

Contributing Factors Influencing Enrollment in North Carolina's Charter Schools:
A Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Case Study

by
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Dissertation Submitted to the Doctoral Program
of the American College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
March 2020

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Abstract

The problem is as charter school enrollment increases school leaders are uncertain what underlying factors influence parents to leave traditional public schools in North Carolina. To address the problem, the purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to investigate parents' perspectives influencing the decision to remove their children from traditional public schools and choose charter schools. The study examined how parental choice impacts the educational environment in North Carolina. While North Carolina's charter schools continue to expand, the focus of the study was to address the perspectives and experiences of parents. The mixed methods study was guided by three research questions: (1) What underlying factors influence parents' decision to remove their children from traditional public schools in the designated school zone?; (2) Is there a significant relationship between the various factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from public schools to attend charter schools?; and (3) What attributes of education do parents perceive are the most important when determining a quality school? Data collection tools for the study consisted of a survey with closed-ended items and questionnaire with open-ended items. A convergent mixed methods design was appropriate for the study as both quantitative and qualitative data were needed for a complete understanding of the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in a charter school. The significance of the study was to understand the factors contributing to the continuous growth in enrollment of charter schools in North Carolina.

Keywords: school choice, public charter schools, traditional public schools, charter school advisory board

Dedication

The dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Aaron and my two wonderful children, Jordan and Geoff. I could not have completed the journey without your love, support, and patience. There were times when I thought I could not continue my doctoral journey and my loving husband stood by my side and encouraged me to move forward. My children will no longer have to see my laptop attached to me like cell phones are to a teenager. I love you to the moon and back!!

Acknowledgements

First, I give thanks to God for the blessings throughout my research work!

I am grateful for those whom I worked with during the doctoral journey. Thank you to my parents who taught me the value of hard work and the importance of education. You were right, Dad – the doors continue to open! My parents are always at the other end of the phone making me laugh and providing support. I am truly blessed to have loving parents who raised me to hold on to my faith and always appreciate the value of hard work! Love you, mom and dad!

I would like to thank dissertation committee, Dr. Matt Smalley and Dr. Katrina Shultz. Dr. Smalley, I greatly appreciate your patience, guidance, and professionalism. I am thankful for your wisdom, and humor while helping me get to the finish! Thank you to the Dissertation Committee for giving me the opportunity to do the research and move forward through the journey. I would like to thank, Dr. Creighton. As my professor and friend, your professional guidance and support kept me moving forward through the obstacles of my dissertation journey. I would like to thank Dr. Eldrige for your support and allowing me to use your site to complete the necessary research.

Thank you to my friends and co-workers who listened and provided continuous encouragement. The funny texts and e-mails made me laugh when I wanted to cry! As promised, we will celebrate in style!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the 19th century, children were homeschooled or apprenticed to become tradesmen, where learning options were tailored to meet the needs of the family. After the creation of compulsory public schools in the 1840s, school choice was slowly removed, forcing low-income families to attend public schools (Liang, 2015). As the traditional public schools expanded, students were assigned schools based on the zip code (Liang, 2015). In 1925, school choice and parental authority was determined when the U.S. Supreme Court heard in the case, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268, U.S. 510 (1925). The U.S. Supreme Court ruled the Oregon Compulsory Education Act of 1922 requiring all students to attend only state-run schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268, U.S. 510, 1925). When the ideas of public charter schools were introduced in the 1970s, the school choice movement was not a new phenomenon (Gawlik, 2016).

North Carolina, which was the focus of the study, opened the first group of 34 charter schools in 1997, but the North Carolina General Assembly lifted the 100-school limit in 2011 (Kennedy, 2018). The enrollment in publicly funded charter schools continued to grow in North Carolina, with more than 109,000 students enrolled at 184 schools across the state (Hinchcliffe, 2019). As more parents choose charters schools instead of the nearby neighborhood schools, the charter schools' enrollment continues to grow (Archbald, Hurwitz, & Hurwitz, 2018). The growing demand for charters provides parents with more academic alternatives to traditional public schools (TPS). North Carolina approved fifteen new charter schools to open in 2019, and ten more in 2020, which raised the number to over 200 charter schools (Hinchcliffe, 2019).

When parents evaluate the educational needs of the children, choosing the right schools is essential. The focus of the study was to understand what contributing factors influence the

parents' decision-making process to remove their children from the North Carolina traditional public schools and enroll in a publicly funded charter school. When charter schools entered the educational landscape in the early 1990s, proponents of parental choice predicted charter schools would increase innovation, management autonomy, competition because charter schools offered the specialized programs and "allow stakeholders to create and run schools independently of TPS bureaucracies" (Archbald et al., 2018, p. 6). "Charter schools are a fairly recent phenomenon, gaining popularity in the early nineties and steadily gaining momentum in the public domain through the early 2000s" (Geheb & Owens, 2019, p. 76). Charter schools are designed to provide parents with an educational alternative to TPS. The following sections outline the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, definition of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of the research study.

Background of the Problem

When the first group of charter schools opened in 1997, North Carolina provided publicly funded alternatives to the traditional public (Antoszyk, 2016). The number of charters grew because education reformers advocate for parent choice, community empowerment, equity, accountability, and school management autonomy (Archbald et al., 2018; Geheb & Owens, 2019). According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2018), charter school enrollment has experienced continuous growth since 2011, and now represents 6.56% of the total public-school population (1,533,180 students). Charter schools' admission process should be fair and equitable and may not discriminate based on race, creed, national origin, or ancestry (NCDPI, 2018). If the charter school receives more applications than available slots, charter schools are required to conduct a lottery and create a waitlist (NCDPI, 2018). In the 2018

Charter School Annual Report, 55,165 students were on waitlists for charter schools (NCDPI, 2018). Hui (2019) reported charter school enrollment had increased by 119%. Although the charter school enrollment numbers continue to grow, there is no clear consensus as to why more parents are choosing the educational alternative.

Problem Statement

The problem is as charter school enrollment increases school leaders are uncertain what underlying factors influence parents to leave traditional public schools in North Carolina. As quality education becomes more critical to maintain a competitive edge in society, more parents are influential stakeholders in the education systems (Wilson, 2015). School choice options provide alternative approaches for teaching and learning compared to traditional public schools (Wilson, 2015). Research suggests more parents opt-out of traditional public schools in favor of other educational alternatives (Wilson, 2015). The target population was parents of K-12 students who were enrolled in traditional public schools at least one year or more and at the school of choice for one year or more.

The literature has not sufficiently explored the causes of charter school growth in North Carolina. A gap in literature warrants further research (Egalite, Gray, & Stallings, 2017; Egalite & Wolf, 2016; Erickson, 2017). Despite the plethora of research regarding the types of school vouchers, scholarships, and funding gaps between charter schools and TPS, there is a gap in the literature concerning the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to leave the TPS and enroll in charter schools. The importance of the problems is predicated on a need to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the issue from the perspective of the parents (Egalite et al., 2017; Egalite & Wolf, 2016). An extensive evaluation of the literature indicates parents may

choose schools which best meet the needs of the children based on specific factors resulting in higher school quality levels (Burke, 2016; DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018).

Purpose

The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. The study examined how parental choice impacts the educational environment in North Carolina. When new school choice opportunities were introduced in North Carolina, more parents sought charter schools to support the education needs of the children (Antoszyk, 2016). Understanding the factors influencing parents' decisions may provide information to school leaders to make future decisions which may retain students and increases the communication between the education stakeholders.

The ability of families to choose an educational pathway fostering the unique interests, diverse abilities and skills, and learning styles (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018) as well as a learning environment conducive to learning contributes to the importance of the study. A convergent mixed methods design was used to understand the parents' perspectives influencing decisions to enroll in North Carolina charter schools. The qualitative and quantitative methods complement each other to provide a holistic view of the problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The use of parallel data collection questions addresses the same concepts in both quantitative and qualitative strands—allowing the data to be merged (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The pragmatic paradigm seeks the truth. Merging the data for a final analysis provides an in-depth understanding of the parents' perceptions of a situation influencing the decision to enroll in a charter school.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study was to understand the factors contributing to the continuous growth in enrollment of charter schools in North Carolina. The intention was to provide knowledge of the parents' decision-making process to seek educational alternatives to the TPS (Egalite et al., 2017). The results of the study will be shared with the Office of Charter Schools located in NCDPI, as parents' perceptions and decision-making processes may impact the enrollment processes. Charter schools provide educational alternatives as parents have indicated various factors affecting educational decisions (Villavicencio, 2013). The study adds to the literature on parents' decisions to enroll in charter schools instead of the TPS by examining the factors contributing to the growth in charter school enrollment. The study benefits charter school leaders and TPS administrators as the results may open the doors of communications with parents and members of the community to work collaboratively to address the concerns of the families.

Research Questions

The study was guided by central research questions to connect the mixed methods design, data collection, and data analysis. The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

Research Question 1: What underlying factors influenced parents' decision to remove their children from traditional public schools in the designated school zone?

Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between the various factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from public schools to attend charter schools?

Research Question 3: What attributes of education do parents perceive are the most important when determining a quality school?

Hypotheses

H2₀: $B_1 = 0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

H2_a: $B_1 \neq 0$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

Conceptual Framework

The pragmatism theory primarily shaped the conceptual framework for the convergent mixed methods study. The philosophical assumptions and conceptual framework for the convergent mixed methods design guided by a pragmatism paradigm provide an umbrella worldview of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Morgan, 2017). Pragmatism focuses on the truth of an idea or proposition of an observable consequence (Dalsgaard, 2014). Pragmatism philosophy aims to uncover practical knowledge of a case or situation (Biesenthal, 2014). On a theoretical level, pragmatism contributes to the development of the discourse on the design method (Dalsgaard, 2014; Stark, 2014). Pragmatism inspired inquiry focuses on the situation, experiences, or phenomenon to provide a more in-depth understanding (Stark, 2014).

The theory aligns with the study as parents evaluated the situation, learning environment, and issues, before making final educational decisions for the children. The theoretical framework focuses on the ability to monitor and adjust the decision-making process based on the parents' concerns and perspectives of the situation. The theory aligns with the methodology of the study by examining the factors impacting the parents' decision to seek the best outcome (Wilson,

2015). The theories link together to guide the study to examine the choices made by parents, based on experiences and beliefs regarding public education. The conceptual framework is explained more fully in Chapter 2.

Definitions of Terms

Some terms may be unfamiliar to the reader, whereas others may define use within the context of the study. The following definitions are provided to assist the reader in understanding the terminology used in the study. The key terms formed a foundational component of school choice and the growth of charter schools.

Charter School Advisory Board (OCSAB): The OCSAB makes recommendations to the State Board of Education regarding operating rules and regulations of charter schools (Office of Charter Schools, n.d.). The OCSAB reviews charter applications, renewals of charters, and revocations of charters (OCS, n.d.).

Coding: Coding used in qualitative research to organize material (i.e., words, phrases, or sentences) representing aspects of data (Clark & Veale, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Competition: Traditional public schools and charters schools may compete for student enrollment. "Educational reform comes through competition from the outside, and the only way you can get competition is making it possible for parents to have the ability to choose" (Friedman, 2003, para 2).

Convergent Parallel Mixed methods Design: A strategy in which the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, analyzes the data separately, and then compares the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Logic Model: The logic model uses a series of "if...then..." questions to measure the similarities and discreteness among the descriptors within the constructs (Creighton, 2008).

Lottery: When charter schools receive more applications than available slots, the school should hold a lottery. If a lottery system is necessary, the charter school may begin a random drawing process (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2019).

Management Autonomy: Charter schools have autonomy over decisions concerning finance, personnel, scheduling, curriculum, and instruction (Ableidinger & Hassel, 2010).

Parental Choice: The decision-making process of parents when choosing to enroll the child in a traditional public school or charter school (Beabout & Cambre, 2013)

Public Charter School: A public charter school is a form of school choice and “is a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract (or charter) with the state, district, or other entity” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019, para. 1). Charter schools are independently run public schools exempt from some regulations as TPS but do have more accountability outlined in the charter agreement (EdChoice, 2018; Gawlik, 2016).

Saturation: Saturation refers to a specific point when the data collection process stops as new data no longer produces new insights or perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

School Choice: School choice allows the parents to choose the best education to fit the needs of the children (EdChoice, n.d.). When parents enroll in school choice programs, public education funds follow the student to pay for schools or services to include but not limited to: a traditional public school, private school, charter school, or homeschool (EdChoice, n.d.)

Traditional Public Schools: A regular school has an assigned principal, receives public funding as a primary support, provides free public elementary or secondary schooling, and is operated by a local education agency or a contracted education program (Tourkin et al., 2010).

Traditional public schools should “adhere to education standards set by the state education board and are not exempt from any state, federal, or local laws regarding education” (Caffee, 2018, para 3).

Waitlists: A charter school may need to create a waitlist before the first day of school. A waitlist is defined as the total number of applications minus the number of available seats (Kern & Gebru, 2014).

Assumptions

The convergent mixed methods study included necessary assumptions. The researcher role was defined in quantitative research; the role in qualitative research is participatory (Clark & Veale, 2018). The *first* assumption was the participants would respond truthfully to the survey questions (Simon & Goaes, 2013). Assuming participants would provide honest answers is critical to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, allowing opinions and perspectives in a non-threatening environment. Providing a clear and concise consent form helped participants understand the role and purpose of the study.

A *second* assumption was the convergent mixed method design would provide rich and context data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Jick, 1979). Experts support the assumption in the field of mixed methods research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Jick, 1979; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). A *third* assumption pertains to the survey questions. To ensure the survey questions were congruent with the purpose of the study, a field test was conducted prior to the start of the actual research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Incorporating the logic model helped measure the construct and content validity of the survey instrument (Creighton, 2008). A *final* assumption relates to the researcher as an objective and unbiased investigator. The researcher should adhere to the proper protocols to

understand potential biases which may influence or taint the study's outcomes (Clark & Veale, 2018). The assumptions listed in the section are critical to the study. Measures were taken in each instance to safeguard the credibility of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The section addressed the scope and delimitations by addressing the boundaries of the research not included in the study. The scope of the study focused on parents of students who are enrolled in a charter school in North Carolina. Participants were chosen to participate in the study based on the decision to enroll in a charter school instead of the assigned TPS within the district. The study focused on the perceptions and perspectives of the parents and does not include the perceptions of the students, which might influence parental decisions.

The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. Reasonable access to the parents and conducting online surveys and questionnaires is a delimitation. The study only focused on parents who made the decision to enroll in a charter school and does not include the parents who chose to enroll in a private school or a homeschool program. The approximate sample size for the study was relatively small in proportion to the larger population of potential participants in North Carolina. The analysis of mixed methods literature and experts in the field of mixed methods research design suggests 100-250 participants for the quantitative research and 10-15 participants for the qualitative questionnaire (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Jick, 1979; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Prospective participants were provided detailed information regarding the purpose of the study and the role of the participants. An information letter and consent form were distributed

with permission of the administrator of the school, through the school's e-mail distribution list. The rationale for using a survey and a questionnaire is consistent with the convergent mixed methods design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A mixed methods design provided an opportunity for corroborating the results of the quantitative and qualitative research about a singled phenomenon (Glogowska, 2011; Halcomb & Hickman, 2015).

Limitations

The potential familiarity with participants could jeopardize the results of both quantitative and qualitative research. Participants with whom the research may have personal friendships or professional relationships were eliminated from the study to ensure the credibility of the results. The mixed methods design requires the researcher to demonstrate rigor (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). A convergent parallel mixed methods design was efficient as both types of data were collected during one phase of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), but there are limitations to the study. The sample size for the quantitative research was different than in the qualitative research as the data were collected for different purposes (i.e., quantitative generalization vs. qualitative transferability) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Halcomb & Hickman, 2015).

In qualitative research, structural constraints may influence the transferability and dependability of the study. Credibility is the first aspect or criterion to establish trustworthiness and of the study's findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Data source triangulation using more than one data collection type strengthens the credibility, dependability, validity, and reliability of the study (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Zohrabi, 2013). A mixed

methods design requires the validity of scores from the quantitative phase and the findings from the qualitative phase.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the problem, purpose of the study, the significance of anticipated research, described the research questions, presented the theoretical framework, provided a definition of terms, included a statement of scope and delimitations, and disclosed the limitations of the study. Chapter 2 begins with a brief description and restatement of the problem and includes the literature search strategies, conceptional and theoretical framework, and a review of the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The study seeks to examine the contributing factors influencing parents to choose charter schools instead of the traditional public schools (TPS). While both types of public education are free, the TPS are required to accept all students living in the designated zoned district, whereas charter schools have open enrollment and may determine by the selection criteria such as the lottery system or application process (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). The charter school movement was rooted in the American education system becoming a nationwide phenomenon in the early 1990s (Bradford, 2018). When Milton Friedman proposed the importance of education markets and limited government involvement, school choice measures expanded to bring charter schools to the forefront receiving support from parents, teachers, liberals, and conservatives (Logan, 2018).

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature about the reasons why parents are seeking viable educational alternatives to TPSs. The literature review outlines the essential elements affecting the growth of charter schools in North Carolina. The common understanding developed in the literature review was utilized to make connections between the analysis of the data and the interpretation of the results. The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. The mixed methods case study examined the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to leave the traditional public schools and choose charter schools in Eastern North Carolina. The literature review begins with the historical background of the charter schools, including the charter school movement, and the differences between TPSs and charter schools. The literature examines the public policies and laws impacting charter schools, the pathways for choosing charter schools,

and the priorities impacting the selection process. The exploration into the literature is foundational to the parents' personal experiences and perspectives impacting the decision-making process to enroll in charter schools. Understanding the reasons why parents exercise the right to choose addresses the continuous growth in the charter school population. Chapter 2 concludes with a summary of the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

The central aim of the literature review is to expand the knowledge base regarding the previous research of parents' decisions to seek charter schools as an educational alternative to TPS. While studies have examined the effects of school vouchers and the financial strains imposed on traditional public schools, few studies explored the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to seek enrollment in a North Carolina public charter school. The literature review is descriptive and follows a synthesis approach to summarize multiple studies (Snelson, 2016). The analysis consists of peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research. An additional goal of the literature review is to provide a full and synthesized accounting of the previous literature to support the purpose of the study (McEwan, 2018).

To conduct the literature review, search terms such as *charter schools*, *charter school competition*, *education savings accounts (ESAs)*, *hybrid schools*, *individual tax credits*, *inter-district public school choice*, *intra-district public school choice*, *magnet schools*, *opportunity scholarships*, *school choice*, *schools of choice*, *school vouchers*, and *quality education* were used. The initial pre-search consisted of reviewing peer-reviewed articles which were consistent with the guidelines and procedures described in previous literature reviews (Snelson, 2016). The scope of the literature review was limited to articles published from 2010 through

2019 to obtain a wide range of information regarding school choice programs. A second and narrower search consisted of reviewing articles and studies ranging from 2014 to present, as the previous research did not include changes regarding the charter school contracts and funding from the North Carolina legislature (Cameron, 2011). The use of online databases yielded studies focusing on the broad spectrum of the history of school choice, the types of school choice programs provided in individual states, and then concentrate on the narrowed scope of schools of choice (public charter schools) in North Carolina. To determine the relevancy of the resource, a scan of abstracts of the peer-reviewed articles, executive summaries of government reports, and reviews of books were used. A thematic organization was developed to sort the resources and establish notes to organize the research.

A broad search using Google Scholar, ERIC, SAGE, and JSTOR provided up-to-date articles regarding the general history of school choice, the creation and implementation of public charter schools in North Carolina, legislation, and TPS data regarding student enrollment. The initial search provided a general overview of the previous studies identifying specific topics impacting the growing trend of charter schools. An examination of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) statistics, standards, and policies provided an in-depth view of the historical changes contributing to the expansion of public charter schools since 2011 (Cameron, 2011). A review of the data established a baseline of information on the state standards, regulations, and guidelines affecting the funding of individual North Carolina charters (Ebert, 2018).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Charter schools are growing in popularity as parents are seeking alternatives to traditional public-school education (Sahin, Willson, & Capraro, 2018), yet there is little research on the

contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll in what has become a viable educational alternative in North Carolina. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, the writing of John Dewey expanded the theory of pragmatism (Dalsgaard, 2014; Morgan, 2017). The philosophical assumptions and conceptual framework of pragmatism shaped the convergent mixed methods design by providing an umbrella worldview of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Morgan, 2017). Pragmatism focuses on the truth of an idea or proposition on observable consequences (Dalsgaard, 2014). The philosophy aims to uncover practical knowledge of a case or situation (Biesenthal, 2014). Pragmatism inspired inquiry focusing on the situation, experiences, or phenomenon to provide a more in-depth understanding (Stark, 2014). While there are many theories associated with pragmatism, Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory, Becker's rational choice theory, and Rotter's social learning theory are associated with pragmatism and align with the focus of the study.

Situational Leadership Theory

The situational leadership theory (SLT) was developed in 1979 by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996). The authors define SLT as leadership with a focus on external circumstances allowing a specific leadership style to be used to address a specific situation (Salehzadeh, Shahin, Kazemi, & Barzoki, 2015). The theory provides an understanding of the relationship between effective leadership styles and the maturity of the followers (Salehzadeh et al., 2015). Behaviorists such as Reddin (1967) and Asdair (1973) believed leadership styles could be defined based on individual situations. Hersey and Blanchard (1996) based the SLT on Reddin's framework. Hersey and Blanchard (1996) stated there were no right or wrong leadership styles because leaders' attitudes impacted the decisions and made a difference.

Hersey and Blanchard's (1996) Situational Leadership Theory implies the leaders evaluate individual situations based on the necessary tasks. The authors explained the theory has two distinct pillars: a) style, and b) the maturity level of those being led. Hersey and Blanchard (1996) believed maturity, education, and experience are contributing factors impacting the leadership style. Situational leadership recommends leadership styles guided by the individual situation allows the leader to change to meet the needs of the followers (Wright, 2017). Effective leaders would evaluate the situation and adjust the decision-making process based on the concerns of the stakeholders (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996; Wright, 2017). The situational leadership style applies to educational leaders and parents as both stakeholders may evaluate the situation, learning environment, and issues, before making final educational decisions. The theoretical framework focuses on the ability to monitor and adjust the decision-making process based on the parents' concerns and perspectives. Parents' decisions to seek alternative viable educational options in charter schools is a concern.

Rational Choice Theory

In the study, the rational choice theory partially aligns with the situational leadership theory. Becker (1993) believed rational choice theory went beyond the economics of the decisions of the individual by focusing on the social issues, individual attitudes, preferences, and calculations impacting individual choice. The rational choice theory, a descriptive framework focusing on incentives for human behavior; the assumption of individuals acting on preference or beliefs (Wilson, 2015). In the theoretical framework, parents have perceptions about the education the desired education opportunities (Wilson, 2015). The rational choice theory helps explain how the conversations surrounding public schools influence the parents' decision to leave traditional public schools and seek other available educational options (Becker, 1993).

The rational choice theory of education attempts to explain why the individual decisions were developed, in part, based on the rationale of parents being responsible for making sure their children are educated in a school achieving student growth (Becker, 1993; Wilson, 2015).

Parents choose between charters schools and TPS based on outcomes and individual actions and tried to predict future choices based on circumstances to maximize preferences (Becker, 1993; Wilson, 2015). Rational choice suggests parents identify quality schools based on the benefits and costs (Villavicencio, 2013). Parents make decisions in terms of cost-benefit analysis to determine quality schools achieving the best outcomes (Villavicencio, 2013). Following the pragmatism of the rational choice theory, parents may make educational decisions to meet the needs of the individual student (Prichard & Swezey, 2016).

Rotter's Social Learning Theory

Julian Rotter's social learning theory partially aligns with the situational theory and the rational choice theory, as the individual perception of the reward impacts the outcome. Rotter (1966) believed behavior was based on the motivation of the individual seeking out a positive outcome. Rotter (1966) explained how individual personalities were built up over time and decisions are based on actions reacting to personal experiences. Rotter connects the impacts of the reward to the individual's behavior (McLeod et al., 2015). The social learning theory created in 1954 and revised in 1966 (Locus of control), is based on whether the individual's competency and autonomy expand the person's confidence to impact the situation (Rotter, 1966). The gratification of the reward perceived by the parents' school choice options and the ability to make educational decisions, may impact the future decision-making process to seek charter schools to meet the needs of the child. Rotter (1966) stated the effects of the reward on preceding behavior depend on whether the person perceives the reward is contingent on the behavior. Rotter's social

learning theory helps to link parents' perceptions and decisions to enroll in charter schools (Jun-Jie & Chen-Jung, 2015; Rotter, 1966).

The situational theory, rational choice theory, and the social learning theory may help to explain the parents' decision-making process. Hersey and Blanchard (1996) believed decisions were implemented based on the situation leading to change. The theories described in context how parents actively participate when seeking the best education for the child. The parents' personal experiences and knowledge may contribute to the pathway of seeking information to identify the best school. Parents' decisions may be guided by preferences, incentives, and constraints (Wilson, 2015). The use of the theories examined the effects of the parents' decisions and perceived benefits of choosing public chart schools. The situational theory centers on the premise the parents may make individual decisions based on the situation or challenges faced (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996). The immediate concerns (e.g., academic achievement, school safety, or class sizes) may influence the parents to seek an alternative educational setting to serve the needs of the students.

The situational theory, rational choice theory, and the social learning theory support the methodology of the study by understanding the parents' perspectives influencing decisions to enroll in North Carolina charter schools. When choosing a school, parents examine the available alternatives, weigh preferences against constraints, and make a choice (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996). The individual experiences of parents and students influence the decisions to immediately seek a solution to achieve the educational outcome or rewards (Wilson, 2015). Figure 1 describes how the theories align with the parents' choice to seek public charter schools.

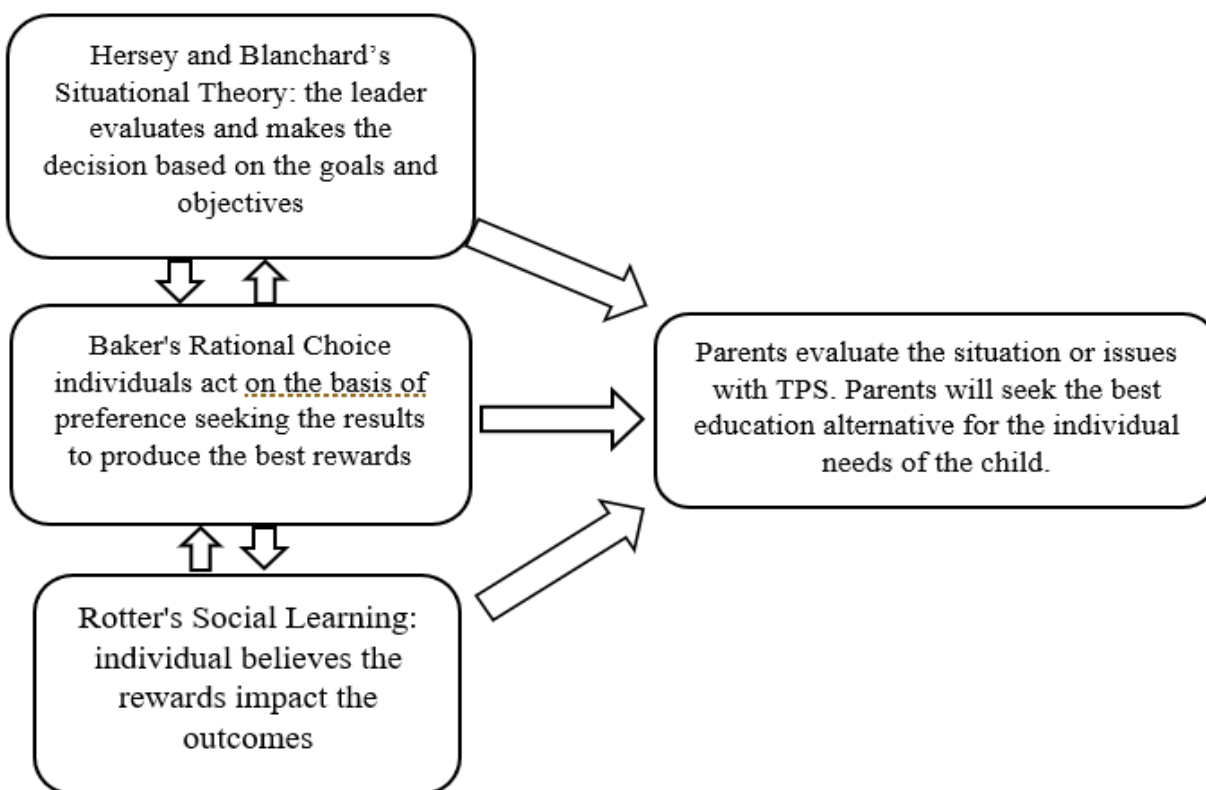


Figure 1. Diagram demonstrates the parallel links between the Situational Theory, Rational Choice Theory, and Social Learning Theory.

Research Literature Review

Charter schools have been in existence for more than two decades and the enrollment and funding continue to expand (Gawlik, 2016). The first generation of charter schools started in the early 1990s, and the surge in growth is due to parents seeking educational opportunities beyond the TPS (Gawlik, 2016). The focus of the literature review was parents' experiences with TPS contributing to the growth in enrollment in the North Carolina charter school system. Adzima (2017) noted charter schools are located in 43 states with an enrollment of 3.2 million students. The enrollment continues to grow, requiring more available space and resources (Smarick, 2016). While state and local tax dollars fund the charter school operations, funding per pupil is significantly less than traditional public schools (TPS). The problem was, as charter school

enrollment increases, school leaders are uncertain what underlying factors influence parents to leave traditional public schools in North Carolina School.

The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. For the past four decades, policymakers, school leaders, and parents have debated the issues of school choice. As a result, parents are becoming more influential stakeholders in the decision-making process regarding the pathway of the children's education (Wilson, 2015). Public policies have expanded school choice options empowering the parents with knowledge and opportunities to make decisions regarding educational alternatives to TPS (Lovenheim & Walsh, 2018). Research and available data continue to be a vehicle for understanding the underlying factors causing parents to choose academic options other than the assigned traditional public schools (Wearne, 2016; Wilson, 2015).

School Choice

School choice is defined as the opportunities for families to pursue educational options to meet the needs of their children (Stewart & Wolf, 2014). In 2004, President George W. Bush signed the first school choice law, *District of Columbia School Choice Incentive Act of 2003*, designating federal funds to assist low-income families to seek private school choices (Stewart & Wolf, 2014). When the law was enacted, other states followed suit by creating and implementing school voucher programs. School choice options vary by state; the common programs are school vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, education savings accounts (ESAs), inter-district/intra-district public schools, and charter schools (EdChoice, 2018; Egalite et al., 2017). School vouchers provide an opportunity for parents to choose private school options using public funding

earmarked for the child's education (Wolf, Harris, Berends, Waddington, & Austin., 2018). The first voucher program was launched in Milwaukee in 1991, 28 states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) have adopted similar voucher programs (Richards, 2017; Wolf et al., 2018).

As more parents seek the private school route, voucher programs have expanded, allowing government funding to be used to pay for private school costs (Wolf et al., 2018). Tax-credit scholarships are desired as, taxpayers could receive full or partial tax credits when the individual(s) donate to nonprofits which grant scholarships to private schools (EdChoice, 2018). The school choice program guidelines and application process vary in each state depending on legislative policy. Catt and Rhinesmith (2017) define intra-district as an open-enrollment policy allowing students to transfer to another public school within the designated district; whereas an inter-district open-enrollment policy may enable students to transfer to a public school in another district.

Public charter schools operate under a different set of regulations and guidelines than traditional public schools (Blackwell, 2016). Some public charter schools are allowed greater autonomy in determining the qualifications of teachers' certifications, standardized assessments to measure student learning, and instructional materials (Blackwell, 2016). The United States Department of Education reported over 6,000 charter schools operate in 43 states and the District of Columbia (Blackwell, 2016). Since the passing of the Charter School Act of 1996 in North Carolina, the number of charter schools has grown. Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) provide parents with the choice to withdraw the children from a public school and receive restricted government funds (deposited in an approved account) to pay for a private school, home school costs, online learning programs, or private tutoring (EdChoice, 2018). In other words, the money follows the student. School choice commonly includes vouchers or education savings accounts

(ESA). North Carolina enacted ESAs in 2017 and launched funding in 2018 (Egalite et al., 2017). North Carolina's ESA program is designed to help some students with special needs.

The ESA program provides qualified families with public funding to help pay for specific services. The North Carolina program is limited to students who were previously enrolled in a traditional public school. While school choice programs in North Carolina include scholarship programs, vouchers, and tax credits, the study focuses on the contributing factors affecting the continuous growth in student enrollment in charter schools in North Carolina. Public charter schools receive a charter or contract and may operate as a public entity following district and state guidelines described by the state board of education, local school board, or a public university (Sahin et al., 2018). The changes in public policy, and the school choice reform movements have contributed to the number of public charter school contracts continuing to expand across the United States (Sahin et al., 2018).

History of the Charter School Movement

In the 1960s, the charter school movement once had bipartisan support, but the roots are tangled in the most contentious debates (Jason, 2017). In 1962, an economist name Milton Friedman proposed the ideas of vouchers to help families pay for private schools allowing the market and competition, not the government, to shape the public-school system (Jason, 2017). Milton Friedman's ideas would force government-run schools to compete for enrollment, fostering innovation, improvement in academic performance, and empowering parents to make educational choices (Jason, 2017; Maranto & Vasile, 2018).

School choice can be traced back to early societies, where parents sought affordable and available educational options (Logan, 2018). The Supreme Court landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 set the precedent for parents' rights to choose public schools of choice

(Logan, 2018). Charter schools have become a significant part of reforming the American education system with Minnesota leading the way with the first public charter (Gawlik, 2016). In 1991, Minnesota's state legislature passed the first charter law allowing for school choice, innovation, and school improvement (Gawlik, 2016). The passing of the charter law addressed parental dissatisfaction with the state's traditional public-school system (Gawlik, 2016). The members of the state legislature and governor supported the charter school law as Minnesota had a long tradition of public-school choice (Gawlik, 2016). While the idea of charter schools was first proposed in 1974, 14 years passed before the idea became a reality with the state of Minnesota granting the first public charter (Gawlik, 2016).

Since the first charter was granted in Minnesota, 43 states and the District of Columbia have adopted charter school legislation sparking the growth in the charter school movement with Arizona, Florida, Ohio, and Texas leading the way (Caffee, 2018; & Ebert, 2018). Proponents of school choice contend the existence of charter schools is a short time relative to the history of public and private schooling in the United States, but stipulate the growth of charters nationwide merits a closer look at the charter-school movement (Bradford, 2018). Supporters of charter schools compare the most recent vision to the one initially established by many pioneers. The pioneers of the charter school movement envisioned an enterprise that aspired toward diversity in the populations of children served, the types of schools offered, the size of those schools, and the culture and race of the of school leaders (Bradford, 2018).

The North Carolina charter school movement started in 1996 but has been a controversial issue as the number of public charters continues to grow (Smarick, 2016). The charter school movement began when the General Assembly approved the Charter School Act of 1996, allowing parents to choose a TPS in the designated zone, or enroll in a public charter school

(Smarick, 2016). The State Board of Education (SBE) was granted the authority to approve or reject any person, group, or non-profit organization proposing a charter school (Smarick, 2016). The new charter schools are free from bureaucratic restraints but required to follow the required content and testing standards as described by NCDPI.

The charter school movement has provided parents the right to choose the best educational option regardless of income or district boundaries (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2008). The expansion of the movement has required public charters schools and TPS to compete, which improves education (Gawlik, 2016). The national charter school movement impacted North Carolina as a new policy change was enacted to promote accountability requiring charter schools to achieve specific outcomes identified in the individual charters (CER, 2018; Gawlik, 2016). To address the growth of charter applications, NCDP created the Office of Public Charter Schools (OPCS). The Office of Public Charter Schools is authorized and regulated by the North Carolina State Board of Education. The charters schools are operated by an independent non-profit board of directors.

The growth of charters. The approved charters function as a license to operate in the state. While charter schools are granted to freedom to design curricula aligned with the school's mission, similar to TPS (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), a TPS is held accountable for academic and financial performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Since 1999, the number of approved charters in the U.S. has experienced growth (Honig, 2016). Most charter schools are located in the urban areas. The unique structure and focus are appealing to families seeking an educational alternative to TPS. Charter school enrollment nearly tripled between the 2006-07 and the 2016-17 school years (David, Hesla, & Pendergrass, 2017). Table 1 shows the national growth of public charter schools between the 2009 and 2018 school years.

Table 1

Growth of Public Charter Schools 2009-10 through 2017-19

<i>Year</i>	<i># of States</i>	<i>Total # of Schools</i>
<i>2009-10</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>4,952</i>
<i>2010-11</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>5,274</i>
<i>2011-12</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>5,696</i>
<i>2012-13</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>6,079</i>
<i>2013-14</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>6,465</i>
<i>2014-15</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>6,747</i>
<i>2015-16</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>6,855</i>
<i>2016-17</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>6,939</i>
<i>2017-18</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>7,038</i>

Note. Data retrieved from the National Alliance for Public Schools in Adzima (2017)

Differences Between Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools

Charter schools were considered an answer to reinventing and expanding TPS, but now the once conservative answer has shifted to the center of the political debates regarding public education and bureaucracy (Logan, 2018). Renzulli, Barr, and Paino (2015) provided a taxonomy based on non-generalist mission code descriptors to study the rising trend of charter school enrollment. Charter schools were granted the autonomy to create schools with specialist missions to accommodate the diverse needs and skills of the students. Some charter schools focus at at-risk students, values (e.g. citizenship or civic responsibility), vocational, fine arts, special education, gifted, curriculum (e.g. Montessori), language, or culture.

Charter schools are non-sectarian, tuition-free public schools operating pursuant to a contract (Geheb & Owen, 2019). Charter schools are a form of school choice designed to provide students an opportunity to attend a publicly funded alternative to traditional public schools (Geheb & Owen, 2019). According to state and federal policies, a charter is considered a performance contract whereby the school's administrator and board should demonstrate accountability and student growth (Gaheb & Owen, 2019). If the SBE determines the charter school failed to abide by the regulations established in the charter and violates the provisions of the charter, the school may be closed (Gaheb & Owen, 2019). If at the end of the designated charter, the school exceeds in student achievement growth and demonstrates provisions of the charter are followed, the school's charter and accreditation may be renewed (Gaheb & Owen, 2019).

Charter schools are described as public schools receiving charter, state, and federal funds (Sahin et al., 2018). Charter schools may differ in purpose and pedagogy, allowing parents to choose schools meeting the needs of their students (Sahin et al., 2018). Charter schools may differ in purpose and pedagogy, allowing parents to choose the schools meeting the needs of the students (Sahin et al., 2018). The charter schools' program guidelines and application process may vary in each state depending on legislative policy and SBE policies. Some school districts may provide either an intra-district or and inter-districts school choice. Catt and Rhinesmith (2017) define intra-district as an open-enrollment policy allowing students to transfer to another public school within the designated district; whereas an inter-district open-enrollment system may enable students to transfer to a public school in another district. Public Charter Schools operate under a different set of regulations and guidelines than traditional public schools (Caffee, 2018). Some public charter schools are allowed greater autonomy in determining the

qualifications of teachers' certifications, standardized assessments to measure student learning, and instructional materials (Blackwell, 2016). The United States Department of Education reported over 6,000 charter schools operated 43 states and the District of Columbia (Blackwell, 2016).

Charter schools are types of public schools with the freedom to incorporate more innovation meeting academic excellence (Sahin et al., 2018). Unlike charter schools, TPS adhere to state-mandated education standards and are not exempt from state or federal laws (Caffee, 2018). Unlike charter schools, TPS is governed by the local school districts, which are run by democratically elected school boards (Caffee, 2018). Charter schools offer parents a choice, but TPS requires students to attend the designated school according to zip code. Both charter schools and TPS receive public funding, charter schools receive state funding on “fixed, per-pupil basis,” whereas TPS rely more on taxpayer dollars (e.g., property taxes) (Caffee, 2018). Both charter schools and TPS compete for state funding.

North Carolina Charter schools and TPS differ in terms of accountability. Charter schools have some freedom and autonomy from the state regulations governing the TPS (Machado, n.d.). Charter schools are not bound by national standards but are accountable through state-mandated tests and the state board of education accountability system (Machado, n.d.). Charters schools are independently managed schools functioning outside of the direct control of the school districts, but Adzima (2017) noted charter schools are evaluated periodically (every three to five years) to ensure the schools adhere to the guidelines. The charter schools may choose the design, theme, personnel, and curriculum, building upon the structure of the academic subjects (Adzima, 2017).

Once the charter school in North Carolina receives approval from the Office of Charter Schools (OCS) (Machado, n.d.), any changes the school makes affecting the initial application

should be submitted through the amendment to documents process. The OCS may approve or deny some changes, and other changes may require State Board approval (Machado, n.d.). Any changes a charter school makes to the application require the school to submit a request to amend those documents to the OCS (Machado, n.d.). The OCS has the authority to approve some amendment requirements, while others require State Board approval (Machado, n.d.). In certain circumstances, such as significant enrollment growth and/or grade expansion, a required approval should come from the State Board of Education (SBE).

The TPS should adhere to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) approved by the US Congress in 2015. The SBE develops and implements the NC Standards Course of Study (SCOS), as well as the end-of-grade (EOG) and end-of-course (EOC) assessments (Ebert, 2018.). The K-12 content standards, curriculum, and instruction should meet the state and federal guidelines as described by ESSA and SCOS. The NCDPI reviews the standards for each grade every five to seven years to ensure the NCSCOS consists of relevant standards and objectives (Ebert, 2108.). The TPS alignment with the statewide assessment program, extended content standards, and materials adoption address the standards-driven process (Ebert, 2018). Table 2 shows the differences between charter school and TPS regulations, teacher certification requirements, and school accountability.

Table 2

Differences Between Charter School and TPS

Category	Charter Schools	TPS
Regulations	Required to comply with rules described in the approved charter to maintain funding; independently run	Adheres to SBE regulations, governed by the district office controlled by an elected school board
Teacher Certification	50% of charter school teachers required to be licensed; teachers required to follow No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for highly qualified staff.	State certified teachers
Accountability	Not required to follow content standards, accountable to the approved performance contract	Content standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are decided by the SBE and implemented by the school district

Note. Adapted from “Comparing Charter Schools Traditional Public Schools” by A. Caffee, 2018

Public Policies Impacting Charter Schools

One of the policy changes impacting charters schools was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The act was renamed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 and is now called Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) as of 2015. The act includes language specifically addressing and promoting highly qualified charter schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The bipartisan bill was created and implemented to increase the states' approval process for charter schools. Supporters of the initiative believe supporting charter schools promotes innovations, including evidence-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Charter school policies and regulations vary from state to state. Each state has the authority to authorize a new charter, the type of charter, approval of charter amendments, to revoke a charter, and set caps on the number of charters. Maranto and Vasile (2018) examined the Arizona charter law and determined the state was open to authorizing new charters, causing a steady growth since 2016. The authorization of new charters is impacted by politics causing advocates and opponents to demand policy changes in the 43 states allowing charter schools. The charter school movement has experienced support to varying degrees (Maranto & Vasile, 2018). For example, the Reagan administration supported the expansion of school choice opening the door for President George W. Bush to sign the first school choice law, *District of Columbia School Choice Incentive Act of 2003*, designating federal funds to assist low-income families to seek private school choices (Stewart & Wolf, 2014). This new policy encouraged parents to seek educational alternatives, including public charter schools.

Charter schools are accountable to individual charters defining the school's mission and purpose (Mann et al., 2016). The approval of individual charters differs based on individual state and local standards and statutes, but these charters are exempt from regulations and procedures imposed on TPS (Mann et al., 2016). The Center for Educational Reform (2018) supports policies allowing charter schools to receive enhanced operational autonomy in exchange for strict state guidelines for accountability and learning outcomes described in the individual charters. When the charter school movement began in the early 1990s, the laws were less complex or limiting to charter school freedoms (CER, 2018).

The authors Caffee (2018) and Ebert (2018) explained operational autonomy as the extent of charter school freedoms regarding school hours of operations, teacher certification, online or blended learning modalities, and assessments. Charter schools nationwide have a specific set of

laws regarding the enrollment process and lottery procedures for admissions (Adzima, 2017). Some states have adopted an open enrollment policy allowing parents to choose a school within the state. If the charter school uses a lottery system (random selection) the school may require a waitlist if the demand exceeds the allotted capacity (Adzima, 2017). Waitlists have become a common practice for highly sought-after charter schools.

North Carolina's Charter School Act of 1996 altered public policies and laws regarding parents' school choice rights. Charter schools are authorized by State Boards of Education (SBE) and operated by an independent board of directors (Machado, n.d.). Both TPS and charter schools are governed by public bureaucracy and have a mechanism to guide parents through the transfer and enrollment process. The mission of the Office of Charters is to work in conjunction with the SBE to create and maintain highly qualified charter schools maintaining guidance and oversight to the charter non-profit board of directors (OCS, n.d.). According to the Charter School Act of 1996, schools are to provide opportunities for all stakeholders (e.g. parents, teachers, and students) to establish schools to meet the following goals: a) improve student learning, b) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods, c) create new professional opportunities for teachers, d) provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities for learning at the school site and within the public school system, and e) hold the schools established under the Article accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results (Charter School Act, §115C-218, 1996).

The Choice Process: The Pathway for Choosing a Charter School

To ensure children would attend high-performing schools, some parents attempt to purchase or rent homes in neighborhoods where schools are identified as high-performing (Liang, 2015). Liang stated not every family has the means to live in certain districts, or some

parents lack the knowledge to choose high-performing schools. According to Lubienski, and Lee (2016), some states restricted parents who opted to participate in school choice programs to only schools in the district based on accessibility and availability. Regardless of race, ethnicity, financial means, most parents desire to send children to excellent schools (Liang, 2015). The success of a charter school may depend on the policy environments in the individual states (CER, 2018). State and federal laws and regulations encourage diversity by allowing autonomy and promoting innovation (CER, 2018).

Parents' choice when making decisions to enroll their children in charter schools, is primarily impacted by networks and social capital (Villavicencio, 2013). Villavicencio stated parents generally do not select low-performing schools and are likely to withdraw from schools not meeting the needs of their children (Villavicencio, 2013). When viewed as consumers, parents are expected to seek the best educational options. Some parents may access multiple resources to make informed decisions regarding the best available education options. Some parents may conduct little research, and other parents may conduct an extensive and strategic search process (Erickson, 2017; Villavicencio, 2013). Lovenheim and Walsh (2018) contended parents tend to research online websites such as GreatSchools.org. According to Lovenheim and Walsh (2018), the website provides users with clear and concise information and data regarding test scores, demographics, ranking, and provides a comparison to similar schools. Great Schools is a free website allowing all parents to use the source of information when choosing a school.

Other parents have opted to rely on information fairs or packets provided by the schools (Erickson, 2017). Parents expressed the importance of school visits to observe the daily functions and characteristics of the school. Parents expressed a desire and need to be armed with information to have the confidence to select schools (Erickson, 2017; Wolf et al., 2018).

Evidence shows parents receiving direct information regarding standardized test scores improves their ability to select the best academic achievement pathways for their students (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018). Parents may focus on college and career readiness as a factor in school choice. (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018; Wearne, 2016; Wilson, 2015). Egalite et al. (2017) surveyed parents in North Carolina and the results of the study demonstrated the importance of social networks. Many of the parents (40%) identified the types of resources and processes used to identify quality schools (Egalite et al., 2017). The results revealed parents learned about the program through informal means such as informal conversations with other parents, friends, or relatives (Egalite et al. (2017). When asked, 33% of the parents who participated in the study indicated knowledge of the school choice program was obtained from school officials, and 15% of the parents learned about the program from an internet search (Egalite et al., 2017).

Parents' focus on college and career readiness may be a driving force for parents to seek hybrid programs – a combination of homeschool and classroom instruction (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018; Wearne, 2016; Wilson, 2015). Parents who seek schools which promote family values are shifting away from the secular public schools (Wearne, 2016). When surveyed by Kelly and Scafidi (2013), the results of the study revealed parents use online sources such as state and local educational databases to locate essential information when choosing charter schools. According to parents' responses, the data used to determine the best school are: a) student to teacher ratio data, b) evidence the school is accredited by a recognized agency or SBE, c) evidence-based data provided by the SBE or organization regarding standardized test scores, d) teacher credentials and licensing data, and e) college readiness information (Kelly & Scafidi, 2013).

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) (2019) examined the difficult task of finding a charter school to best fit the needs of students. Parents noted the information gathering process may be overwhelming at times, especially when there is little time to choose (IES, 2019). To assist parents, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) passed in 2015, requires all SBEs and local districts to provide public report cards. The report cards should include information regarding state, district, and school performance and progress in a user-friendly manner (IES, 2019).

How Differing Priorities Impact the School Selection Process

When parents enroll children in schools of choice, research shows there are several factors causing enrollment in charter school to increase: academic performance, school safety, family values, class size, and a better learning environment (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018). For example, parents may seek school options based on the school's standardized test score data (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018). Parents who seek school choice options based on school-level achievement have influenced the shift in enrollment from TPS to charter schools (Friesen, Javdani, Smith, & Woodcock, 2012).

Public K–12 education is thought to be a one-size-fits-all system which does not meet the needs of all students (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018). When parents seek to enroll in schools of choice, research shows there are several factors in the parents' decision, including academic performance, test scores, religious beliefs class size, and a better learning environment (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018). Previous literature addresses how families value quality education and other school characteristics when choosing a school (Erickson, 2017).

Academic rigor. Factors contributing to parent preferences for academic quality include curriculum, assessment scores, individualized instruction, and a better learning environment

(Catt & Rhinesmith, 2017; Erickson, 2017). Many charter schools focus on a professional theme or specific academic focus such as science and technology, fine arts, or a school for business and entrepreneurship. Unlike TPS, charter schools may focus on specialized education such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The STEM high schools are supported by parents who sought out schools based on academic rigor (Bruce-Davis et al., 2014). Parents noted the rigorous curriculum and instruction of charter schools with the STEM focus or a similar academic focus, would help the student develop a sense of community, feel safer, and better prepared for college readiness (Bruce-Davis et al., 2014).

College readiness is one of the key accountability standards in the North Carolina charter school program. College readiness is defined as criteria or level of preparedness to succeed in college without requiring remediation (Adzima, 2017). According to Adzima, many charter schools focus on the individualized needs of the students. Since the implementation of the Common Core Standards Initiative of 2009 and the ESSA implemented in 2015, the issue of college readiness has been moved to the forefront of education reform (Adzima, 2017). Parents focus on the students' high school preparation to meet the demands of postsecondary education (Adzima, 2017).

School safety. Parents are more concerned with the safety in TPS (DeAngelis, 2018). When surveyed, parents noted school safety is a priority when choosing to leave the TPS and enroll in a school of choice (DeAngelis, 2018). Parents have become more concerned with school safety issues in TPS which may be impacting the rise of parents seeking to enroll their children in a charter school (DeAngelis, 2018). Parents believe children's safety at school should be the number one priority (DeAngelis, 2018). School violence in TPS is not new, but due to the

increased number of cases and the increased national attention, school officials have become more concerned about student safety (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016).

Most states have school safety agencies known as state school safety centers (SSSC) (Carlton, Wyrick, Frederique, & Lopez, 2017). The states without the SSSC rely on other state agencies (e.g., department of public safety or individual police departments) to provide school security (Carlton et al., 2017). The school's safety efforts reflect the priorities and concerns of parents and members of the school communities (Carlton et al., 2017). Based on the feedback from parents, safety in TPS is a growing concern (Carlton et al., 2017). Some SSSCs work closely with the state legislature to analyze existing and proposed statutes impacting school safety (Carlton et al., 2017). SSSCs keep the community informed of changes affecting school safety. The states carry out a variety of activities to support school safety, including providing training, resources, and guidance to schools and school districts on topics ranging from bullying to emergency operations planning (Carlton et al., 2017, p. 2). Chabrier, Cohodes, and Oreopoulos (2016) posited charter school success is due to “an intensive ‘No Excuses’ approach with strict and clear disciplinary policies, mandated intensive tutoring, longer instruction times, frequent teacher feedback, and a relentless effort to help all students” (p. 63).

Religious and family values. Religious beliefs, personal beliefs, or family values may be a factor for families choosing to leave TPS (Wearne, 2016). Parents, with family-based values guided by religious beliefs, are shifting away from the secular public schools (Wearne, 2016). The parents’ decisions to remove their children from the TPS, may transfer the responsibility from the government to parents which rests upon the basic beliefs about the dignity of the person, the rights of the children, and the sanctity of family (Prichard & Swezey, 2016). Parents

may consider quality schools as the most important factor influencing the decision to leave TPS (Prichard & Swezey, 2016).

Smaller class sizes. Smaller class sizes are a contributing factor for parents to choose a charter school. The lower student-teacher ratio allows students to receive more individualized instruction (DiPerna & Catt, 2016). Charter schools have the freedom to create and implement curriculum and innovative instructional methods to emphasize the basics such as reading, writing, math and provide specialized instruction to promote the fine arts or STEM. Charter schools are designed for students seeking a college or a career pathway. Along with smaller class sizes, Chabrier et al. (2016) contend innovative instructional methods such as tutoring offered at charter schools are typically more intense than tutoring offered at TPS. Charter schools may use paid tutors and require students to attend after-school sessions (Chabrier et al., 2016).

Special education. Parents of children with special needs are concerned with specialized services for children with disabilities but may not find the answer to be enrollment in charter schools (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2017; DiPerna & Catt, 2016). Blackwell (2016) examined parents' preferences regarding children with disabilities and why some chose charter schools. The focus of many charter schools is a specific academic focus or professional theme, but two federal laws guide the services for children with disabilities, Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) (Blackwell, 2016). Parents may look at specific charter schools with special education services, but due to the autonomy and focus of the charter school, these services may not be available. About 15.5% of students with disabilities are suspended at least once, compared to 7% of students without disabilities (Adzima, 2017). The gap in non-public charter schools is almost as large, at 8% (Adzima, 2017). While

parents may search for special education services, charter schools provide fewer separate special education services than TPS (Blackwell, 2016).

Opponents and Proponents of Charter Schools

The national debate over charter schools continues to be driven by polarized narratives and bipartisan politics (Malkus, 2016). Malkus (2016) contends the charter school debate is based more on partisan narratives, rather than evidence-based facts. The charter schools appeal to a wide range of political and ideological supporters such as neoconservatives, neoliberals, parents, and teachers (Gawlik, 2016). Each of these factions (opponents and proponents) support or oppose charters for different reasons, such as required regulations, teacher certification requirements, and academic accountability standards.

Opponents. Charter critics believe charter schools operate as "cream-skimmers" allowing the charter operators to side-step the laws and regulations with which TPS must comply (Hess, Hamilton, & Hatfield, 2016; Malkus, 2016). Strong opposition to charter schools comes from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the national and local teachers' unions who have called for a moratorium on charter schools (Malkus, 2016). The critics note, cream-skimming is a practice which provides opportunities for charter schools to enroll fewer students; segregating students historically disadvantaged in terms of poverty, family background, race, English language skills, or low academic achievement (Anderson, 2017).

The TPS must accept all students who reside in the district zone. Anderson, (2017) explained another critic's description of charter school methods as the "Dirty Dozen." The dirty dozen includes burdensome application forms and interviews which market to more advantaged areas, counseling students out, failing to provide services for high-needs students, and

disciplining students more harshly. The media has highlighted concerns about these strategies (Anderson, 2017). The opponents stated charter schools harm academic performance, decrease equity, shift school funding to private business, and disempower teachers and unions (Maranto & Vasile, 2018). The critics contend school choice erodes the political support for communities addressing poverty (Maranto & Vasile, 2018).

Proponents. Proponents of charter schools contend competition of education fosters innovation, pushes traditional public schools to improve, increases classroom integration, and addresses individual student needs (Maranto & Vasile, 2018). Proponents stipulate charter schools promote innovation, flexibility with curriculum, and have the ability to create the necessary changes to meet the immediate needs of the students (Adzima, 2017). Other supporters believe charter schools promote competition providing families a choice (Gawlik, 2016). Conservatives support the charter schools due to fewer government restrictions such as deregulations and decentralization in order to create schools emphasizing moral values and religious teachings (Gawlik, 2016).

Proponents focus on the test scores demonstrating college readiness assisted by the increased parent involvement and engaged teachers (Adzima, 2017). According to Schwenkenberg and VanderHoff (2015) who analyzed charter schools in New Jersey, "An analysis of charter school average scores indicates that, in math, 40% of charter schools have significantly larger student gains than TPS and 13% have significantly lower gains than TPS" (p. 301). The increased supply of alternative public-school providers offers multiple educational options from which families may choose (Malkus, 2016). Supporters of charter schools believe competition for enrollment and funds, may force TPS to compete for students by implementing policies and standards to help students improve in math, reading, and writing (Schwenkenberg &

VanderHoff, 2015). Proponents claim if parents have the freedom to choose, the selection of more effective schools by parents may require less effective schools to improve (Prichard & Swezey, 2016).

The Political Debate

Charter schools can stimulate reforms in the public education system (Anderson, 2017; Prichard & Swezey, 2016). The political debate of charter schools is influenced by the attitudes of interest groups and politicians which influence the public opinions of advocates both for and against charter schools (Reckhow, Grossmann, & Evans, 2015). When policymakers understand the effectiveness of charter schools, new policy debates may address the strengths and weaknesses of the movement (Anderson, 2017). Policies, laws, and regulations establish the framework contributing to long-term effects charter schools may have on parents' decisions to leave TPS. Charter schools have generated bipartisan support from politicians, but interest groups and lobbyists continue to debate the issues surrounding charter schools (Reckhow et al., 2015). Charter schools are part of the political competition between the charter school advocates and the opponents who want to expand or constrain school choice (Reckhow et al., 2015).

Opponents perceive charter schools as a form of privatization that would exacerbate educational inequality (Reckhow et al., 2015). Proponents view charter schools as public school reforms which address inequality, increase innovation, and offer parental choice (Reckhow et al., 2015). The national and state teachers' unions focus on the aspect of funding and are pushing for a moratorium on charter schools. Political polarization between opponents (i.e. teachers' unions and politicians) and proponents (parents, educators, and politicians) continues to spark the debate about whether charter schools may privatize public education (Reckhow et al., 2015). According to Reckhow et al. (2015), the political debate surrounding the charter school movement is

measured by the number of state courts rejecting claims the funding violates public-school funding policies. State and national teachers' unions claim the state laws violate public policies as the unions contend charter schools are not public schools and should not receive funding.

Advocates of charter schools claim state and national studies conclude charter schools raise student achievement for socially and economically disadvantaged students (Reckhow et al., 2015). While public opinion may be swayed by the polarized political debate, surveys conducted by the Center for Educational Reform revealed the majority of people favor charter schools in local communities (Reckhow et al., 2015). The school choice movement supported by the U.S. Department of Education sparked national debates over educational policies supporting charter schools (Robertson & Riel, 2019). Stakeholders (parents, educators, and policymakers) expressed concern with the underperforming TPS (Roberts & Riel, 2019). Advocates of charter schools argued the best interest of the students may be overlooked if forced to enroll in a failing school.

Chapter Summary

Charter schools have emerged as a viable educational alternative for parents who choose to leave TPS. Parents may continue to seek to enroll their children in the charter schools offering rigorous academic programs, innovative instructional methods, and smaller class sizes to prepare students for college readiness or school-to-work programs. Some state legislatures have increased the allotted number of existing charters while maintaining accountability to promote student learning. As a result of the increased number of approved charters, some state legislatures have increased funding for charter schools. If evidence-based data continues to support student achievement in charter schools, the enrollment in charter schools nationwide

may increase. Parents have become influential stakeholders in the educational decisions of the students, expanding the school choice movement nationwide.

Chapter 2 was an examination of the literature regarding the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll in charter schools. The findings in the literature further indicate parents continue to arm themselves with knowledge regarding the available charter school options. The gap in research literature can be narrowed by understanding the contributing factors and characteristics of the parents who are choosing to leave TPS to seek charter school options. Chapter 3 reveals the methodology, data collection, and analysis procedures to be used for the convergent mixed methods design. Chapter 3 addresses multiple strategies for confirming the validity and reliability of the instruments and interview procedures.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. A case study is an empirical inquiry to investigate a phenomenon in a real-world context and focus on an in-depth issue such as understanding the root causes of the increased enrollment of charter schools in North Carolina (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2009). While mixed methods design originated in the 1980s from individuals in educational, health sciences, and sociology fields, the combination of multiple methods surfaced as early as the 18th century (Bazeley, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The study followed the logical sequence of a mixed methods design to develop a complete understanding of the research problem. The study was guided by central research questions to connect the mixed methods design, data collection, and data analysis. The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

Research Question 1: What underlying factors influenced parents' decision to remove their children from traditional public schools in the designated school zone?

Question one is designed to determine the key factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll in charter schools. A quantitative survey provided answers to the question to understand the perspectives of the parents who identified the concerns with the designated public schools. The answers to question one explained the reasons why a school of choice would best fit the needs of the student.

Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between the various factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from public schools to attend charter schools?

Question two focuses on the existence of the relationship of the underlying factors and the parents' lived experiences influencing the decision to choose an educational alternative for their children. Identifying the relationship between the variables does not require the independent variables to be manipulated. The purpose is to understand the relationships and determine if the variables are related.

Research Question 3: What attributes of education do parents perceive are the most important when determining a quality school?

Question three should provide in-depth answers to identify the attributes of education which parents value the most. The purpose of question three was to allow the parents to share personal experiences affecting the individual decision to seek a charter school instead of a traditional public school. The use of open-ended questions provides an opportunity for the participants to explain the answers chosen in the quantitative surveys. The answers shared during the individual interviews shed light on the attributes of education, participants deemed important.

Hypotheses

H₂₀: $B_1 = 0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

H_{2a}: $B_1 \neq 0$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

Chapter 3 addressed the research design, methodology, data collection, analysis, reliability, and validity of the research study. The rationale for the chosen research methodology is described using the work of expert researchers and an explanation of the philosophical theory

supporting the use of a mixed methods design. Chapter 3 addresses the ethical procedures of the study to ensure the participants are protected.

Research Design and Rationale

A convergent mixed methods design was used to understand the parents' perspectives influencing decisions to enroll in a charter school in North Carolina. The two methods (quantitative and qualitative) complement each other to provide a holistic view of the problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A mixed methods case study allows two data sets (quantitative and qualitative) to be used to provide evidence for a case (Stake, 1995). A convergent parallel mixed methods is a design in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and merged for final analysis; bringing together two strands of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The qualitative method addresses the participants' perspectives of a phenomenon using open-ended individual interviews. With the purpose of corroboration and validation, the study incorporated triangulation by comparing quantitative and qualitative statistical results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

A convergent mixed methods design was needed for a complete understanding of the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll in a charter school. The strengths of using a convergent design include allowing data to be collected concurrently during one phase of research. The philosophical assumptions and theory for the concurrent design worked from a pragmatism paradigm providing an umbrella worldview of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Morgan, 2017). Pragmatism is an American philosophy historically associated with figures such as John Dewey and William James (Morgan, 2017). Pragmatism philosophy aims to uncover practical knowledge of a case or situation (Biesenthal, 2014). The pragmatic approach merges theory and practice, and the theories are formed in relation to specific situations and

circumstances (Dalsgaard, 2014). Pragmatism is associated with mixed methods, as the philosophy is a problem-solving paradigm using a practical approach to a problem (Cameron, 2011)

Role of the Researcher

The purpose of the study centered on data collection and analysis. The study was conducted outside of Onslow County, North Carolina to avoid any potential conflicts of interest, as the researcher lived and taught in Onslow County. To avoid possible interaction with known participants, the study focused on charter schools located in Alamance County where participants met the sampling criteria and have no known interaction with Onslow County Schools. The approach of the research rests on the adopted mixed method style (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The sole purpose was to understand the perspectives of the participants, not interject personal opinions or direction. Following the guidelines and requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and to address potential ethical issues, the parents participating in the surveys were identified numerically.

Research Procedures

The study used a QUAN + QUAL convergent design in which quantitative and qualitative strands have equal emphasis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Morse, 1991). The director of the school reviewed the survey, questionnaire, and data collection guidelines to address and concerns before inviting the parents to participate in the study. Proper protocols related to obtaining permissions and participation were followed, and appropriate instruments were identified and used. The data collection and analysis procedures were reviewed to ensure research questions were answered.

Population and Sample Selection

While North Carolina's charter schools continue to expand, the focus of the study was to address the perspectives and experiences of parents. Participants for the quantitative survey and qualitative questionnaire were chosen using criterion sampling methods (Morgan, 2017).

Purposeful sampling is a research method to identify individuals who are knowledgeable and experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). The primary criteria for participants were parents whose children attended traditional kindergarten-12th-grade public schools and who are now enrolled in a charter school. Parents whose children are homeschooled and never attended a traditional public school and parents whose children have only attended a charter school or private school were excluded from the study. The study addressed the contributing factors influencing parents leave the traditional public schools to enroll their children in a charter school.

The administrator of the charter school provided permission and assisted with the distribution of the survey and questionnaire using the school's parent e-mail system. Parents who did not have internet service received a paper survey through the United States Postal Service. The sample size of 100-250 participants was determined using a sample-size calculator (Survey Monkey, 2019). The sample size was chosen to address the quantitative and qualitative questions guiding the study. Parents were asked to complete a questionnaire containing ten open-ended questions. The purpose of using a questionnaire is to allow the parents to share in-depth perspectives and experiences of the factors addressed in the survey (Salkind, 2010).

Agreement from the school administrator and board of directors (if necessary) required a detailed description of the study (Appendix A) and a copy of the IRB approval notice (Appendix B). The administrator distributed an information letter containing details, purpose, and protocols

of the study via the school e-mail server (Appendix C). Participants for the quantitative and qualitative studies were provided an informed consent form (Appendix D) containing clear and concise information explaining the purpose of the study, research procedures, data collection, and protections established by the IRB (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants who agreed to participate in the study and returned the signed consent forms were e-mailed or mailed confirmation containing a link to access the survey and questionnaire or paper copy of the survey and questionnaire. The surveys and questionnaires were sent out using the e-mail distribution list to ensure the private information of the participants is protected and secured. No names or other information were provided on the surveys or questionnaires to protect the anonymity of all participants. Based on the number of completed surveys and questionnaires, snowball sampling was considered to acquire additional participants if the initial response to the surveys and questionnaires did not yield the desired number of participants. Snowball sampling is an approach used to obtain additional participants from individuals who already participated in the study (Glesne, 2016).

The participants completing the survey and questionnaire were assigned a number to provide an additional safeguard to personal identities. The information about the study was accessible in the weekly announcement located on the school's homepage. All data collected were kept on an exterior hard drive and secured in a locked safe away from the school. No survey or questionnaire data or information were stored on personal laptops or desktop computers to ensure personal information was not compromised should the computer database or hard drive be compromised. Records relating to the research will be retained for three years after completion of the study (American College of Education, 2017).

Instrumentation

When designing a research study, researchers should identify which data sources answer the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Morgan, 2017). Data collection tools for the study consisted of surveys with closed-ended items and questionnaires with open-ended items. The quantitative phase used a Likert-type survey (Appendix E) to measure the strength of the participants' perspectives on the factors influencing the decision-making process. Surveys based on the predetermined response scales allowed participants to rate answers to questions on a scale (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The qualitative phase of the study used an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix F) which allowed the participants an opportunity to share in-depth perspectives of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Morgan, 2017). The instruments (survey and questionnaire) were tested by a panel of five experts to ensure the construct validity of the survey and credibility of the questionnaire questions using the Expert Panel Validation Rubric (Appendix G). The feedback from the panel ensured the questions were clear and concise, used effective methods, and addressed the appropriate constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McNamara, 1999; O'Leary, 2014). Probing questions were asked on the questionnaire to analyze the reasons and perspectives behind the participants' answers on the surveys (Demir & Pismek, 2018). The standardized, open-ended questionnaire provided an opportunity for participants to freely answer questions providing in-depth knowledge of the issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The respondents did not provide "yes" or "no" answers making the analysis and comparing process easier. The use of parallel data collection questions addresses the same concepts in both quantitative and qualitative strands, allowing the data to be merged (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Data Collection

Data collection requires the information to be collected, documented, and appropriately analyzed. A mixed methods case study method promotes validity and reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2009). The data collection procedures for implementing the convergent parallel design followed three major assumptions: 1) quantitative and qualitative topics of interest are identified and collected simultaneously, 2) both data sets have equal importance for addressing the research questions, and 3) data collection is concurrent; one does not depend on the results of the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The design variant for the study was a parallel-databases variant. A parallel-databases variant allowed both data strands (quantitative and qualitative) to be analyzed independently and merged during the interpretation (Caffee, 2018).

The use of two independent sources for triangulation of the databases provided corroborated outcomes by comparing quantitative statistics and qualitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Demir & Pismek, 2018). Triangulation, using multiple sources of evidence and member checking, ensured the construct and content validity of the study. The procedures are outlined in a flowchart. Figure 2 below demonstrates the convergent design.

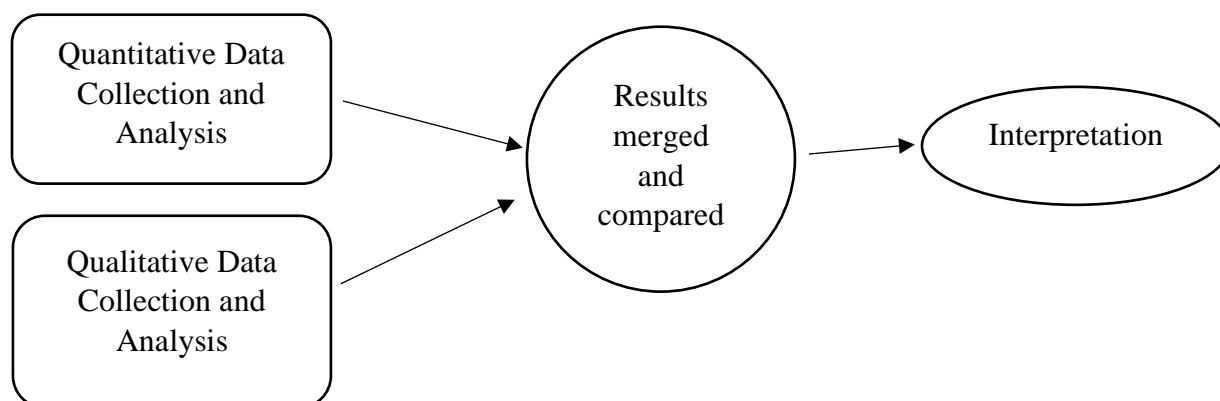


Figure 2. Diagram demonstrates Convergent design procedures. Adapted from “The Convergent Design” by J.W. Creswell and V.L. Plano Clark, 2018, *Designing and Conducting Mixed methods Research* (3rd ed), 66, Los Angeles, CA. SAGE.

Data Preparation

Preparation is an important step, especially for a mixed methods design (Bazeley, 2018). In a convergent design, quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently, but the first analysis of the information is done separately. After data collection, the data were prepared for analysis. The quantitative raw data from the surveys were converted into numeric values and checked for errors. Using the Likert scale, the four responses are *strongly disagree* (coded as 1), *disagree* (coded as 2), *agree* (coded as 3), and *strongly agree* (coded as 4). Data were sorted, coded, and checked for relevant variables or themes (Bazeley, 2018). Questionnaires were distributed online allowing the participants to speak freely about perspectives and opinions regarding the factors contributing to the decision to enroll in a charter school. The questionnaires were imported into MAXQDA for coding and checked for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data consisted of examining both databases separately and then merging them to address the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative analysis was

conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) shifting from descriptive analysis to inferential analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using the following steps established by Creswell and Creswell (2018), data analysis for the convergent design consisted of three phases: 1) the quantitative data is analyzed in statistical terms, 2) qualitative information is coded and checked for reoccurring themes, and 3) the databases are integrated in which the results from both databases are merged/integrated. The databases were merged using a joint display using tables and figures to create consolidated variables. The purpose of integration in a convergent design is to expand the understanding of the research, and the interpretations are validated and confirmed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Quantitative Data

The data were compared to link common concepts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) served to analyze the quantitative dataset. W.K. Kellogg's (2007) logic model was used to measure the relationship between the constructs (academic rigor, school safety, class size, and personal or religious beliefs) and links outcomes with processes. The logic model uses a series of "if...then..." questions to measure the similarities and discreteness among the descriptors within the constructs (Creighton, 2008). The logic model helped confirm the relationships between the resources, activities, and results (Creighton, 2008). The W.K. Kellogg (2007) logic table defines the components of a logic model and provides uses a backward mapping process to integrate the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the quantitative survey instrument.

The survey instrument addressed research question two. The use of the logic model may determine the desired outcomes of the survey, by asking the "if...then..." questions to confirm the understanding of the constructs regarding the contributing factors influencing participants to

choose charter schools (Creighton, 2008). Incorporating the logic model helps measure the construct and content validity of the survey instrument (Creighton, 2008). Figure 3 demonstrates the use of a verbal logic matrix to measure the discreteness of constructs, and congruence of the survey items aligned with each construct. The discreteness is between the two constructs (school safety and curriculum), resulting in *two-way disagreement*. Within each construct (e.g., school safety) the survey questions should experience a *two-way agreement* to assure the measurement of the accompanying construct.

<p>School Safety Parents feel students are comfortable in the school environment</p> <p>Curriculum The academic content in each subject taught in educational institutions</p> <p>If/then statements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If a parent feels the school is a safe learning environment, then he/she agrees with the school curriculum. 2. If the parent agrees with the school curriculum, then he/she feels the school is a safe learning environment. <p>School Safety (survey items included in School Safety): Two-way Agreement Survey item: Parents feel students are comfortable in the school environment Survey item: Parents feel welcome when visiting the school</p> <p>If/then statements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If parents feel students are comfortable in the school environment, then they feel welcome when visiting the school. 2. If parents feel welcome when visiting the school, then they feel students are comfortable in the school environment.
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Figure 3. Demonstrates a sample of “if/then” questions. Adapted from “Symbolic-Logic Matrix with Two ADI Constructs” by Creighton, T.B., Coleman, D.G., & Adams, R.C., 1997. Using Symbolic-Logic Matrices To Improve Confirmatory Factor Analysis Techniques.

The study utilized Spearman’s rank-order correlation, the nonparametric version of the Pearson product-moment correlation. Spearman’s correlation coefficient, (ρ , signified by r_s) measured the strength and direction of the association between ranked variables (Creighton,

2017; Salkind, 2010). The research study reported the effect size (Cohen, 1988). In a sense, effect size helps to move beyond the simplistic “Does it work or not?” to the far more sophisticated, scientific, and scholarly “How well does it work in a range of contexts?” (Coe, 2002, p. 26). Correlation can be a useful tool but explains nothing about the predictive power of variables or the strength or magnitude of the outcome (Field, 2005). The effect size represents the proportion of variance in one variable explained in the variance of the other variable (Cohen, 1988).

The calculated effect size for statistically significant correlations was the square of Spearman’s correlation coefficient (r_s^2). For example, a r_s value of .63 would result in a r_s^2 value of .40. Per Cohen’s (1988) scale, the effect size would be considered medium. The four responses are *strongly disagree* (coded as 1), *disagree* (coded as 2), *agree* (coded as 3), and *strongly agree* (coded as 4). The survey questions were turned into numbers and placed into the SPSS program allowing the data to be represented in a spreadsheet. The ordinal data were inserted in the SPSS to produce a p-value. The standard alpha level was .05 with a confidence level of .95 (95%). These procedures addressed research question 2 based on the assumption the constructs were important. The alternative hypothesis stated the results of the analysis of the Spearman correlation showed high scores for the four constructs. Correlation does not imply causation, and only measures two things: (1) the relationship and (2) the direction – either positive or negative. The quantitative survey was designed to confirm (or either not confirm) the relationships between constructs. The data may show significant correlations were found between some constructs and not others. If significant relationships between all constructs are not confirmed, the result is the failure to reject the null hypothesis for research question 2.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using computer software NVivo for coding. Coding divides the text into small units and assigns a label the text allowing the segments to be presented in a visual aid (e.g., graph). Names were replaced with numeric codes to protect the privacy of all participants. Validity and reliability for the questionnaire were addressed through ‘member checking’ by allowing parents to review the written comments to make certain the responses are accurate. The trustworthiness of the participants’ responses is the basis of qualitative research (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Caffee, 2018). Member checking provides credibility of results as participants are provided an opportunity to check for accuracy of the recorded information of personal experiences. The quantitative and qualitative databases are displayed jointly. In a convergent design, data is presented in a written discussion to explain the findings from the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative databases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Reliability and Validity

Data source triangulation using more than one data collection type strengthens the credibility, dependability, validity, and reliability of the study (Carter et al., 2014; Zohrabi, 2013). A mixed methods design requires the validity of scores from the quantitative phase and the findings from the qualitative phase. In quantitative research, construct validity and reliability are addressed. Construct validity is the degree to which the instrument measures what is intended. Parallel concepts were used in both quantitative and qualitative data collection to address possible validity threats in the convergent design. To integrate the quantitative and qualitative strand properly, the study includes a side-by-side joint display. Instrumentation for

the study aligns with the framework set in place by experts in the field of mixed methods research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McNamara, 1999; O’Leary, 2014).

To improve the inter-item correlations and construct validity, a Verbal Logic Truth Table (Creighton, 1996; Creighton et al., 1997) was used to verify each descriptor (question) would logically agree with the others measuring the same construct. In the study, the constructs were Academic Rigor, School Safety, Class Size, and Personal and Religious Beliefs. Each of the constructs is represented by two individual questions on the survey. A Verbal Logic Truth Table (Appendix H) resembles a correlation matrix but allowed individual items to be compared according to verbal construction (logic) by subjecting participants to ‘if-then’ statements. The numbers across the top represent the eight questions listed in the first column of the truth table, and the ‘XX’ is placed in the box where the descriptor (question) correlates with itself and is not of interest in the analysis.

By contrast, validity in qualitative research was conceptualized in terms of credibility and transferability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research focused on procedural validity to ensure the study focuses on the credibility of the study. Credibility is similar to internal validity, “confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings” (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014, p. 5746). Transferability demonstrates the findings have applicability in other contexts (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). In the study, the purpose of the questionnaires (qualitative) was to capture the authenticity of the participants’ perspectives of why the charter schools were chosen. Participants were given an opportunity to review the answers which is known as member checking. Member checking allowed the participants to check the transcribed text for accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services policy entitled *Protection of Human Research Subjects* found in the Code of Federal Regulations (45 C.F.R. § 46) regulates all research involving human subjects. Following the regulations, all participants received a written consent form containing information about the purpose of the study, the procedures of the study, and the role of the participants (Protection of Human Research Subjects, 45 C.F.R. § 46, 2009). Participants were given an opportunity to ask questions about the study to ensure there was a clear and concise understanding of what was expected of the participants. All participants signed the written consent form. The quantitative surveys and qualitative questionnaires were e-mailed through the school server. To protect the privacy of the participants, names were replaced with numeric codes. The data were transcribed and kept in a secured locked safe. Records will be retained for three years after the completion of the study and then destroyed.

The American College of Education (ACE) Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved informed consent forms, a permission letter from the participating site, IRB approval letter, a statement of confidentiality, a certificate of completion by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) regarding the protection of human research participants (Appendix I), and a list of the types of validity (Appendix J). The collection of existing data, documents, or records, if these sources are publicly available, or if the information is recorded, occurred in such a manner to ensure participants cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to participants (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). The potential benefits and risks, research questions addressed in the study, and how the information obtained used were addressed in the consent form and administered to participants who meet the criteria for the

study. The distribution of the consent letter occurred before the data collection to provide all participants an opportunity to opt-out of the research study.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. The measurement was accomplished through a survey with closed-ended items to identify a correlation between contributing factors and the decision-making process of the participants to choose the school of choice. The open-ended questionnaire provided an opportunity for participants to share in-depth personal perspectives regarding charter schools. Chapter 3 outlined the method by which the research study was conducted, including the rationale for a convergent mixed methods design, the theoretical framework used to guide the study, the sampling method, and how data were collected and analyzed.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to examine the contributing factors influencing participants' decisions to leave the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. Participants with children enrolled at the charter school in North Carolina participated in the research study conducted online. The case study identified the contributing factors impacting the decision-making process of participants to utilize the school choice option by enrolling children in a public charter school. The study used a pragmatist view focusing on the truth of an idea of an observable consequence (Dalsgaard, 2014). Pragmatism, through analysis, aims to uncover practical knowledge of a situation (Biesenthal, 2014).

Chapter 4 summarizes the results of the mixed methods analyses described in Chapter 3. Data collection methods included an online survey and questionnaire. Chapter 4 outlines the research findings and depicts the emerging themes relating to the three research questions guiding the study as follows:

Research Question 1: What underlying factors influenced parents' decision to remove their children from traditional public schools in the designated school zone?

Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between the various factors influencing participants' decisions to remove their children from public schools to attend charter schools?

Research Question 3: What attributes of education do parents perceive are the most important when determining a quality school?

Hypotheses

H2₀: $B_1 = 0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing participants' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

H2_a: $B_1 \neq 0$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing participants' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

Data Collection

The director of Chatham Charter School and the charter school's board members viewed the proposal to ensure proper school protocols were in place before giving final approval to use the site for the case study. An initial invitation to participate in research was sent through the school's e-mail system using a program called School Messenger. Participants received a letter containing a detailed description of the study and contact information to address any questions or concerns before participating. Following the initial parent letter, consent forms (Appendix G) were delivered via e-mail and included an option to opt-out of the study. Instructions and a link to access the questionnaire and survey were e-mailed to participants. When accessing the survey, participants reviewed the consent to ensure an understanding of procedures and protocols. All participants had access to e-mail, requiring no paper copies to be mailed.

The primary criteria for inclusion in the study were participants whose children attended traditional kindergarten-12th-grade public school at least one year and enrolled in a charter school for at least one year. Participants whose children never attended a traditional public school were excluded from the study. Data collection occurred over two weeks from September 29, 2019, through October 12, 2019. The convergent parallel mixed methods design collects both forms of

data (quantitative and qualitative) simultaneously using the same or parallel construct (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey and questionnaire were distributed using SurveyMonkey®. The link to the site was attached to instructions contained in the parent letter and distributed using School Messenger. The number of parents who initially invited to participate was 250 - 300. The initial response rate from the first set of participants did not yield the desired number of surveys, and snowball sampling was used. When the initial invitations were e-mailed, North Carolina was preparing for a major hurricane (Hurricane Dorian) which may have impacted the parent responses to the study.

Snowball sampling is an approach used to obtain additional participants from individuals who already participated in the study (Glesne, 2016). The final total number of responses was 35. The completion of the survey collection period was ending, and surveys from participants had not met the prescribed quantity. Reminder e-mails were sent out to improve the number of responses. Data collection revealed four participants did not meet the criteria as the children had never been enrolled in a traditional public school (TPS). These factors resulted in a final sample of 31 participants for the study. Table 3 summarizes the selection process for the final sample of 31 participants.

Table 3

Selection of Final Parent Sample

Parent Category	Number of Participants
Participants initially identified as meeting selection criteria	35
Participants whose children never attended a TPS	4
Final Sample	31

Qualitative Component

The qualitative data were gathered using an open-ended questionnaire. Each of the nine questions allowed insight into the feelings and perspectives influencing the participants' decision-making process. The responses were typed directly into SurveyMonkey®, allowing participants to review answers for accuracy before submitting responses. The responses were exported to Microsoft Excel®, and personal information was replaced with a numeric code (e.g., parent01) to protect the participants' privacy. The initial data preparation using Microsoft® Excel organized the data for further analysis. The Microsoft® Excel document was imported into a software program, MAXQDA. The data were organized by document name, allowing the questionnaires and surveys to be separated for an individual analysis.

Quantitative Component

The quantitative data collection consisted of an eight-question survey using closed-ended questions to measure the relationship of two descriptors in each of the four constructs: (1) school safety, (2) class size, (3) academic rigor, and (4) religious and or personal beliefs. Individual participants submitted the surveys, and SurveyMonkey® gathered and analyzed the quantitative

data using the Likert-like question into a percent (Robbins & Heiberger, 2011). The surveys were exported from SurveyMonkey® to Microsoft® Excel to organize the documents. The data were converted from text to numbers using the Likert scale to include the four responses: strongly disagree (coded as 1), disagree (coded as 2), agree (coded as 3), and strongly agree (coded as 4). The Microsoft® Excel document was imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software for final analysis. Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was used to measure the strength and direction of the association between ranked variables (Creighton, 2017; Salkind, 2010).

Triangulation of parent responses was maintained using a survey with closed-ended items and a questionnaire with open-ended items. A mixed methods design triangulates the methods by comparing the quantitative statistical results with the qualitative findings to corroborate and validate the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation of the tools was used for reliability purposes and provided a holistic understanding of the personal experiences and perspective of the participants' decision-making process. The decision to use SPSS for the data analysis was based on the software's capability to analyze the statistically significant relationship between variables in the quantitative section of the mixed methods study. The data were imported directly from Microsoft® Excel into SPSS, as the software can analyze quantitative data using Spearman's rank-order correlation. Data were merged for a side-by-side analysis completing the third phase of the convergent mixed methods design.

Data Collection Sample

The participants in the study live in Eastern North Carolina. At the time of the study, the participants reported one or more children had attended a TPS in the state and chose to exercise a

school choice option by enrolling in one of North Carolina's public charter schools. Figure 4 reveals the children enrolled in a TPS and the number of years enrolled in charter schools.

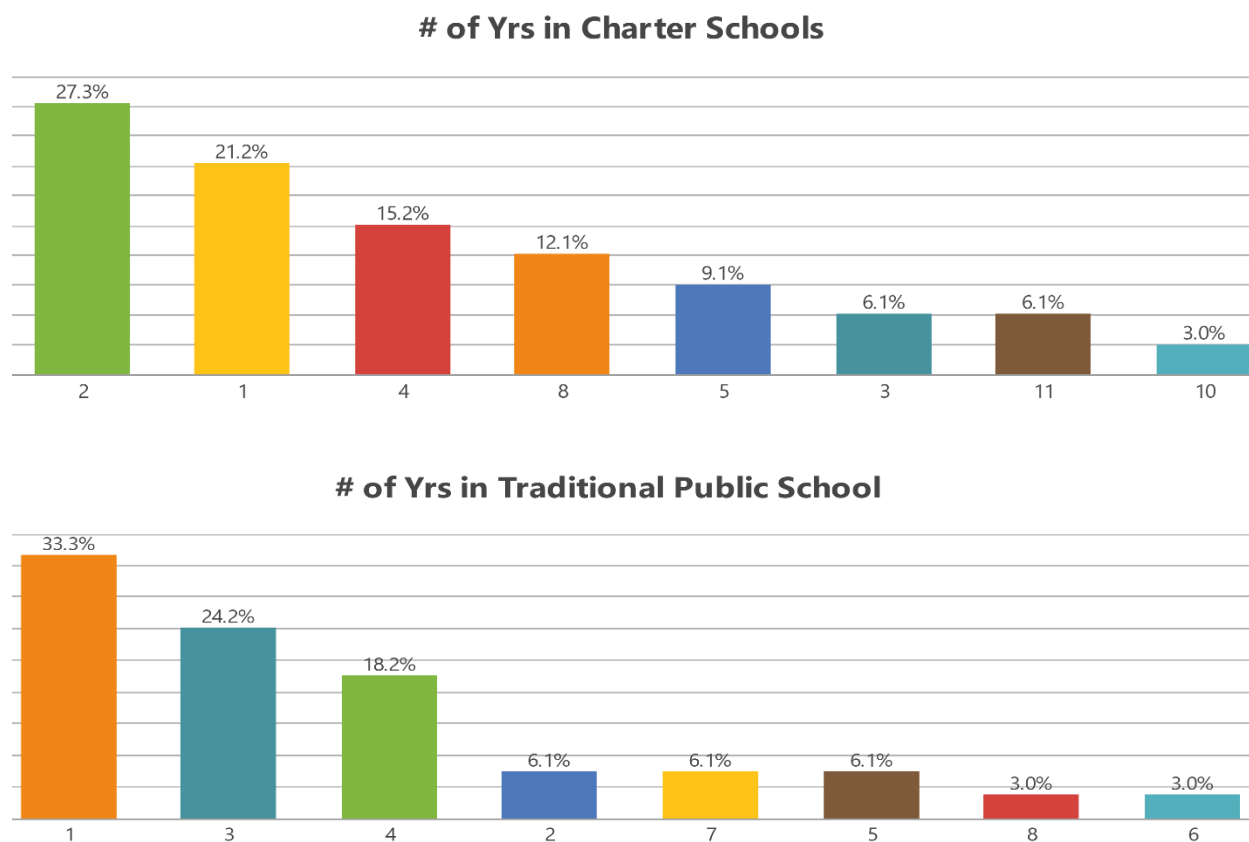


Figure 4. Years enrolled in TPS and charter schools.

Deviations from Data Collection Plan

There were two deviations from the data collection and analysis plans initially proposed. The sample size was smaller than the desired size indicated in Chapter 3. While the desired number was 100, only 35 participants responded to the initial request. Of the 35 responses, only 31 met the established selection criteria. The small sample size meets the convergent mixed methods design number (21-30 participants) established by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The second deviation was the use of MAXQDA for the final analysis of the qualitative data instead of

NVivo. The MAXQDA program incorporates NVivo into the coding process eliminating the need to use a separate NVivo program.

Data Analysis and Results

All data were stored securely and accessible only by the researcher. Electronic data were stored on an offline hard drive and locked in a safe. Password-protected electronic data included survey responses, questionnaire responses, and all correspondences to prepare for the study. The researcher was the sole individual with access to the data. All data collected for the study will be stored for three years and then properly destroyed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All participants were reminded of the confidentiality protocols and the purpose of the study. Any identifiable information was removed from the data collected., and pseudonyms (e.g., parent01) were used to safeguard participation protection. Content analysis began as data were categorized by questions. Data analysis followed the process for convergent mixed methods research described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). While the convergent mixed methods design allowed for the qualitative and quantitative data collection to co-occur, the two data sets were analyzed separately and then merged for an overarching analysis to understand the contributing factors influencing participants in North Carolina to leave a TPS in the zoned area and seek a public charter. Chapter 4 presents the analysis and results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses. In each subsection, the research questions guided the presentation of the results. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary of a side-side comparison from both subsections.

Qualitative Analysis

The first step in the convergent design process was to focus on qualitative data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative data were organized in Microsoft® Excel and then imported into MAXQDA for coding. The next step involved rereading the individual answers to

each of the nine questions. The primary coding cycle consisted of marking responses to each question with codes using MAXQDA. The coding feature highlights the relevant words based on the frequency of answers to a single question on the questionnaire. Codes and sub-codes are highlighted, identifying significant words or statements of the participants' responses conveying personal experiences or perspectives relevant to the research questions. Once the coding process was complete, reports containing codes and summaries were developed for each question to be presented in a codebook. The participants' answers to the nine open-ended questions were cross analyzed to better delineate emerging thematic codes of school safety, academic rigor, innovation, smaller class sizes, and information source. A cluster map was then created to visualize relationships between categories and sub-categories to assist with further research (see Figure 5).

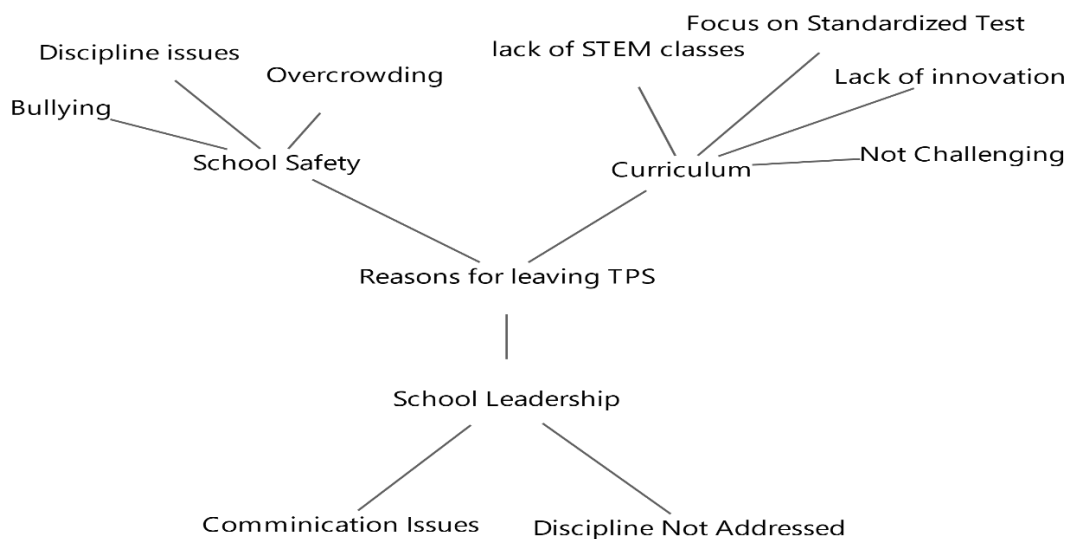


Figure 5. Cluster map of thematic categories regarding traditional public schools.

A separate cluster map was created to identify thematic categories regarding reasons parents enrolled their children in a charter school (see Figure 6). The two thematic categories were reviewed separately to address two separate questions on the qualitative questionnaire (a)

What were the characteristics of the traditional public school in your zone that contributed to your decision to seek a charter school?, and (b) What qualities influenced your decision to seek enrollment in the charter school?

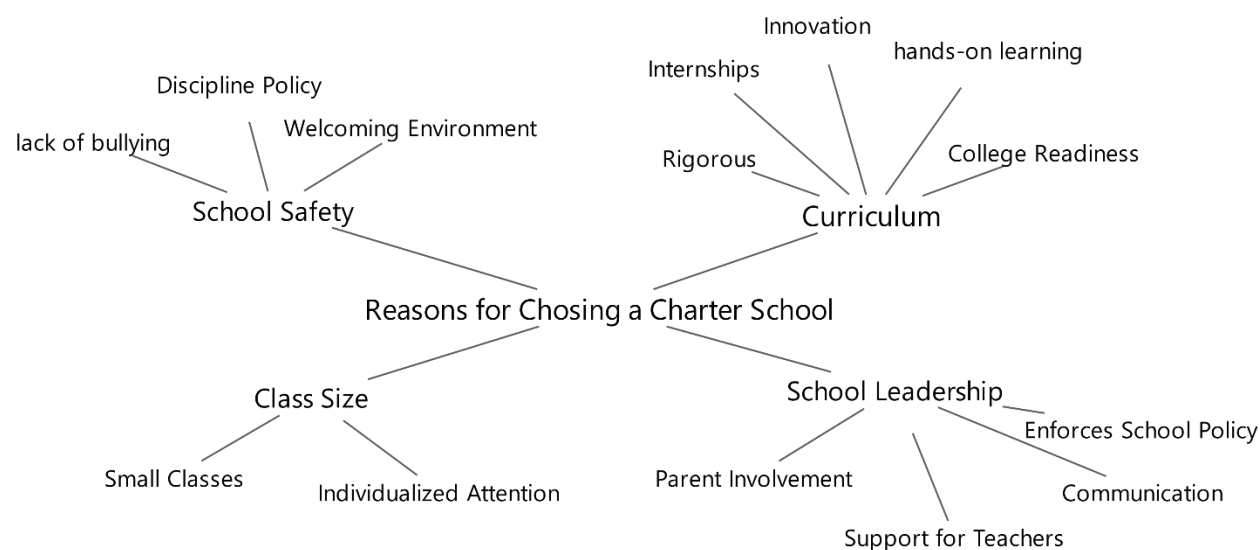


Figure 6. Cluster map of thematic categories regarding charter schools.

A second and refined review of the thematic categories revealed four major themes: (a) participants felt the curriculum in TPS was not rigorous, and students were falling behind, (b) school safety (overcrowding and bullying) were problematic at the TPS, (c) charter schools promote more innovative learning strategies, and (d) smaller class sizes at the charter school provide opportunities for individualized learning. Table 4 lists the topics comprising each theme in a side-by-side comparison of statements.

Table 4

Themes Emerging from Participants' Statements

Reasons for choosing to leave TPS	Reasons for choosing to enroll in a CS
School Safety	School Safety
- Bullying	- Welcoming environment
- Overcrowding	- Lack of bullying
- Other discipline issues	- Discipline policy
Curriculum	Curriculum
- Not challenging (especially for gifted students)	- Rigorous
- Lack of STEM classes	- Innovation (instructional methods and technology)
- Lack of Innovation	- Hands-on-learning
- Emphasis on standardized tests	- Emphasis on college readiness
	- Internships
	Class Size
	- Smaller class
	- More individualized Attention

Qualitative Results

The qualitative results addressed two research questions (RQ1 and RQ3). The data were collected using a questionnaire. The results of the qualitative data were organized by research questions.

Research Question 1: What underlying factors influenced parents' decision to remove their children from traditional public schools in the designated school zone? Each parent provided significant statements explaining the personal experiences and perspectives with TPSs. Several participants had agreeing statements about the importance of school safety. Thirteen participants mentioned school safety as a reason for leaving the TPS. Participants' described

bullying and lack of discipline in the classrooms as a reason for leaving the TPS. Parent05 stated, "Bullying was terrible, and school leaders did little to address the problem."

Three participants believed discipline issues in the classroom required teachers to focus on the disruptions rather than teaching. Parent01 wrote, "school safety - too much bullying and disrespect towards teachers. Teachers spent more time disciplining students who should have been removed by the administration." Four participants expressed the importance for school leaders to implement and enforce a discipline policy in the school. Parents did not confirm whether leadership was the contributing factor for leaving the TPS. The parents identified the necessity for discipline policies to address school safety which will support teachers and protect students.

A second theme was the academic rigor of the curriculum and instruction. Eighteen participants stated academics were a contributing factor in the decision to leave the TPS. Several participants described curriculum as not challenging all students, lacked innovation to keep students engaged in learning, lacked programs for gifted students, and few programs for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), and focused too much on standardized tests. Parent19 explained, "The traditional public schools were failing and did not have the academic challenges I wanted for my children." Parent03 felt the "curriculum was not challenging for gifted students." Three participants believed too much emphasis was placed on standardized tests rather than promoting innovative instructional methods. Parent04 explained, "low test scores. Too much emphasis placed on standardized tests and not on classroom instruction."

One distinction in the variation among participants' responses was the concern with school leadership. While the participants did not feel school, personnel were a factor for

disenrolling the student, several expressed concern over the lack of parent communication. Fifteen participants stated no school personnel (teachers, counselors, or administration) asked why the student was leaving the school. Six participants expressed concern over the lack of communication between school leaders and participants. Four participants stated the teachers asked why the student was leaving, and nine participants confirmed school leaders asked why the student was leaving. Parent12 stated the principal asked, “How would the charter school be better?”

Research Question 3: What attributes of education do parents perceive are the most important when determining a quality school. Participants stated academics, school safety, and the school’s reputation are important attributes of a quality school. Participants described individual characteristics of academics such as rigorous curriculum, innovative instructional methods, academic opportunities, and the availability of technology. Participants were asked, "When looking for a charter school, what source of information do you think influenced your decision-making process?" The responses varied from the internet to asking other parents or friends. Figure 7 shows the percentages of participants who sought information using different pathways.

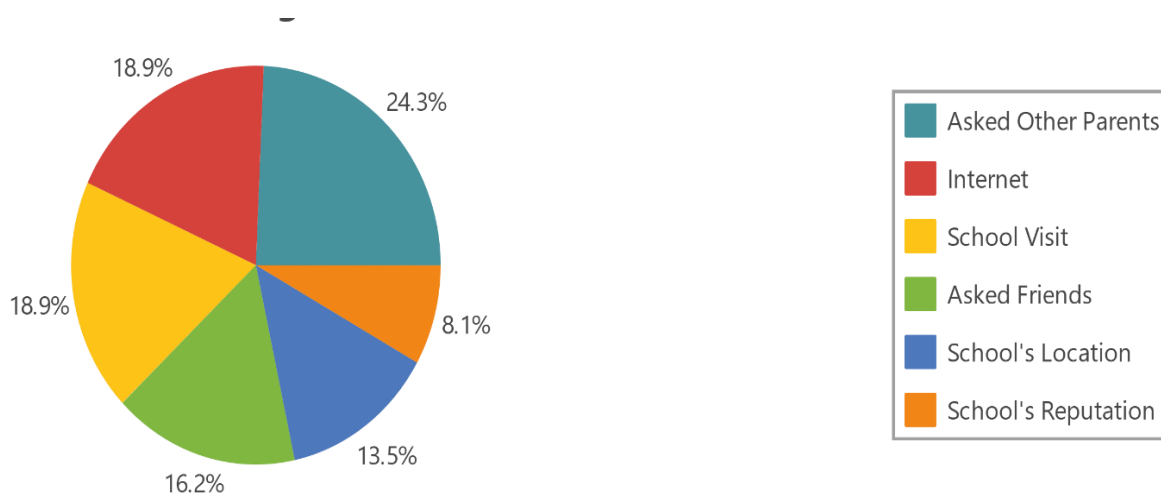


Figure 7. Chart showing the sources where participants find information regarding quality schools.

After the source of information was identified, participants were asked to explain the important characteristics of a quality school. Twenty-four participants expressed the importance of a rigorous curriculum. Parent16 stated, “students are challenged to work hard in the classroom.” A challenging curriculum was described by participants as a curriculum to engage the students. Five participants shared the importance of challenging gifted students, offering STEM programs, or advanced placement classes for reading and math. Nine participants explained the importance of using innovative instructional methods to keep students engaged. Participants stated academic rigor involves technology and innovation. Thirty-one participants mentioned the difference in the availability of technology for students and innovation. “The use of technology keeps young students engaged in the learning process” (Parent09). Participants perceived innovative instructional methods to promote learning as important attributes. Participants stated the curriculum should incorporate hands-on learning to keep students engaged in learning. Participants were asked, “In your opinion, how have the academic innovations

offered at your charter school impacted the educational needs of your child?” Figure 8 shows the participants' perspectives regarding the benefits of incorporating academic innovations.

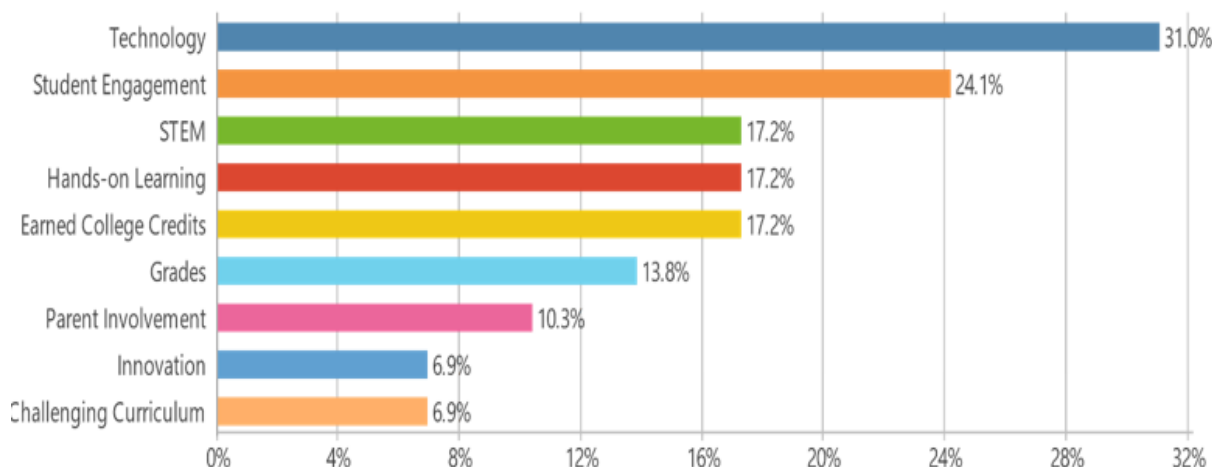


Figure 8. Chart showing the incorporation of academic innovations into the learning process.

Parents did not mention whether the TPS promoted college readiness programs but did identify the programs offered in the charter school. Two participants described how the charter school provides innovative instructional methods to promote student growth and college readiness at the high school level. Parent02 expressed the need for “advanced reading and math programs.” One participant shared the opportunities for earning college credit through the dual enrollment program.

My oldest graduated from the charter with 38 college credits and prepared him well for college. My youngest is similarly benefitting. I hear from parents of students that attended the local traditional public high school, and the children felt unprepared for college and struggled. (Parent20)

Parent30 described the “importance of academic opportunities such as internships” incorporated into the curriculum prepares students for college.

Participants describe school safety as an important attribute when determining a quality school. Thirty-one parents expressed quality schools implement policies to ensure students feel safe and comfortable at school. Eleven participants mentioned school safety as an important factor when considering schools. Parent09 shared, “Bullying and exposure to extreme unfavorable behavior” was a problem at the TPS. Parents who completed the questionnaire did not describe whether the discipline policy was an issue at the charter school but did state school safety was a reason for removing children from the TPS. Table 5 lists the attributes chosen by the participants.

Table 5

Attributes Identified by Participants

Attributes	# of Participants Who Mentioned the Attribute ($n = 31$)
Academics	
- Rigorous Curriculum	24
- Innovative Instructional Methods	9
- Technology	9
- Academic Opportunities (Dual Enrollment and Internships)	10
School Safety	
- Discipline Issues (Bullying)	8
- Overcrowding	3
Parent Communication	5

Quantitative Analysis

The data were collected using closed-ended questions in an online survey. The results of the quantitative data were organized by research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between the various factors influencing participants' decisions to remove their children from public schools to attend charter schools?

Hypotheses

H₂₀: $B_1 = 0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

H_{2a}: $B_1 \neq 0$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

Participants answered eight Likert-type questions focusing on the contributing factors for choosing a charter school. After participants completed the online surveys with closed-ended questions, the results were exported from Microsoft® Excel into SPSS for analysis. Spearman's rank-order correlation, the nonparametric version of the Pearson product-moment correlation was used to measure the strength and direction of association which exists between two variables measured on an ordinal scale (Creighton, 2017; Salkind, 2010). A checking process was conducted to ensure a nonparametric correlation procedure; specifically, the Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (i.e., Spearman's rho) was an appropriate tool to analyze the data.

Before conducting correlational procedures, scatterplots were generated for each of the four variables: school safety, small class size, religious beliefs, and rigorous curriculum. Each

scatterplot was examined and was clearly indicative of a bivariate linear relationship (Appendix K). No departures from a linear relationship were evident, justifying the use of correlation coefficients (Slate & Rojas-LeBouef, 2011). A Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was calculated. The strength of a statistical test is the probability the test may yield statistically significant results (Cohen, 1988). Cohen (1988) posited the terms small, medium, and large are relative to the specific content and research method used in the investigation. If the effect size (or power) is small (.10) the difference between means may be seen (Cohen, 1988). If the effect size is medium (.30) the practical relevance is visible (Cohen, 1988). If the effect size is large (.50), the practical relevance or meaningfulness of the relationship is large. If the effect size is larger, the relationship between the two variables is stronger (Creighton, 2017). Failing to address effect size increases the risk of reporting inaccurate results in the data analysis and committing a Type 2 error (Creighton, 2017).

Results

The second research question, “Is there or is there not a ‘strong correlation’ (relationship) between each of the four constructs?”, was addressed through four Spearman correlation calculations, one for each of the four constructs. To address School Safety, a Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was calculated for Q2 (i.e., Parents feel safe at the charter school) and Q10 (i.e., Child feels safe at the charter school). The result was $r_s(31) = .19, p = .30$, indicating the lack of a statistically significant relationship between these two variables. Figure 9 shows the correlation between Q and Q10.

			Q2 - Parents feel safe at the charter school	Q10 - Child feels safe at charter school
Spearman's rho	Q2 - Parents feel safe at the charter school	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.191
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.304
		N	31	31
	Q10 - Child feels safe at charter school	Correlation Coefficient	.191	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.304	
		N	31	31

Figure 9. Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient for School Safety, Q2, and Q10.

Regarding the second construct of Small Class size, a Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was calculated for Q4 (i.e., Parents chose charter schools for small class size) and Q12 (i.e., smaller class size relates to better instruction). The result was $r_s(31) = .52, p = .003$, indicating the presence of a statistically significant positive relationship between these two variables. The r^2_s value of XX was reflective of a [small/medium/large] effect size (Cohen, 1988). Squaring the correlation value revealed the presence of a 27.04% overlap (i.e., strength of association) in the responses of parents to these two variables. Figure 10 shows the SPSS results regarding the second construct, class size.

			Q4 - Chose Charter school for small class size	Q12 - Smaller class size relates to better instruction
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	Q4 - Chose Charter school for small class size	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.523**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.003
		N	31	31
	Q12 - Smaller class size relates to better instruction	Correlation Coefficient	.523**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	
		N	31	31

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 10. Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient for Small Class Size, Q4 and Q12.

The third construct of religious beliefs, a Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was calculated for Q6 (i.e., Religion was a factor) and Q16 (i.e., Personal and or religious beliefs are important factors when choosing a charter school). The result was $r_s(31) = .63, p < .001$, indicating the presence of a statistically significant positive relationship between these two variables. The r^2_s value of XX was reflective of a [small/medium/large] effect size (Cohen, 1988). Squaring the correlation value revealed the presence of a 39.69% overlap (i.e., strength of association) in the responses of parents to these two variables. Figure 11 addresses the correlation from the SPSS analysis for Q6 and Q16.

			Q6 - Religion was a factor	Q16 - Personal and religious belief are important factors
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	Q6 - Religion was a factor	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.633**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	31	31
	Q16 - Personal and religious belief are important factors	Correlation Coefficient	.633**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	31	31

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 11. Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient for Religious Beliefs: Q6 and Q16

The fourth construct of a rigorous curriculum, a Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was calculated for Q8 (i.e., More academic rigor at charter school) and Q14 (i.e., Parents value rigorous curriculum). The result was, $r_s(31) = .04$, $p = .82$, indicating the lack of a statistically significant relationship between these two variables. Squaring the correlation value revealed the presence of a 1.6% overlap (i.e., strength of association in parent responses to these two survey items). Figure 12 shows the SPSS results for Q8 and Q14.

			Q8 - More Academic rigor at charter school	Q14 - Parents value rigorous curriculum
Spearman's rho	Q8 - More Academic rigor at charter school	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.042
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.824
		N	31	31
	Q14 - Parents value rigorous curriculum	Correlation Coefficient	.042	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.824	
		N	31	31

Figure 12. Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient for Academic Rigor, Q8, and Q14

Statistically significant relationships were revealed for the constructs of small class size and for religious beliefs. Both of these statistically significant relationships were reflective of large effect sizes. For the constructs of school safety and rigorous curriculum, statistically significant relationships were not present.

Analysis of Qualitative and Quantitative Data Combined

Following the convergent mixed methods procedures allows the qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately in parallel, and then integrated through merging (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). A narrative approach is used for the final analysis of merging the qualitative and quantitative data. Integrating the results (known as weaving) connect each data set thematically, allowing the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data to weave back and forth around similar themes or concepts (Fetters et al., 2013). The mixed methods study resulted in a holistic understanding as to how the qualitative components provided information about the parents' experiences and perspectives influencing

the decisions to enroll their children in a charter school. The thematic categories addressed throughout the study were academic rigor, school safety, class size, and religious beliefs.

Academic rigor. When asked about academic rigor on the questionnaire, participants addressed the curriculum in both the TPS and the charter school. Based on the results from the questionnaire, the participants believed a challenging curriculum is an important attribute when choosing a quality school. The survey results showed 70.97% of the participants strongly agreed the curriculum was more challenging at the charter school, and 3.23% strongly disagreed. When asked probing questions in the questionnaire to understand why participants believed academic rigor was important. Many responses to the questionnaire indicated charter school curricula are more challenging as innovative instructional methods (i.e., hands-on learning and technology) are incorporated. Participants further explained the TPS was more focused on standardized tests, whereas the charter school focused on college readiness programs (i.e., internships and dual enrollment programs). Figure 13 shows the results of the responses to the survey question Q8 regarding academic rigor in the charter school.

School

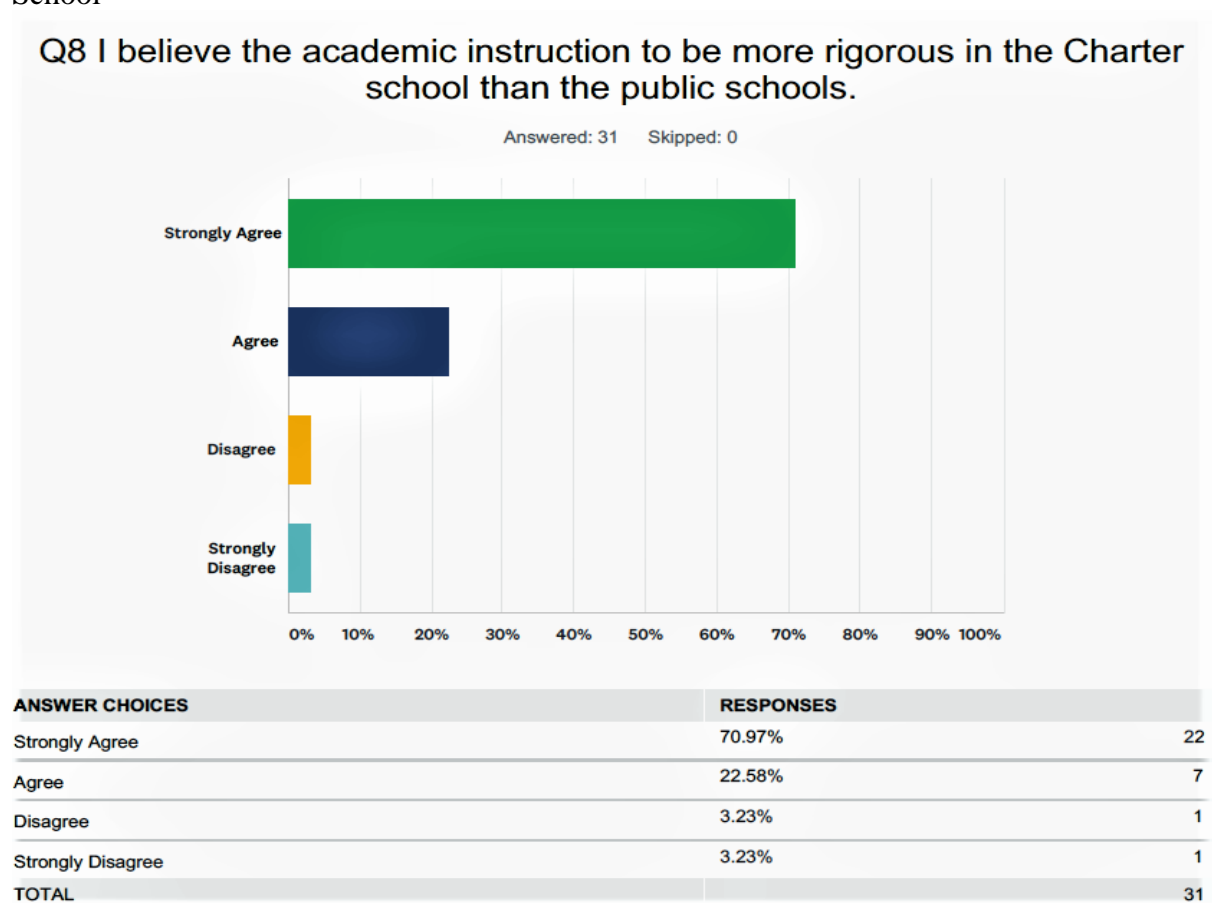


Figure 13. Chart showing responses to Q8.

Safety. When participants identified characteristics of the TPS in the assigned zoned area, contributing to the decision to seek a charter school, several participants stated school safety as one of the contributing factors for leaving the TPS. Results of the open-ended questions identified bullying and overcrowding as concerns with the TPS. When asked whether students felt safe in the charter school, 80.65% of the participants strongly agreed, and 3.25% of the participants strongly disagreed. Figure 14 shows the responses to Q10 of the survey.

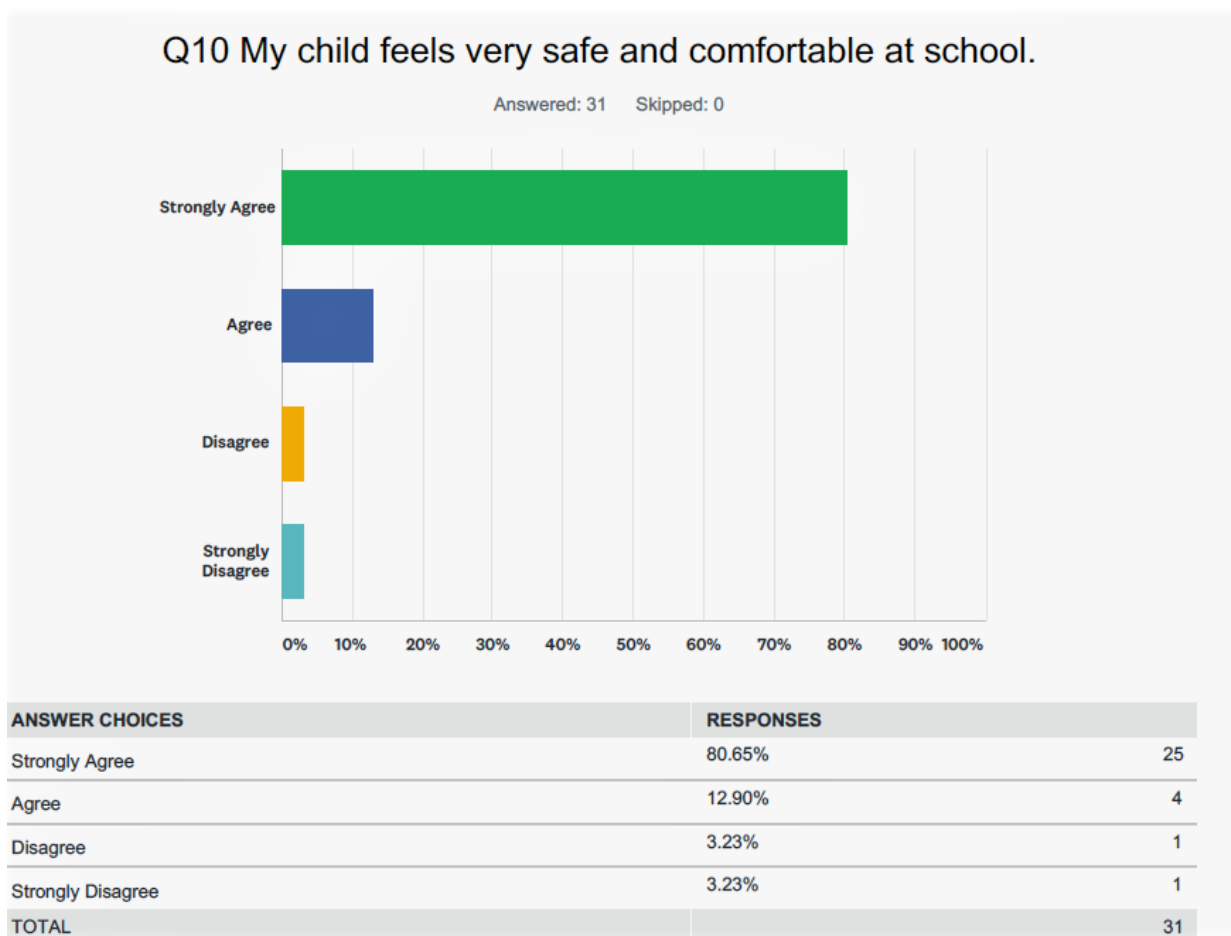


Figure 14. Survey Q10 regarding school safety at the charter school.

Class size. Class size was identified as an important characteristic of a quality school in both the qualitative and quantitative data sets. The findings from the quantitative data showed 67.74% of the participants strongly agreed smaller class sizes were a contributing factor for choosing a charter school. When asked is smaller class sizes relate to better instruction, 90.32% of the participants strongly agreed. Figure 15 provides a comparison between the two survey questions regarding smaller class sizes.

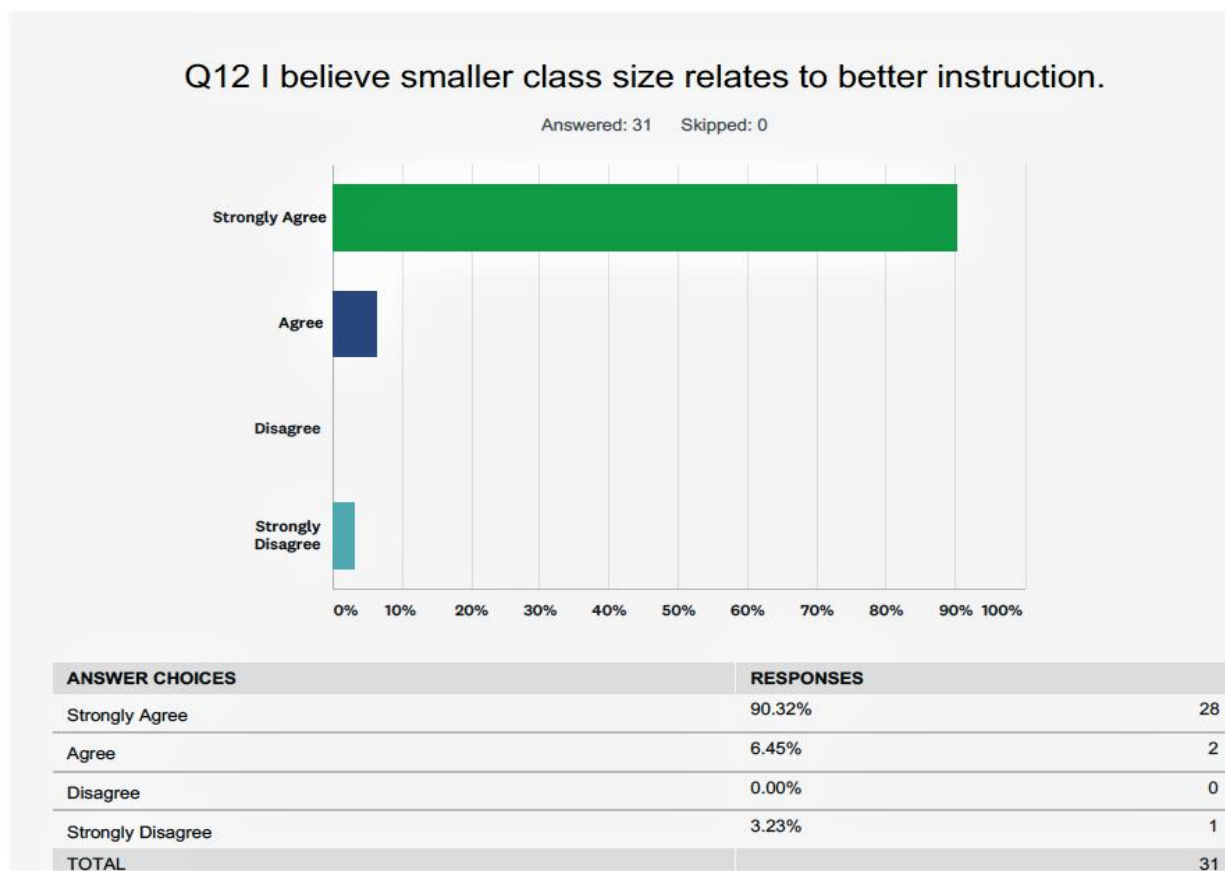


Figure 15. A comparison of survey responses regarding smaller class sizes.

Religious Beliefs. The initial analysis of Question 6, "My religious beliefs were factors in choosing the charter school," revealed 54.8% disagreed, and 19.35% strongly disagreed. When asked, "I feel one's personal and/or religious beliefs to be important factors in choosing a Charter school," 45.16% agreed, and 25.81% strongly agreed. The survey results showed 54.84% of the participants believed religion (Q6 on the survey) was not a contributing factor for leaving the TPS and choosing a charter school. Figure 16 addresses Q6 regarding religious beliefs.

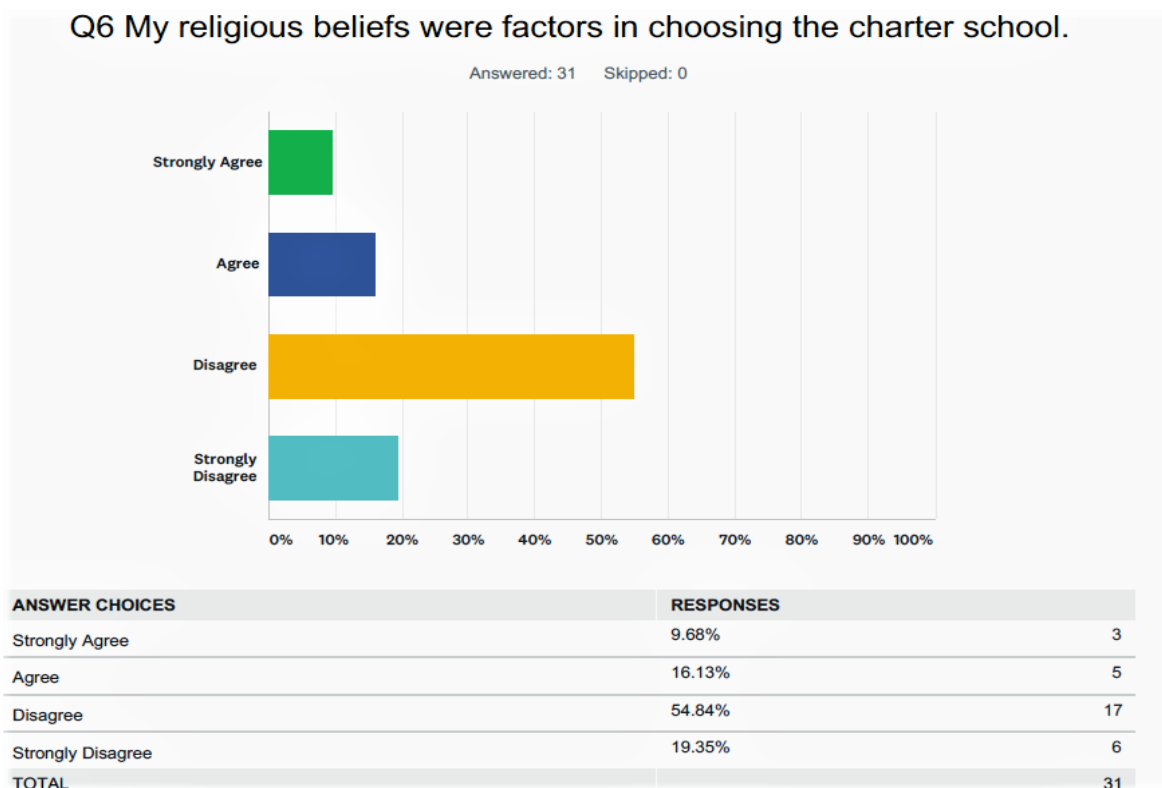


Figure 16. Parents' responses to Q6 regarding religious views.

When asked if religious and or personal beliefs (Q16 on the survey) were important factors for choosing a charter school, 45.16% of the participants agreed. The deviation in the results for Q6 and Q16 is addressed in Chapter 5. Figure 17 shows a deviation in the survey results regarding religious beliefs and personal beliefs.

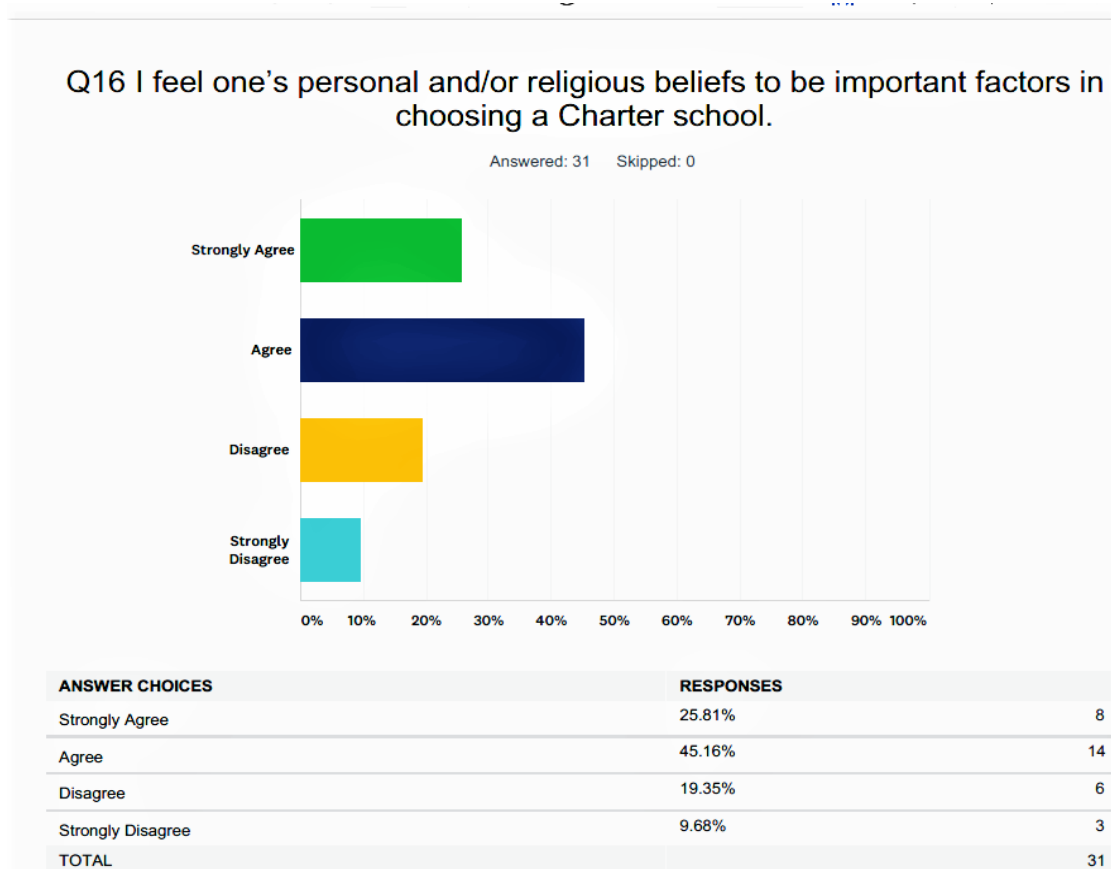


Figure 17. Q16 responses regarding religion and or personal views for choosing a charter school.

Reliability and Validity

A mixed methods design requires the validity of scores from the quantitative phase and the findings from the qualitative phase. Qualitative research focused on procedural validity to ensure the study focuses on the credibility of the study. In quantitative research, construct validity and reliability are addressed. Data source triangulation using more than one data collection type in a mixed methods design strengthened the credibility and dependability, reliability, and validity (Carter et al., 2014; Zohrabi, 2013).

To ensure the credibility of the qualitative research, the data collection instruments were tested by a panel of five experts to ensure the questions were clear and concise. Providing a rubric allowed the panel to provide feedback to ensure all questions aligned with the research

questions guiding the study. The feedback from the panel resulted in the adjustment of two questions. A member-checking process was implemented to validate data collected from participants. Participants had an opportunity to review all responses to the questionnaire to check for the accuracy of the statements. The use of a codebook, created in the MAXQDA software, identified and highlighted distinct codes for responses to each question.

Construct validity is the degree to which the instrument measures what is intended (Creighton, 2017). To improve the inter-item correlations and construct validity, a Verbal Logic Truth Table was used. The instrument was used to verify each descriptor (question) would logically agree with the others measuring the same construct. A Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient analysis was conducted using SPSS software. To ensure the process was done correctly and results accurately reflected the data, an outside SPSS expert, professor Dr. John Slate from Sam Houston University, assisted with conducting the quantitative analysis.

After the completion of the individual analyses (qualitative and quantitative), data were merged for a final analysis completing the final phase of the convergent mix-methods study. Parallel concepts were used in both quantitative and qualitative data collection to address possible validity threats in the convergent design. To properly integrate the quantitative and qualitative strands, the study included a joint display to accurately presents the findings and results.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 detailed the findings of the convergent mixed methods case study exploring the parents' experiences and perspectives influencing the decision to leave the TPS in the zoned area and enroll in a charter school. The processes for recruiting participants and data collection through open-ended questionnaires (qualitative) and closed-ended surveys (quantitative) were

described. Data analysis processes for both data sets were explained. The major themes from the questionnaires were described using a narrative format including quotations as supporting evidence. The surveys were analyzed using the Spearman correlation coefficient to determine the direction of the relationship between variables. A final analysis merged the qualitative and quantitative data to provide an in-depth understanding of the study.

Chapter 5 provides further interpretation and analysis of the participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the decisions to exercise the school choice option of choosing a charter school. Study limitations and recommendations for future research are addressed in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with implications the research study holds for TPS and charter school leaders.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. The research study focused on four significant constructs: academic rigor, school safety, class size, and religious beliefs. The sample size consisted of 31 parents whose children were enrolled in a charter school in Eastern North Carolina. The convergent parallel mixed methods process provided a rich understanding of personal experiences and perspectives of parents who chose to exercise school choice options. The measurement was accomplished using a questionnaire with open-ended items (qualitative) and a Likert-style survey with closed-ended items (quantitative).

The motivation for conducting the study was to help charter school leaders and traditional public schools (TPS) administrators understand why parents in North Carolina are seeking educational alternatives to the TPS. The significance of the study is to identify the contributing factors influencing the parents' decisions and help school leaders create and open dialogue to address the concerns of all stakeholders. The findings from the study may be used to create a replicable model to help educational leaders evaluate future goals affected by the continuous changes in the educational landscape. As revealed by the literature in Chapter 2, there is minimal research regarding parents' opinions and beliefs impacting educational decisions and the growing numbers of charters granted by the SBE in North Carolina (Sahin et al., 2018).

Chapter 3 detailed the research design and methods used to address research questions and hypotheses. The study was a convergent parallel mixed methods design using qualitative and quantitative data to provide a holistic understanding of the problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The qualitative data provided a rich understanding of the parents' beliefs regarding the choice to

enroll in charter schools instead of a TPS. The quantitative data used a Spearman correlation to determine the direction of the relationship between the variables. The study focused on four constructs: (a) academic rigor, (b) school safety, (c) class size, and (d) religious beliefs.

The data collected and analyzed in Chapter 4 provided information about the sample population and the data collection procedures. The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed separately and then merged for final analysis. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings of the mixed methods study, including interpretations and conclusions of the results and findings. Chapter 5 presents limitations, recommendations for future studies, and implications for leadership.

Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions

The results of the data analysis detailed in Chapter 4 provided the required information to address the research questions and hypotheses. The interpretations and conclusions may be drawn from the study's conceptual framework of pragmatism. Pragmatism inspired inquiry focusing on the situation, experiences, or phenomenon to provide a more in-depth understanding (Stark, 2014). The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study.

Research Question 1: What underlying factors influenced parents' decision to remove their children from traditional public schools in the designated school zone?

Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between the various factors influencing participants' decisions to remove their children from public schools to attend charter schools?

Research Question 3: What attributes of education do parents perceive are the most important when determining a quality school?

Hypotheses

H2₀: $B1 = 0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

H2_a: $B1 \neq 0$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

To address the qualitative research questions (RQ1 and RQ3), the use of open-ended questions allowed participants to share detailed information regarding experiences and perspectives. To address the quantitative question (RQ3) and hypotheses, Spearman's rank-order correlation, the nonparametric version of the Pearson product-moment correlation was used. Spearman's correlation coefficient (two-tailed test) measured the strength and direction of the association between ranked variables (Creighton, 2017; Salkind, 2010).

For Research Question 1, data revealed four themes. The themes were (a) participants felt the curriculum in TPS was not rigorous, and students were falling behind, (b) school safety (overcrowding and bullying) were problematic at the TPS, (c) charter schools promote more innovative learning strategies, (d) smaller class sizes at the charter school provide opportunities for individualized learning.

For Research Question 2, statistical tests measured the significant relationship between four constructs: rigorous curriculum, school safety, small class size, and religious beliefs. For Q2 (i.e., Parents feel safe at the charter school) and Q10 (i.e., Child feels safe at the charter school), the result was not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05, $r_s(31) = .19$, $p = .30$, indicating

the lack of a statistically significant relationship between these two variables. For Q4 (i.e., Parents chose charter schools for small class size) and Q12 (i.e., smaller class size relates to better instruction), the result was statistically significant at the alpha level of .05, $r_s(31) = .52$, $p = .003$, indicating the presence of a statistically significant positive relationship between these two variables. For Q6 (i.e., religion was a factor) and Q16 (i.e., Personal and or religious beliefs are important factors when choosing a charter school). The finding was statistically significant at the alpha level of .05, $r_s(31) = .63$, $p < .001$, indicating the presence of a statistically significant positive relationship between these two variables.

For Research Question 3, data revealed parents identified academics, school safety, and the school's reputation are significant attributes of a quality school. The findings for academics indicated rigorous curriculum, and incorporating innovative instructional methods are important to parents. The findings for the school's reputation indicated parents are concerned with school leadership and parent communication.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings for the study were based on the conceptual framework described in Chapter 2. The conceptual framework incorporated principles from the Pragmatism philosophy with the aim to uncover knowledge of a situation or case (Biesenthal, 2014). Pragmatism inspired inquiry on experiences or phenomena to provide an in-depth understanding of the situation (Stark, 2014). Hersey and Blanchard's (1996) situational leadership theory, Becker's (1993) rational choice theory, and Rotter's (1966) social learning theory are associated with pragmatism and align with the focus of the study. Effective leaders guided by situational leadership, evaluate the situation and adjust decisions based on the concerns of the stakeholders (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996; Wright, 2017). Becker (1993) believed rational choice theory went beyond the economics of the

decisions of the individual by focusing on the social issues, individual attitudes, preferences, and calculations impacting individual choice. The theories were discernible in the study.

The mixed methods study supported the conceptual framework concerning the parents' knowledge, beliefs, and educational decisions.

The study builds upon the literature and expands the understanding of why parents are choosing charter schools instead of TPS. Previous literature sought to identify the strategies used by parents to locate and enroll children in high-performing schools (Liang, 2015). Lubienski and Lee (2016) explained parents who exercise school choice program rights when enrolling in charter schools may be limited to only schools located in the district. The study supported previous literature regarding parents' decision-making process. Villavicencio (2013) stated the decision process is impacted by networks and social capital. The findings from the study showed parents identify and choose quality charter schools by conducting online research, ask friends or other parents, and visit charter schools. North Carolina allows parents to apply to any charter school. The guidelines for enrollment are established by the individual charter schools and approved by the Office of Charter Schools. The findings of the study revealed the parents used these resources to help make an enrollment decision using Great Schools, the NCDPI website, and asked other parents for recommendations. Scheduling school visits allowed parents to review the school setting and ask questions regarding school safety policies as well as review the school's curriculum.

Through the analysis, definite conclusions emerged regarding the contributing factors influencing parents to enroll in a charter school instead of the TPS in the zoned area. The results from the qualitative and quantitative analyses provided an understanding of the differing priorities affecting the school selection process. DeAngelis and Erickson (2018) examined how

parents' educational priorities impact the school selection process. Previous literature showed parent research information regarding academic achievement and college and career readiness (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018; Wilson, 2015). The results from the qualitative questionnaire showed parents believe rigorous curriculum, school safety, and small class sizes are essential attributes of a quality school.

As with any study, specific findings reveal a surprise. One of the surprises surfaced in the qualitative analysis. Parents identified school leaders and the school's reputation as essential factors. Several parents identified discipline policies when addressing school safety. While the parents did not elaborate on the discipline policies, several mentioned the need for school leaders to enforce the policies. Another surprise was parent communication. Parent communication was identified as an important factor for school safety. The findings did not indicate whether parent communication was a contributing factor, but the lack of communication was identified as a school safety issue.

Conclusions

Three research questions formed the basis for the mixed methods case study. The qualitative questions allowed parents to share information about personal experiences with TPS and the charter school. The quantitative question and hypotheses provided statistical data regarding the relationship between the variables. Data analyzed in the study indicated parents who participated in the study value curriculum, school safety, and smaller classes when choosing a quality school. The evidence revealed three constructs were legitimate and measured what was intended. Data did not provide definitive answers about religious beliefs as a contributing factor for influencing parents. The study contributed additional data to the research examining the

reasons why parents chose to seek charter schools instead of enrolling students in the neighborhood TPS.

Limitations

The number of respondents who voluntarily completed the survey limited the study. The desired number of participants for the quantitative data set was based on the statistical calculations of the school's population. While the parents were properly informed the study was in no way connected to Chatham Charter School; parents may have assumed otherwise. Another limitation was the possible overlap or wording error in two survey questions regarding religious beliefs. The overlap with the two questions or wording errors may have impacted the participants' responses.

Previous studies indicated religious beliefs or personal beliefs impacted parents' school choice decisions (Wearne, 2016; Wilson, 2015). There were two survey questions addressing religious views and personal beliefs. The wording in question 6, "I believe my religious beliefs were factors in choosing the charter school" addressed personal religious views which some parents may not be comfortable disclosing on a survey. In other words, parents may feel the topic is a personal matter which may have impacted the response to the question. Question 16, "I feel one's personal and/or religious beliefs to be important factors in choosing a charter school" yielded different responses. While both questions addressed religious beliefs, the overlap of the topic and the wording in question 16 addressed personal beliefs which may have influenced parents' responses. After reviewing previous literature and the results from the study, religious beliefs would be appropriate in future studies addressing school choice decisions regarding home school or private schools.

Recommendations

The findings and conclusions of the study are the basis for recommendations for future research and policy planning for educational institutions. The literature review in Chapter 2 revealed the need for additional studies about the factors influencing parents to seek available charter school options in North Carolina. As parents exercise the rights of school choice, educational leaders may continue to face challenges of competing for enrollment. The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. A mixed methods design provided an in-depth understanding of the parents' decision-making process when choosing to stay at the neighborhood TPS or enroll children in a charter school. Using a quantitative or qualitative method alone would not provide the necessary data to understand the problem fully. The data collected from the open-ended questionnaires complemented the data from the closed-ended survey questions. Future research studies should consider mixed methods designs to obtain a holistic understanding of the topic. Using only quantitative surveys does not allow participants to share in-depth knowledge and/or experiences. Adding open-ended questions allows participants to speak freely about the topic provide a rich understanding of the perceptions influencing decisions.

While speculations continue to surround funding and competition, understanding why parents are choosing educational alternatives to TPS is significant. The *first recommendation* would be to expand the study geographically to include participants from counties across the state. Expanding the geographical area may provide a more diverse sample size contributing to knowledge and understanding of parents' values and beliefs influencing educational decisions.

Future studies, including other designations in the state, may provide an opportunity to assess a more comprehensive view of potential changes to the educational landscape of TPS and charter schools. Replicating the study comparing the responses of parents who chose to enroll in the charter schools and parents who chose to stay at the TPS may yield information impacting future educational policies. Because the study only considered the perspectives of the parents who chose to leave the TPS, a second study using the same criteria to identify the reasons why parents choose to stay enrolled in the TPS would provide a balanced examination of the issues. A side-by-side comparison would provide meaningful information to all stakeholders to create an educational environment to meet the needs of all students. The findings from future studies may contribute meaningful information to the ongoing political debate over school choice programs across the country. A comparison of differing views of parents may lead to new public policies regarding school choice.

The second recommendation would be to replace the online questionnaire format with face-to-face interviews. The validity and reliability of the instruments used in the mixed methods study were discussed in Chapter 3. While parents provided detailed responses to the open-ended questions, conducting face-to-face interviews allows the researcher to ask probing questions allowing the participants to speak freely about personal experiences and perspectives. The individual interviews should be conducted away from the school to provide a comfortable environment for the participants to engage in an open dialogue.

The third recommendation relates to the content of the survey questions. A review of the data yielded overwhelming detailed response regarding curriculum, school safety, and class size. Previous literature showed religious views as a contributing factor for parents seeking educational alternatives. Question six, “My religious beliefs were factors in choosing the charter

school” (51.18% of the participants disagreed) and question sixteen, “I feel one’s personal and/or religious beliefs to be important factors in choosing a Charter school” (42.42% of the participants agreed), revealed differences in the wording may produce a different outcome. The recommendation is to leave religion out of the survey as the topic may be too personal. The wording of the question should address personal beliefs or family values as participants may feel religious matters should remain private. With the political climate surrounding education, some participants may believe religion is a personal matter. Addressing personal beliefs and or family values allow participants the opportunity to incorporate religious views into the conversation without feeling obligated to do so.

The fourth recommendation is to share the results with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) to provide parents an active voice. While the sample size for the study was relatively small, the results of the study highlight the areas in education valued by parents. Parents are more involved in the education landscape which impacts the long-term goals identified in the schools’ strategic planning process. Incorporating the feedback into the planning process contributes to the conversations regarding professional development training, the adoption of resources, and impacts instructional methods to improve student learning.

Implications for Leadership

Future studies may prove valuable to the discussion of school policies, strategic planning, school choice programs. From the research perspective, previous literature defined school choice as the opportunities for families to seek the best education to meet the needs of the children (Stewart & Wolf, 2014). The findings of the study provide a further understanding of the previous scholarly literature. The study is significant to educational leaders, as more parents are changing the educational landscape by exercising school choice rights (Wilson, 2015).

Findings from the study, coupled with future studies, may provide additional information to improve communications between all educational stakeholders: policy makers, teachers, curriculum directors, principals, charter school directors, superintendents, school board members, and parents. The study was not meant to identify the causes and effects of the rising growth in charter schools.

Understanding the reasons why parents are choosing to exercise school choice options impacts the educational policies in North Carolina (Mann et al., 2016). Parents are seeking an active voice in the educational policies impacting the growth of charter schools in North Carolina. As the NCDPI continues to assess the increase in charters across the state the results from the study may provide statistical data to support policies allowing charter schools to maintain operational autonomy but continue to evaluate the accountability and learning outcomes. The study may impact research-based decisions regarding overarching school choice policies (i.e., curriculum standards, school safety policies, and instructional methods).

At the start of the 2018-2019 school year, 189 public charter schools were operating in North Carolina (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). As of 2019, 78% of parents supported charter schools operating in the zoned areas (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). The findings from the study contribute to the statistical data to understand why parents are choosing charter schools. Future studies may yield additional data to understand why there is a continuous growth in charter school enrollment in over 90 counties in North Carolina.

Conclusions

Chapter 5 presented an overview of the study. The purpose of the study, the problem of the study, and the methods used guided by the research questions and hypotheses were summarized. The study revealed three constructs (academic rigor, school safety, and class size) were

contributing factors influencing parents' decisions. The findings did not confirm religion was a contributing factor.

Chapter 5 discussed the limitations of the study's data analyses guided by the conceptual framework, the research questions, and previous literature. Because the study focused on only one county in Eastern North Carolina, the generalizability of the results may be limited. Despite the limitations, the findings from the study contributed to the growing body of research examining the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll in charter schools instead of the TPS. As educational leaders continue to address the increasing number of charters schools in North Carolina; further research is recommended to understand the relationship between the factors and the decisions made by parents.

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Appendix A: Site Approval Letter

Good Morning,

My name is Rikki Hatfield and I am a doctoral candidate at the American College of Education. The topic of my dissertation is to conduct a mixed methods study of the contributing factors influencing parents to leave the traditional public schools and enroll in a charter school. The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study was to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. As a wife of U.S. Marine, I have experienced school choice and I am a teacher who is passionate about providing students the best opportunities. When we moved to NC, I was researching and amazed at the growth of charter schools and the changes in legislation.

I reached out to David Machado at NCDPI and he provided a list of charter schools to contact to seek approval. The methodology requires participants (parents) to be surveyed and asked to complete a questionnaire, to identify the contributing factors influencing their decision to enroll in charter schools. I will be submitting my proposal to the IRB in July or early August, and I was hoping to survey your parents via e-mail. I will be sharing the process, protocols, and results with you to ensure all participants are protected and the study meets reliability and validity. I will not be interviewing the parents as I will be using an online survey. In addition, some parents will be asked to complete an online questionnaire to provide an in-depth perspective of personal experiences. If the initial survey and questionnaire does not yield the desired number of responses, a snowball effect allowing parents to share the survey may be used. All participants will be provided the appropriate informed consent form to ensure the parents understand the survey and have an opportunity to opt out. The parents will be given an online survey which required e-mails to be sent out.

If you are willing to allow your school to participate, I would appreciate the opportunity to talk with you and provide more information. I would need written approval (via e-mail) that you allow me to survey your parents pending my IRB approval. I would list your school in the research proposal and attach your e-mail to the IRB forms in July.

Thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in a meaningful research study. My contact number is 910-333-4880.

--

Cheers,

Rikki Hatfield

Appendix A continued: Site Approval Letter

John Eldridge 12:16 PM (35 minutes ago)

to Rikki

Rikki,

After speaking on the phone and hearing your proposal, I am comfortable in moving forward with the project (both the questionnaire and survey) once I have received and reviewed them both, and after you've received approval from IRB.

Please let me know what else you need from me to proceed.

Dr. John A. Eldridge
Chatham Charter School
Head of School
Office Number: 919-742-4550
Website: <http://www.chathamcharter.org/>



Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval



AMERICAN COLLEGE
of
EDUCATION®

August 19, 2019

To: Rikki Hatfield
Matt Smalley, Dissertation Committee Chair

From: *Becky Gerambia*
Becky Gerambia
Assistant Chair, Institutional Review Board
Office of Institutional Analytics

Re: IRB Approval

"The Contributing Factors Influencing Parents to Enroll in North Carolina's Charter Schools: A Mixed-Methods Case Study"

The American College of Education IRB has reviewed your application, proposal, and any related materials. We have determined that your research provides sufficient protection of human subjects.

Your research is therefore approved to proceed. The expiration date for this IRB approval is one year from the date of review completion, August 19, 2020. If you would like to continue your research beyond this point, including data collection and/or analysis of private data, you must submit a renewal request to the IRB.

Our best to you as you continue your studies.

|

Appendix C: Introduction of Study for Recruitment

Note: The letter was provided to potential participants via email and campus flyers.

Parents,

My name is Rikki M. Hatfield and I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education. I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation in Educational Leadership with an emphasis on Curriculum and Instruction. **The study is in no way connected to the charter school.** I kindly ask for your assistance with my research. The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study is to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to leave the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina.

I am currently seeking 100-250 parents to participate in surveys and questionnaires pertaining to their experiences when exercising their school choice option to enroll in a charter school instead of a traditional public school. The survey may take 10 ten minutes. The questionnaire consists of questions allowing you to share personal experiences and perspectives relating to the topic of the study. The surveys and questionnaires will be e-mailed through the school's server.

Your participation in the study will remain confidential, and your identity will be known only to Rikki M. Hatfield. Your cooperation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time by informing me that you no longer wish to participate. If at any time, you choose to withdraw as a participant of the study, please contact Rikki M. Hatfield at 910-333-4880 or e-mail at rmhat@hotmail.com. No questions will be asked if you choose to withdraw from the study. Likewise, you may decline to answer specific questions while continuing to participate in the study by responding to subsequent queries.

The surveys and questionnaires will be distributed on September 29, 2019. If you are willing to participate in the study, please contact me by email rmhat@hotmail.com or by telephone at (910) 333-4880. I look forward to your help with the research. Please carefully read the informed consent form prior to completing the survey.

Sincerely,

Rikki Hatfield
Rikki M. Hatfield

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form for Doctoral Degree Dissertation Research

Purpose of Research: The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study is to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to leave the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina.

Participation: If you agree to take part in the research project, you will be invited to participate in a survey and complete a questionnaire. You will not be asked to identify yourself by name on either instrument (survey or questionnaire).

The time required: The survey may take 10 ten minutes. The questionnaire consists of questions allowing you to share personal experiences and perspectives relating to the topic of the study. The questionnaire may take 20-25 minutes depending on your in-depth written responses.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks for participating in the research project.

Benefits: The research project will allow you the opportunity to express your views and experiences as parents who chose to enroll your child in a public charter school

Confidentiality: Your response to the interview questions will be confidential. Your identity will only be known by Rikki M. Hatfield and at no time will your actual identity be revealed to others. All participants will be identified by a numerical code. All survey and questionnaire responses will be retained by Rikki M. Hatfield and will be destroyed three years after completion of the project. Surveys and questionnaires will only include the numeric identifier.

The data obtained in the surveys and questionnaires will be used exclusively for the dissertation, future presentations based on the study, and other related research purposes. At no time will publications or presentations identify you by name. If you have any concerns, please feel free to contact American College of Education (ACE) Institutional Review Board at IRB@ace.edu.

Participation and withdrawal: Your cooperation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time by informing me that you no longer wish to participate. If at any time, you choose to withdraw as a participant of the study, please contact Rikki M. Hatfield at 910-333-4880, or e-mail at rmhat@hotmail.com. No questions will be asked if you choose to withdraw from the study. Likewise, you may decline to answer specific questions while continuing to participate in the study by responding to subsequent queries.

Researcher Contact: If you have any questions or concerns pertaining to the research and your participation in the study, please feel free to contact me personally. Rikki M. Hatfield at 910-333-4880 or e-mail rmhat@hotmail.com.

Agreement: The purpose and nature of the research have been satisfactorily explained, and I agree to participate in the study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Appendix E: Survey Questions

To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please place a 'check mark' in your choices.

1. I feel very safe and comfortable while visiting my child's charter school.

Strongly Disagree ____ Disagree ____ Agree ____ Strongly Agree ____

2. One of the reasons for choosing the harter school for my child was the smaller class sizes that do not exist in public schools.

Strongly Disagree ____ Disagree ____ Agree ____ Strongly Agree ____

3. My religious beliefs were factors in choosing the charter school.

Strongly Disagree ____ Disagree ____ Agree ____ Strongly Agree ____

4. I believe the academic instruction to be more rigorous in the Charter school than the public schools.

Strongly Disagree ____ Disagree ____ Agree ____ Strongly Agree ____

5. My child feels very safe and comfortable at school.

Strongly Disagree ____ Disagree ____ Agree ____ Strongly Agree ____

6. I believe smaller class size relates to better instruction.

Strongly Disagree ____ Disagree ____ Agree ____ Strongly Agree ____

7. I believe many parents value the rigorous curriculum existing in Charter schools.

Strongly Disagree ____ Disagree ____ Agree ____ Strongly Agree ____

8. I feel one's personal and/or religious beliefs to be important factors in choosing a Charter school.

Strongly Disagree ____ Disagree ____ Agree ____ Strongly Agree ____

Appendix F: Questionnaire Questions

1. How many years was your child enrolled in a traditional public school?
2. How many years has your child enrolled in the current public charter school?
3. What were the characteristics of the traditional public school in your zone that contributed to your decision to seek a charter school?
4. When you chose to leave the traditional public school did school personnel attempt to persuade you to stay?
5. When you chose to leave the traditional public school, did school personnel ask for your reason(s) why you are choosing a public charter school?
6. When looking for a charter school, what source of information do you think influenced your decision-making process?
7. Do you feel the enrollment process at the charter school was fair to all applicants?
8. What qualities influenced your decision to seek enrollment in the current charter school?
9. In your opinion, how have the academic innovations offered at your charter school impacted the educational needs of your child?
10. Which were the important quality or qualities influencing your decision to choose the current charter school?

Appendix G: Request for Improving Instrument

Rikki M. Hatfield, Doctoral Candidate, American College of Education

Dear [name here],

[Introduction], I am respectfully requesting your expert assistance. I am seeking approval from the American College of Education (ACE) Institutional Review Board (IRB) to proceed with my doctoral research. The first three chapters have been approved by my dissertation chair, Dr. Matt Smalley, and committee member, Dr. Katrina Schultz. However, to obtain approval from the ACE IRB, I am required to verify the validity of my research instrument (survey and questionnaire) with a panel of five experts.

The remainder of the first page will familiarize you with my study, the survey and questionnaire questions which I intend to use. The next two pages includes rubrics, one for the survey and one for the questionnaire, which I will kindly ask you to complete. Your expert recommendations and input concerning the efficacy of my research questions will assist me in ensuring they are appropriate for the intended research.

The purpose of the convergent parallel mixed methods case study is to examine the contributing factors influencing parents' decisions to leave the traditional public schools and choose a charter school in North Carolina. The study is guided by three research questions:

Researcher Question 1: What underlying factors influenced parents' decision to remove their children from traditional public schools in the designated school zone?

Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between the various factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from public schools to attend charter schools?

Hypotheses

H₂₀ : B₁ = 0: There is no statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

H_{2a}: B₁ ≠ 0: There is a statistically significant relationship between the factors influencing parents' decisions to remove their children from the traditional public school and choose a charter school.

The hypotheses focuses on the direction of the relationship addressed in question two.

Research Question 3: What attributes of education do parents perceive are the most important when determining a quality school?

Sincerely,

Rikki Hatfield

Appendix G continued: Request for Improving Instrument

Criteria	Operational Definitions	Score				Questions NOT meeting standard (List page <u>and</u> question number) and need to be revised. <i>Please use the comments and suggestions section to recommend revisions.</i>
		1=Not Acceptable (major modifications needed) 2=Below Expectations (some modifications needed) 3=Meets Expectations (no modifications needed but could be improved with minor changes) 4=Exceeds Expectations (no modifications needed)				
		1	2	3	4	
Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The questions are direct and specific.• Only one question is asked at a time.• The participants can understand what is being asked.• There are no <i>double-barreled</i> questions (two questions in one).					
Wordiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions are concise.• There are no unnecessary words					
Negative Wording	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions are asked using the affirmative (e.g., Instead of asking, “Which methods are not used?”, the researcher asks, “Which methods <i>are</i> used?”)					
Overlapping Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No response covers more than one choice.• All possibilities are considered.• There are no ambiguous questions.					
Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The questions are unbiased and do not lead the participants to a response. The questions are asked using a neutral tone.					

Use of Jargon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The terms used are understandable by the target population. • There are no clichés or hyperbole in the wording of the questions. 					
Appropriateness of Responses Listed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The choices listed allow participants to respond appropriately. • The responses apply to all situations or offer a way for those to respond with unique situations. 					
Use of Technical Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of technical language is minimal and appropriate. • All acronyms are defined. 					
Application to Praxis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The questions asked to relate to the daily practices or expertise of the potential participants. 					
Relationship to Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The questions are sufficient to resolve the problem in the study • The questions are sufficient to answer the research questions. • The questions are sufficient to obtain the purpose of the study. 					

Survey/Questionnaire Validation Rubric for Expert Panel – VREP ©By Marilyn K. Simon with input from Jacquelyn White <http://dissertationrecipes.com/>

* The operational definition should include the domains and constructs that are being investigated. You need to assign meaning to a variable by specifying the activities and operations necessary to measure, categorize, or manipulate the variable. For example, to measure the construct *successful aging* the following domains could be included: degree of physical disability (low number); prevalence of physical performance (high number), and degree of cognitive impairment (low number). If you were to measure creativity, the construct is generally recognized to consist of flexibility, originality, elaboration, and other concepts. Prior studies can be helpful in establishing the domains of a construct.

Permission to use the rubric includes in the dissertation manuscript was granted by the author, Marilyn K. Simon, and Jacquelyn White. All rights are reserved by the authors. Any other use or reproduction of the material is prohibited.

Comments and Suggestions

Appendix H: Verbal Logic Truth Table

Truth Table	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. I feel safe and comfortable while visiting my child's Charter School	XX	R	R	R	A	R	R	R
2. One of the reasons for choosing the Charter School for my child was the smaller class sizes	R	XX	R	R	R	A	R	R
3. My religious beliefs were factors in my choosing the Charter School	R	R	XX	R	R	R	R	A
4. I believe the academic instruction to be more rigorous in the Charter School than in public schools	R	R	R	XX	R	R	A	R
5. My child feels very safe and comfortable at the Charter School	A	R	R	R	XX	R	R	R
6. I believe smaller class size relates to better instruction	R	A	R	R	R	XX	R	R
7. I believe many parents value the rigorous curriculum existing in Charter Schools	R	R	R	A	R	R	XX	R
8. I feel one's personal and/or religious beliefs to be important factors in choosing a Charter School	R	R	A	R	R	R	R	XX

Beginning with a correlation between question 1 and 2 (second box across the first row), and 'if/then' statement is created to read: "If a parent feels safe and comfortable while visiting child's Charter School (question 1), then he/she states one of the reasons for choosing the Charter School was smaller class sizes." If the statement is not true, an R (reject) is placed in that box. As the evaluator begins to address all of the columns, a need exists to reverse the 'if/then' statement. For example, the only column in the first row that receives an A (agreement) is column 5. Looking carefully, one notices that number 5 is another question about school safety. Here we have: 'if a parent feels safe and comfortable about visiting the school/then his/her child feels safe and comfortable at school.' Looking more closely, we can be somewhat certain the 'if/then' statement is true (Agree).

In conclusion, one sees that the intersections receiving an A, are in fact the two questions selected to measure each of the constructs. We can be relatively confident that they are measuring the same thing, and not confident that they are measuring one or more of the other three constructs. We can then feel confident that our instrument is more valid and reliable and will likely measure what we are wanting to measure.

Appendix I: CITI Certification of Completion



Completion Date 08-Jul-2019

Expiration Date 07-Jul-2022

Record ID 31753610

This is to certify that:

Rikki Hatfield

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers (Curriculum Group)**Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers** (Course Learner Group)**1 - Basic Course** (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

American College of EducationVerify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?we6a8a0fb-a979-48e9-bfe3-04e0f64b34aa-31753610

Appendix J: Types of Validity

VREP is designed to measure face validity, construct validity, and content validity. To establish criterion validity would require further research.

Face validity is concerned with how a measure or procedure appears. Does it seem like a reasonable way to gain the information the researchers are attempting to obtain? Does it seem well designed? Does it seem as though it will work reliably? Face validity is independent of established theories for support (Fink, 1995).

Construct validity seeks agreement between a theoretical concept and a specific measuring device or procedure. It requires operational definitions of all constructs being measured.

Content Validity is based on the extent to which a measurement reflects the specific intended domain of content (Carmines & Zeller, 1991, p.20). Experts in the field can determine if an instrument satisfies the requirement. Content validity requires the researcher to define the domains they are attempting to study. Construct and content validity should be demonstrated from a variety of perspectives.

Criterion related validity, referred to as instrumental validity, is used to demonstrate the accuracy of a measure or procedure by comparing it with another measure or procedure which has been demonstrated to be valid. If after an extensive search of the literature, such an instrument is *not* found, then the instrument that meets the other measures of validity are used to provide criterion related validity for future instruments.

Operationalization is the process of defining a concept or construct that could have a variety of meanings to make the term measurable and distinguishable from similar concepts. Operationalizing enables the concept or construct to be expressed in terms of empirical observations. Operationalizing includes describing what is, and what is not, part of that concept or construct.

Appendix K: Example of a Scatter Plot

