Determining Factors for Parents to Choose a School: Empirical Analysis of Religious Based Private Schools

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Abstract	This study explores the factors influencing parental decision-making in choosing a school in the context of private, faith-based education. Using a quantitative descriptive and exploratory approach, this research investigates various factors shaping parents' interest in choosing a school. The population examined were parents of students attending private Christian schools, resulting in a purposive sample of 235 respondents. The sampling technique targets parents actively involved in the school community and has varying levels of involvement and perspectives on the school selection process. Data was collected through an online survey conducted between June and September 2023. Next, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using SmartPLS was used for data analysis. This study identified eight factors influencing parental decision-making: teacher ability, school location, religious values, school facilities, school image, perceived costs, school environment, and school safety. The implications of these findings highlight the school's strategy to increase its attractiveness, thereby increasing school enrollment rates.
Keywords	Parental Decision-Making; Religion-Based Private Education; School Selection Factors

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1. INTRODUCTION

Their chosen school greatly influences a child's academic progress, social environment, and prospects. Therefore, understanding the various factors parents consider when making this important choice is critical. Parents consider a variety of criteria when selecting a school for their children, including academic standing, teaching excellence, facilities, location, costs, ethos, extracurricular offerings, and the broader scholastic environment (Jones et al., 2015). Examining these components will yield deep insight into parents' priorities and explain how these goals influence their decision-making processes. In addition, it is important to investigate how parents' criteria for school selection may evolve (Dini, 2022).

In addition, the decisions made by parents in choosing a school for their children are often influenced by socioeconomic variables, cultural norms, and societal expectations (Burgess et al., 2015). Therefore, a deeper understanding of how social and economic variables influence educational choices can contribute to formulating policies that promote justice and equal access to high-quality education for all. Educational institutions should understand the factors determining parents' decisions in choosing a school. By assimilating these important determinants, schools can adapt their curriculum and pedagogical approaches to align with parental expectations, thereby improving a child's overall educational journey.

In this day and age, parents have various choices when considering educational institutions for their children. The ongoing evolution and diversification of public and private schools present challenges for decision-making. Investigating parents' perceptions regarding the quality of education offered by different schools is of great importance, considering that these perceptions can significantly influence their choice of a particular school (Wulyatiningsih & Mandagi, 2023). Differences in available options, particularly differences between private and public schools, are additional factors that require examination (Yaacob et al., 2015). Understanding the motivations and considerations that guide parents in school selection will provide valuable insights for educational institutions, potentially directing students' futures and development (Mann et al., 2018).

Private schools, as educational institutions, are financially supported and managed by private or non-governmental institutions. Some private schools have different educational focuses, such as religious, arts, or international education, while others follow state or national curricula. Faith-based private schools, in this category of private schools, are institutions founded or operated by certain religious organizations or denominations. These schools combine religious education with academic subjects to fortify students' beliefs and traditions (Sinaga, 2017).

Private religion-based schools usually integrate religious education or certain religious teachings as an important curriculum component. This aspect allows students to understand and deepen their religious beliefs. Religious education seeks to humanize individuals. Therefore, the essence of religious learning lies in helping students achieve holistic humanity—individuals who embody faith, knowledge, ethics, culture, and community awareness (Latuconsina, 2016). Choosing a faith-based private school often stems from parents' belief that this education is more aligned with their children's daily lives, providing them with values, a moral foundation, and a deep understanding of their religion.

Parents' decisions regarding their children's education are profoundly influenced by their deeply ingrained values, beliefs, and individual preferences (Yaacob et al.,2015). This decision-making process is complex and influenced by various factors, with pedagogical methodology being a significant aspect. While many parents lean towards contemporary pedagogical approaches emphasizing creativity and critical thinking, others may prefer conventional, regimented learning models. Moreover, the selection of an educational institution is often based on factors such as academic performance, standardized test results, graduation rates, and a rigorous curriculum (Verdiyani, 2016; Wuryaningrat et al., 2023). Parents also place great importance on extracurricular activities and diverse educational experiences, seeking institutions that offer a comprehensive range of options, including sports and fine arts. Furthermore,

the school's location is crucial, with easy access, smooth traffic, a comfortable environment, and ample parking space being important considerations (Mandagi et al., 2021). Additionally, parents are deeply concerned about safety and discipline, seeking institutions with strict disciplinary measures and a secure environment for their children (Barrett et al., 2015; Krisbiyanto & Nadhifah, 2022; Perwita & Widuri, 2023).

Parents face a pivotal and intricate decision to select an educational institution for their children. This decision has significant implications for the children's future, making it important. Furthermore, the complexity of this decision is derived from the multifaceted nature of the factors involved. Various elements, including values, beliefs, and individual preferences, such as pedagogical methodologies, cultural and religious influences, as well as the incorporation of spirituality and ethical values, are instrumental in shaping these decisions (Krisbiyanto & Nadhifah, 2022; Perwita & Widuri, 2023). Moreover, the quality of teaching, the relevance of the curriculum, the availability of extracurricular activities, and the overall reputation, prestige, and public image of the educational institution all hold substantial sway in the decision-making process for parents (Lestari et al., 2019; Rahmadana & Ichsan, 2021; Kainde & Mandagi, 2023; Poluan et al., 2022). Geographic location, transportation options, safety considerations, socio-cultural factors, and socio-economic considerations, encompassing the financial aspects of school costs and scholarship opportunities, also exert a pivotal influence on parental choices (Lase, 2020; Wea & Adiwidjaja, 2019; Sari & Totalia, 2016; Sudarmono et al., 2020).

This study explores the intricate interplay of these diverse factors within the decision-making process when selecting an educational institution for children. The insights gained from this research will significantly contribute to strategic educational planning and policy formulation. Government agencies and educational authorities responsible for policymaking can utilize research results to design policies and strategies that align with parents' aspirations and preferences. Therefore, the education system must increase effectiveness through optimal resource allocation and tailored interventions. Furthermore, this understanding is poised to stimulate parents' active involvement in their children's education, foster stronger family-school relationships, and advance students' best interests (Burgess et al., 2015).

2. METHODS

This research employs a methodological design that integrates both quantitative descriptive and exploratory methodologies as the chosen research approach. The selection of this methodological approach was predicated on the central research objective, which is to offer a comprehensive understanding of the determinants influencing parents' selection of schools for their children. The amalgamation of quantitative and exploratory descriptive designs is anticipated to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the factors informing parents' decisions in choosing a school. This, in turn, is poised to establish a robust foundation for developing more effective education policies and school marketing strategies.

The population of this study were parents of students currently enrolled in private Christian schools. The sample was deliberately selected based on certain criteria to ensure a diverse and relevant population of parents associated with the school was represented. The sample size was determined by the Slovin formula, which indicated a minimum of 222 respondents. However, this study included 235 respondents. Respondents in this study consisted of parents of students currently enrolled in private Christian schools, parents who are actively involved in the school community, and parents who demonstrated varying levels of involvement and perspectives regarding the school selection process.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	67	28.5 %	28.5 %
	Female	168	71.5 %	100 %
Age	Less than 26 years old	23	9.8 %	9.8 %
	26 – 30 years old	41	17.4 %	27.2 %
	31 – 35 years old	66	28.1 %	55.3 %
	36 – 40 years old	38	16.2 %	71.5 %
	41 – 45 years old	30	12.8 %	84.3 %
	More than 45 years old	37	15.7 %	100 %
Occupation	Teacher / Lecturer	17	7.2%	7.2%
	Housewife	72	30.6%	37.8%
	Employee	47	20%	57.8%
	Private employees	42	17.9%	75.7%
	Retirees	1	0.4%	76.1%
	Civil servants	23	9.8%	85.9%
	Entrepreneur	33	14.1%	100%
Gender of Respondent's Child	Male	116	49.4 %	49.4 %
	Female	119	50.6 %	100 %
Age of Respondent's Child	Less than 7 years old	62	26.4 %	26.4 %
	7 years old	30	12.8 %	39.20 %
	8 years old	34	14.5 %	53.7 %
	9 years old	16	6.8 %	60.5 %
	10 years old	17	7.2 %	67.7 %
	11 years old	9	3.8 %	71.5 %
	12 years old	13	5.5 %	77 %
	More than 12 years old	54	23 %	100 %

As presented in Table 1, the demographic profile of respondents includes several variables, namely gender, age, gender and age distribution of children, and occupation. A total of 235 respondents participated in this study, and 168 people identified as women. Based on age distribution, most respondents were 31 to 35 years old, namely 66 people (28.1%). Regarding gender distribution among their children, 116 boys and 119 girls indicated an almost even gender distribution. The largest age group of children is under seven years. Based on the respondents' occupations, the largest category was homemakers, with 72 people (30.6%).

To facilitate a broad and diverse participant base, data was collected via an online survey utilizing the accessible and easy-to-use Google Forms platform. This approach speeds up the data collection process and increases response rates significantly by providing a user-friendly interface for participants. Utilization of this online platform allows for centralized data collection, ensuring data collection procedures are organized and thorough. The questionnaire link was distributed via WhatsApp to the school principal, who then distributed it to the student's parents. Throughout the data collection phase, updates and follow-ups were continuously carried out with responsible parties to achieve the target sample size.

Subsequently, careful processing of the dataset begins by utilizing the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) version 27 application to extract demographic information. Next, the collected data was comprehensively analyzed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Smart PLS (Partial Least Squares) version 3.9. CFA was chosen because of its suitability in validating the structure and measurement of the survey instrument, confirming the reliability and validity of the determinants that influence parental tendencies towards school choice. Smart PLS, a powerful statistical analysis tool, was chosen for its proficiency in managing complex models and providing precise results, ensuring careful examination of data and subsequent decision-making. This analytical approach is carefully adopted to derive meaningful conclusions and insights, aiming to increase understanding of the various factors that guide parents' decisions in the school selection process for their children.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

In this section, our study's results were examined, focusing on both descriptive statistics and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to provide a comprehensive insight into the data and the underlying structure of our research variables. Descriptive statistics offered a detailed dataset overview, summarizing key characteristics and trends. At the same time, CFA was employed to test and confirm the latent constructs and their relationships rigorously. These analytical approaches allowed us to understand the patterns within our data and validated the theoretical framework underpinning our study.

Descriptive statistics

Before the main analysis, a descriptive analysis was performed. This preliminary analysis sheds light on key dataset characteristics and trends, laying the foundation for subsequent procedures. Table 2 below presents the descriptive analysis results for the eight factors examined in this study, offering valuable insights into their quantitative attributes and data distribution.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable/Factor	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers Capability (TC)	235	2	5	4.43	0.652
School Location (SL)	235	1	5	4.37	0.833
Religious Value (RV)	235	1	5	4.42	0.760
School Facility (SF)	235	1	5	4.09	0.734
School Image (SI)	235	2	5	4.02	0.765
Perceived Cost (PC)	235	1	5	4.09	0.800
School Environment (SE)	235	1	5	4.37	0.662
School Security (SS)	235	1	5	4.34	0.844

The results of the descriptive analysis presented in Table 2 revealed several important findings. First, about the Teacher Ability factor, the average value is 4.43, which indicates the perception of the competence of educators at the school. This perception is also reinforced by the relatively low standard deviation of 0.652, which reflects a consistent view of teacher competence. Regarding School Location, the Mean Score was calculated as 4.37, which shows that most of the respondents have a good perception of the geographical position of the school. However, a standard deviation of 0.833 indicates real variation in respondents' views of school locations. Religious values are shown by a mean of 4.42, which illustrates the importance of religious values as a determining factor in school selection. However, a standard deviation of 0.760 indicates that there is quite a large disparity in respondents' perceptions of religious values in schools. For School Facilities, the Mean is 4.09, which indicates positive acceptance of school facilities in general. However, a standard deviation of 0.734 shows real differences in respondents' perceptions of school facilities. Finally, School Image shows encouraging results, with a mean of 4.02, which implies a positive overall perception of respondents towards the school.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In pursuit of addressing the research question about the determinants guiding parental choices in selecting a faith-based school, a CFA was performed. The outcomes of this CFA procedure are displayed in Figure 1.
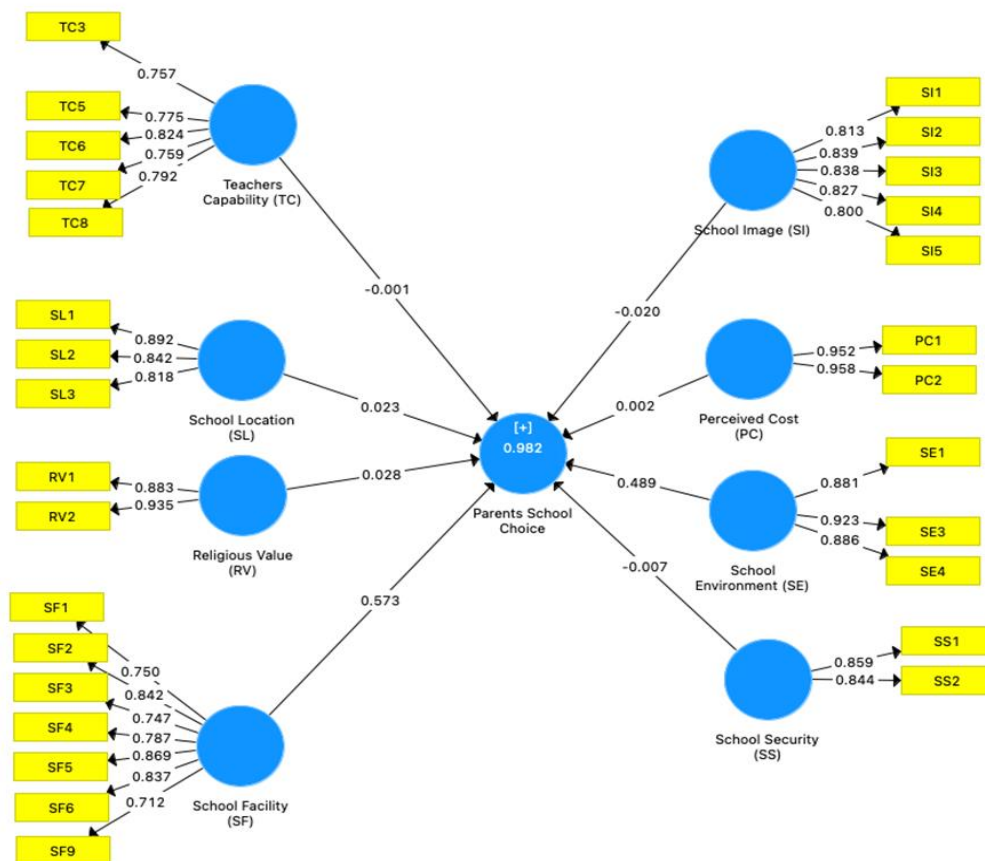
Figure 1. Measurement Model

Figure 1 delineates the factors underpinning parental decision-making in school selection alongside the pertinent indicators employed to quantify these variables. This research has identified eight primary determinants shaping parental decision-making: teacher ability, school location, religious values, school facilities, school image, perceived costs, school environment, and school safety.

The measurement model depicted in Figure 1 comprised multiple latent factors influencing parents' school choice and corresponding valid observed indicators. The latent constructs, including "Perceived Cost," "Religious Value," "School Environment," "School Facility," "School Image," "School Location," "School Security," and "Teachers Capability," were assessed using a range of valid indicators. The observed variables exhibited factor loadings within a notable range, with values spanning from 0.71 to 0.958, signifying the strength of association between these factors and the respective indicators.

Table 3. Measurement Model Test Results (Factor Loading)

Variables	Indicators	Factor Loading
Teachers Capability	TC3	0.757
	TC5	0.775
	TC6	0.824
	TC7	0.759
	TC8	0.792
Perceived Cost	PC1	0.952
	PC2	0.958
Religious Value	RV1	0.883
	RV2	0.935
School Facility	SF1	0.750
	SF2	0.842
	SF3	0.747
	SF4	0.787
	SF5	0.869
	SF6	0.837
	SF9	0.712
School Image	SI1	0.813
	SI2	0.839
	SI3	0.838
	SI4	0.827
	SI5	0.800
School Location	SL1	0.892
	SL2	0.842
	SL3	0.818
School Environment	SE1	0.881
	SE3	0.923
	SE4	0.886
School Security	SS1	0.859
	SS2	0.844

The confirmatory factor analysis results, as depicted in Table 3 show that all factor loading values exceed 0.70, indicating satisfactory convergent validity for all indicator factors. In particular, among the 29 School Parent Choice indicators, PC2 (Affordability of additional costs, including annual fees, uniforms, field trips, and book costs) has the highest loading factor value, namely 0.958.

Regarding the Teacher Ability factor, extensive teacher experience in teaching (TC6) shows the highest factor loading value, namely 0.824. In the School Location (SL) factor, SL1 (School Accessibility) has the largest factor loading value, 0.892. In the Religious Values Factor, the application of religious values in schools (RV2) has the highest loading factor value of 0.935. In the School Facilities Factor, adequate health facilities in schools (SF5) have the highest loading factor value, 0.869. In the context of the School Image factor, the academic achievement of extraordinary students at selected schools (SI2) shows the largest loading factor value, namely 0.839.

Regarding the Perceived Cost Factor, the affordability of additional costs such as annual fees, uniforms, field visits, and bookkeeping (PC2) recorded the highest loading factor value of 0.958. In the School Environment factor, a comfortable school environment (SE3) has the highest loading factor value of 0.923. For the School Security factor, SS1 (Presence of security officers at school) displays the highest factor loading value of 0.859.

Fornell-Larcker criteria

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker criteria

	PC	RV	SE	SF	SI	SL	SS	TC
Perceived Cost (PC)	0.955							
Religious Value (RV)	0.328	0.909						
School Environment (SE)	0.399	0.360	0.897					
School Facility (SF)	0.422	0.404	0.728	0.794				
School Image (SI)	0.356	0.416	0.622	0.697	0.824			
School Location (SL)	0.361	0.322	0.340	0.452	0.495	0.851		
School Security (SS)	0.230	0.174	0.629	0.617	0.509	0.200	0.852	
Teachers Capability (TC)	0.403	0.453	0.561	0.624	0.586	0.562	0.377	0.782

Next, the Fornell-Larcker Criteria was used to assess discriminant validity by calculating the square root value of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct and then comparing it with the observed correlation between other constructs in the model (Henseler et al., 2015). To meet the criteria for discriminant validity, the value must exceed 0.7 and exceed the value of all other indicators related to the construct (Hamid et al., 2017; Hair et al., 2016). Based on the results of the data analysis presented in Table 4, it can be seen that all factor values have met the specified requirements, especially exceeding the required threshold of 0.7.

Reliability

Table 5. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Perceived Cost (PC)	0.904	0.907	0.954	0.912
Religious Value (RV)	0.795	0.840	0.905	0.827
School Environment (SE)	0.878	0.879	0.925	0.804
School Facility (SF)	0.901	0.903	0.922	0.630
School Image (SI)	0.883	0.893	0.913	0.678
School Location (SL)	0.809	0.814	0.887	0.724
School Security (SS)	0.621	0.622	0.841	0.725
Teachers Capability (TC)	0.841	0.841	0.887	0.611

Reliability testing is carried out to assess the consistency of item results within the same construct. Construct reliability assessment uses a combination of reliability and Cronbach's Alpha calculations, with values exceeding 0.7 indicating the reliability of research indicators (Hair et al., 2016). If Composite Reliability exceeds 0.7, the instrument is considered reliable (Ghozali & Hengky, 2015). Based on the reliability test results in Table 5, all indicators meet the requirements, showing a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.6 and a Composite Reliability value above 0.7.

Based on the results, which involved careful CFA, it is evident that a comprehensive set of determinants significantly influences parental decision-making in school selection. Our analysis identified eight main factors, each of which demonstrated strong convergent validity coefficients exceeding 0.7, indicating the capacity of these factors to explain variation in the corresponding indicators effectively. These determining factors include the affordability of additional fees, the application of religious values, and the school's location.

Discussions

This study explores the multifaceted factors that govern parents' school preferences, particularly within faith-based private schools, specifically focusing on Christian-based institutions. The research

reveals that parents' decisions when selecting an educational institution for their children are influenced by many factors, each carrying varying levels of importance. A salient finding underscores the importance of applying religious values as a significant influence in parental decision-making. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Septhevian (2014), which also identified the application of religious values as a pivotal factor guiding parental choices, albeit with fluctuations in the prominence of other determining factors.

In addition to the influence of religious values, the affordability of additional fees emerges as another significant factor shaping parents' decisions. This finding resonates with previous studies, which have shown that costs and the availability of scholarships and financial aid programs are among the socioeconomic factors influencing parents' decisions (Lase, 2020; Wea & Adiwidjaja, 2019; Sari & Totalia, 2016; Sudarmono et al., 2020). Lase (2020) argues that parents seek to balance school quality and financial feasibility, aligning their choices with family values and long-term financial planning. Consequently, scholarships and financial assistance are often sought after to alleviate the financial burden of education, and partnerships with financial institutions or school-based financial aid can sway the decision-making process (Wea & Adiwidjaja, 2019)

Furthermore, this study provides insights into other essential determinants that shape parental preferences. Factors such as the proximity of the school, transportation options, and geographic location are fundamental in parents' decision-making processes. This result corroborates the findings of previous research by Perwita and Widuri (2023), which also found that parents often opt for educational institutions near their homes for convenience and reduced travel time. Furthermore, access to public transportation and parking facilities also influences their decisions, especially when they lack private vehicles or live far from schools (Lase, 2020). This location-based factor is also related to safety and a secure school environment, which is also instrumental in shaping parents' decisions (Barrett et al., 2015; Krisbiyanto & Nadhifah, 2022; Perwita & Widuri, 2023).

Moreover, the study highlights the significant roles factors like school image and school environment play in shaping parental preferences. This further corroborates the findings of previous research, which have consistently shown that parents often rely on a school's reputation, which encompasses perceptions of overall quality rooted in factors like academic achievement, standardized test scores, graduation rates, and alumni success (Hasan & Ass, 2020). Prestige, determined by historical lineage, geographical location, and financial resources, is equated with the promise of an extraordinary educational experience. The public image of an educational institution is constructed through a combination of symbols, perceptions, and behavior disseminated by the organization, with various stakeholders contributing to shaping this image (Dwi & Mina, 2023; Mandagi et al., 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

The research analyzes the factors influencing parents' decision to choose a school. This study identified eight main factors influencing parental decision making: teacher ability, school location, religious values, school facilities, school image, perceived costs, school environment, and school safety. These factors, which include teacher ability, school location, religious values, school facilities, school image, perceived costs, school environment, and school safety, serve as critical determinants in the school selection process for parents.

The findings provide valuable guidance for educational institutions and policymakers, particularly those in the faith-based school sector, who seek to increase their attractiveness and competitiveness in the educational landscape. Considering the results of this research, it is recommended for educational institutions, especially faith-based schools, to optimize and utilize the determining factors identified and empirically proven to be influential in parental decision-making. By doing this, these schools can effectively attract parents and students, ultimately strengthening their competitiveness compared to

other educational institutions. Optimization of these key determinants not only facilitates informed school choice but also fosters a mutually beneficial environment where educational institutions thrive and parents make choices based on their unique priorities and values.

This study acknowledges certain weaknesses and limitations, which require discussion and consideration. The main limitation relates to the geographical scope of this research, as this research was exclusively conducted in private Christian schools located in Manado City, Indonesia. Given the socio-cultural and demographic heterogeneity across various urban centers in Indonesia, it is important to realize that the findings obtained from this single-site study may not be universally applicable. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to other regions, as differences in regional characteristics, educational infrastructure, and sociopolitical context can significantly influence parents' decision-making processes regarding school selection.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the potential existence of unexplored variables that may influence parents' choices in selecting educational institutions for their children. Although this research has attempted to investigate and identify certain factors, it remains plausible that additional variables that have not been considered may play an important role in shaping parental decisions. The inherent complexity of the human decision-making process and the diverse nature of school selection require broader consideration of potential determinants beyond the variables included in this study. Therefore, future research efforts should seek to comprehensively explain the entire spectrum of factors influencing parental preferences, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of the dynamics of school selection.

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