Choosing the 'Right' School: A Sociological Introspection of the Perspective of Middle-class parents in Urban India

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Abstract

Individuals in modern society are expected to make their own decisions about how to live their lives. The choice of 'right' education is one of the most critical choices that they make in their lives. It is no wonder that parents explore a large number of schools to identify the 'right' school for their children. This research explores the engagement of parents in school choice decisions and the rationale that they use in selecting a particular school, with special reference to Lucknow city. The study examines the information-gathering process and the strategies used by parents to identify the 'right' school for meeting their aspirations for their children. Additionally, the thesis also examines whether the children's needs (that are learning, attitudes, and capacity) are considered in such selection. Moreover, the process and context of decision-making are examined as well.

There are 5 chapters in the thesis. The Introductory Chapter focuses on the educational scenario and the school system in India, and the educational aspirations of middle-class parents. Chapter 2 deals with the Literature Review. Existing studies (both from India and abroad) relating to the school choice decisions of the parents are discussed here. The chapter also identifies the knowledge gaps, and the research questions are formulated. Chapter 3 entails the research methodology that was used to address the research questions. The study follows a qualitative research approach and the schools in Lucknow were selected on the basis of purposive sampling. Thus, both public and

private schools of different educational boards were identified for the study on the basis of the representativeness of the concerned educational boards. Observation and open-ended semi-structured interviews were the main tools of data collection. The idea was to provide a positive space to the parents of school-going children to freely share their school selection process. Chapter 4 deals with the findings and discusses the conception of a good school from the perspective of the middle-class parents, the information-gathering process that they engage in, highlights a comparative understanding of the choices made by the upper and lower middle-class parents, examines the findings from the Bourdieusian conception of 'Cultural Capital'. Finally, in Chapter 5 we summed up and discussed the various findings obtained and some of the proposed solutions were also contemplated.