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FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' SELECTION OF PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS IN THU DUC CITY

Thi-Trang Tran¹, Thi-My-Dung Pham², Thi-Bich-Diep Le^{1}*

HUTECH University, Vietnam

ROYAL School, Vietnam

ltb.diep@hutech.edu.vn

Abstract

Early childhood education (ECE) serves a crucial role in the formation and growth of children's personalities. Vietnam's robust integration process and the trend of population concentration in megacities such as Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) provide numerous advantages and opportunities for ECE institutions, particularly private ECE institutions. In addition, it necessitates a high level of quality, expertise, and a number of other factors. Institutions that can satisfactorily satisfy the needs of parents in selecting a three-year school for their children. With the participation of 350 parents in a survey based on a constructed model and questionnaire, along with the results of a regression analysis, data were processed using SPSS 23.0 software. The research uncovered eight factors that positively influence parents' selection of a private preschool in area 1 of Thu Duc city: learning environment, location, teaching methodologies, cost, communication, word-of-mouth, safety, and school-parent relationship.

Keywords: *Preschool education, School choice decision, Thu Duc City Kindergarten*

1. Introduction

There have been numerous domestic and international studies on the components of private preschools, but these studies have been conducted in different contexts and for diverse purposes. Teachers - Staff, Training Programs, Safety Health, Reasonable Cost, Facilities, Reference Groups, and Convenience are factors that influence parents' decision to select a non-public preschool. However, the survey is only conducted in a few districts in the inner city of Ho Chi Minh City, so the applicability of the results of this research will not be particularly accurate because each area is unique, and the parents' perspectives will vary greatly.

Parallel to domestic studies, a number of international studies imply that certain factors stem from the characteristics of the parents. For instance, Ghosh, S., et al. (2020) found that family and parental characteristics, combined with the child's personality and the characteristics of the educational institution, have an effect on Parents' feelings and emotions, thereby influencing their school choice decisions. However, the investigation was conducted in India, which has a distinct population characteristic.

In recent years, particularly in 2021 and 2022 after the Covid 19 pandemic, there has been a lack of interest in research on early childhood education and the factors that influence the decision to enroll in a preschool. Despite the significant change in parental behavior in selecting a preschool following the pandemic, factors such as foreign languages, international standard education models, child abuse prevention and safety, facilities for physical development, and numerous others continue to play a significant role. This study seeks to assist non-public preschools in understanding the factors that influence

parents' school selection, thereby providing governance implications to improve training quality and management activities, thereby increasing parents' and students' satisfaction with schools.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of early childhood education services

Early childhood education is a subfield of pedagogy, which is responsible for the theoretical development and scientific organization of the educational process for children ages 0 to 6. Preschool education is an early form of formal education for children between the ages of three and six. Audition classes and other informal alternative programs, such as weekend and seasonal classes, are examples of complementary programs. Multiple studies have demonstrated that ECE programs have a positive effect on early literacy development, socioemotional learning, and academic achievement (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013).

According to Manigo et al. (2017), preschool was once viewed as preparation for general education, but it is now an integral element of general education. Therefore, educational institutions are concerned with what occurs before children enter school. Even educators concur that children aged three to five are in a crucial period of academic and social-emotional development. Moreover, a number of studies emphasize the significance of ECE, which includes activities that predict future academic achievement.

According to Repko-Erwin (2017), despite the fact that many young children have been exposed to other types of external education prior to attending preschool, traditional ECE seeks to connect these early experiences with formal academic dynamics in elementary school and beyond. Recent changes in the nature and function of preschool have prompted some to question whether ECE is a new type of elementary school (Bassok, Latham, and Rorem, 2016).

Education from a perspective of service: activities as services (Gronroos, 1988). Included among these are "actions, processes, and performance". Multiple prior studies on services indicate that they are intangible, inseparable from production and consumption, and heterogeneous. In addition, the distinctive service characteristics include a high ratio of fixed to variable costs and a predominantly transitory nature. In addition to being experiential, services have few search attributes (i.e., characteristics that can be evaluated prior to purchase). Nonetheless, service customers perceive tangible values as a measure of service quality.

Few studies have examined institutions from a service perspective. Ford et al. (1999) observe that education is as reluctant to adopt a service perspective as any other public service. With the harsher environment of the 1990s, universities realized they needed to comprehend what their students desired from their education. Dolinsky's (1994) research, on the other hand, emphasizes complaint procedures in education. Due to the heterogeneity of services, the complaint procedure is utilized more frequently by service providers than by products providers.

The primary service of the educational experience, according to Forbes et al. (2009), is reflected in the student's own learning experience. In contrast to other services, however, the value of education is jointly created by the student and the institution (Bitner et al., 1997).

2.2 Factors Influencing Parents' Selection of Private Preschools

Learning environment. Clean and sanitary environment; adequate space for study, recreation, and rest; Parents' decision to enroll their children in a private preschool has always been influenced by the availability of an abundance of learning apparatus and tools, as well as the conditions of classrooms, playgrounds, and learning tools. The learning environment is one of the school characteristics whose influence has been confirmed in numerous domestic and international studies. Clean and hygienic environment, landscaping and boarding areas fully furnished boarding classrooms, safe structures and

facilities, teaching aids and developmental toys for children, modern teaching equipment, and special equipment all influence a parent's decision to enroll their child in a particular school. Since then, the findings of Yaacob et al. (2014) support the importance of the learning environment.

Hypothesis H1: The learning environment has a positive influence on the decision to enroll in a private preschool.

Location. When selecting a non-public preschool, parents also take into account the school's location. This is primarily due to the fact that the majority of schools do not provide transportation, as well as rising travel costs due to high petroleum prices, particularly for students from low-income households. Additionally, the proximity of the educational institution to the parents' residential environment is a significant factor in their propensity to select a school. Therefore, convenience is the factor connecting distance, school attendance, and transportation considerations (Lee et al., 2019).

Hypothesis H2: The location has a positive influence on the decision to enroll in a private preschool.

Teaching methods. Teaching programs should foster a love of learning in children by focusing on their interests rather than compelling them to achieve specific outcomes. Instead, they are more concerned with how to aid children's development at advanced educational levels. Several studies, for instance, have documented parental preferences for pedagogical approaches that emphasize higher learning and academic abilities (Gamble et al., 2009). Other parents who choose non-public institutions emphasize child-centered classroom approaches, child-directed learning, and game-based classroom activities.

Hypothesis H3: The teaching method has a positive influence on the decision to enroll in a private preschool.

The school's relationship with the parents. A healthy school-parent relationship is as a significant driver of overall student achievement. Many previous studies have also affirmed that the parent-teacher relationship is in fact a mutually beneficial partnership for all parties involved. According to research conducted by Merkle et al. (2006), clear and timely information corrects any potential misperceptions about the organization, thereby increasing parent involvement.

Hypothesis H4: The school's relationship with the parents has a positive influence on the decision to enroll in a private preschool.

Cost. Parents are concerned about tuition fees, meal costs, additional teacher gratuities, and other surcharges. Parents evaluate whether these fees are reasonable in relation to the services provided by the school, as well as their own financial situation. Foskett et al. (2006) found that fee payment flexibility, financial aid, and reasonable housing costs have a significant impact on school selection decisions. According to Joseph et al. (2010), cost-related issues appear to gain prominence over time.

Hypothesis H5: Cost has a positive influence on the decision to enroll in a private preschool.

Communication activities. With specialized services such as early childhood education, parents have a unique understanding of their child's educational interests and requirements. This necessitates complete and accurate information about the quality of education, which is necessary for parents to make an informed decision. Clearly, all parents want the finest for their children's education. Parents have the opportunity to express their preference for the school they want their child to attend. Non-public school communication activities are therefore highly concentrated. According to a study by Joseph and Joseph (2010), educational events are another method to increase awareness of the programs offered.

Hypothesis H6: Communication activities have a positive influence on the decision to enroll in a private preschool.

Word-of-mouth information. Parents frequently evaluate the quality of a school based on subjective criteria rather than objective indicators such as test scores. Individuals who receive school information cannot be certain of its veracity, just as other information reflects personal experiences or opinions. Parents must identify connections that will be advantageous to their family. Some previous studies have also verified reliance on information from common parental relationships, such as encouragement, suggestions, or warnings provided by these informants (Kimelberg, 2014). School choice is a highly participatory purchasing decision due to its impact on children's academic performance as well as the associated enrollment costs. This is generally true for parents who favor private schools over public schools and not only word-of-mouth information, but also electronic word-of-mouth information, influences the decision to select a school

Hypothesis H7: Word-of-mouth information has a positive influence on the decision to enroll in a private preschool.

Safety. Parents rated safety-related factors as the most essential aspect when selecting childcare services, with the caregivers' relationship with the child ranking second. Parents recognize the significance of all aspects of safety item maintenance. Compared to observers, parents rated the quality of care their children received higher. Several other studies concur with the findings of this study; for instance, parents cite safety concerns when characterizing high-quality preschool programs or when making decisions for their children (Kim & Fram, 2009).

The safety of their children is one of the most essential factors that parents consider when choosing between public and non-public schools. As previously mentioned, when comparing categories of preschools, parents indicated that they chose public schools for academic reasons (quality), in part because they were dissatisfied with the safety and convenience of this group of schools. In other words, safety is one of the primary distinctions between public and private preschools, according to the study's author.

Hypothesis H8: Safety has a positive influence on the decision to enroll in a private preschool.

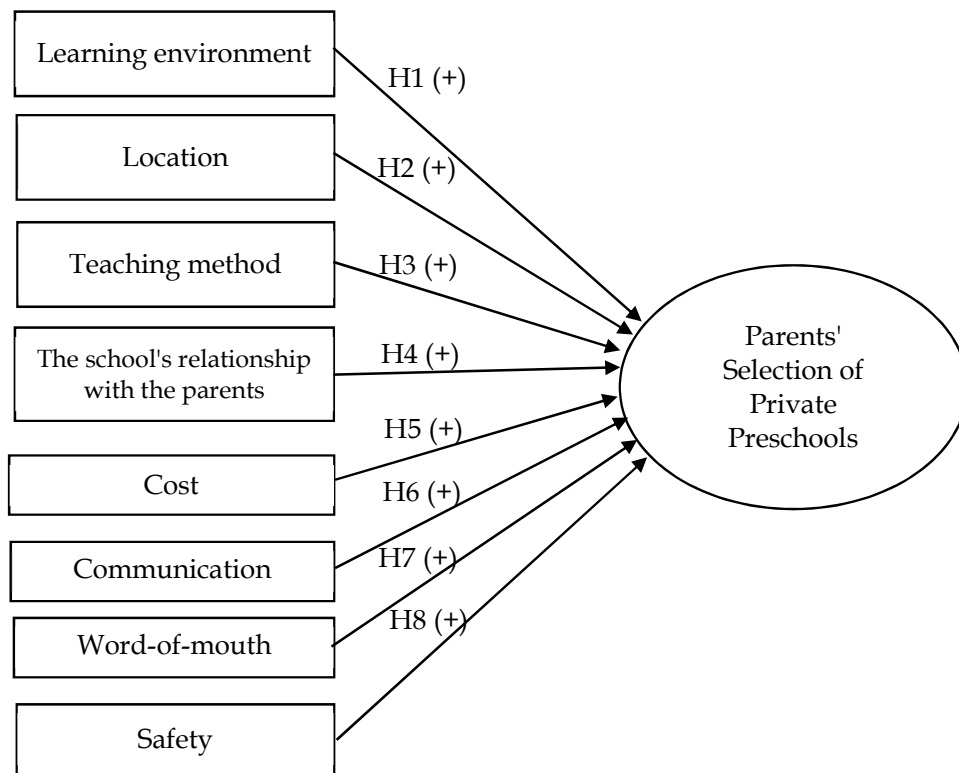


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework

3. Research Methodology

This investigation was conducted using a combination of two research techniques:

In the first step of the research procedure, qualitative research methods are utilized. The author leads group discussions with experts in the field of education and parents whose children attend private preschools in the city of Thu Duc. Subjects with distinctive characteristics will provide multidimensional and comprehensive data for the research content, thereby achieving the goal of testing and evaluating the variables identified in the original theoretical model.

In the next stage of the research process, formal quantitative research is conducted to test the research model and hypotheses using quantitative research methodology. In particular, a formal survey ($n = 350$) was conducted to evaluate the validity and reliability of the scale (using Cronbach's Alpha and variable-total correlation). The elements in this sample are parents whose children attend the institution. Check the convergent and discriminant value of each scale using the factor loading level (Exploratory Factor Analysis - EFA), and then evaluate the linear regression model.

4. Main Findings

4.1 Factors influencing parents' selection of Private Preschools

In this study, the reliability of the research model's nine scales is evaluated separately. All scales were evaluated for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha > 0.6 and the variable-total correlation coefficient > 0.3 .

Independent variable and dependent variable factor analyses both produced satisfactory results: (1) For the independent variables, the results indicated that KMO attained 0.720, indicating that the data are suitable for factor analysis. The first Bartlett test yields Sig = 0.000 (0.05), indicating that the observed variables are related. Simultaneously, all observed variables belonging to these eight factors have both

convergent and discriminant values; (2) For the dependent variable, the EFA analysis reveals a KMO of 0.697%, indicating that the factor analysis is applicable for the data. Bartlett's test yields Sig = 0.000 (0.05), indicating that the observed variables are related. Also satisfactory are the discriminant and convergent values of the observed variables.

F-test for the fit of the overall linear regression model. This indicates whether the dependent variable is linearly correlated with the entire independent variable.

The regression equation: $y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n$

The hypothesis is that: H_0 is: $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = \dots = \beta_n = 0$.

Beta coefficient (β) (Standardized regression weight) is used to compare when the independent variables do not have the same unit of measurement: MT, DD, PP, QH, CP, TT, TM, AT. Since the variables are normalized, this weight is used to compare the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. With the Coefficients results, it shows that Learning Environment ($\beta = 0.029$), Location ($\beta = 0.116$), Teaching method ($\beta = 0.014$), The school's relationship with the parents ($\beta = 0.286$), Cost ($\beta = 0.064$), Communication ($\beta = 0.325$), Word of mouth ($\beta = 0.078$), Safety ($\beta = 0.214$). The level of impact of 8 factors in descending order is (i) Communication activities, (ii) School-parent relationship, (iii) Safety, (iv) Location, (v)) Word of mouth information, (vi) Cost, (vii) Learning environment, (viii) Teaching method. Thus, the linear regression equation is built as follows:

$$Y = 0,029*MT + 0,116*DD + 0,014*PP + 0,286*QH + 0,064*CP + 0,325*TT + 0,078*TM + 0,214*AT$$

Or:

$$\text{School decision} = 0.029*\text{Learning environment} + 0.116*\text{Location} + 0.014*\text{Teaching method} + 0.286* \text{The school's relationship with the parents} + 0.064*\text{Cost} + 0.325*\text{Communication activity} + 0.078 * \text{Word of mouth} + 0.214*\text{Safety}$$

Thus, eight factors, including learning environment, location, teaching method, school-parent relationship, cost, communication activities, word-of-mouth, and safety, have a positive impact on the decision to enroll a child in a private preschool in area 1 of Thu Duc. Thus, as the values of the variables MT, DD, PP, QH, CP, TT, TM, and AT increase, so does the likelihood of selecting a private preschool in area 1, Thu Duc city. The formal theoretical research paradigm accepts the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7, and H8.

Communication activities: This is the factor with the greatest number of observed variables, with observed variables from TT1 to TT3. This is also the factor that has the greatest influence on parents' school selection intentions. This suggests that parents' decisions can be influenced by having access to comprehensive and engaging information both online and in person.

As the second factor influencing parents' intention to choose a school, the school-parent relationship factor is comprised of 5 observed variables (QH1 to QH5), with the perceived level of parents in this group of factors being high. This demonstrates that the interaction between the school, administration, pedagogical staff, and parents has a significant impact on parents' school selection decisions.

Safety: This factor has the third impact on parents' intention to choose a school, including three observed variables (AT1, AT2, and AT3); this group of factors is associated with the level of positive perception and interest. The fundamental need of parents for their children's protection motivates their comprehensiveness.

Location: Place is one of the four fundamental elements of the 4P Marketing model. The most widely used marketing model in the world demonstrates that choosing the right and most convenient location for

the right consumer will be crucial to the school's growth. Location is a factor with variables ranging from DD1 to DD4, making it the fourth most influential factor on parents' intention to choose a particular school. This indicates that location, home-to-school distance, and transportation support policy influence parents' decisions.

Word-of-mouth information: The learning benefit factor, which consists of four observed variables (TM1 to TM4), is the subsequent variable in the study that influences parents' intention to choose a school. This factor is favorable. It demonstrates that the school has a positive reputation through word-of-mouth information from parents, teachers, and other family members, which makes it easy for parents to decide to enroll their children.

Cost: The average perceived importance level for three observed variables from CP1 to CP3 demonstrates that the cost factor has a substantial impact on the parents' intention to choose after evaluating facilities, academic interests, and social requirements. The detailed value of the benefits of sending your child to school must also be weighed against the expense.

Learning environment: After analyzing the perceived level, it was determined that the factor of the learning environment had a lesser impact on parents' intention to choose a preschool. This demonstrates that the ownership of a location ensures traffic convenience, safety, and security in the area, as well as the ability to connect to other important places such as amusement parks, sports facilities, and shopping centers.

Teaching approach: The final variable in the proposed research model influences parents' decision to enroll their child in a private preschool after other variables have been considered. This demonstrates that parents' attention is demanded even more in new teaching methods, which help to develop children's receptive and cognitive skills.

This study employed an Independent Samples T Test with the null hypothesis H0: sample variances are equal in order to comprehend the difference in perceived levels of parent groups by gender and profession. The various historical exam outcomes are as follows:

For gender, the 95% confidence level Sig. of Levene test = 0.000 0.05 accepts the null hypothesis H0. Thus, there is no distinction between male and female parents in Thu Duc regarding their decision to enroll their child in a private preschool. Men's mean value (4.7119) is near to women's mean value (4.1426). Therefore, it is unnecessary to consider gender when providing gender-related solutions and recommendations to parents regarding the selection of a private preschool in Thu Duc.

For occupation, the significance level Sig.= 0.00077 < 0.05 indicates that the variance of parents' decisions to enroll their children in a non-public preschool in Thu Duc city varies. Consequently, each group of parents with diverse occupations must have its own measures to promote school choice.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the factors that influence the selection of a public preschool in the city of Thu Duc. It is crucial to construct a model of influencing factors based on this information. Through the objective assessment of parents, the school will be able to find solutions to enhance and improve the attraction of enrollment, while also helping to increase the interaction between students, teachers, parents, and schools. This will play a significant role in the success of improving the enrollment process, quality training, avoiding wasting enrollment costs in an inefficient manner for schools, and by enhancing educational efficacy.

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HO CHI MINH CITY UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

141 - 145 Dien Bien Phu, Ward 15, Binh Thanh District, HCM City

Website: uef.edu.vn - Hotline: (028) 5422 6666 * (028) 5422 5555