

Church, State or Independent? Factors that influence nine parents' school preference

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Abstract

At a glance, the concept of school choice seems to be universal, a right enjoyed by everyone, but upon further reflection, several factors present themselves as potential stumbling blocks to prevent or even inhibit an individual's right to choose. Such potential choices can be seen in the Maltese educational system. This manifests itself in 3 main forms: State-led schools, Church schools and Independent private schools. The purpose of this study is to examine the aspects that nine parents took into account and describe how these factors, taken together, helped them make decisions about their children's schools.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine parents in order to gain insight on the decision-making process, where parents weighed up several factors in order to evaluate and single-out potential choices. These interviews revealed that parents, through the use of various means of communication, namely social media and word of mouth, were able to become aware of the different schools offered by each sector. Although school choice is individualistic in nature, it was discovered that parents were quick to point out the financial contribution needed in order to attend school, regardless of sector as well as put emphasis on the accessibility of each school as main features that frame school choice. This was followed by other factors namely educational quality, proximity, the perception of classroom size as well as further educational opportunities offered or gained through attendance. The analysis of the lived experiences of parents, helped to expose the factors on which ultimately hinged choice.

Keywords: School preference, State schools, Faith-based church schools, Independent/Private schools, Parents, Factors

Declaration

This work is dedicated to my mum, Deborah, whose unwavering love, support and encouragement have been my greatest source of strength and inspiration through my life, my educational journey, and beyond. If it was not for her, I would not be the man I am today.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	v
Declaration	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
List of Figures	xi
List of Tables	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction:.....	1
1.1 Research context.....	2
1.2 Research questions	4
1.3 Conceptual Framework	5
1.4 Significance of this study.....	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review:.....	8
2.1 Introduction to school choice	9
2.2 The difference between school sectors and parents’ perceptions within a wider context	11
2.2.1 State Schools	11
2.2.2 Faith based Schools.....	12
2.2.3 Independent Private Schools	13
2.3 Factors influencing school choice/preference	14
2.3.1 Social Class and Economic capital.....	14
2.3.1.1 High Socio-Economic families	14
2.3.1.2 The middle class and bourgeoisie	16
2.3.1.3 The working class	18
2.4 Cultural Capital and Educational Aspirations.....	20
2.5 The effect of community, proximity, and social networks	23
2.6 School Reputation, Academic performance and Peer Effects.....	24
2.7 The Role of Information and the Decision-Making Processes	25
2.7.1 Access to Information	25
2.7.2 Decision-Making Strategies.....	27
2.8. The development of the Maltese school sectors as a basis for preference.....	28
2.8.1 Developments in education in Malta and the progression of school choice post 1949.....	28
2.9. The Impact of Policy and Governance on School Choice	38

2.9.1 Policies and Marketization in Malta and abroad	38
2.9.2- Benefits of Marketisation	40
2.9.3- Challenges of Marketisation	40
2.10 Conclusion.....	41
Chapter 3: Methodology	43
3.1- Introduction	44
3.2- Aim of Study and subsequent Research Questions	44
3.3 The researcher’s positioning in the study	45
3.4 Research Methods	47
3.4.1 Theoretical Framework.....	47
3.4.2 Qualitative Research	48
3.4.3 Participant recruitment.....	48
3.4.4 Interview process and consent	50
3.5 Interviews as a data collection tool.....	53
3.6 Data Collection and Thematic Analysis	54
3.7 Ethical considerations	59
3.8 Limitations.....	61
3.9 Conclusion.....	63
Chapter 4: Findings	64
4.1 Introduction	65
4.2 Demographic characteristics of the participants	66
4.3- Factors that parents/guardians consider when thinking about sending their child/ren to a particular school	67
4.3.1- Knowledge based on different school sectors.....	68
4.3.2- Parent’s perceptions and experiences of Maltese education sectors.....	69
4.3.2.1- The effects of socio-economic status, expenditure and accessibility to education.....	69
4.3.2.2- Discipline and quality of education.....	75
4.3.2.3- Vicinity of school and catchment area.....	80
4.3.2.4- Educational journey and possibility of further schooling	81
4.4- Research parents/guardians conduct before enrolling their children into the chosen sector	85
4.4.1- Sources of information in order to create a school preference	85
4.4.1.1- The availability of resources in the public sphere	86
4.4.2- The role of school in generating preferences.....	87

4.5 Conclusion	89
Chapter 5: Data Analysis and interpretation.....	90
5.1 Introduction	91
5.2 Analysing parent’s perceptions of each school sector in the Maltese education system and eventual factors that led to potential school preferences	91
5.2.1- Accessibility and financial considerations	92
5.2.2- Perceptions on classroom size and quality of education	101
5.2.3- Proximity and catchment area correlating with school reputation	106
5.2.4- Possibility of further schooling within same system or college.....	109
5.2.5- Educational journeys within the Maltese education system.....	111
5.3- Analysis of the sources of information and research conducted by parent’s order to facilitate the creation of possible school choices.	111
5.4 Conclusion	113
Chapter 6: Conclusion	115
6.1 Synthesis	116
6.2 Limitations of the Study	119
6.3 Recommendations for Further research	119
6.4 Conclusion	121
Bibliography.....	122
Appendices	142
Appendix 1: Agreement on the Church schools (28/11/1991)	143
Appendix 2: Outline of the function of the Parents Foundation for Education	160
Appendix 3: General Regulations for Admissions into Church Schools, Malta (Year 1 Primary 2025-2026, Applicants born in 2020)	167
Appendix 4: Information Letter and Consent Form	180
Appendix 5: Interview Questions.....	188

List of Figures

Figure 1: The geographical location of the 10 colleges, spanning kindergarten, primary and secondary State education as formed by The Education (Amendment) Act, 2006.....	190
Figure 2: Timeline of the process of education in Malta	191
Figure 3: Evaluation process of parental school choice	192
Figure 4: Distribution of boys' and girls' enrolment found within private educative institutions (church and non-church) from scholastic year 1960-1961 to 1990-1991.....	193
Figure 5: Maltese Social Class as researched by Sultana (1991) encompassing the time of Church school debate (1984).....	194
Figure 6: Distribution of Educational Institutions between Government and Private Stakeholders (Church and non-Church) from scholastic year 1969-1970 to 1989-1990	195
Figure 7: Distribution of Educational Institutions between Government (State) and Private Stakeholders (Church and non-Church) from scholastic year 1990-1991 to 2007-2008.....	196

List of Tables

Table 1: Overview of sectors chosen by the participants that took part in the interviewing process.....	50
Table 2: Primary and Secondary coding	55
Table 3: Demographic information elicited from participants	66
Table 4: Summary of each parent's reason for school preference.....	83
Table 5: Overview of participant's chosen sector and the sources of information used	87
Table 6: Key observations taken from participant's insights	100
Table 7: Average classroom sizes in State, church and independent schools from 1970-2021.....	104
Table 8: List of schools in Malta, arranged according to sector:	197
Table 9: Amounts of capitulation grants given during the year 1970, according to each year group	199

Chapter 1:

Introduction:

1.1 Research context

Education has been a main staple for the human race, as to survive, thrive and evolve into our current form we currently occupy as Homo-sapiens in the 21st Century. Many a philosopher has tackled the meaning and effect of education and the reason why education is integral to our development, namely Socrates who highlighted rather than passively imparting knowledge to his students, gave importance to the act of learning through self-discovery using critical thinking skills and comparing one's findings to others, through dialogue, to form new understandings and insights (Knezic, Wubbels, Elbers, & Hajer, 2010). Building off Socrates, Dewey viewed education as a way through which a person can grow and learn through a student-centred pedagogy. This pedagogy further included aspects of socialisation including adaptation to the surrounding environment by engaging collaborative problem solving, in which they conduct themselves in a just and democratic manner (Saltmarsh, 2008; Rorty, 1999). On the other hand, Freire found the definition of education hidden among the pedagogy used, of which he was critical, seeing education as liberation and empowerment, a way to free oneself from oppression from those of the socio-political and socio-economical dominant class. Students were able to become fully free thinkers despite societal differences by culminating critical consciousness. This enabled them to see the true world around them, free from myths and propaganda, and achieve social reform. (Hederman, 1982).

According to the National Statistics Office (2018), out of a total of 280 schools that were established in the Maltese islands during the 2016-2017 school year, three distinct types of educational institutions were identified. These include the State sector Education institutions,

which consist of 159 schools, the Church Sector Education institutions, which consist of 77 schools, and the Private Sector Education institutions, which consist of 44 schools.

Given the multitude of educational options on the island, the concept of school choice or preference has become a key consideration for some parents. The decisions parents made are influenced by the elements discussed below. For some individuals, the decision may not have constituted a clear choice due to their circumstances; for instance, if parents lack someone to retrieve their child from school, they may elect to enrol them in a school near their workplace.

Within the findings of the 2015 PISA study (OECD,2015), school preferences, among participating countries, might be based on a variety of factors, including the ethos and philosophy of the school, its closeness to the student's home, its reputation, the presence of a safe school environment, the expenditures invested for such an education, or the academic accomplishment of both former and present students. Albert and Garcia-Serrano (2010) further discussed the concept of selection bias among families, such as those who favour private schooling, may hold key characteristics such as financial means and the social network, to assist them in making a decision. On the other hand, according to Bosetti (2004), parents made decisions based on information gathered from their social and professional spheres. It can be noted that some parents may not have the professional and societal networks necessary to make an informed choice.

It was stated also in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (2012) that all state schools would be grouped into a new college-based system that promoted continuity between

local primary schools and secondary schools. This system would include the teaching of a wide variety of subjects, including wood and metal work, home-economics, hospitality, and other subjects that are more traditional, such as foreign languages and the sciences. Schools that are both state-run and independent are co-ed, which means that both boys and girls are allowed to attend the same school. Additionally, schools have grown increasingly multicultural, which is reflective of society as a whole. Most Church schools continue to be single-gender institutions and have a far lower level of diversity. There is a possibility that these elements will impact the preferences of parents with regard to the education of their children.

1.2 Research questions

This study investigates the perspective of 9 parents/guardian's and the reasons behind opting for a particular school, first based on which sector they preferred, those being Government State schools, Church schools, and independent schools. Secondly, the study shall also delve into how parents/guardians were able to garner an attraction towards particular schools they chose for their children. The following research questions have been formulated in order to address the curiosity generated by the concept of school preference/choice as well as offer directionality to the research as it was being carried out.

- What are the factors that parents/guardians consider when thinking about sending their child/ren to a particular school?
- What forms of research do parents/guardians conduct to inform and aid in their decision making in regards to which sector and school is chosen?

1.3 Conceptual Framework

The primary scope of this study was to find out what factors' parents/guardians take into consideration when creating a preference/s for a particular school/s, taking into consideration aspects such as the academic quality provided by the school, religious affiliation, physical location and proximity to the household (Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson, 2015), among other attributes. Given the variety of school sectors in Malta, it is crucial to understand the history of each sector as it defines, how the current education system was conceived and developed up by looking at major educational milestones from the post war period till the present. It shall also give crucial insight to the distinction between Church, State and Independent schools in approach, vision and mission, administration and set-up and barriers/requirements for entry.

The literature review (Chapter 2) explores the evolution of school choice in Malta, tracing the historical developments of the three main educational sectors, namely, state, church and independent schools. It also examined the underlying sociological and economic factors that effected parental decision making, drawing on notions of social class and cultural capital as well as the effects of marketisation of education. This chapter elaborates on how school preference has evolved alongside political, economic and policy changes such as educational reform and increased competition within the Maltese educational sector. Through the critical analysis of parent's perceptions and the challenges they faced, may help to set the stage for the study's findings and their discussion with literature, helping the reader to understand the nuances of the Maltese education system.

The literature review chapter revealed the emergence of the marketisation of education in Malta throughout the late 1970s-1980s to the present day, in conjunction with the historical growth of schools. Educational institutions have been and continue to be regarded as private corporations competing with each other (Spiteri, 2016). These institutions can be classified as either Church or non-church independent schools based on whether they rely on donations or fees for access to education and are not controlled by the government's monopoly on state education. Marketisation provides parents/guardians with a range of school options, each with distinct qualities. However, not all parents/guardians have the opportunity to choose any school they want due to the fees associated with private schools. Consequently, their ability to enrol in a specific school depends on their socio-economic status and cultural capital (Butler & Van Zanten, 2007).

1.4 Significance of this study

The significance of this dissertation lies in its exploration of the complex decision-making process behind parental school preferences within the educational landscape of Malta. While education serves as a means of socialization and empowerment, the specific factors influencing parental choices regarding schools are multifaceted. The study's focus on understanding these factors through qualitative methodology, involving interviews with parents from different educational sectors, offers valuable insights into the nuances of decision-making. By examining factors such as academic quality, religious affiliation, and proximity to home, the research sheds light on how historical and contemporary developments shape the educational market in Malta. Moreover, the exploration of the marketization of education underscores the socio-economic

implications of school choice, where access to certain institutions is influenced by financial means and social networks. Through this lens, the dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between education, socio-economic status, and parental decision-making, which have significant implications for educational equity and social mobility in Malta.

Chapter 2:

Literature

Review:

2.1 Introduction to school choice

The concept of school choice is the act of parents choosing educational institutions for their children. Although it may seem deceptively straightforward, school choice can encompass a wide range of decisions, such as between different school sectors such as public/state schools, independent private schools, and faith-based schools among others. The increased implementation and enforcement of school choice laws, notably in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, represents a worldwide trend towards allowing parents more control over many elements of their children's education. The justification for these regulations is generally defended by claiming that they foster competition among various educational institutions, raise educational standards, and accommodate students' diverse needs (Lubienski and Weitzel, 2010).

Neoliberal educational reforms often discuss school choice, prioritizing market concepts such as competition, consumer choice, and decentralisation (Ball, 2003). Those who support school choice argue that it is beneficial to educational equity because it gives parents from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds the opportunity to choose the schools that are best suited for their children. Those who are opposed to school choice argue that it might make educational disparities worse by giving preference to wealthy families who have the means, experience, and cultural advantages necessary to negotiate the complicated school selection procedures (Burgess et al., 2009).

The education system found in the Maltese islands can be divided into 3 distinct sectors, firstly, State/government schools which can be divided into a series of 10 colleges, such as St. Thomas More College, St. Benedict's College and Saint Margaret's College to mention a few; are spread

around the island encompassing within their catchment area a number of schools within different towns and villages, which can be seen in figure 1 (p.190), showing the catchment area of each college on the map of Malta and Gozo. Within its' remit, the state also holds the Malta Visual and Performing Arts School as well as the National Sport School.

Secondly, there are various faith-based schools in Malta, under which a good majority of 43 schools under the management and directorship of the Secretariate for Catholic Education except for 1 faith-based school, Mariam Albatool school, which is a Muslim faith school but is categorised as an independent school, as categorised in table 8 (p.197) by the Ministry of Education (2024). These schools used to be single sex schools although in recent years, some schools have switched to become co-educational.

Lastly, Independent Private schools such as San Anton school and San Andrea school (Table 8, p.197), are completely distinct from any other governing body, made up from parent's foundations (appendix 2) and in order to attend charge fees for tuition, of which parents benefit from tax rebates from the government, acting as an alternate choice to the aforementioned school sectors (Eurydice, 2023). The 3 main sectors mentioned above offer education at different levels, namely pre-schools, kindergarten, primary schooling, secondary schooling as even post-secondary education, as defined by figure 2, showing the timeline of education in Malta by age (Figure. 2, p.191).

Parents' perceptions of the various available school sectors, namely state, faith based, and independent schools, are a critical factor in the decision-making process of selecting a school for their children. Throughout the decision-making process, parents assess the distinctive

characteristics of each sector in accordance with their personal values, beliefs, and educational objectives for their children. These perceptions may be based on a number of variables, as highlighted by Charles' (2011) model, which parents take into consideration when forming an opinion and ultimately a decision on a particular school, showing the process on how school preference is created. (Figure. 3, p.192).

2.2 The difference between school sectors and parents' perceptions within a wider context

2.2.1 State Schools

State schools are valued for being inclusive and easily accessible, despite being seen as the default choice in many nations. The majority of parents who send their children to state schools do so because they think the diverse curriculum and school climate will better prepare them for the social dynamics of the real world. According to research by Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz (1996), parents believe that their children's social development depends on their ability to "mix with others from different backgrounds", which is why they see state schools as important venues for this (p. 91).

However, there is a prevalent concern over the quality of education at public institutions. Reay and Lucey (2003) found that British parents often expressed worry about the large class sizes, insufficient funding, and perceived lower academic standards in public schools, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas. It was also found that for a good number of working-class families, with was simply down to luck "whether their house or council flat was in the catchment area of a good or poor state school" (Reay and Lucey, 2003, p. 126). Research

conducted in various nations has shown that parents may see public schools as less effective in providing individualised attention and offering academically stimulating opportunities compared to private or religious schools (Bosetti, 2004).

2.2.2 Faith based Schools

There is a common perception among parents that church schools, which are often linked with a variety of faith-based denominations, provide an education that is morally and values-oriented and is in line, more often than not, with their own religious views. The selection of these schools is based not only on the religious education they provide, but also on the perceived amount of discipline and organisation they exhibit. Research conducted in the United Kingdom indicates that parents appreciate the "strong moral framework" and "high standards of behaviour" that church schools provide for their children (Green & Triventi, 2020, p. 112). Typically, faith based schools are most often divided by gender, usually influenced by the monastic order in charge of the institution, which as a result could lead to a disparity in the access to faith-based education based on a number of factors such as the physical location and distance needed to attend school, whether it caters to either males or females, the family's socio-economic background in order to pay for tuition as well as the which aligned faith being followed at the school (Shah & Conchar, 2009).

Parents perceive that faith-based schools have an academic reputation that surpasses that of state schools, in addition to their religious affiliation. According to the findings of research conducted by Sikkink (2001) in the United States, parents often feel that church schools provide superior academic results and safer settings than state schools (p. 360).

Nevertheless, this perception may differ based on the specific context and the reputation and resources of the individual school.

2.2.3 Independent Private Schools

Perceptually, academic achievement, a specialised curriculum, and an abundance of extracurricular activities are often associated with private schools. Private schools are frequently selected by parents for their children due to their conviction that these institutions offer the most promising opportunities for future success. Buckingham (2010) argues that the perception of private schools as "incubators of privilege" is a result of their ability to provide students with networking opportunities and resources that are not available in state institutions (p. 305). Due to the fee-paying nature of independent schools, certain hidden fees in the form of "extracurricular activities, voluntary contributions and uniforms" have been found to act as a deterrent against those of lower socio-economic status (Yoon, 2019, p.8)

Parents typically choose private schools owing to the smaller class sizes and personalised attention they provide, believing that private schools are more capable of fulfilling the special educational needs of their children rather than state-based education (Dauber, 2013). According to Holmes (2002), private schools provide more customised educational experiences and individualised assistance in comparison to state or faith-based schools, thereby endorsing this perspective. Nevertheless, the limited access to private schools might also reinforce the continuation of social inequalities. This is due to the fact that private schools are accessible only to families with significant financial means (Campbell, Proctor, & Sherington, 2009). According to Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson (2015), when making a decision to send a child into

independent schooling, parents would also be making a future preference for younger siblings, to also attend the same school.

2.3 Factors influencing school choice/preference

In contrast to the idea that the choice of which school to attend is only a matter of personal preference, the decision is preceded by a wide range of social, cultural, and economic considerations. By using a sociological perspective, one may discover the underlying aspects that influence how school preferences are established. By delving into school choice, possible interaction with concepts of social class, cultural capital, academic achievement, information access, and local environmental influences among others may be uncovered.

2.3.1 Social Class and Economic capital

One's economic capital and resulting position within the social class hierarchy have a great impact on how parents perceive and act upon establishing a school choice for their children. Choosing a school extends beyond a mere decision about an educational institution for a child; it also functions as a reflection of broader socioeconomic inequalities.

2.3.1.1 High Socio-Economic families

Families with high socio-economic status, due to their significant economic wealth, has the most influence and the most mobility when presiding over matters of school choice, actively participating in the reproduction of social inequality (Lenkewitz, 2022). Families in this socioeconomic stratum have both the financial resources to attend top-tier schools, whether they are private or international, as well as the ability to exert considerable influence over these

institutions through financial contributions, social connections, and legacy admissions for their children (Zhang, Hu, & Hu, 2023; Ornstein, 2019).

Parents from higher socioeconomic classes often see schooling as a strategic investment aimed at preserving and improving their social standing (Müller, Pforr, & Hochman, 2019). Müller, Pforr, & Hochman (2019) further argue that parents often choose prominent private schools that not only provide rigorous academic standards but also give networking opportunities that might enhance their children's prospects for admission to esteemed institutions and high-status professions. This decision extends beyond academic achievements, ensuring their children's integration into social circles that uphold their social standing (Khan, 2011). In addition, the financial capital possessed by affluent families allow them to be quite selective when it comes to choosing a school, typically taking into account criteria such as the school's prestige, its network of alumni, and the socioeconomic composition of the student population. According to Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) and Lareau (1987) present that high socio-economic families closely linked their school selection to their desire to uphold their social status. Parents were more inclined to choose schools that provide a certain cultural prestige, thus strengthening their children's affiliation with the privileged class as well as their ease of access and comfort within such schools (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Lareau, 1987).

These families have the resources and the potential for representation to be able to influence school policies and curriculum, solidifying their position in the educational landscape of private schooling. Upper-class parents may exert influence over educational procedures by making substantial donations or actively participating in school events and positions of leadership such as those on school boards. This degree of control underscores how economic

wealth not only grants entry but also confers the authority to structure educational experiences in ways that sustain social inequity, further creating barriers to entry (Lareau, 1987). Due to the developments in education through the marketisation of education in the UK, the system of “educational selection is increasingly based on the wealth and wishes of parents rather than the individual abilities and efforts of students” (Reay, 2004, p. 539) thus showing that the market is favouring those with economic capital thus creating segregation between various groups based on their socio-economic status.

2.3.1.2 The middle class and bourgeoisie

When considering the broader middle class, economic resources remain essential in determining school selection; however, the specific factors may vary somewhat compared to the bourgeoisie. Typically characterised by a consistent income, high level of education, and professional standing, middle-class families are strongly committed to ensuring their children obtain a high-quality education (López-Calva & Ortiz-Juarez, 2014; Yoon, 2019). Families from the middle class are increasingly participating in the ‘school market’ i.e “shopping for the best school available in the education market” (Kosunen & Rivière, 2017, p. 3) in countries such as the United Kingdom, using their financial resources to secure admission to prestigious schools even though as identified by Napolitano, Pacholok & Fustenberg (2013), middle class families struggle to save money for their children’s education. Families can achieve this by either paying tuition fees or purchasing property in the highly sought-after areas where these schools are located (Reay et al., 2011).

A parent's financial resources may make up for their lack of educational capital when choosing a school, claims Akyol (2022). Small business owners and shopkeepers are able to send

their children to prestigious schools despite having lower levels of education than other middle-class parents because of the financial resources available to them through their businesses. Private schools are within their financial means, and thus they have more control over their children's learning experiences (Akyol, 2022).

These families closely link the concept of school choice to their aspirations for upward social mobility and the preservation or enhancement of their social standing, rather than solely focusing on academic results. Bathmaker, Ingram, & Waller (2013) drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1986) found that middle class individuals would be 'playing the game' to maintain their societal position through "the acquisition, maintenance, development and mobilisation of cultural, social and economic resources" (p.730). Bathmaker, Ingram, & Waller (2013) further discuss that in order to secure advantageous positions whether knowingly or unknowingly, this movement within the middle class can be attributed to assimilation into circles dominated by the upper-class i.e. private independent schooling. This is especially true for the bourgeoisie, as described by Karl Marx, who own enterprises, shops, and other revenue sources as means of production, putting much emphasis on meritocracy and quality education in order to maintain social standing (Hill, 2022). Even if bourgeois parents with working-class backgrounds have less formal education than other middle- or working-class individuals, their financial advantages influence their school choice, as they have acquired secure positional advantage when compared to the working class with access to better schools (Hill, 2022).

Due to their financial security, the bourgeoisie and middle class can contribute to paying school fees, participate in extracurricular activities, or relocate to more prosperous areas with

better schools for their children, as strong economic power typically gives these parents a greater voice in school selection, despite their lower education levels (Harding, 2011).

2.3.1.3 The working class

Despite facing financial constraints, working-class families also make considerable efforts to impact their children's educational accomplishments, whereas public perception would frame working class parents as not engaged in school culture due to their own experiences at school (Lavee & Benjamin, 2015; Barg, 2019). Barg (2019) continues by showing that working-class parents, may have fewer educational options due to financial constraints than middle class or high socio-economic value parents and may feel uncomfortable being involved in schooling, when the majority of the school is made up of the middle-class population. However, this does not mean that they are passive participants in the learning process. Working-class families were found to be ready to make concessions, albeit made difficult due to their low-socio-economic status and caring necessities. In reality few families were able to undertake additional employment or reduce expenditures in order to afford superior educational opportunities or relocate to regions/locations with more reputable state schools. (Lavee & Benjamin, 2015; Reay and Lucey, 2003). This is evident in studies indicating that working-class parents, despite their low economic status, demonstrated a high level of dedication to their children's education. Working-class families made practical decisions when it came to selecting schools for their children, influenced by variables such as proximity to the school, the school's reputation within the community, and the availability of support services (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003).

Furthermore, numerous parents from the working class engaged in "aspirational capital", as defined by Yasso (2005) as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future,

even in face of real or perceived barriers” (Narvaiz, 2023, p.13). By tapping into their aspirational capital, parents prioritised educational decisions that they believed would improve their children's future prospects, even if it meant making significant financial sacrifices. According to Rowan (2019), research has shown that certain working-class families were choosing charter schools or specialised programs within public schools for better educational outcomes, within the United States of America, as a way for securing the best possible education for their children. Bennett et. Al (2012) also highlighted how parents of working-class backgrounds prioritised their children’s social mobility and the strengthening of their children’s abilities all the while maintaining a high level of safety within school. Working class parents would also promote a greater deal of autonomy for their children to choose their free time rather than subject them to extra-curricular activities over the distrust of dominant social institutions (Snellman, Silva & Putnam, 2015). Conversely the middle-class parent’s desire to tailor make structured extra-curricular for their children’s participation are as a means to cultivating different skills and future success, thus nurturing professional attributes for social mobility (Martinez, Coker, McMahon, Cohen, & Thapa, 2016; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2016). Though this structured approach, gives allowance to middle class children to build cultural capital, developing skills and connections which are necessary for traversing the social sphere, leading to furthered success. However, for working class families, the time and financial investment in extra-curricular activities may prove impractical due to tight work schedules and less financial flexibility, have been found to rather embrace resilience and independence (Cheadle & Amato, 2011).

Social class distinctions show a clear disparity in both social and educational equity, as upper-middle class students benefit from having access to extra-curricular activities that foster leadership, teamwork, and discipline, whereas the working-class students may not have the opportunity for such development and learning, thus reinforcing divisions by social class based on economic and cultural backgrounds (Donnelly, Lazetic, Sandoval-Hernandez, Kameshwara, & Whewall, 2019; Snellman, Silva & Putnam, 2015).

2.4 Cultural Capital and Educational Aspirations

Cultural capital, coined by Pierre Bourdieu, highlights “The symbols, ideas, tastes, and preferences that can be strategically used as resources in social action” or a “disposition to act, think or feel in a particular way” (Oxford Reference, 2024). In order to access different levels of information, assets such as social class standing and economic status dictate to the amount of cultural capital and individual may absorb. To afford an individual access to and acceptance within spaces dominated by those of higher social calibre requires the aforementioned aspects as the working-class person may not have access to such cultural capital, within their habitus, in order to attempt to transcend the social ladder and assimilate with those of higher social class. This can be characterised by exhibiting cultural knowledge of “the knowledge of or competence of “highbrow” aesthetic culture such as fine art and classical music” (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p.568).

Cultural capital is highly debated by Edgerton & Roberts (2014) and Jæger and Karlson (2018), discussing that cultural capital is reproduced, knowing or unknowingly, through exposure, creating educational inequalities between those of a higher cultural capital and a

lower cultural capital, “which can be used to exclude others from positions of material or symbolic advantage” (p.778).

Parents that possess a greater amount of cultural capital are often more skilled at understanding and manoeuvring through the education system, as they are more equipped to make well-informed decisions about which schools are most suitable for their children, based on their desired outcomes (Vincent & Ball, 2007). Ball (2003) found that parents who have a higher level of cultural capital are more likely to prioritise the school's alignment with their own values, the possibilities of extracurricular opportunities, and academic reputation when making school choices. For instance, in the United States, parents who possess a significant amount of cultural knowledge tend to look for schools that provide advanced courses, well-developed programs, and a comprehensive curriculum that prepares students for college/university (Holme, 2002). In the UK, middle-class parents often choose schools that align with their geographical location, educational beliefs, with a particular emphasis on academic strictness, discipline, and the social environment of the school (Montacute & Cullinane, 2018).

A report by the UK Department for Education exposed the pertinent role of parental preferences, outlining that middle class parents were more likely to choose better performing schools which were able to cater their values of structure and discipline (Department of Education, 2014). This is further complimented by the findings of Williams, Hancer, and Hunter (1983) who understood that parents, regardless of their own enrolment in specific school sectors i.e. private or state schooling as well as their overall educational level, attributed as influences in their school choices for their children. This is in contradiction to Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau (2003) who, as previously discussed, that working class parent who may not possess

such cultural capital, were still able to make an informed choice from their selection criteria and values for schools, thus disproving that informed decision making is not conducted through solely cultural capital.

This is further emphasised by Hammersley (2024), who compares it to study undertaken by Gerwitz, Ball, and Bowe (1995) and Tooley (1997) in the United Kingdom, where they defined 3 types of choosers “Privileged” attributed to the middle class, “Semi-skilled” attributed to a mixture of classes and “disconnected mainly attributed to the working-class, once again framing the working class as uncaring for their children’s education” (p.3). This was evaluated by Tooley (1997) as unfair on families being classified and assuming that all members of a specific class were exhibiting characteristics of being either privileged, frustrated or disconnected from making school choice. Hammersley (2024) discussed Tooley’s (1997) argument that one cannot attribute characteristics to an entire class system solely based on their inclination to take interest in schooling and having the ability to provide socio-economic and cultural resources for the betterment of their choice, reinforcing stereotypes depending on class. Whereas parents from a working-class background tended to prioritise a more practical approach to accessing education, relying on proximity and convenient in travelling rather than evaluating the school’s academic achievements. This is debated by Glatter, Woods, & Bagley (1997); Shah & Conchar (2009); Montacute & Cullinane (2018), as in their research, all found that parents, irrespective of social class, preferred educational institutions which were nearer in proximity due to factor of convenience and nearness to their home and also took into account academic performance at the same time.

2.5 The effect of community, proximity, and social networks

The effect of the local community and social networks are tantamount in the school selection process and its effects have been acknowledged as playing a part in the form of “grapevine information that is spread in the social networks of families” (Kosunen & Rivière, 2017, p.1). This contradicts the assumption made by many that school choice is upheld on 3 pillars, those of location, social class and the concept of having a choice (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995).

Kosunen & Rivière (2017) give much importance to the act of school choice, considering it a family matter as the decision-making process is shared between the parents and the children. They identify how middle-class families tended to pre-select different institutions for their children, for them to choose from, thus avoiding disreputable local schools in favour for more prestigious schools beyond their immediate proximity. Kosunen & Rivière (2017) build upon Reveaud and van Zanden (2007) stating that some middle-class families are choosing local, government funded state schooling, as through their investiture in the schools result in better infrastructure and resources for the school and all the while supporting the local context, thus “making local, socially mixed schools attractive for also other middle-class families by many means” (p.3) when weighing up their options in the education market of schools.

Proximity matters in school choice as it plays a large role in a person’s routine, dictating the distance travelled, using a means of automotive or pedestrian transportation in order to get to and from school, thus effecting the care-giver who is with the children prior and past school hours. Further distance travelled for schooling coincides with the rise in concerns regarding

traffic and possibility of “traffic- accidents and stranger danger” (Kosunen & Rivière, 2017, p.4) due for the fact that children may be traversing to school unaccompanied.

Therefore, when selecting possible schools, families often rely on the perspectives and recommendations of fellow parents in their social circles. The process of decision-making through networking can potentially worsen existing inequalities, as parents from similar socioeconomic backgrounds often share similar information and preferences through their social networks (Burgess et al., 2009).

2.6 School Reputation, Academic performance and Peer Effects

A school's reputation is typically established before any official information is known about it. This reputation is often formed based on personal experiences and word-of-mouth, taking into account various factors such as academic achievements, the perceived competence of the teaching staff, the school's behaviour policies, and its standing within the community (Bosetti, 2004). It is further believed that there is a correlation between a school's reputation and the student population as Hanushek, Kain, Markman & Rivkin (2003) indicated that parents sent their children to a particular school based on the academic and social norms presented by the student population to better enhance their success in the education system and thus reinforcing the prestige of certain schools, driving parental demand in countries such as the UK and India (Allen & Bartley, 2017; Srivastava, 2007). The primary purpose of a school is to provide information to its students, which may be quantified using a variety of assessments methods. According to Lubienski (2007), prospective parents frequently prioritise good test results when

choosing a school because they believe it reflects a strong commitment to teaching and comprehensive curriculum coverage across all grade levels.

As previously discussed in section 3.1, not every parent has the unlimited freedom to choose a school according to its reputation due to their socio-economic status and cultural background. Parents who have a high economic status may have more freedom of choice, whereas working class parents may face a reduced choice, if any choice at all, being isolated due to the previously mentioned factors (Seghers, Boone, & Van Avermaet, 2019). They may be further affected by social “inequalities and increased stratification through creaming and other mechanisms” (McGinn & Ben-Porath, 2014, p. 173) meaning that working class parents, even if they do have the financial capital for schooling, may not be chosen based on their background, not fitting that of the school.

2.7 The Role of Information and the Decision-Making Processes

2.7.1 Access to Information

It is unreasonable to make the assumption that information, within its various formats does not affect the decision-making process in the creation of school preference. According to Ball and Vincent (1998) parents who attained higher levels of education and combined with a strong social habitus, were found to be better equipped at accessing and understanding information regarding various schools through statistics published. Slack, Mangan, Hughes & Davies (2014) discuss Ball and Vincent (1998) further by splitting knowledge into Hot or cold. Hot knowledge referring to information gathered through “social networks and relates to first-hand or second-hand recommendations” (p.208), seen by Ball and Vincent (1998) as more

reliable than school provided information. Cold knowledge, inversely, is the information provided directly by institutions “e.g. [university] websites and guides” (p.209).

It was found that Australian parents would rely on information published by a relevant authority such as governmental websites, or accessed directly through the school itself such as during visits as well through published school rankings, in order to guide them to make the best possible decision for their child/ren (Independent schools Queensland, 2019).

On the other hand, parents who may have a lower socio-economic status would possibly rely more on informal sources of information such as recommendations from others or the experiences of another parent within their community (Reay, 2004). This serves as a disadvantage as relying on an informal source of information can limit a parent’s range of options as the validity of the information or exposure of a variety of educational sectors may be limited within their particular community/social circle. On the other hand, McGinn & Ben-Porath (2014) found that “poor, minority and migrant parents” (p.173) in the USA, would muster time and money in the search to learn about their educational options for their children, and if these options were not agreeable, they would “engage collectively and with policy makers” (p.173) to better the choices for their children, reflecting their family’s needs and values.

Furthermore, within the last 30 years, another mode of accessibility to information came into existence in the form of the internet, which in of itself can also create disparities in the access of such information. Parents who may not be digitally literate or struggle to obtain internet access may encounter further challenges in making an informed choice in forming a

sound decision about a particular school, as a considerable amount of information that may be crucial to being informed is available online (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016).

2.7.2 Decision-Making Strategies

Strategies used during decision making can be better understood when placed within the theory of rational choice. Rational choice theory, according to Amadae (2024), helps to “better understand the behaviour of a society in terms of individual actions as explained through rationality, in which choices are consistent because they are made according to personal preference.” (Drew, 2022).

Drew (2022) summarises rational choice theory in 5 simple points, which when combined with the concept of school choice, helps to further understand how parents deal with finding an ideal school:

1. Decisions are simple matter of cost vs reward
2. People take action when benefits outweigh the cost
3. People will take no action, stop taking action, or take opposite action, when the cost outweigh benefits
4. People utilize the resources they have at hand to maximise opportunity and tip the scales of a decision in their favour.

Drew, C. (November 9, 2022).

By referring to rational choice theory, parents have been found to use a variety of decision-making strategies when weighing up their options between different schools, often ranging from more logical and evidence-based approaches whereas others may prefer a more

intuitive choice or based upon their morals and values (RogoÅ, & BaranoviÄ, 2016). Using rational choice theory, Friedman (1953), evaluated that parents act as rational agents in order to maximise the opportunity of their children's success by enrolling them within the most beneficial school, but this decision is further affected by one's aforementioned cultural or socio-economic status.

It can be witnessed that parents may differ in their priorities when it comes to evaluating the aspects of different schools. Whereas some parents may rely on exam results and educational achievement statistics and the school's reputation, others may prioritise a school's values, extra-curricular offerings if available, disciplinary measures as well as the experience of peers within the school (Bosetti, 2004; Glatter, Woods, & Bagley, 1997). Bosetti (2004) stated that parents would do their utmost to ascertain a balance between the concept of academic success offered by a particular school as well as other factors that would leave a positive impact upon their child's development and wellbeing.

2.8. The development of the Maltese school sectors as a basis for preference

2.8.1 Developments in education in Malta and the progression of school choice post 1949

The National Statistics Office (2018) recognised three categories of educational institutions among the 280 schools founded in Malta during the 2016-2017 academic year, divided into three sectors: state (159 schools), church (77 schools), and private (44 schools) at all levels i.e. pre-primary, primary and secondary education. The proportion of schools per sector is evident

of Malta's history of education with the church-based education dominating most of history, second, state-based education and lastly independent-based education. Major growth spurts that helped grow Malta's education system include creating compulsory education in 1949 for all children aged between 6 and 14, The B'Xejn jew Xejn debate of the 1980s and the subsequent rise of independent education as a response, and the eventual agreement between the state and the church in 1991. These events have led to the structure of the Maltese education system we find today, comprising of private independent schools (run by governing bodies or parent foundations), state owned and funded schools as well as state funded faith-based schools.

Cassar (2019) discusses that, in 1945, an increased number of Maltese families were interested in the educational betterment of their sons rather than their daughters. Despite the introduction of new girls secondary schooling adapted for entry into university, were guarded by a means test, resulting that not every girl had the chance to enter higher education unlike their male counterparts (Cassar, 2019). As a response, the Maltese government began to assume a more significant role in education with the passing of compulsory education from age 6 to age 14 and creating free primary education as introduced in 1946 (Zammit Mangion, 1956; Cassar 2019). It was further established in following the introduction of the 1947 Constitution (Zammit Mangion, 1956; Cassar 2019). Education became a focus of national policy, with the intent on the expansion of equal access to opportunities for all children regardless of gender, economic background, or religious affiliation (Sultana, 1992).

In order to provide education for all children, state schools began to provide free textbooks and transportation to school by 1956 (Fenech, 1964). This was followed by a common exam to

enter secondary schooling in 1961 thus providing a standard benchmark for admission into state schooling as according to Cassar (2019), this would have been beneficial to parents as it would have made them aware of different schools which lead to the same end level.

Parents were allowed to choose between different state schools, which were free of charge, and private schools, including those run by private institutions or Catholic Church schools, if they were willing or able to pay fees for such education. Due to the fee-paying nature of private schooling, the 1961 agreement between the state and the Private Schools Association (P.S.A) offered 100 fully-funded scholarship schemes, providing “50 boys and 50 girls” (Borg & Montebello, 1989, p. 110) each year to academically successful children from state schools who performed well in their end-of-primary written exams, enabling them to enrol in private secondary schools (Catholic church schools and Private independent schools) (Borg & Montebello, 1989). Additionally, this initiative served as a means of providing financial assistance, offering “the sum of LM40 each year for each 100 scholarship holders for the period they spent in Private Secondary schools” (Borg & Montebello, 1989, p. 110; Lewis, 1967). This scheme lasted till 1970 until it was gradually phased out over 3 years and was subsequently replaced with the capitulation grant system (Borg & Montebello, 1989).

The next major milestone of educational development occurred from 1971 to 1987, during which the elected Labour government led by Mr. Dominku Mintoff aimed to overhaul the education system. They sought to eliminate the unfair “Tripartite system of State-sponsored secondary education because of the social divisiveness and unhealthy competition which it

engendered among the students” (Zammit Marmara, 2017, p.277). The tripartite system included 3 government schools of which children would be able to attend, depending on their examination results either “Grammar Schools”, “Secondary Technical Schools” with specific exams and curriculum and “General Secondary Schools” for those who were considered “Low ability” (Zammit Marmara, 2017, p.277). This led to the development of comprehensive schooling within state schools, which involved abolishing examinations in favour of continual assessment, removing streaming within classrooms, and suggested reducing scholarships and private school fees to LM72 per student per year but would be subsidised by government capitation grants (Table 9, p.199). This decision would significantly cut a crucial source of income for private schools, putting some, like St. Albert The Great College, Our Lady Immaculate, and St. Catherine’s College, at risk of bankruptcy due to insufficient paying students and mounting running costs (Tomorrow, 1983).

The concept of comprehensive schooling was met with resistance from the population, parents, teachers, and school administrations due to the lack of clarity provided by the government and ministers. The government's introduction of comprehensive, state-funded schooling meant that students would not be defined and selected on “ability, need, personal characteristics, or family background” (Gorard, 2015, p.258). This concept left parents perplexed and concerned about the rationale behind its introduction and its future trajectory and as a result led to some parents removing their male children from state-run schools (Zammit Marmara, 2017; Gorard, 2015). The migration of male students from state to private schooling gained traction, with private schools, majority of students being sent to church schools, benefiting from the income through fees and the need to redefine and recalibrate their

standards and resources to cater to the new influx of privileged students (Zammit Marmara, 2017). The sudden rise of private schools was a severe blow to the state education system, as it created a division according to gender, leaving most girls at a disadvantage and victims of discrimination. This was evident in the educational statistics from 1960-61 to 1990-91 (Figure. 4, p.193), indicating that the private education had been equal towards providing education to males and female, distributed through the level of enrolment, with the difference becoming larger post 1967/68. It also shows the sharp rise in males in Private education post the introduction of comprehensive education in 1971.

Private schools, which were predominantly Catholic church schools, had been completely autonomous from the government, except regarding their curriculum (Zammit Marmara, 2017). At that time, the management of these schools was under the control of the Archbishop and his Curia. The remaining private schools constituted a minority, independently owned and governed by individuals or organizations without religious affiliation. The Labour government viewed these private schools as serving only the upper class, acting “as a nest for the nurturance and reproduction of elites” (Cilia & Borg, 1997, p. 224). This situation posed a threat to the Labour party's interests, as education was being defined by social class, with those within the upper class paying for private education to acquire and increase their “power, money and prestige” (Fenech, 1988, p.21) (Figure. 5, p.194).

By 1977, little less than half of the nation's male students were enrolled in secondary private education, as noted by Zammit Marmara (2017). The concept of comprehensive learning began to decay from the previous year and was subsequently phased out by 1981, leading to a return to the tripartite system.

By 1980, the schism between private and state education became increasingly evident. From the introduction of the Education for All scheme in 1972/73 until the scholastic year 1979/80, the total state school population decreased, while the number of students in private schools rose by 5,767. This trend was also reflected in the data, where private educational institutions increased from 74 schools in 1972/73 to 94 schools by 1979/80, indicating a growing demand for private schools. Due to the nature of the national statistics, one is unable to distinguish whether the increase was in Church school or independent schools (Figure. 6, p.195).

On July 17th, 1980, a correspondence page in the Times of Malta discussed the concept of Private and State schools and capitulation grants, inviting readers to react to a recent article.

Ms. Rose Camilleri from Paola contended that the standard of the state education sector, similar to the state healthcare system, had deteriorated, making it harder to compete with private schools. She claimed that the government had imposed unacceptable restrictions on private schools to level the playing field (Times of Malta, Thursday July 17, 1980, p.17). It could be understood that Ms. Camilleri was referring to the reduction in quality provided by private schools due to the restrictions such as higher income taxation, which can be contested due to the fact that most of the clientele of private schools (Church and independent schools), are families with significant financial means (Campbell, Proctor, & Sherington, 2009) and thus may have been willing to give more donations or stimulate the Curia to shoulder the burden of financing church schools, whereas at the time they were relying on the government's capitulation grant as a form of subsidy on top of the fee paid by parents for private tuition (Borg & Montebello, 1989; Central Office of Statistics, 1978).

Mr. G. Borg from Msida noted that readers supported a previous correspondence by Mrs. Tanya Montanaro Gauci from Sliema, who remarked that private schools only accepted high-achieving children from affluent families, implying that government schools served “below average families or those from needy backgrounds or who were orphans or educationally subnormal.” (Times of Malta, Thursday July 17, 1980, p.17). This is indicative of stereotyping of working-class families, as previously discussed by Lavee & Benjamin (2015) and Barg (2019), as being detached and not engaged in school culture and reinforcing the fact that private schools (both church and independent schools) were creaming a certain type of student and creating a barrier to entry for others social (McGinn & Ben-Porath, 2014).

Mr. Borg countered Ms. Montanaro Gauci's assertion that competition among students is “part and parcel of life,” stating that educationally gifted children do not necessarily come from high socio-economic backgrounds, matching the argument of Narvaiz (2023) and to Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau (2003) that working-class parents have the aspiration and do care about the educational outcomes of their children. He also criticized Maltese parents for spending on luxuries instead of investing in their children, while emphasizing the importance of paying fees and other contributions that would otherwise be free in other countries (Times of Malta, Thursday July 17, 1980, p.17).

By early 1981, the MLP highlighted within its electoral manifesto that education was to be free for all, including all private schools (Fenech, 2010). By adopting a free education for all policy to level state and private schooling, bore the slogan which would define the next decade in Maltese education history as the **‘Jew b’xejn, jew xejn’ debate (translated as: For Free or Nothing)** (Fenech, 2010). By 1982, tensions were still simmering but had transformed

themselves straying from the concept of free education, no matter a person's socio-economic background to the concept of balance between the government and the church's power (Borg & Montebello, 1989). This included the equitable distribution of the Church's wealth in support of church schools (Borg & Montebello, 1989). This manifested in the form of freezing state subsidy of church schools to stimulate the church to take financial responsibility for their upkeep (Borg & Montebello, 1989).

Due to the friction between state and church increasing from 1981 up to 1984, surmounted in riots, protests and violence (Fenech, 2010). Due to the climax in public fervour especially among M.L.P. supporters, dockyard workers rioted after instigation, on the 28th September, in the process ransacking the Law courts, in Valletta and after the Archbishop's Curia in Floriana, which caused the archbishop to fear further uprising by mobs turning on church schools. Therefore, on the 30th of September, the archbishop ordered all church schools closed and to be guarded by police, whilst instructing parents, students or teachers not to move anywhere near schools due to fear of being attacked. P.M. Dom Mintoff apologised to the archbishop and the deputy P.M. Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici admonished the workers quoting "Għamiltu aktar milli stennejna" (Fenech, 2010, p.13). The rioting and confusion also extended to government schools as mobs were also attacking state school teachers since becoming targets due to the lock-out ordered by the government due to an MUT teacher's strike over wages and work conditions (Fenech, 2010). During this time, since schools were not functioning and were not staffed due to the teacher's lockout or a lack of licensing, Fenech (2010) describes clandestine lessons taking place within state schools by untrained individuals. The Times also recounts how children who attended church and independent private schools, rather gathered

for private lessons in private residences as it was not safe for anyone to be within the vicinity of schools during this timeframe (Times of Malta, 20 November, 1984; Cassar, 2019, Calleja, 2015). To the relief on many, church schools re-opened on the 17th of November, 1984 and private independent schools such as St. Edwards opened on the 3rd of December due to licencing disagreements with the government (Times of Malta, 17th November, 1984)

The work aimed to conclusively resolve the church school debate, starting with the drafting of the education act of 1988. This act sought to safeguard the autonomy of church schools regarding financial aid, uphold the principle of free education, and ensure that parents had the choice between state, independent and church schools (Borg & Montebello, 1989; Parliament of Malta, 1988). The Holy See act of November 28, 1991, further solidified this resolution through two agreements: the Ecclesiastical entities (properties) act and the agreement on parental choice in education. This act, overseen by the Prime Minister and the Apostolic Nuncio for Malta, established the current relationship between church and state schools.

The first agreement facilitated the transfer of unused church properties to government ownership, valued at LM 29,316,862 in government bonds (The Times, November 29, 1991). The second agreement outlined 15 articles that required church schools to align with state schools regarding curriculum and conditions while gradually reducing government financial support. This included allowing church schools to finance themselves through various means, such as donations and tuition fees from non-Maltese students (Holy See agreement, 1991, p.6) (Appendix 1). It was later ratified in 1993.

In 1995, the ballot approach was introduced to manage church school admissions, aiming to provide equal opportunities for all applicants regardless of their background. This random selection method was intended to curb prejudice and favouritism, thereby enhancing the democratic nature of the admissions process (Gauci, 2005). The lottery system drew inspiration from practices in other countries, like the United States, where charter schools utilize similar methods when demand exceeds capacity. The Maltese adaptation emphasized transparency and accountability, with applications collected and a public draw conducted in the presence of independent observers and representatives from both the church and the Ministry of Education, ensuring trust in the new system (Borg & Mayo, 2006).

At this juncture, it was important to note the rise in independent schooling from 1988, which stemmed from the church school debate. This debate prompted non state/church aligned schools to seek independence from any church/state affiliations and possible, as they too faced losses and scrutiny. Notable institutions such as St. Edwards College, Verdala International School, and Chiswick House School were strengthened and others emerged during this period. The Parents Foundation of Education (P.F.E.) was established and opened San Anton School in 1988, followed by San Andrea School in 1992, heralding the concept of freedom in school choice, as seen in their aims and ideologies in page 3 of Appendix 2. Additionally, another independent group launched St. Michael School in 1988, responding directly to the debate through their own funding.

The Nationalist Government tenure from 1987 to 1996 encouraged this trend of educational entrepreneurship, allowing private schools to develop their own curricula and pedagogical approaches aligned with the national curriculum. This initiative aimed to provide

alternatives to an educational system that lacked choice. The government also facilitated opportunities for parents and students through financial aid such as reductions in income taxation and scholarships, thereby reducing the economic burden of fee-paying schools (Fenech, 2010; Camilleri, 2010; Baldacchino, 2009; Parent's Foundation of Education, 2023; Ministry of Education, 2003). Data from figure 7 (p.196), covering the scholastic years from 1990-1991 to 2007-2008, illustrated the distribution of governmental educational institutions alongside the growth of private educational institutions (both church and non-church) over a 17-year span.

The financial burden raised apprehensions over the long-term viability and quality of education offered by these establishments, since they primarily depended on punctual government funding to cover their operating expenses (Gatt, 2014).

2.9. The Impact of Policy and Governance on School Choice

2.9.1 Policies and Marketization in Malta and abroad

By ending the church school debate and once again assigning the full autonomy to the church schools in Malta as well as the flourishing of the Private Independent school sector, the concept of open marketisation of education was cemented in Maltese reality. Marketisation of education entails the transition from seeing education as a public benefit, financed and overseen by the government, to regarding it as a market-oriented industry, as schools and university's function more like to commercial enterprises. This process entails heightened competition, a wider range of options, and the participation of the private sector. In Malta, there is a clear indication of this pattern occurring throughout all levels of education, namely and most recently in higher

education. This is characterised by the notable endorsement of degree programmes offered by international institutions (Malta Independent, 2007).

Marketisation encompasses the crucial element of school choice, which gives parents the ability to choose for either public, faith-based, or private educational establishments. Advocates contend that this incentivizes schools to enhance their performance in order to attract and retain students, hence potentially resulting in superior educational results (Hoxby, 2020). Nevertheless, some argue that this practice might worsen inequality, since schools in affluent areas, and depending on a certain sector, tend to get more resources, leaving those in economically disadvantaged locations at a disadvantage in terms of competition (Lubienski, 2019).

2.9.2 Historical context and the drive for marketisation

From a historical perspective, the majority stakeholder of education system in Malta was centralised, with the state maintaining control but during the 1980s and 1990s one can begin to notice a shift, as found by Ball (2007) showing a trend of decentralization, further influenced by neoliberal policies that helped to promote competition within the sphere of education. These reforms took to empower schools to cater to the local needs rather than rely on the state, thus displaying an improvement rather than relying on state bureaucracy but Ball (2007) further argues that through decentralising education enhances the concepts of “democracy and common equity” (Ball, 2007, p.9) as agreed by Mifsud (2016) who states that it creates “Communities where parents, teachers and administrators come together to develop a sense of purposeful educational leadership” (Mifsud, 2016, p.5) thus a greater sense of autonomy. This

shift has been further aided by Malta's introduction into the European union and encouragement of policies of decentralisation, school autonomy, and accountability, have been taken on to improve the educational yield of schools in Malta as well as aligning skills through significant changes within the curriculum, with those in demand in the labour market (European commission, 2022; European commission 2020). By up taking the aim "being that of renewal-modernizing" has given the opportunity of Malta to grow "in line with global policy development", thus "be in a better position to cater for the needs of students through an enhanced teaching and learning process" (Mifsud, 2016, p.5).

2.9.2- Benefits of Marketisation

Those in favour of marketisation would establish the fact that through introducing privatisation into the sphere of education, one can foster a number of new systems which are in tune to the needs of their students as well as the demand from the labour market, as discussed above. The main aim of marketisation is the creation of competition between institutions which acts as a vehicle for heightened quality due to create an attractive educational package for prospective students which can include enhanced facilities as well as a wider scope of academic courses which are industry- relevant (Dumay & Dupriez, 2014).

2.9.3- Challenges of Marketisation

Although marketisation brings forth much needed quality and diversification to education, concerns may be raised in regards to access by students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Due to the capitalistic, competitive based market, students of a lower socio-economic background may be left at a disadvantage, especially as wealthier families could afford better resourced private schools (Ravitch, 2014). Subsequently, leaving lesser-funded

schools for those who cannot pay tuition fees, as evidenced in the United States (Ravitch, 2014). Recent data shows a de-facto two-tier system in Malta, where private and faith-based schools enrolled higher SES pupils and achieved a higher PISA outcome than state schools (European Commission, 2024; Camilleri, 2024), which further exemplifies how marketisation stratifies education (Ball & Youdell, 2008)

2.10 Conclusion

The concept of school choice is complex, since parents' choices are shaped by an intricate interaction of social, economic, cultural, and political elements. When looking at it from a sociological standpoint, variables like socioeconomic status, cultural capital, and community networks have a significant impact on the decisions people make about which school to choose. These factors frequently contribute to the perpetuation of existing disparities. Parents' choices are influenced by their values, views, and goals for their children, causing them to seek out for schools that match their educational philosophies, religious convictions, or cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, in order to find out the factors that influence a parent's school preferences, I propose the following research questions in order to delve deeper into the topic at hand

- What are the factors that parents/guardians consider when thinking about sending their child/ren to a particular school?
- What forms of research do parents/guardians conduct to inform and aid in their decision making in regards to which sector and school is chosen?

Although school choice is often advocated as a method to enhance educational quality and promote fairness, it also gives rise to substantial apprehensions over social justice. Unequal distribution of the ability to choose schools may lead to increased segregation and inequality, especially in certain circumstances. The extension of school choice can further worsen these issues.

Chapter 3:

Methodology

3.1- Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine the lived experiences and rationale taken by parents in regards to sending their children into different school sectors, namely Faith-based, State, and independent schools. Overarchingly, identifying the characteristics of the parents and guardians who opt for each different sector as well as the characteristics, they deem important for the children's education. In order to understand their preferences, it necessitates a thorough and systematic approach, through the use of a qualitative dimension in parental or guardian decision-making. This chapter will elucidate the research design, overarching research questions, participant selection process, data collection method, and analytical technique employed to uncover the factors influencing these educational preferences.

3.2- Aim of Study and subsequent Research Questions

As discussed in the previous chapter, the choice of school for their children is one of the most significant decisions that parents make, impacting not only their child's education but also their social and emotional development (Reay, 2004). The purpose of this study is for the researcher to discover the rationale and influential factors behind parental or guardian school preferences through the collection and subsequent analysis of the lived experiences of parents whose children attend church, state, or independent schools. This data collection aims to identify the diverse characteristics of parents and the significant aspects of schools they value, while also shedding light on how parents gained knowledge to shape their preferences and make informed decisions, as demonstrated in Chapter 2.

Thus, the research questions formulated to identify and discover school preference are:

- 1. *What are the factors that parents/guardians consider when thinking about sending their child/ren to a particular school?***
- 2. *What forms of research do parents/guardians conduct to inform and aid in their decision making in regards to which sector and school is chosen?***

The researcher investigated each participant's demographic characteristics to identify the types of parents who sent their children to a school within a specific sector of the education system, while also accounting for a variety of factors mentioned by parents. In order to accurately collect this data, a qualitative approach was adopted in order to understand the lived experiences of the participants.

3.3 The researcher's positioning in the study

To provide the reader with clarity regarding the interpretation of the findings in the next chapter, it is critical to consider the researcher's background and experiences in order to further justify the findings. The researcher's unique viewpoint profoundly influences the process of data collection and interpretation, whether consciously or unconsciously through biases. This can be manifested by the lived experience of the researcher, who attended a state school for kindergarten and primary. The researcher's parents attempted to enrol him in a Catholic church kindergarten, but the ballot system did not select him. During their fourth year in state primary school, he took an entrance examination to join a Catholic church primary school as part of a larger college, as there were vacancies within the specified year group. At the end of year six, the researcher's parents admitted him, the researcher, for the secondary church school ballot

and he was chosen to attend a Catholic church secondary school of his choosing. The researcher then proceeded to enrol in a state 6th form, and subsequently, he was accepted into the University of Malta. This extensive journey through the education sector has inspired the researcher to examine the social aspects of school choice, focusing on sociological factors such as social class, the history of education, and the segmentation and privatization of education. In line with the findings of O'Keefe et al. (2017), which alluded to the correlation between a person's particular topics of interest, the researcher can help to manifest a prolonged degree of motivation and persistent engagement throughout the research process.

Given his background, experiences, and interests within the education sector, the researcher believes that this study seeks to contribute to the broader conversation about school choices by highlighting the perspectives of parents and the complex factors that guide their decision-making process. One can anticipate that the findings of this research will have practical implications for parents and the educational sphere as a whole. This study aims to act as a possible recommendation for policymakers and educational institution leaders about parents' needs and preferences by identifying the crucial elements that impact school choice. Moreover, the acquired insights may further assist parents who are presently in the process of choosing a school for their children, offering them a broader understanding of the possible advantages and disadvantages of various school types.

3.4 Research Methods

3.4.1 Theoretical Framework

The researcher conducted this qualitative research using phenomenological and interpretivist epistemology, which provided strong theoretical foundations for extracting and analysing the study's findings. Phenomenology, a branch of philosophy, is concerned with studying people's subjective experiences in order to understand how they perceive and give meaning to these experiences (Van Manen, 2016). This type of approach is especially appropriate for analysing the school choices of parents, since it focuses on their individual, subjective experiences and interpretations, hence offering profound insights into their decision-making processes. Phenomenology aims to understand the fundamental nature of these experiences, enabling a deep understanding of the emotional and intellectual aspects that influence the decision-making process while choosing a school (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Interpretivism emphasizes the importance of interpreting interpersonal events based on the perspectives of the individuals involved (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). Crotty (1998) suggests that society creates reality, which one can only comprehend by examining the significance and explanations people give to their own experiences. By using an interpretivist framework for this study, researchers may gain a deeper understanding of the many viewpoints and contextual factors that shape parents' choices for schools. This theoretical framework promotes the use of qualitative research methodologies, which aim to investigate the intricate and profound interpretations that parents attribute to various kinds of schools (Geertz, 1973).

3.4.2 Qualitative Research

For the purpose of this study, qualitative research has proven particularly beneficial for examining parents' viewpoints on their school choices, whether they are church, state, or independent schools, since it delves into the subjective experiences, motives, and values of individuals in great detail. This type of research method enables a thorough and detailed comprehension of the reasons why parents prefer some kinds of schools over others. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), a qualitative approach takes into account the intricate combination of personal and environmental elements that quantitative methods could fail to include. By employing methodologies like in-depth semi structured interviews, as used during this study, researchers can gather comprehensive and rich narratives that uncover the fundamental motivations behind parents' choices, providing critical insights for policymakers, educators, and administrators seeking to address parental concerns and improve educational conditions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The use of qualitative approaches in this research allows for a comprehensive examination of parental preferences, revealing underlying themes and patterns that may not be readily discernible via quantitative data alone (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

3.4.3 Participant recruitment

Nine participants were required for this study in order to provide a clear indication of parents' or guardians' intentions regarding school choice and the reasons behind their decision. The researcher further subdivided the nine participants into three parents from each school sector to ensure a harmonious and fair assessment of each sector, ensuring equal representation and reducing bias. This specific sample of nine parents was decided upon due to

the impossibility of obtaining data from the entire population of parents. This sample of individuals shall act as an indication of the reasons of parental choices and how they backed up their decision-making process. In order to begin the recruitment process, I first sought permission and approval of my research from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) under the application number EDUC-2023-00749. The recruitment of participants entailed the contact of three different social media groups on Facebook, namely “Are You Being Served (Malta & Gozo)”, “Is-Salott”, and the Maltese Association of Parents of Students in State Schools “M.A.P.S.S.S.”.

After obtaining all necessary permissions, I initiated contact with the administrators of each social media page to facilitate the creation of a post for upload, while adhering to any existing rules on these pages. At this stage, I had only managed to garner permissions from “Are You Being Served (Malta & Gozo)” and “Is-Salott” and henceforth created posts to recruit potential participants. The “M.A.P.S.S.S.” failed to respond to my request. Through these social media posts, I successfully enlisted five participants using random sampling, taking into account the sector (church, state, or independent) where the participants chose to send their children.

Simple Random sampling was chosen as through this method I was able to recruit participants at random for an interview in an unbiased manner (Singh & Masuku, 2014). During the pre-interview discussion, I was able to turn away participants depending on the sector in which they attend, to whether I had enough participant for a particular sector.

This approach was hoped to ensure equal representation of each sector in the study and facilitated a deeper investigation into the diverse experiences of the participants but the

participants acquired proves otherwise. The researcher acknowledges that the division of [participants per sector are not equal, with state and church schools being the chosen type of school, whereas only 2 participants sent their children to independent schools. Word of mouth and the general interest in my academic progress led to the recruitment of the next four participants through snowball sampling.

During the process of recruiting potential participants, I encountered participant attrition. Some potential participants declined to continue with the study, citing various reasons such as family commitments, discomfort or uncertainty due to the nature of the research involving their children, while others did not proceed with the recruitment process to schedule an interview for unknown reasons. The study further explores this phenomenon within its limitations.

3.4.4 Interview process and consent

This study's primary research component involved conducting semi-structured interviews with nine parents. Parents with children currently enrolled in local primary schools across the three education sectors in Malta. i.e. state, church/ faith based and independent schools, participated in this study.

Table 1: Overview of sectors chosen by the participants that took part in the interviewing process

Pseudonym of participant	Sector/s chosen for education
Anna Mallia	State and church schools

Grace Magro	Independent school
Adelaide Bartolo	State/Independent schools
Jamie Debattista	State school
Mary-Rose Theuma	State school
Tina Ellul	Church school
Zoya Brincat	Church school
Ian Pace	Church school
Jessica Borg Schembri	Church school

The researcher specifically designed these interviews to gather comprehensive and in-depth information and rationale about parents' preferences for various factors in church, state, or independent schools. Every participant was sent an invitation to participate in a 35–45-minute interview at a venue of their choice, providing them with flexibility and comfort to foster candid and sincere conversation. Most of the participants chose the online meeting option because it allowed them to allocate the interview more easily within their personal schedules. Flexibility played a vital role in reducing the scheduling challenges that were faced by myself as well as the participants and enhancing the rates of involvement (Lo Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016). I made the decision to offer two modes of participation to mitigate possible obstacles to participation and ensure that parents felt at ease and comfortable throughout the interview process by providing the participants with the opportunity to tailor their experience. Only 4 participants agreed to an in-person interview, which took place in locations of their choosing, such as their home, place of work, or a public garden.

Before commencing the interview, participants signed a consent form that ensured their understanding of the study's purpose, the use of their data, and their right to withdraw at any time. In accordance with the principles of qualitative research, they were also given the option to consent to the recording of the interview of which 5 participants from the total agreed. This common procedure aims to guarantee the precision and dependability of the gathered data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Four of the participants did not consent to being recorded therefore the interviews were written at the time of the interview due to concerns over the sensitivity of the data being spoken about and for that reason did not consent.

During the interview process, the participants were able to choose whether to speak in English or Maltese. Participants were asked an initial demographic question led by a total of 13 main questions divided 8 questions to answer the first research question and 5 further questions to answer the second research question. Due to the nature of the interviews, being semi-structured, as the researcher, it was possible to allow flowing conversation with an aim of answering my main questions as well as asking additional questions for further clarification and probing deeper into the topic. All of the participants bar 1 chose to do the interview in the English language. The information letter and consent form addressed to the participants is found within appendix 4 as well a copy of the interview questions asked during the interviews, in both English and Maltese can be found within the appendix 5.

3.5 Interviews as a data collection tool

Interviews are a fundamental and widely used aspect of qualitative research, providing sincerity and reliability by enabling researchers to thoroughly explore the actual experiences of participants. Interviews are extremely effective at collecting the intricate nuances that characterize human opinions, yielding abundant and intricate data that quantitative tools often overlook. Interviews are credible because they allow researchers to get detailed insights by directly interacting with participants. This engagement allows researchers to ask follow-up questions and gain a comprehensive grasp of the participants' perspectives (Kvale, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews provide a well-rounded approach by blending the adaptability of open-ended questions with the uniformity of a regulated style. This methodology enables researchers to investigate pre-established topics while also giving participants the autonomy to articulate their opinions using their own language. According to Bryman (2016), this adaptability aids in the discovery of unforeseen insights and themes, thereby increasing the depth of the gathered data. In addition, semi-structured interviews promote a more authentic and colloquial exchange, fostering a sense of ease and willingness among participants to freely disclose their experiences (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

The strong connection between the interviewer and interviewee bolsters the credibility of the data gathered through the interview process. This connection cultivates a sense of trust, which encourages individuals to be more open and honest in their responses. King & Horrocks (2010) have shown that establishing a strong connection is essential for collecting accurate and reliable data, as it reduces the influence of social desirability bias and other types of response bias.

In addition, semi-structured interviews have the benefit of capturing the intricate and subjective elements of participants' experiences. Researchers can delve into specific themes that emerge during conversations, thereby gaining a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Galletta, 2013). The cyclical nature of these interviews allows a researcher to improve questions based on previous replies, ensuring that the obtained data is both pertinent and comprehensive and delves deeper into the chosen topic.

To summarize, interviews, particularly semi-structured ones, provide significant benefits in qualitative research by guaranteeing authenticity and trustworthiness. They conduct a thorough investigation into individuals' personal experiences, resulting in detailed and intricate data that is critical for understanding complex social phenomena.

3.6 Data Collection and Thematic Analysis

After conducting the interviews, the first stage of data analysis was transcribing the recorded dialogues. Every interview was transcribed verbatim to guarantee the precise capture of any intricacies in the participants' responses (Poland, 1995). In order to adhere to ethical guidelines and protect the privacy of the participants, all identifying information, including names, places, and precise details that may potentially disclose their identities, were made anonymous. Implementing this step was critical to safeguarding participant anonymity and complying with ethical principles and standards set out by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) and the University Ethics Research Committee (UREC) (Kaiser, 2009).

The transcribed data subsequently underwent thematic analysis, a meticulous approach to identify, analyse, and describe patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first coding method involved identifying and categorising portions of the data into overarching generalist themes. These first topics provided a framework for understanding the main areas of interest in parents' school choices.

The researcher, then conducted a second, more detailed coding step to refine these themes and identify sub-themes within the data. The cyclical procedure included a thorough examination of the coded data to provide profound insights and a more intricate understanding of the participants' declarations (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). By dissecting the data into more detailed subcategories, the analysis might expose the intricacies and interrelationships in parents' decision-making processes, enhancing the overall conclusions of the study. In the following table below, samples of the coding process shall be presented from random respondents, taken using question.

Table 2: Primary and Secondary coding

Question 4: Do you think certain schools carry a particular stigma or association?	Primary coding	Secondary coding
	behaviour	

Yes, it is generally known that state school can be rougher and that church schools give a higher level of education, especially since I pay for it and that it follows the Catholic religion.	Better quality education due to fee paying nature and religious aspects, in church schools: Concept of fee paying; The effects of religiosity	Disparity in behaviour between State and Church schools Link between fees, religiosity and behaviour
They do. In fact, I do have a concern when it comes now to middle school and, and secondary school. I'm afraid of my daughter getting lost, in the system Because of the sheer volume of students, especially coming from a very small state school. And then you're going to a big college with a lot of students. So, there is that stigma, I guess, that they're	Concern due to size of middle and secondary schools: Classroom size and school population	State school having larger classroom sizes "Sheer volume of students"
	Lack of discipline in state schools	Concept of safety within schools
	Teachers discussed as not being attentive to individual children due to the number of children within the school	Teachers are busy and do not give heed to students: Teachers seen as uncaring in larger secondary state schools
	Identifying their role as a parent in making a school choice for their child. "I think	The role of the parent in decision making: Concept of responsibility of choice

rowdy, that they're violent, that, teachers are so busy that they don't really care. They just keep going. At the same time, like, I think now the parents have to play a role in this.	now the parents have to play a role in this”	
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Question 8: What do you think of this statement? “Every child, regardless of school sector, has the same educational journey as other children in the different sectors.”	Primary coding	Secondary coding
Well, I would have to agree with that it doesn’t matter how much money you throw	Financial contribution does not affect child’s educational journey	Socio-economic status and financial contributions

at something, all schools teach well and all have the same subjects it comes down to the child's willingness to learn and the teacher's ability to teach rather than the building the lessons are held in.	Perception of schools teaching the same curriculum	Concept of quality education
	Teacher's method of teaching and passing knowledge	
	Children's willingness to learn	Student motivation to learn
I do not agree with this statement as I believe that my children under Gods wing will blossom in their education where as children from state schools are left to fend for themselves more will have a harder time to succeed. Where as a child from a private school knows that mummy and daddy have enough money to keep them so they care less about their educational journey.	Church school's religious aspect helps to nurture children's education	Religiosity and its' effect in church schools
	Perception of State school children left unsupported and therefore find it harder to succeed in education	Support in education
	Perception of parents who send their children to independent schools may care less of educational journey due to socio-economic status	Socio-economic status Aspirations for education

The methodical use of semi-structured interviews, along with meticulous theme analysis, offered a strong framework for investigating and comprehending the varied viewpoints of parents about their school choices. This approach assured that the gathered data was thorough and highly perceptive, making a substantial contribution to the research's authenticity and trustworthiness.

3.7 Ethical considerations

In order to carry out this research, it was required to obtain FREC approval, under the application number EDUC-2023-00749, in order to gather information from participants and to make sure that the process of doing so was not in breach of ethical considerations, on behalf of myself as a researcher, my participants and the University of Malta.

Ensuring the ethical integrity, encompassing authenticity and trustworthiness within this study, was of utmost importance, especially considering the sensitivity surrounding parents' school choices for church, state, or independent schools. The researcher adopted several steps to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' data, adhering to the criteria set by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Prior to the gathering of information, all participants were obligated to provide their signature on physical consent forms, which explicitly detailed the goal and procedures of the study, as well as their rights, including the ability to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences. Those participants whose interviews were held online, were sent a soft copy of the consent form, to be printed and signed physically

and sent back to the researcher. The procedure ensured that participants had a comprehensive understanding of the nature of their engagement and the safeguards in place to maintain their privacy (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

In order to ensure the confidentiality of the data, pseudonyms were allocated to each participant, and all personally identifiable information about them or their children was eliminated from the transcripts and reports. This was further extended to the names of schools, if they were highlighted, as well as specific information making certain schools identifiable. Implementing this step was important in preserving confidentiality and guaranteeing that the parents' shared information could not be linked back to them personally (Kaiser, 2009). In addition, I, the researcher, ensured the data's security by storing it on encrypted devices and restricting access to only authorised persons, as stated in the consent forms.

Establishing rigorous standards for data management alleviated the participants' concerns about the potential disclosure of sensitive information. For instance, the researcher conducted all digital interactions with participants, including interview arrangements and follow-ups for additional information, using safe and encrypted methods. During the analysis phase, the researcher meticulously displayed the data in a generalist manner, preventing the identification of individual replies, even for those familiar with the participants' situations, without altering the provided data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

These ethical concerns were not only essential for adhering to FREC and UREC requirements and standards, but also vital for fostering trust with participants, enabling them to openly express their thoughts. The research maintained the highest ethical standards by

prioritizing the participants' best interests and permissions, thereby ensuring the reliability and ethical integrity of the obtained data.

3.8 Limitations

Various limitations impacted this study on parents' school choices for church, state, or independent schools, despite the methodological merits and in-depth findings of qualitative research. The drop in participation numbers as a result of scheduling challenges raised a major concern. Numerous parents, who are balancing their job and family obligations, had difficulty committing to interview schedules, leading to a decrease in possible participation. Studies have shown that schedule problems often arise in qualitative research, resulting in smaller sample numbers and possibly partisan findings due to the researcher's own biases as well as those emerging from the participants, especially if they have a similar background (Sandelowski, 2000; Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Additionally, inadequate communication and a lack of reaction from some parents hindered the research process. Non-response is a well-acknowledged issue in qualitative research, referring to the situation when individuals who first express interest do not continue to participate (Groves et al., 2002). The recruiting procedure was hindered by participants who either failed to reply to further messages or chose not to continue with the research after the first contact, leading to an extension to the timeframe allotted to finding potential participants, in order to substantiate the number and ratio of participants and make this study a fair comparison between the three main school sectors.

Another significant constraint was the reluctance of some parents and guardians to participate in the study due to concerns over the preservation of confidentiality and the possible disclosure of sensitive data. The researcher noticed that parents and guardians were cautious about discussing their children's schools and the reasons for their selections, fearing that their comments might unintentionally reveal sensitive information about their socio-economic position, cultural knowledge, political preferences, or religious convictions, especially during the recording of their responses. This worry aligns with the results of prior research, which emphasise the difficulties in eliciting honest replies when participants are concerned about potential social or personal consequences (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). Many parents were reluctant to fully express their views due to the sensitivity of choosing a school, which closely connects to personal and family identity. As the researcher, I made every effort to uphold trust with the participants by being transparent about the analysis of their responses and providing comfort through clear responses and a friendly yet professional demeanour.

Furthermore, using social media for recruiting presented its own distinct set of complications. Although social media platforms provide extensive coverage within the general population, posts soliciting participation might be easily disregarded or overlooked in users' congested feeds. The fleeting nature of social media and its role as a primary information source in a person's life exacerbated this phenomenon, as constant updates and competing postings can unintentionally obscure it. Research has shown that social media recruiting, despite its convenience, often leads to decreased levels of involvement as a result of these characteristics (O'Connor et al., 2014). As a result, the recruiting procedure became quite

drawn due to a lack of interaction from participants on the posts made within two prominent Facebook groups.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter explored the inner workings of this research, building upon key aspects that helped form the basis of this study, namely the research questions and the justification for using a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews as the main source of data gathering. As discussed in Section 3.2.4, the use of semi structured interviews was crucial, as it not only allowed a framework of questions to be upheld throughout all of the interviews, but also allowed the opportunity to delve into a variety of topics that may not have been directly related to the question asked. This was discussed along with the epistemological framework, incorporating phenomenological and an interpretivist approach to data analysis. A discussion ensued, focusing on the authenticity and credibility of semi-structured interviews, as well as the ethical considerations inherent in this method. The limitations of the study were also reviewed. The collected data will undergo thematic analysis in the next chapter.

Chapter 4:

Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data on the school preferences of parents whose children are currently in primary education in Malta. It explores the parents' perceptions of the church, state and independent school sectors; their knowledge of the aspects of similarity and difference between the sectors; and their reasons for opting, where possible, for a particular sector within the Maltese education system. It also explored ways in which parents were able to search and enquire for information to be able to weigh any possible choice for their children. The data obtained from the interviews were coded into several major themes, presented thematically, and organised under the corresponding research question.

To get deeper insight on the factors behind the creation of a particular preferences for a certain sector of schooling in Malta as well as the means by which the parents became knowledgeable about potential preferences. A detailed recount of the qualitative data from these interviews shall be presented in this chapter, in line with following research questions:

1. What are the factors that parents/guardians consider when thinking about sending their child/ren to a particular school?
2. What forms of research do parents/guardians conduct to inform and aid in their decision making in regards to which sector and school is chosen?

The chapter opens with an overview of participant demographics, followed by a thematic analysis structured around the research questions. Each section concludes with a summary of the main findings to provide clarity and ensure a coherent progression of findings.

4.2 Demographic characteristics of the participants

In order to further understand the participants taking part in the interviewing process, the researcher found it essential to ask a demographic question in order to elicit from the parents, information such as their age, occupation, family structure in regards to children, and the location of residence, these elements may have played a role in formulating any school choice and offers the readers an in-depth view at each participant. For the purpose of anonymity, the researcher allocated a variety of pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. It was noticed that majority of the participants were females aged between 30 and 40 years old, married with 2 children and were employed. Geographical location of the participants varied, four hailed from the south of Malta, whilst two participants lived in central Malta and three from the north.

Table 3: Demographic information elicited from participants

Name of participant (Pseudonyms)	Sex	Age	Marital status	Num. of children	Location of residence (North/central/south of Malta)	Sector/s chosen
Anna Mallia	F	36	Married	2 children	South	Child 1: State Child 2: Church
Grace Magro	F	40	Married	2 Children	Central	Child 1: Independent Child 2: Independent
Adelaide Bartolo	F	44	Married	3 children	South	Child 1: State Sport school

						Child 2: Independent Child 3: Independent
Jamie Debattista	F	45	Single-parent	2 children	South	Child 1: State Child 2: State
Mary-Rose Theuma	F	33	Married	2 children	North	Child 1: State Child 2: Pre-school
Tina Ellul	F	NP	Single parent	4 children	Central	Child 1: Church Child 2: Church Child 3: Church Child 4: Pre-school
Zoya Brincat	F	26	Co-habiting	2 children	North	Child 1: Church Child 2: Church
Ian Pace	M	46	Married	1 child	South	Child 1: Church
Jessica Borg	F	30	Married	3 children	North	Child 1: Church Child 2: Church Child 3: Church

Note. NP- Not provided.

4.3- Factors that parents/guardians consider when thinking about sending their child/ren to a particular school

In this section the data in regards to the first research question shall be presented along with the major and sub themes that had emerged from the participant's responses. By describing the findings by theme provides the readers with the opportunity of assess the data

given by each participant, and ultimately a conclusion which shall serve to answer the first research question.

4.3.1- Knowledge based on different school sectors

Participants exhibited varying levels of knowledge pertaining the three school sectors in Malta, namely State, Church and Independent schools. While parents were familiar with the basic distinctions between the sectors, such as the donation and fee-paying nature of church and independent schools, some were unable to comment on the operational knowledge of certain sectors. Anna Mallia highlighted this gap, stating *“As far as I am aware, there are 3 types of schools in Malta.... Being the state schools, the church and the Independent”*. However, not all participants were equally informed. Ian pace expressed uncertainty about curricular differences between the sectors, stating:

Ian Pace:

“Hemm 2 jew 3 setturi differenti ta’ skejjel, żgur, hemm l-istat u l-knisja imma hemm ukoll skejjel privati imma m’inix ċert jekk jimxu fuq l-istess kurrikulu.”

Ian Pace:

“There are 2 or 3 different sectors of schools for sure there is state and church but there is also private schools but I am not sure if they run on the same curriculum.”

Jessica Borg, also was unsure about the operational running of independent schools, similar to the experience of Ian Borg, citing, *“There is the state schools, church schools and private schools but I am not sure if the private schools run the same as the other two”*.

Other parents recognised the concept of fee paying as a distinguishing factor between the different sectors. Zoya Brincat stated, *“There is one regular school which is the state schools and 2 which you pay for the church and the private schools”*. While parents could broadly identify sector distinctions, fewer demonstrated a deep understanding of their operational or curricular nuances.

While parents broadly understood the three main school sectors in Malta, gaps in detailed knowledge, especially regarding independent schools were evident. Participants were generally more familiar with the financial contribution as a distinction than the curricular or operational differences, highlighting their depth of understanding depending on their previous interactions with different school types, revealing significant informational disparities.

4.3.2- Parent’s perceptions and experiences of Maltese education sectors

In this section, parent’s experiences of the different Maltese school sectors (Church, State and Independent schools) were discussed. Each participant shared their perception in regards to similarities and differences between the different sectors as well as any stigma or associations carried by schools in the different sectors, all of which was able to effect school preference.

4.3.2.1- *The effects of socio-economic status, expenditure and accessibility to education*

Financial contribution emerged as a significant factor influencing school choice. When questioned about state education, most of the participants eluded towards the state school system in Malta was the default type of education which the biggest difference being that state schools do not charge a fee or require a donation in order to attend. Grace Magro noted, *“Government [school] is free. That’s the biggest difference, and private schools, obviously the*

financial contribution is larger than church schools". Tina Ellul elaborated on this, explaining, "State schools are free apart from the stationary for personal use, church schools, there is a donation per year and private schools you pay a fee per term per child." These comments highlight how affordability makes State based schooling as a default option for many families, particularly those with limited financial resources. When being asked whether paying fees for education was fair, when referring state schools, Grace Magro stated "the government schools are free because we pay them through our taxes". When asked if state schools should start changing a fee to attend, Grace Magro replied, "No, I don't think that state school state schools can never be paid for because everyone has a right to education and you cannot put a cost or a financial burden on families to do so."

When being asked about whether the concept of fee paying and the giving of donations was fair, most of the parents recognised the specifically the amounts which is required to pay for each sector.

The donation system in Church schools was described by the participants as ambiguous and often misunderstood. Mary-Rose Theuma noted, *"Well so when they ask for a donation with an amount, it's a fee. So that's a bit ridiculous. Having said that, I believe that once they say it's a donation, they can give an indication of what they believe, like, what they believe would cover some costs. I don't think that church schools ask too much, in my opinion, especially when compared to independent schools. I think independent schools are ridiculous."* This concern was also expressed by Anna Mallia, stating,

"In of itself, it is very misleading as I define a fee as something that needs to be paid by force, whereas a donation you give what you choose where in reality you have to pay a church school, a stipulated donation amount if not more. You cannot go below so it's not a donation, it is a fee."

This issue underscored dissatisfaction among the participants with the way Church school donations were framed and communicated to parents. When asked in regards to donations being given to church schools, Grace Magro commented that she did not wish to see church schools be turned free of charge due to the need of school maintenance, she stated: *"I don't think it should be subsidized, and I don't think, for example, church schools should be free because there is a maintenance cost to upkeep at school."*

Independent schooling was widely seen as financially prohibitive. Jamie Debattista described the fees as *"exorbitant, I mean, fees are exorbitant, exorbitant!"* and explained, *"I'd prefer to invest that money otherwise."*, further citing her experience with a fellow parent who had more than one child enrolled in an independent school emphasising the cost of independent school education. She explained, *"At the point, she was paying 20,000 a year for her children's education. Oh my god. 20,000 a year is more than half the pay that I get."* Similarly, Adelaide Bartolo, a patron of an independent school, agreed and emphasised, *"So but then when you compare it [Church schools] to independent schools, you know, it's a breath of fresh air at church schools compared to an independent school because the fees for independent schools are phenomenal."*

Despite the high costs, Grace Magro defended her choice to send both of her children to independent school rather than free state education, referring to the tax-cut which patrons of independent schools may benefit from as a mitigating factor to paying the full fee. She noted,

“It's fair because it is a choice I chose to send my kids to private school and I could choose to send them to government too. I couldn't choose to send them to church school, but I could have chosen the free choice.” ... “And people who send kids to private school get a tax reduction as well. So it's not like you pay the full amount either.”

Over and above the fees/donation required to enter a particular sector, parents highlighted the significant costs of materials needed for school, regardless of sector. These items included uniforms, stationary, books and extra-curricular activities. Tina Ellul gave mention but Jamie Debattista expanded on this and stated,

“To keep my child in the particular school, which I cannot afford. I cannot afford, you know, because this is not just about donations. It's school uniforms, its shoes, it's, It's the books. It's the photocopies, it's the stationary because some students are made to buy stationary from school.” ... “It's the stationery. It's the outings every month. It's the extras, you know. Clubs and, like, that's all.”

In regards to the social element found within church schools, Adelaide Bartolo expressed her view that, the current entrance system via ballot by the Archbishop's Curia each year allowed many people from a variety of social classes to choose church schools; *“I'm skipping the church schools because in the church schools you find all types of different status within society because when the ballot is drawn its by kind of luck, sheer luck”*. She further refers to the ballot

system working on pure luck, to whether the child is chosen for a spot in a particular school. When being asked about their preference, Ian borg responded by eliciting towards church schools being more socially desirable schools, especially when it comes to applying for work, later on, when listing it in a curriculum vitae.

Ian Pace:	Ian Pace:
<i>"L-iskejjel tal-istat ma jogħġbunx għax naħseb li huma "below standard" u li jkollok ċans aħjar, aktar 'il quddiem jekk ikollok skola tal-knisja mnizla [fuq il-CV] bħala skola li attendejt peress li tkun meqjusa bħala aħjar fis-soċjetà."</i>	<i>"I do not like state schools as I think that they are "below standard" and that you have a better chance later on if you have a church school written [on your CV] as a school you attended as it regarded to be better in society."</i>

When asked what distinguishes the 3 main sectors of education, in relation to independent schools, parents were quick to point out the financial contribution needed to enrol a child as well as the perceive social status of those who are able to attain private education. Grace Magro was quick to define parents who are patrons of independent schools as different highlighting their economic status, by citing, *"Obviously a different type of people, obviously people who are a bit more well off."* This viewpoint was not shared by Adelaide Bartolo as she explained *"And then you find the independent schools, where you find what you can say the higher part of society but obviously, in the independent schools you will still find people who are not well educated and their children are there because they have money to pay for the fees"*. On the other hand, Adelaide Bartolo, voiced the segregation she experienced between parents as a

result of differing socio-economic status, alluding, *“Then again once you are there, you will still get groups of people sticking together, totally higher class on their own and the middle class in another”*. Anna Mallia also agreed with the distinction between different parents as she stated, that regardless of the amount one pays for schooling, social class, stating:

“I would say that anywhere where money is concerned, that there will always be a hierarchy as you will have people who pay more, from under the carpet, and even in independent schools you will still even if you are all paying the same as you will have the families who are rich and the families who are less well-off but still manage to pay the fee, will not be counted as the same.”

Tina Ellul commented that regardless of socio-economic status and school sector, learning depends on the child wanting to learn rather correlating fee-paying education with higher educational attrition, stating,

“The children who attend private schools do tend to think highly of themselves for no reason because they have money but learning is going to happen if the child is open to learning not because you throw money at it.”

Financial constraints were a deciding factor when forming potential school preferences. State schools were found to be the most accessible, while the perceived mandatory donations in Church schools and the high costs of independent schools, as well as additional expenditures like uniforms and stationery were significant factors that influenced parent’s decision making.

4.3.2.2- Discipline and quality of education

The perceptions of the different schools' sectors were evident during the interviews. The concept of the quality of education as well as discipline were elaborated upon. State education elicited a number of varied opinions. Jamie Debattista elaborated that state schools were able to avail themselves of quality resources, especially for children with special needs, stating, *"they used to eventually end up in state schools because private schools did not provide the best resources or best learning environment for them, and they would end up in a state school just the same"*. This sentiment was echoed by Adelaide Bartolo who reinforced the idea that state schools were the best equipped of all three sectors, citing,

"There is this idea that you see that government schools are not that good when as a matter of fact, you find, the most resources in government schools, the best teachers in government schools and especially if you have children with special needs, they are more catered for in government schools, you have plenty of resources".

However, Anna Mallia gave a negative recount of her experience in State schooling in regards to the upkeep of discipline, citing,

"I witnessed firsthand, Infront of my face, my son being bullied and dragged across the floor whilst the teachers on supervision were on their mobiles. I began to scream at them so that I could get their attention but when a teacher came to talk to me through the gate, she told me that "kids will be kids" and turned round and went back on her mobile."

She further commented on the lack of communication between the school and parents, culminating in her displeasure, stating,

“As far as the state is concerned, I have found that the children can tend to be little more unruly and the teaching staff can be slightly more uncaring than the church school as in my experience, given the difference in pupil numbers between the church school and the state school, discipline seems to be harder to instil”.

Adelaide Bartolo agreed with Anna Mallia, whilst also comparing that school discipline, with that found in the other two sectors, explaining,

“I find that in government schools, the discipline is not, on par as in church schools and, and independent schools. You find more disciplined children in in in those two sectors. Whereas in government schools, it depends on the school. It's a bit of a personal opinion.”

Negative behaviour also worried Zoya Brincat who stated that due to large classroom sizes in state schools and having a variety of children from different backgrounds, would negatively impact the learning taking place. She explained,

“As the state schools cater to everyone, I think that they are at a lower standard of teaching as they have larger classes and children from many different backgrounds that it is bound to take a negative effect on learning” ... “the state are known for being ruff and having naughty pupils”.

When being asked about labels and associations, Zoya expressed that the state needed to improve itself in order to raise the standard *"I think the state schools could try to improve themselves to bring them up to standard."* Tina Ellul took issue with state schools being considered of lower quality than the other 2 school sectors and stated that there was no redeemable difference between the different sectors; *"I personally don't think that state schools are any lower than the others, a good majority of children go to state primary, secondary, sixth form and university and still come out the same as children that attended the other two schools' choices."*

The concept of church schools as better regarded for one's future is contested by Tina Ellul who stated that it may reveal even though the church school may be held in high regard, the student's behaviour and action may not match the ethos instilled by the school; *"Obviously church school are associated with the church and God etc. Maybe people see the students should be more pure but that is not always the case"*. This is different to the experiences of Jessica Borg, who cited that church schools have a great deal of discipline; *"their teaching methods are more strict and so disruption in class is reduced leading to a better school environment."*; which in turn creates a better classroom environment, which aids in the learning experience and the formation of the pupils under their care. This idea was corroborated by Mary-Rose Theuma who said: *"With church school, there's the idea of being disciplined but nurtured."*

Some participants mentioned that due to the smaller class sizes within church schools, it was more conducive to instilling discipline into students due to more individual attention, thus making part of a more holistic educative environment. Jessica Borg continues by stating her own

children's progression in 2 different church schools. *"I had always wanted my children to attend a church school if it was at all possible as I believe that the holistic approach to schooling makes children more rounded and respectful."*

According to Mary-Rose Theuma, church schools, maintained a nurturing discipline through the school structure of having smaller classes. She reinforces the concept of religious doctrine found within the school through reference of the patron saint, reinforcing the religious identity of the school. She stated,

"So maybe smaller classrooms, so children get to know each other. I don't think they might have as many options with regarding to subject choices. And I do believe that depending on the school, the church school, depending on the church school that they're at, there's a focus on the patron saints or the whatever."

Jamie Debattista, who is familiar with the internal workings of the education system, was able to expound on the distinctions between state assessments and religious school examinations, characterising the latter as more liberal in terms of curricular learning. The reason she gave was that teachers could move topics between year groups if a certain topic wasn't covered that year. This isn't possible in state schools because the tests are set by the department of education, not the teachers.

"So, in a state school, the teacher has to do all the syllabus because she will never know what's going to be asked at the end of the year. So, she's covering all the syllabus. In a church school, a teacher, she hasn't covered that particular topic because of, you know,

whatever happened during this scholastic year, she can omit it from the paper and it's fine."

In Independent schools, similar to the experiences of parents with children in church schools, participants noted that smaller classroom sizes facilitated better discipline instillation. Adelaide Bartolo compared her experiences with her daughter at the national sports school and her son in an independent school, noting that when a case of bullying occurred with her daughter, the school took no action and failed to communicate effectively regarding the issue. In the private school, they had been more attentive to her son's needs, actions had been taken, and the parents had been informed.

"No action is taken. Thus, they leave the parent pending on some very important issue such as bullying. So, you call the school. You would like to speak to the head of school, for instance, and they tell you he will call back, and he never calls back. Whereas, for example, if something happened for, for instance, at the child care or at my son's school, they always took action."

Grace Magro, in her experience, agreed that having a smaller school population, resulted in fewer classrooms and smaller number of students per class. Thus, made tracing and rectifying certain issues far easier as she believed that there is more focus on each student. She noted, *"There are only two classes, so then the attention is more focused and there are less kids. So if there should be bullying, there's a lesser chance, everything is a bit more controlled within the private school environment."*

4.3.2.3- Vicinity of school and catchment area

When asked during the interviews, regarding advantages to living close by to a primary school, the participants were able to bring up many salient comments, highlighting the convenience of proximity in terms of traversing to and from school and the toll it had on several participants and their children. Jamie Debattista stated that living within proximity to her son's school allowed him to go to school by bike, stating *"Proximity. For example, my son goes to school by bike. So, he's been nominated for a mobility award for Ekoskola because, obviously, you are reducing traffic"*

She further stated that in her experience of going to schools outside her village, being caught in traffic whilst taking her children to and from school, was a great source of frustration. She stated:

"It's a blessing. I used to be nervous and tired before getting to work in the morning and frustrated by the time I was back home because spending 2 hours in the car every day just to get to school and back takes a toll. In the long run, it takes a toll on everyone. The kids are tired. They go to school too tired because they're waking up too early."

She also recanted how in her employment, she experienced a number of foreign families asking about the catchment area, especially when choosing in which locality to settle, stating:

"We have a Facebook page for the school, and we still get asked the, questions about the school, about our system. We are living in a reality where, we are getting a lot of foreign parents, and they ask isma', but if you want to send our child to that particular school,

what do we have to do? So, you have to tell them, listen, you have to be living in this particular village. Otherwise, you cannot send your child here."

Adelaide Bartolo, who makes use of school transport for her child to attend an independent school stated, "we use transport, and, the transport picks him up early at half past 7, and then I can leave for work. It does slot in well.", thus showing the advantage of using school transport which is beneficial for her routine. Tina Ellul sympathised with those who did not live within the vicinity of a primary school as in order to wake up and prepare to be collected by a minibus, to take the child to school, can take a toll on the child, especially travelling to and from school in the morning and afternoon. Tina stating that: *"Some school minibuses I see come around before 5.45am so the child would have to wake up at 4.45am. That is way too early"*.

Mary-Rose Theuma did not just look at proximity as a positive factor but mentioned the social aspect of living close to a primary school, in regards to children being able to socialise outside of the school setting. She stated:

"And I think the fact that you can see your class the children can see their classmates in playgrounds or, like, even going to the shops. Like, they can see each other outside of school and normalize that. That it's not just in a classroom that they can hang out."

4.3.2.4- Educational journey and possibility of further schooling

When being asked about the concept of educational journeys, most parents agreed that Several parents in the study, stated that a factor for choosing potential schools was the fact of continuity within the same college or school as one moved throughout the education system i.e.

from kindergarten to primary, and then towards secondary and possibly sixth-form, whilst others did not consider it as a factor when looking at potential schools of preference.

Zoya Brincat stated that she did choose a school which did have continuity to higher education but since her children were chosen in the ballot for church schools, she deemed it “Luck of the draw”. In order to avoid the ballot system again, Jessica Borg, preferred to choose her children’s schools which avail themselves of sixth- forms, stating that” As all my children will remain in church schools even into sixth form God willing, we will not have to go through the picking and traveling to other institutions such as MCAST or Junior College.”. Jamie Debattista suggested the fact that her child should choose a church sixth form for his studies as she alluded to the social connections formed in 6th form could be beneficial to him, later on in life and in his career, stating, “But the connections there are, I think that they're valuable because then they can keep going even into university and even later on into a job. Yes. To have somebody, like, on the inside who you know, it's good.”

Anna Mallia also gave an account of how state school can also continue further as she stated “in state schools you are able to get to the same location in the end.”. When she was asked to explain further, she stated “As all children that go through the state school system will end up in going to the main 6th forms like ITS, the Higher, Junior College or MCAST.”

Although the participants were able to identify the different advantages and disadvantages of remaining in the same school/college for future schooling, Grace Magro highlighted that she did not wish to continue her child’s education within a state school was due to the negative experience her husband had in state secondary schooling, thus prompting her to

find alternate schools for both her children which offer educational schooling till secondary level.

Table 4: Summary of each parent's reason for school preference

Parent name	School Sector chosen for each child	Reason for preference
Anna Mallia	Child 1: Primary state school Child 2: Primary church School	Distrust in the state school system after experiences with child 1's education in terms of discipline of children and teacher quality.
Grace Magro	Child 1: Primary independent school (Previously in local state school) Child 2: Kindergarten independent school	Chose for both children to attend independent school as they did not wish to continue to state secondary school due to father's negative experience and preferred both children to be within the same school.
Adelaide Bartolo	Child 1: National Sports school (Previously in Primary independent school up to year 6) Child 2: Primary independent school	Chosen independent school due to being able to attend pre-school, primary and secondary with the same

	Child 3: kindergarten independent school	cohort of children as well as the homely feel of the school
Jamie Debattista	Child 1: Secondary State school Child 2: Primary state school	Chose state school due to the high fees for enrolment in independent schools and mixed social setting of church schools
Mary-Rose Theuma	Child 1: Primary State school Child 2: Prospective state school	Chosen state school due to vicinity, school size, a sense of school community, and the possibility of lesser qualified teachers employed in the other 2 sectors
Tina Ellul	Child 1: Primary Church school Child 2: Primary Church school Child 3: Kinder Church school (Different school to child 1 & 2) Child 4: non-school age	Chosen church school by attempting ballot and gained entry. Chose specific church school due to proximity to home
Zoya Brincat	Child 1: Church school Child 2: Church school	Chose church school as to make sure that her children were in the same class together.

Ian Pace	Child 1: Primary Church School	Chosen Church school due to the perceived social standing of having attended the particular school
Jessica Borg	Child 1: Primary Church School Child 2: Primary Church School Child 3: Primary Church school	Chose church school due to its' holistic educational programme

4.4- Research parents/guardians conduct before enrolling their children into the chosen sector

4.4.1- Sources of information in order to create a school preference

When asked to identify the sources they used to guide themselves about various prospective school choices, many parents said that social media, word of mouth, and overall school reputation were primary sources of information. Other parents relied on information obtained from interactions with schools, such as during open days. Jamie Debattista used her role as an educator to acquire deeper understanding of various educational sectors by consulting with her colleagues, as she articulated:

"I suppose I used to ask around. You know? It's easy when you are a teacher, you're in the educational sector because you would have friends teaching in the different sectors, and, you know, you can ask their opinion as well."

Mary-Rose Theuma too conferred with other people, including family members who she knew had children in different sectors, whilst also researching online, to aid her decision making.

“So I asked people who I knew were in different schools. That was my primary research. So I spoke to friends and cousins who had children in, like, in different schools. I did my online research.”

4.4.1.1- The availability of resources in the public sphere

Regarding obtaining knowledge, the participants were requested to discuss the concrete count of valuable resources available in the public domain that enabled them to differentiate a certain inclination. Participants were aware that, from several sources, there was enough material available for public consumption. In response, Tina Ellul said she thought it was simple to get information based on all three sectors but felt certain independent schools were not as transparent in sharing public information about the institution when compared to state and church schools.

“I think that in this day and age with everyone having a phone and computers it is very easy to find information regarding different schools from all 3 sectors, maybe the private schools are still a little guarded about what information they put out but state and church schools kept us parents very informed.”

On the other hand, Jessica Borg, whilst also agreeing that there was adequate information available, expressed that parent, rather than relying on information, focus on the financial contribution required to attend certain schools. She stated, *“I think that there are*

plenty of resources for parents to make a choice plus for most parents there is often no choice as money/fees dictate where they will choice to send their children to school.”

4.4.2- The role of school in generating preferences

Parent were also asked with revealing if the school directly played a role in solidifying a particular preference for the parents, this included getting information by asking school administration or physically visiting the school. All of the parents except 3 parents were in contact with school administrations in order to gather information, whilst the 3 parents relied of other sources of information, namely relying on word or mouth or social media.

Mary-Rose Theuma, in her response to how schools may promote themselves, touched upon the fact of being updated in terms of information that is available. She stated;

“I think keeping, like, their websites updated, social media updated in a way, then, like, having the information available. Like, for example, not logging into a website of a school and finding, like, the name of a headmistress who was there, like, 20 years ago.”

On the other hand, Jamie Debattista, rather than the information given by the school, she alluded to the perception of the school as a factor that influences their choice. She stated, *“But in Malta, it is rather more of a perception. You send to the school, your child to the school because your perception of the school is good.”*

Table 5: Overview of participant’s chosen sector and the sources of information used

Parent name	Sector/s chosen	Sources of information in order to facilitate potential preferences

Anna Mallia	State and Church school	Facebook groups (social media), open days and advice from relatives
Grace Magro	Independent school	Word of mouth
Adelaide Bartolo	Independent school	Social media, open days, school meetings, Advertisements in newspapers
Jamie Debattista	State school	Word of mouth from colleagues
Mary-Rose Theuma	State school	Online research and word of mouth with friends and family
Tina Ellul	Church school	Facebook groups (social media), open days, and word of mouth from fellow parents
Zoya Brincat	Church school	Social media and word of mouth
Ian Pace	Church school	Open days and word of mouth with friends
Jessica Borg	Church school	Word of mouth and personal inclination towards school

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the demographic information of the participants and an in-depth view of the qualitative findings that help to answer the study's two main research questions. The demographic analysis aided to highlight key aspects of each participant's characteristics, all of which contributed to shaping their perspective and preferences on school choice. The subsequent sections delved into the participant's knowledge of each sector of the Maltese education system, through identifying their differences and similarities, revealing the participant's knowledge, perceptions and preferences. This was followed by their experiences, according to their sector of preference. By establishing the findings, the study uncovered a variety of nuanced insights into the factors that influence the creation of school preferences, thus allowing for subsequent discussion and drawing conclusions in the subsequent chapters. In the following chapter, the results presented in this chapter shall be investigated through the use of thematic analysis. The findings shall be compared to literature in order to justify their credibility as well as elaborate on any sub topics of interest that emerged.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and interpretation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter critically analyses the data obtained from parents through interviews, presented in the previous chapter. It shall address the research questions related to the factors influencing school preferences, the methods parents use to gather information and their perceptions of Malta's school sectors.

The results will be analysed within 3 distinct sections as mentioned below:

1. Parent's perception of each school sector within the Maltese education system
2. An Analysis of the factors considered by parents when formulating a potential choice of school
3. The sources of information and research conducted by parents in order to facilitate the creation of possible school choices.

Each section integrates the data found within literature reviewed in Chapter 2, providing a comprehensive understanding of parental decision making, within the Maltese education system.

5.2 Analysing parent's perceptions of each school sector in the Maltese education system and eventual factors that led to potential school preferences

Parents were quick to show their perceptions of each school sector in Malta and the emergence of factors that dictated the formation of their school preference. It was noted that the parents were able to identify each of the sectors and were able to mention some of the differences between the sectors, showing a prior knowledge. The findings shall be compared

with the findings displayed in chapter 2, presented according to the pertinent themes that emerged from the data. Through the use of rational choice theory, Drew (2022) and Amadae (2024) aided in further understanding the motives for decision making as well as how the decisions were formulated based on the school preference as discussed below, uncovering the parent's intentions and pre-conceived ideas about the potential selection of education institutions

5.2.1- Accessibility and financial considerations

When being asked to introduce the different school sectors and their characteristics, the participants gave much insight into their perception of each sector. Parents primarily perceived state-based education as the default system in Malta, identifying it as the largest of the three school sectors. This aligns with the list provided by the Ministry of Education (2024), and figure 1 (p.190), which illustrates the distribution of state colleges, consisting of primary and secondary levels, across Malta and Gozo. Following state education, the participants discussed that the second largest was the church school sector, with the independent school sector being the smallest, consistent with the Ministry's school list (2024).

These perceptions reflect previous research of school choices in Malta. Bezzina (2015) noted "Two thirds of the school age population attend the state (public) sector, whereas the remaining one third is in the church and independent sector." (p.530), thus reinforcing the parent's general knowledge and correct perception of an aspect of schooling in Malta.

Through the discussion of perceptions based on the different school sectors, the participants were quick to mention particular aspects of the composition of each sector which

acted as a defining factor. Characteristics mentioned were of a monetary/economic as well as the standard of quality between the aforementioned sectors.

Parents praised state schools for their fee-free structure, which aligns with Moe's (2008) findings on state school accessibility. As stated by Grace Magro, "the government schools are free because we pay them through our taxes". Grace Magro's statement further aligned with Eurydice (2023) that stated "In Malta, all State educational provision from early childhood education and care up to tertiary level is financed by the Government ". Inversely, Tina Ellul, Mary Rose Theuma and Anna Malli, among others, were able to identify the other financial contributions required to attend the two other sectors. Even though the parents were able to identify how financial contribution effected their decision making, they did not highlight that the government also financially supports church schools¹. Grace Magro gave further insight to the difference between the free structure of the state school and the fee-based system of an independent school, highlighting that even though they pay fees per term in order to attend, "people who send kids to private school get a tax reduction". This comment aligns with Bezzina (2024), who highlighted "The government also subsidises church schools so that do not charge tuition fees and gives tax rebates to parents sending their children to independent schools." (p.2) (Table 4, p.83).

Even given the fact that state schooling is free at face value, Jamie Debattista and Tina Ellul further eluded that even though state schooling was free of charge, hidden costs, such a

¹ As of the 10th September 2024, the Maltese government shall be supporting independent schools through providing financial assistance to the sum of 27 million euros, as a way to avoid increases in fees for attendance (Zammit, 2024; TVMnews.mt, 2024). This event happened after the data was collected.

uniforms and items needed for schooling, such as stationery, were also found which contributed to the financial burden. This can be considered as a misnomer as even though state education is free, this suggests that the accessibility is free but the requirements for school needed further investment. Schreyer, Oberhuemer, and Sollars (2024) further highlight how parents in church and independent schools must have the economic capital in order to pay registration and administration fees on top of purchasing textbooks and other pre-requisites required by the schools in order to attend. Whilst this may be true, as discussed by Ms. Magro, Ms. DeBattista and Ms. Ellul, parents who send their children to state school can also face fees, unrelated to administration and registration. These fees can take the form of activities throughout the year, donations for good causes and organisations, everyday resources such as copybooks and stationery, school-based events such as Christmas concerts which require costuming and any specific resources needed to help in the education of their children. Therefore, depending on one's socio-economic status, one could perceive, that the cost of state schools is lower compared to those of church and independent schools, which are far more expenditure driven in order to attend. This is clarified once again Schreyer, Oberhuemer, and Sollars (2024) who gave an overview of the financial constraints of each sector, finding that parents of children attending state schools, attain their textbooks free of charge and in order to enrol, no registration fees were imposed.

Meehan and Axisa (2022) moreover stated that students from a background of lower socio-economic status were able to benefit from the state system by being given free school lunches, uniforms and other items through a governmental scheme name Scheme 9. Scheme 9,

as defined by the National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee 2022-2030 by the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights (2022) encompasses,

“Through the Scheme 9, free healthy and nutritious meals, are provided on all school days to children in low-income families. Additionally, Scheme 9 provides for other in-kind benefits including: free uniform; free stationary; free photocopies; and exemption from any fees in relation to extracurricular activities.” (p.28).

Accessibility into church schools was found to be based on the ballot system, which was described by Borg & Mayo (2006) and Gauci (2005) as a fair and democratic process of enrolment. The ballot system aids, in allowing everyone, the possibility to be chosen for a space in a church school. For instance, Adelaide Bartolo expressed her views stating, “in the church schools you find all types of different status within society because when the ballot is drawn its by kind of luck, sheer luck”. Her words of “all types of different status” can be interpreted as socio-economic status, separately or in conjunction with the religious status of the parents/children accepted into a particular church school. As outlined in Appendix 3 (p.173, section 7.0) states that only a singular school requires a Catholic baptism certificate and 5 other schools only accept Catholic and Christian baptism certificates. All other children’s schools except Catholic, Christian and any other faith to be enrolled. This echoes Zoya Brincat’s experience where she chose her children’ church school from the ballot, having felt that her choice was “Luck of the draw” as she had to choose from the places left in each school to consider them as contenders for a preference. Anna Mallia highlighted that “the church [schools] is only open to those that are Roman Catholics and nobody else”, implying a sense of

exclusivity within church schools based upon religious inclination, thus coming into conflict with the perception of Adelaide Bartolo.

Darmanin (2013) mentioned the ethnic and religious diversity found within church schools to be in sharp contrast to the state school sector, being described as portraying “more homogeneity in these church schools” (p.38). The impression gathered by the researcher was that based on the concept of the participants may not have wished to be associated with those of a lower socio-economic status or potentially, depending on given the set-up of particular church schools, children attending being of a different religion.

However, this seemed to be a misconception held by some parents as according to the Secretariat for Catholic Education (2024) Catholic, Christian and other religions are allowed in specific schools, which is up to the discretion of the administration of the particular school whether they can enrol or not, upon presentation of Catholic baptism certificate or accordance with Christian faith or any other religion. (Appendix 3). Appendix 3 further states that before being opened to the public, places within the church school ballot are reduced, making way for children who are “children from Church homes, children of church school employees or of the secretariate, siblings attending the same church school and transfers between church schools of the same religious entity”. These spaces are filled before the public choice of church schools thus accounting for Zoya Brincat’s experience of choosing the remaining places within the selection of church schools.

Parents also discussed the donation that is required on a yearly basis in order to enrol a child into Maltese church schools, as stated by Tina Ellul “*church schools, there is a donation per*

year". The donation process within the church school system was quite ambiguous according to the participants, such as the perception of Mary-Rose Theuma who stated *"Well so when they ask for a donation with an amount, it's a fee"*. Anna Mallia, agreed and referred to it as "a stipulated donation amount if not more. You cannot go below so it's not a donation, it is a fee".

As stated in article 6 of the agreement between the Holy See and Malta (Appendix 1), one can read "Free donation from parents or others" (p.6), meaning that parents should be at liberty to give as much as they wish, but it may be up to the discretion of the particular school. When asked, it was apparent that participants believed that the donation was important as it helped the school to maintain the infrastructure as well as aid in other aspects of its operation as outlined by the Holy See agreement (Appendix 1).

On the other hand, Grace Magro, when asked whether church schools should be made truly free of charge, expressed, *"I don't think it should be subsidized, and I don't think, for example, church schools should be free because there is a maintenance cost to upkeeping at school"*. This sentiment follows the findings of Sciriha (2024) who found that through the combination of different socio-economic backgrounds that are able to contribute to a donation, would aid the running cost of the school, as stated:

"Monetary contributions are, however, requested by the administrators of these schools to help cover costs related to teaching tools and the general upkeep of the school. Entry into such schools is by means of a ballot system at the primary level. On account of this new system, Church schools now enrol a diverse pupil body from various socio-economic backgrounds." (p.12)

For those who are unable to contribute to the donation, the Times of Malta (2012) stated that “most schools say parents facing financial difficulties are told to “forget about the donation””. The Times of Malta (2012) reinforces that the donation is of a voluntary basis and there is no obligation to pay it, even though it found that “Yet, many parents view the “voluntary” donation expected from them as an indirect obligation to fork out money, even if this means many sacrifices for them.”(p.1).

Based on the concept of paying a donation as a necessary part of the running of a church school comes into dispute with the findings by Marcotte and Dalane (2019) who found that “school choice options would increase income-based segregation” (p.2), therefore one can assume that the ballot process was gateway through which church schools can accept parents and children from different social strata due to the transparency of the ballot and its democratic nature but the donation may act as a stumbling block and thus alienating parents who are not able to afford such monetary contribution per annum on top of further expenditure for school supplies (Table 3, p.66).

When looking at perceptions of independent schools, parents were quick to point out the financial disparity between those who attend independent schools and those who attend the other 2 sectors, as the concept of fee paying was highlighted, in section 4.3.2.1. The participants alluded to the fact of the presence of a hierarchy within independent schools, also present within church schools, dividing parents according to their socio-economic status. (Table 3, p.66)

As stated by Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009), private schools become accessible only to those who have a high socio-economic status and this coupled with the findings of Buckingham (2010) and Rowan (2019) show independent school as creating social disparities by “incubating privilege” (p.305) in order to improve the family’s social status, seem to match the argument placed forward by Anna Mallia. Moreover, it is important to note that parents were able to identify, in contrast to Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009), that even though enrolment into an independent school requires a high financial contribution, one may still find parents who may have the economic status in order to access fee-paying education but may not have the social or cultural capital in order to fit in the dominant social group that attends those schools , in order to attend as stated by Horvat, Weininger and Lareau (2003).

It was interesting to discover that Grace Magro, a patron of an independent school, disclosed that parents who enrol their children in independent schools, benefit from a tax credit. This matches the research done by Cutajar (2007) stating “Parents of these students are now receiving a tax relief when they submit their annual income tax returns.” (p.4). Even though, as from the 2024 annual budget for the year 2025, the tax return acquired by each parent was raised substantially, but independent schools were unable to increase their fees by more than 12% (Cordina, 2024). Therefore, with consideration for the tax cut benefitting patrons of independent schools, the sector remains firmly within the grasp of only those who have a high socio-economic status. Yet those middle-class parents who managed to send their children to independent schools still found themselves segregated according to Adelaide Bartolo, who said “Once you are there, you will still get, groups of people sticking together. You find the total higher class on their own and the middle class”. Akyol (2022), Hill (2022), and Bathmaker,

Ingram and Waller (2013) building from Bourdieu (1986)'s concept of capital, reminds the reader that parent's financial capital may serve to replace cultural capital which they may lack as by having access to significant financial capital offers more options for prospective choices, acting as a source of obtaining further advantage in school choice. This hierarchical structure alluded to by Bartolo above may be due to the difference in cultural capital as expressed by Edgerton and Roberts (2014) and Jæger and Karlson (2018). It was discovered that this hierarchy is further reinforced by the fact that according to one participant, parents would attempt to occur favouritism by pledging further financial contribution to the school thus creating further inequality between parents in the same sector. Through the very nature of fee-paying schools, inequalities become more apparent due to the gatekeeping of a resource, in this case education. Mifsud (2024) states

“While schools are crucial to ensure the provision of equitable education, they may also contribute (advertently or inadvertently) to the transformation of socio-economic inequalities into educational inequalities. Schools are embedded within the wider education system with its own particular structure, policies, practices, and traditions that ultimately have a bearing upon the degree of equity in education” (p.67)

Table 6: Key observations taken from participant's insights

School sector	Accessibility	Financial contribution	Key Observation
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State schools	High	Minimal (Hidden costs)	Inclusive
Church schools	Moderate- depending on ballot	Donations required per annum	Ballot system criticised
Independent schools	Low	High tuition fees	Exclusive but offers tax credits (Cutajar, 2007)

5.2.2- Perceptions on classroom size and quality of education

Adelaide Bartolo and Jamie Debattista emerged with a concept in regards to state schools being the strongest in terms of resources for children with learning difficulties, with Adelaide stating, *“There is this idea that you see that government schools are not that good when as a matter of fact, you find, the most resources in government schools, the best teachers in government schools”*. Jamie Debattista commented *“they [children with learning difficulties] used to eventually end up in state schools because private schools did not provide the best resources or best learning environment for them”*. This contests Bosetti (2004) who found that, abroad, parental perception of state schools displays state schools as not being able to tailor to the individual needs of learners in terms of academic performance and support when compared to private or faith-based institutions.

On the other hand, the overall sentiment of Ian Pace, of the lack of quality education and discipline found within state schools. He believed that the quality varied due to the large classroom sizes, having a mixed cohort of children from different backgrounds and discipline

being less comprehensive, in state schools, when compared to the other 2 sectors in the Maltese education system. Research done by Blatchford, Baines, Kutnick, and Martin (2001) highlighted the concerns which were expressed by the participants, namely in the UK, regarding classroom size, quality of the education provided and resources available in state schools, stating that it may infringe on the learning process and negatively affect student's academic outcomes. Dauber (2013) and Holmes (2002) pointed out that parent's choice of private school was based upon classroom size and better individual attention, but this contrasts with the parent's comments, stating that independent schools were unable to cater for children with learning disabilities, even though having smaller classroom sizes and perceived better individual attention, according to Dauber (2013), exposing state schooling as far superior in this regard. Parents also brought up the concept of bullying, in that with a smaller classroom environment, it would be easier to control.

This also contrast the research where Ball, Bowe and Gerwitz (1995) found that parents would seek out this aspect as it benefits children's social development to socialise with children from different backgrounds, whereas their apprehensions, according to Reay and Lucey (2003) are on par of those of British parents. Reay and Lucey (2003) continued that British parents would oft worry in regards to classroom sizes, lack of school funding and the low perception of academic standard emanating from state schooling.

The data from the participants perceptions, suggested a misconception based on the classroom sizes in state, church and independent schools, of which state schools having the largest classroom size and the independent schools having the smallest classroom size.

According to Times of Malta (2024) “In 2022-23 the average class size in primary schools was 16.5 pupils in state schools, 20.5 in private schools and 23.9 in church schools.” which supports the clarification that in fact, state schools have the smallest classroom size, followed by independent schools and lastly, church schools with the largest classroom size. Although this was not a point of focus within the Literature review, the statistic became pertinent in light of the results. This therefore shows that Maltese classroom sizes differ to those from abroad, as compared with the work by Dauber (2013), Holmes (2002) and Raey and Lucey (2003).

Parent’s perception of Faith based education, namely Catholic based education, was clearly distinct from the other two sectors. The participant’s responses of the Maltese context were consistent with the foreign research cited, believing church schooling to be stricter than state schooling but this is instilled through a nurturing approach and through their religiosity. It was further perceived that by having smaller classroom sizes in the church sector, helped to aid in the instilling of discipline among the children. Some of the participants commented on the importance of the religiosity within church schools, as some agreed that the religious aspect of church schools further aided in their children’s holistic development. Green and Triventi (2020) and Sikkink (2001), discussed how parents in the UK and the USA highlighted church schools’ strong moral code as well as their high standard of discipline, behaviour and high academic attainment. Other participants deemed it the most unimportant part of prospectively choosing to enrol in a faith based educational institution, with one participant stating that even if one does not agree with the doctrine, one must still support it throughout their time at the school. Through the positive social standing of certain church schools in Malta, as another participant alluded to the name of the college/school could aid their child to better success later on in life,

for having attended that particular school. That statement falls in line with the research gathered by Allen and Bartley (2017); Srivastava (2007) and Hanushek, Kain, Markman and Rivkin (2003), stating that abroad, the academic and social norms found within certain schools can act as a form of marketing, enticing parents to the school, based on the prestige of the school. Mullard and Pirotta (2008) found the popular perception in Malta were that the private sector institutions i.e. independent/private education were good and the state sector was bad, further referring that parents would sooner “prefer to send their children to Church schools than government schools” (p.128).

This public perception of each school may have stemmed from the deduction that since the state school sector is the largest in terms of pupil population and its status of being free of charge, as well as being influenced from the experiences of the individual’s schooling in the past, when classroom sizes were larger within state schools than the present day. It is important to point out that even though classroom sizes were larger in state schools in the past, but yet were still lower than the average of church and independent schools (Table 5, p.87).

Table 7: Average classroom sizes in State, church and independent schools from 1970-2021

	State primary	Church primary	Independent primary
1970-1971	22.1		28.4
1981-1982	23.25		27.8
1990-1991	21.6		27.1
2001-2002	18.9	27.3	21.7
2012-2013	14.5	20.75	19.78

Note. 1970-71, 1981-82 and 1990-1991 NSO statistics show church and independent statistics counted as one as they were considered under the umbrella term 'Private schools', after which being considered as government dependent schools and Independent private school, and later as Church schools and independent schools.

In terms of quality of education, participants also questioned the differences between the three sectors based on examinations and curriculum. Jamie Debattista stated *"In a church school, a teacher, she hasn't covered that particular topic because of, you know, whatever happened during this scholastic year, she can omit it from the paper and It's fine"*. Church schools on the other hand are more lenient, as teacher are able to choose certain topics to omit for teaching, if there is not enough time within that year whereas state schools have fixed exams for all that was done throughout the year, encompassing the syllabus. Darmanin (2021) found that " Church schools and independent schools have more curricular freedom than do State schools" (p.228)

Parents were able to identify that a key part of independent school education was the number of clubs and extra-curricular activities that would take place throughout the year, usually against a fee in order to attend. Grace Magro explained that "when it comes to the private school, if it's something which can be directly related, they have after school extracurriculars, which then are like life skills, which they can actually use". Cachia (2014) sheds light that independent schools had the perception of having a specialised curriculum and a large selection of extra-curricular activities in order to entice further learning. Harding (2011) and Ball (2003) states that by having economic capital as a reinforcement, parents would be more willing

to contribute to extra-curricular activities, while at the same time acting as a factor, attracting parents to the schools that offer them.

5.2.3- Proximity and catchment area correlating with school reputation

Within section 4.3.2.3, it was revealed that parents exhibited a keen awareness of their local catchment area and the corresponding schools, particularly among those who enrolled their children in state schools. Participants were quick to list the advantages of living within close proximity to a local primary school, highlighting that proximity not only provides convenience but also helps to foster stronger bonds among the children in the local community.

Jamie Debattista commented that for her, proximity was the advantage as her stated “*For example, my son goes to school by bike*”. This experience is echoed by Grace Magro citing that when her son was attending a local state school that it was “Very, very convenient, because I used to walk it to school and walk him back home”. Adding to the proximity, within state schools, Breakfast club, which helps working parents, allowing children to enter school early, as stated by Jamie Debattista “Even for primary school, you know, we have breakfast service for everyone who works, but being so near the school saves a lot of time.”

This concept of proximity also ties in the sense of community as due to catchment areas, in the state school system, most of the students would be from the surrounding area. Mary-Rose Theuma explained that it was beneficial for children to be able to socialise in other locations other than the classroom, stating “the children can see their classmates in playgrounds or, like, even going to the shops. Like, they can see each other outside of school and normalize that.” Likewise, Glatter, Woods, and Bagley (1997), Shah and Conchar (2009), and Montacute and Cullinane (2018) all emphasised that regardless of socio-economic status, the

convenience factor of a nearby school, in conjunction with the school's academic performance, was found to be a significant factor is school choice. Jamie Debattista surmised "I believe that if I have to do it again, even if I was in a situation where I would be able to pay for an independent school or send my children to a church. I would still choose the school which is nearer to where I live."

From the knowledge of Jamie Debattista, she stated that in certain cases, when choosing a potential school, some foreign parents would deliberately choose to rent in areas that fell within a particular catchment area, stating:

"What do we have to do? So, you have to tell them, listen, you have to be living in this particular village. Otherwise, you cannot send your child here... They are choosing because they are choosing a place to rent according to the availability of school".

This was interesting as it combined both the concept of proximity whilst also juggling other different factors being entertained by the parents, such as the reputation of the school. These findings are well supported by literature. For instance, Reay and Lucey (2003) highlighted that parent, especially in state schooling contexts abroad, were also aware of the educational catchment area to which they belong. The strategic decision by middle class families to secure enrolment in schools of good reputation, by choosing to reside within a conducive catchment area is consistent with the observations Kosunen and Rivière (2017), Napolitano, Pacholok and Fustenberg (2014), and Reay et al. (2011).

Moreover, Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, and Wilson (2015) found that parents from different socio-economic groups valued proximity as a positive factor but also realised that

some parents from each socio-economic group were willing to send their children to schools further away, which was accessible whilst also meeting other requirements pertaining to their preference. Although moving village for the express purpose of attending a specific state school catchment area is not common in the Maltese context, it can still be considered as a strategic decision for parents who decided to send their children to school which were not within the proximity of their homestead, namely church and independent schools.

In regard to those sending their children further afield for their education such as Adelaide Bartolo, referred to the concept of her children using transport that comes to pick them up and takes them to school, thus allowing time for her to prepare and leave for work. She eluded “Not so much because we use transport, and, the transport picks him up early at half past 7, and then I can leave for work. It does slot in well.”, but she did also make reference to the advantage of living close to a school, citing having more control over routine and waking up her children. On the other hand, Tina Ellul was appalled with the concept of having some students wake up excessively early in order to travel to school, having stated “Some school minibuses I see come around before 5.45am so the child would have to wake up at 4.45am. That is way too early”. It can be considered that even though parents were able to identify various benefits of sending their children to nearby schools, they still deemed other factors more important than proximity as a detrimental factor to school preference. Furthermore, a number of participants mentioned their dissatisfaction in regards to the concept of commuting extensive distances in order to get to the school of their choice, highlighting prolonged commuting times, traffic congestion and other hazardous factors that may be faced on a school commute. This is elaborated on by Jamie Debattista as she recanted “I used to be nervous and

tired before getting to work in the morning and frustrated by the time I was back home because spending 2 hours in the car every day just to get to school and back takes a toll.”, having a negative effect on herself as well as her children”

Finally, the concerns raised during the study due to dangers of having a longer commute to school, echo Konsunen and Rivière (2017)’s research on the risks associated with extended travelling, also giving mention to traffic accidents and stranger danger.

5.2.4- Possibility of further schooling within same system or college

Participants from all sectors gave a notion that during the contemplation of a school preference, they considered further schooling opportunities and the logistics surrounding such a decision. Jessica Borg made a preference for a church school that led onto a sixth Form, underpinned the concept of consistency within the same school network, stating “As all my children will remain in church schools even into sixth form God willing, we will not have to go through the picking and traveling to other institutions such as MCAST or Junior College”. As previously referenced, in terms of accessibility, the possibility of further schooling within the church sector.

Jamie Debattista commented that by choosing a prestigious church school for or which led to a sixth form, would offer social connection which could aid them later in life, highlighting “To have somebody, like, on the inside who you know, it's good”. Whereas other parents such as Anna Mallia were more blasé about the choice of further state schooling “as all children that go through the state school system will end up in going to the main 6th forms like ITS, the Higher, Junior College or MCAST.”. The insight shown by Jamie Debattista seems to imply that social connections can only take place in certain settings of particular prestige Whereas the locations

mentioned by Anna Mallia, were seen as of lesser prestige by Jamie Debattista, even though they too are 6th form venues, in which one may find social connections.

Both Grace Magro and Adelaide Bartolo further mirrored the work of Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, and Wilson (2015) showing that they that chose independent school education were also thinking in the long term, to send the child's siblings to the same school, as a future preference.

It can be understood that this sentiment does not reside only with those who send their children to independent schools, but with those who potentially avail themselves of the services of the other two sectors. In some cases, as seen in Appendix 2, Church schools accept siblings of the same gender into their school or an equivalent church school if a child is already enrolled or is of a different gender, this is further extended to the children of teachers who work in a particular church school.

The participants who sent their children to independent schools explained this process. Within independent schools, where each school runs to their own rules and regulations, an example of the entry of siblings can be cited as according to the Parents Foundation for Education's Admissions rules (Appendix 2). It states that brothers and sisters are able to be registered in order to pre-apply for a spot within the school, which can be done either after birth or within a time of enrolling the first child. To further add to the concept of accessibility and enrolment, it was mentioned that parents would formally register their children's names within school applications, in the hopes that they would be offered a place (Appendix 2).

5.2.5- Educational journeys within the Maltese education system

The comparison of educational journeys within Malta' three school sectors, in section 4.3.2.4, revealed parents perceived their experiences as individualised. Most of the participants argued that although the main core structures of education might be similar across all sectors, each child's journey was unique and largely influenced by the child's personal inclination to learn. It was also mentioned that the expectations within church and independent schools were more pronounced than in the state sector.

Moreover, several participants emphasised that the quality of a child's educational experience pivoted on 2 aspects, family support as well as their interaction with their educators. This insight complimented the research of Lubienski (2007) and Hoxby (2020), who argued that parents gave preference to schools which higher academic standards, as they associated such schools with better educational outcomes and better school quality.

5.3- Analysis of the sources of information and research conducted by parent's order to facilitate the creation of possible school choices.

As discussed in the section 4.4, The participants were candid when asked about the sources of information they relied upon in order to make a sound decision of school choice for their children.

Mary-Rose Theuma stated that she had asked a number of individual's experiences in order to become informed, combining it with independent internet research, stating, *"So I asked people who I knew were in different schools. That was my primary research. So I spoke to friends and cousins who had children in, like, in different schools. I did my online research."*

When asked whether the information available for public consumption was adequate enough to generate a preference Jessica Borg stated “I think that there are plenty of resources for parents to make a choice plus for most parents there is often no choice as money/fees dictate where they will choose to send their children to school”. Tina Ellul agreed with the availability of information for all three sectors but commented that some aspects of independent schools were harder to access, “it is very easy to find information regarding different schools from all 3 sectors, maybe the private schools are still a little guarded about what information they put out”. The impression gathered by the researcher is that even though private schools may be seen as guarded, this may be due to several different factors. These factors may incorporate the socio-economic status of the parents, which affects their access to the information needed in order to create a preference. This information could also be guarded in order to safeguard the reputation of the school. It is important to note that for parents who, due to their socio-economic status, may not be able to create a school preference, therefore not needing to do any research into other schools as they must default to their only option.

Working from the discussions of Slack, Magan, Hughes and Davies (2014) and Ball and Vicent (1998) found that most participants used a mixture of hot knowledge, such as word of mouth, social media and recommendations from families and friends, whilst also making use of cold knowledge such as school meetings and open days, with information provided by the institution. In terms of accessibility to this database of knowledge, the participants found that using online media, aligning with the findings of Bunar and Ambrose (2016), was of great inspiration in making an informed decision but this poses an issue in regard to those who are not able to avail themselves of online media, as revealed by McGinn and Ben-Porath (2014).

They further commented on the ease at which one was able to find information which was able to be found publicly, which could be assumed as an active topic of discussion among parents and wider society. Maltese parents, were found to mirror Australian parents, in terms of contacting school authorities in order to garner certain information to make an informed choice, as argued by the Queensland Independent Schools Parent Network (2019)

The information gathered along with the prior perceptions and knowledge found within this study aligned themselves with the findings of Amadea (2024) and Drew (2022), highlighting aspects of the theory of rational choice.

5.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to examine the results that were collected throughout this study. Through the review of international and local literature, a comparison was drawn up in order to develop a deeper understanding into the factors that influenced the participant's school choices and preferences and the ways in which they informed themselves to make a decision, which would ultimately benefit their children. Based on the findings of this study, a number of potential research areas were identified, in order to generate further and deeper knowledge on the differences between Malta's three school sectors.

This chapter shall be followed by the final chapter of this research, wherein shall be included a summary of study highlighting key aspects such as the aims of the research and a summary of the findings as well as any limitations of the study. The chapter shall close of by

framing the study's contribution of its readers as well as recapping the possible areas for further research.

In the wake of the analysis of the findings collected by this study, a number of possible areas of further research shall follow. These potential research topics stemmed from the writing of the literature review as well as from the findings of the study. Some of the topics here were also mentioned informally by some of the participants from the study.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

6.1 Synthesis

Through defining the main similarities and differences between Malta's three school sectors, gave the necessary background, to understand the decision-making process taken by all nine participants within the study. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews with parents, several prominent themes emerged, shaping how their school preference were formed, namely through their perceptions of accessibility into each sector, socio-economic considerations, perceived classroom size in each sector, the quality of the education provided, proximity, and future educational prospects. These findings were analysed in line with existing literature, to frame and nurture a deeper understanding of how rational choice theory and socio-economic factors weave together to inform school preference.

Through a thorough analysis of the research findings, it was concluded that all nine parents gave great heed to the concept of school preference, all for their individual reasons. One of the most prominent findings of the study was the significant effect of the economic considerations. Parents perceived that even though state schools were considered free of charge in terms of registration, enrolment, and free textbooks, but additional costs for stationery and uniforms were highlighted, which could pose a financial burden to some families. Scheme 9 within state schools aid parents with low economic level, through subsidy for certain necessities and services. Church schools were deemed to be the second most accessible due to the ballot to gain entry. However, the annual donation asked by these schools, made it inaccessible to certain parents. It was noted that due to the emphasis made for the donation in most church schools, parents considered it more of a mandatory fee. On the other hand, independent schools were considered as the most financial demanding sector, being only viable

for those with the economic means to suffice the fee payments for attendance. Although a tax rebate was available for patrons of independent schools, the participants only felt that these slightly offset the high costs, thus reinforcing the socio-economic disparities within school preference.

The participant's perceptions of classroom and the quality of education between the three sectors highlighted several misconceptions. Parents were quick to associate state schooling with large classroom size as well as lack of discipline, whereas parents perceived church and independent schools as the smallest in class size as well as the most disciplined. The perception may be a result of a historical perspective where the sizes of classes were the opposite to nowadays average.

Proximity was mentioned as an aspect that effected decision making. When asked about the advantages of living within the proximity to a school, participants referred to the factor of convenience in travel and maintaining social relationships between peers within school as well as outside, in the community. For families that showed preference for schools that were further away, expressed frustration with long travel times, traffic as well as early morning wake-up calls in order to arrive to school on time. Even though some parents were able to identify the importance of being within proximity of a school, some still made the decision to send their children to schools further afield. This may be for a variety of reasons

This was noted in the parents who chose mainly church and independent school settings for their children.

Beyond the financial and logistical aspects, parents' perceptions of reputation and ethos was found to influence school preferences. This was manifested through perceptions of church schools upkeeping a strict moral and religious foundation on which gave a means of instilling discipline and ethical values to their students, in line with Catholic values. Concerns were expressed that some church schools were exclusive because they only admitted catholic students. Independent schools were perceived as fostering a high achievement environment, with parents emphasising the importance of extra-curricular activities, which were frames as positive traits attributed to the schools.

It was also noted that from within church and independent schools, parents carried a level of aspirational capital, believing that their children's attendance within particular schools would render enhanced social mobility and future opportunities.

Lastly, Information, was found to play a large part in becoming sensitive to the differences and similarities between each sector. It was found that the parts made majority use of 'hot' knowledge such as word of mouth, and experiences as well as combining that to 'cold' knowledge, acquired through social media, school websites, open days. However, some parents expressed that whilst they were able to find information for state and church schools, some independent schools were less transparent with providing certain information into the public sphere. It was found that social networks, played a crucial role in the formulation of school choice, especially to those who did not have access to official/formal data.

I have come to understand that even though at surface value, the concept of choice may be seen as universal for all, this is far from the truth, as socio-economic status played a major

role, either in providing cultural capital or the economic capital among other factors to support the different preferences a parent may make for their children.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

Despite exposing valuable insights into the school selection process, the study had several limitations. Firstly, it was very difficult to recruit participants and hence the sample size of 9 parents was relatively small, which cannot be considered as indicative of the perspectives of all Maltese parents within the education system. Thus, a larger sample, with more varied participants may offset a broader understanding of school choice among different demographics. Further research done on this topic could offer to be investigated using a mixed methods approach in order to garner both qualitative and quantitative insight for data analysis.

Finally, this study was focused solely on the parental perceptions and perspective, whereas the perspectives of educators, SLT, or students, may have provided further insight by gathering and comparing data between different stakeholders in education, as well as providing an in-depth view of the strengths and challenges faced by each sector.

6.3 Recommendations for Further research

In the wake of the analysis of the findings collected by this study, a number of possible areas of further research shall follow. These potential research topics stemmed from the writing of the literature review as well as from the findings of the study. Some of the topics here were also mentioned informally by some of the participants from the study.

- The progress and development of education through the history of Malta

Through reviewing the literature in order to create a background on the similarities and differences between the three school sectors, further research in this area could yield further insight into the origins of these sectors and the history of shaped how each sector's functions gave rise to their current form.

- The budgetary distribution of funds in State, Church and Independent schools.

As mentioned by the parents, in relation to state schools being the most equipped schools, especially when providing for children with learning difficulties, when comparing to church and independent schools. It would be interesting to find out why such a perception may exist and to find out some schools within each sector allocate their budgets as well as looking at how state budgeting or institutional funding is used.

- Social class/socio-economic status of parents whose children attend State, Church and Independent schools.

Through parent's perspective of social distinctions within independent schools, the concept of social class and social mobility could be explored to find out how this translates to a school setting. It may also explore the implications or advantages this may have on individuals of the same class or those lower or above.

- The stories of children with learning difficulties in State, Church and Independent schools.

Through the experience of different parents who commented that children with learning difficulties were not properly taken care of within schools of church and independent sectors. Therefore, a study about the experiences of these children and their parents may show the similarities and differences in each sector. This may also include how each sector implements different policies in order to create and maintain an environment of inclusion.

6.4 Conclusion

This study has provided a detailed exposition of the factors that influence parental school choice in Malta, by offering insights into how factors such as the economic, logistical and social status were to shape educational decisions. Through the highlighting of these disparities, this research contributes to the ongoing discussion on how to achieve a more equitable education system for all. In conclusion, policy design should be given to improving the transparency, the reduction of financial barriers and bettering of services, to ensure that all children regardless of socio-economic background, have access to high quality education.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Agreement on the Church schools (28/11/1991)

399

The REPUBLIC OF MALTA and the HOLY SEE,

bearing in mind, on the part of the Republic of Malta, the principles enforced by its Constitution and by those International Bodies to which it adheres, and, on the part of the Holy See, the documents of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council and also the norms of the Code of Canon Law;

acknowledging the primary right of parents to choose the schools they deem best suited for the education of their children;

acknowledging as well the right to freedom of education and the consequent duty of the State to make possible in practice the exercise of this right, without discrimination;

considering the public character of the service offered by Church Schools to Maltese society;

have agreed that it is opportune to reach a new and definitive Agreement on Church Schools.

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Wherefore, the Republic of Malta, as represented by its Plenipotentiary Dr Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, Minister of Education and the Interior, and the Holy See, as represented by its Plenipotentiary Msgr. Pier Luigi Celata, titular Archbishop of Doclea, Apostolic Nuncio ^{to Malta} have by common accord established as follows: ⁴⁴⁹ ^{A.P.C.}

Article 1

The State recognizes as "Church Schools", the subject-matter of this Agreement, the schools which, even though belonging to or directed by various canonical legal persons, are recognized as such in writing by the competent diocesan Bishop, and are subject to him according to Canon Law.

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Article 2

1. The State recognizes the right of the Church to establish and direct its own schools according to their specific nature and with autonomy of organization and operation, while observing the general regulations envisaged by the State's educational policy regarding the "National Minimum Curriculum" and the "National Minimum Conditions" put into effect in State Schools.

2. In the event that a Church School is found to be in breach of such general regulations, as actually put into effect in State Schools, the Minister of Education, before adopting any provision, shall be bound to grant a respite of twelve months within which the School, saving any other right guaranteed by law, shall bind itself to conform to those same regulations.

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Article 3

The criteria for admission to Church Schools are freely established by the competent ecclesiastical Authorities in such a way that, without discrimination, the public character of the service offered by the same Schools to those who share their educational principles is assured. This does not exclude the possibility, in line with the proper mission of the Church and in the judgement of the same ecclesiastical Authorities, of reserving some places for less privileged categories, or in view of particular socio-familial needs.

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Article 4

The Church shall complete the process of reorganization of its Schools in such a way that all the Primary and Secondary schools will have complete cycles of classes as from the scholastic year 1992 - 1993.

Article 5

Church Schools are free of charge. Free tuition, already put into effect in Secondary Classes, will be extended to the Primaries and Kindergartens as from the first January 1992 and from the first January 1993 respectively.

P.P.C.

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Article 6

Church Schools are financed by the Church and by the State according to the following criteria:

1. a) The Church makes available to its own Schools such buildings that it owns in which they are established.

b) There shall also be to the exclusive charge of the Church: the maintenance and possible future extension of the schools' buildings; the renting from third parties of immovable property for use as schools; the remuneration to Spiritual Counsellors; the services rendered by persons not forming part of the ordinary teaching or non-teaching staff of the Schools; the board and lodging of Maltese and non-Maltese students; the tuition of any non-Maltese students.

The Church shall see to the financing of the above costs through: the raising of funds; free donations from parents or others; an annual collection in each diocese; boarding fees; tuition fees of any non-Maltese students; any other source of income.

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2. a) There shall be to the charge of the Church and the State: the remuneration of the teaching and non-teaching staff, inclusive of the social security contributions and the bonuses prescribed by law; the general expenses estimated at ten per centum of the total amount of the remuneration paid to the teaching and non-teaching staff, taken gross before the deduction corresponding to the contribution of Religious personnel as in article 6, 2.b, ii).
- b) The Church shall contribute towards the financing of the expenses mentioned in article 6, 2.a) according to the measure resulting from the sum:
- i) of the yearly income of that part of the capital, accruing from a better development of its immovable property, which it shall assign to this purpose and which it shall entrust to the Foundation for Church Schools;

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ii) and of the contribution offered by the Religious serving in Church Schools, corresponding to the difference between the remuneration properly due to them as established in article 6, 2.a) and 6, 2.d), iii) and that actually received by them according to the decisions of the competent ecclesiastical Authorities.

c) The State shall contribute towards the financing of the same expenses mentioned in article 6, 2.a) according to the measure corresponding to the difference between their total amount and the contribution of the Church mentioned in article 6, 2.b).

d) For the purpose of determining the remuneration of the teaching and non-teaching staff, it is established that:

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- i) the teaching staff includes the same categories envisaged in each State School;
- ii) the number of teaching and non-teaching staff is established in relation to operational requirements and in proportion to the number of students in each school, according to the criteria also used in State Schools;
- iii) the remuneration of the teaching and non-teaching staff, including also the social security contributions and bonuses prescribed by law, is established, for the same service and qualifications, on a par with that paid in State Schools.

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Article 7

In order to make it possible to determine in due time the financial contribution of the State, the Commission for Education of the Maltese Episcopal Conference shall submit to the Ministry of Education, by the thirty-first August of every year, the list of the teaching and non-teaching staff, both Religious and lay, of Church Schools, deemed to be required for the following scholastic year, with an indication of the respective remuneration of each.

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Article 8

1. The Government shall forward its contribution, free of all taxes, to the Fund for Church Schools at the Commission for Education of the Maltese Episcopal Conference, in six instalments, at two months' interval, in advance, by the fifteenth day of the months of October, December, February, April, June and August.

2. In view of the different dates of the commencement of the financial years of the Government and of Church Schools, in the months of October and December the Government may continue paying instalments of the same amount as in the preceding scholastic year, provided that the difference will be settled in the first days of the following Government financial year.

Article 9

The State guarantees to the teachers of Church Schools the same facilities envisaged for those in State Schools: in-service training courses, scholarships, etc.

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Article 10

1. The State shall guarantee to the students of Church Schools the same allowances and stipends granted to students in its own Schools, and shall also guarantee to them those other facilities enjoyed by students in State Schools in ways to be agreed upon by the Maltese Episcopal Conference and the Ministry of Education and, in the event of lack of agreement, through the procedures established in article 15.

2. The State, moreover, recognizes parity between qualifications obtained at Church Schools and those awarded by its own Schools, for all intents and purposes for which these qualifications may be required, without any discrimination.

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Article 11

The Church places at the disposal of its Schools the buildings and their annexed facilities in the actual state in which they are to be found. Any restructuring or improvements of these buildings that the Government, now or in the future, shall deem necessary shall be at the charge of the Government, saving however the latter's right to be indemnified, taking into account the time that would have elapsed, if ever the same buildings would no longer be used as schools.

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Article 12

If at any time the canonical legal persons concerned, with the approval of the Maltese Episcopal Conference, so request, the Government undertakes to obtain from Banks to be designated the concession of loans at reduced rates of interest to effect works of restructuring, improvement or expansion, which, in the judgement of the competent ecclesiastical Authorities, are deemed useful to improve the efficiency of the buildings or of the installations of Church Schools, or to ensure to a larger number of parents the exercise of their right of choice of education for their children.

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Article 13

Church Schools, given their social function and their exclusion of profit motive, are exempt from import-duty on goods destined to be used for their own activities, and are subject to the tariffs applicable for domestic or non-commercial use as regards public utilities.

Article 14

1. The present Agreement shall come into force, saving the provisions of articles 4 and 5, when the Parties exchange an official communication that the full implementation of all the provisions of the same Agreement through the appropriate legal instruments according to their respective legal systems has taken place.

2. The present Agreement replaces all other previous agreements on Church Schools.

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699

Article 15

1. If in future there shall arise difficulties of interpretation or of application of the provisions of the present Agreement, the Holy See and the Republic of Malta shall entrust the search for an amicable solution to a Joint Commission that shall be composed of the Apostolic Nuncio to Malta and of the president of the Maltese Episcopal Conference or of their delegates for the Holy See, and of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and of the Minister responsible for Education or of their delegates for the Republic of Malta.

2. In case of default of performance of what is contemplated in the preceding paragraph, or in the absence of an amicable solution of difficulties of interpretation or of application of the provisions of the present Agreement in the manner contemplated in the preceding paragraph, or in case of default of performance of the obligations undertaken by virtue of the present Agreement, saving always the rights of the Parties at international law, an ecclesiastical entity or the Government which consider themselves as being due any obligation whatsoever deriving from this same Agreement, shall have the right to take the appropriate legal measures against the party not fulfilling its obligations before the Courts having jurisdiction and competence.

P. P. C.

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Done at Valletta, Malta, on the ^{28th} day of November, 1991, in
two originals in the English and Italian languages, both texts
being equally authentic.

+ P'ier Luigi 'Cicote

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For the Republic of Malta

For the Holy See

Appendix 2: Outline of the function of the Parents Foundation for Education



Historical Background

Way back in the mid-1980s, a group of parents got together to share views on a common educational situation: they were concerned about the educational future of their young children because private Schooling at the time did not offer enough choice to parents.

The solution they arrived at was to set up an independent School financed by the collective effort of the parents.

The idea soon gathered momentum among parents and the response was overwhelming.

Parents found the moral strength needed to realize an idea which at the time was only a desire to do something for the educational development of their children.

The notarial public deed that gave birth to the Foundation was published on the 2nd July, 1988 in the records of Notary Public, Dr. Pierre Attard.

Objectives of the Foundation

The main objectives of the Foundation are, *inter alia*, to raise funds in order to establish private Schools for the purpose of:

- Providing a broad-based multilingual education, in a personalized manner aiming at the development of the full person,
- Offering high academic standards in line with national curricula,
- Having a Catholic environment,
- In a physical environment conducive to the above to children of all ages in such number as may be determined.

The Trustees of the Foundation

Mr Frederick Mifsud Bonnici – 1988-2004
Prof. Joseph M Ganado – 1988-2008
Rev. Prof. Peter Serracino Inglott – 1988-2005

Mr James Bonello – 2004-
Prof. Josef Lauri – 2005-

Dr Joseph A Schembri – 2008-

Rules of the Foundation

Apart from the constitutive notarial deed establishing the Foundation, rules are made to ensure consistent application of procedures and to implement policies. Rules are reviewed and updated as needs arise. The Foundation carries out its functions by means of resolutions of the Trustees after consultation with the two Schools; San Anton and San Andrea Schools. The Statute of the Foundation empowered the Trustees to make, amend and interpret the rules of the Foundation.

On the 14th of July 1988, the first Rules and Regulations were approved at general meetings by the parents:

- The Contribution Rules 1988, and
- The Admission Rules 1988.

When San Andrea School opened its doors, the following additional Rules were approved:

- The Contribution (Amendment) Rules. Resolution of all the Trustees of the Parents Foundation for Education dated 11th September 1992
- The Admission Rules (Second School). Resolution of all the Trustees of the Parents Foundation for Education dated 11th September 1992.

A year later, in 1993, these additional Rules came into force:

- The Contribution Rules 1993 as amended in 2009
- The Admission Rules 1993
- The Delegation of Functions Rules 1998
- Resolution on Refund of Contributions (San Anton School) 2003

In administering the Rules, every effort is made to apply them correctly. Where doubts arise, the official text prevails.

Contributors are obliged to read and observe the Rules of the Foundation. They should familiarise themselves with all other available material on the Schools and with the aims and systems.

Experience has shown that Contributors in their very great majority are proud to form part of the Foundation and they abide by and respect the Rules. To safeguard the common good of the Foundation and of the Schools, the Foundation is empowered by Rule 18 (d) of the Delegations of Functions Rules 1998 to refuse, suspend or reduce any refund to any Contributors who fail to fulfil their obligations under any applicable Rules of the Foundation and of the Schools.

Aims and Ideals

These are the sub-headings of the leaflet: Aims and Ideals:

1. Parental choice,
2. Parents must choose and not be chosen,
3. The Foundation must not be exclusive,
4. It is a voluntary organization,
5. The Parents Foundation is autonomous,
6. The Parents Foundation for Education and its Schools are to be non-profit making,
7. Capital and current income,
8. Educational aims,
9. The Foundation has a democratic culture,
10. A catalyst for change,
11. The Foundation is outward looking,
12. Scholarships,
13. Ecumenical

A copy of this leaflet can be obtained from the Schools of the Foundation. The contents of this leaflet have largely remained unchanged since the beginning of the Foundation, with the only exception being made to include in it the reference to San Andrea School when this School was instituted.

The Current Position

Two Schools, both at I-Imselliet, are fully operational: San Anton School and San Andrea School. Both offer education from a very early age of the children right up to their teenage years (ages 15/16).

The vision and the principles that served as a catalyst to set up the Foundation in 1988 are as strong today as they were in early days. It is appropriate to reproduce a definition of what the Foundation stands for. This is taken from a write-up found in the website of the San Andrea School:

"The PFE is owned by present contributors, and it is an institutional mechanism through which the two Schools are able to receive funds in order to carry out the necessary capital expenditure, the operational expenditure being covered by the fees that the Schools charge. It is a voluntary and totally autonomous organization and is a public institution open to all on an equal opportunity basis. The PFE is not owned by any one or more persons nor controlled by any interests. It is managed by the Trustees. The Schools are separate bodies and are managed each by a School Board. The PFE and its Schools are non-profit making organizations, all their income is invested directly in the fulfilment of the PFE's

aims. Any excess of income over expenditure does not accrue to anyone but is directly re-invested". (Quoted from San Andrea School website).

The Contribution

"The PFE's Schools are committed to the kind of parental involvement that puts into practice the principle that education must be a partnership between home and School, for the ultimate benefit of the children."

The principle of "a partnership between home and School for the benefit of the children" sums up the whole meaning of the Parents Foundation for Education as a non-profit making voluntary organization.

The Contribution is made to the Foundation to apply in any one of the Schools. It enables the Foundation and the Schools to fund their respective projects for the building of the Schools in accordance with the Statute of the Foundation. The Schools of the Foundation had to support their capital programmes by means of additional financing through bank loans. Accordingly, Contributors are bound by the Rules to keep their Contribution in the system until the bank loans, relative to the building of the Schools, are fully repaid and a programme of refunds is initiated.

What had been set in motion in 1988 needs to be sustained by current and future Contributors. In this way, the Foundation will be in a position to refund Contributions to Parents whose children have completed their Schooling and for the Schools to continue to progress in the years ahead.

In support of this requirement, the Foundation is empowered by the Rules to determine itself when refunds of Contributions are made; and the method of such refunds. Contributions do not bear any interest in favour of the Contributor – Article seven of the Contribution Rules 1988.

No Guarantees

The payment of a Contribution does not imply any guarantees on the part of the Foundation or any School to provide educational facilities for the children registered or any specified type or level of educational facility. However, the Foundation, through the Contributors who are Parents of children wishing to attend the Schools, endeavours to establish and provide such facilities to highest standards possible – Rule 13 of the Contribution Rules 1993.

Contributors' Obligations

Contributors share in the moral and ethical obligation to act positively as a Contributor participating in the establishment and operation of Schools, for the benefit of the children registered with the Foundation, in line with the Aims and Principles of the Foundation.

The Foundation is synonymous with Parent Contributors and acts only through them. It is not a distinct functional unit, although it has very specific duties. The Foundation and the Trustees are not obliged to provide any services or assistance unless there are Parents willing to take on the respective responsibilities and only through such Parents. Each and every Contributor shares in the responsibility and undertakes to participate when making a Contribution - Rule 14 of the Contribution Rules 1993.

Liability of Foundation

The Foundation is a distinct legal person from the Schools it establishes. The Foundation shall not be liable for any obligations incurred by the Schools in fulfilling their projects, or otherwise.

Queries

Parents seeking to obtain more information on the Foundation and its Schools may do so through the Administration Offices of the respective Schools. Queries requiring particular attention are referred by the Administration Offices of the respective Schools to the Registrar of the Foundation for guidance. In exceptional circumstances, matters are referred to be dealt with by the Trustees of the Foundation.

The Registrar

By time, the functions and duties of the Registrar of the Foundation have become mainly administrative, co-ordinative and regulatory. For this reason, the School where Parents register their children remains the direct channel of contact between Contributors and the Schools/Foundation.

Contribution Refund

By resolution dated 14th May 2003, it was established as a policy, after extensive debates at School Board and Trustees levels, and following consultation with the Parents, that Contribution Refunds, when due for repayment, shall be made on the basis of a list consisting of Contributors whose children no longer attend a School of the Foundation. Each School has its own separate list of such Contributors. The way the two lists are compiled takes the same format as defined in the said Resolution dated 14th May 2003, namely:

1. According to the year when the last child of a family was removed from the official class list of the relative School and
2. Within the same groups, the sequence is established according to the Contribution Number.

At the time of this review (July 2019), the Foundation is effecting refunds to Contributors whose children have completed schooling in San Anton School. This process has reached Contributors whose children have finished schooling last year (2018). The process of refunds to Contributors whose children have attended San Andrea School has started following the Annual General Meeting held by San Andrea School on 28th February 2019

and a resolution by The Trustees on 25th June 2019. The same policy as for San Anton School was adopted. It is relevant to state that San Andrea School, as in the case of San Anton previously, had managed to anticipate the target year set for the commencement of refunds. This had been set for year 2022. Refunds would therefore commence three years in advance. Contributors who are not offered a confirmed place in writing in any of the two Schools of the Foundation and withdraw their registration are refunded their Contribution within a period of about two/three months from the date their request reaches the office of the Registrar.

The Contribution Rules 1993 are amended by the Contribution Amendment Rules, 2009

In 2009, the following clauses were added to the Contribution Rules 2/93.

- Clause 15 - Non-refundable Contribution on registration, and certain administrative provisions regarding receipt of all Contributions.
- Clause 16 - Certain special cases where Contribution becomes refundable immediately subject to an administrative charge.
- ~~Clause 17 - Right to extend the benefit of the Contribution to grandchildren.~~
(Please see Note below).
- Clause 18 - Waiver of Contribution requirement – clause relative to expatriates.

The Contribution Rules include also a number of rulings by the Trustees to explain how the Rules are to be interpreted – Reference: The Interpretation clauses at the end of the booklet of the Contribution Rules 1993.

Note:

As of 31st December 2016, the application of this Clause is suspended by the Trustees following a request by San Anton School which was agreed to also by San Andrea School – Meeting of the Trustees held on Thursday 16th June 2016.

Note on the Protection of Personal Data kept in the Registration System for the Admission of Children in the Schools of the Foundation.

The nature of the registration of Contributors and of Children requires the submission and the keeping of personal data during the registration process. It is hereby declared that personal data is given the importance it deserves, and the Foundation and its Schools ensure that personal data is kept solely for the administration of the registration system. It is never made use of for any other reasons whatsoever.

The personal data maintained by the system includes such details as Names, Age, Gender, Address and other related information. For example, the release with the Foundation and its Schools of a copy of the birth certificate is an essential requirement.

Any Contributor registering with the Foundation needs to give such data because it is a very important element in the registration system. By reading this note on the protection of data, Contributors are asked to give their consent to the Foundation and to its Schools to the use of the data given, specifically and strictly, for the purpose of administrating the registration system, as regulated by the Aims and Ideals and the Rules of the Parents Foundation for Education.

Personal Data entrusted with the Foundation and its Schools ceases to be of any use to the registration system when Contributors receive the refund of their Contribution. Once refunds are affected, the Foundation and its Schools cancel personal data records that are no longer of any use to the registration system. Contributors regain their right to be "forgotten".

The Foundation and its Schools commit themselves to hold control over the information which they keep and it can be stated that the personal data of Contributors has always been in safe hands. The Foundation and its Schools will strive to maintain the high standards expected in regard to the keeping and use of personal data of Contributors and their families.

Amendments to the Rules of the Foundation

Article Seven of the statute of the Foundation empowers the Trustees to make rules regarding the establishment of any school, its operations and other matters that may be necessary from time to time.

During the year 2020, effective from 1st June 2020, due to exigencies of the two School Boards, the Trustees in conjunction with them made a general review of the Admission Rules 1993, particularly to Rule 7. The Contribution Rules 1993 and the Delegation of Function Rules 1998 were also amended (effective from 1st June 2020).

Joseph Bonello

Registrar, Parents Foundation for Education

03rd June 2023

Appendix 3: General Regulations for Admissions into Church Schools, Malta (Year 1 Primary 2025-2026, Applicants born in 2020)



**SECRETARIAT FOR
CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

Admissions Office

General Regulations for Admission into Church Schools, Malta Year 1 Primary 2025-2026 Applicants born in 2020

ADMISSIONS CRITERIA

1.0 CRITERIA 1 - MAINSTREAM: Apply with the higher criterion according to your case.

- a. Children from Church Homes.
- b. Church School Employees or Employees of the Secretariat for Catholic Education may register their children in the same school where the parent / custodian works, or in a school of the same religious entity. Since the Archbishop's Seminary and the Sacred Heart College are schools of the same religious entity, employees at The Archbishop's Seminary may register their daughters at the Sacred Heart College and vice versa, employees at the Sacred Heart College may register their sons at The Archbishop's Seminary. Reference to this criterion will hereafter be "children of employees in the same school".

Curriculum Heads of Departments of the Secretariat for Catholic Education may register their children in the same school where they teach three times a week.

The parent / custodian should have been employed *full-time*, latest, during the first part of the scholastic year prior to the scholastic year of admission and has to still be employed *full-time* with a church school at the beginning of the scholastic year of admission. This includes *full-time* employees who are on reduced hours temporarily and will return to *full-time* employment. This is not applicable to those employed long-term on *Full-Time Reduced Hours*.

Children of employees at the following schools may be registered in the same school where the parent / custodian works, or in a school of the same religious entity, if the schools have vacant places (vide paragraph 1.6).

Boys: St. Augustine, St. Paul's Missionary College, and the Archbishop's Seminary. Employees at the Sacred Heart College may register their sons at the Archbishop's Seminary.

Girls: Our Lady Immaculate, St. Dorothy Żebbuġ, St. Dorothy Sliema, St. Joseph Blata l-Bajda, St. Joseph Paola, St. Joseph Sliema, St. Monica Birkirkara, St. Monica Gżira, St. Monica Mosta, St. Jeanne Antide College Primary School Gudja, St. Jeanne Antide College Immaculate Conception Secondary School Tarxien, and the Sacred Heart College. Employees at the Archbishop's Seminary may register their daughters at the Sacred Heart College.

Boys and Girls: De La Salle, St. Aloysius College, St. Albert the Great, St. Benild (Stella Maris College), St. Francis Birkirkara, Cospicua, Imsida, San Gwann, Sliema and St. Lucija, Theresa Nuzzo Hamrun and Marsa.

- ċ. Children whose siblings are attending a Church School during scholastic year 2024-2025 may be registered in the same school as their sibling/s or in a school of the same religious entity. The schools of the religious entity need to be either both in Malta, or else both in Gozo.

Since the Archbishop's Seminary and the Sacred Heart College are schools of the same religious entity, girls whose brothers attend The Archbishop's Seminary may be registered at the Sacred Heart College and vice versa, boys whose sisters attend the Sacred Heart College may be registered at The Archbishop's Seminary.

This is not applicable to the siblings of Sixth Form students at St. Aloysius College Birkirkara.

In a school for girls only, the Siblings Criterion will not apply if the applicant is a boy, and vice-versa. In this case, the applicant may apply under the "Other Applicants" Criterion (paragraph 3).

Eligible for this criterion:

- i. Siblings, from the same parents / custodians and who are residing in the same house and form part of the same family.

Archbishop's Curia
St Calcedonius Square
Floriana FRN 1535, Malta

Postal Address
Binja Josmar, 30, Idmejda Street,
Bulzan BZN 1521

Tel. +356 2203 9360 / 7999 0224
Email. admissions@maltadiocese.org
www.church.mt

- ii. Siblings, who although have common parents / custodians do not live in the same house or family but spend at least 20 hours a week together. For the application to be considered, one needs to submit relevant documents **and** a declaration under oath taken in front of a notary, made by both parents / custodians, indicating the number of hours the children live together in the same house.
- iii. Siblings, who have one common parent / custodian and spend at least 20 hours a week together. For the application to be considered, one needs to submit relevant documents **and** a declaration under oath taken in front of a notary, made by the people who have the care and custody of the children, indicating the number of hours the children live together in the same house.
- iv. Children who are being brought up by the same adults together and are living in the same house and family. For the application to be considered, one needs to submit relevant documents **and** a declaration under oath taken in front of a notary, stating that the adults are taking care of the children together and indicating the reasonable cause for this situation. In these cases, the Admissions Board will determine if the reasonable cause presented is justified or not.
- v. Children who are adopted or in foster care and are living with a family who have other children attending a church school. Adopted or fostered children are considered siblings to the children of the family they live with. For the application to be considered one needs to submit the Certificate from the competent agency that indicates that the child is adopted or is fostered within the family.
- d. **Children attending a Church School who wish to be transferred to another Church School of the same religious entity.** This applies between the Schools of St. Dorothy Sliema and Żebbuġ; between the Schools of St. Joseph Blata l-Bajda, Sliema and Paola; and between the Schools of St. Monica Mosta and Birkirkara when the parent / custodian is employed at St Monica Birkirkara or when the sibling already attends or will be attending St. Monica Birkirkara during the next scholastic year.
This criterion will only be available till the 2026-2027 Admissions process.
- e. **Exemption from Regular Attendance in case family is abroad for serious reasons.** The admission of children who were exempted from attending the Church School they were registered in as their parents / custodians were going to be abroad for a serious reason. These children attend the school chosen during the process of entry of the previous year.
- f. **Kindergarten 2 pupils of Church Schools without Continuity.** These pupils participate in the Choice of School Ballot.
- g. **Children of Church School Employees or Employees of the Secretariat for Catholic Education who cannot attend the same school where the parent / custodian works.** Reference to this criterion will hereafter be "children of employees in another school". They will participate in the Choice of School Ballot.

The parent / custodian should have been employed *full-time*, latest, during the first part of the scholastic year prior to the scholastic year of admission and has to still be employed *full-time* with a church school at the beginning of the scholastic year of admission. This includes *full-time* employees who are on reduced hours temporarily and will return to *full-time* employment. This is not applicable to those employed long-term on *Full-Time Reduced Hours*.

The Criterion 1g applies also for children of Employees who work in Church Schools and for children of Curriculum Heads of Departments of the Secretariat for Catholic Education who teach three times a week in a particular school where the level of entry is not Year 1 and when the children are not in a school without continuity.

Criterion 1g also applies to the children of Employees mentioned in the previous paragraph where there are classes in Year 1 which do not have any vacant places. If a vacancy arises, Criterion 1b will apply and not Criterion 1g. These applicants need to apply under Criterion 1b and 1g.

The Primary School of St Aloysius College is receiving many applications from siblings and children of employees of their own school. Therefore, it will not accept children of employees in another school and the remaining available places will be offered to other applicants (Criteria 3).

Hence, Children of employees in another school may apply under criteria 1g and take part in the choice of school ballot. They would be able to choose a school from those mentioned in paragraph 6, excluding St Aloysius College.

Parents / custodians who wish to include St Aloysius College along with the other schools need to apply as "Other Applicants".

For children of employees in another school one is to choose if to apply under Criterion 1g and participate in the Choice of School Ballot but with restricted choice of schools, or apply under Criterion 3 "Other Applicants" and take part in the Participation Ballot. If the latter proceed to the Choice of School Ballot, they will make their choice by rank order from all the schools.

- h Applicants who are eligible to apply under criteria 1a – 1d who did not apply in the stipulated time may apply under criterion 1h on the same dates of "Other Applicants" (paragraph 10)

There will be 10 mainstream places reserved for this criterion. 1h criterion applicants will be registered at the school they were eligible for if places are still available. Should there be more than 10 applicants for this criterion, a ballot is held amongst them and the first 10 in rank will be enrolled in the school they were eligible for.

Those who are not registered through this ballot, will participate in the participation ballot as "Other Applicants". However, they will also be placed on the waiting list for the school they were eligible for before those who are in the general waiting list, as indicated in paragraph 1.6.

If the places reserved for criterion 1h are not utilised all, these will be added to the total places available for the ballot of "Other Applicants".

- 1.1 Criteria 1a–1g are hierarchically structured: children who were exempted from attendance are admitted first, then children from Church Homes, followed by children of employees in the same school, then Siblings, those requesting a transfer. Children from Church Schools without Continuity, and the children of employees in another school will choose a school according to the choice of school rank order.
- 1.2 Applicants under Criteria 1a-1d will be accepted if the number of applications is not greater than the vacant places in the relevant school/s. If the number of applicants is greater:
1. children who were exempted from attendance are admitted first, then
 2. the children from Church Homes followed by
 3. children of employees in the same school, then
 4. the applicants whose siblings are going to be in the same Church school, then
 5. applicants whose siblings are going to be in a school of the same religious entity, and then
 6. those for transfers.

A ballot takes place amongst the applicants of a group when the number of applicants in that group is greater than the number of places.

- 1.3 If the number of vacant places is sufficient to cater also for all the children of Church Schools without Continuity but not for all the children of employees in another school, a ballot takes place for the children of these employees. The applicants who rank first will be able to take part in the Choice of School Ballot together with children from Church Schools without Continuity. If the number of vacant places is not enough for all the children from Church Schools without Continuity, the Choice of School Ballot will be held for applicants of this criterion only.
- 1.4 Children from Church Schools without Continuity and the children of employees in another school participate in the Choice of School Ballot together with "Other Applicants" of Criterion 3.
- 1.5 For the sake of transparency, the lists of names and criteria of applicants by school are published on www.church.mt.
- 1.6 Initially some schools cannot offer placements i.e schools which feature a 0 in the 'Number of Places' column of Table in paragraph 6. However a vacancy may arise in these schools either during or after the Registration process. Therefore those who are eligible need to apply.

On the same day of the Participation Ballot, particular ballots will be drawn for each school and each criterion. The following will participate in these ballots: the applicants for the schools which had no availabilities and the applicants who applied late, criterion (1h), according to the criterion they were eligible for. Ballots will be held for applicants of Employees (1b) and applicants for Employees who applied late (1h) for the same school and ballots for Siblings (1c) and Siblings who applied late (1h) for the same school. If need be, this procedure will be applied also for applicants under the criterion of Children from Church Homes who applied late (1h) and those who applied late for transfer (1h).

These applicants will be placed on the waiting list according to the criterion hierarchy and rank order from the particular ballots.

2.0 CRITERIA 2 - SERIOUS CASES:

A number of children needing the assistance of an L.S.E., children considered as social cases and asylum seekers cases are accepted.

2.1 The Regulations that govern admission in Church Schools of Serious Cases and of children who themselves or their parents / custodians sought asylum when they came to Malta, are being published as separate documents, entitled: *Regulations for Admission into Church Schools, Malta 2025-2026 Serious Cases* and *Church Schools Admissions 2025-2026 Regulations for Asylum Seekers*, respectively. The Regulations for Serious Cases and for Asylum Seekers form part of these same Regulations. These documents are available on www.church.mt.

2.2 The Regulations for Serious Cases provide for the admission of:

- **Serious cases of Criteria 1** i.e. Serious cases of children from Church Homes, children of employees in the same school, siblings, transfers, exempted from attendance, children from Church Schools without Continuity, children of employees in another school and Social Case of children under Care Order living in the same Residential Home.
- **Serious cases of Criteria 3** i.e. Serious cases of "Other Applicants".

2.3 Children who need the assistance of an L.S.E. – This Criterion includes children who:

- are statemented and need the assistance of a Learning Support Educator (L.S.E.) or similar, and for whom the schools can provide an individualised educational programme (IEP).
- have started or are about to start the statementing process at the Statementing Moderating Panel or at the C.D.A.U.
- have or will have certification from an educational psychologist or similar, which can lead to the assistance of an L.S.E. or similar.
- are applying for entry in Kinder one and whose autism screening resulted in the possible requirement of L.S.E. support.

Relevant documents are to be submitted with the application.

2.4 Children who already have a statement of needs and who by the application date have requested its review, or appealed the Statementing Board's decision, must apply as a Serious Case. The Commission of Serious Cases studies and takes decisions regarding such cases.

2.5 When an applicant already has a statement of needs and is supported by an L.S.E. but has registered progress and the parents / custodians, the school and the educational psychologist deem that s / he may advance without the assistance of an LSE and have submitted a request to the Statementing Moderating Panel for the removal of the support of the L.S.E. by the 31st October 2024, the applicant initially needs to apply as mainstream and needs to present the request for the removal of the L.S.E. and other relevant documents.

The Admissions Board will determine if the application is to proceed in mainstream or as a serious case.

2.6 Applicants with a statement of needs reading '*Learner's needs to be met by Class Teacher*' apply as mainstream students. The application is to include the Statementing document issued by the Statementing Moderating Panel and the most recent psycho-educational report.

2.7 Applicants who have allergies and / or might need to use an Epi-Pen but do not need the support of an LSE are to apply under mainstream. On the application, the parents / custodians of these applicants are obliged to present the latest medical reports accordingly.

2.8 It is very important that if circumstances change after the application or registration phase, the Admissions Office needs to be notified. This applies if the applicant starts a process at CDAU, psychologist or medical conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy, etc, are developed or if there is a change in the support given or if given the support of an L.S.E. (see paragraph 2.13).

2.9 Applicants who fail to apply as indicated above and are registered in a Church School, will lose their right of enrolment in the Church School. False declarations will result in invalidation of the application.

- 2.10 Social Cases.** Children under *Care Order* fall in this category. Children who are under *Care Order* and live in the same house with other children under *Care Order* who attend a Church school may apply for the same Church school, if there are available places (see Serious Cases Regulations paragraph 1.10).

Social Cases applicants can be mainstream or with the support of an L.S.E. Therefore, they will be considered according to their condition.

This category does not cover cases which are presented with only one of the following reasons: children of unmarried mothers; separation in marriage; adoption; fostering. Also see Criteria 1c regarding adopted and fostered children.

- 2.11 Asylum seekers.** Children who themselves or their parents / custodians sought asylum when they came to Malta. A small number of places in Church Schools is being allocated to these children.
- 2.12** Asylum seekers who need the assistance of an L.S.E. as described in paragraph 2.3 must apply according to the Regulations for Serious Cases as "Other Applicants" or according to the case itself.
- 2.13** Applicants for whom an application was not originally filed as a Serious Case, but start assessment by an educational psychologist or similar which might result in the support of an L.S.E., need to inform the Admissions Office immediately and ideally before the ballots. These will be placed in the relevant group according to the support needed (see paragraph 8.3 Serious Cases Regulations) and a ballot will be drawn as explained hereafter. Two groups of numbers will be presented: one group with numbers from 0 to 9, and another group with numbers from 0 to the number of tens of applicants. These two groups of numbers represent the units and the tens. A number is drawn from each group. The two numbers that are drawn will make up the applicant's number. It is probable that another applicant will already have the same number. If it evolves that these two applicants have a chance of choosing a place and only one place is available, a ballot will be drawn for them to determine who will be awarded the place in question. This process does not cancel the choices already made (see paragraph 2.8).

3.0 CRITERIA 3 - MAINSTREAM - "OTHER APPLICANTS"

- 3.1** Amongst "Other Applicants" there may be siblings who are applying for the same year of admission (twins) or other years of admission. Whenever possible siblings will be enrolled in the same school or in a school of the same religious entity. This happens when one of the siblings chooses a school. If there are not enough places for all siblings, the rank order of the one choosing the school is used.

In the case of twins, triplets etc, the child who ranks low during the ballot, is given the same ballot number of the sibling who ranked higher.

This also applies to Serious Cases if the possibility exists. Serious Case applicants of Criteria 1 are enrolled first. If the School has a vacant place for Shared L.S.E. and the applicant requires a full-time L.S.E., the School would be unable to accept the applicant in that particular case.

When applying, each sibling must declare who the other sibling is and which Year of Admission the latter is applying for. If this requirement is not adhered to, the Criterion for Siblings will not apply. This also applies for Girls.

- 3.2** Should the number of total applicants from Church Schools without Continuity and children of employees in another school be greater than the number of vacant places, applications from "Other Applicants" would not be filled.

4.0 SUBMISSION OF MORE THAN ONE APPLICATION

- 4.1** The Application under Criteria 1b (children of employees in the same school), Criteria 1c (siblings) and Criteria 1d (transfers) is also an application for Criteria 3. Therefore, there is no need for another application to be submitted. Those who do not wish to retain their Application under Criteria 3 are to write to the Board according to paragraph 17.4. There are instances where the Application under Criteria 3 does not apply (see paragraphs 4.7 and 4.8).
- 4.2** Those applying under Criteria 1b (children of employees in the same school) cannot apply under Criteria 1g (children of employees in another school) too and vice versa. This is unless both parents / custodians work in two separate church schools and Criteria 1b would apply for one parent / custodian and Criteria 1g would apply for the other parent / custodian. Another exception for this criterion applies

when a parent / custodian is applying for a school which has no vacant places in this level. Example: a parent / custodian who works at St Albert and has a son or daughter for Year 1.

- 4.3 Applicants under the Criterion of Exemption from attendance (Crit. 1e) may also apply under the Criterion of "Other Applicants" (Crit. 3).
- 4.4 Applicants under the Criterion of Schools without Continuity (Crit. 1f) are not to apply also as "Other Applicants" (Crit. 3) because they will participate in the Choice of School Ballot.
- 4.5 Applicants under the Criterion of children of employees in another school (Crit. 1g) have to choose to either apply under Criterion 1g and participate in the Choice of School Ballot, or apply under Criterion 3 "Other Applicants" and take part in the Participation Ballot.
- 4.6 The situation might present itself whereby an applicant would be able to submit an application both under the Criterion of children of employees in the same school (Crit. 1b) and also under the Siblings' Criterion (Crit. 1c). In this case one may also apply as "Other Applicants" (Crit. 3).
- 4.7 The situation might present itself whereby an applicant would be able to submit an application both under the Criterion of children of employees in the same school (Crit. 1b) and also under the Criterion of Schools without Continuity (Crit. 1f). In this case one is not to apply also under "Other Applicants" (Crit. 3) because through the Criterion of Schools without Continuity one would already be participating in the Choice of School Ballot.
- 4.8 The situation might present itself whereby an applicant would be able to submit an application both under the Siblings' Criterion (Crit. 1c) and also under the Criterion of Schools without Continuity (Crit. 1f). In this case one is not to apply also under "Other Applicants" (Crit. 3) because through the Criterion of Schools without Continuity one would already be participating in the Choice of School Ballot.
- 4.9 Applicants from a Church School with both a Primary and Secondary Level, but who wish to attend a different Church School may do so without forfeiting their place in the school where they are currently registered. In this case, they may apply as "Other Applicants" (paragraphs 3 and 10).
- 4.10 Applicants under Serious Cases are not to apply under another Criterion. If the Church Schools Admissions Board concludes that the application is not to proceed under serious cases, it will be placed under the relative criterion – view the Regulations for Serious Cases paragraph 10.4.
- 4.11 Applicants who may submit more than one application will be asked to make their final choice of school (either their current school or the new one) on the School Registration day.
- 5.0 APPLICANTS' YEAR OF BIRTH – Eligible applicants have to be born in 2020.**
- 5.1 The Board will consider requests for exemptions from this Regulation in the light of specific reasons, including cases where applicants would have repeated a year. These requests, together with relevant documents and other information requested by the Board, are to be addressed in writing to the Church Schools Admissions Board as indicated in paragraph 17.4, not later than fifteen days from application dates. The Church Schools Admissions Board decides if the exemption request should be granted.
- 5.2 Children need to be toilet trained before starting school. Children who are still in nappies or pull-ups at the beginning of the scholastic year, will not be allowed to attend and will lose their place at that school. Exemption may be made for children with a statement of needs.

6.0 THE SCHOOLS WHICH ACCEPT CHILDREN IN YEAR ONE ARE:

BOYS' SCHOOLS	Locality	Mainstream Places	Serious Cases
St. Augustine College	Marsa	63	9
St. Paul's Missionary College	Rabat	40	7
The Seminary	Rabat	62	8
Total Boys		165	24

GIRLS' SCHOOLS	Locality	Mainstream Places	Serious Cases
Sacred Heart College	St. Julians	64	7
Our Lady Immaculate	Hamrun	45	3
St. Dorothy	Sliema	26	4
St. Dorothy	Żebbuġ	5	3
St. Joseph	Blata l-Bajda	0	0
St. Joseph	Paola	7	1
St. Joseph	Sliema	15	1
St. Monica	Birkirkara	21	3
St. Monica	Gżira	2	5
St. Monica	Mosta	0	0
St. Jeanne Antide College Primary	Gudja	10	5
Total Girls		195	32

SCHOOLS BOYS AND GIRLS	Locality	Boys		Girls	
		Mainstream Places	Serious Cases	Mainstream Places	Serious Cases
De La Salle	Cottonera	41	6	42	5
St. Albert the Great Primary	Valletta	0	0	0	0
St. Aloysius Primary	Balzan	2	0	3	0
St. Benild (Stella Maris College)	Sliema	30	5	32	3
St. Francis	Birkirkara	0	0	0	0
St. Francis	Msida	0	0	0	0
St. Francis	Cospicua	0	0	0	0
Theresa Nuzzo	Marsa	0	0	0	0
Total Boys and Girls		73	11	77	8

- 6.1 The total vacancies for girls in mainstream is 272. The total vacancies for girls under serious cases is 40. The total vacancies for girls in mainstream and under serious cases is 312. The total vacancies for boys in mainstream is 238. The total vacancies for boys under serious cases is 35. The total vacancies for boys in mainstream and under serious cases is 273.
- 6.2 The total of serious cases includes children who need the assistance of an L.S.E., Social Cases and Asylum Seekers. If necessary the number of places offered in mainstream and for serious cases may vary but the total number of places offered would not be less than the published amount.
- 6.3 The amount of vacant places decreases once the first criteria applications have been made. A circular declaring the number of places filled, will be issued before the opening of the applications for "Other Applicants".
- 6.4 During the first scholastic term, an exercise is carried out by St. Francis Birkirkara, Cospicua and Msida Schools to identify the number of students who will be transferring from St. Francis Kinder Schools to St. Francis Primaries. The remaining vacant places in each of St. Francis Primaries will be published once this exercise is finalised.

- 6.5 If necessary, the number of places for boys or for girls at St. Aloysius College Primary, the primary schools of De La Salle and St. Benild, St. Francis Primary Schools and Theresa Nuzzo Marsa Primary School may vary but not the total number of available places in each school.
- 6.6 Initially some schools cannot offer placements because the places are filled by the children who are promoted from Kinder 2. If a vacancy arises in these schools, the vacant place will be offered according to the Criteria Hierarchy.
- 6.7 During the registration process some applicants from a church school will choose another school. Hence they will leave a vacant place in the school with continuity. These vacant places will be offered as per Admission Regulations. For example, a boy attending school "x" at second year kindergarten chooses another school for year one primary. The vacant post in school "x" that was going to be occupied in year one primary will be offered according to the Year One Primary Admissions Regulations.

7.0 RELIGION:

- 7.1 The aim of Church Schools is to impart a civic and Christian education to children according to the ideals of the Catholic Church as expressed in the Church Documents on Christian Education. Church Schools offer the teaching of the Catholic Religion, which includes Catholic Ethics. Church Schools will not offer an alternative subject to the teaching of the Catholic Religion.
- 7.2 St. Paul's Missionary College, only accepts candidates who present a Baptism Certificate of the Catholic Church or a Certificate stating acceptance in the Catholic Church.
- 7.3 St. Augustine College, the Seminary, Our Lady Immaculate Hamrun, St Dorothy Żebbuġ and Sliema, Sacred Heart College accept applicants who present a Catholic or a Christian Baptism certificate.
- 7.4 The other schools accept Catholics, Christians and Others.

8.0 INFORMATION & DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED FOR THE APPLICATION:

8.1 Online applicants are required to provide the following information:

Child's name and surname; Child's ID card number; Child's Date of Birth; Child's Gender; Address, Locality & Post Code; Home Telephone Number; Mother's / Father's / Custodian 1 and / or 2 name and surname; Mother's / Father's / Custodian 1 and / or 2 ID card number; Mother's / Father's / Custodian 1 and / or 2 mobile number; Email address of the Mother's / Father's / Custodian 1 and / or 2.

8.2 Documentation required to be uploaded during the online application.

- Catholics and Christians are to present the Baptism Certificate.
- Extract of the Birth Certificate from the Public Registry.
- Foreigners who do not have a Maltese identity card are required to write their passport number and upload a copy of their passport details instead of the identity card.
- A photo of the applicant.
- When applying parents / custodians will be asked to agree to The Declaration re Data Protection and Privacy. This Declaration may be viewed and / or downloaded from www.church.mt. Parents / custodians will be asked to indicate whether they would like to be notified or not if the Board needs to contact the school of their child.
- The Educational Programme Declaration, filled by the Head of School, indicates whether the student is mainstream, has access arrangements or is supported by an LSE or has started the process for statementing.

This Declaration may be downloaded from www.church.mt.

In certain circumstances the Educational Programme Declaration may be sent later. In this case, the applicant needs to indicate whether the student is mainstream, has access arrangements, is supported by an LSE or has started the process for statementing. If there is a discrepancy between the parents' / custodians' declaration and that of the Head of School, the Admissions Board will consider the indications by the Head of School and chances available according to the parents' / custodians' indication may be forfeited even if they have already occurred.

The Educational Programme Declaration signed by the Head of School, needs to be sent to the Admissions Office not later than a week after the School Registration, for the application to be valid. If this is not submitted, then the Registration will be invalid.

- g. The application by one parent / custodian, or a representative of the parents / custodians, indicates that the parents / custodians agree about the application.
- g. In the case of separated parents / custodians when the Courts have decided that the care and custody is joint and both parents / custodians have legal rights re the education of their children, both parents / custodians need to indicate their consent. In such cases, the relative and most recent legal document that defines the children's custody and educational responsibility is to be presented.
- The application is invalid if one parent / custodian disagrees or is uninformed and has not given his / her consent.

Other Documents required when applying with the following criteria:

- gh. If applying according to the Criterion for Children from Church Homes (1a) or Criterion for Social Cases of children under Care Order who live in the same Residential Home (2i):

A Declaration on the appropriate form, signed by the Director of the Church Home / Residential Home, to show that the child is a resident in the Church Home / Residential Home. This Declaration is to be made on the same day of the application. The preferred choice of school is also to be indicated.

The Declaration may be downloaded from www.church.mt.

- h. If applying according to the Siblings Criterion:
- i. The Birth Certificate from the Public Registry of the other sibling/s already attending a Church School;
 - ii. A photocopy of the identity cards of both parents / custodians;
 - iii. In the case of adopted or fostered children, a certificate from the Agency concerned, declaring the adoption or the fostering of the child, is also required.
 - iv. When applying according to paragraphs 1c ii, iii and iv, custody documents **AND** a Declaration under oath in front of a notary (paragraph 1c) are also required.
- fi. Applicants with a Statement of Needs that reads "*Learner's needs are to be met by Class Teacher*" are to present the Statement of Needs and the most recent psycho-educational report.
- i. Applicants who have allergies and / or might need to use an Epi-Pen need to present the latest medical documents accordingly.
- j. Documents which are not submitted with the application need to be submitted online on this link: <https://knisja.mt/forms/csm-missing-documents/>. You would need to include the application number and passcode.

Unless indicated otherwise, all documents for First Criteria applications have to be submitted by the 31st January 2025 and all documents for Third Criteria have to be submitted by the 31st March 2025. In case these are not sent, the application will be invalid.

9.0 APPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Parents / custodians may apply for Church School Entry online. Those who need assistance to fill the application online can phone as indicated in paragraphs 9.2, 9.3, 10 and 10.1.

- Only one application per criterion for the same applicant is accepted.
- Those who apply under the criteria for employees, siblings, transfer and schools without continuity are requested to give the necessary information according to the criteria they are applying under. All this information will be verified with the schools and the Secretariat accordingly.

9.2 APPLICATIONS CRITERIA 1

Applications of the following Criteria: Children from Church Homes, children of employees in the same school, Siblings, Transfers, children exempted from attendance, children from Church Schools without Continuity, and children of employees in another school (paragraphs 1a-1g), are filled:

- online on <https://church.mt/applications> from Thursday 21 November to Thursday 28 November 2024
- Those who require assistance to apply online may phone on 2203 9360 between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Application forms are not downloaded or collected beforehand.
Documents referred to in paragraph 8 are required.

9.3 LATE APPLICATIONS OF CRITERIA 1

- online on <https://church.mt/applications> from Thursday 5 December to Thursday 12 December 2024
- In case of difficulty in filling the application online, one can phone on 2203 9360 from Monday to Friday between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

10.0 APPLICATIONS CRITERION 1h and CRITERIA 3 “OTHER APPLICANTS” (paragraph 3):

- online on <https://church.mt/applications> from Tuesday 4 February to Thursday 13 February 2025
- Those who require assistance to apply online may phone on 2203 9360 between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Application forms are not downloaded or collected beforehand.
Documents referred to in paragraph 8 are required.

10.1 LATE APPLICATIONS CRITERION 1h and CRITERIA 3 “OTHER APPLICANTS” (paragraph 3):

- online on <https://church.mt/applications> from Thursday 20 February to Thursday 27 February 2025
- In case of difficulty in filling the application online, one can phone on 2203 9360 from Monday to Friday between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

10.2 Parents / custodians who submit an application online for Criteria 1, including Serious Cases Criteria 1, are to contact Admissions Office as per instructions in paragraph 17.4 should they not receive an acknowledgement for the application by Sunday, 19 January 2025.

Parents / custodians who submit an application online for Criteria 3 and Criterion 1h, including Serious Cases “Other Applicants”, are to contact Admissions Office as per instructions in paragraph 17.4 should they not receive an acknowledgement for the application by Tuesday, 18 March 2025.

10.3 A list of applicants under criteria 1a-1g, criterion 1h, and criteria 3 will be published on www.church.mt.

11.0 FEES – These are charged to help cover administrative costs:

11.1 Fee on Application €25.

Fee for a Late Application €30.

11.2 A registration fee of €50 is paid on enrolment.

12.0 BALLOTS

12.1 There will be two Ballots: PARTICIPATION BALLOT and CHOICE OF SCHOOL BALLOT.

12.2 The ballot and registration sessions will be streamed live on www.church.mt and a notary will be physically present and certify the whole process.

In the event the transmission is not broadcast live, due to technical problems, a recording of the sessions will be uploaded as soon as circumstances permit.

12.3 In the eventuality that an applicant's name is not included in the ballot, the Church Schools Admissions Board will hold another ballot as explained hereafter. Three groups of numbers will be presented: two groups with numbers from 0 to 9, and another group with numbers from 0 to the number of hundreds of applicants. These three groups of numbers represent the units, the tens and the hundreds. A number is drawn from every group. The three numbers will establish the applicant's number. It is probable that another applicant will already have the same number. If these two applicants have a chance of choosing a place and only one place is available, a ballot will be drawn for them to determine who will be awarded the available place.

13.0 PARTICIPATION BALLOT – BOYS AND GIRLS : Tuesday 8th APRIL 2025

Archbishop's Curia
St Calcedonius Square
Floriana FRN 1535, Malta

Postal Address
Binja Josmar, 30, Idmejda Street,
Balzan BZN 1521

Tel. +356 2203 9360 / 7999 0224
Email. admissions@maltadiocese.org
www.church.mt

- 13.1 This Participation Ballot will select the “Other Applicants” who will be entitled to participate in the ‘Choice of School’ Ballot. The Ballot is open **ONLY** to “Other Applicants” including those who applied under Criterion 1h, who were not registered in the school they were eligible for. These applicants will be ranked according to this ballot. There will be a Participation Ballot for girls and another one for boys.
- 13.2 The drawing of the Participation Ballot will be transmitted live on www.church.mt on Tuesday, 8th April 2025. The ballot for **BOYS** will start at 9:00 a.m. and that for **GIRLS** at 11:30 a.m.
- 13.3 The Rank Order established by the Participation Ballot will be published on the Curia Website www.church.mt. The application number, name and surname and the respective placing on the Rank Order will be published. **No information will be given over the phone.**
- 13.4 The number of “Other Applicants” entitled to participate in the ‘Choice of School’ Ballot will be equal to the number of places remaining **AFTER** the total of mainstream places awarded under the First Criteria (paragraphs 1a-1h), and siblings who are applying for the same year of entry (twins) or other years of entry (paragraph 3.1), is deducted from the total number of places available in all of the schools together (paragraph 6, boys = 238, girls = 272).
- 14.0 **CHOICE OF SCHOOL BALLOT - BOYS & GIRLS : Tuesday 15th April 2025**
- 14.1 This ballot will establish a Rank Order which determines the procedure for the actual School Registration process, the applicant drawn first will be entitled to choose first; etc.
- 14.2 The total number of vacant places will be published on the day of the Choice of School ballot. The following will participate in the Choice of School Ballot: Kindergarten 2 pupils of Church Schools without Continuity (paragraph 1f) and children of employees in another school (paragraph 1g), and “Other Applicants” as determined by the Participation Ballot (paragraph 13).
- 14.3 The total number of places to be awarded by the Choice of School Ballot will be the total number of remaining mainstream places **AFTER** the number of places awarded to those registered under the First Criteria (paragraphs 1a – 1e and 1h), and siblings who are applying for the same year of entry (twins) or other years of entry (paragraph 3.1) is deducted from the total number of places available in all of the schools together (boys = 238, girls = 272, paragraph 6).
- 14.4 The drawing of the Choice of School Ballot will be transmitted live on www.church.mt on Tuesday, 15th April 2025. The ballot for **BOYS** will start at 9:00 a.m. and that for **Girls** at 10:30 a.m.
- 14.5 The Rank Order established by the Choice of School Ballot will be published on the Curia Website www.church.mt. The application number, name and surname and the respective placing on the Rank Order established by the draw will be published.
- 15.0 **SCHOOL REGISTRATION - For applicants without any type of support (mainstream)**
- 15.1 **Parents / custodians who are due to register their children in a church school will receive an email a few days before the School Registration and will be reminded of details regarding the actual Registration as per paragraph 15.4. They will also be informed about the number of vacancies available in each school. No information will be given over the phone.**
- 15.2 A list with the names of those taking part in the school registration process, in rank order number, will be published on www.church.mt.
- 15.3 The school registration session will be transmitted live on www.church.mt. During the transmission, the parents / custodians will be called according to the rank order and will be asked to register their child in a school.
- 15.4 School registration for **BOYS** will be held on **Thursday 8th May 2025** and starts at 9:00 a.m.
School registration for **GIRLS** will be held on **Tuesday 13th May 2025** and starts at 9:00 a.m.
- 15.5 It is imperative that parents / custodians are available to make their school registration on the day and at the time indicated above. We will contact one person at a time according to the Choice of School Ballot rank order. It is the parents' / custodians' responsibility to be available or authorise someone else to carry out the school registration on their behalf.
- 15.6 If the parents / custodians cannot be reached the next one on the rank order list will be called and the process will continue. However, other attempts will be made to try to reach the parents / custodians

who could not be contacted. A separate telephone number will be available for such an emergency. The non-contacted parents / custodians may try to contact us on 7951 5491. Once contacted these parents will be able to register their child but will not be able to change choices already made. If this procedure is not successful it cannot be interpreted as a shortcoming on the part of the Admissions Board.

- 15.7 Parents / custodians who opt not to send their child to a Church School will be registered as "No Choice".

- 15.8 After the school registration session, the process continues through emails.

- 15.9 If vacancies remain, once this session of the registration process has been concluded, the next applicant/s on the ballot list will be eventually contacted. S/he will also be given the opportunity to fill the 'Schools Waiting List Form'.

16.0 WAITING LIST

- 16.1 After each session of the registration process, parents / custodians will be given the opportunity to indicate an alternative school. The 'Schools Waiting List Form' will be made available online and by email. This form may also be filled by parents / custodians who opt not to register their son/ daughter, without losing their place on the rank order as established by the Choice of School Ballot paragraph 14.1.

- 16.2 On the waiting list form, parents / custodians can indicate one other school. Parents / custodians interested in a school which had no vacancies, and which in the Schools Table of paragraph 6 had a 0 in the Number of places column, can list that school as well (see paragraph 1.6).

- 16.3 The parents' / custodians' preferences make-up the waiting list. This waiting list will be published on www.church.mt and is updated from time to time. The waiting list is used when a place in a school becomes vacant. This is offered according to the Admissions Criteria Hierarchy, and / or to the highest ranking applicant in the Choice of School Ballot who had preferred that school but could not choose it.

- 16.4 The waiting list form can be revised only once. It will start counting once the new waiting list is published.

- 16.5 In certain schools, the school attendance of applicants who fill a vacated place after the beginning of the scholastic year might be postponed to the next scholastic year.

- 16.6 The rank order established through the Participation Ballot and the Choice of School Ballot serves as the general waiting list and remains active till 30th June 2026 for admission in year one primary for scholastic year 2025-2026.

17.0 OTHER INFORMATION

- 17.1 Children registered in a Church school are obliged to attend regularly the school which they registered in, from the beginning of the scholastic year.

- 17.2 An exemption from attendance for a period of one scholastic year may be given when parents/ custodians are going to be abroad for a serious reason, for example employment, health or study. In such cases parents / custodians are to write to the Admissions Board informing them of their need, the duration of their stay abroad and are to send any relevant documentation that proves that they are going to be abroad for a serious reason.

Parents / custodians can ask for an exemption for a second scholastic year by writing to the Admissions Board and by providing the necessary details. The Board will inform the parents / custodians about its decision, which decision is final. The place reserved for the child will not remain available if the exempted child does not attend school by the stipulated date.

- 17.3 All information provided to the Church Schools Admissions Board in relation to oneself or ones child, which according to the Data Protection Act 2018 is "Personal Data", will only be processed in accordance with the said Act – view paragraph 8e.

- 17.4 The Board and Admissions Office can be contacted at: The Secretary, Church Schools Admissions, Secretariat for Catholic Education, Binja Josmar, 30, Idmejda Street, Balzan BZN 1521, or: admissions@maltadiocese.org.

- 17.5 Anyone who does not receive a reply as indicated in these Regulations within a week of the relevant date should contact the Board.

- 17.6** Investigation of infringement of these Regulations follows the Infringement Procedures published on www.church.mt. Infringement of Regulations may lead to the exclusion of the applicant from this process or from school if the applicant is already registered, as well as for other actions. Allegations are to be reported as per the infringement procedures and are to be addressed to: The Director General for Catholic Education, Secretariat for Catholic Education, 16, The Mall, Floriana FRN 1472, tel. 2779 0060, email: ian.mifsud@maltadiocese.org.
- 17.7** The Regulations for admission to year one kindergarten, year two kindergarten, year one primary and form one secondary are published every scholastic year. It is necessary that a fresh application be filled for every new scholastic year.
- 17.8** These Admission Regulations apply for entry in the coming scholastic year. It is possible that in the future they might be changed. It is possible that the situation in schools may change in the future. Therefore it is not guaranteed that present opportunities will also be available in the future. Opportunities may remain constant, they may decrease or increase.
- 17.9** The Admissions Office needs to be notified of any changes in the applicants' circumstances that happen after the application has been submitted. The application can become invalid if this does not happen.
- 18.0** Decisions of the Church Schools Admissions Board and of the Commission for Serious Cases are final.
- 18.1** The Maltese language version prevails in case of discrepancies between the Maltese and English language versions of these Regulations.

Appendix 4: Information Letter and Consent Form

Information letter to Participants

06/07/2023

Information letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Brendan D'Amato and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Masters in Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood and Primary Education. I am presently conducting a research study for my dissertation titled Church, State or Independent? Factors that influence nine parents' school preference. This is being supervised by Dr Louise Chircop. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to find out the factors that parents/guardians are motivated by and consider when sending their children to a particular school. In conjunction with this, the research study shall also investigate the forms of research parents/guardians conduct in order to make an informed decision in relation to the different school sectors and the particular school chosen. Your participation in this study would help contribute to a better understanding of the motivators, insights and information gathering methods that parents/guardians use when deciding on which school and which school sector they wish to send their child/ren. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to kindly sit for an interview, which shall take between 30 to 45 minutes to complete. The interviews can be done either in person or online, according to your preference. The interview shall be recorded for means of data collection only (see next paragraph) as to make sure that the results yielded from the interviews show a true indication, in-line with answering the research questions as well as fidelity and respect towards the participants and their experiences/responses.

Data collected will be used as research results within the study. At this point, it is important to note that all participants shall be anonymised, in regards to details of their identity as well as the identity of the school their children attend, to reduce identification of particular individuals. The data shall only be viewed by my supervisor and myself, for reasons of marking and compiling, prior to the publication of the dissertation and shall not be unveiled to any other third party.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased. All data collected will be stored in an anonymised form within a password protected drive, of which I, the researcher, will have sole access. On completion of the study and following publication of results, after which all information shall be deleted. A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you wish to participate in this study or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail [REDACTED]; you can also contact my supervisor via email:

Sincerely,

Brendan D'Amato
[REDACTED]

Dr. Louise Chircop
[REDACTED]

Participant's Consent Form

Church, State or Independent? Factors that influence nine parents' school preference

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Brendan D'Amato. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in an interview in which the researcher will ask several questions in order to *investigate* the factors that parents/guardians are motivated by and consider when sending their children to a particular school. In conjunction with this, the research study shall also investigate the forms of research parents/guardians conduct in order to make an informed decision in relation to the different school sectors and the particular school chosen. I am aware that the interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that *my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks*.
5. I understand that *there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study*.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.

7. I understand that all data collected will be *erased on completion of the study and following publication of results*.
8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
9. I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for this interview to be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree to this interview being audio recorded.
- ☐ I do not agree to this interview being audio recorded.

10. I am aware that extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs, either in anonymous form, or using a pseudonym [a made-up name or code – e.g. respondent A].

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Brendan D'Amato

Dr. Louise Chircop

06/07/2023

Ittra ta' Tagħrif

Għażiż/a Sinjur/a,

Jiena Brendan D'Amato, student fl-Università ta' Malta, u bhalissa qed insegwi Masters in Teaching and Learning fl-Edukazzjoni bikrija u primarja. Ir-riċerka għad-dissertazzjoni tiegħi jisimha: Knisja, Stat jew Indipendenti? Fatturi li jinfluwenzaw il-preferenza tal-iskola ta' disa' ġenituri; it-tutor tiegħi hi Dr Louise Chircop. B'din l-ittra nixtieq nistiednek tipparteċipa fir-riċerka. Hawn taht issib aktar informazzjoni fuq l-istudju li qed nagħmel u fuq xi jkun l-involvement tiegħek jekk tiddeċiedi li tiegħu sehem.

L-għan tal-istudju hu li nesplora il-fatturi li l-ġenituri/gwardjani jqisu meta jibagħtu lil uliedhom fi skola partikolari. Flimkien ma' dan, l-istudju għandu jinvestiga wkoll il-forom ta' riċerka li jagħmlu l-ġenituri/gwardjani sabiex jieħdu deċiżjoni infurmata fir-rigward tas-setturi differenti tal-iskola u l-iskola partikolari magħżula. Sehem jgħin biex ikun hawn iżjed għarfien dwar il-motivaturi, l-għarfien u l-metodi ta' għir ta' informazzjoni li l-ġenituri/gwardjani jużaw meta jiddeċiedu dwar liema skola u liema settur skolastiku jixtiequ jibagħtu lil uliedhom. L-informazzjoni kollha li tingabar fir-riċerka tintuża biss għall-fini ta' dan l-istudju.

Jekk taqbel li tipparteċipa, tintalab ġentilment toqgħod għal intervista, li għandha tiegħu bejn 30 u 45 minuta biex titlesta. L-intervisti jistgħu jsiru jew personalment jew onlajn, skont il-preferenza tal-partecipant. L-intervista għandha tiġi rrekordjata għal mezzi ta' għir tal-informazzjoni biss (ara l-paragrafu li jmiss) biex jiġi żgurat li r-riżultati mogħtija mill-intervisti juru indikazzjoni vera, konformi mat-twegibiet għall-mistoqsijiet tar-riċerka kif ukoll fedeltà u rispett lejn il-partecipanti u l-esperjenzi/twegibiet tagħhom.

L-informazzjoni miġbura se tintuża bħala riżultati tar-riċerka fi hdan l-istudju. F'dan il-punt, huwa importanti li wieħed jinnota li l-partecipanti kollha għandhom ikunu anonimizzati, fir-rigward tad-dettalji tal-identità tagħhom kif ukoll l-identità tal-iskola li jattendu t-tfal tagħhom, biex titnaqqas l-identifikazzjoni ta' individwi partikolari. Id-dejta għandha aċċess għaliha jien kif wkoll is-superviżur, għal raġunijiet ta' mmarrar u kumpilazzjoni, qabel il-pubblikazzjoni tad-dissertazzjoni u m'għandhiex tiġi mikxufa lill-ebda persuna oħra.

Il-partecipazzjoni tiegħek f'dan l-istudju tkun għalkollox volontarja; fi kliem ieħor, inti liberu/a li taċċetta jew tirrifjuta li tiegħu sehem, mingħajr ma tagħti raġuni. Inti wkoll liberu/a li twaqqaf il-partecipazzjoni tiegħek fl-istudju meta tixtieq, mingħajr ma jkollok tagħti spjegazzjoni u mingħajr ebda riperkussjoni. Jekk tagħżel li tirtira mir-riċerka, l-informazzjoni li tkun laqgħet ittiegħdet fl-intervista miegħek tithassar dment li dan ikun teknikament possibbli (ngħidu aħna, qabel ma tiġi anonimizzata jew ippubblikata), u sakemm l-għanijiet tar-riċerka jkunu jistgħu jintlaħqu u ma jintlaqtux serjament. F'dak il-każ, l-informazzjoni tiegħek tintuża u tinzamm anonima.

Jekk tagħzel li tipparteċipa, jekk jogħġbok innota li m'hemm l-ebda benefiċċju dirett għalik. Il-parteeipazzjoni tiegħek ma fiha l-ebda riskju magħruf jew mistenni.

Bħala parteċipant/a, għandek id-dritt, skont ir-Regolament Ġenerali dwar il-Protezzjoni tad-Data (GDPR) u l-leġiżlazzjoni nazzjonali, li taċċessa, tikkoreġi u fejn hu applikabbli, titlob li l-informazzjoni li tikkonċernak titħassar. L-informazzjoni kollha li tingabar fl-istudju se tinżamm maħżuna b'mod anonimu f'*Hard drive*, li għalih jien, ir-riċerkatur, se jkolli aċċess uniku. Meta jintemm l-istudju u joħorġu r-riżultati, dan l-informazzjoni kollha għandha titħassar.

Qed ngħaddilek kopja ta' din l-ittra biex iżzommha bħala referenza.

Grazzi tal-ħin u l-kunsiderazzjoni tiegħek. Jekk tixtieq tieħu sehem fl-istudju, jew ikollok xi mistoqsija, tiddejjaqx tikkuntattjani fuq [redacted]; tista' tikkuntattja wkoll lit-tutor tiegħi elettronikament fuq [redacted].

Tislijiet,

Brendan D'Amato

Dr. Louise Chircop

Formola tal-Kunsens tal-Parteċipant/a

Knisja, Stat jew Indipendenti? Fatturi li jinfluwenzaw il-preferenza tal-iskola ta' disa' ġenituri

Jiena, hawn taht iffirmat/a, nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi li nieħu sehem fl-istudju ta' Brendan D'Amato. Din il-formola tal-kunsens tispjega t-termini tas-sehem tiegħi f'din ir-riċerka.

1. Inghatajt l-informazzjoni bil-miktub u/jew bil-fomm dwar l-iskop tar-riċerka; kelli l-opportunità nagħmel il-mistoqsijiet, u kull mistoqsija ngħatajt twegiba għaliha b'mod sħiħ u sodisfaċenti.
2. Nifhem ukoll li jiena liberu/a li naċċetta li nieħu sehem, jew li nirrifjuta, jew li nwaqqaf il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi meta nixtieq mingħajr ma nagħti spjegazzjoni jew mingħajr ma niġi penalizzat/a. Jekk nagħżel li nipparteċipa, jaf niddeċiedi li ma nwegibx kull mistoqsija li ssirli. F'każ li nagħżel li ma nkomplix nieħu sehem fl-istudju, l-informazzjoni li tkun laħqet ingabret mingħandi titħassar dment li jkun teknikament possibbli (ngħidu aħna, qabel ma tiġi anonimizzata jew ippubblikata), u sakemm l-għanijiet tar-riċerka jkunu jistgħu jintlaħqu u ma jintlaqtux serjament. F'dak il-każ, l-informazzjoni tiegħi tintuża u tinzamm anonima.
3. Nifhem li ġejt mistieden/mistiedna nipparteċipa għal intervista u l-persuna li qed tagħmel ir-riċerka se tistaqsi diversi mistoqsijiet biex jinvestiga l-fatturi li l-ġenituri/gwardjani jqisu meta jibagħtu lil uliedhom fi skola partikolari. Flimkien ma' dan, l-istudju għandu jinvestiga wkoll il-forom ta' riċerka li jagħmlu l-ġenituri/gwardjani sabiex jieħdu deċiżjoni infurmata fir-rigward tas-setturi differenti tal-iskola u l-iskola partikolari magħżula. Jiena konxju/a li l-intervista se ddum bejn wieħed u ieħor 30-45 minuta. Nifhem li l-intervista se ssir f'post u f'hin li huma komdi għalija.
4. Nifhem li l-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi ma *fiha l-ebda riskju magħruf jew mistenni*.
5. Nifhem li *bil-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi f'dan l-istudju, m'hemm l-ebda benefiċċju dirett għalija*.

6. Nifhem li, skont ir-Regolament Ġenerali dwar il-Protezzjoni tad-Data (GDPR) u l-legiżlazzjoni nazzjonali, għandi dritt naċċessa, nikkoreġi u, fejn hu applikabbli, nitlob li l-informazzjoni li tikkonċernani titħassar.
 7. Nifhem li l-informazzjoni kollha miġbura, se tinżamm mażżuna b'mod anonimu f'*Hard drive*, li għalih, ir-riċerkatur, se jkollu aċċess uniku. Meta jintemm l-istudju u joħroġu r-riżultati, dan l-informazzjoni kollha għandha titħassar.
 8. Inghatajt kopja tal-ittra ta' tagħrif biex inżommha u nifhem li se ningħata wkoll kopja ta' din il-formola tal-kunsens.
 9. Konxju/a li, jekk nimmarka l-ewwel kaxxa t'hawn taħt, inkun qed nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi biex l-intervista tiġi rrekordjat bl-awdjo u maqlub f'kitba fl-istess waqt (traskrizzjoni).
- IMMARKA BISS DAK LI JAPPLIKA**
- ☐ Naqbel li l-intervista tiġi rrekordjat bl-awdjo.
- ☐ Ma naqbilx li l-intervista tiġi rrekordjata bl-awdjo.
10. Konxju/a li siltiet mill-intervista tiegħi jistgħu jiġu riprodotti b'mod anonimu jew bl-użu ta' psewdonimu [isem ivvintat jew kodiċi - eż. parteċipant A].

Qrajt u fhimt l-istqarrijiet t'hawn fuq, u naqbel li nipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju.

Isem il-parteeipant/a: _____

Firma: _____

Data: _____

Brendan D'Amato

Dr. Louise Chircop

Appendix 5: Interview Questions

Interview questions

English translation:

Demographic question:

Can you tell me something about yourself? (Age?, Occupation?, Family structure?, number of children?, Where do you live? (North/central/south)

Research question 1:

What are the factors that parents/guardians consider when thinking about sending their child/ren to a particular school?

1. Are all of your children within the same sector (state/church/independent)? Why/Why not?
2. Can you explain why you chose this particular school for your child/ren? If possible can you give concrete examples?
3. What aspects did you consider as crucial when creating a preference of a particular school?
4. Do you think that certain schools carry a particular stigma/association?
5. Some schools ask for a donation, others have a fee. How far do you think these fees are fair?
6. Did you choose a particular school due to its association to other institutions such as secondary schooling and post-secondary schooling such as Sixth forms?
7. Can you mention some benefits of attending primary school in the same town/village?
8. What do you think of this statement? "every child, regardless of school sector, has the same educational journey as other children in the different sectors."

traduzzjoni Maltija:

Mistoqsija ta' riċerka 1:

X'in huma l-fatturi li l-ġenituri/kustodji jqisu meta jaħsbu biex jibagħtu lil uliedhom fi skola partikolari?

1. *It-tfal tiegħek huma kollha fl-istess settur (stat/knisja/indipendenti)? Għaliex/ Għaliex le?*
2. *Tista' tispjega għaliex għażilt din l-iskola partikolari għat-tifel/tifla/tfal tiegħek?*
3. *Liema aspetti qiest bħala kruċjali meta ħolqt preferenza għal skola partikolari?*
4. *Taħseb li ċerti skejjel għandhom 'stigma'/assoċjazzjoni partikolari?*
5. *Xi skejjel jitolbu donazzjoni, oħrajn għandhom ħlas. Kemm taħseb li dawn it-tariffi huma ġusti?*
6. *Għażilt skola partikolari minħabba l-assoċjazzjoni tagħha ma' istituzzjonijiet oħra bħal skola sekondarja u skola post-sekondarja bħal 'Sixth forms'?*
7. *Tista' ssemmi xi benefiċċji għal min jattendi l-iskola primarja fl-istess belt/raħal?*
8. *X' taħseb dwar din id-dikjarazzjoni?: "kull tifel, irrISPettivament mis-settur tal-iskola, għandu l-istess vjaġġ edukattiv bħal tfal oħra fis-setturi differenti."*

Research question 2:

What forms of research do parents/guardians conduct to inform and aid in their decision making in regards to which sector and school is chosen?

1. What sources of information did you use in order to become informed of different potential school preferences?
2. Do you think that there are enough resources that inform parents regarding different schools and sectors?
3. In order to gather information about a particular school, have you ever been in contact with the school administration?
4. Have you ever visited a school in order to see the amenities, during open days or by appointment?
5. What can schools do so that prospective parents are able to make an informed decision?

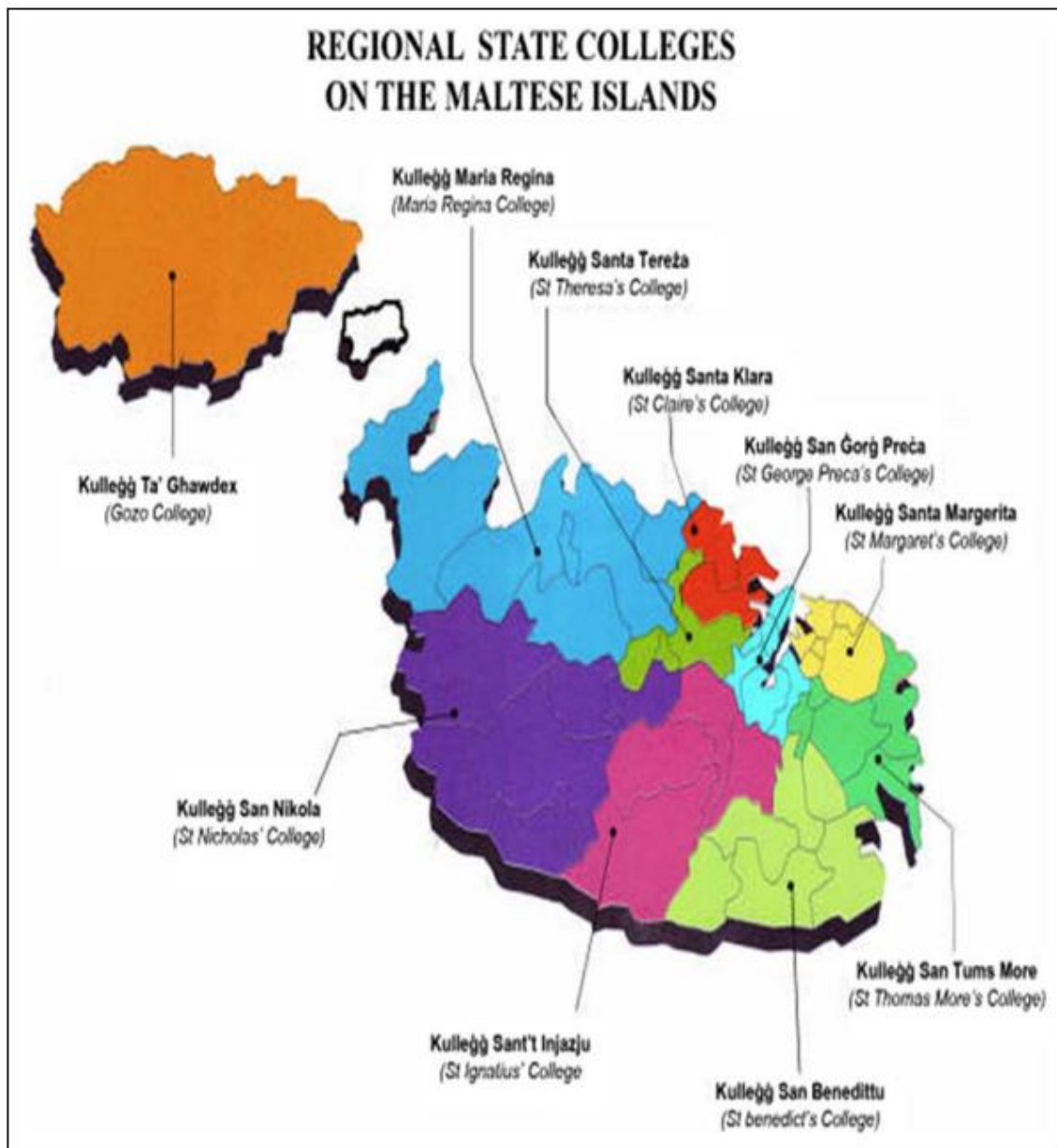
traduzzjoni Maltija:

Mistoqsija ta' riċerka 2:

X'forom ta' riċerka jagħmlu l-ġenituri/ kustodji biex jinfurmaw infushom u jgħinu fit-teħid tad-deċiżjonijiet tagħhom dwar liema settur u skola jintgħażlu?

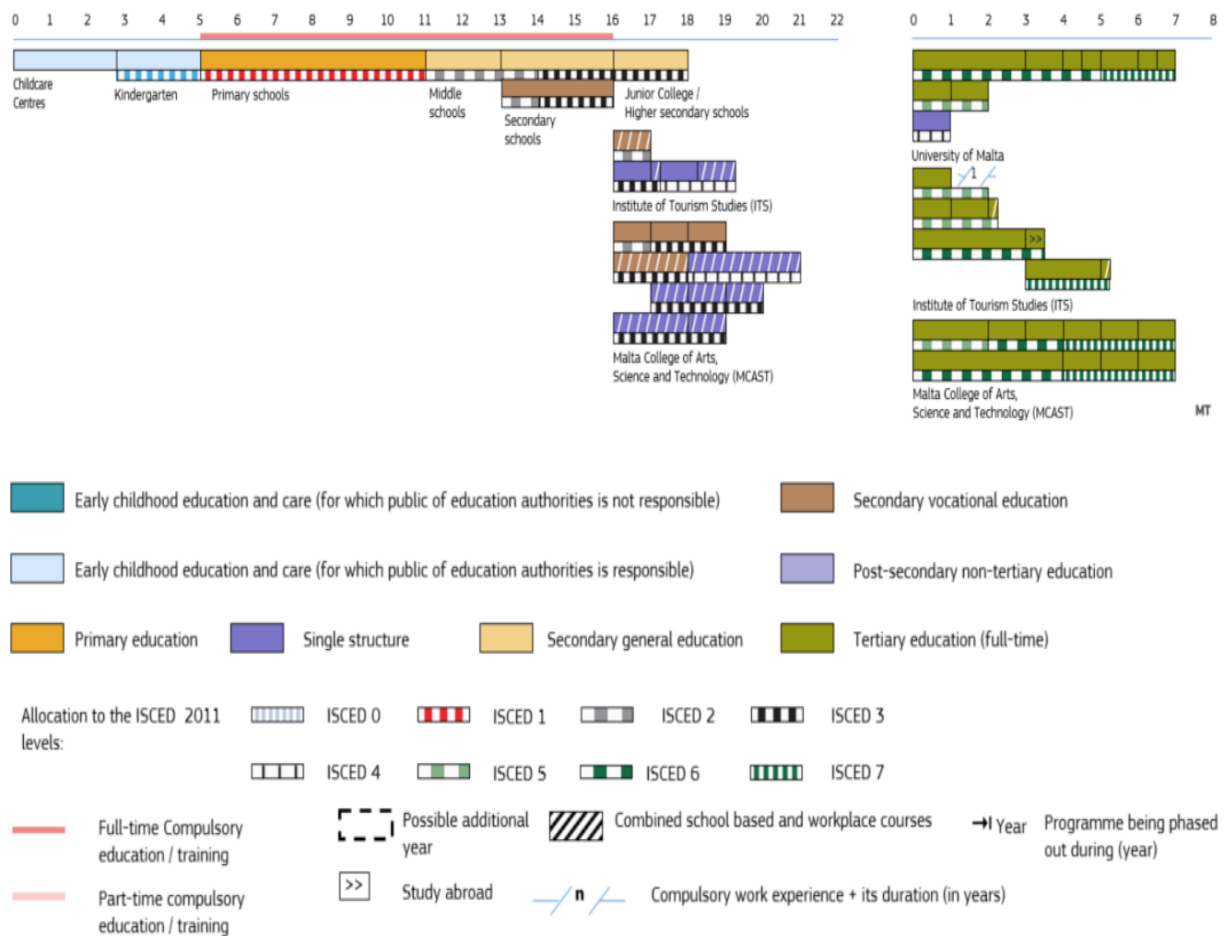
1. Liema sorsi ta' informazzjoni użajt sabiex tkun infurmat fuq dawn l-iskejjel sabiex toħloq preferenzi tiegħek?
2. Taħseb li hemm biżżejjed riżorsi li jinfurmaw lill-ġenituri dwar skejjel u setturi differenti?
3. Sabiex tiġbor informazzjoni dwar skola partikolari, qatt kont f'kuntatt mal-amministrazzjoni tal-iskola?
4. Qatt żort skola sabiex tara l-kumditajiet, waqt il-ġranet tal-ftuħ jew b'appuntament?
5. X'jistgħu jagħmlu l-iskejjel sabiex il-ġenituri prospettivi jkunu jistgħu jieħdu deċiżjoni infurmata

Figure 1: The geographical location of the 10 colleges, spanning kindergarten, primary and secondary State education as formed by The Education (Amendment) Act, 2006.



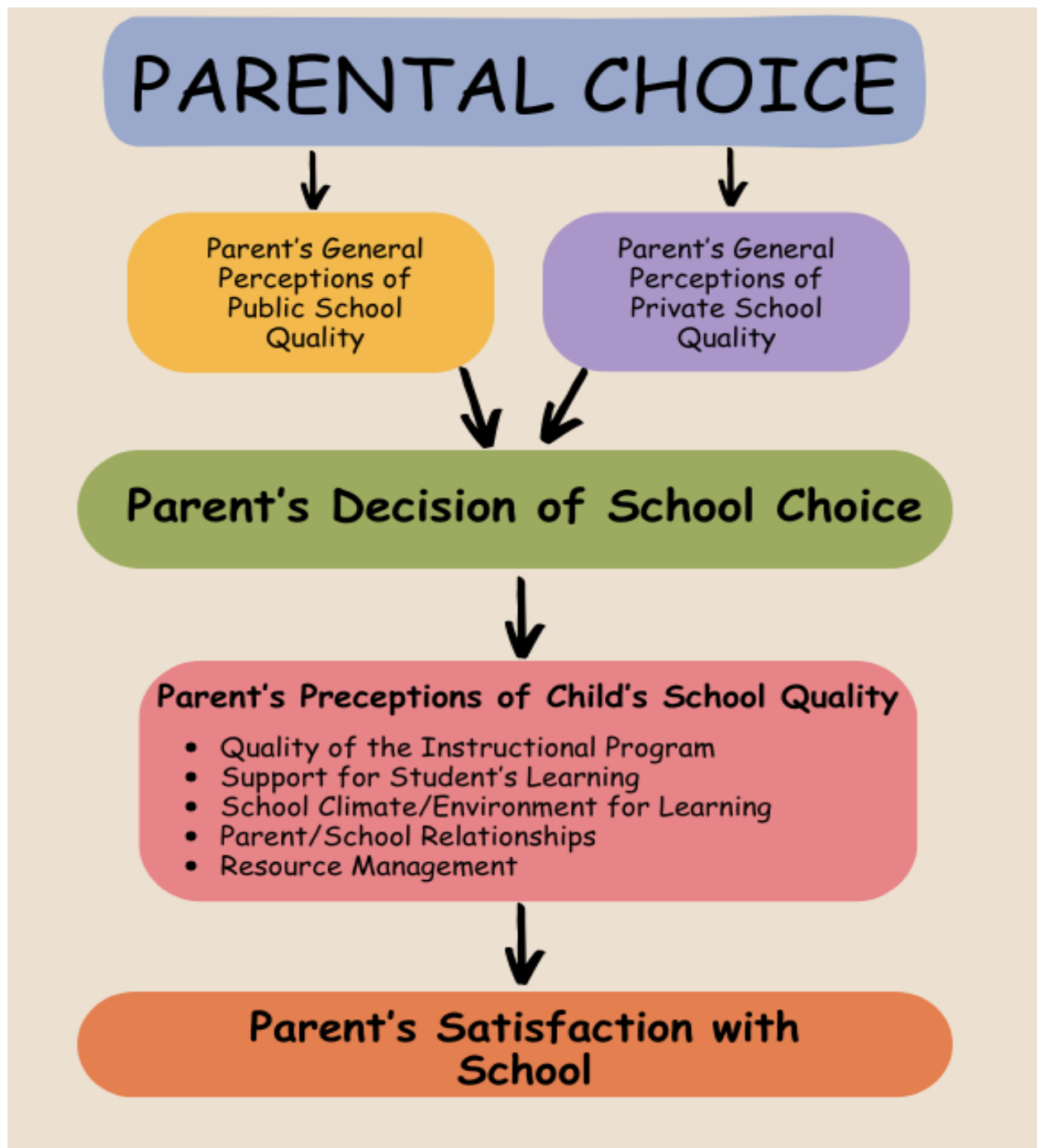
Source: Cutajar, M., Bezzina, C., & James, C. (2013). Educational reforms in Malta: A missed opportunity to establish distributed governance. *Management in Education*, 27(3), 118-124.

Figure 2: Timeline of the process of education in Malta



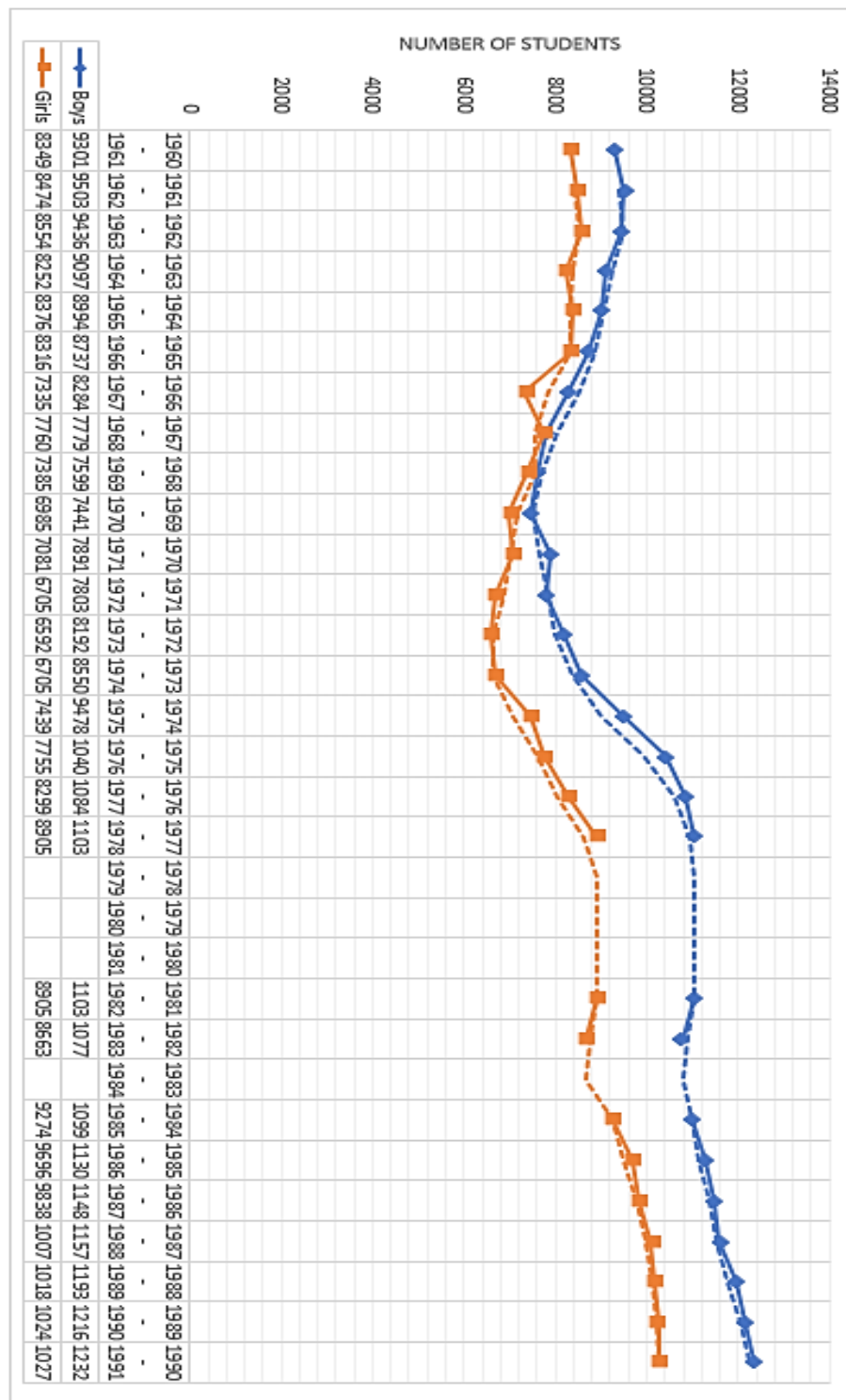
Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2022. The Structure of the European Education Systems 2022/2023: Schematic Diagrams. Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Figure 3: Evaluation process of parental school choice



Source: Charles, G. W. (2011). *Parental perceptions of school quality in public and private schools*. Northcentral University. Pp.8

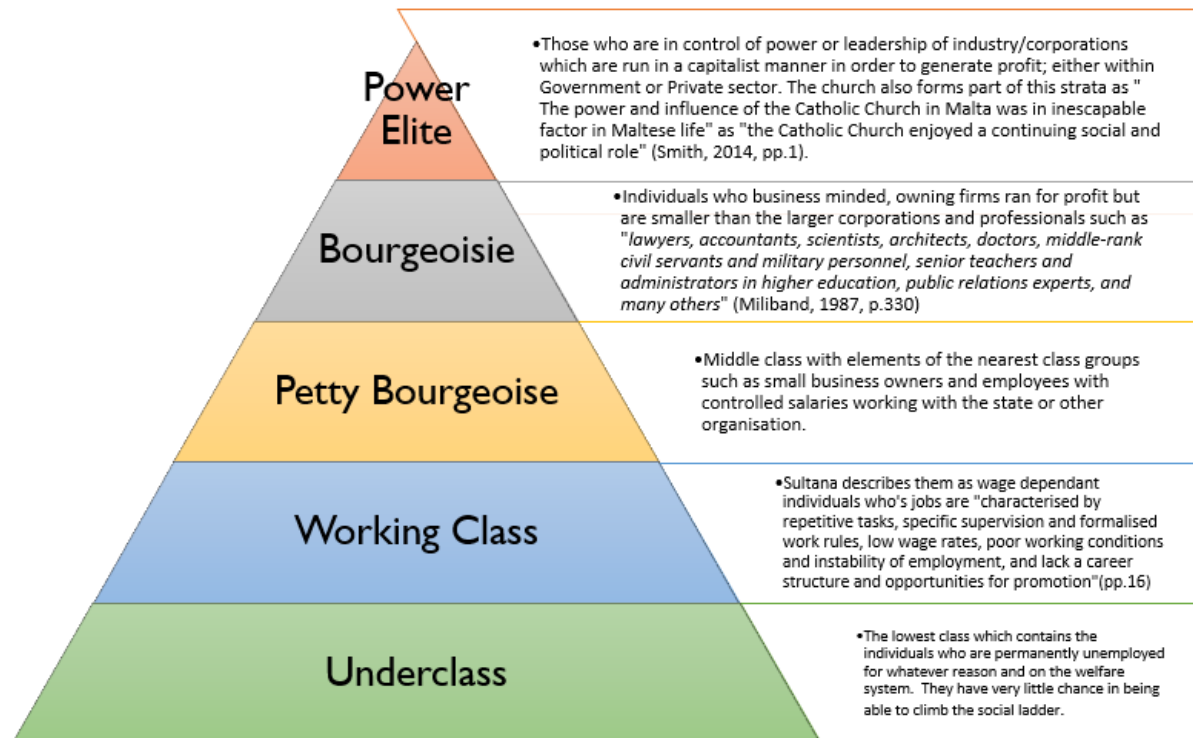
Figure 4: Distribution of boys' and girls' enrolment found within private educative institutions (church and non-church) from scholastic year 1960-1961 to 1990-1991



Source: Data taken from Central Office of Statistic (Malta) *Educational statistics* from 1960-61 to 1990-91

Note: Statistics 1978-79, 1979-80, 1980-81, and 1983-84 were unavailable

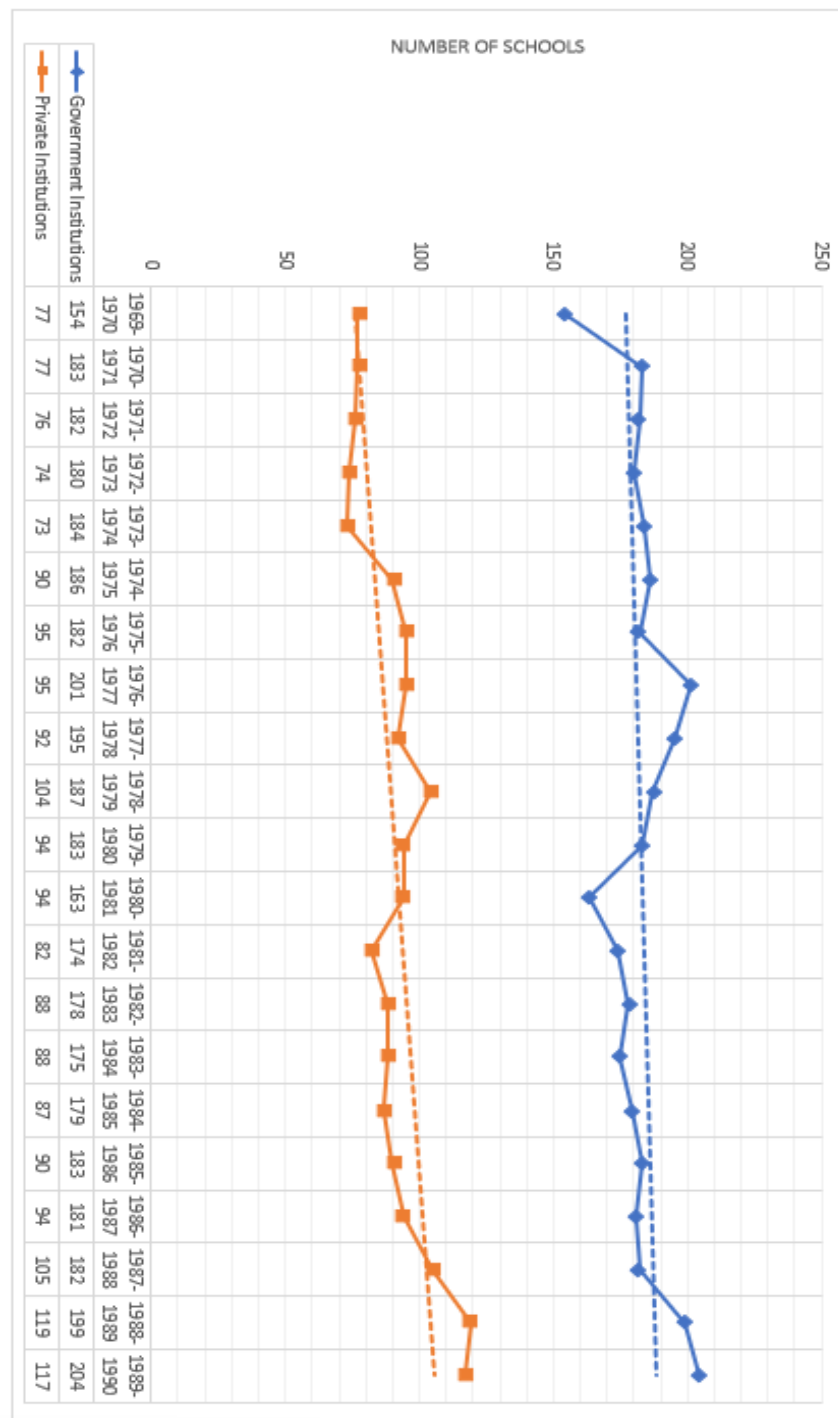
Figure 5: Maltese Social Class as researched by Sultana (1991) encompassing the time of Church school debate (1984)



Sources:

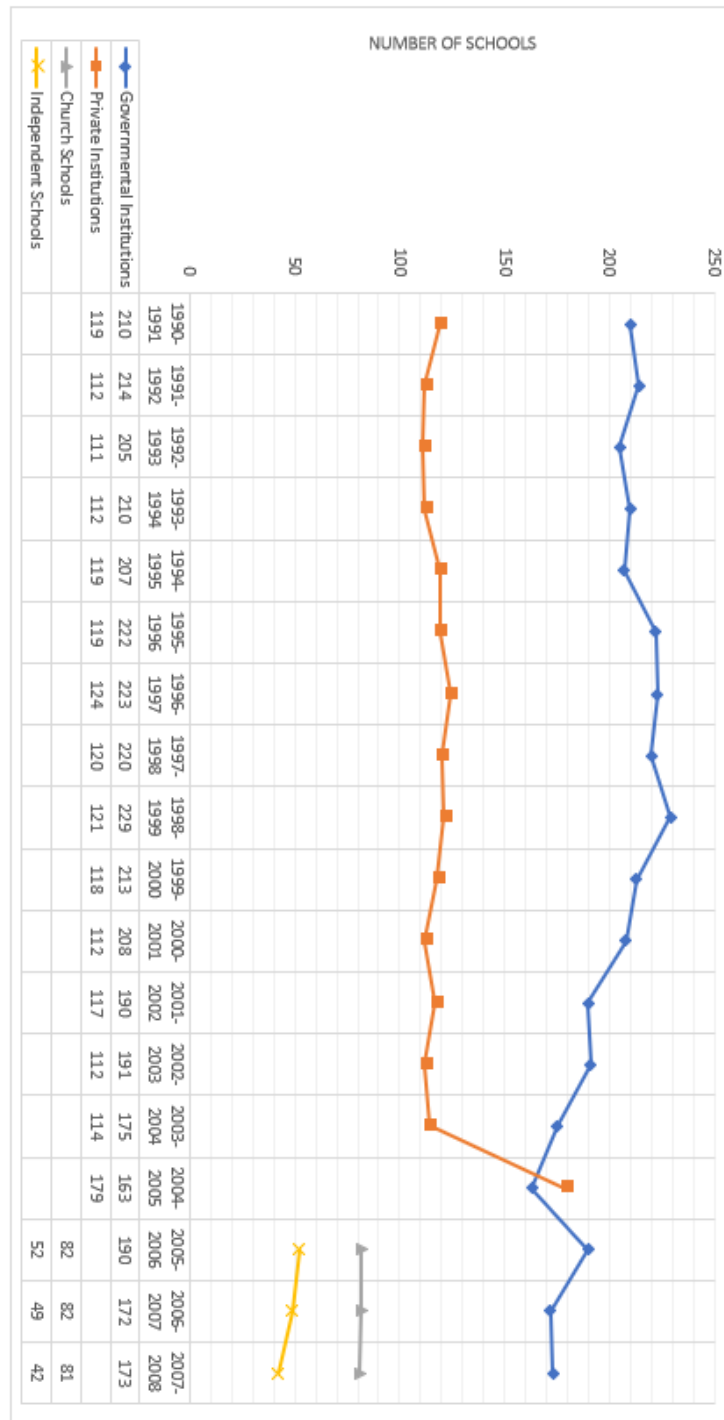
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Figure 6: Distribution of Educational Institutions between Government and Private Stakeholders (Church and non-Church) from scholastic year 1969-1970 to 1989-1990



Source: Data taken from Central Office of Statistics (Malta) Educational statistics from 1960-61 to 1990-91

Figure 7: Distribution of Educational Institutions between Government (State) and Private Stakeholders (Church and non-Church) from scholastic year 1990-1991 to 2007-2008



Sources: Malta. Data taken from Central Office of Statistics (Malta)/National Statistics Office (Malta) Educational statistics from 1990-91 to 2007-08

Table 8: *List of schools in Malta, arranged according to sector:*

State colleges	Independent schools	Church Schools
St. Margaret College	Beesmart Kindergarten	Bishops Conservatory School
Maria Regina College	Casa Maria Montessori	De La Salle College
St. Benedict College	Chiswick House School	Immaculate Conception School
St. Nicholas College	Il-Perla Kindergarten	St. Jeanne Antide School
St. Gorg Preca College	Kidstart Kindergarten	Laura Vicuna School (Ghasri)
St. Theresa College	Little Einsteins Montessori System	Laura Vicuna School (Victoria)
St. Ignatius College	Miriam Albatool School	St. Joseph, Mater Bon Consilii
St. Thomas More College	Mickeys Kindergarten (Bulebel & Pieta)	Our Lady Immaculate School
St. Clare College	Newark School	Sacred Heart College
Gozo College	Nikis Nursery School	Sacred Heart Minor Seminary
Mikiel Anton Vassalli College	San Andrea School	Savio College
Migrant Learning Unit	San Anton School	St. Benild's School (Stella Maris College Junior School Yr1-Yr2)
Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary (6 th form)	St. Catherines High School	Stella Maris College
	St. Cecillias Kindergarten	St. Albert The Great College
	St. Edwards College	St. Aloysius College
	St. Martin's College	St. Augustine College-Primary
	St. Michael Foundation	St. Augustine College-Secondary
	St. Patricks Salesian School	St. Angela Kindergarten (Lija)
	St. Paula Early Education Centre	St. Angela Kindergarten (Msida)
	Thi Lakin School	St. Angela Kindergarten (Rabat)
		St. Angela Kindergarten (Zabbar)
		St. Dorothy's School (Sliema)

St. Dorothy's School (Zebbug)

St. Elias College

St. Francis School (B'kara)

St. Francis School (Cospicua)

St. Francis School (Nadur)

St. Francis School (San
Gwann-Msida)

St. Francis School (Santa
Lucia)

St. Francis School (Victoria,
Gozo)

St. Francis School (Msida)

St. Francis Secondary School
(Sliema)

St. Joseph school (Blata l-
bajda)

St. Joseph School (Sliema)

St. Michael School (Santa
Venera)

St. Monica School (B'kara)

St. Monica School (Gzira)

St. Monica School (Mosta)

St. Paul's Missionary College

St. Theresa School (Kercem)

The Archbishops Seminary
School

Theresa Nuzzo School
(Hamrun)

Theresa Nuzzo School
(Marsa)

Source: Ministry of Education, 2024 (Education.gov.mt/Colleges)

Table 9: Amounts of capitulation grants given during the year 1970, according to each year group

Capitulation Grant Agreement of 1970 Between the Government of Malta and the Malta Private Secondary Schools Association (M.P.S.S.A)	
Secondary Year Group	Amount given for each Maltese child attending
Form I and II (<i>Year 7 and 8</i>)	£20
Form III and IV (<i>Year 9 and 10</i>)	£30
Form V and VI (<i>Year 11 and 6th form</i>)	£40

Source: Borg & Montebello, 1989, pp. 85