

## Parents' Perceptions and Preferences Toward School Selection for Elementary School-Age Children

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received 2025-06-12

Revised 2025-07-26

Accepted 2025-07-28

#### Keywords:

Parents perception

Parents preference

School selection

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### ABSTRACT

Children's education is the main responsibility of parents as the initial foundation for shaping children's character and intelligence. This study analyzes parents' perceptions and preferences in selecting schools for elementary-age children. The research employed a quantitative descriptive approach using a survey method involving 112 parents of elementary school-aged children. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings indicate that parental decisions are influenced by their perceptions, which are shaped by factors such as educational background, personal experience, and income. In contrast, preferences tend toward factors like school facilities, safety, a conducive learning environment, technology integration, religious education, leadership, academic performance, and location. The characteristics of the respondents also affect their school selection behavior. These results help explain the declining interest in public schools in certain areas. This study contributes to a better understanding of how parental decision-making may inform educational stakeholders in developing policies and school programs that align with family expectations and student needs.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Schools are formal educational institutions that serve as a vehicle to accommodate students' maximum potential. Formal educational institutions in Indonesia can be reached by attending public or private schools. Both institutions have their characteristics and the same goal of “educating the nation's life”.

Parents' perceptions and preferences towards education indicate their involvement in making the best choices for their children. Parents' perceptions of schools are also influenced by their personal experiences and the information they get from trusted sources. This means that parents' experiences, including their educational background and previous school

involvement, shape their perceptions of education for their children [1]. Positive perceptions of private schools are often based on their widely recognized reputation and academic achievements. On the other hand, public schools are often perceived as less competitive due to limited resources, such as inadequate facilities and a lack of innovation in learning approaches. However, this perception does not fully reflect the reality on the ground. As Deapati et al. [2] point out, the classroom atmosphere and improved quality of educators can create an optimal learning environment, even with limited resources. This shows that the success of a school is not only determined by its status as public or private, but also by its commitment and strategy in improving the quality of education.

Furthermore, to meet the needs and potential of children, parents often make personal preferences the basis for determining educational choices. According to Restarie et al. [3], parents have several categories when choosing schools for children: facilities, location, cost, recommendations, school reputation, and school image in Islamic private schools. This indicates that each parent has their own preferences regarding providing education for their children. Internal factors consist of the strategic location of the school, infrastructure facilities, school promotions, and accreditation and for external factors consist of the development and construction of schools that are strategically located, have a free school policy through the achievement path and the international school label due to the mindset of parents regarding the importance of education for their children [4]. In addition, the number of school enthusiasts can be measured by parents' level of satisfaction [5]. This means that parents are actively involved in choosing education for their children.

Although public schools have characteristics that should be advantages, namely state funding and minimal education costs, they have not been able to meet public expectations fully. The shift in parents' choices to private schools indicates a mismatch between education policy and its implementation. Therefore, it is important to review the governance of educational institutions, both public and private, which indirectly shape public perceptions of the quality of educational services.

Public schools are closely linked to the state. Educational facilities have been covered by the state, utilizing a budget of 20 percent of the state budget funds allocated for education [6]. Since 2016-2021, every year there has been an increase in the education budget of 370.8 billion, 406.1 billion, 431.7 billion, 460.3 billion, 547.8 billion, and 550.0 billion, with the distribution of funds for the Education Implementation Fee, Transfers to Regions and Village Funds, and financing [7]. Although more affordable, public schools still often suffer from constraints related to facilities and teaching quality [8]. Limited budgets and resources are often a significant barrier to public schools being able to compete with private schools.

Foundations or individuals generally establish private schools. Law No.16 of 2001 concerning Foundations, article 1, paragraph 1 "Foundation is a legal entity consisting of assets that are separated and intended to achieve certain goals in the social, religious, and humanitarian fields, which do not have members". Education is included in the social field so that foundations can establish and manage private schools. Although the decision to organize education is in the hands of the foundation, private schools are still under the supervision of the government. As is the supervision of the use of the state budget. Makhfud and Parsi Ema [9] stated that the Semarang city education office has supervised the

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management of School Operational Support funds in schools, including private schools. Although School Operational Support funds have been provided, especially in big cities, many parents still have to bear the burden of considerable education costs, especially for those who send their children to private schools [10]. However, the costs incurred are commensurate with what will be obtained. Private schools excel in providing facilities and infrastructure. Facilities include textbooks, media, and laboratory facilities. Meanwhile, infrastructure includes buildings, rooms (classrooms and worship), fields, etc. [11].

People are faced with choosing between sending their children to public or private schools, considering quality, location, and facilities. Choosing a public or private primary school for their children is based on the quality of teachers, religious values, school facilities, tuition fees, the learning environment, and school safety. However, it should be underlined that the decision to choose a school does not always affect the parents' level of satisfaction, which means that the decision does not necessarily reflect their satisfaction with the chosen school [12]. Meanwhile, for those who choose public schools, the common reasons are the choice of more affordable costs, the existence of scholarships or free, good curriculum and accreditation, and the opportunity to enter favorite universities, making public schools the choice of parents in sending their children to public schools [13].

Currently, there is a concerning phenomenon of declining demand for public schools in many places. According to BPS [14], it was recorded that in 2016-2023 in Java Island, public primary school students decreased, the largest in East Java (0.41 million), followed by Central Java (0.36 million), and West Java (0.2 million), followed by Banten, Jakarta (0.04 million), and Yogyakarta (0.03 million). Meanwhile, private primary school enrollment has increased in the last 6 years, the largest in West Java (168.9 thousand), followed by East Java (76.3 thousand), Central Java (71.2 thousand), Banten (36.3 thousand), and Yogyakarta (7.2 thousand). However, Jakarta experienced a decline of 18.7 thousand.

In Boyolali, this perception is reflected in the downward trend in the number of applicants to various public elementary schools in the last school year's New Student Admission, which even caused some schools to have no students. Supported by findings, Adhitama [15], there has been a concerning decline in interest in public schools, and Ngawi, East Java, three elementary schools received no new students during the 2024 enrollment period. Similar findings were also revealed by Faizah [16], who reported that around 75% of public elementary schools in Boyolali Regency experienced a drastic decline in student enrollment. This decline indicates a shift in public perception of the quality and attractiveness of public schools.

This phenomenon raises critical questions about the effectiveness of public schools' competitiveness in the eyes of the public, even though, in principle, they are intended to provide inclusive and affordable education for all social strata. This situation reflects a gap between the state's policy of providing basic education and the public's expectations regarding service quality. Despite the significant budget allocated by the government for public schools, reality shows that aspects such as the quality of learning, supporting facilities, as well as religious nuances and learning comfort often fail to meet parents' expectations. This dissatisfaction, albeit slowly but consistently, is shaping a pattern of preference migration toward private schools, which are perceived as better able to

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accommodate these needs, despite the higher costs involved. This phenomenon is evident in perceptual statements and confirmed by demographic data on basic education.

According to a systematic review by Shiferaw and Kenea [17], choosing a school involves internal factors such as parents' education and experience, and external factors such as cost, facilities, location access, and school reputation. In a local study, Sukmawati [18] found that parents in Tulungagung prefer religious private schools despite higher costs due to better teaching quality, religious curriculum, and supporting facilities. Meanwhile, research in Riau by Zul et al. [19] used the TOE (Technology Organization Environment) framework and rational choice theory to show that technological factors (e.g., digital integration), organizational factors (school management), and external environmental factors (partnerships, school image) significantly influence school attractiveness and parental decisions. Also relevant are the findings of Rasdiany et al. [20], who state that the presence of religious facilities influences the motivation to choose a religious-based educational institution, a conducive school environment, and active community participation in children's education.

Although many studies have examined parents' perceptions and preferences, few have directly linked these factors to declining interest in public schools, especially in non-urban areas such as Boyolali. Taking Boyolali Regency in Central Java as the setting, this study examines the general phenomenon that is currently occurring. This phenomenon reflects a decline in public interest in public schools, which could impact the sustainability of schools and the quality of education provided. Few studies have linked parental perceptions and preferences to public schools losing their appeal, despite this being an important issue in regional education planning. Therefore, this study aims to identify the determinants of parental perceptions and preferences in choosing schools for their children. In addition to explaining the contribution of these factors to the declining public interest in public schools, this study seeks to fill the academic gap that has not yet extensively addressed this issue specifically. Through this research, it is hoped that effective solutions and strategies can be identified to reignite interest in public elementary schools in Boyolali, provide new insights relevant to the local context, and support the formulation of data-driven policies.

## **2. METHOD**

This section comprehensively explains the research approach, methods, population, sampling, data analysis, steps, and the instruments used to provide a clear and scientifically accountable methodological overview.

### **Research Design**

This research uses a quantitative method with a descriptive approach. Data collection was conducted through a survey, where questionnaires were used to obtain answers from participants. This approach was used to systematically describe parents' perceptions and preferences in choosing elementary schools for their children, particularly focusing on declining interest in public schools in Boyolali Regency.

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## **Population and Sampling**

The study population includes parents who have elementary school-age children in Boyolali. The sample in this study was 112 respondents. The sampling method in this study used non-probability sampling techniques with a purposive sampling approach. In this technique, respondents are selected based on certain criteria following the research objectives, not randomly [21]. So, this study chose respondents consisting of parents who have elementary school-age children and are or have gone through the process of choosing schools for their children. Therefore, only parents who meet these criteria are selected, so the respondents involved are individuals who are considered to be relevant to the objectives of this study.

The characteristics of respondents in this study can be seen from several aspects, such as gender, age, education level, occupation, and income. These characteristics are used to analyze a more thorough understanding of parents' backgrounds as research subjects. This technique was selected based on limited access to the entire population and the need to target respondents with specific characteristics relevant to the objectives [22]. This is done to understand how their perspectives, attitudes, and decision-making related to perceptions and preferences influence them in choosing a school. By analyzing these characteristics, researchers can know the pattern of answers and the relationship between variables and the choice of education to be taken, so that the research results truly reflect the real conditions and can represent the group under study.

## **Data Analysis**

The collected data was then analyzed using IBM SPSS 25 output. The research process using survey techniques was carried out through several stages. Before distributing the questionnaire via Google Forms, the first step was to test the instrument's reliability. In the second stage, the answers obtained from the respondents were tabulated. In the third stage, the collected data was recapitulated using Microsoft Excel, and the respondents' scores were calculated based on a Likert Scale of 1-5. In the fourth stage, the data that has been calculated is then analyzed using SPSS to conduct descriptive statistical tests on the variables and calculate the mean value and standard deviation. Descriptive statistics allow researchers to understand the most dominant factors in parental decision-making clearly. As this study only aimed to describe the data and did not require comparisons between groups, no prerequisite tests were required. Furthermore, the crosstabs test was conducted to determine the most dominant category answered according to the characteristics of the respondents. Finally, descriptive statistical tests were interpreted to gain a deeper understanding of the data that had been collected.

## **Instrument**

Instrument reliability testing was conducted to obtain consistent data and ensure each item was reliable. The trial was conducted with characteristics similar to those of the target population. Reliability testing used the Cronbach's Alpha approach using SPSS. The instrument was deemed reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha value  $> 0.60$  [23].

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Table 1. Reliability Test Results

Item	Variable	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
X <sub>1</sub>	Parents' Perceptions	14	.804	Reliabel
X <sub>2</sub>	Parents' preferences	26	.885	Reliabel
Y <sub>3</sub>	School Selection	15	.815	Reliabel

Source: Output IBM SPSS 25

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results

Based on the data collection and presentation results in the field, information was obtained about parents' perceptions and preferences in choosing schools for their children. These perceptions and preferences include various aspects that parents consider and are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondent Data on Perceptions of Choosing a School

Indicator	Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean
<i>Education</i>	X <sub>1,6</sub>	112	3	5	4.47
	X <sub>1,10</sub>	112	1	5	3.73
	X <sub>1,11</sub>	112	3	5	4.68
	X <sub>1,14</sub>	112	1	5	3.09
<i>Income</i>	X <sub>1,5</sub>	112	1	5	3.53
	X <sub>1,13</sub>	112	1	5	2.62
<i>Parents' Experiences</i>	X <sub>1,1</sub>	112	1	5	3.45
	X <sub>1,2</sub>	112	2	5	4.29
	X <sub>1,3</sub>	112	1	5	3.80
	X <sub>1,4</sub>	112	1	5	4.04
	X <sub>1,7</sub>	112	3	5	4.56
	X <sub>1,8</sub>	112	1	5	3.82
	X <sub>1,9</sub>	112	3	5	4.46
	X <sub>1,12</sub>	112	1	5	3.69

Source: Output IBM SPSS 25

Table 2 shows the responses from 112 respondents, with an average answer of agree as seen from the score range (3.45-4.04). All parents' perceptions of schools are in the agree category (4), more dominant than the strongly disagree category (1). disagree (2). neutral (3). strongly agree (5) with the highest value in the indicator of parents' education level (X<sub>1,11</sub>).

Further analysis through Crosstabs of perceptions against respondent characteristics shows that the "Agree" category refers to items related to parents' experience, income, and education. In the indicator of parents' education level, it can be seen that the higher the parents' education level, the greater their tendency to consider important aspects in choosing a school, such as the long-term vision of education, the inculcation of character values, and the suitability of the curriculum to children's developmental needs. Meanwhile, in terms of parents' income level, more stable-income parents tend to have better access to information and are more critical in assessing school quality. The parental experience indicator shows that parents who have sent their children to a particular school will be more selective and have more mature considerations, both in academic and non-academic aspects.

Agree responses were dominated by female respondents (70.6%) from the age group of 25-35 years (78.4%). Respondents with a university level of education (69.6%) and an income of more than IDR2,000,000, with occupations ranging from private employees to others, also dominated this category. The results show that perceptions of the quality of school education are quite good but have not reached a very satisfactory level. This reinforces that although public schools are considered decent, many parents still perceive private schools as better.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondent Data on Preferences for Choosing a School

Indicator	Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean
Method	X <sub>2.1</sub>	112	4	5	4.54
	X <sub>2.14</sub>	112	1	5	3.71
Security	X <sub>2.2</sub>	112	1	5	3.66
	X <sub>2.15</sub>	112	1	5	4.13
Conduciveness	X <sub>2.3</sub>	112	4	5	4.63
	X <sub>2.16</sub>	112	1	5	4.13
Facilities	X <sub>2.4</sub>	112	2	5	4.38
	X <sub>2.17</sub>	112	1	5	3.79
Technology	X <sub>2.5</sub>	112	1	5	3.87
	X <sub>2.18</sub>	112	2	5	3.77
School leadership	X <sub>2.6</sub>	112	3	5	4.42
	X <sub>2.19</sub>	112	2	5	4.21
Extracurricular	X <sub>2.7</sub>	112	3	5	4.41
	X <sub>2.20</sub>	112	1	5	4.09
Academic achievements	X <sub>2.8</sub>	112	3	5	4.32
	X <sub>2.21</sub>	112	2	5	3.96
School input	X <sub>2.9</sub>	112	2	5	4.29
	X <sub>2.22</sub>	112	2	5	4.22
Parental involvement	X <sub>2.10</sub>	112	2	5	4.26
	X <sub>2.23</sub>	112	1	5	4.07
Nearby locations	X <sub>2.11</sub>	112	3	5	4.28
	X <sub>2.24</sub>	112	1	5	3.52
Cheap	X <sub>2.12</sub>	112	3	5	4.15
	X <sub>2.25</sub>	112	1	5	2.55
Religious services	X <sub>2.13</sub>	112	3	5	4.46
	X <sub>2.26</sub>	112	1	5	3.89

Source: Output IBM SPSS 25

Table 3 describes that the 112 respondents' responses show that the average answers agree and strongly agree have balanced results, seen from the Likert scale score range of category 4 (3.45-4.04) and Likert scale category 5 (4.21-4.63). That way, the categories agree (4) and strongly agree (5) dominate compared to the categories strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), and neutral (3), with the highest value in the school conduciveness indicator (X<sub>2.3</sub>). Further analysis through Crosstabs of preferences against respondent characteristics shows that the dominance of the “Agree” category of female respondents (52.9%) is from the age group 36-45 years (56.1%). Respondents with a high school education level (64.6%) and an income of more than IDR 2,000,000 with other jobs also dominate this category.

This study shows that respondents were predominantly in the “Agree” category for the statement items measuring preferences in choosing a school, particularly on indicators such as learning methods, conducive learning environment, security, facilities, technology

integration, and religious services. This result reflects that parents have a fairly good assessment of these aspects, although it has not reached the “Strongly Agree” category, which indicates that their expectations have not been fully met. This illustrates the link with declining interest in public schools, which are considered unable to provide optimal educational services that match parents' preferences. In contrast, the increasing interest in private schools indicates that these institutions are more responsive to community needs by providing more complete facilities, professional management, and adaptive and quality-oriented learning approaches.

Table 4. Distribution of Respondent Data on School Selection

Indicator	Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean
<i>Cost</i>	Y <sub>1</sub>	112	1	5	2.96
	Y <sub>5</sub>	112	1	5	3.63
	Y <sub>9</sub>	112	1	5	3.22
<i>Location</i>	Y <sub>2</sub>	112	1	5	2.94
	Y <sub>8</sub>	112	1	5	3.42
	Y <sub>3</sub>	112	2	5	3.96
<i>Facilities</i>	Y <sub>6</sub>	112	1	5	4.10
	Y <sub>10</sub>	112	2	5	3.77
	Y <sub>7</sub>	112	1	5	4.08
	Y <sub>11</sub>	112	1	5	3.93
<i>Quality of education</i>	Y <sub>12</sub>	112	1	5	3.96
	Y <sub>13</sub>	112	2	5	3.88
	Y <sub>14</sub>	112	1	5	3.59
	Y <sub>4</sub>	112	1	5	3.72
<i>School accreditation</i>	Y <sub>15</sub>	112	1	5	3.19

Source: Output IBM SPSS 25

Table 4 shows the responses from 112 respondents, with an average answer of agree as seen from the score range (3.42-4.10). All items are dominated by the Likert scale category 4 “Agree” more than the categories strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), and strongly agree (5), with the highest value in the school facilities indicator (Y<sub>6</sub>). A crosstab analysis of school selection against respondent characteristics shows that the “Agree” category is dominated by female respondents (68.2%) from the age group 36-45 years (70.7%). Respondents with a University education level (64.3%) and an income of more than IDR 2,000,000, with other occupations, followed by private employees, dominate this category.

The research results on school selection variables show that most parent respondents assessed the “Agree” category on indicators of cost, location, facilities, quality of education, and school accreditation. This indicates that these aspects are the main considerations in parents' decision-making when determining schools for their children. Affordable costs, location close to the place of residence, and the availability of adequate facilities are practical needs that are highly considered. In addition, the quality of education and accreditation status also reflect parents' trust in the quality and credibility of educational institutions. When public schools are considered not optimal in fulfilling these indicators, the choice will naturally shift to private schools that are more responsive to these needs. Thus, these results show that the factors in school choice strongly influence parents' decisions.

## **3.2. Discussion**

### **3.1.1 Parents' Perception**

The first dimension is about perception; this study includes four aspects: education level, income level, parents who have sent their children to school, and parents who have not sent their children to school. The descriptive statistical analysis results show that parents' perceptions of school selection for children tend to be positive, with the dominance of "Agree" responses in Likert scale category 4. Furthermore, cross tabulation of perceptions against respondent characteristics shows that the "Agree" response category is dominated by female respondents, age group 25-45 years, with the last education at the University level, who work as private employees, compared to others with an average income above Rp.2,000,000.

The highest mean values are found in indicators related to the level of education. This indicates that most parents strongly consider aspects of the school's vision and mission, curriculum direction, and learning strategies in shaping their perceptions of an educational institution. The high scores on these indicators indicate that parents' expectations of schools focus on formal academic aspects and include a holistic approach and long-term educational direction for their children. In contrast, the lowest score on the income level indicator suggests that income may be a limiting factor or a more significant consideration for some parents. While they may positively perceive the importance of quality education, financial limitations may affect their school choice. They may be forced to choose a more affordable school.

Theoretically, this finding aligns with Thahir's [24] opinion that perception is an active process of individuals in filtering, categorizing, and giving meaning to the information received based on their experience and background. Parents' perceptions of school quality are shaped by their educational experiences, social expectations, and information developed in the surrounding environment. In this context, parents with higher educational backgrounds tend to have a broader understanding of education quality, including the importance of curriculum and school vision orientation in shaping children's character and achievement.

Support for this result also comes from Ullah and Mukherjee [25], who examined the perceptions and preferences of middle-class parents in India and found that middle-class parents' decisions in choosing schools are not only based on rational considerations but are also influenced by emotional factors and social values. This finding reinforces that perceptions of education cannot be separated from the influence of societal norms and values, and parents' long-term expectations for their children's future. In other words, although public schools are still perceived to be quite good, their inability to meet certain socio-cultural expectations can be the cause of switching to private schools.

Furthermore, the research results by D. S. Pratiwi et al. [1] showed that positive perceptions of early childhood education were more prevalent among parents with higher education levels and incomes. This group tends to evaluate the quality of education more critically and choose institutions that align with their values. Similarly, a report by Lista et al. [26] revealed that parents prefer private schools such as SDIT because of the weak religious education aspect, low discipline, and lack of worship facilities in public schools.

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This clarifies that non-academic factors are important in shaping parents' perceptions and decisions when choosing schools.

Thus, although most respondents agreed with the quality of education in public schools, reality shows a gap between perception and action. Many public schools have experienced a decline in enrollment to the point where there are shortages of students, and some have even been closed. This phenomenon suggests that positive perceptions alone cannot sustain parental interest if expectations of value, services, and the educational environment are not fully met.

### **3.1.2 Parents' Preferences**

The second dimension is about preferences; the descriptive statistical analysis results show that parents' preferences in choosing schools for their children are drawn between Likert scale category 4, "Agree", and Likert scale category 5, "Strongly Agree". This means parents have strong preferences when choosing a school that suits their child's needs. This preference also confirms parents' high expectations in choosing schools that can provide quality education for their children. Furthermore, cross tabulation of perceptions of respondent characteristics shows that the "Agree" answer category is dominated by female respondents, age group 25-35 years, with the last level of education who work as private employees, compared to others with an average income above Rp.2,000,000.

The highest average value is found in the school conduciveness indicator, which shows that parents strongly consider a school environment that is safe, orderly, and supports an optimal learning process. Other preferences that also stand out include facility factors, fun learning methods, and parental involvement in school activities. In general, these results indicate that parents prefer schools that can provide an effective, safe learning atmosphere and support children's social and academic development in a balanced way.

Furthermore, the theory of Burges et al. [27] asserts that parents, especially from the middle class, prioritize schools with high academic standards, that are nearby, and have a similar socioeconomic composition. However, access to such schools remains limited for some groups, which explains why preferences often do not align with the reality of available options. Thus, most parents with relatively good purchasing power will choose private schools that offer all these criteria.

This is also in line with the results of Santosa & Aida [28], that the main factors in school preference are cost, academic achievement, curriculum, and the school's religious base. Other factors, such as teacher quality and promotion strategies, still have a significant influence, although to a lesser extent. Meanwhile, the findings of Fauyan et al. [29] underline the importance of an active, creative, and safe learning environment as the dominant reason in shaping parents' preferences, which is in line with the results of this study, where the conduciveness indicator was the most highly rated.

This study's results align with the preference theory proposed by Kotler & Keller [30], which states that consumers, in this case parents, see schools as a set of attributes. These attributes include methods, school safety, conducive school climate, adequate facilities, use of technology, school leadership, extracurricular activities, academic achievement, good school input, parents are actively involved, closer location, cheaper,

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religious services available, and others. Each parent has a different level of importance to these attributes, depending on their needs and wants. Parents who prioritize a safe and supportive learning environment will prioritize the conducive school climate attribute. Furthermore, parents will develop beliefs about how a school fulfills each attribute. The level of satisfaction with these attributes will influence parents' attitudes towards the school and ultimately determine their preferences. Therefore, schools must understand what attributes are most important to parents and work towards meeting their expectations.

The declining interest in public schools cannot be separated from the mismatch between parents' preferences and the quality of services available in public schools. When public schools cannot provide a conducive learning atmosphere, adequate facilities, or innovative learning approaches, parents will look for alternatives that better meet their expectations. This explains the massive shift of interest to private schools, even causing some public schools to experience student shortages and threatening closure.

Some respondents showed awareness of the importance of supporting factors that reflect the consumer behavior of parents. This means that schools must pay attention to what parents are looking for and need. By understanding these needs, schools can become more attractive to prospective students and parents. This can be realized through adequate facilities, infrastructure, and effective school management. Thus, schools not only improve the quality of education but also ensure that they meet the expectations and needs of parents when choosing the right school for their children. As a result, the satisfaction of both parents and students will increase as schools can provide quality and relevant education.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study shows that positive assessments of aspects such as quality, religion, educational vision, curriculum, conducive learning environment, and adequate facilities dominate parents' perceptions and preferences in choosing schools. However, these are not yet at a highly satisfactory level. Other factors, such as school location, cost, and school input, are also included. Academically, these findings contribute to a broader understanding of school selection behavior and provide a basis for formulating policies to improve the quality of public schools. However, this study has limitations in terms of its geographical scope, which is limited to Boyolali Regency, and its descriptive quantitative approach, which cannot fully capture the subjective reasons of parents. Therefore, future research is recommended to use a qualitative or mixed-methods approach with a broader scope. Practically, these findings contribute to developing strategies to enhance the appeal of public schools and encourage collaboration between the government, schools, and the community in building public trust in quality and equitable basic education.

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