



Determinants of Parents' School Choice and Its Implications on Student Occupancy: Evidence from Private Schools

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Abstract

Increasingly intense with the growing number of educational options available to parents. This study aims to identify the key factors influencing parents' decisions in selecting schools while linking these factors to student occupancy rates as an indicator of institutional sustainability. The research employs an Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) involving 113 parent respondents from Super Brilliant Kidz (SBK Center) and My School Palembang. The research instrument consists of 48 statement items that were tested for validity and reliability, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.914, which indicates a very high level of internal consistency. The analysis revealed four dominant factors school quality and excellence, school reputation and image, cost and accessibility considerations, and religion and moral values which together explain 41.98% of the variance. The findings emphasize that teacher quality, school reputation, cost transparency, and value-added programs must be consistently maintained across all levels to strengthen student retention. Theoretically, this study contributes by linking school-choice factors with student occupancy sustainability, while practically offering insights for private school administrators in Palembang to design strategies for enhancing competitiveness.

Introduction

Introduction

Education does not merely aim to develop intellectual abilities but also to shape character, moral values, and social skills that equip individuals for the future (Irawan et al., 2023; Iksal et al., 2024; Hanafiah et al., 2024). Considering the rapidly evolving realities, choosing the right education has become a decision that requires careful consideration (Allothman et al., 2024; Kurniawan, 2023). Within this context, schools, as formal educational institutions, serve as strategic arenas where individuals acquire the knowledge and competencies necessary to thrive in the future. Therefore, school selection is not a random decision but the outcome of a complex and multidimensional process influenced by social, economic, cultural, and psychological factors (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; Epstein, 2018; Bai et al., 2024).

Previous studies have identified several theoretical frameworks relevant to understanding parental school choice, including rational choice theory, which views parents as rational agents seeking to maximize educational benefits (Ulfa, 2022) and the theory of planned behavior, which emphasizes the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in decision-making (Ajzen, 1991; Abdulghaffar & Bakr, 2024; Apiradee et al., 2025). These perspectives suggest that parental choices are shaped not only by practical considerations such as cost, distance, and facilities, but also by value-based motives related to religion, curriculum orientation, and school reputation (Reay & Ball, 1998; Rahayu et al., 2025; Segal et al., 2025).

Beyond individual-level decision models, school choice can be understood through broader sociological and economic frameworks. Bourdieu's theory of cultural and symbolic capital (1986) posits that parents seek schools that signal social distinction and facilitate the accumulation of valued credentials, whereby institutional reputation and alumni networks function as markers of class position. Becker's human capital theory (1964) frames education as an investment in future economic productivity, where parents rationally assess the expected returns of schooling in terms of career prospects and earning potential. Meanwhile, market theories of schooling emphasize how competition among educational providers shapes parental behavior, with schools employing branding strategies and value differentiation to attract clientele (Lubienski, Gulosino, & Weitzel, 2009; Hasanudin & Srinio, 2024; Petrescu et al., 2024). These complementary perspectives collectively inform our analysis of how parents navigate Palembang's private education landscape.

This study specifically examines the dynamics of education in Palembang, focusing on Super Brilliant Kidz (SBK Center) and My School Palembang as concrete representations of the challenges faced by private schools in maintaining student sustainability (student occupancy). Palembang is known for its high social, cultural, and economic diversity, which results in a wide range of parental considerations when choosing schools, from religious orientation and technological integration to international curricula and character education. In an increasingly competitive environment, each school is expected to offer value-added advantages aligned with parental expectations (Ulfa, 2022; Nurhayati et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025).

Internal data indicate that TK SBK Center has been relatively successful in maintaining positive occupancy trends: from 54.17% in the 2021/2022 academic year, rising significantly to 81.25% in 2023/2024, and stabilizing at 75% over the following two years. This suggests that TK SBK Center continues to hold strong appeal for parents.

Conversely, SD My School demonstrates fluctuating occupancy trends with a declining tendency from 56.25% in 2021/2022, dropping sharply to 20.83% in 2024/2025, before recovering to 47.32% in 2025/2026. This pattern indicates a phenomenon of student leakage, where not all students from TK SBK Center continue their education at SD My School.

Accordingly, this study seeks to fill a crucial research gap by exploring the factors influencing parents' decisions to either continue with or move away from Super Brilliant Kidz and My School Palembang. The findings are expected to provide deeper insights into parental decision-making patterns while offering strategic recommendations for schools to enhance competitiveness and institutional sustainability in the future.

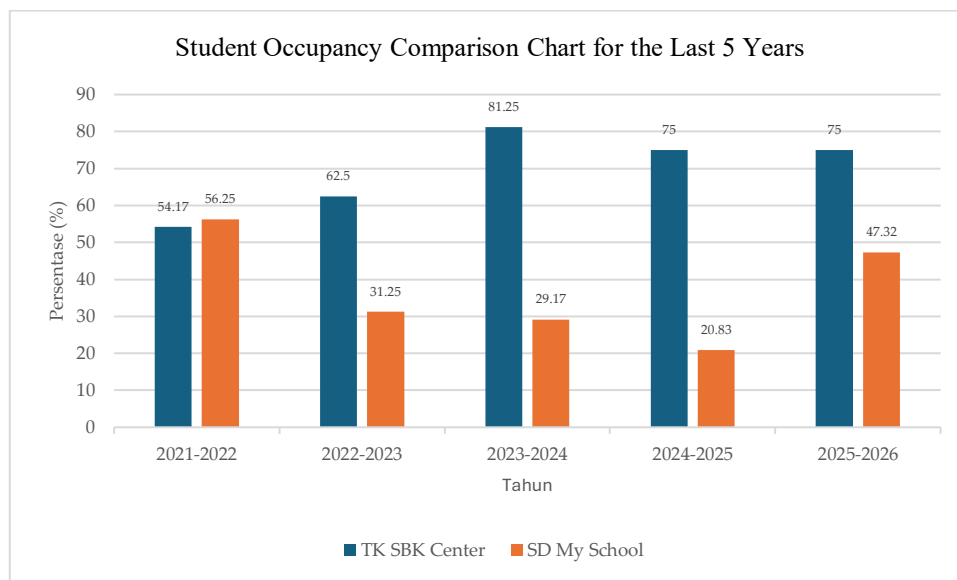
Table 1. Student Occupancy Comparison Table for the Last 5 Years

Level	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
TK SBK Center	54,17	62,50	81,25	75,00	75,00
SD My School	56,25	31,25	29,17	20,83	47,32

Source: Internal school data, processed by the author (2025)

Parents consider a variety of factors when choosing a school for their children, and each parent tends to prioritize different aspects over others. Restarie (2025) found that parents' school choices are shaped by both subjective and objective considerations. Subjective considerations are based on recommendations from close acquaintances and the school's alignment with the family's religious values. Meanwhile, objective considerations include facilities and infrastructure, tuition fees, curriculum design, and flagship programs. The distance between home and school also plays a decisive role in school selection, a factor identified by Jonathan

et al., (2023); Kurniawan, (2023); Thooyibah et al., (2022), who emphasize that proximity is a dominant determinant influencing parents' decisions.



Source: Internal school data, processed by the author (2025)

Figure 1. Percentage of Student Occupancy per Level

Schools today offer a wide range of advantages, from religious-based learning approaches to digital technology integration, bilingual instruction, and character education models (Restarie, 2025). This situation illustrates that educational institutions are no longer merely centers of learning but also competitors in attracting public interest as “education consumers” (Budiarti, Anggreini, Susanti, Damayanti, & Yunita, 2023). Consequently, parents, as primary decision-makers, must carefully weigh multiple factors before determining which school best suits their child’s needs.

Given these issues, this study aims to understand the factors influencing parents’ decisions to either choose or leave Super Brilliant Kidz and My School Palembang. The findings are expected to provide an in-depth understanding of parental decision-making patterns and offer strategic recommendations for schools to enhance their competitiveness and sustainability in the future.

Literature Review

Parental school choice is a complex decision influenced by various subjective and objective factors. Several previous studies have attempted to reveal these dynamics from different approaches and contexts. Restarie (2025), through a systematic literature review, identified that parents’ decisions to choose private elementary schools are shaped by a combination of subjective factors such as school image and reputation, recommendations from close acquaintances, and alignment with personal or religious values, as well as objective factors such as facilities, tuition fees, and distinctive curricula. These findings are consistent with Lee, Johnson, & Cheng (2024), who employed a quantitative experimental approach (conjoint experiment) and found that academic quality and spiritual development were the primary considerations, while tuition fees and extracurricular activities had a lesser influence.

In the context of faith-based schools, Jonathan et al. (2023), using a quantitative descriptive and exploratory approach, revealed eight key factors that influence parents’ decisions, including teachers’ competence, location, religious values, and school safety. The importance

of teachers and facilities was also confirmed by Djazilan, Retnowati, Masnawati, Mardikaningsih, & Darmawan (2023), who applied multiple linear regression and concluded that teacher quality, learning facilities, and school services significantly affect parents' choices of private junior high schools. Meanwhile, Irawan et al. (2023), in a survey-based questionnaire study, emphasized that parental education levels influence their priorities in school selection, such as attention to infrastructure, services, and accreditation. Conversely, distance and the number of students were not considered essential. Furthermore, Thooyibah et al. (2022), through a qualitative descriptive approach, found that tuition fees are not always the primary consideration; location, educational quality, services, and accreditation are more influential factors for parents.

Methods

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design, aiming to identify and explain the underlying factors that influence parents' decisions in selecting schools, as well as their implications for student occupancy sustainability. The research population comprises parents whose children are enrolled in both the kindergarten and elementary levels at Super Brilliant Kidz (SBK Center) and My School Palembang. A total sampling technique was used, meaning that all members of the population were included as respondents to ensure comprehensive data representation.

While this approach enables contextual depth, it is important to acknowledge the bounded nature of this sample. Both institutions represent private schools emphasizing bilingual instruction, modern pedagogy, and value-added programs, thereby attracting middle- to upper-middle-class families with cosmopolitan educational aspirations. Parents from lower-income households, rural contexts, or those seeking religiously conservative education may operate under different decision-making frameworks not fully captured here. Therefore, findings should be interpreted as representative of a particular stratum within Palembang's private education market rather than universal patterns applicable to all Indonesian parents.

The research instrument is a structured 48-item questionnaire designed to capture multidimensional parental school-choice behavior. Development began with extensive literature review encompassing international scholarship (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; Epstein, 2018; Reay & Ball, 1998) and Indonesian contextual studies (Djazilan et al., 2023; Kurniawan, 2023; Ulfa, 2022), from which six preliminary constructs emerged: (1) academic quality and pedagogical innovation; (2) institutional reputation and symbolic capital; (3) infrastructural and environmental quality; (4) economic considerations; (5) accessibility and logistical convenience; and (6) values alignment. An initial 52-item pool was refined through expert review by two educational researchers and pilot testing with 15 parents, resulting in the final 48-item instrument measured on a five-point Likert scale. While this breadth introduces conceptual overlap among closely related items such as teacher qualifications (X5), teaching quality (X6), and instructional methods (X8), this is inherent to exploratory research comprehensively mapping complex phenomena, with subsequent factor analysis serving to empirically identify item clustering and reveal underlying dimensional structures.

Data collection was conducted over three weeks through online and paper-based distribution. All respondents received information sheets explaining research purpose, voluntary participation, and data protocols, with informed consent obtained ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and secure storage with restricted access. To mitigate respondent fatigue, the questionnaire featured clear sectioning, varied formats, and 15-20 minute completion time, with single reminder prompts to maintain adequate response rates without pressure.

Prior to its use, the instrument underwent validity and reliability testing. The validity test ensured that each statement item was appropriate and capable of accurately measuring the intended construct. The reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the instrument's level of internal consistency. Data analysis was performed using the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) method with the aid of SPSS software. EFA was chosen because it aims to uncover the underlying factor structure of parental school-choice indicators without relying on a predetermined theoretical model. The factor analysis procedure included the following steps: (1) data adequacy testing using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity; (2) factor extraction through Principal Component Analysis (PCA); (3) selection of significant factors; (4) factor rotation using the varimax method; and (5) interpretation of the resulting factor structure.

Table 1. Operational Factors Definition

	Statement
X1	I consider the distance between home and school before enrolling my child.
X2	I prefer schools that are easily accessible by private vehicle.
X3	I avoid schools located in areas with heavy traffic or poor accessibility.
X4	A school located near my workplace is an added advantage for me.
X5	The educational background and experience of teachers are important considerations.
X6	The quality of teaching greatly influences my decision.
X7	I prefer schools whose curriculum is developed in line with the latest educational trends.
X8	I consider the teaching methods used by the school when choosing a school for my child.
X9	I appreciate schools that implement personalized learning based on students' interests and talents.
X10	I consider the school's accreditation status before enrolling my child.
X11	The school's reputation and image (both online and offline) influence my decision.
X12	I pay attention to the school's achievements and awards.
X13	Positive reviews from other parents are an important consideration.
X14	I consider schools that have both academic (e.g., science, math, technology) and non-academic (e.g., arts, sports) achievements.
X15	Input and recommendations from others (friends, relatives, colleagues) affect my school choice.
X16	Learning technologies such as interactive screens and LMS are important considerations.
X17	A clean and well-maintained learning environment is a key factor in my decision.
X18	Physical safety (restricted access, CCTV, security personnel) is my top priority.
X19	The school's social environment (friendship, values, culture) is an important factor for me.
X20	I consider the total cost of education before choosing a school.
X21	I believe the fees I pay should be proportional to the quality of services provided.
X22	Scholarship or discount programs are attractive features for me.
X23	I choose a school that aligns with my family's religious beliefs.
X24	Religious education at school is an important factor in my decision.
X25	I appreciate schools that promote moral values and religious tolerance.
X26	I want my child to regularly participate in worship activities.

X27	I avoid schools that lack a clear moral foundation.
X28	I want my child to grow in an environment that shapes both heart and behavior.
X29	I choose a school based on promotions seen on social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook.
X30	I choose a school based on recommendations from friends or relatives.
X31	I consider schools that actively promote themselves both online and offline.
X32	I feel more confident about choosing a school after attending an open house or promotional event.
X33	Teachers who can identify children's unique potential are a key factor for me.
X34	Teachers who are communicative and caring toward both children and parents are important.
X35	I prefer schools that apply active and creative learning models.
X36	I prefer schools that use a national-plus or international curriculum.
X37	I appreciate schools that organize field trips (e.g., to malls, banks, airports, fire stations) to expose children to real-world experiences.
X38	I support school innovations such as "Bridging Classes" that prepare children for smooth transitions between levels (e.g., from kindergarten to elementary).
X39	I value schools that teach and develop an entrepreneurial mindset and character.
X40	I consider schools that use 100% English in their teaching and learning process.
X41	I consider the quality and achievements of the school's alumni as part of my decision.
X42	Extracurricular programs such as Coding or AI are important considerations.
X43	I value schools with a green ecosystem culture that teaches children about environmental responsibility (e.g., waste sorting).
X44	Facilities such as laboratories, playgrounds, and art studios are important for me.
X45	I consider the safety of the neighborhood surrounding the school.
X46	Adequate and organized parking facilities are important considerations.
X47	I compare the costs of several schools before making a decision.
X48	I prefer schools that offer flexible payment options (e.g., installments).

In the initial stage of factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were conducted. The KMO test assesses the adequacy of the overall sample size for analysis, while Bartlett's Test is used to confirm the presence of significant correlations among variables (Ilmantia & Putro, 2019). The data are considered suitable for analysis if the KMO value exceeds 0.5 (Ongsano & Sondak, 2017). Subsequently, the Anti-Image Correlation test was performed to evaluate the sampling adequacy of each variable individually, with the criterion that the Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) must be greater than 0.5 for a variable to be retained (Ongsano & Sondak, 2017).

The next step was the Communalities test, which aims to assess the extent to which each variable contributes to the extracted factors. A variable is considered acceptable if its extraction value exceeds 0.5. This was followed by the examination of eigenvalues and Total Variance Explained to determine the number of relevant factors. According to Kaiser's Criterion, only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 are retained. However, Jolliffe's Criterion offers an alternative approach by allowing factors with eigenvalues greater than 0.7 to be considered.

The final stage of the factor analysis involved constructing the factor matrix, which presents the coefficient or factor loading values. These coefficients indicate the strength of the relationship between the observed variables and the extracted factors. The higher the factor

loading value, the stronger the association between the variable and the factor, thus confirming the variable's suitability as an explanatory indikator (Ongsano & Sondak, 2017).

Results and Discussion

The respondents in this study were parents of kindergarten and elementary school students at Super Brilliant Kidz (SBK Center) and My School Palembang, with a total of 113 participants. The research instrument consisted of a 48-item questionnaire that was tested for both validity and reliability prior to conducting the factor analysis.

The validity test results indicated that all items had item-total correlation values greater than the r-table value (0.1848). Therefore, all items were deemed valid and suitable for use in the study. Furthermore, the reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha produced a coefficient of 0.914, well above the minimum threshold of 0.60, indicating that the instrument was highly reliable with excellent internal consistency.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.914	48

To ensure the adequacy of the data for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were conducted. As presented in Table 4, the KMO value of 0.711 exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.5, indicating adequate sampling for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's Test produced a Chi-Square value of 3168.344 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), confirming that the correlations among variables were sufficiently strong to proceed with the analysis.

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.711	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3168.344
	df	1128
	Sig.	.000

These statistical prerequisites validate the appropriateness of factor analysis for this dataset. The KMO measure of 0.711, falling within the "middling" to "meritorious" range (Kaiser, 1974), demonstrates that the 48 indicators share sufficient common variance to be reducible into meaningful latent constructs rather than independent dimensions, confirming that parents' school-choice considerations follow identifiable underlying patterns. The highly significant Bartlett's Test ($p < 0.001$) reinforces this by indicating genuine interdependencies in parental evaluation, for instance, parents prioritizing teacher quality also value curriculum innovation, suggesting these cluster within broader academic excellence concerns.

These results imply that parental school choice operates through systematic cognitive frameworks rather than isolated preferences. Parents mentally organize the 48 attributes into higher-order considerations, conceptualized as latent factors, consistent with bounded rationality theory (Simon, 1955) where decision-makers simplify complex choices by grouping information into manageable categories. Factor analysis thus serves not merely as data reduction but as a window into the cognitive architecture of educational decision-making in Palembang's competitive private school market.

Table 4. Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
X1	2.097.168	231.276	.352	.913
X2	2.094.159	232.442	.393	.913
X3	2.097.788	231.995	.334	.914
X4	2.098.761	227.110	.408	.913
X5	2.090.265	237.133	.346	.913
X6	2.089.558	238.221	.352	.913
X7	2.092.035	233.949	.376	.913
X8	2.090.088	237.473	.348	.913
X9	2.091.681	231.355	.547	.911
X10	2.090.973	233.214	.522	.912
X11	2.091.858	232.581	.548	.912
X12	2.094.956	226.841	.605	.910
X13	2.093.894	227.204	.633	.910
X14	2.094.159	228.942	.548	.911
X15	2.099.115	225.099	.541	.911
X16	2.094.602	228.304	.592	.911
X17	2.089.027	238.571	.397	.913
X18	2.089.204	239.181	.300	.914
X19	2.090.531	233.854	.541	.912
X20	2.095.133	232.663	.374	.913
X21	2.090.531	236.122	.372	.913
X22	2.094.159	229.888	.505	.911
X23	2.097.611	237.505	.111	.917
X24	2.094.867	231.913	.353	.913
X25	2.089.469	238.765	.311	.914
X26	2.091.504	234.665	.364	.913
X27	2.089.381	239.041	.236	.914
X28	2.088.761	240.270	.243	.914
X29	2.100.619	227.041	.435	.913
X30	2.102.035	227.271	.432	.913
X31	2.101.681	225.409	.495	.912
X32	2.098.319	230.963	.381	.913
X33	2.089.823	237.285	.344	.913
X34	2.088.673	240.509	.228	.914
X35	2.089.292	238.691	.311	.914
X36	2.093.009	231.480	.446	.912
X37	2.094.248	231.389	.425	.912
X38	2.091.770	232.683	.513	.912
X39	2.092.832	228.651	.607	.910
X40	2.094.867	229.538	.468	.912
X41	2.096.637	225.725	.565	.911
X42	2.094.336	228.034	.562	.911
X43	2.093.628	227.412	.632	.910

X44	2.092.743	230.094	.484	.912
X45	2.088.850	238.960	.393	.913
X46	2.090.973	235.392	.376	.913
X47	2.095.664	232.069	.310	.914
X48	2.101.416	230.248	.378	.913

Source: Questionnaire data, processed by the author (2025)

The item-total statistics presented in Table 5 demonstrate strong internal consistency across all 48 items. All corrected item-total correlation values exceeded the threshold of 0.1848, ranging from 0.111 (X23) to 0.633 (X13), confirming that each item contributes meaningfully to the overall scale. Notably, items related to school reputation (X13: positive reviews from other parents, $r = 0.633$), achievements (X12: school achievements and awards, $r = 0.605$), and alumni quality (X41: alumni quality and achievements, $r = 0.565$) exhibited the highest correlations, suggesting that reputational factors form a particularly cohesive dimension in parental decision-making. The Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted values remained consistently high (ranging from 0.910 to 0.917), indicating that no single item disproportionately weakens the instrument's reliability, thereby supporting the retention of all 48 items for factor analysis.

The factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation extracted four principal factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1.0, as presented in Table 6. These four factors collectively explain 41.98% of the total variance in parental school-choice decisions. While this proportion indicates moderate explanatory power, it is consistent with exploratory studies examining complex multidimensional behaviors where no single theoretical model fully accounts for human decision-making (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The first factor demonstrates the strongest explanatory capacity, accounting for 23.10% of variance with an eigenvalue of 11.087, substantially higher than the second factor (7.48%, eigenvalue 3.592). This distribution suggests a dominant underlying dimension in parental preferences, with additional nuanced considerations captured by subsequent factors. The remaining 58.02% of unexplained variance likely reflects idiosyncratic family circumstances, children's individual preferences, peer influences, and contextual factors not systematically measured in this study, indicating avenues for future research refinement.

Table 5. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	11.087	23.098	23.098	11.087	23.098	23.098	6.012	12.526	12.526
2	3.592	7.484	30.582	3.592	7.484	30.582	5.739	11.956	24.482
3	2.882	6.004	36.586	2.882	6.004	36.586	5.116	10.657	35.139
4	2.590	5.396	41.981	2.590	5.396	41.981	3.284	6.842	41.981

The rotated factor matrix revealed the distribution of variables across four distinct factors. The first factor comprised indicators related to the perceived quality and excellence of the school (X11, X18, X20, X12, X13, X15, X43, X47, X46, X48, X38, X19, X9, X5, X6). The second factor was formed by indicators associated with school reputation and image (X44, X41, X10,

X45, X8, X35, X40, X37, X17, X42, X39, X36). The third factor encompassed indicators reflecting cost considerations and practical aspects in school (X34, X21, X4, X7, X30, X23, X31, X1, X32, X33, X2, X14, X16, X3, X22), while the fourth factor was linked to religious and moral values (X27, X25, X28, X24, X26, X29).

Tabel 6. New Factors Classification

Factor	Indicator Code	Factor Loading	Statement
Quality and Excellence of the School	X11	.677	The school's reputation and image (both online and offline) influence my decision.
	X18	.614	The school's physical security (restricted access, CCTV, guards) is my priority.
	X20	.598	I consider the total cost of education before choosing a school.
	X12	.592	I pay attention to the school's achievements and awards.
	X13	.578	Positive reviews from other parents serve as my consideration.
	X15	.577	Input and recommendations from others (friends, relatives, colleagues) influence me in choosing my child's school.
	X43	.561	I consider schools with a green ecosystem culture that teaches children from an early age to sort plastic waste from others, and to distinguish organic from inorganic waste.
	X47	.558	I compare the tuition fees of several schools before making a decision.
	X46	.547	Adequate and organized parking facilities are important to me.
	X48	.540	I tend to choose schools that offer flexible payment options (e.g., installments).
	X38	.510	I support school innovations, such as organizing Bridging Classes to help children transition smoothly from kindergarten to primary school or from primary to secondary school, both mentally and academically.
	X19	.477	I highly consider the school's social environment (friendship, values, culture).
	X9	.461	I prefer schools that apply learning based on children's interests and talents (Personalized Learning).
	X5	.433	Teachers' educational background and teaching experience are my considerations.
X6	.365	The quality of teaching provided by the teachers greatly influences my decision.	
School Reputation and Image	X44	.694	Facilities such as laboratories, playgrounds, and art studios are important to me.
	X41	.679	I also consider the quality and achievements of the school's alumni.

	X10	.672	I take into account the school's accreditation before enrolling my child.
	X45	.650	I consider the safety of the surrounding school environment.
	X8	.577	I take into account the learning methods applied by the school when choosing one for my child.
	X35	.570	I prefer schools that implement active and creative learning.
	X40	.549	I consider schools that use English 100% in the teaching and learning process.
	X37	.538	I prefer schools that organize field trips to places like malls, banks, airports, and fire stations to introduce children to real-life experiences.
	X17	.523	A clean and well-maintained learning environment is an important factor in my decision.
	X42	.509	The availability of extracurricular activities such as Coding and AI is also a consideration for me.
	X39	.492	I consider schools that teach and train children to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and character.
	X36	.394	I prefer schools with a national plus or international curriculum.
Cost Considerations and Accessibility	X34	.351	Teachers who are communicative and caring toward both children and parents.
	X21	.654	I believe that the tuition fees I pay should be proportional to the services received.
	X4	.606	The school's proximity to my workplace is an added value for me.
	X7	.581	I prefer schools whose curricula are developed according to the latest trends in education.
	X30	.579	I choose a school based on recommendations from friends or relatives.
	X23	.573	I choose a school that aligns with my family's religious beliefs.
	X31	.556	I consider schools that actively promote themselves, both online and offline.
	X1	.550	I consider the school's distance from home before enrolling my child.
	X32	.550	I feel more confident choosing a school after attending an open house or promotional event organized by the school.
	X33	.547	Teachers who can recognize each child's unique potential are a key factor for me.

	X2	.540	I choose schools that are easily accessible by private vehicles.
	X14	.510	I consider schools that have academic achievements (e.g., Olympiads in science, math, and technology) and non-academic achievements (e.g., arts and sports).
	X16	.472	Learning technologies such as interactive screens and LMS are considerations for me.
	X3	.435	I avoid schools with congested or difficult access roads.
	X22	.401	Scholarship or tuition discount programs are among the factors that attract me.
Religious and Moral Values	X27	.696	I avoid schools that lack a clear moral foundation.
	X25	.654	I appreciate schools that instill moral values and religious tolerance.
	X28	.622	I want my child to grow up in an environment that shapes their heart and character.
	X24	.558	Religious education at school is an important factor in my decision.
	X26	.543	I want my child to become accustomed to participating in regular worship activities.
	X29	.482	I choose a school because of promotions on social media, such as Instagram and Facebook.

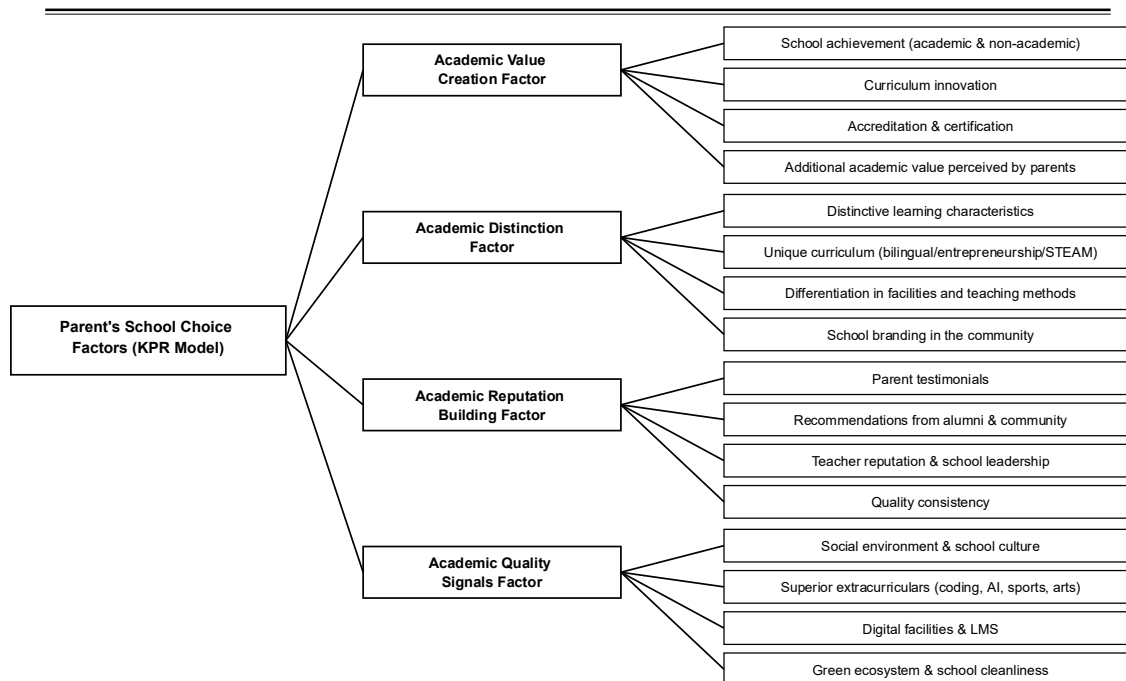
Source: Questionnaire data, processed by the author (2025)

Table 7 below presents the factor rotation of the 48 items into four interpretable factors whose factor loading is between 0.351 and 0.696. In accordance with the conventional existence (Hair et al., 2010), loadings that are greater than 0.50 will be considered practically important and those that lie between 0.30 and 0.50 indicate mediocre relations. The former factor has 15 items whose loadings range between 0.365 and 0.677; the latter factor has 12 items (loadings 0.394 to 0.694); the former factor has 15 items (loadings 0.351 to 0.654); and the latter factor has 6 items (loadings 0.482 to 0.696). It is worth noting that some of the items have cross-loadings; this is often common in exploratory analyses where the constructs have not been clearly defined; however, an item was placed under the factor in which it loaded most significantly. This aspect scheme provides an empirical foundation to explain the manner in which parents construct the criteria of school choices. Besides, the strong cluster of items in each factor signals that the respondents are likely to assess and cognize school related attributes as continuous dimensions but not as separate dimensions. It, therefore, seems to be the case that parental decision-making is informed by a set of interrelated assessive structures, thus adhering to the concept of school choice preference as being multidimensional.

Moreover, the meanings of item loadings on factors also support the strength of the identified items components since the items that cluster together in the same factor have conceptual congruence that, in turn, indicates internal consistency in each dimension. The existence of moderate loadings in multiple items, also points to the possibility that some school attributes can have conceptual overlap and this highlights the complexity and fluidity of parental expectations of academic quality, facilities, values, and institutional reputation. These trends

are typical of research in behavioural and educational preferences where choices are rarely based on an individual attribute but rather the result of a set of perceived advantages. In general, this structure supports the validity of the instrument used and provides useful information on the importance of various factors in the process of school selection by the parents, and thus contributes to further interpretation and discussion in the further parts.

PARENT'S SCHOOL CHOICE FACTORS



Source: Questionnaire data, processed by the author (2025)

Figure 2. Diagram of New Factor Classification

The results of this study indicate that parents’ decisions in choosing private schools in Palembang are influenced by four main factors: school quality and excellence, school reputation and image, cost and accessibility considerations, and religion and moral values. Together, these four factors explain 41.98% of the variation in parental decision-making. This means that other elements, such as personal preferences, family socioeconomic conditions, and cultural background, may also play a role. Nevertheless, these four dimensions are sufficiently representative to capture the dominant patterns of parental behavior as educational decision-makers.

The four extracted factors represent distinct yet interrelated dimensions of parental reasoning. The first factor, “School Quality and Excellence,” conceptualizes the academic and pedagogical core of schooling, encompassing teacher competence, curriculum relevance, and instructional effectiveness as parents' primary gauge of educational value. The second factor, “School Reputation and Image”, captures the symbolic and social dimensions of institutional choice, reflecting how parents assess schools through external markers such as accreditation, facilities, and alumni success rather than direct pedagogical observation. The third factor, “Cost and Accessibility Considerations”, embodies the pragmatic constraints shaping choice, where economic capacity and logistical feasibility mediate aspirational preferences. The fourth factor, “Religious and Moral Values”, represents the normative foundation of educational choice, emphasizing character formation and cultural congruence as non-negotiable priorities for

families seeking value alignment beyond academic outcomes. Together, these factors reveal that school choice operates simultaneously across instrumental, symbolic, pragmatic, and moral registers.

School Quality and Excellence

This factor represents parents' conceptualization of educational excellence as an integrated system of pedagogical competence, institutional credibility, and environmental safety. The clustering of teacher qualifications (X5, X6), curriculum innovation (X7, X9), and accreditation (X10) with security measures (X18) and cost transparency (X20, X47) suggests parents evaluate academic quality not in isolation but as embedded within a broader ecology of institutional trustworthiness, signifying holistic guarantees that children will thrive intellectually, socially, and securely.

As the factor explaining the largest variance (23.10%), this dimension reflects what Yin and Mu (2020) term pedagogical capital, where perceived excellence derives from integrated instructional quality rather than test scores alone. Parents assess quality through the interactional texture of teaching: how teachers engage students, practice differentiated instruction, and demonstrate adaptive learning models (Djazilan et al., 2023; Harianto, Tambunan, Dewi, Dinata, & Okuwhere, 2022). They emphasize teachers' educational backgrounds, teaching methods, communication skills, and sensitivity in recognizing each child's unique potential, alongside personalized learning implementation, school accreditation, and conducive learning environments that foster character development and comprehensive skill formation.

From a sociological perspective, this factor encapsulates both instrumental and expressive rationalities. Instrumentally, parents view education as an investment in their children's future competitiveness, aligning with Becker's (1964) human capital theory. Expressively, they interpret educational quality as moral care, a reflection of teacher dedication and school ethos (Addi-Racah & Ainhoren, 2009).

Empirically, this dual logic is visible in the contrast between My School Palembang and SBK Center. My School emphasizes bilingual programs, international accreditation, and project-based learning appealing to parents with global aspirations and higher cultural capital. In contrast, SBK Center focuses on discipline, structured pedagogy, and exam readiness, appealing to parents seeking stability and moral order. Thus, the factor "quality and excellence" does not represent a single notion of quality but rather two parallel ideals: innovative quality (associated with global modernity) and standardized quality (associated with moral reliability).

This duality reflects Palembang's broader sociocultural tension between modernization and moral traditionalism, where the emphasis on teacher-student interaction and personalized learning aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) notion of pedagogical capital as symbolic distinction. The coexistence of both preferences demonstrates that parental decision-making operates at the intersection of instrumental rationality and symbolic morality, negotiating between cosmopolitan aspirations and local values (Irwan, 2018).

In addition, this factor is also related to student development support and value-added programs, such as extracurricular activities, coding, artificial intelligence, and entrepreneurship. These findings are highly relevant to global educational trends that emphasize the mastery of 21st-century skills. Parents in Palembang expect not only schools that provide strong academic instruction but also those that foster character building, social competence, and future-oriented skills. Schools must be willing to invest in supplementary curricula that incorporate technology and entrepreneurship while ensuring that student

development support remains consistent across all educational levels. By doing so, schools can strengthen parental loyalty and reduce the phenomenon of student leakage.

School Reputation and Image

This factor conceptualizes reputation as a form of symbolic assurance, where parents rely on external validations such as facilities (X44), alumni achievements (X41), and accreditation (X10) as proxies for educational quality when direct assessment is impractical. The inclusion of learning methods (X8, X35), English immersion (X40), and extracurricular programs (X42) within this factor indicates that parents perceive these as reputation-enhancing features rather than merely pedagogical tools. Reputation thus functions as a cognitive shortcut, condensing complex institutional attributes into a recognizable and socially validated brand identity.

The second factor highlights the school's image, academic and non-academic achievements, alumni quality, and the availability of facilities. Reputation is one of the fastest aspects to shape public perception. The findings align with previous literature, which emphasizes that a school's reputation often serves as parents' initial consideration before exploring other factors (Restarie, 2025). Parents tend to prefer schools with a proven record of achievement and modern facilities, including laboratories, art studios, and bilingual programs. The implication is that school management should invest in institutional image-building through performance improvement, publication of student accomplishments, and optimal use of social media. A strong reputation can serve as a "quality assurance" that fosters parents' confidence to continue their children's education at the next level.

The second factor groups indicators related to achievement, alumni quality, facilities, and brand image, which together form the school's symbolic capital (Yin & Mu, 2020). These elements shape parental perception through visibility and social recognition rather than direct classroom experience. Reputation functions as a shortcut to trust, a form of social proof that reduces uncertainty when evaluating educational options.

In Palembang, where educational information circulates primarily through social networks and digital media, reputation becomes a performative construct. My School, for instance, sustains its brand through consistent social media exposure, alumni testimonials, and international partnerships. SBK Center, meanwhile, relies on its long-standing credibility and alumni who hold respectable positions in local institutions. Parents interpret these symbolic signals as quality assurance, especially when direct observation of classroom practice is not possible.

Analytically, this factor directly exemplifies Bourdieu's (1986) theory of symbolic capital, where reputation functions as a socially recognized form of distinction that transcends objective academic quality. Parents accumulate symbolic capital by affiliating with prestigious institutions, thereby positioning their families within desirable social networks. The emphasis on facilities, alumni success, and institutional branding reflects the commodification of education, where the "image" of learning becomes as significant as learning itself (Lubienski et al., 2009). Reputation thus operates simultaneously as a quality signal and a status marker, transforming school choice into an act of social positioning that reinforces class boundaries within Palembang's stratified educational marketplace.

Cost and Accessibility Considerations

This factor represents the practical filtering mechanism through which aspirational preferences encounter material constraints. The convergence of cost transparency (X21), proximity (X1, X4), curriculum alignment (X7), and religious congruence (X23) within a single factor reveals that parents mentally bundle logistical feasibility with value justification, constructing a holistic notion of "reachability" integrating economic, spatial, and cultural dimensions.

Theoretically, this factor embodies bounded rationality (Simon, 1955), where parental decisions are constrained by limited resources, incomplete information, and structural inequalities rather than purely rational utility maximization. In Palembang's context, parents operate within matrices of financial limitations, workplace locations, traffic density, and safety concerns that narrow feasible schooling options. Comparatively, SBK Center attracts lower-middle-class families through moderate tuition and central location, while My School Palembang appeals to higher-income families via transparent financial systems and premium facilities, demonstrating how cost-perceived value trade-offs structure educational choices within what Appadurai (2004) terms the economy of aspiration.

This economy of aspiration captures how Indonesian middle-class families negotiate futures against material constraints, where schooling functions simultaneously as mobility instrument and modernity symbol. Parents aspire toward prestigious institutions signaling cosmopolitan competence, yet decisions are tempered by income realities and institutional accessibility, producing calculated compromise between aspiration and affordability. This logic of value justification (Martinez, 2015) requires parents to assess whether costs correspond to anticipated educational outcomes and social prestige. Parents justify higher tuition when schools deliver superior facilities, English immersion (X40), or character-building programs (X39) promising long-term social capital. Conversely, cost-quality misalignment triggers disillusionment, evidenced by My School's occupancy decline from 56.25% to 20.83%, revealing how market-oriented systems transform families into rational consumers where institutional legitimacy becomes contingent upon demonstrable value delivery.

The spatial politics of schooling further compounds these dynamics, as accessibility transcends physical distance to encompass infrastructural privilege. Schools in Palembang's central or affluent districts enjoy enhanced visibility and safety, while families in peripheral areas face structural disadvantages including higher transportation costs and safety risks. Although Indonesia lacks formal school catchment zones, spatial stratification operates through urban design and real estate distribution, linking educational access to housing affordability (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2011). The clustering of proximity items (X1, X2, X4) with cost considerations (X20, X21, X47) empirically demonstrates how geographic and economic barriers intersect, revealing cost and accessibility as socio-spatial determinants of educational inequality.

What appears as pragmatic consideration is deeply social and political, as tuition affordability and proximity reflect the spatial and economic stratification of educational opportunity. Higher-income parents prioritize bilingual curricula and premium facilities, while middle- and lower-income families balance aspirational ideals with pragmatic constraints, manifesting structural inequality that spatially segregates families into educational niches defined by class and geography. The “choice” discourse often obscures these inequalities by presenting decisions as personal preferences rather than outcomes of systemic disparities (Ball, 2003). Moreover, cost decisions embody moral and emotional dimensions where high tuition signifies parental devotion and responsibility (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), reinforcing class identity while perpetuating privatized notions of educational responsibility that shift quality burdens from state to individuals. This ideological normalization of market-based provision raises critical questions about educational equity and public accountability in Indonesia's evolving schooling landscape.

Religion and Moral Values

This factor conceptualizes moral education as the foundational layer upon which other considerations rest. The tight clustering of items emphasizing religious instruction (X24, X26),

moral clarity (X27), values transmission (X25), and character formation (X28) indicates that for many parents, schooling legitimacy derives first from ethical trustworthiness before academic credentials. The inclusion of social media influence (X29) within this factor suggests that parents perceive promotional channels as extensions of a school's moral transparency and accessibility, linking institutional communication practices to perceived ethical integrity.

The fourth factor integrates indicators concerning religious formation, moral education, and character development. Conceptually, this factor operates within terms of educational moralism, the belief that schooling must cultivate ethical citizens before skilled workers (Yacek & Ijaz, 2020).

In Palembang, religion functions as a moral grammar of educational choice. Parents often describe “good schools” not merely in academic terms but as institutions that nurture *adab* (behavior), discipline, and social empathy. The convergence of religious practice and value education thus constructs an ethical dimension of parental rationality.

Comparatively, SBK Center foregrounds daily religious rituals, Qur’anic studies, and moral strictness, appealing to families emphasizing discipline and social order. Meanwhile, My School Palembang integrates moral education with creativity, entrepreneurship, and technology-based learning, representing a progressive morality that fuses faith with innovation. The shared core across both is the pursuit of moral coherence, an attempt to reconcile spiritual conviction with modern competency (Hafeez, 2021).

Theoretically, this dimension extends beyond economic rationality (Becker, 1964) to encompass “educational moralism” (Yacek & Ijaz, 2020), where schooling serves cultural reproduction and moral socialization alongside human capital formation. Parents seek schools transmitting values aligned with family identity, functioning as Bourdieu's (1986) “habitus formation sites” where dispositions are cultivated. The emphasis on religious instruction and character development reveals how school choice embeds within identity maintenance and cultural resistance against perceived secularization, positioning selection as simultaneously educational and ideological within Indonesia's plural society.

These findings reflect Palembang's evolving educational landscape shaped by economic development and marketization. The prominence of bilingual instruction, international curricula, and technological integration mirrors emerging middle-class aspirations toward cosmopolitan identity and global mobility. As Indonesia's sixth-largest city, rapid urbanization has expanded a professional class positioning children within globally competitive labor markets (Irwan, 2018). Preferences for English immersion (X40) and coding programs (X42) signal symbolic alignment with transnational modernity, reflecting broader Southeast Asian middle-class patterns viewing education as cultural capital accumulation and class reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986).

Simultaneously, sustained emphasis on religious and moral values reveals cultural preservation amid perceived secularization threats. For many Palembang families in this predominantly Muslim city, school choice represents identity maintenance and cultural resistance (Yacek & Ijaz, 2020). The integration of religious instruction with entrepreneurial mindset (X39) and environmental consciousness (X43) exemplifies “progressive traditionalism” where religious authenticity coexists with contemporary competencies, reflecting Indonesia's negotiation between globalization and cultural rootedness. The divergent occupancy trends between SBK Center and My School Palembang illuminate these tensions as families continuously reassess whether schools deliver on both global competitiveness and values congruence, revealing how parents synthesize the four dimensions into coherent frameworks where quality and reputation

establish legitimacy, cost and accessibility determine feasibility, and values alignment ensures existential congruence as interdependent logics negotiated according to family circumstances.

Conclusion

This study concludes that parents' decisions in selecting private schools in Palembang are shaped by four primary dimensions. First, school quality and excellence, which make children feel both comfortable and intellectually stimulated. Second, school reputation and image, which instill confidence among parents. Third, cost and accessibility considerations, ensuring proportional value between expenses and services. Fourth, religious and moral values, which guide students toward positive habits and moral grounding. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that parents assess schools through a multifaceted lens, considering quality, reputation, financial value, and holistic child development simultaneously.

Limitation and Suggestion

Despite its methodological rigor, this study has several limitations. First, the sample is drawn exclusively from two private institutions in Palembang catering to middle- to upper-middle-class families with aspirations toward modern, bilingual education. This constrains generalizability to more diverse populations, including parents from lower-income backgrounds, rural areas, or those prioritizing affordability and religiously conservative education. Second, the 48-item questionnaire, while comprehensive, may introduce respondent fatigue affecting response consistency, and its breadth may have resulted in conceptual overlap among certain items, potentially diluting factor precision. The 48-item questionnaire may induce respondent fatigue among busy parents, potentially affecting response consistency and factor stability. Third, the cross-sectional design captures preferences at a single point in time, limiting insights into how these evolve across educational stages or in response to changing conditions. Finally, the four factors explain 41.98% of variance, suggesting that other dimensions such as peer influence, children's preferences, or personal family experiences also play significant roles but were not fully captured.

Building upon these findings, future investigations may extend the study's scope to a wider range of schools, both private and public, to capture more diverse parental decision-making patterns. Comparative analyses across different regions could also reveal how cultural, economic, and policy contexts influence school choice behavior. To deepen understanding, qualitative methods such as interviews may be employed to uncover the nuanced motivations behind parents' decisions. Moreover, exploring the roles of digitalization, school branding, and post-pandemic educational shifts could offer insights into how these factors affect school reputation and student occupancy. Incorporating moderating variables like family income or parental education would further enrich the explanatory strength of future research in this field.

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