

**CHINESE PARENTS' PREFERENCE FOR
PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOL IN SANDAKAN**

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2013**

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material in this thesis is my own except for quotations, excerpts, equations, summaries and reference, which have been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

CHINESE PARENTS' PREFERENCE FOR PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOL IN SANDAKAN

The main purpose of this dissertation is to determine the phenomenon of parental preference for private secondary school in Sandakan. The study also examines the main criterion of Chinese parents in Sandakan for sending their children to a certain secondary school and the relation of some demographic factors of the Chinese parents with the school choice perception. The population is consisted 300 Chinese parents or guardians of the children in a private secondary school. Convenience sampling was used to select 300 parents from the private school by the help of the principal and the form teachers. A questionnaire was used as an instrument to collect data. The instrument was validated and reliability coefficient was found that the Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.869. The results were analysed using the frequency counts, percentages, t-tests, Pearson Correlation and One-Way ANOVA by the SPSS 19.0 for windows program. The findings revealed some factors such as the academic performance, the quality and quantity of staff, the physical facilities, the curriculum standard, the cost-effectiveness and the quality of output as the responsible concepts of the Chinese parental preference for private secondary schools. Besides, some of the demographic factors of the parents do not show much relation to the parental preference for private secondary schools. In addition, this research is better to be done by using both the quantitative and qualitative research methods as both methods have their own strengths.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama disertasi ini adalah untuk menentukan fenomena keutamaan ibu bapa terhadap sekolah menengah swasta di Sandakan. Kajian ini juga meneliti kriteria-kriteria utama ibu bapa Cina di Sandakan bagi menghantar anak-anak mereka ke sekolah menengah tertentu dan hubungan antara beberapa faktor demografi ibu bapa Cina dengan persepsi pemilihan sekolah. Populasi kajian ini adalah terdiri daripada 300 ibu bapa Cina atau penjaga kanak-kanak di sebuah sekolah menengah swasta. Persampelan rawak mudah telah digunakan untuk memilih 300 ibu bapa daripada sekolah swasta tertentu dengan bantuan pengetua dan guru-guru tingkatan. Satu set soal selidik telah digunakan sebagai instrumen untuk mengumpul data. Keesahan dan kebolehpercayaan instrument tersebut telah ditemui dengan nilai Cronbach's Alpha 0.869. Keputusan telah dianalisis dengan menggunakan pengiraan kekerapan, peratusan, Ujian-t, Korelasi Pearson dan One-Way ANOVA melalui program SPSS 19.0 for Windows. Penemuan mendedahkan beberapa faktor seperti prestasi akademik, kualiti dan kuantiti kakitangan, kemudahan fizikal, standard kurikulum, keberkesanan kos dan kualiti output sebagai konsep keutamaan ibu bapa Cina terhadap sekolah menengah swasta. Selain itu, beberapa faktor demografi ibu bapa tidak menunjukkan hubungan yang seberapa terhadap pilihan ibu bapa untuk sekolah menengah swasta. Di samping itu, kajian ini adalah lebih baik dijalankan dengan menggunakan kedua-dua kaedah penyelidikan kuantitatif dan kualitatif kerana kedua-dua jenis kaedah ini mempunyai kekuatan masing-masing.

LIST OF TABLES

	Page	
Table 3.1	Items Contribution in the Perception Categories	33
Table 3.2	Research Phases	35
Table 3.3	the Reliability of the Research Instrument	36
Table 3.4	Data Analysis	37
Table 4.1	Gender of the Respondents	39
Table 4.2	Ages of the Respondents	40
Table 4.3	Educational Level of the Respondents	40
Table 4.4	Gross Household Incomes of the Respondents	40
Table 4.5	the Reliability of the Actual Research Instrument	41
Table 4.6	Items Analysis	42
Table 4.7	Total Mean Score of 6 factors	43
Table 4.8	T - test for H_01	44
Table 4.9	T - test for H_02	44
Table 4.10	T - test for H_03	45
Table 4.11	T - test for H_04	46
Table 4.12	T - test for H_05	46
Table 4.13	T - test for H_06	47
Table 4.14	Independent-Samples T Test for H_08	48
Table 4.15	Correlate-Bivariate Test for H_08 (Pearson Correlations)	48
Table 4.16	One-Way ANOVA Test for H_09	49
Table 4.17	Hypotheses Test Summaries	51
Table 5.1	Average Private School Tuition: 2007-2008 (in USA)	65

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

	Page
Diagram 1.1 Conceptual Framework	15
Diagram 2.1 Process of Immediate Perception	23
Diagram 2.2 Influence of Customer Satisfaction	25
Diagram 2.3 Focusing on Your Needs - Two Levels of the Decision Making Model	27
Diagram 2.4 American Customer Satisfaction Index Model	28
Diagram 3.1 Research Procedures	34



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LIST OF APPENDIX

	Page	
Appendix A	Questionnaire	73
Appendix B	Reliability Statistic (Pilot Study)	78
Appendix C	Reliability Statistic (Actual Research)	80
Appendix D	Items Analysis	82
Appendix E	Total Mean Score of Six Factors	90
Appendix F	Hypothesis Test for $H_01 - H_06$	91
Appendix G	Hypothesis Test for H_07	94
Appendix H	Hypothesis Test for H_08	95
Appendix I	Hypothesis Test for H_09	96
Appendix J	Table 63, Digest of Education Statistics 2010, National Center for Education Statistics	98



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UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE	i
DECLARATION	ii
CERTIFICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ABSTRAK	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF DIAGRAMS	viii
LIST OF APPENDIX	ix
LIST OF CONTENTS	x
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research Background	2
1.3 Problem Statement.....	7
1.4 Research Purposes	9
1.5 Research Objectives	9
1.6 Research Questions	9
1.7 Hypotheses.....	10
1.8 Operational Definitions	11
1.8.1 Preference.....	11
1.8.2 Chinese parents.....	11
1.8.3 Private school.....	12
1.8.4 Perception.....	12
1.9 Research Significance	13

1.10 Research Limitation	14
1.11 Conceptual Framework	14
1.12 Summary	15
CHAPTER 2	16
LITERATURE REVIEW	16
2.1 Introduction.....	16
2.2 Conceptual Definition.....	16
2.2.1 Preference.....	16
2.2.2 Chinese Parents	17
2.2.3 Private school	17
2.2.4 Perception	18
2.3 Researches Reviewed	19
2.4 Theory Reviewed	22
2.4.1 Perception Theory.....	22
2.4.2 Customer Satisfaction Theory.....	24
2.4.3 Utility Theory.....	26
2.5 Model Reviewed.....	27
2.5.1 Decision Making Model	27
2.5.2 ACSI Model	28
2.6 Summary.....	29
CHAPTER 3	30
METHODOLOGY	30
3.1 Introduction.....	30
3.2 Research Design	30
3.2.1 Descriptive Methods	30
3.3 Population and Sampling.....	31
3.3.1 Population.....	31

3.3.2 Sampling.....	31
3.4 Research Location	32
3.5 Research Instrument	32
3.6 Review Procedures	33
3.6.1 Preliminary Planning.....	33
3.6.2 Phase of the Research.....	35
3.7 Pilot Study	35
3.8 Data Analysis	36
3.9 Summary.....	38
CHAPTER 4.....	39
DATA ANALYSIS.....	39
4.1 Introduction.....	39
4.2 Respondent Profile	39
4.3 Reliability of the Instrument in the Actual Research.....	41
4.4 Questionnaire Analysis.....	41
4.5 Hypotheses Tests.....	43
4.5.1 H ₀ 1: There is no significant difference on better academic performance in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.....	43
4.5.2 H ₀ 2: There is no significant difference on better quality and quantity of staff in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.	44
4.5.3 H ₀ 3: There is no significant difference on better physical facilities in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.	45
4.5.4 H ₀ 4: There is no significant difference on higher curriculum standard in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.	45
4.5.5 H ₀ 5: There is no significant difference on better cost-effectiveness in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.	46
4.5.6 H ₀ 6: There is no significant difference on higher quality of output from private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.	47

4.5.7	H ₀ 7: There is no significant difference on mean score of choice perception towards the private school between the genders of the Chinese parents who are major in making decision for the school choice.....	47
4.5.8	H ₀ 8: There is no significant Correlation between the educational level of the Chinese parents and the mean score of choice perception towards the private school.	48
4.5.9	H ₀ 9: There is no significant difference on mean score of choice perception towards the private school among the Chinese parents based on their gross household incomes group.	49
4.6	Summary.....	50
CHAPTER 5		52
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS		52
5.1	Introduction.....	52
5.2	Research Findings Summary.....	52
5.3	Research Finding Discussion.....	53
5.3.1	Better academic performance in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.	53
5.3.2	Better quality and quantity of staff in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.....	54
5.3.3	Better physical facilities in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.	55
5.3.4	Higher curriculum standard in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.	56
5.3.5	Better cost-effectiveness in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.	57
5.3.6	Higher quality of output from private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.	57

5.3.7 The mean score of choice perception towards the private school between the genders of the Chinese parents who are major in making decision for the school choice.	58
5.3.8 The educational level of the Chinese parents and the mean score of choice perception towards the private school.	58
5.3.9 The mean score of choice perception towards the private school among the Chinese parents based on their gross household incomes group.	59
5.4 Research Finding Conclusion	60
5.5 Research Finding Implication.....	62
5.6 Further Research Suggestion and Recommendation	65
5.6.1 Research Sampling or Scope	66
5.6.2 Research Design	66
5.6.3 Research Instrument.....	66
5.7 Summary.....	67
BIBLIOGRAPHY	68
APPENDIX.....	73



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Education is very important for all of us. Since the mankind occurs in this world, we learn every day anywhere. It is same as a baby. Once she comes to the new world, she starts to learn. She learns to breathe, cry, stretch the muscles and many more. Even nowadays, we had been introduced the prenatal education. It is an education that can be conducted by the mother for the baby in her womb. This can be done through singing, talking, music listening, reading and etc. According to Logan (1987), a baby in the womb can certainly hear many of the sounds and noises from her mother's external environment. She had introduced that the best learning start from the heartbeat of the mother. It is because the most dominant sound heard by the baby is the mother's pulsing heartbeat. As the baby develops, the heartbeat of both the baby and mother become imprinted in the baby's cognitive architecture that is the permanent foundation upon which all learning will be built.

In a normal family, parent always takes care and concerns about their children's education. In the olden days, most of the families were not afforded to send their children to be educated. The children had to go to help the family to get more money to raise the whole family. As an example, a fisherman's family needed their children to help them to repair the fishing net; the elder children were trained to become fishermen one day. Although the repairing work and training are considered as a kind of learning, but these are non-formal educations.

Human beings are undergoing evolution in this changing world. And, the education has become more and more important as the decades went by. The varieties of careers give a great impact to the parents. This is due to the higher the education level of a person, the better the job he or she get. Furthermore, the

salary and the self-image or one's status is also higher. Therefore, more and more awakening parents send their children to school to be educated. This is also happening in our country, Malaysia. Parents are concerning about the education obtained by their children. As a result, some of the parents will try to send their children to a better reputation school, so that they can make sure their children learn effectively.

After receiving primary education in national-type primary school, the students have the choices to study in either national secondary school or independent secondary school. But obviously, the choices are normally done or influenced by the parents. Nevertheless, the education for secondary level can be obtained from the public school systems, which provide free education for all Malaysians or the private school, which needed the parents to pay certain amount of money monthly.

In this research, we can find out the preference of the Chinese parents in choosing between the independent secondary school and the public secondary school (SMK). First of all, we would need to identify the perception of the Chinese parents towards both of the school. From there, we can generate the different types of preference of the parents about a suitable school for their children.

1.2 Research Background

As a teacher or an educator, he or she always encounters a lot of work and problems every day. We need to conduct the lesson in or outside the classroom, check the work that done by the student, evaluate or assess the learning progress of the students, and reconstruct the knowledge that had learnt by the student. But all of these are focusing on student only. Of cause, teachers are much more works to concentrate at. According to Mok (2003), teachers are not only having the relationship on accountability with the students, but also related with their parents, the school colleague and even the whole community.

Besides focusing on students learning progress, teacher also needs to face the parents. In general, parents are very concern about their children's education in the school nowadays. Many of them think that sending their children to school is still not enough. They need to get some or more tuition class for their children so that they can learn the most and the best in education. For formal education that conducted in school, the parents always like to compare and find out which school in the area is the best or suitable for their children. They will even do their own survey or some sort of research by looking at the achievements of the school, comparing their friends' or neighbours' kids who have had studied in different schools. Except for those, the parents may also ask the opinions from the school teacher. This is because they might think that the teachers knew the ability, behaviour and learning progress of their children better than them sometimes.

It is certainly that collaboration between parents and teachers can greatly enhances the students' education. According to a news in Utusan Melayu (2010), the close relationship in cooperation between the parents and teachers is very important to help the students of a school to reach a better and higher achievement. Therefore, the parent-teacher association in a school plays a very important role to help the school to arrange the useful programs for the students. Moreover, according to a research on parents' role in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in SJK(C) Kulai, Johor by M. Al Muz-Zammil Bin Yasin and Moong (2010), cooperation of both parents and teachers is important to help the children to learn better. This can be obviously seen from the achievement of the students in a school. The main reason is, the cooperation from the parents can help the teachers to understand about the neighbourhood relationship among them. This will also help them to reduce the conflicts and obstacles between them.

In an article written by Chua (2011), Chinese parents seem to have children who displayed academic excellence. They would agree to the strict education and stressing academic success for the children. This is because most of the Chinese parents believe that their children can be the best student and they also have the concept that the academic achievement reflects successful parenting. On the other hand, the Chinese parents believe that they know what is best for their children

and therefore override all of their children's own desires and preferences. This kind of concept in the Chinese parents' mind may be caused by the habit becomes nature or the background cultures from their own family.

The Chinese in Malaysia was come from China in the olden days. Of course, they had brought the culture far from there too. During those days, China was still under a feudalism social system. This is because in this kind of society, all the people were not open minded and they were born in the permanent position or we call that as "society level" or "social class". The main four classes are the *shi*, or gentry scholars; the *nong*, or peasant farmers; the *gong*, artisans and craftsmen; and the *shang*, merchants and trades. Obtaining education was impossible to some of the people those in the lower class, especially the peasant farmers who made up over 90 per cent of the population. As a result, when a family member have the opportunity to learn and to obtain education, they were ready to pay full support to him (normally, only the male had the opportunity to be educated at those days). This is the only chance for them to upgrade their social class if their family member got the highest achievement in the unify examination. He would have the chance to work for the emperor (Morton and Lewis, 2005).

At home, the children were trained to be fully respected to their parents. They could not refuse what had been set by their parents. Even for wedding, they had to follow the decision of their parents. Sometimes, their future wife or husband had already fixed by their parents since they were still in their mothers' womb. Children at that time were fully under the control of the parents. They had to follow the pattern and preference of the parents. This mean the children had to satisfy the parents' dream. Parents believed that they did so were for the sake of their children. Thus, the children should pay full respect to the parents but not against what they had planned and arranged for them. This kind of culture started in families and passed continuously from one generation to another.

Compared with Europe, where feudalism lasted about one thousand years, China had a much longer feudal period, which is more than two thousand and five hundred years until it was shaken by foreign cannons during the Opium War. However, the culture that had been built up during those days is very hard to

change. This had been already mind set in all the Chinese. Of course, since so many impact and influence from other countries throughout the centuries, the mind of the Chinese are being open wider. But still, some concepts in their mind are remaining till now. Here, we are not going to discuss whether the concepts are good or not and judge the Chinese parenting pattern.

Every normal parents love their children. They always ensure the best they can provide for their kids. Especially in education, parents would start thinking since their children are still babies. They always hope to send their children to the best school with their capability. For the Chinese parents in Malaysia are the same. One of the main reasons is that the Chinese parents nowadays are having fewer offspring. As the standard of living rises, the parents are willing to pay more for equipping their posterity better. They might think that the higher the education level of their children, the better their lives in the future.

The primary school students are still too young in choosing further study to the secondary school. They always depend on their parents at that time. According to a document from American Psychological Association (2011), everything that the parents did will influence their children. Children depend on their parents for encouragement, protection, and support as they learn to think for themselves. For a child, he or she may like and choose a certain school probably is because of their parents' value to the school. They would not know much about the school whether it is good or not to them. Therefore, the parents are the decision maker indeed. They will choose the suitable school for their children and send them there for learning.

In Sandakan, there are not much choices of secondary school for the parents to think twice about. Residential Schools would only occur in the rural area of the state. Due to the Chinese families are mostly leaving in the town area or near a town, this kind of schools will not be in their list of choices. Likewise, the Chinese parents also won't let their children out of their own eye sight for a long time at that age. They will only choose the school near their residences or neighbourhood. Unless they have more than enough money to support their

children to go to the best school that far from their home town. Therefore, the choices of secondary school in Sandakan are probably only the *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan* (SMK, the National Secondary School) and the Chinese Independent Secondary School, which is a private school. The National Secondary School is a public school, which provide free education for all Malaysians. And for the Chinese Independent Secondary School, it is a private school that needs the parents to pay a certain amount of school fee to let the children to study in the school. The range of school fee can be differed from each different school.

The public secondary school or we called the National Secondary School in Malaysia (SMK in Malay language), can be stated as the continuous or further study after the primary school. According to Azmir Salleh (2009), the National Secondary School is overseen and monitored by the Ministry of Education. The fund to run the school is also come from the government. The Malay language is used as the main medium language of instruction in the school. They study in five forms. Each form will take a year. Some students, however, will have to study in "Remove class" before they can study in Form 1 because of the poor academic results, or simply choosing to do so, which is possible in some schools. At the end of Form 3, a Lower Secondary Evaluation that is *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR, formerly known as *Sijil Pelajaran Rendah* (SRP) or Lower Certificate of Education (LCE)) is taken by students. Based on choice, they will be streamed into either the Science stream or Arts stream for two years in form 4 and form 5. The Science stream is generally more desirable. Students are allowed to shift to the Arts stream from the Science stream, but rarely vice-versa. At the end of Form 5, students are required to take the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) or Malaysian Certificate of Education examination, before graduating from secondary school.

After receiving primary education in national-type primary school, some students from SJK(C) may choose to study in a Chinese Independent Secondary School. There are 60 Chinese Independent Secondary Schools in Malaysia, which are funded mostly by the Malaysian Chinese public, with UCSCAM (United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia, also known as *Dong Jiao Zong* after its Chinese acronym) as the overall coordination body. Most subjects are taught in

Chinese language, yet, a number of independent schools also conduct classes in Malay and English in addition to Chinese, enabling the students to sit for the PMR and SPM additionally. Of course, the students are just encouraged to take the examination, but not necessary at all. Chinese Independent Secondary Schools are monitored and standardised by the UCSCAM. However, unlike government schools, independent schools are autonomous. It takes six years to complete secondary education in Chinese independent schools, which are three years for junior middle levels and another three years for senior middle levels. Like the students in public secondary school, students in Chinese Independent Secondary School are streamed into several streams like Science Stream or Art/Commerce Stream in the senior middle levels. However, some school recently provided unique streams like Electrical Engineering stream, Food and Beverage Studies or Arts design stream. Students will sit a standardised test conducted by UCSCAM, which is known as the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) in Junior Middle 3 (equivalent to PMR) and Senior Middle 3 (equivalent to A-level).

Therefore, when comes to choosing a school which is the learning environment for their children, the parental decision or choice plays the main role. Except for the academic and curriculum of the school, some parents may also consider about the Co-curricular activities conducted in the school. Competitions and performances are regularly organized. An outstanding student is not only good in academic, but also need to be remarkable in the co-curricular activities, good social or communication skill and more.

1.3 Problem Statement

Formal education is normally obtained by sending a child to the school. As education is more and more important nowadays, parents are very concern in valuing a school that they would send their children there to learn properly. The issue of excellence and quality assurance in education should be of primary concern to any society, governments and parents alike.

The excellence and quality of the education in a school is always valued by identifying the achievements in academic and co-curricular activities of the school, the motivation of the student learning in the school, the educational level and professionalism of the teachers in the school, the management in education of the school and others more. Besides that, the government also revises the curriculum of the school frequently and provides tons of training courses for the teachers in order to improve to quality of teaching and learning processes in the school.

Actually, there is something that had been missed out. That is, there are many private schools in our country other than the public schools. The private schools and public education are almost entirely exclusive. Those who pursue education in these schools must pay for the services they enjoy. Public schools on the other hand are, at least, include and open to all, rich and poor. However, it seems that there are many Chinese parents are willing to send their children to the private school after receiving primary education in national-type primary school.

In this case, the parents' preference for sending their children to the private school should be of interest to the society, government and the parents. For the society, it would be more choices of a place to pass on and instruct knowledge and education to the new generation. For the government, this may become a competition among the schools. According to the view of an economist, monopoly will bring failure to the market for a long run period (Sowell, 2007). The public school may work hard to improve the level of instruction. A positive and virtuous competition will help the schools to improve themselves in order to compete with other schools. Therefore, it is positive for a country to have more than one kind of education. As for the parents, they will have more choices to take for consideration whether they want to send their children to private or public school.

In this research, the researcher will try to find out the criteria of Chinese parents in Sandakan in their school choice for their children. Through the concepts and perceptions of the Chinese parents, this research will also try to explain the preference of the Chinese parents towards the private secondary school as the choice for sending their children there. They will judge some of the factors or

redundancies about the school before making a choice for the children for better future in the society.

1.4 Research Purposes

Since the private schools need the parents to pay for the children's education, there are a portion of Chinese parents sending their children to the private secondary school instead of the public secondary school. Many people would want to know the reason of this phenomenon. The purpose of the research is to find out the concepts and perception of the Chinese parents in Sandakan towards the private secondary schools. Moreover, the researcher hopes to find out the main reason for the Chinese parents in Sandakan to send their children to the private school through this research. Besides that, this research can also help in checking out the criteria that would be judged by the parents towards a school to define it is valuable for sending their children to study in the school.

1.5 Research Objectives

By referring to the background of study and the problem statements that were stated earlier, the objectives of this research is,

- i. To identify the main criterion of Chinese parents in Sandakan for sending their children to a certain secondary school.
- ii. To identify the perception of the Chinese parents towards the private secondary school in Sandakan.
- iii. To identify the relation of the genders, the educational level and the gross household income of the Chinese parents between their choice perceptions towards the private school.

1.6 Research Questions

This research is going to discuss the several questions as shown below,

- i. Do Chinese parents choose to send their children to the private school because of better academic performance?
- ii. Do Chinese parents choose the private school for their children because of better staffed (in quality and quantity)?
- iii. Do Chinese parents choose the private school for their children because of better off in terms school environment, equipment and other facilities?
- iv. Do Chinese parents choose the private school for their children because of the curriculum in the school is higher?
- v. Do Chinese parents choose the private school for the children because of pursuing education in privately run school is more cost-effective?
- vi. Do Chinese parents based on the quality of the output from private school is higher to be their choice for their children?
- vii. Do genders of the Chinese parents who are major in making decision for the school choice affect their choice perception towards the private school?
- viii. Do educational levels of the Chinese parents affect their choice perceptions towards the private school?
- ix. Do gross household incomes of the Chinese parents affect their choice perceptions towards the private school?

1.7 Hypotheses

- H₀1: There is no significant difference on better academic performance in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.
- H₀2: There is no significant difference on better quality and quantity of staff in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.
- H₀3: There is no significant difference on better physical facilities in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.
- H₀4: There is no significant difference on higher curriculum standard in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.
- H₀5: There is no significant difference on better cost-effectiveness in private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.
- H₀6: There is no significant difference on higher quality of output from private school and the Chinese parents' choice perception.