
AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS IN THE SELECTION OF SCHOOLS

Ahmad Faizuddin, Tumin An-Nuaimy, Muhammad Irzal
International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia
E-mail: akhi.faizuddin@gmail.com

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Abstract

Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), as an International school provided by the government of Indonesia is not a favourite among Indonesian parents living in Malaysia. It results in a big question on what are their reasons behind that decision. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the experiences of Indonesian parents living in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, about their reasons of not choosing Indonesian School for their children. The purpose of this research is using a case study approach by deep interviews to three Indonesian parents who live in Malaysia and choose other International schools for their children. The data of the interviews were analysed and categorized based on certain themes. The result of an interpretive analysis found that parents' reasons are demonstrated in three interrelated themes: (1) The need of specific curriculum, (2) The lack of creative teaching methods used in Indonesian School, and (3) The less strategic location of Indonesian School. As a final point, this paper provides an insight analysis of parents' reasons and some recommendations for improvement.

Keywords: Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), school choice, International school, curriculum, teaching method, school access

Abstrak

Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), sebagai sekolah Internasional yang disediakan oleh pemerintah Indonesia, tidaklah favorit di antara orang tua Indonesia yang tinggal di Malaysia. Hal ini membuat pertanyaan besar tentang alasan mereka di balik hal tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki pengalaman orang tua Indonesia yang tinggal di Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, terkait dengan alasan mereka tidak memilih sekolah Indonesia bagi anak-anak mereka. Untuk tujuan penelitian ini, pendekatan studi kasus dilakukan. Menggunakan wawancara mendalam, tiga orang tua Indonesia yang tinggal di Malaysia dan memilih sekolah internasional lain dipilih. Data wawancara dianalisis dan dikelompokkan berdasarkan tema-tema khusus. Hasil interpretasi analisis menemukan bahwa alasan orang tua tergambar pada tiga item: (1) kebutuhan kurikulum tertentu, (2) kurangnya metode mengajar kreatif yang digunakan di sekolah Indonesia, dan (3) kurang strategis dari lokasi sekolah Indonesia. Akhirnya, tulisan ini memberikan analisis wawasan tentang alasan orang tua dan rekomendasi untuk peningkatan.

Kata kunci: Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), pilihan sekolah, sekolah internasional, kurikulum, metode pengajaran, akses sekolah

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Introduction

There are many kinds of schools, such as International schools, National schools, Religious schools, Integrated schools, and Vocational schools. Each school has different objectives and offers various facilities that affect parents to choose the school to be their children's playground to study. With the advancement of information technology, parents can get all information about the schools. They can compare between one school and another before deciding a suitable one for their children. Mostly parents will compare the educational institution in terms of facilities, brand names, teacher, syllabus or curriculum used in that school, and school payment.

Indonesia, as a neighbour country of Malaysia, has a great numbers of people living, working, and studying in many kinds of fields in Malaysia. Some of them live in Malaysia for a short period and some others have lived here for more than 10 years. As in the cases of other countries that have Indonesian residents in those particular countries, the government of Indonesia feels necessary to provide an Indonesian School for the need of Indonesian parents living in Malaysia. The Indonesian School in Malaysia is called *Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur* (SIKL). SIKL adopts and uses curriculum, teacher, and any other materials of teaching from Indonesia Ministry of Education. Specifically, this school uses Indonesian Language as the medium of teaching.

The objective of this research is to identify various reasons and factors that contribute to Indonesian parents' choice of school for their children while they are living in Malaysia. It is argued that Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) is gradually losing their market due to the fact that most of Indonesian parents decide to send their children to other International schools and Islamic boarding schools. In a way,

this study will help future Indonesian parents who want to live and work in Malaysia to know major issues and concerns in choosing a good school for their children. In addition, it will also help the SIKL to receive constructive recommendations for future improvement.

Due to lack of literature and research about the choice of Indonesian School in Kuala Lumpur, the current study intended to explore parents' reasons of not choosing SIKL regardless they are Indonesian citizens. It hoped that all Indonesian students who are living in different countries could still learn their own national language by attending Indonesian schools in respective countries. Hence, this study posits one research question: What are the reasons of Indonesian parents living in Malaysia of not choosing Indonesian School for their children?

Literature Review

Parents take into consideration many issues when choosing an educational institution for their children. Some parents prefer a school that puts more attention on educational environment factors, such as safety and the community to which the school belong. Thus, Hsu and Yuanfang (2013) hypothesized that school's educational environment has a positive correlation with parents' choice of the school. School educational philosophy also has an impact on parents' consideration. Educational philosophy reflects school administration and leadership, school culture and tradition, and school professional core values (Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2000).

In addition, school facilities also have a significant influence when deciding a good learning environment. An effective design of learning areas provides convenient spaces for students to learn and improve their skills. Among other factors that have positive correlation with parental choice of a school are

curricular activities (Maddaus, 1990), school location and accessible transportation (Ewing, Schroeder, & Greene, 2004).

All children should have access to good schools that can fully support their academic achievements. In the early stage of education, parental choice will determine better schools for their children (Bell, 2009). According to Hawkins, Mothersbaugh and Best (2007), choice refers to an optimal decision-making process made after considering various relevant factors and forecasting numerous benefits that can be gained in the future. Normally, parents choose schools for their children based on “costs and benefits (incentives), the availability of information, and the presence of opportunities (choices)” (Bast & Walberg, 2004).

School choice involves between the planning of getting all the benefits for the future of children and the total cost parents must pay for the schooling. Dahari and Ya (2011) argued that Malay parents prefer branded, private-run, English medium and religion-based schools. Perhaps this will be a similar case with Indonesian parents living in Malaysia. Somehow they are influenced by their counterparts or surrounding environment. However, the trend in choosing private-run, English medium and Islamic based schools is normally pursued by the higher income parents. Meanwhile, the lower income parents tend to choose government-run and Islamic based schools. Hence, the top most reasons influencing parents' choice of the schools are safety and security, quality of teaching, hygiene and cleanliness, religious values, ethnic background, occupation and family incomes (Dahari & Ya, 2011).

In term of professionalism, English language, for example, is one of the most important languages to be mastered in this globalization era. Thus, 21st century schools have to use English as a medium of learning in order

to make the students as global citizens who can communicate fluently with other people in different parts of the world. For that reason, many parents prefer to send their children to International or English medium schools compared to normal schools which use local or national languages. However, language is only one factor that contributes to school choice. There are many other factors that influence parents' decision in selecting schools for their children, such as safe environment, up-to-date curriculum, good administration, and professional teachers.

Finally, when it comes to the school choice, parents have different educational believes and perceptions which influence them to choose one particular school. Some parents want their children to master English language; hence they will definitely choose International School for their children. While some other parents want both of English and Arabic languages for their children so they will opt for boarding school, or any other Islamic Schools which use English and Arabic as the medium of teaching. For any others who want their children to know their own language and culture, they prefer national school or in the case of Indonesian parents they have option to choose Indonesian School for their children.

Method

Study of Design

The present study is a qualitative research design based on a case study. Parents' reason of not choosing Indonesian School among Indonesian Parents was discussed and analyzed. The researchers tried to figure out the important points related to the factors affecting the parents in selecting other schools for their children. Participants of this study were Indonesian parents who have experienced of choosing school for their children. Purposely for the important of

the study the researcher selected three parents who did not choose Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) for their children.

This main concern of this study is the reasons of not choosing Indonesian School among Indonesian parents living in Kuala Lumpur. The study is then to identify the reasons of not choosing Indonesian School as the school provided by Indonesian Government for the citizen of Indonesia and to investigate the challenges of that choice. Among the three participants who participated in this study, one of them chooses International School (Alice Smith International School), and the two other parents choose International Islamic School for their children. Most of the parents are expatriates of Oil Company in Malaysia.

Initially, purposeful and snowball sampling methods were used for data collection. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Once the participants were informed of the objective of the study, the interview was started in different times and places. The researchers first asked the participants about their agreement and their leisure time to conduct the interviews. Then after the arrangement was set, the interview was conducted. All participants were informed of the objectives of this study and method of this research.

Interview Questions

During the interview, participants were first asked about demographic questions including name, age, nationality, number of children, and duration of their experiences living abroad, especially in Malaysia. The participants were also asked about their opinions about a good school, the challenges faced by their children, and some other things that related to their experiences in choosing any International School for their children.

The following set of questions was used as guidance for the interviews:

1. How do you describe a good school?
2. What kind of benefits do you expect from a school?
3. How do you get the information regarding the school for your children?
4. What are the factors that motivate you to choose a certain school for your children?
5. Do you involve your children when deciding a school to be admitted?
6. Do you find any challenges when your children learn in various and different cultures?
7. How do you advice your children when they find a shock culture dealing with various and different cultures in their school?
8. Regarding the teaching of Islamic value, how good is your choice of school in term of teaching Islamic value to the children?
9. Do you need to give any additional class for your children in order to teach them Islamic lessons or value? How?
10. Since the school doesn't use Indonesian Language as the medium of teaching, how do you introduce Indonesian Language as your mother tongue and Indonesian culture to your children?
11. Do you get any information about Indonesian School in Kuala Lumpur? What do you think about the school?
12. Do you have any suggestion to the improvement of Indonesian School?

Participants

There were three participants who involved in this study. They are Indonesian parents living in Kuala Lumpur. Two of them are engineers at oil industry (PETRONAS), and the last one is a Lecturer at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

1. First Participant

Code Name	: IDN-1
Age	: 42 years old

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| Sex | : Female |
| Number of children | : 2 |
| 2. Second Participant | |
| Code Name | : IDN-2 |
| Age | : 35 years old |
| Sex | : Female |
| Number of children | : 2 |
| 3. Third Participant | |
| Code Name | : IDN-3 |
| Age | : 50 years old |
| Sex | : Female |
| Nationality | : Indonesia |
| Number of children | : 4 |

Data Analysis

All the interviews were recorded and some important notes during the sessions written down. After that the data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed. The duration of each interview was about 15 to 30 minutes. Data analysis was conducted by reviewing the content of answers from each participant. Their answers were then analysed one by one and a narrative analysis was made by reviewing the interview transcripts. Lastly, the researcher made comparison from the participants' answers.

The steps taken in analyzing data were as follow:

1. Get to know the data: Transcribing, note taking.
2. Focus on the analysis: Narrative transcription.
3. Categorize the information: Classifying the themes.
4. Identify the pattern and connection within and between categorization.

Interpretation of the data.

Conclusions

This paper provides an insight into the reasons why Indonesian parents are not choosing Indonesian School (Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur) for their children. Using face to face interview, the researchers asked several questions related to the issues of good schools and its benefits, getting information about a school, factors that motivate them in choosing certain schools, and challenges faced when dealing with different cultures. From the transcriptions, classification of themes and interpretative analysis, we found a significant understanding about the real situation and the needs of the Indonesian parents living in Malaysia in accessing suitable schools for their children.

Our findings show that qualitative method may offer a different perspective and a meaning of a case. Interestingly, it was found that some of Indonesian parents living in Malaysia have no options to choose schools for their children due to their financial situation. However, some of them tend to think that since they will move from one country to another, which is why they need a school that provides a continuously International curriculum so that their children can easily adapt and interact with other International friends. It means that Indonesian School is not suitable enough to their needs. Moreover, it is located a bit far from their houses or working places. As Muslim parents, they should also encourage their children to learn about Islamic religions and values, otherwise their children will lose their way of life in the future.

Based on the above mentioned issues, it is a big homework for Indonesian Government to improve the quality of Indonesian School, especially in Malaysia. Hence, the authors would like to outline some suggestions and recommendations for constructive improvement:

1. For government and school administration, they should improve the curriculum to meet the students' needs and interests. More stress should be put on moral and religious education to help build good characters of the students. School should also guarantee a safe and excellent educational environment so that the children will be able to study effectively and grow up happily with their friends.
2. For teachers and parents, there must be positive interactions between teachers and parents to improve their professional expertise. Teachers should know that teaching skills and knowledge alone are not sufficient to support and improve the performance of students. They should build a communication with students' parents to understand more about their backgrounds. Parents, on the other hand, have the right to pick a school that best suits their children's interests and expectations.
3. For future researchers, this study adopted in depth interviews instead of surveys or questionnaires. The interviews were limited to three informants only, so it cannot be generalized to other cases. To get a better picture of the potential factors that influence parental choice of school and to improve the generalization of the research results, it is suggested to larger samples for quantitative studies and more in depth discussions.

In summary, three main factors that contribute to parents' decision in choosing a school are: curriculum, teaching methods, and school access. While some parents prefer English medium and religious based schools, among other the most important decision factors are safety and security, quality of teaching and family income. In this study, parental choice can be considered as a market indicator for the

schools to improve their services and meet the needs and interests of potential students.

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