

Evaluating Parental Preferences for Preschool Education in Malaysia: A Case Study of Kindergartens in Pulau Pinang

Radhega Ramasamy¹, Gurdip Kaur Saminder Singh², Ranjit Kaur P. Gernail Singh³

^{1,2,3,4}Faculty of Education and Humanities, UNITAR International University, Kelana Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: gurdip.saminder@unitar.my, ranjit.kaur@unitar.my

Corresponding Author Email: radhegaramasamy79@gmail.com

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Abstract

The study aims to investigate the factors that affect the parent's choice of preschools in Malaysia. The quantitative research design was adopted to carry out the research. A questionnaire was uploaded on the Internet and dispersed to the target population consisting of parents who send their children to preschools. A total of 100 completed questionnaires were collected and processed and analyzed statistically. The findings showed that the main factors that affected the decision of parents to choose a preschool were curriculum factors, academic factors, school-parent relationships, and school facilities. The findings suggest that Malaysian parents attach a lot of importance to the quality of the curriculum, positive academic factors, their relationship with the school, the school facilities. Based on these findings, it is suggested that Malaysian preschools can enhance the attractiveness of their brands by enhancing the quality of their curriculum, ensuring better quality academic related factors, creating stronger and closer school-parent relationships and ensuring that their preschools equipped with modern and attractive facilities.

Keywords: Preschools, Early Childhood Education, Malaysian Education, Teaching.

Introduction of Study

In this study aim to investigate factor influences parent's choice preschool education in Malaysia particularly in Penang state and provides suggestion based on research results. Malaysia, three authorities were given responsibility to overview and implement in early childhood education system. These authorities as Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOE), Ministry of Rural Development and Regional, Department of National Unity and Integration In year 1970, Department of National Unity and Integration develops preschool particularly as known as 'Rukun Tetangga' PERPADUAN. PERPADUAN preschools will intake students from all religion in Malaysia. As at report date, there are about 1496 PERPADUAN preschools registered under the National Unity and Integration Department.

In year 1992, preschools were implemented by MOE as a pilot project to support the entity to the primary school. As there was success in the pilot project, MOE's program was introduced to the Malaysia in the year 2003. Preschools introduced by the private entities are launched by the government as an option to children especially those parents can afford it (Lily & Muhammad, 2013). Nevertheless, these preschools are required to abide the National Education Act 1996. These preschools are given option to be taught in National Language, Chinese, Tamil or English.

In year 1980, there were a large number of preschools registered in private and government sectors (Lydia et al., 2018). From year 2005, 67% compare to in year 2014, 84.2% (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015) increase registered preschool children's in kindergartens. Government aims to achieve a 97% enrolment rate in preschools by 2020. The national policies were introduced to provide guidelines and growth for preschools services in Malaysia included Education Act 1996 (Act 550), National Key Result Area (2010-2012), Government Transformation Program Version 2 (2013-2017), Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025).

Rohaty et al. (2011) research pointed out that preschool is the main institution that develops children's socialization and multicultural awareness towards the formation of national identity, national integration that will lead to national unity. Prosen & Kuscer (2007) research suggested that early childhood education plays a vital role in the children's socialization process, encourages children to learn social values and develop social skills through integrating with other children.

(Ministry of Education, 2003), MOE developed National Curriculum in implemented syllabus to sectors. The National Preschool Curriculum is based on the principles of Rukun Negara and the National Philosophy of Education. The objectives of the Curriculum is to implement the skills to children's such as divide to social, intellectual, physical, spiritual, aesthetic values (creativity and appreciation). It is a national ruling that public and private preschools must follow the National Preschool Curriculum as stipulated in the National Education Act 1996 (Education Act, 1996, 2006). Children in government-aided preschools are taught in the Malay (Ministry of Education, 2003). The private preschool adopts English in teaching and learning as the main language and Malay language must be taught as a subject for at least two hours a week.

Problem Statement

Preschool education is a form of education that is very important, and this is because this educational experience is what forms the foundation for a person in his or her early years to acquire knowledge, competencies, and intellectual capabilities that are required to achieve positive intellectual progress. Hence, it is of great importance that parents choose the most appropriate preschool for their children to ensure that their children get the best possible preschool education that can help them progress later in life (Jukic & Reic-Ercegovac, 2008). Deciding on the preschool of choice for their children is a decision that is very important for a parent because choosing the right preschool can determine the difference between the child excelling at education or regressing. Several factors are likely to influence the choice of a preschool by a parent and these factors are of great importance in helping parents decide which preschool that they should send a child (Nuzha, Mas Ayu, & Tengku, 2019).

These factors can include quality of education provided by this preschool, the competencies of the teachers in question, the religious affiliation of the school, the environment of the school, the quality of the syllabus, the facilities of the school, the brand recognition of the school and various other factors which mostly relate to factors like quality, reliability, and comprehensiveness of the education product. Typically, an ordinary parent is likely to make an evaluation of different preschools and to choose the best one for the children based on the needs and requirements of the parent and the child in question (Kamaruddin, Mamat, & Razalli, 2017).

The main problem is that many preschools do not provide very comprehensive preschool education products and services to children and as such, these preschools are unable to provide their customers with high satisfaction levels. In many cases, preschools are lacking in certain areas and unable to provide a comprehensive educational product of the highest quality to their customers. When this is the case, the preschool in question would not create a very good image of itself in the industry and this would result in them not being favored by customers. The inability of these preschools to cater to the very important needs of parents and children when it comes to preschool education would mean that these preschools would miss out on the opportunity to attract more customers and thereby would result in them becoming very uncompetitive (Nuzha, Mas Ayu & Tengku, 2019).

The objective of the researcher in this paper will be analyze various factors affected the choices parents when it comes to choosing preschools for their children. This is a very complicated and complex decision-making process which those running preschools must understand. They must be able to appreciate the factors that affect the decision-making of parents and to improve their education-related products and services as a means of attracting and captivating the attention of parents. By ensuring that by satisfy these factors, these preschools will be providing parents with the confidence required for them to make a proper decision in their favor.

Research Objective

This study provides what the research is going to achieve and should follow from the definition of the research problems (Zainudin, 2010). Based on the problem statement, this study was involved to identify the behavior patterns parents as consumers of preschools:

1. To investigate factors to contribute parents' choice of preschools education in Penang.
2. To investigate the relationship between school curriculum factors and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.
3. To examine the relationship between school academic factors and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.
4. To determine the relationship between school - parent relationships and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.
5. To examine the relationship between school facilities and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.

Research Question

Zainudin (2010) says that this study will guide and help clarify the confusion that normally arises in any research.

The following research questions were formulated based on the research objectives:

1. What does the factor contribute to parents' choice of preschools education in

Penang?

2. What is the relationship between school curriculum factors and the parent choice of preschool in Penang?
3. What is the relationship between school academic factors and the parent choice of preschool in Penang?
4. What is the relationship between school - parent relationships and the parent choice of preschool in Penang?
5. What is the relationship between school facilities and the parent choice of preschool in Penang?

Literature Review

This study refers to the documentation of the relevant studies citations of author and the year of studied. It was clear and relevant research work in logical presentation. As stated earlier, the purpose of this study to identify and highlights the important variables and documentation of significant findings from past researcher. This is important to create new ideas related to the topic of the study. There are four factors that is related to the parents' choice of preschool education such as School Curriculum Factors, Academic Factors, School - Parent Relationships, School Facilities. All these variables manage to affect the factors influence parents' choice of preschool education in stated Penang. The reviews are on the related issues concerning the factors influence parents' choice of preschool education. This chapter begins with the reviews of theories and theoretical framework of the past studies and next follows with the parents' choice of preschool education as a dependent variable and School Curriculum Factors, Academic Factors, School - Parent Relationships, School Facilities as the independent variables.

Concept of Preschools Education

A preschool known as a school studied for children in between of infancy to school age. It essentially is an early childhood program whereby children combine learning with play in programs that are run professionally by adults. In essentially a school for children who are not yet old enough to attend a kindergarten.

The Development of Preschools Institution in Malaysia

In essence, preschool education helps to provide a child with a good head start for learning, it helps to teach children in a fun way, it places the child on the correct part of lifelong learning, it paves the way for the development in high language and mathematical skills, it provides them with a great opportunity to develop social skills and exposes them to improved communication skills.

According to Puteri (2005), the initial official preschools were started by the Ministry of Education in 1992, with 1,131 annex preschool classes in the vicinity of Government primary school's area. In Malaysia, there are five categories of preschools.

1. Ministry of Education Preschools
2. KEMAS Preschools
3. PERPADUAN Preschools
4. Preschool Education for Children with Special Needs
5. Preschools Operated by Private Sectors and NGOs

Pre-school institutions may be differentiated based on the medium in English, Malay and Chinese subjects, the curriculum approaches, religious orientation, origin (i.e. local or international), or political affiliations (Puteri Zabariah, 2005).

The Importance of Preschools

The importance of preschools is said to be quite apparent when it comes to helping with the development of a child. Researchers have stated that numerous dynamic developmental changes take place during the social, emotional, cognitive, moral, physical, and communicative development of a child. This preschool education that helps children to gain a better understanding of the world, and to create various opportunities to satisfy their needs and desires in a way that is deemed to be socially acceptable.

Types of Preschools

There were several types' preschools in Malaysia and these are classified according to the approach to adhere to. The most famous preschool in Malaysia is the Montessori preschool and this is followed by the Reggio Emilia preschool. There is also the Waldorf type preschool, which is based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner.

Theories Related to Parents' Choice

The theory of rational choice explains how and why people make decisions. Every individual has own preferences and chooses which option they prefer based on the available option to them (Levin and Milgrom 2004). In a simple word, people will make decisions on how they will act by comparing the different benefits of options. Based on a study by Nuzha et al. (2019), there are five factors used to model the parents' choice of preschool education in Malaysia which are program, school fees, teachers' quality, and school environment.

A comprehensive overview of the theories behind the parental choice of children provides by (Weber 2011). The figure 1.0 diagram by Weber (2011) of Parental Childcare Decision as shows below explains the values of family and beliefs will interact with community in area such as the supply of childcare programs, available information, social networks, and available employment to produce parental preferences. Interaction between these preferences with parents' employments and the opportunities and constraints perceived by the parent will determine the childcare type and assistance of financial used. All of these outcomes will influence the next childcare decision.

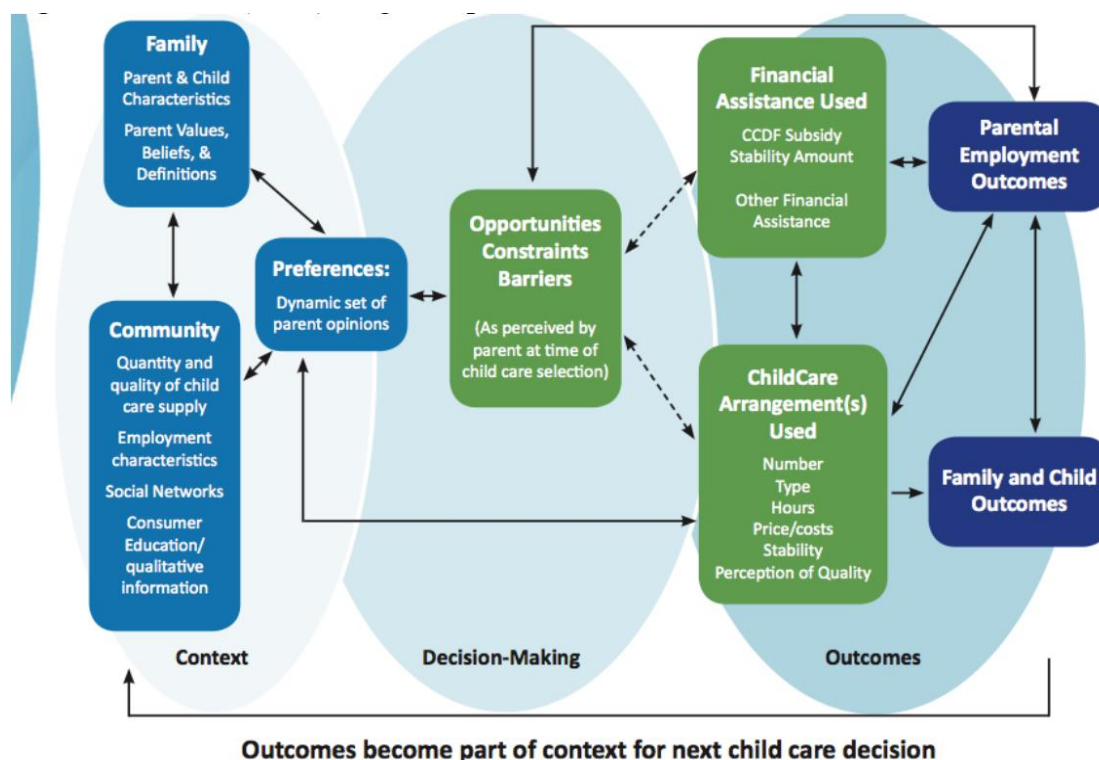


Figure 1.0: Diagram by Weber (2011) of Parental Childcare Decision

Parent's Preference and Choices of Pre-Schools

Parents need to make a big choice as when their child reached the age of four. It is time to choose their child's first education (Dahari and Ya 2011). The process of decision by parents consists of evaluating children needs, searching of information and evaluating alternatives that is available. Several parents believe that the perception of children about preschool should be considered in choosing preschool because children have their right to reveal their views which preschool is the best for them (Ceglowski 2007).

According to Dahari and Ya (2011), each parent has their own educational believes and preferences. Since the different preschool will work best for different types of students, it makes it hard for parents to select which learning environment is the most suitable for their children (Zarybnisky 2010). Parents have their rights in selecting the preschool that they want to send their children. Chianese (2018) said that the parents find all the information and evaluate all the available options as much as possible before they decide which preschool becomes the best for their children.

Each parent will consider various factors and these factors will influence their decisions (Nuzha, et al. 2019). The model developed from Wolfson (2015) identifies six factors that parents be considered when choose a preschool for their children as follow as location, hours of operation, educational philosophy, teacher's quality, and safety, facilities, and they're on instinct. Refers to the model developed by Dahari and Ya (2011) found that parents' choice of preschool education may refer to factors such as brand, private, English medium, and religion-based preschool become more favorable to Malay parents.

A qualitative study from Kamaruddin, Mamat, and Razalli (2017) found that parents' decision to choose a particular type of preschool with influenced by various factors which are good branding, teacher and members treat their child as a family member, priority of safety and security, teachers' quality, hygiene and cleanliness, religious value, distance from home and fees. From this study, the findings reveal that majority of the respondents (84.0%) choose

preschool with a good brand, 95.1% decide to choose on religious-based preschool with English medium. The results also revealed that the teacher's quality is the predictors for the choice of preschool education by parents. Kamaruddin, Mamat, and Razalli (2017) said that 52.5% of parents choose private preschool compare to government preschool. It has happened because the trust of parents to private preschool exists due to their business and marketing strategy that keeps upgrading their services and facilities to the maximum to maintain their competitiveness and market ranking (Thompson, Strickland III and Gamble 2008).

Factors Affecting Choices

A preference or choice can be described as a person's feeling of liking someone or something. It involves choosing someone or something over another person or other things. There are many factors that will be discussed here which are:

Academic Factors

Academic factors are known to play a significant role in affecting the preference and choices of parents when it comes to selecting preschools. Generally speaking, preschools that have quality academic offerings are usually shown better preference by parents in contrast to preschools that do not offer an attractive academic product to them. As mention by Ceglowski (2007), parents' will look at a school with a global segment for advanced education to their children's development and learning. Several researchers have consistently found that the type and quality of children's academic programs of preschool have suggestion for future academic success (Barnett 1995, Reynolds, Temple and Ou 2003, Li-Grining and Coley 2006). The preschool program with good academic quality is essential for the development of children and considered as evidence that children have attended the high-performance preschool. From that, the children will more advances in preparing for good academics results compare with children studying in early education programs with lower quality (Tran and Weinraub 2006). Sammons et al. (2008) developed an evidence base to understand the importance of various influences on preschool quality education through a study and provide a basis as guidance on good practice for practitioners. The findings show that the academic quality aspects of preschool are an effective intervention in order to produce excellent children.

Curriculum Factors

Another factor that is said to affect the preference and choices of parents when it comes to preschool selection is the curriculum factors. Parents are likely to show a preference to preschools that offer comprehensive and attractive curriculum in contrast to those that are incapable of offering a comprehensive curriculum. According to M Yusoff and Osman (2010) quality curriculum will increase or decrease teacher's effectiveness. The importance of curriculum quality gives significant implication for some parents to make a comparison. The curriculum quality becomes a good topic to discuss. The advantages of this have been debate in many industries and developing countries for the past two decades (Yaacob, Mohamed Osman and Bachok 2015). Practically speaking, curriculum factors can have a role in affecting the choice of preschools by parents. There are examples of when parents who are inclined to send their children to preschools that offer better curriculum. Curriculum is said to be a very important factor that can influence the choice of parents of preschools for the children. It is believed that parents who are from a high-income category are more likely to choose

preschools that offer better quality curriculum at high costs. On the other hand, parents from a lower income bracket would choose more affordable preschools with considerable levels of curriculum quality.

The capacity to read fluently is a key to academic achievement during formal education and, in this way, the advancement of reading skills must be viewed as a basic part of the early childhood curriculum. Several studies on early education have proved that it is vital to consider certain external conditions, which can advance or discourage the development of the child (Adi-Japha & Klein, 2009). Parents must enquire the management on the school's philosophy of education. Parents will ask family and friends who had previously enrolled their children on the concept of 3Rs. 3R is reading, writing, and arithmetic. Some preschools focus more on academic skills. Completed syllabus in language studies in Malay and English together with Mathematics is an indicator of teacher's quality in performance and time management in the preschool. An intensive curricular approach is required to improve and gives a positive effect to a child.

School Facilities

School facilities are also a factor of importance to parents when choosing preschools, and this because preschool that has high quality and comprehensive facilities is usually favored over those whose facilities are not very comprehensive. Parents feel more comfortable sending their children to preschools with comprehensive, safe, and quality facilities. There are exist clear relationships between school performance and school facilities. High school performance is an output from the key to a healthy school environment (Berry 2002). Most of the parents prefer to enroll their child to a private preschool comparing to public preschool based on the facilities available in the school. According to the NCES research, students from private preschool performed much better compared to students from public preschools with good facilities. The education quality is highly correlated with the environment of the educational institution itself (Rehman, et al. 2010). Yaacob et al. (2015) state that school facilities may also relate to academic performance. Usually, private preschool accommodates new buildings and facilities to support the instructional need.

When it comes to the school facilities, this is another factor that is believed to affect the parent's decision-making process. Certain parents who come from very high education level backgrounds are likely to choose preschools that offer high-quality school facilities at higher costs. They would like their children to have the best quality possible education. However, parents with low educational backgrounds might be satisfied with sending their children to ordinary preschools that provide affordable yet satisfactory levels of facilities quality that the school can provide. Quality facilities in preschool education can improve children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Stankovic et al., 2006). The most quality that should have in a preschool is indoor air quality on school-age children which is at an alarming state. Research study indicates that the quality of air inside public-school facilities may significantly affect students' ability to concentrate.

Parents will also consider about the physical school environment such as the rooms spacious, airy, clean, and well-lit, and above all, safe. Parents will strict with determine their decision to enough spaces for schools have activities and do not limit its activities due to limited space. They will observe how the room is organized, such as specific areas for different forms of play, sometimes referred to as activity centers.

Based on an investigation made by Mark Schneider (2002) on the availability of school facilities affect academic outcomes? Their study looked into six factors: indoor air quality,

ventilation, thermal comfort, lighting, acoustics, building age and quality, school size, and class size. The study concluded that preschool needs clean air, good light, a quiet-comfortable and safe learning environment. The research also concluded that this factor can be achieved with constrain of existing knowledge, technology, and materials. This research also concluded that providing good facilities can achieve long-term, positive effects on academic outcomes.

Parents and Teachers Relationship

Parent and teacher relationships are of great importance and are capable of influencing the decision of parents to streamline which preschool to choose. Preschools that can provide sound and good parent-teacher relationships would generally be preferred in contrast to those that are not able to ensure proper relations between parents and teachers. This is parents feel comfortable sending their children to preschools when they know the teachers and have good relations with them. A powerful and consistent predictor of student's performance is parent-teacher relationships. Usually, private schools ensure effective parent-teacher relationships. This is important because parents always ask about teachers' experiences with the principal. Some of the parents will be observing how the teachers interact with their children. Will the teacher's approach make children happy? Do the teachers sit beside students and work together with them? Most children will give the best responses to the teachers that show a lot of physical warmest such as kissing and hugging (Dahari and Ya 2011). Mustafa and Azman (2013) stated that a good parent-teacher relationship is significant as the predictors for the choice of preschool among parents.

Research Hypothesis

A hypothesis is a tentative statement made by a researcher based on underlying problem in study. A hypothesis is a declaration statement by a researcher and proved with data analysis (Zainudin, 2010). The research objectives that are related to this research study are:

1. Positive linear school's curriculum - parent choice of preschool in Penang.
2. Positive linear between school's academics - the parent choice of preschool in Penang.
3. Positive linear between schools – relationships parent choice of preschool in Penang.
4. Positive linear between school's facilities and parent choice preschool in Penang.

Conceptual Framework

These present studied builds based on literature review and rational choice theory (Becker, 1964) and Becker, G. S. (2009) by examining the variables that may relate to parents' choice of selecting preschools for their children. Rational choice theory assumes that the choices of an individual make tend to maximize on his or her utility. Hence, based from the literature reviewed, factors that may include in parents' choice of selecting preschools for their children may include quality of curriculum that the schools offer, academic recognition and performance that the school have achieved, the quality of facilities that the school can provide to the students and a good relationship between parents and teachers. Figure 2.0, identifies the relationships to explain parents' choices in selecting preschools in the state of Penang.

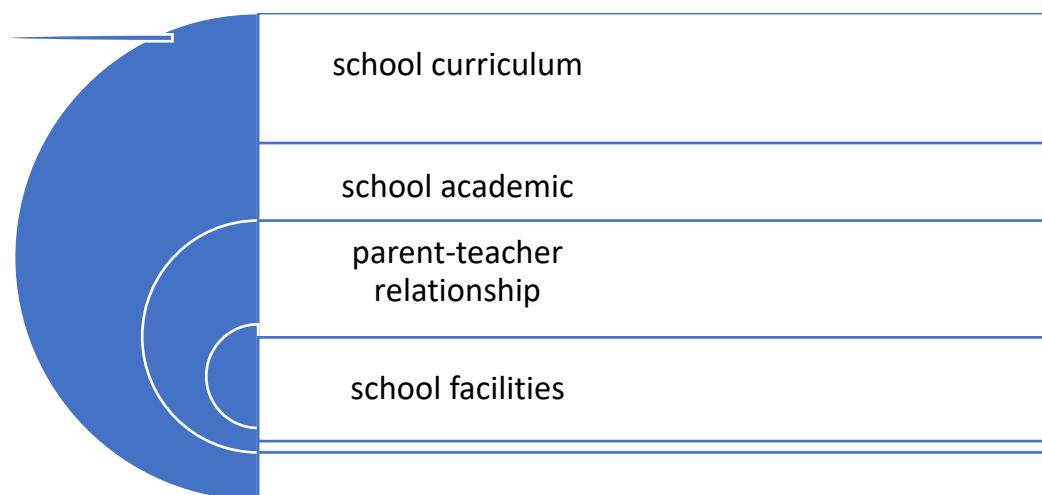


Figure 2.0: Conceptual Framework of Factors that Influence Parents' Choice of Preschool

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed all the relevant literature used in this study of examining the influences factors to the parent's choice of preschool education. This literature will lead to the development of a conceptual framework in the follow chapter. The following chapter discuss about the methodology and measurement model development based on the proposed conceptual framework.

Introduction Research Methodology

This research study was intended for assess factors parents' choice of preschool in state Penang. To be precise, this study was intended to investigate whether factors such as curriculum, school academic, parents-teachers relationship and school facilities could influence parent choice of selecting preschools particularly in Penang. There are several methods used to perform in this research study in conjunction with obtaining significant results. Hence, these sections explained the research methods used to perform the aims of this research study. These sections will discuss research design, conceptual framework and instruments. Research methodology refers to explain about the data collection method. Finally, this section also described on how the data was collected, analyzed and interpreted. These methodology elements must accurate and selected to reliable results to fulfill this research objective.

Research Design

This research study was intended to investigate whether factors such as curriculum, school academic, parents-teachers relationship and school facilities could influence parent choice of selecting preschools and not to determine causality. Therefore, a mixed of descriptive - correlation studies, which is also known as descriptive-correlation appropriate to be apply as a research design. In deciding the suitable research design to conduct the descriptive-correlation study, a survey research method preferred as it will determines behaviors. Survey method is also efficient in cumulating information using questionnaires. The information gained from the survey can generalized the entire population.

Hence, this study also used a descriptive and quantitative approach. Generally, quantitative study is one of the statistical analyses and results-oriented. The quantitative types research always associating with numerical and data of accuracy, where the data is collect and analyze by statistic methods. Based on what the researcher wants to study, asks specific questions,

narrows the scope, collecting data, analyze data using statistical methods based on research objectives (Creswell 2003).

Descriptive Approach

The descriptive approach involves data collection by way of distributing questionnaires that will describes the factors or characteristics, organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection (Glass and Hopkins 1984). Descriptive approach will assist the user understand the data distributed by adopting the use of visual aids such as graphs and charts. Human mind cannot excerpt information from a raw data. Hence, descriptive statistics method is vital to reduce ambiguity in managing data form (Knupfer and McLellan 2001).

Quantitative Approach

The quantitative approach is a process of investigating collected data to evaluate the impact between a dependent variable and independent variables. Quantitative approach can be quantitatively used to evaluate statistical treatment to support the information of relationship between dependent and independent variables (Creswell 2003). Nevertheless, quantitative approach has several setbacks such as design, issues, deciding on measurement parameters and defining way of analysis. Hence, design issues may cause inference in sampling and differentiate designs situations. Measurement setbacks are issues relating to determining the measurement of reliability and validity. Defining way of analysis is techniques used to quantify the co relationship between a dependent and independent variable.

Research Framework

Figure 3.0 below is based on discussion made in literature review chapter together with research objective chapter. In this framework, it will show relationships of school curriculum, academic, facilities and parent-teacher on parent choices of selecting preschools. Basically, this framework was based on information derived from research made as shown in literature review, chapter and based on rational choice theory. Rational choice theory state that the main elements of rational choice explanations are preferences, beliefs, and constraints. In this research context, individuals make their based- on cost-benefit calculations and choose the alternative that generates the highest expected utility (Witteck, 2013). Figure 3.0 also described the variable which is examined in this study. The independent variables that are selected for this research study are factors that will influence parents' choice of preschools for their child which can be further broken-down to curriculum, qualified teachers, quality of teaching, facilities and infrastructure, transportation, cleanliness and hygiene, safety and security, nutrition food served, operating hours, and costs.

The researcher has provided the research framework in which the researcher shows to independent variables are supposed to relate to dependent variable. The research framework outlines the independent variables as school curriculum factors, academic factors, school – parent relationships and school facilities. The framework depicts these variables meant to affect the dependent variable of parents' choice of preschools.

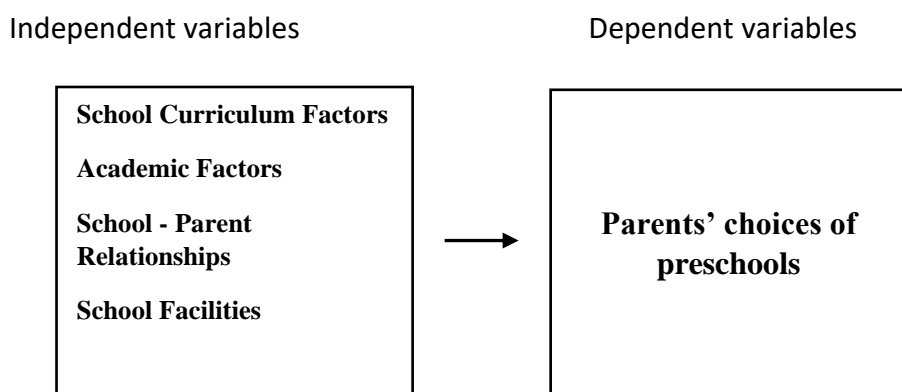


Figure 3.0: Research Framework

Population and Sample

Sampling Design

Sampling design is specific planning way to systematically group a small group of research target that will represent the general population. Further discussion will be made on target population, sampling frame, sampling technique and sampling size.

Target Population

Sampling begins with specifying a small group of the target population. Target population is the collection of elements or objects and the process information sought by the researcher and about which inferences are to be made. The target population defined precisely. Imprecise definition of the target population will result in research that is ineffective at best and misleading at worst. Target population involves translating the problem definition into a precise statement of who should and should not be included in the sample.

Sampling Frame

Sampling frame is as define researcher's population of interest. Based on research made by Hair et al. (2010) sampling frame (also called as work population), is defined as fundamental of which a sample that is selected. Sampling frames are parents that are located in Penang. Fundamental of sampling are derived from the population who takes part in this research study. Respondents who volunteer take part in this research study must have at least one child at preschool and lives at Penang. From these questionnaires, the researcher may discover clearly and accurately the relationship between the four independent variables which are School Curriculum Factors, Academic Factors, School - Parent Relationships, School Facilities that serve as the factors to influence the parents' choice of preschool education in Penang.

Sampling Technique

In this research study, a purposive sampling method is select because my research type was quantities research. A purposive sampling technique is a non-probability sample technique that selected based on the characteristics of a population (qualitative research) and the objective of the study.

Sampling Size

Henry (1990) stated that sampling size is one of the most efficient methods to achieve estimation by providing reliable and precise results. Identifying the sample size is vital in this research study. Hence, a total of 100 respondents will choose among the parents in Penang.

Instruments

To measure the factors that influence a parent's choice of preschool education, a set of questionnaires is adapted from other researchers. The questionnaire consisted of two major sections (refer to Appendix A). The first section, i.e. section "A", represents general information of the selected respondents which are gender, age, income level, occupation, and several kids.

The second section is section B is divided into 5 parts. The questions consisted of 28 items (5-point Likert Scale) measuring the parents' level of agreement on five variables: School Curriculum Factors, Academic Factors, and School - Parent Relationships, School Facilities and parents' choice of preschool education. Below table 3.1 shows each variable used in the questionnaire and outlines the variables and the number of measurement items.

Table 3.1

Number of Measurement Items

Variables	Number of Items	Code Items
School Curriculum Factors	5	B1, B2, B3, B4, B5
School - Parent Relationships	8	B6, B7, B8, B9, B10, B11, B12, B13
School Facilities	10	B14, B15, B16, B17 B18, B19, B20, B21, B22, B23
Academic Factors	5	B24, B25, B26, B27, B28
School Curriculum Factors	7	B29, B30, B31, B232, B33, B34, B35

Below table 3.2 provide a description of the measurement scale in which the main variables and the items outline.

Table 3.2

Measurement Scale

Variables	Number of Items	Source
Parents' Choice of Preschools	5-point Likert Scale statement measuring the extent to which the parents' feelings about parents' choice of preschools	(Grogan 2011)
School's curriculum factor	5-point Likert Scale statement measuring the extent to which the parents' feelings about school's curriculum factors	(Fairman, Louge and LaBrie 2016, Hsu and Chen 2013)
School's academic factors	5-point Likert Scale statement measuring the extent to which the parents' feelings about school's academic factors	(Fairman, Louge and LaBrie 2016, Hsu and Chen 2013)
School's facilities	5-point Likert Scale statement measuring the extent to which the parents' feelings about school's facilities	(Fairman, Louge and LaBrie 2016)

Pilot Study

Before distributing the questionnaires to the respondents, a pilot test was conducted to ensure that the questions are relevant to this research study and these questions are easily

understood by the respondents. A pilot study was to identify the weaknesses of each item in the questionnaire (Mohd Najib 2003). A total of 30 respondents among the parents are involved in this pilot study.

Table 3.3 shows the results of the reliability test using Cronbach alpha values. The outcome of this pilot test show that all Cronbach alpha values of variables which were school performance, teacher's quality, and parents' choice of preschool education are greater than 0.6. This finding shows that all the variables are reliable and can be used in an actual study.

Table 3.3

Cronbach's Alpha Values

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Parents' Choice of Preschools	5	0.857
School's curriculum factor	8	0.905
School's academic factors	10	0.937
School and parents' relationship factor	5	0.820
School's facilities	7	0.905

Data

Here there will be a summary of data collection and samples that are being used in this research study. This includes the method data was collected, what instruments are been employed, and how the collected instruments were analyzed.

Sample

Target sample consists of parents that were selected from state of Penang preschools. Sample selection was based on the availability or convenient samples as only parents who have given consented to respond to the survey was selected to participate this research study. A minimum target sample size of 100 respondents was taken for this research study.

Data Collection

Data collection is processing, receiving all data on variables of interest that enables to answer state of research questions as in objective of this study. Survey questionnaires were distributed to parents who have given consent to participate in this research study. These parents have a child who is enrolled in a preschool or who is actively in quest to enroll their children in a preschool. The researcher did not impose any time limit for the respondents to reply to the questionnaire. Nevertheless, the questionnaires were distributed and collected back on the same day.

The advantages of using questionnaires to collect data is the responses are obtained in standardized manner, it is convenient to distribute to a large number of respondents and it also saves time and money (Awang, 2010). Apart from that, it is also the quickest way to collect information from the respondents.

The Constructs in the Model

Dependent construct (Y1)

The dependent construct is the type of preschool the parents choose that can be further describes to a branded or a non-branded preschool, provided by government or dent to a private institution, the medium of teaching i.e. language or is it religion-based school.

Independent constructs

The independent variable in this study is identified as factors that influence the parents' choice of preschools, type of curriculum, availability of qualified teachers, teaching quality, availability of facilities and infrastructure, availability of transportation, level of cleanliness and hygiene, level of safety and security, supply of nutrition food, operating hours, and costs.

Data Analysis

This section will summarize all the methods that are involved. The data's entire are collected and analyze through software Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) 19. Below is some details on methods used in data analysis which are taken mostly from the main reference book, Applied Multivariate Data Analysis by Everitt and Dunn (second edition), and Using Multivariate Statistics by Tabachnick and Fidel (sixth edition).

Descriptive Analysis

Data is compiling, organizing, summarize and present suitable graphical forms which are easy understood such as tables, graphs, charts and diagrams. The researchers adopted descriptive statistics table and pie chart to summarize the independent variable (School Curriculum Factors, Academic Factors, School- Relationships, and School Facilities) and dependent variable (parent's choice of preschool). The collected date data are analyzed are presented in an easily understood manner for the researchers to derive conclusions.

Introduction Finding Results

This chapter explain the data analysis and findings of research conducted. This research study was conducted to assess factors to contribute to parents' choice of preschool Education in the state of Penang. Specifically, this study was intended to investigate whether factors such as curriculum, school academic, parents-teachers relationship and school facilities could influence parent choice of selecting preschools particularly in Penang. The research analysis is based on the research objectives:

1. To investigate the factors, contribute to parents' choice of preschools education in Penang.
2. To investigate the relationship between school curriculum factors and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.
3. To examine the relationship between school academic factors and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.
4. To determine the relationship between school - parent relationships and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.
5. To examine the relationship between school facilities and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.

The objective of this chapter is to present the findings from the analysis of the data collected. The analysis will be accompanied by SPSS results presented in the form of tables and diagrams, which will then be interpreted, and implications are discussed. This chapter

presented all the research findings very well. The data analysis was discussed here and the important observation of trends, and research implications were presented. The analysis also resulted in the research hypotheses being accepted.

Introduction Discussions, Recommendations, Conclusion

Chapters discussed in five sections include summary of this study, discussions on research findings conclusion, implication of the study and the final recommendation for future study is also presented in this section. The objective of this chapter is to the entire research summarize the entire research and to discuss the main findings that were made in the study. The objective is performing the study to make an analysis the various factors that affected the decision to decide of parents when it came to choosing preschools for their children in Malaysia. This is a very important research area which the researcher believed to have many gaps and thus this study was done as a means of closing these gaps. As a result of the study carried out, the researcher successfully highlighted many important findings in this research paper and these will be highlighted in this part. These findings are believed to be very important because they highlight the role of certain factors in affecting the judgment of parents in choosing preschools and thus, the implications of these findings can have far-reaching consequences. This part of the project will also discuss the research limitations and provide recommendations for future studies in this area. The findings were based on data collected from the 100 respondents distributed questionnaires. This chapter will discourse and deliberate the evaluations and relationships with the literature review as well as to provide clarifications to the findings of this research study. The considerations will be consecutively presented in line with the five- research objectives as that have been constantly performed in previous chapters.

Discussions on Research Findings

This study was intended to answer the following research:

Discussions RO1: To determine the factors that contribute to parents' choice of preschools education in Penang.

Hence, Malaysian parents were also found to attach a lot of importance and to preschools education and were likely to send their children to schools where these parents could establish close, contribute and beneficial relations to preschools education. This finding highlights the how parents were contributing in preschools education. It is essential that the nature of the relationship be very positive, close and value adding for both the parents' and the preschool authorities. If such a relationship is present, then it is likely that parents would favor such a preschool by sending their children to study at that preschool. Parents' also known well their part to support by contribute to preschools education, encouraged and giving moral support. In the event that the nature of the relationship is good, then this relationship would be able to have much benefit in terms of shaping the preference of parents to send their children study at the preschool and support it.

Discussions RO2: To investigate the relationship between school curriculum factors and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.

Overall, the findings suggest that Malaysian parents attach a lot of importance to the quality of the curriculum provided in these preschools and were likely to show a preference for preschools that provide quality early childhood education. This means that the curriculum of

the preschool must be of acceptable quality for it to be capable of shaping a parent's decision in favor of sending their children to that preschool in question. If the preschool offers an unattractive curriculum, then it is more than likely that the parent would be not inclined to send their children to study at the preschool. This means that it is very important for preschools to take steps to enrich, improve and enhance the quality of their curriculum so that they can offer quality curriculum to preschool children, and this would then result in better favorability among parents. Based on these findings, it can be confidently stated that research question 1 was answered successfully as it was shown that relationship between school curriculum factors and parent's choice of preschools in Malaysia.

Discussions RO3: To examine the relationship between school academic factors and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.

The findings have also shown that there is a close relationship between academic factors of a preschool and the choice of parents of such a preschool in Malaysia. The results highlight the fact that various academic factors play a very important role in shaping the parent choice of preschools in Malaysia. This shows that parents attach a lot of importance to academic factors and in the event that the academic factors of particular preschool are satisfactory, then it is more than likely that a parent would send their children to study at the preschool. However, if the academics factors are perceived to be not of good quality at the preschool, then it is unlikely that parent would send their children study of the preschool.

Discussions RO4: To determine the relationship between school - parent relationships and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.

Besides that, Malaysian parents were also found to attach a lot of importance to the relationship with the school and were likely to send their children to schools where these parents could establish close and beneficial relations with the teachers and other members of the school. This finding highlights the importance of schools establishing close and fruitful relationships between themselves and the parents of the children studying at their organizations. It is essential that the nature of the relationship be very positive, close and value adding for both the parent and the preschool authorities. If such a relationship is present, then it is likely that parents would favor such a preschool by sending their children to study at that preschool in question. In the event that the nature of the relationship is bad, then this relationship would not be able to have much benefit in terms of shaping the preference of parents to send their children study at the preschool.

Discussions RO5: To examine the relationship between school facilities and the parent choice of preschool in Penang.

The researcher also found that another very important factor that motivated parents to choose a certain preschool is the school facilities. It seems that parents in Malaysia are likely to send their children to preschools which are capable of providing them with superior facilities that are modern and which add value. The findings highlight the fact that preschools that have comprehensive, modern and state-of-the-art facilities are likely to have more popularity among parents in contrast to preschools that are incapable of offering such facilities. The findings imply that school facilities are indeed a very important factor that can shape a parent's choice of preschool in Malaysia. Therefore, it is very important that preschools in Malaysia pay attention to ensuring that their facilities are comprehensive, attractive and are able to provide satisfaction to preschoolers as well as their parents.

Research Implications for Early Childhood Practices

This research study discovered that the findings of this study in general contribute to body of knowledge by determining the extent and this is very important to discuss the research implications pertaining to early childhood practices because these implications for parents, preschools and policymakers can enlighten the relevant stakeholders about the value of the findings and the way these findings can be used to bring about improvements. There are three implications factor that will be discussed here which are:

Implications for Parents

The various findings that were made by virtue of the research that was done in this paper have very important implications for parents. On the basis of the findings made here, it is quite apparent that many important factors are given importance to by parents when it comes to choosing preschools in Malaysia and this shows that parents are starting to become very discerning in their choice of preschools. As a result of these findings, steps will invariably be taken by preschools to improve their product offering so as to ensure that they are able to attract parents to choose that preschool. This will then provide parents with a wider choice of quality preschools choose from and they would be able to choose the best preschool that suits the needs of themselves and their children.

Implications for Preschools

Concerning the implications of these findings for preschools in Malaysia, from the findings made here are that these preschools would be much more understanding about the factors that can affect a parent's decision to choose a particular preschool. By virtue of such knowledge, steps can be taken to improve the curriculum by making it more contemporary, progressive and up-to-date with international standards. Steps can also be taken to ensure better quality academic outcomes to ensure that the children of these parents are able to experience quality academic developments in their childhood years. More importantly, these preschools must make it a point to create better relationships with the parents and this would involve making parents part of the learning process and to continuously solicit feedback and input from parents about the children and also to relay important information to the parents about their children. This involves a symbiotic process whereby both the parent and the school benefits mutually.

Implications for Policymakers

From all of these findings, policymakers in Malaysia would also benefit because it will enlighten these policymakers about the fact that certain preschools in Malaysia continue to lack in the quality of the education product which they provide, and thus, positive steps have to be taken by the Malaysian government to implement policies as a means of helping these preschools to improve their brand, and they can accomplish this by incrementing policies that are targeted at assisting these preschools to make changes to their brand. Among the suggested policy implementations by which these preschools can enhance the attractiveness of their brands to parents of preschool children in Malaysia include the Malaysian government helping preschools by enhancing the quality of their curriculum, by ensuring better quality academic related factors, paving the way for creating stronger and closer school-parent relationships and ensuring that their preschools equipped with modern and attractive facilities.

Conclusion

This chapter concluded the study, and the important findings are summarized and discussed. The research limitations were then provided in this involves describing the various limitations associated with this study. The recommendation for future research was then proposed as a means of overcoming these limitations. Overall, the study was executed and completed with success as all the research questions were properly and successfully answered and the research objectives were also achieved. The researcher believes that all the findings made within the study will be very important in ensuring that early childhood education in Malaysia develops on the correct part and that preschools are capable of playing their roles successfully to ensure superior delivery of early childhood education products and services to Malaysian parents.

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