

**MALAY PARENTS' CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING PRIMARY
SCHOOLS FOR THEIR CHILDREN**

by

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Statement of Originality

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ABSTRACT

MALAY PARENTS' CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING PRIMARY SCHOOLS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Diana Joan Kampulin

A central concern in the school choice debate is whether parents choose schools based on school quality or any other reasons. In the Western countries, relatively few studies addressing school choice certainly suggest that parents care about academic performance and school status in terms of culture or race. However, literature in Asian countries on parents considerations in making school choice are rather scarce. Thus, this study aimed to investigate parents' considerations when choosing primary school for their children. Four types of primary schools in Kuching district were selected namely fully-funded schools, missionary schools, Chinese medium schools, and private schools. The study also sought to examine the similarities and differences in the considerations of parents sending their children to various types of schools. A total of 32 participants with 8 parents from each type of school were involved in this study. Data were gathered through extensive semi-structured interviews. The findings show there were six major considerations taken by the respondents in choosing primary school for their children. They are convenience, school's reputation, teachers' reputation, influence of relatives and/or friends, personal experience, and language related. The study found that convenience was given top priority in choosing primary school for the children but not for private schools parents. Besides, school reputation found to be one of priority for parents from various types of school. Most of the parents also being influenced by their relatives, friends as well as their personal experience when it coming to make a school choice. On the other hand, half of respondents from Chinese medium schools chose the school for the medium of instruction used in the school. On the whole, the study has able to shed a light on importance considerations which influenced parents school choice and hopefully will give significant insight for the educators especially school administrators.

ABSTRACT

MALAY PARENTS' CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING PRIMARY SCHOOLS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Diana Joan Kampulin

Perdebatan mengenai factor-faktor pemilihan sekolah sama ada ibu bapa membuat pilihan berdasarkan reputasi sekolah ataupun atas dasar factor-faktor lain sering diutarakan. Di negara-negara Barat, kajian menunjukkan ibu bapa lebih menitikberatkan pencapaian akademik and status sekolah dari segi bangsa. Walaubagaimanapun, kajian berkenaan isu ini adalah sangat terhad di negara-negara Asia. Oleh itu, kajian ini dijalankan bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pilihan ibu bapa dalam membuat pilihan untuk sekolah rendah bagi anak-anak mereka. Empat jenis sekolah iaitu sekolah tajaan penuh kerajaan, sekolah mubhaligh atau lebih dikenali 'missionary schools', sekolah jenis Kebangsaan Cina dan sekolah swasta, yang terletak di daerah Kuching telah dipilih bagi tujuan kajian ini. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti persamaan dan perbezaan yang wujud dalam respon yang diberikan oleh responden yang terlibat. Sebanyak 32 orang responden dengan 8 orang responden bagi setiap sekolah telah terlibat dalam kajian ini. Data-data telah dikumpul dengan menggunakan teknik temuramah semi-struktur bersama responden. Semua data yang telah dikumpulkan telah dianalisis untuk memenuhi objektif kajian. Kajian menunjukkan terdapat enam faktor utama yang mempengaruhi pilihan sekolah rendah oleh ibu bapa bagi anak-anak mereka iaitu factor fleksibel (lokasi sekolah), reputasi sekolah, reputasi guru-guru, pengaruh ahli keluarga dan/atau kawan, pengalaman peribadi, dan pengaruh bahasa. Kajian juga telah menunjukkan reputasi sekolah menjadi faktor yang mempengaruhi pilihan ibu bapa dari empat buah jenis sekolah yang terlibat dalam kajian ini. Pengalaman peribadi ibu bapa juga dilihat menjadi antara faktor yang mempengaruhi pilihan ibu bapa bagi empat buah jenis sekolah. Factor fleksibel didapati menjadi factor utama yang mempengaruhi pilihan ibu bapa dari tiga buah jenis sekolah. Walaubagaimanapun, kajian mendapati ibu bapa dari sekolah swasta menjadikan reputasi sekolah sebagai faktor utama dalam membuat pilihan berbanding factor fleksibel. Setengah daripada responden dari sekolah Cina pula memilih sekolah tersebut kerana penggunaan Bahasa Mandarin sebagai medium pengajaran and pembelajaran. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini telah memberikan gambaran tentang faktor-faktor penting yang mempengaruhi pilihan ibu bapa. Hasil kajian ini diharap mampu memberi infomasi yang berguna kepada golongan pendidik terutama sekali pentadbir sekolah tentang faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pemilihan sekolah oleh ibu bapa.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FF	Fully-funded School
MS	Missionary School
CM	Chinese Medium School
PV	Private School

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter overview

This chapter provides introduction to the present study consists of background of the study, which discusses the factors affecting parents considerations when choosing primary schools for their children, statement of the problem which brings to the problems that motivate the researcher to carry out the study. This is followed by research objectives and research questions related to the topic of the study. The significance of the study discusses the importance of the study. Definitions of key terms define the specific key terms used in this study while the scope of the study presents the sample selected in the study.

1.1 Background of the study

A child is like a white canvas that will be painted by his parents. If the painting is perfect, the child will grow up as a successful person. Contrarily, if the painting is lacking essential values, the child will grow up as a fragile person (Connell, 1981). This shows that parents play an important role in children's development as well as the children's education which will shape the children attitudes and thoughts.

According to Malaysian Education Act 1996 cited in National Report Malaysia (2001), parents are responsible for their children education which encompasses primary to secondary level of education. The report outlines the responsibility of the parents to ensure their children go to school and received the necessary education at their level. In Malaysia, primary school is the first place where the children gets their formal education such as a firm foundation in basic reading skill, writing skill and arithmetic, as well as thinking skills and values across the curriculum (Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2001). Many parents in fact realize the importance of primary education for their children, however, the turning point over the parents' consciousness when choosing primary school is whether they have reached the best decision not only for their children but also for themselves. This is because there are many types of school established in their own 'class' and standard. Indeed, this scenario shows schools become the product of choice whereas parents are the decision maker who has to make thorough decision for their children's primer education (Cookson, 1992).

Generally, primary education in Malaysia consists of six years of education which begin at the age of seven and ends at twelve (Ministry of Education, 2001). There are also various types of primary schools such national schools (fully-funded), semi-government school (semi-funded) which consist of vernacular school such as Chinese medium schools, Tamil medium schools and missionary schools, private schools, and religious schools.

The various choices of primary schools, which promise the best environment, education and socialization for the children has put the parents under pressure in making the right choice for their children future benefits. It shows that their children future life in their hands. As parents, they are expected to know their children need especially the aspect that the children's lacking. Hence, since children and families are so varied, parents needs and the importance of their needs for school can differ dramatically even among the closest relatives, friends and neighbours (Hassel & Hassel, 2004). As consequences, there are many reasons for the differences of schools choices among the parents.

Each family constitution in every part of this world regardless of race, religion or language has its own circumstances, its own values, and its own reasoning for choosing particular school for their children. Therefore, each parent may have their own perceptions toward the schools available around them. Though, the perceptions maybe shaped by the people around them which may also affect their choice of school. Some parents take into account their socioeconomic status when choosing schools for their children. Many say those who having high occupational and educational status are more likely to choose a private school compared to those with lower level of socioeconomic status (Beavis, 2004). Meanwhile, some parents consider their residential location, whereby the nearest school from their home will be the school for their children. Despite everything, when talking about perfect school for children, people cannot stop from discussing the achievement or performance of a school. This is because the most important 'bottom line' in education is student performance as at the end of the day, students will sit for their test or examination in order to evaluate their level of knowledge of what has been learnt (Teske and Schneider, 2001). Thus, people tend to label schools such as 'good' school, 'so-so' school and 'bad' school only based on the students' achievement. It shows that a quality school still becomes the most important consideration or choice for many parents. Yet, there are still numbers of reasons arise regarding to this issue, which extends from parents racial to parents religion.

However, do all these reasoning really appear among parents in Asia, and in Malaysia particularly? Hence, this study is carried out to discuss the considerations of parents making school choice for their children.

1.2 Statement of problem

Lately, the birth of many types of primary schools in Malaysia provides more choices for parents on where to enroll their children. As the authority for their children's education, each parent hopes for the best for their children. Therefore, parents are likely to have own priority when considering the right school for their children which could be differ or similar to other parents. However, it cannot be denied that parents also may have their own perceptions toward each school and reasons to select particular school. Perhaps, there are also parents who puzzled in making their decision. Previous studies in Western countries have been identified many considerations by parents preferences in choosing school for their children. However, at present, literature on Asian parents consideration particularly Malaysian parents consideration are rather scarce. In a nutshell, there is a need to discover the aspects or criteria of Asian parents take into considerations when choosing schools for their children.

1.3 The purpose of study

This study mainly aimed to investigate parents' considerations when choosing primary schools for their children. In Malaysia, there are many types of primary schools available. However, for the purpose of this study, four types of primary schools were chosen namely fully-funded schools, Chinese schools, missionary schools, and private schools. The researcher attempted to identify the considerations taken by the parents' in choosing particular primary school for their children. Furthermore, from the findings, the researcher investigated the

similarities and differences of why parents chose different types of school for their children.

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the Malay parents' reasons for sending their children to fully-funded schools?

RQ2. What are the Malay parents' reasons for sending their children to missionary schools?

RQ3. What are the Malay parents' reasons for sending their children to Chinese schools?

RQ4. What are the Malay parents' reasons for sending their children to private schools?

RQ5. What are the similarities in the parents' considerations?

RQ6. What are the differences in the parents' considerations?

1.4 Significance of the study

Parents' involvement in children education is extremely important. Past studies show that the more concerned the parents, the more benefits the children received. Caminiti (1990) cited in Kaplan (1992) quoted, "study after study has shown that a parent's involvement in education is powerful predictor of how that child is going to do in school". Parents involvement may come in many ways such as play an important in school board, guidance in children homework, and choose the right school for children, which is the center of this study. Consequently, this study is carried out to investigate parents' considerations when choosing primary school for their children.

Therefore, with the findings, hopefully contribute an understanding on what parents really want for their children's education. The government and schools can have a better understanding of parents' expectation for their children's schooling. Apart from that, the findings can help other parents in making the right choice, which school meets their children needs as well as their expectation. Thus, the findings of this study bring great values because parents' school choice may lead to academic benefits as a result of better 'matches' between students and the schools they attend (Goldhaber & Eide, 2002). As a result, hopefully, parents would increase their degree of involvement in their children education for better future.

1.5 Operational definition of terms

- **Primary school** - In this study, primary school refers to the place where children get their first formal education, which offer Primary 1 to Primary 6 level of education in Malaysia. Education at this level aim to provide the child with firm foundation in the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as emphasising thinking skills and values across the curriculum (Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2001). In this study, primary schools refer to the fully-funded schools, semi-funded schools, vernacular schools, and private schools.
- **Fully-funded schools** - Generally, fully-funded schools refer to the schools which are funded mainly through a combination of local, state and federal funding, 'owned' by the public, and controlled by the local board of education. In this study, fully-funded schools are owned by the government who pay for all the school budget. All fully-funded schools are known as Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) or Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan (SRK).

- Vernacular schools - In this study, vernacular schools refer to the schools that are using mother tongues as a medium of instructions. Chinese and Tamil medium schools are categorized as vernacular schools. This type of school also known as a semi-funded school.

- Missionary schools – In Malaysia, this type of school previously known as capital assisted schools or ‘sekolah bantuan modal’. Now, this type of school is known as SK in the same category as Chinese Schools and Sekolah Agama Rakyat where the land and buildings of the schools are not owned by the government but by the owners. After 1971, when nearly all mission school teachers opted to be Government servants, all mission schools opted to be run by the Government. The schools became partially aided (semi-funded) Government Assisted Mission Schools.

- Private schools - Generally, private schools refer to the school which is funded mainly through a combination of tuition and fees charged to parents and fundraising campaigns, owned by non-profit organizations , and controlled by boards of alumni, parents, staff and interested citizens (Hassel & Hassel, 2004). In Malaysia, private schools are not funded by the government.

1.6 Scope of study

This study was concerned with the parents’ considerations when choosing primary schools for their children. Therefore, the researcher only focused on the considerations made by the parents and not making any attempt to study the correlations between children achievement and the school choice or any kind of form. Furthermore, the target parents for this study were Malay parents; thus, other parents from other races not included.

Moreover, this study focused on the four types of schools which well established in Kuching district. Thus, considerations for other types of schools which located in the rural area or have small numbers in Kuching were not covered in this study.

1.7 Chapter review

This chapter has given an overall idea of the background of the study and why the study is worth addressing. It also mentions the objectives of the study and the research questions to be answered. Operational terms used in the study also had been elaborated for readers understanding. The following chapter discusses review of literature related to the present study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter overview

This chapter consists of review of literature related to the present study and the need of present study. In the literature review, the researcher includes four sub-headings; parents roles in education, the importance of primary education, education in Malaysia, and parents' considerations when choosing primary schools. Then, the need for present study is discussed.

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 Parents roles in education

The role of parents in education is well established. It is agreed by Tony Blair, Britain ex-prime minister who is cited in Leason (2007), as he says “put parents in the driving seat for change” about the importance of parents roles in children success in education. In England, following the Education Act 1980, parents gained significantly more representation in the governance of state schools. They gained greater representation on school governing bodies and education committees. This stem from their role and influence in state education has continued to grow since and this has been good thing (Green, 2005).

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Education Act 1996 repealed the Education Act 1961 stated that it is the parent responsibility on education to ensure their children receive the essential knowledge and skills needed at particular age (National Report Malaysia, 2001). Loh (2007) referring to Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, mentioned parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. Moreover, as cited in Berger (2000) pertaining to U.S Department of Education 1994, it is important for the parents to get their right in choosing school for their children because it enables the community to create a stronger, safe, and more enriching future for the children. Thus, it is impossible to overemphasize the significance of the roles of parents.

Historically, the home was the center for teaching and learning. It means that “parents had primary responsibility for educating their children. Communication skills, values, traditions, and wisdom gained through experience were and still are taught through parental example” (Wissburn & Eckart, 1992 cited in Kaplan, 1992).

Home is the first classroom. Parents are the first and most essential teachers.

Boyer, 1991 cited in Berger, 2000