



Exploring Parents' Perceptions Regarding the Importance of Scientific Literacy as a Consideration in Choosing an Elementary School

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Abstract: Basic education is a crucial foundation for a child's academic journey. Amidst the dynamics of the 21st century, dominated by technological advancements and global challenges – from climate change to health crises – the ability to understand and apply scientific concepts is vital. Scientific literacy is not simply the ability to memorize formulas or the names of planets, but rather the capacity to think critically, evaluate evidence-based information, and make logical decisions in everyday life. Changes in parental preferences in choosing elementary schools in Sungai Seluang Village are important to study because they indicate a trend of increasing interest in private schools compared to public schools, in line with the national trend of decreasing public school enrollment. This study primarily aims to examine factors influencing parental decisions, including comparing views on the quality of public and private schools, identifying barriers to accessing information, and assessing the influence of school location. The method used is a qualitative approach (case study) with data collection through interviews, observation, and documentation, then analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, accompanied by triangulation for validity testing. The results show that the dominant factors influencing parental choices include teaching quality, facilities, access to information, perceptions of security, and school distance, and these findings are directed to support the development of more responsive local education policies.

Keywords: Educational decisions; Educational facilities; Elementary schools; Parental preferences; PPDB zoning

Introduction

The shift in parental preferences for primary education in Sungai Seluang Village indicates a significant shift in school selection patterns. Despite the greater number of public elementary schools, private schools are actually more popular (Tarkhnishvili et al., 2022; Jimenez & Sawada, 2001). One private elementary school in the area has a record number of students compared to the four existing public elementary schools. This phenomenon aligns with national trends showing a decline in the number of students in public schools and an increase in enrollment (Huseynli et al., 2025; Karaagac et al., 2022). This shift in preferences is

influenced by various factors, including teaching quality, facility availability, and the implementation of the zoning-based New Student Admissions (PPDB) system (Ogawa et al., 2025; Djazilan et al., 2023).

Although the zoning system aims to create equitable access to education, in practice, this policy creates uncertainty for some parents regarding their children's admission to public schools (Kauffman et al., 2024; Liu & Bray, 2025). These conditions encourage parents to choose private schools as an alternative, perceived as more reliable and reliable (Chuktu et al., 2024; Shen, 2025). This study aims to examine the factors influencing parents' decisions in choosing an elementary school in Sungai Seluang Village, specifically in the

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context of comparing public and private elementary schools. This study is based on several theoretical frameworks, namely decision-making theory, consumer preference theory, social education theory (Reina Paz & Rodríguez Vargas, 2023; Li & Hua, 2022), education quality theory, and information access theory.

These frameworks are used to understand how parents assess the quality of teaching, facilities, social values, and available information in determining their children's educational choices (Li & Qiu, 2018; Jonathan et al., 2023). Specifically, this study aims to identify the dominant factors influencing parental preferences, analyze parents' views on the quality of education in public and private elementary schools, and examine the influence of location, distance, and access to information on school choice decisions. The results of this study are expected to be used as consideration in formulating education policies that are more responsive to community needs and provide a clearer understanding of parents' preferences in choosing elementary schools for their children.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach, using case studies, to gain a better understanding of parents' preferences in choosing schools. Exploring the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of subjects in their daily lives provides a better understanding of the social phenomena studied (Mansour, 2024; Lim, 2025). The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews and observations conducted directly in the school environment and the homes of informants. The interviews aimed to explore parents' experiences, considerations, and reasons for choosing an elementary school for their children. Observations were conducted in both participatory and non-participatory ways to obtain a realistic picture of the condition of the school and its surrounding environment. Secondary data were collected through documentation in the form of notes, photographs, archives, school policies, and other administrative information relevant to the research focus. Documentation data was used to support and strengthen the data from interviews and observations.

Data collection in this study was conducted using a qualitative approach through interviews, observations, and documentation. The research participants were parents of students from five elementary schools in Sungai Seluang Village: SDN 008, SDN 002, SDN 012, SDN 023, and one private elementary school. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, namely the selection of informants. The data collection technique was based on specific criteria

aligned with the research objectives. This technique was chosen because the researchers needed informants with direct experience and understanding of the school selection process for their children, ensuring relevant and in-depth data.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews to explore parents' perspectives, experiences, and considerations in choosing an elementary school. Furthermore, observations were conducted to gain a firsthand understanding of the school and surrounding environment. Documentation, including notes, photographs, and documents related to school policies and information, was used as supporting data. The data were then analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and technical triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. The researchers also conducted member checking with informants to ensure the research results aligned with the participants' experiences, ensuring the data obtained was reliable and accountable.

Result and Discussion

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, several key findings were obtained regarding parental preferences in choosing an elementary school in Sungai Seluang Village. These findings reflect the factors that predominantly influence parental decision-making regarding public and private elementary schools.

Parental Preferences in Choosing an Elementary School

The research findings indicate that teaching quality is a primary factor influencing parents' decisions in choosing an elementary school. Most parents stated that teacher competence, teaching methods, and the school's attention to their child's academic development and character are important considerations. This finding is supported by observations that private schools tend to employ more varied and communicative learning methods than some public schools. In addition to teaching quality, school facilities also influence parental preferences. Parents believe that adequate facilities, such as comfortable classrooms and learning support facilities, can optimally support their children's learning process. Documentation results indicate that private schools have relatively more complete and well-organized facilities, thus fostering a positive perception among parents.

The zoning-based New Student Admissions System (PPDB) also influences parental choices.

Interviews revealed parental concerns about the uncertainty of their children's admission to public schools due to the zoning system. This situation encourages parents to choose private schools as a perceived more secure alternative. These findings suggest that the zoning policy indirectly influences community preferences for elementary schools. Access to information is also a factor influencing decision-making. Parents who receive comprehensive information about school programs, learning systems, and the school environment tend to be more confident in their choices. Conversely, limited information about public schools presents a barrier for some parents (Abuhammad, 2020; Calderon-Villarreal et al., 2025). This is evident from interviews and reinforced by observations of the frequency of school information dissemination to the public. Locations, distance, and school security are also factor parents consider. Schools that are easily accessible and have a safe environment are considered more attractive by parents. The management flow in revealing and analyzing the extent to which the Exploration of Parental Preferences in Choosing Elementary Schools in Sungai Seluang Subdistrict is visualized in the following image:

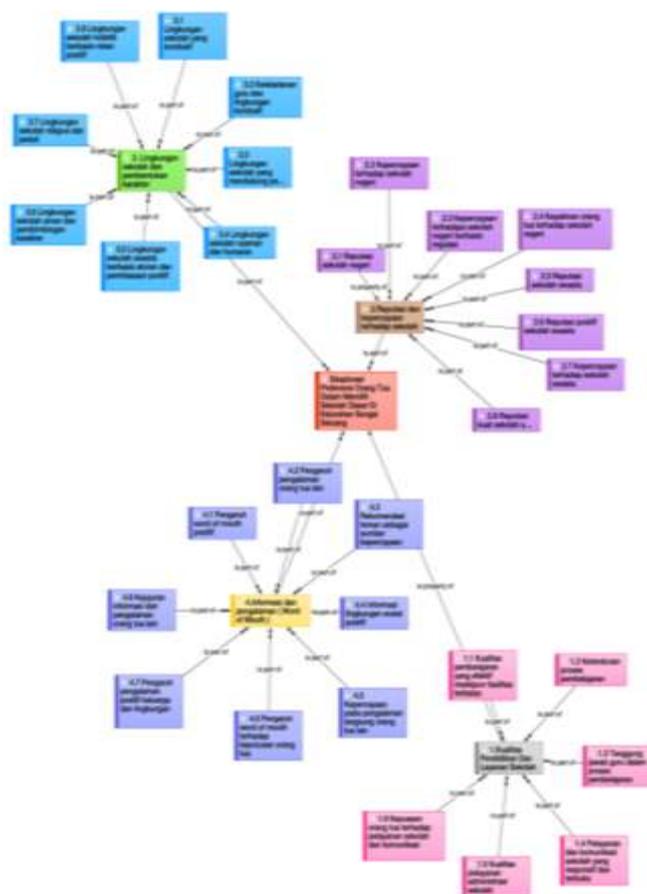


Figure 1. Exploration of parents' preferences in choosing elementary schools in Sungai Seluang subdistrict

Quality of Education and School Services

Research findings indicate that the quality of education and school services are the primary factors influencing parents' preferences when choosing an elementary school in Sungai Seluang Village. Parents interpret educational quality comprehensively, not just limited to academic results, but also encompassing teacher competence, teaching methods, and the school's attention to child development. Teachers who are patient, communicative, and able to understand students' personalities are considered to provide a sense of security and comfort for both children and parents. This is reflected in the following informant's statement: "I chose this school because the teachers are patient, and they don't immediately scold children for mistakes." (Parent Interview). "If a child doesn't understand, the teacher is willing to repeat and guide them; that's what we look for." (Parent Interview). In addition to teaching aspects, the quality of school services is also an important consideration for parents. These services include ease of communication, transparency of information, and the school's responsiveness to student concerns. "If there are problems, the school quickly contacts parents." (Parent Interview). "We can easily communicate with the teachers, so we know our children's progress." (Parent Interview). These findings indicate that the quality of education and school services are perceived as a complementary unit. A good learning process without the support of responsive services does not fully meet parents' expectations.

Reputation and Trust in Schools

Research results indicate that a school's reputation plays a significant role in shaping parental trust. A school's reputation is formed through the collective experiences of the community, the sustainability of educational quality, and the positive image developed in the surrounding community. Parents tend to choose schools that are widely recognized and have a good track record. As expressed by an informant: "This school has been well-known here for a long time; many people have said it's good." (Parent Interview). "We trust it because the school already has a reputation in the community." (Parent Interview). Parental trust is also strengthened by the experiences of family or relatives who have sent their children to the school. "My nephew used to go to school here, so I already know the quality." (Parent Interview). A school's reputation provides parents with a sense of security in making educational decisions, especially when they lack direct information about the classroom learning process (Mann et al., 2024; Piller et al., 2023). Thus, reputation serves as social security, reinforcing parents' preference for a particular school.

School Environment and Character Formation

Research findings indicate that the school environment and character formation are important considerations in parental preferences. Parents view schools not only as places for academic learning, but also as social environments that shape children's attitudes, behaviors, and values. A safe, orderly, and religious school environment is considered to support positive character formation. This is as expressed by informants: "I see that the children here are polite, and the environment is orderly." (Parent Interview). "This school emphasizes discipline and etiquette, which is important to us." (Parent Interview). Parents also believe that teachers' exemplary behavior and the instilling of positive values at school contribute to children's character formation. "The teachers set good examples, and the children become accustomed to them." (Parent Interview). These findings indicate that parents view the school as a partner in their children's education and upbringing. A conducive school environment strengthens parents' belief that their children develop not only academically but also morally and socially.

Information and Experience (Word of Mouth)

Research findings indicate that information and experience gained through word of mouth have a significant influence in shaping parents' preferences for elementary schools. Parents trust the stories and experiences of other parents more than formal information provided by the school. Information based on real-life experiences is perceived as more honest and relevant. As one informant stated: "I heard about this school from a neighbor's story, they said their kids felt at home there." (Parent Interview); "My friend told me that the teachers were caring, and that made me interested." (Parent Interview); Positive experiences shared by other parents strengthen their confidence in choosing a school. "If I hear it directly from the person who sends their child to the school, I feel more confident." (Parent Interview); "Stories from other parents are more credible." (Parent Interview); These findings indicate that parental preferences are social and collective. Word of mouth serves as a primary mechanism for shaping perceptions, trust, and the image of a school in the community. Positive experiences shared informally play a strategic role in increasing parents' interest in a school.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that parents' preferences in choosing an elementary school are the result of multidimensional considerations encompassing academic aspects, facilities, educational policies, access to information, and the safety of the school environment. Parents not only consider the status of a public or private school, but also place greater

emphasis on the perceived quality of educational services. These results align with the theory of educational quality, which states that the quality of teaching and facilities are key indicators in assessing educational institutions (Engida et al., 2024; Geletu, 2026). Furthermore, the influence of the zoning system on parents' decisions supports the findings (Sidik, 2025; Safitri & Istiyono, 2022), which stated that zoning policies have an impact on increasing public interest in private schools. Access to information as a basis for decision-making also strengthens the theory of access to information proposed by Parma et al. (2024). Overall, the results of this study confirm that parents' decisions in choosing an elementary school are influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, as stated in the research by Han et al. (2022). These findings illustrate that improving the quality of educational services and information transparency are important aspects in addressing community needs and preferences.

Quality of Education and School Services

Research results indicate that the quality of education and school services are primary considerations for parents when choosing an elementary school in Sungai Seluang Village. Parents assess school quality through teacher competence, the learning process, and the school's attention to academic development and children's needs (Commodari et al., 2025; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Schools deemed capable of providing structured, communicative learning, and supported by responsive services tend to be more trusted by parents. This finding reinforces the view that educational quality is not only defined as academic achievement, but also as the quality of interactions and services experienced directly by parents and students. Reflectively, parents' preference for schools with good services indicates a shift in orientation from mere school status to the perceived educational experience. Parents are not only concerned with the final learning outcomes but also with the process of supporting their children during school. This aligns with research by Rahmi et al. (2025), which confirmed that teacher professionalism and the quality of learning services significantly influence parents' decisions in choosing an elementary school. Thus, the quality of education and school services serves as an indicator of parental trust in the school's ability to meet their children's learning needs.

School Reputation and Trust

Research findings indicate that a school's reputation plays a crucial role in shaping parental trust. This reputation is shaped by the school's image in the community, its achievements, and its consistency in providing educational services. Parents tend to choose

schools with a good reputation and the trust of their social circle (Yazdani, 2025; Wu, 2021). This trust forms the basis for the belief that the school is capable of providing a safe, quality, and sustainable education for their children. From an analytical perspective, a school's reputation serves as a form of social security for parents in making educational decisions. Parents minimize the risk of making the wrong school choice by relying on the collective trust developed within the community. This finding aligns with research by Jabbari et al. (2022) which states that a school's reputation is a strategic factor in parental decisions because it directly relates to perceptions of the quality and future of their children. Therefore, reputation and trust are not only the result of a school's achievements, but also the consistency of its management and its relationship with the community (Amado Mateus et al., 2024; Martín-Miguel et al., 2020).

School Environment and Character Building

Research results also indicate that the school environment and character building are important considerations for parents in choosing an elementary school. Parents place great importance on the safety of the school environment, the comfort of the learning environment, and the values instilled in their children (Yurt & Kara, 2025). Schools are viewed not only as a place for the transfer of knowledge but also as a social space that shapes children's attitudes, behavior, and character from an early age (Van Liempd et al., 2020). Reflectively, these findings indicate that parents have expectations of schools as partners in the process of nurturing and shaping their children's character. This aligns with the view of Miranda et al. (2023), who emphasized that elementary schools play a strategic role in shaping children's character and social skills. A conducive school environment, supported by teacher role models and the instilling of positive values, strengthens parents' confidence that their children will grow up not only academically intelligent but also socially and morally mature (Lin et al., 2025).

Information and Experience (Word of Mouth)

Research findings reveal that information and experience gained by parents through word of mouth significantly influence the elementary school selection process (Jabbari et al., 2022). Stories, recommendations, and experiences from other parents are considered more honest and trustworthy sources of information than formal information from the school. Parents tend to consider the consistency between the information received and the actual experiences of others. In an analytical context, word of mouth functions as a social mechanism that strengthens or weakens a school's image in the eyes of the community. This finding aligns with research by Wahyuni et al. (2024), which

emphasized that positive experiences from other parents can increase parents' interest and confidence in choosing a school. Thus, parents' preferences are not formed individually, but rather through social interactions and the exchange of experiences within the surrounding community. This suggests that a school's success in maintaining quality service and good relationships with parents has a long-term impact on community trust and interest (Bormann et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This study shows that parents' preferences in choosing an elementary school in Sungai Seluang Village are influenced by several key factors, namely teaching quality, school facilities, the zoning-based New Student Admissions (PPDB) system, access to information, and the school's location and security. Parents tend to choose schools that are perceived as providing high-quality educational services, a safe learning environment, and guaranteed admission for their children. These findings suggest that parents' decisions are based not only on the status of a public or private school, but also on the overall quality and convenience of educational services.

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Author Contributions

Conceptualization; methodology; validation; formal analysis; investigation; S. K., M. Z.; resources; data curation; writing – original draft preparation; writing – review and editing; visualization: S. All authors have read and approved the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The researchers funded this research independently.

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