

Factors influencing enrollment intention in private schools

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ABSTRACT

The growth in private school student enrollment in Malaysia has prompted institutions to upgrade to stay competitive in the market. However, despite the increasing number of private schools, regrettably, only a few studies have focused on the factors that influence private school enrollment. This study examines the relationship between social influences (SI), school environment (SE), characteristics, parent-administration-teacher relationship (PAT), and private school enrolment intention in Malaysia. It uses a quantitative method and G*Power to determine the minimum sample size. Data was gathered from 135 respondents who have enrolled at least one child in private schools using questionnaire surveys. The statistical package for social science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The results showed that SI and school characteristics (SC) significantly and positively correlated with enrolment intention. The PAT was not significantly associated with enrolment intention. This study clearly shows that SI factors and SCs are crucial for enrolment intention in private schools. The management should develop and implement marketing strategies that effectively tackle current market challenges by focusing on SI and improving the SC. They can tailor the marketing strategy with electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) for SI and apply learning analytics for SC.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nelson Mandela said that the most effective tool for changing the world is education. Providing children with access to high-quality education is one of the most essential things parents can do to ensure their children have access to such an education. Malaysia's education system is divided into government, government-aided, and private schools. The 95.6% of Malaysia's schools are government or government-aided schools, which are entirely or partially funded by the country's government [1]. Meanwhile, the other category is private schools. They are typically self-funded and owned or controlled by non-governmental organizations, such as unions, companies, or private enterprises [2].

In Malaysia, private schools offer students a wide range of educational options, providing a unique and diverse curriculum that differs from the Malaysian National Syllabus and prepares them for a globalized world in the years to come. As reported in the Malaysian Educational Statistics, student enrollment in private schools has been increasing yearly. It rose from a total of 194,055 in 2015 to 214,229 in 2020. Additionally, the number of private schools increased from 404 units in 2015 to 532 units in 2022 [1], representing a 31.6% rise. Private education has led to uniform competition in the education market and ridiculous growth of the private sector [3], [4]. The increase in private school student enrollment has prompted the institution to

upgrade and compete in the market continually. Despite the increasing number of private schools in Malaysia, regrettably, few studies have focused on the factors that influence private school enrollment in Malaysia. Investigating the factors influencing enrollment intentions in private schools has become increasingly important. A thorough understanding of these factors can assist private schools in school reputation, perceived educational quality, location, affordability, academic performance, peer and parental influence, family income, school environment (SE), and the relationship between parents and administrators and social organization are some of the factors that have been found to affect school enrollment intentions [5]–[7].

In addition to being responsible and mindful, parents play a crucial role in ensuring their children's well-being. Parents' choice of a child's public or private school can significantly impact that child's education and future. Since education has become increasingly important in the 21st century, it is vital to learn how parents choose between different types of schools based on various factors. Numerous elements have been found to affect students' intentions to enroll in school, including school reputation, perceived educational quality, location, cost, academic achievement, peer and parental influence, family income, SE, and the relationship between parents and administrators, as well as social organization [5]–[7]. However, private schools in Malaysia may differ from these factors; we need to investigate private schools in Malaysia, especially to understand these factors. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationships between social influences (SI), SE, characteristics, parent-administration-teacher relationships (PAT), and private school enrollment intention in Malaysia. It adds new knowledge by discovering factors influencing enrollment intentions in private schools and provides practical solutions for developing effective marketing strategies to attract students and increase enrollment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Intention of private school enrolment

According to Stamp and Clemons [8], an individual's intentions show a willingness to engage in specific behavior. These intentions are considered crucial to persuading behavior. All predictors, including attitudes toward behavior, subjective standards, and perceived behavioral control, were weighted based on their significance for the behavior and the population of interest. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) can explain these [9]. When given the chance and sufficient control over their actions, people are more likely to fulfill their intentions [10].

This study discusses parents' intention to enroll their children in private schools. Children's education is the state's responsibility, while parents have the option to choose their children's education [11]. Choosing a school is a complex decision-making process that requires careful consideration of human behavior. The high enrollment in private education is due to extensive private tutoring, intense competition in examinations, and dissatisfaction with the public schools. Private schools are more likely to support academic success, offer a wider range of extracurricular activities, and are convenient for working parents, all of which contribute to a student's academic success due to their positive school enrollment intentions [12]. The school will compete for student enrollment by offering various programs for various types of families to satisfy parents' and students' interests and demands [10], [13]. Four selected factors for this study are SI, SE, parents-administration-teachers, and school characteristics (SC).

2.2. Social influence

SI is the phenomenon where a person's actions, viewpoints, or beliefs change due to their social connections, often becoming more similar to those of people they are related to [14]. As noted by Izuma [15], SI has been conducted in two primary forms: observer effect and social conformity. Observer effects refer to the influence that the presence of others has on an individual's behavior, particularly in terms of prosocial behavior. Conversely, social conformity refers to the influence that others' opinions have on an individual's preferences. The concept of social implies changes in an individual's behavior, emotions, or beliefs due to external influences [16].

It is the practice of parents to use social networking sites to gather information about potential schools and assess their reputations before enrolling their children. The information on these sites can be helpful when researching potential schools. SI plays a significant role in the decisions parents make about their children's educational choices, often based on information from others. SI is crucial when parents intend to enroll their children in private school [17], [18]. Therefore, it is hypothesized as: SI has a positive relationship with the intention of private school enrolment in Malaysia (H1).

2.3. School characteristics

School is where a child receives their education or learning; meanwhile, characteristics are features that typically belong to a place. SC refer to an institution designed for the teaching and learning process.

A SC are important as they can provide ground rules for life, help children learn, practice good behavior, and instill a sense of right and wrong. Different researchers have another point of view. Research by Spreitzer and Hafner [19] identified principal leadership, student achievement, and teacher evaluations as essential aspects of school success. Meanwhile, Alvarado *et al.* [20] have claimed that the cost of education, financial aid, reputation, selectivity, state policies, and college rankings are crucial factors in characterizing a school. A favorable working atmosphere that offers excellent classroom management, shared student-staff tasks, and positive student feedback is a hallmark of a good school. Teachers should be held to high standards, and students should be treated equally [21].

As described by Subedi [13], private schools have been granted considerable autonomy in several aspects of education in some countries, including teacher and student selection, student activities, extracurricular activities, and ensuring that classroom sizes are conducive to learning. Most parents consider class size and characteristics when selecting a school for their children. A smaller class size benefits both students and teachers, as it creates a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment for everyone involved. In this way, teachers can better understand their students' abilities, interests, and challenges, thus be more effective. Additionally, good schools help children learn more effectively and promote academic achievement. This finding is consistent with Alsaudini findings [22] that extensive experience with multiple educational systems in private schools, various teaching approaches, practices in the relationship between students and teachers, and SC all increase enrollment changes in the school. Therefore, it is hypothesized as: SC have a positive relationship with the intention of private school enrolment in Malaysia (H2).

2.4. School environment

The environment in educational institutions encompasses the academic, sociocultural, affective, and physical conditions within them [23]. Additionally, the relationships established between teachers and students within the classroom significantly influence the SE [23]. The same applies to methodologies, strategies, norms, values, knowledge, experiences and learning, which are framed within a sociocultural, affective, physical and academic context.

According to Subedi [13], several factors influence parental choice, including school facilities, class size, and the environment in which children will be educated. The facilities provided to students and the condition of the school grounds are also part of the SE. Therefore, students must have a stimulating and conducive learning environment to succeed academically. According to Venketsamy and Miller [24], school facilities encompass the entire plan, including the allocation and utilization, that enables the efficient and smooth operation of any educational institution. To determine the quality of education, the environment of the academic institution, including its atmosphere, number of learning opportunities, and facilities, is an important factor [24]. Therefore, it is hypothesized as: SE has a positive relationship with the intention of private school enrolment in Malaysia (H3).

2.5. Parents-administration-teachers relationship

According to Pennington *et al.* [25], the relationship between parents, administration and teachers represents the collaboration between the school and the family to achieve educational objectives within a particular setting. By working together, the school and parents can promote trust, eliminate apprehensions, and foster respect and understanding for one another. Parents, teachers, and administrators must foster positive relationships to create learning environments that facilitate the development of social and academic skills [26].

Research by Subedi [13] showed a strong relationship between parents, teachers, and administrators and their role in enrolling their children in a specific school. In addition, according to Cantu *et al.* [27], to meet the school's educational goals and ensure that parents are fully engaged in their children's education, the school and parents must collaborate. The parent-school relationship is part of the enrollment intention in the education process. Therefore, it is hypothesized as: parents-administration-teachers relationship has a positive relationship with the intention of private school enrolment in Malaysia (H4).

3. METHOD

3.1. Population and samples

The intended audience for this study is people who have enrolled at least one child in a private school in Malaysia. According to the G-Power software, the minimum sample size for this investigation was 85 participants. The researcher successfully gathered 135 responses from the respondents. The convenience sampling approach was used in this study because it is suitable and effective [28].

3.2. Measures

The authors adapted the measurement items for enrolment intention (4 items) [29], SI (4 items), SC (5 items), SE (6 items), and the relationship between parents, administration, and teachers (6 items) [6] from past studies. We use a 5-point Likert scale to assess the measurement, ranging from “1,” representing “strongly disagree,” to “5,” representing “strongly agree.” The statistical package for social science (SPSS) then analyzed the measurements to derive hypothesis testing results for discussion.

3.3. Data collection procedure

We employed a quantitative methodology to conduct the research and created the survey questionnaires in Google Docs, written in English. To facilitate the data collection process, the researcher distributed the questionnaires directly to all individuals who had enrolled at least one child in private schools in Malaysia. We gave the respondents two weeks to complete the survey.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Profile of the respondents

A total of 135 respondents participated in this study. The number of male respondents is 45 (33.3%), while the remaining 90 respondents are female (66.7%). Most respondents are 30-49 years old, with 55 respondents (40.7%) of the total respondents, 46 respondents (34.1%) aged between 30-39 years old, 21 (15.6%) aged between 50-59 years old, 11 (8.1%) aged between 20-29 years old, and 2 (1.5%) aged 60 above. As for marital status, 94 respondents (69.6%) are married, 9 respondents (6.7%) are divorced, 21 respondents (15.6%) are widowed, and 11 respondents (8.1%) are separated. A total of 56 (41.5%) respondents have two kids, followed by one kid with 37 respondents (27.4%), three kids with 20 respondents (14.8%) and four kids with 20 respondents (14.8%). Regarding the number of children in private schools, 66 respondents (48.9%) have one child in private schools, 44 respondents (32.6%) have two children in private schools, 18 respondents have three children in private schools, and 7 respondents have four children in private schools.

4.2. Validity and reliability test

To demonstrate the validity of the quantitative questions used in this study, we conducted a factor analysis on 135 survey responses. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's (KMO) sampling adequacy measure and Bartlett's sphericity test were used to assess the suitability of the research model's study variables. Table 1 shows that the independent variables of social characteristics, parent-teacher relationships, and SI have a p-value of 0.001 and a KMO of 0.837, respectively, according to Bartlett's test of sphericity. Experts suggest that a KMO score of more than 0.6 is suitable, and that Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant at the $p<0.01$ level [30]. The principal component analysis (PCA) results indicate that three of the components in Table 1 have eigenvalues greater than 1. A total of 69.976% of the variance in the questionnaire items was explained by the extracted factors, with 43.114% attributed to component 1 (SC), 15.543% to component 2 (parents, administration, and teachers' relationships), and 11.319% to component 3 (SI). The scale's factor loading values in Table 1 ranged from 0.582 to 0.912, which are acceptable. Due to cross-loading, we deleted the items for SC5, PAT1, PAT6, and all items related to the SE (SE1 to SE6).

Table 1. Factor analysis for the independent variables

Item	Description	Factor loadings		
		1	2	3
SC2	The tuition fees should be reasonable.	0.912		
SC1	The school's reputation is important.	0.895		
SC3	The academic program's quality is appropriate for my kids.	0.886		
SC4	The school's location is crucial.	0.857		
PAT3	Teachers and parents ought to get along well.		0.893	
PAT4	Parents and teachers should communicate well.		0.879	
PAT5	I prefer to receive information on the school's upcoming activities online.		0.769	
PAT2	Parents and school administrators should communicate effectively.		0.731	
SI3	Children typically like attending the same school as their preschool or primary school peers.			0.737
SI2	Social media is essential for disseminating school-related information.			0.731
SI4	I always keep my friends and family informed on school-related matters.			0.582
SI1	I frequently shared information about the school with friends and family, which is crucial.			0.582
Eigenvalue		5.174	1.865	1.358
Percentage of common variance (%)		43.114	15.543	11.319
Cumulative		43.114	58.657	69.976

Remarks: KMO=0.837, Bartlett's test of sphericity $p<0.001$

According to Table 2, the p-value for the Bartlett's test of sphericity for enrolment intention is 0.001, and the KMO value is 0.738. According to PCA, there is one component in Table 3 with an eigenvalue greater than the extracted factor, which explains 1.64% of the variance in the questionnaire items. The scale's factor loading values fell between 0.635 and 0.858, which are acceptable. We did not remove any items.

Cronbach's alpha scores indicate the internal consistency or moderate correlation of each item on the study instrument, examining its reliability [31]. The dependent variable of enrolling intention has a very high Cronbach's alpha of 0.779, which is excellent. Additionally, as shown in Table 3, the Cronbach's alpha for SC is 0.940, and the PAT is 0.884, both of which are strong and acceptable. Meanwhile, Cronbach's alpha for SI is 0.636, which is acceptable [32].

Table 2. Factor analysis for the dependent variable

Item	Description	Factor loadings
B3	I intend to visit private schools to gain a deeper understanding.	0.858
B1	I intend to send my child to private/international schools.	0.857
B2	I intend to seek more reviews and comments from parents of private/international schools on social networking platforms.	0.830
B4	I intend to send my child to a private school as my first choice.	0.635
	Eigenvalue	2.562
	Percentage of common variance (%)	64.054
	Cumulative	64.054

Remarks: KMO=0.738, Bartlett's test of sphericity p<0.001

Table 3. Reliability test

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Enrollment intention	4	0.779
SI	4	0.636
SC	4	0.940
PAT	4	0.884

4.3. Multiple regression analysis

To test the hypothesis and validate the significance of the relationship, we used multiple regression analysis. The findings of multiple regression analysis between the research variables are shown in Table 4. The multiple regression model was significant at $p<0.001$ with an F-value of 38.312. The analysis's findings demonstrate a substantial positive correlation between enrollment intention, SI ($r=0.298$, $p=0.05$), and SC ($r=0.438$, $p=0.05$). However, there was no significant correlation between enrollment intention and the PAT ($r=0.123$, $p>0.05$). Therefore, H1 and H2 are supported, whereas H4 is rejected. The model explains 46.7% ($R^2=0.467$) of the variance in enrollment intention.

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis

Independent variable	Enrolment intention beta β	Sig.	Hypothesis	Result
SI	0.298	0.000**	H1	Supported
SC	0.438	0.000**	H2	Supported
PAT	0.123	0.101	H4	Rejected
F value			38.312	
R square			0.467	

Remarks: ** Significant at the 0.001 level

The regression analysis results indicate a significant positive connection between SI and enrolment intention. This outcome aligns with previous research [17], [18] that shows SI plays a crucial role in the decisions parents make about their children's educational choices, based on information from others. Parents make educational choices based on the opinions and experiences of others [19], [20]. Next, this study found that SC were significantly related to enrollment intention. This outcome is comparable to previous research [13], [21], where SC were identified as the top three factors influencing parental choice in private schools, including class size and SE. Additionally, Alsaudia [22] claimed that these high rates of good SC would increase enrollment intention and directly help the institution improve educational practices and school outcomes. However, we found the PAT insignificantly associated with enrollment intention, consistent with researchers [33].

The involvement of parents in Malaysia is very low. The low participation of parents in class meetings or activities is due to their heavy engagement in careers, as well as their attitude, which means parents might avoid engaging with schools unless necessary [29]. In addition, schools with rigid administrative layers may unintentionally marginalize parental voice, reducing opportunities for building PAT. This becomes a drawback for parents to be involved in these activities [34]. From a social standpoint, private schools can tailor their marketing strategies with electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Parents frequently check e-WOM sources, including online reviews, blog comments, and ratings from others. The e-WOM has significantly influenced parents' decisions to choose a private school for their children. The amount of information provided by e-WOM is essential, and it travels quickly and has significant effects on the parent [35]. In addition, to further improve the SC, the institution may focus on applying learning analytics to retain students and increase course enrollment and student satisfaction [36], [37].

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that SI and SC have a significant relationship with enrollment intention. However, the PAT did not significantly correlate with enrollment intention. This study suggests that the findings can guide private schools, educational leaders, and policymakers in developing and implementing marketing strategies that effectively address current market challenges by focusing on SI and SC. The cross-sectional research design used in the current study limits the study's contribution to understanding the factors that may change over time. Furthermore, this research was conducted in Malaysia and does not allow for comparison between countries. For future research, a longitudinal approach is recommended to investigate whether factors influencing enrollment intention in private schools change over time. In addition, future studies might consider extending the research's geographic reach to generate new findings.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no known competing financial interest or personal relationship that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding [OCH], author upon reasonable request.

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