warm reception by the proprietor), relationship between and among the children, availability of payment by credit, process factors, and the presence of parental values. Maria explained: “I think the interaction with the proprietor influenced a great deal my choice, the way she received us that morning, her warm reception.” On the other hand, Nkechi said, “here he [her child] will have friends to play with.” Jesse stated: “just explain to them and tell them they abide and listen to you and hear your own view or suggestions.” Maria responded, “they made it easy for me to pay at my own pace.”

Nkoli emphasized, “if the money is not readily available they cannot send my child away, I know the head teacher I can always say please give me some time.” Jesse insisted “what I care most is the qualification of the teachers.” Moreover, Patty, Sophia, Mercy, Maria, and Nkechi focused their interest on personal beliefs while constructing an ECCE placement decision for their child. They used the terms “spirituality,” “God-fearing,” “Godly people,” and “Christian crèche” to express their beliefs and values. Furthermore, participants confirmed that their priorities guided them in making a placement selection for their child. They all expressed satisfaction with their choices because the presence of their priorities made them have confidence in the programs.

Maria, a nurse, agreed that her priorities were quite helpful in making a choice and she expressed it thus: “where I finally settled down with had about 80% of what I really needed.” Also, Mercy said, “the availability of my priorities made me feel that my child is in good hands and I don’t need to worry while I am away.” Jesse explained that he was able to arrive at a concrete decision through being guided by his priorities. Furthermore, Tracy believed that her priorities were of immense help because she could see “joy” in her child. Mary seem highly impressed with the services her child was receiving: “the way they treat the children, in fact everything when I came; the environment was conducive.” In addition, Patty stated that investigation revealed that her “priorities” were available in the program she eventually chose. Consequently, using priorities to construct placement decisions for ECCE served as a guide to making a satisfactory choice.

Participants indicated that the questions on the interview protocol touched on virtually all the information they were willing to disclose concerning their construction of an ECCE placement decision for their child. Six of the participants said the questions touched on practically all they wanted to discuss regarding their decision process for early childhood education placement for their child. They expressed it as follows: “you have said it all” (Mary); “No, I have nothing else to say” (Tracy); “none, you have asked all” (Patty); “I didn’t really think of any other thing” (Nkechi); “I was focusing on answering your questions” (Sophia); and “eventually you have touched on everything” (Jesse).

However, three of the participant felt they did not have the opportunity to explain some of their observations about the programs of their choice. Maria explained that the

program allowed her family to make staggered payment for the fee “that made it easy for us to pay.” Nkoli added that she felt impressed by the one-on-one attention her child was receiving: “any day my child did not come, they call to find out if the child is not feeling fine.” Mercy acknowledged that even when it seemed that all the children were hungry at the same time, the caregivers were able to coordinate themselves and attended to each child promptly. She said, “when it comes to feeding the children, the way they coordinate themselves impressed me so much.” By implication, parents appreciated a great deal individual and prompt attention to their child’s needs as well as credit facility. These attributes of a program served as influences in the construction of early childhood education placement decision.

In constructing early childhood care and education placement decision for their child, parents synthesized the quality indicators of safety and security, physical characteristics of the location, and the rate of retention of teachers and their priorities of existing relationships, financial requirements, child-caregiver ratio (structural factors), parental values, the proximity of the child care location to home or work, and parents’ unhindered access to the child during the day (of interest particularly to families that included breast-fed babies). As indicated in the results for research question 3, parents’ decision-making relied more heavily on their personal priorities than on indicators of program quality. The synthesis of program alternatives was unbalanced, with greater weight given to parental priorities and less attention afforded to quality bench marks. The relative inattention parents afforded to quality indicators may explain continued enrollment in deficient programs.

Findings by Program Type

Purposeful sampling was applied to identify equal numbers of participants from each of three program types: private (independently-funded), mission (non-profit), and public (government supported). No discernible differences were found in response to interview questions by parents whose children were enrolled in different program types. For example, the seven participants who described the task of searching for ECCE as “easy” cut across the private, mission and public programs. The participant who reported the task as confusing enrolled his child in a public program, but so also did another who said it was a worthwhile experience. Three out of the five participants who reported memorable incidents in their decision-making process were from both private and mission programs and their emphasis was on teacher-child ratio (structural factor) and physical characteristics. The three public program participants reported encouraging incidents of personal attraction but also of personal challenge.

In sourcing information by which to make an ECCE decision, participants from private programs mentioned social networks, and religious and school sources most frequently. The participants from the mission programs obtained information from family members and from previous experience of having had a child in a program. Public program participants seem to have collected information from wider sources that included family members, school sources, social networks, and previous experience of having engaged the services of a program. However, all participants agreed that the information they obtained was useful, irrespective of the sources.

Safety, comfort, and security were priorities for participants from all three program types, as were parental values, cost, and the availability of credit or staggered payment options. Parents from public and mission programs mentioned proximity as a priority more often than did parents from private programs. The emphasis participants placed on personal priorities over quality indicators cut across the three program types represented in this study. Participants from the three program types confirmed that their choice of program was heavily guided by their priorities.

Summary

Data analysis showed that parental perspectives concerning the task of choosing an ECCE placement for a small child differed according to their individual experiences, so that this task could be categorized as seeming very easy, confusing, or worthwhile. Also, parents indicated that information about ECCE choices were derived from a variety of sources, such as social networks, family members, religious communities, and program staff, as well as from previous personal experiences. The information parents gathered from these sources was mainly general, but parents deemed it useful and said this information guided their placement decisions. Parents also applied quality indicators in making an ECCE placement decision. Qualities parents looked for in early childhood care and education placement foremost were safety and security for children and physical characteristics of the location, with qualities of teachers and the rate of teacher retention and quality of the curriculum of less importance. However, parents did not indicate that these qualities were actually applied in their decisions, but instead seem to rely mostly on convenience of location, personal familiarity with the center proprietor, credit facility,

individual and prompt attention to the child's needs, as well as personal attractions of other parents dispositions towards engaging the services of early childhood education program for their child. . Even though, parents ordered the quality indicators and even designated some as of non-negotiable importance. Equally non-negotiable, however were various personal priorities. In describing their synthesis of all this information, when there was conflict between quality indicators and personal priorities parents most often decided in favor of personal priorities, even if that meant accepting deficient quality.

In Chapter 5 I will offer an interpretation of findings and results, and how the findings relate to literature. The limitations of study that became evident during data collection and analysis was described. In Chapter 5, I also offered recommendations as well discussed the implications of this study to social change, and to policy and practice. Mention was also made of the likely source of disseminating the findings of the study and conclusions based on the findings presented here.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Recommendations and Conclusions

The purpose of this case study was to understand parents' perceptions of early childhood education and how these perceptions influenced their decision-making processes for early childhood education choices. A qualitative approach with case study design was adopted. One-on-one interviews provided thick descriptions for analysis of factors which have contributed to increased enrollment in ECCE programs that lack quality indicators.

The enrollment of young children into quality-deficient programs has a detrimental impact on language, social development, and later school performance that is difficult to remedy (Krieg et al., 2015; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Therefore, parents' decision-making processes for ECCE are important, because early investment in the lives of children through enrollment in quality ECCE creates the opportunity for positive school performance. Lack of investment in quality ECCE may compel efforts later to remedy the negative effect of quality-deficient programs (Gerlter et al., 2014; Jenkins, 2014; Jones, 2015). Prior to this study, little was known of parental considerations in constructing ECCE placement decisions for their child.

Participants perceived their task of ECCE placement for their child differently depending on their personal experiences; they sought information for ECCE placement decisions based on social networks, family members, religious organizations, school sources, and previous experiences. Furthermore, parents engaged quality indicators such as: rate of retention of teachers, parental engagement, safety and security, quality curricula, physical characteristics and effort to create a multicultural setting during the

construction of ECCE placement decisions. However, these quality indicators were superseded by personal priorities of safety, security and comfort, various levels of relationships, care giver-child ratio, parental values, cost, unhindered access to their children, and proximity of the center to home or work. Generated alternatives of ECCE programs were synthesized based on the availability of parental priorities earlier indicated and quality indicators of ECCE programs they considered indispensable such as: safety and security, physical characteristics, parental engagement and the relative value parents placed on each. These themes aligned with the four research questions. Overall, they indicated that parents of children aged 6 months to 1 year may take the task of deciding ECCE placement for their child casually, so that it is an easy decision, one based not on evaluation of each location's quality but on personal priorities like familiarity, convenience, and unhindered access to the child during the day. Few differences were found in terms of program type. A more detailed interpretation of the findings follows.

Interpretation of the Findings

RQ1: Interpretation of Findings

RQ1 was: How do these parents describe the task of constructing a decision about an early childhood education placement for their child? The findings of the study revealed two key themes for RQ1. Parents' perceptions as measured by interview question 1 regarding the task of constructing ECCE placement decision for their child. The participants presented different opinions about their ECCE placement decisions based on their diverse experiences in their construction ECCE program decisions. The

second theme was the memorable incidents that were either encouraging or discouraging, which occurred in the course of constructing ECCE placement decisions. Nkoli, a mother of five, said, “Chibuike is my fifth child so I have been around, most of my children passed through this program.” Nkoli’s account confirms the finding of Citizen Advice (2015) that parents’ choice of ECCE programs may be partially determined by the options available and previous experiences of having had another child in a program.

Results related to RQ1 confirmed literature regarding the importance to parents of elements of programs like the reputation of the center, the types of indoor and outdoor play equipment, and the size of the playground and the physical structures (Bauer, 2014; Boyd, 2014; Forry et al, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Rothenberg et al., 2013). Jesse said, “My experience is a bit hazy, because I was looking for a comfortable school and also a school with good environment for physical exercise, a comfortable place to play and run around for sporting activities. Furthermore, Maria, Tracy and Nkoli corroborated reports of Forry et al., (2014) and Rothenberg et al., (2013) that a friendly, caring environment is a priority parents consider in making early childhood education choices. Maria a nurse said “ I wanted someone that is motherly and has passion for children” Also, Tracy stated “My major interest was the relationship between the caregiver and the child” Nkoli said “The person taking care of the child must be friendly.” Parental preferences for the availability, affordability, and accessibility of ECCE alternatives reported by Coley et al., (2014) and Weng-Yon Wong (2013) were evident in Tracy’s statement that “it was very, very easy to choose a program for my child, because the location was very close to my domain and very easy to access since, I am working in a school environment” The fact

that most parents considered making an ECCE placement decision an easy task suggests that most parents did not investigate their placement options extensively, but relied on priorities of convenience and familiarity, and visible attractions like playground size. Only one parent characterized the process as confusing, suggesting that this parent took the task seriously and was overwhelmed by the factors that might enter into a sound decision.

Some memorable incidents that participants reported, which occurred during their construction of ECCE placement decisions, were regarded as encouraging. Mercy said she was encouraged to take her child to a particular ECCE program, because she observed another woman who was never under stress as a working woman for the reason that she enrolled her child in an ECCE program. That relieved her of the stress of having to care for her child while at work. However, Jesse reported feeling under pressure to meet the timing of his mornings as a result of the distance between his house and the the ECCE program. Also, Maria, Tracy, and Sophia said they were discouraged from enrolling their child in specific ECCE programs, because they witnessed overcrowding, and absence of prompt attention to the child's needs in those centers. By implication, incidents parents considered memorable, which were either encouraging or discouraging in the course of constructing an ECCE placement decision, contributed in adding an insight into the factors that influence decision making process of ECCE placement. Consequently, expanding knowledge concerning things that influence the decision making for ECCE placement choices.

RQ2: Interpretation of Findings

RQ2 asked: How did these parents source information to guide their construction of a decision for an early childhood education placement for their child? The data analysis for RQ2 revealed two themes : sources of information for the construction of ECCE placement decisions, which include social networks, family members, religious affiliations, school sources and the previous experience of having enrolled a child in an ECCE program. Second, the nature of the information obtained from the various sources of information were mainly general information not specific to any aspect of the ECCE program. The findings of the study indicated that the essential sources of information available to parents for their construction of early childhood education placement included their social networks, family members, religious affiliations, schools connections, and neighbors. Vesley (2013) stated that social networks are the key sources of ECCE program information. Also, Bauchmuller et al. (2014) and Beckett (2014) reported that parents' preference for an ECCE program is determined by parents' assessment of program quality, the recommendations by friends and neighbors, and the previous experience of the parents with a program under consideration and competing programs.

The result of the investigation revealed that the information gathered from these sources was not focused on any specific aspect of the ECCE programs, but mainly included only general information they felt was useful for their decision making concerning their child ECCE placement. Consequently, the decision process seemed to be enacted casually, since the placement decisions were swiftly made upon collection of

minimal information (Bauer, 2014). In other words, the understanding of parental perception of their experiences and knowledge construction concerning ECCE placement decision for their child was enhanced by the constructivist's perspective that knowledge is constructed by individuals as determined by the existing knowledge, beliefs and new knowledge.

RQ3: Interpretation of Findings

RQ3 was: How did parents use quality indicators in deciding on an early childhood education placement for their child? The analysis of data reflected two prominent themes: parents' priorities that guided their decision making for early childhood education selection for their child and how parents ordered quality indicators in constructing early childhood education placement for their child. Parents considered safety, security, comfort, relationship between care giver- child, child-child, parent and program staff, care giver-child ratio, parental values, cost, unhindered access to their children during the day, and proximity of the center to home or work as priorities in their search for ECCE programs for their child. These findings confirmed Day Care Trust's (2010) report that parents identified cost as a priority when making ECCE selection, as well as factors of safety, trusting and loving staff, parents' involvement, strong curriculum and small pupils to teacher ratio. Also, program proximity to home has been identified as one of the top three reasons for selecting a program (Canada & Bland, 2014; Joshi 2014; Matei, 2014).

Even though parents ordered the quality indicators that were engaged in the construction of their early childhood care and education placement decisions, the

ordering was not uniform for all the participants. In other words, each parent ordered the quality indicators according to personal preference. The quality indicators parents engaged included center safety and security, the rate of retention of teachers, the relationship between care givers and children, care giver-child ratio and physical characteristics of centers. This finding suggests that parents are aware of quality factors of ECCE, as has been reported by various authors (Lopez Boo, Araujo & Tome, 2016; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Most of the participants considered safety and security as an indispensable quality indicator and a personal priority. Consequently, parents' choice of quality indicators agreed with reports by Matei (2014) and Natsiopoulou and Vitoulis (2015) that parents rank safety, child-teacher interactions, and support to learning as highly important when selecting a program. Despite attention to these quality indicators, the increase in enrollment in deficient programs suggests that parents were unable to notice these quality indicators in actual child care settings or to employ objective benchmarks in evaluating program quality. Consequently, this finding aligns with the constructivist framework of this study, in that meaning making and understanding are constructed by individuals based on their own interpretation of influencing factors.

RQ4: Interpretation of Findings

RQ4 was: How did these parents synthesize the generated alternatives in constructing a placement decision with regards to their child? The findings of this study revealed that parents combined their priorities with the quality indicators they considered indispensable in constructing a placement decision for their child. This interaction among parental interests, available opportunities, and apparent constraints reflects that meaning-

making and understanding are constructed by individuals in a process that entails interdependence between existing knowledge and beliefs and new knowledge and experiences. According to Richardson (1992), decisions are reached while considering the optimal value of choice, so that the construction of early childhood education placement decision included consideration of the idea of optimal value, since both parental priorities and the available quality indicators were synthesized to attain the needed value. Moreover, as indicated by Spitzler et al., (2016), decision-making is a process of identifying and selecting alternatives that correspond with the values and interests of the decision maker, so that making a decision is an indication that a choice can be made from alternatives. In other words, the literature suggested and results of this study confirm that participants constructed their placement decision based on their interests and chose the alternative that they thought was best able to meet all their expectations. The synthesis of priorities and quality indicators in constructing a placement decision aligns with the constructivist framework of this study, in that knowledge was constructed by individuals based on their experiential world. Also, this result corroborates the constructivists' viewpoint that knowledge is a process of actively interpreting evidence and key factors, and that the construction of knowledge is accomplished by each individual.

Summary: Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that even though parents considered information from multiple sources, they haphazardly ordered quality indicators without regard for the influence of any quality-compromising indicator on their child's

development. Consequently, the relative inattention parents gave to quality indicators may explain continued enrollment in deficient programs. In addition, although parents had the information to make a wise decision, they appeared to not fully grasp the effect that quality has for the child's development, so that quality could take a greater importance over mere convenience and familiarity. However, the study is not without limitation and that is the issue for discussion in the next paragraph.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher in a qualitative study is considered the key instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Consequently, I functioned as the sole instrument for data collection for the study, and by implication the data interpretation was based on my personal interpretation and inferences. In other words, my personal integrity, sensitivity, and personal prejudices as the researcher may have affected the conduct of the study thereby leaving unknown gaps and bias in the study.

Also, the country in which this study was conducted was experiencing severe economic depression during the study period and as such may have affected the participants' perceptions or dispositions towards the concept and phenomena under scrutiny in this study. Despite these limitations, the issue of continuing enrollment in quality-deficient programs is a widespread problem, affecting ECCE in many countries (Janta, Belle & Stewart, 2016; Mongeau, 2016), as well as and across wide numbers of parents and children, and the results of this study indicate parental misperceptions that may contribute to this phenomenon.

In addition, the small number of participants limited my ability to draw distinctions between the three program types represented by participants. It may be that greater differences in understanding of quality indicators or in the influence of various personal preferences may exist, specific to those who decide on a program supported by one of the three funding methods included in this study.

Recommendations for Further Study

In light of the limitations to the trustworthiness of the present study, I will make several recommendations for further study. First, it would be good if the same study were repeated using a survey design to allow for the participation of larger sample that might enable generalization of the findings. In addition, a study could be conducted to explore why parents consider spirituality and unhindered access to their child in ECCE a priority in constructing placement decision for their child. These factors were outliers in the current study but suggest needs that may be under-represented in the literature. Further, additional study might explore the mechanism by which parents synthesize the generated alternatives in constructing ECCE placement decision, using a methodology that could enable real-time observation of this process. It would also be interesting to investigate why some quality indicators were considered more important than others in constructing early childhood education placement. A forced-choice ranking of the priorities and indicators that surfaced in this study and others that are typical in the literature might clarify parents' consideration of various factors and might indicate the level of consensus among parents about factors' relative value. In addition, more study of parents' decision-making by program type would be helpful. Selection of a program by its method of

funding was not explored in this study, but may constitute a significant variable in parents' ECCE decision-making. Finally, as the study-country emerges out of economic recession, this study could be repeated to ascertain more clearly the influence of economic considerations on parents' perspectives and considerations for ECCE decision-making.

Implications

Implications for Positive Social Change

The understanding of parental perceptions and their influence on ECCE choice provided by this study serve as a platform for social change because parents are the key stakeholders in making decisions concerning ECCE placement for their child. As a result of this study, mechanisms may be created so that parents will be better informed of the need to give attention to quality indicators above other considerations in their construction of placement decisions for ECCE. In other words, as a result of this study, parental priorities that do not contribute to the optimal development of the child may be deemphasized in constructing early education placement decision for the child, so that more children will be enrolled in quality programs in the future. This change may contribute in reducing achievement and opportunity gaps between income groups and create social equity and greater success for children. Furthermore, as a result of this study, society may become aware of family needs and contexts as factors that influence early education placement decisions and give these factors due recognition as a responsive element in supporting parents' participation in the labor force and their options for convenient, affordable, quality child care.

Implications for Practice and Policy Change

The key finding in this study is that parents may not pay attention to the fact that their children are the ultimate consumers of child care services, but instead give preference to their own convenience and familiarity with the proprietor of a child care center over child care center quality. To change this inclination on the part of parents, several policy changes and changes in practice might be implemented. First, child welfare agencies and government authorities might team up to create a campaign that informs parents of the importance of quality early childhood education and the problems that might be associated with low-quality child care. A list of indicators to look out for could be distributed to both new and older parents. In addition, greater regulatory attention might be made to improve child care quality and eliminate or reform low-quality centers, so that parents' priorities of convenience, cost, and familiarity might be realized through nearby high-quality centers that support the needs of both parents and children. Employers might be encouraged to offer high-quality on-site child care to their workers, so that parents' desire for child care that is convenient to their workplace and affordable might be combined with children's need for developmentally supportive care. Workplace centers have the potential of supporting nursing mothers, who expressed a desire for unhindered access to their infants during the child care day. To the extent that children's optimal development is important to national, educational, and business interests in the study country, these changes in policy and practice have potential for improving outcomes for children in the future.

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to understand parents' perceptions of early childhood education and how these perceptions influenced their decision-making process for early childhood education choices, including enrollment of their children in deficient programs. I used a case study design in drawing on the insights of parents who have made child care decisions recently for their children. Furthermore, the study has been able to uncover the decision-making process for a choice that sets the tone of the educational journey in a child's entire life as well bridge the knowledge gap in the literature on parental decision making process of early childhood care and educational choices. In this study, I succeeded in describing the family context as a factor in the ECCE choice by providing information concerning systemic obstacles, service gaps and the nature of family needs. The findings of this study provided an understanding of the decision-making process of parents in making ECCE choices, and has the potential to generate policy reform to improve ECCE programs.

This study generated information for policy makers by which to encourage placement decisions into quality programs, so that an increasing number of children might experience the benefits of quality programs. The results of this study, and the understanding of parents' perspectives it provides to educators and policy-makers, provide a direction for program reform and for increasing parents' understanding of the implications for children of their ECCE choices. Changes made as a result will provide a positive foundation for children's future learning, changes that are responsive in

supporting parents' participation in the labor force and realistic in creating a fairer and more equitable society.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The influence of Parental Perception on Early Childhood Educational Choices in Nigeria

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that influence the decision – making process engaged by parents in selecting early childhood education programs, which has encouraged the continuous enrollment into ECCE programs with obvious deficiencies. Contrary to the government approved minimum standards.

Interview Questions:

1. What was the early childhood education placement experience like for you? (Can you tell me how it happened? Where there specific incidents you can share with me?)
2. What were your sources of information for constructing your child's placement decision and how did you choose them?
3. Did the information gathered from these sources help you make a decision?
4. What were the things you considered as priorities that guided your search for an early childhood education program for your child?
5. Which of these elements of high quality ECCE did you engage to generate alternatives? Quality of teachers and rate of retention each succeeding year; physical

- characteristics of the program facility; quality curricula; parental engagement and involvement with the program; safety and security of the child within the program facility ; and effort to create a multicultural setting.
6. How did you order your quality indicators in evaluating various placement options?
 7. Were some quality indicators more important to you than others?
 8. Apart from the quality of service your child is going to receive, were there any other major factors that influenced your choice of program?
 9. How did the things you considered as priorities actually guide you in making a final decision for your child's placement?
 10. Is there anything that I have omitted that you would like me to know concerning your decision making process for your child?

Once again, I want to say thank you very much for participating in the interview. I wish to seize this opportunity to reiterate my assurance of confidentiality of your responses. I will email you the transcript of our conversation today so you may confirm, modify and verify that the interview transcript adequately reflects your perspective concerning the phenomenon being investigated. Accept my best wishes.

Appendix B: Email Invitation to Participants

Dear Parent,

My name is Magdalene Okobah, and I am a Ph.D. student at Walden University. I am conducting research as an aspect of the requirements for my degree in early childhood education. The purpose of my study is to gain insight of the factors that influence decision making for early childhood education placement. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. You are being invited because your child is enrolled in one of the licensed centers in Asaba Educational Zone, which has been selected for the study. Participation in the research is voluntary and participants are at liberty to discontinue participation at any point in the study. Participation entails one event of 45 minutes ^{one-}on-one interview that will be audio recorded with a voice recorder. Subsequently, you will be given an opportunity to review the interview transcript for confirmation, modification and verification of your perspectives, which may take about 20 minutes. Your response to the interview questions will be confidentially handled and will be utilized for the purpose of this study. If you accept to participate in the study, please respond via e-mail. Participants will be recruited on first come first serve basis from the first five people from each program type to indicate interest to participate in the study. The study may have no direct benefit to you as an individual, but it has the tendency to generate information that policymakers can employ to draw up program policy that could be relevant, realistic and accessible to many children. Your kind consideration will be appreciated.

Warm regards

Appendix C: Predetermined Codes

PPSP: (Parents perception of the selection process)

EISP: (Events of interest in the selection process)

InI; (Information from the internet)

In FN;(Information from friends and networks)

InFM: (Information from family members)

InCM: (Information from church members)

PS: (Physical structure)

PF: (Process factors)

PC: (Parents concerns)

RCC: (Relationships between caregivers and children)

RC: (Relationship among children)

RCS: (Reactions of center staff)

FC: (Family circumstance)

CE: (Cost of enrollment)

PPF: (Proximity of program for the family)

O/CH: (Opening and closing hours)

ES: (Environmental safety)

SQ: (Staff qualification)

CPT:(Communication between parents and teachers)

QR: (Quality of resources)

PC:(Program curriculum)

PP: (Parents priorities)

PV: (Parents values)