

**PARENTAL CHOICE AND SATISFACTION IN  
PRIVATE SCHOOL IN KARAMBUNAI  
ELECTORAL ZONE, SABAH**

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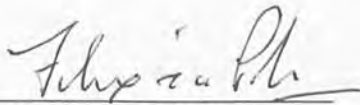
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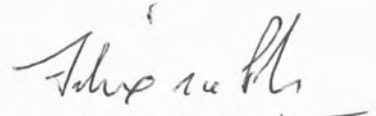
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## DECLARATION

The materials in this thesis are original except for quotations, excerpts, summaries and references, which have been duly acknowledged.

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## ABSTRACT

Nowadays, more and more educated parents are performing the role as a consumer of education services. Schools are forced to perform in ways that are in compliant with the market issues of supply and demand, while parents are encouraged to exercise their statutory right to voice a preference over which school they would like to send their child to. This papers aims to study the impact of the reasons of parental choice in the selection of private school towards the parental satisfaction among the parents who have enrolled their children in the private school within the Karambunai electoral zone. The findings showed that the academic, convenience, discipline and safety, and value and community factors are able to build up the satisfaction of the parents. In a closer view, the academic factor and the value and community factor play more significant roles in creating parental satisfaction. It is also reported that parents of the private schools found to be satisfied with the small class size, small teachers to students ratio, teaching style, English teaching and communication language and the multiracial mix of students in the schools. Meanwhile, the parents who have chosen the private schools are found to have high socioeconomic status with great percentage of the respondents are affluent and highly educated. Besides that, one's household income, occupation and the small number of children in a family are known to have the moderating effects on the relationship between the reasons of parental school choice and parental satisfaction. The identified factors shall be taken carefully in further improving the school and also creating the satisfaction among the parents who pay for their schooling children in the private schools.



## ABSTRAK

### **FAKTOR PEMILIHAN DAN KEPUASHATIAN IBU-BAPA DALAM PEMILIHAN SEKOLAH SWASTA DI SEKITAR ZON PILIHANRAYA KARAMBUNAI**

*Pada masa kini, semakin ramai ibu-bapa yang terdidik melaksanakan tugas mereka sebagai seorang pengguna dalam bidang servis pendidikan. Sekolah-sekolah terpaksa berfungsi dan mencapai prestasi yang sepadan dengan permintaan pasaran, manakala, para ibu-bapa juga dinasihati supaya menggunakan kuasa mereka untuk memilih sekolah yang diingini untuk anak-anak mereka. Kajian ini berobjektif untuk mengembarakan impak faktor pemilihan sekolah terhadap kepuashatian di kalangan ibu-bapa yang telah mendaftarkan anak-anak mereka di sekolah swasta di sekitar zon pilihanraya Karambunai. Berdasarkan keputusan kajian, didapati bahawa faktor akademik, faktor kemudahan, faktor disiplin dan keselamatan serta faktor nilai dan komuniti dapat meningkatkan tahap kepuashatian para ibu-bapa. Pemerhatian secara lebih mendalam menunjukkan faktor akademik dan faktor nilai dan komuniti memainkan peranan yang lebih penting dalam peningkatan kepuashatian ibu-bapa. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga mendapati ibu-bapa sekolah swasta adalah lebih berpuashati dengan saiz kelas yang kecil, nisbah guru kepada pelajar yang rendah, cara mengajar, bahasa Inggeris dijadikan media mengajar dan komunikasi di sekolah, serta masyarakat sekolah majmuk. Selain itu, para responden yang memilih sekolah swasta mempunyai tahap sosial dan ekonomik yang tinggi, di mana mereka adalah lebih kaya dan mempunyai tahap pendidikan yang tinggi. Kajian ini juga mendapati tahap pendapatan sekeluarga, perkerjaan dan jumlah anak dalam keluarga responden merupakan faktor penyelaras terhadap perhubungan antara faktor pemilihan sekolah dan tahap kepuashatian ibu-bapa. Faktor-faktor yang didapati daripada kajian ini harus diambil-beratkan dalam proses meningkatkan prestasi and kualiti sekolah, dan juga dalam usaha mencapai kepuashatian para ibu-bapa sekolah yang telah membeli servis pendidikan untuk anak-anaknya di sekolah-sekolah swasta.*

# CONTENT

	PAGE
<b>DECLARATION</b>	i
<b>APPROVAL</b>	ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	iii
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	iv
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	v
<b>CONTENT</b>	vi
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	ix
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	x
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.0 OVERVIEW	1
1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT	2
1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	3
1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	3
1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH	4
1.5 SCOPE OF STUDY	4
1.6 KEY VARIABLES	5
1.6.1 PRIVATE SCHOOL	5
1.6.2 PARENTAL CHOICE OF SCHOOL	5
1.6.3 PARENTAL SATISFACTION (CUSTOMER SATISFACTION)	5
1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THESIS	6
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
2.0 INTRODUCTION	8
2.1 CENTRAL QUESTIONS IN THE SCHOOL CHOICE DEBATE	8
2.2 THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND STUDENTS AS DECISION-MAKERS – EXIT OR VOICE	9
2.3 TYPES OF PARENTS CHOOSE NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLS	11
2.3.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	11
2.3.2 RELIGION	12
2.3.3 FAMILY STRUCTURE	13
2.4 REASONS FOR PARENTAL CHOICE OF SCHOOL	13
2.5 PRE-PURCHASE ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION AND POST-CONSUMPTION EVALUATION – SATISFACTION AND DISATISFACTION	16
2.6 SUMMARY	18



### **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK**

3.0	INTRODUCTION	19
3.1	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	19
3.3	DEFINITION OF VARIABLES	20
3.2.1	INDEPENDENT VARIABLES – PARENTAL REASONS FOR CHOICE OF SCHOOL	20
3.2.1.1	ACADEMIC FACTOR	21
3.2.1.2	CONVENIENCE FACTOR	21
3.2.1.3	DISCIPLINE AND SAFETY FACTOR	21
3.3.1.4	VALUE AND COMMUNITY	21
3.2.2	DEPENDENT VARIABLE – CUSTOMER SATISFACTION (PARENTAL SATISFACTION)	22
3.2.3	MODERATING FACTORS – RESPONDENTS’ DEMOGRAPHIC	22
3.2.3.1	RACE	22
3.2.3.1	HOUSEHOLD INCOME LEVEL	22
3.2.3.1	BACKGROUND OF EDUCATION	22
3.2.3.1	OCCUPATION	22
3.3.2.2	RELIGION	23
3.3.2.3	NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FAMILY	23
3.3	RESEARCH HYPOTHESES	23
3.4	RESEARCH DESIGN	24
3.4.1	LOCATION OF THE STUDY	24
3.4.2	SAMPLE SIZE	25
3.4.3	INSTRUMENT DESIGN	25
3.5	DATA COLLECTION METHOD	25
3.6	DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE	26
3.6.1	GOODNESS AND CORRECTION OF DATA	26
3.6.1	VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	26
3.6.3	DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS	27
3.6.4	ANALYSIS PLAN	27
3.6.4.1	MULTIPLE REGRESSION	27
3.6.4.2	HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION	27

### **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

4.0	INTRODUCTION	29
4.1	RESPONDENTS’ PROFILE	29
4.2	RELIABILITY ANALYSIS	31
4.3	STATISTIC OF VARIABLES OVERVIEW	32
4.4	HYPOTHESES TESTING AND EVALUATION OF FINDINGS	33
4.5	SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES TESTING	40

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.0	INTRODUCTION	42
5.1	THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF RESPONDENTS	42
5.2	SCHOOL ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE INCREASES PARENTAL SATISFACTION	43
5.3	CONVENIENCE FACTOR RAISES PARENTAL SATISFACTION	44
5.4	DISCIPLINE AND SAFETY FACTORS OF A SCHOOL AFFECT THE SELECTION OF PRIVATE SCHOOL	44
5.5	VALUE AND COMMUNITY FACTOR PLAYS IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE SELECTING PRIVATE SCHOOL	45
5.6	COMPARISON OF THE INFLUENCES OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	47
5.7	INCOME, OCCUPATION AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN A FAMILY MODERATES TO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL SCHOOL CHOICE AND PARENTAL SATISFACTION	48
5.8	IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY	50
5.9	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE STUDY	51
5.10	CONCLUSION	52
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>53</b>
	<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>58</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

	PAGE
FIGURE 2.1 Consumer Decision Making Process	17
FIGURE 3.1 Theoretical Framework	20

## LIST OF TABLES

	PAGE	
TABLE 3.1	Summary of Questionnaire	26
TABLE 4.1	Respondents' Profile	30
TABLE 4.2	Cronbach's Alpha Value of Variables	32
TABLE 4.3	Means and Standard Deviation of Variables	32
TABLE 4.4	Simple Linear Regression for Reasons of Parental School Choice and Parental Satisfaction	34
TABLE 4.5	Multiple Regression for Model 1 (The Reasons of Parental Choice and the Parental Satisfaction)	36
TABLE 4.6	Moderating Effect of Race on Independent and Dependent Variables	37
TABLE 4.7	Moderating Effect of Household Income on Independent and Dependent Variables	37
TABLE 4.8	Moderating Effect of Education Background on Independent and Dependent Variables	38
TABLE 4.9	Moderating Effect of Occupation on Independent and Dependent Variables	39
TABLE 4.10	Moderating Effect of Religion on Independent and Dependent Variables	39
TABLE 4.11	Moderating Effect of Number of Children in a in a Family on Independent and Dependent Variables	40
TABLE 4.12	Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results and Findings	40

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Overview

In Malaysia, there are 7616 public primary schools and 2047 public secondary schools in 2006 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2006); in great contrast, only 65 primary schools and 75 secondary schools are owned privately by individuals or organizations (Education Guide Malaysia 10th Edition, 2007). Whereby, only two private schools of each category are found in Kota Kinabalu, and two of them are located in Karambunai electoral zone (Department of Private Education Malaysia, 2006). This indicates the market for private schools has not been sufficiently explored, and can be considered as a lucrative area for promising commercial investment.

Malaysia's rapid economy growth has increased the per capita Gross National Income (GNI) from 1990's RM 9375 to RM 20841 of year 2006 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2008). This has directly improved the standard of living of the country population. Furthermore, the number of expatriates in the country has also increased dramatically in last few years due to the increase in foreign investments which grew from RM13.1billion (year 2004) to RM33.4 billion of year 2007 (MIDA, 2008) as well as the setting up of new offices of foreign companies in Malaysia. Therefore, the demand for more private education services in Malaysia for both locals with higher social economical status and the expatriates' children is set to increase rapidly in the coming years.

Nowadays, more and more educated parents are performing the role as a consumer of education services. Schools are forced to perform in ways that are in compliant with the market issues of supply and demand, while parents are encouraged to exercise their statutory right to voice a preference over which



school they would like to send their child to (Wilkins, 2007). Hence, the public often regards a private school as a more prestigious establishment than the local public schools (Mizala and Romaguera, 2004). They expect them to provide better quality education services (Hanushek *et al.*, 2007) and to have higher social status (Goldring and Hausman, 1999). This could be seen when parents in the Johor State sent their young children to schools in Singapore, commuting back and forth between the two countries everyday, imagining that their children could receive better education there than those provided at their home country.

The Malaysian government plans to build the country to be regional educational destination as well as centre of educational excellence (YB Dato' Sri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, 2005). They have already liberalized the establishments of higher education. Thus, it will only be a matter of time before private schools will also be playing their important roles in helping the country to achieve this important mission. The establishment of high quality private schools in the country will be able to attract foreign students from the neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Korea. This will be another avenue of bringing valuable foreign exchange into our country.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

The potential of establishing private schools in Malaysia is well highlighted earlier; however, there is insufficient information regarding the private school market in the country especially in Sabah state. This information is essential for the establishment of a successful private school which has high standard to deliver quality education and high satisfaction to the students and parents (Bosetti, 2004). Furthermore, Brasington (2003) highlighted the importance of knowing the actual demand in private education market as one of the success factors to increase student enrollments. Therefore, this statement indicates the needs of gathering useful private school market data in order to secure the investment of the venture.

In Malaysia, all students are assigned by the government into public schools, where parents are hardly involved in the selection of schools for their children's education. Therefore, the factors which drive parental school choices are rarely investigated by researchers. Hence, the lack of this information hampers the efforts of the private school education providers to deliver the actual needs of private school parents.

Furthermore, the parental reasons for school choice have been studied extensively in other countries but it is still very limited in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Consequently, there is a gap between the private school education providers and the parents. According to Expectancy Disconfirmation Model of Oliver (1980), ones' satisfaction failed to be achieved if the outcomes do not meet or exceed the expectation. As a result, without a truthful understanding, private school operators would fail to meet the expectations of the parents and students, and would eventually reduce their satisfaction level.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

There are three research questions that inspired the author to carry out this study in order to further understand the actual view of the parental choice and satisfaction in the selection of private school in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The research questions are as below:

1. What are the parents' reasons in the selection of private school choice?
2. What is the parent's satisfaction level towards private schools situated at the Karambunai Electoral Zone.?
3. Are parents' demographics affecting the relationship between the reasons of school choice and their decision making?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To identify the factors which influence the parents' decisions making in their selection of private school.

2. To develop the profile of the importance of reasons in parental choices for private school.
3. To identify the parents' demographic that significantly influences the private school selection.
4. To provide suggestions for the education providers to improve their education centers by delivering quality courses or programmes that suit the real demand of the students and parents.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

At the end of the study, the findings enriched the academic knowledge and understandings of the parental reasons of choices for private school in Karambunai electoral zone. Hence, the study explored the undiscovered private school industry in a local context and acted as the pioneer of its kind of research in the academic field of study. Consequently, the findings of the study could also be utilized as the foundation of building courses or programmes which provide higher quality and supplying the actual needs of the parents and students. The findings of the study provided numerous suggestions to improve the school in particular, and also improve the investment climate of the city private school market. Thus, foreign private education investors could utilize this finding as the foundation for understanding parental choices and satisfaction before venturing into the private school industry in Sabah. Lastly, in a wider sense, the contributions of the present paper could create an impact to the education industry in the State of Sabah and the whole of Malaysia.

#### **1.5 Scope of Study**

This quantitative study focused on the parents of the two private schools, namely Maktab Nasional and Sekolah Rendah Swasta (S.R.S.) Datuk Simon Fung both situated at the Karambunai Electoral Zone.



## **1.6 Key Variables**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms shall be defined and explained to avoid confusion and misunderstanding in the later part of the study. At the same time, this will provide the consistency for further discussion and debates regarding the issues in this study.

### **1.6.1 Private School**

In Malaysia, private education is education provided by private education institutions (private schools) for students. Private education institutions are not government institutions. They are fully financed by the private sector. The establishment, management and operation of private education institutions are subject to the Education Act 1996 and its Regulations (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2007). Hence, the school management retains the right to select their students and charge their students whole or part of tuition fees.

### **1.6.2 Parental Choice of School**

Parental choice is the decision-making process of parents who exercise their rights to choose from among the available school types with a controlled parental choice plan. Parents seek information to weigh alternatives, and then choose to enroll their child or children in the preferred school (Goldring and Hausman, 1999).

### **1.6.3 Parental Satisfaction (Customer Satisfaction)**

Anton (1996) defines customer satisfaction as customers' needs, wants and expectations throughout the services that have met or exceeded. In this study, author uses this customer satisfaction definition for the parents' satisfaction because parents are also customers who purchase education (a form of service) for their child or children.

## 1.7 Organization of Thesis

The first three chapters of this dissertation consist of (1) Chapter one – Introduction, (2) Chapter two – Literature review and (3) Chapter three – Research methodology and framework. The next two chapters are (4) Chapter Four – Data Analysis and Interpretation and (5) Chapter Five – Discussion and conclusion.

In the first chapter, the overview of the study as well as the delivers problem statement, research objectives and research questions are highlighted. Furthermore, the significances of the research are also explained to draw out the expected strengths and contributions to either the academic researchers as well as the industry operators upon the completion of the research. Hence, the key variables of the study are clarified and well explained for the benefits and ease of further discussion.

Meanwhile, literature review is the second chapter of this dissertation. It gathers the related established studies of researchers to the present study, and explains the possibility and appropriateness to carry this research. These secondary sources also build the foundation for the future of present study.

The third chapter in this dissertation is the methodology and framework of present study. The theoretical framework, research design, sampling design, instrument design and data analysis methods and plans are presented here. This chapter can be considered as the mainframe that supports the whole research, where, all established methods and procedures to carry out the thesis are highlighted in this chapter. It shall be carefully followed in later part of the study in order to obtain the most valid and reliable data.

The fourth chapter is the data analysis and interpretation of collected data. All collected data were analysed by using SPSS to generate the outputs which are able to answer the research objectives and address the research questions. The results of hypotheses testing are shown in this chapter, provided useful outputs for discussions.

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In the last chapter – discussion and conclusion, arguments are made and explained according to the statistical outputs that presented in the earlier chapter. The findings of present study are discussed and cross-referred with past literature. By the end of the chapter, the implications, limitation, suggestions for future study and conclusion are highlighted.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the key literature which is relevant or closely related to present research topic. It gives readers the fundamental understanding and most basic knowledge regarding the issues of the study. The literature review shows the central questions in the school choice debate, the roles of parents in making decisions for their children, the types of parents who choose private school, the parental reasons of making school choice and lastly the consumer decision making model that explains parents' pre-purchase evaluation and post-consumption evaluation.

#### 2.1 Central Questions in the School Choice Debate

The central idea of the school choice lobby is that this would take the focus of educational decision making from the government – its elected official, bureaucrats and associated pressure groups – and put it into the market place where it would be responsive to the preferences of families, parents and children (Dolton, 2003). It is argued by its proponents that the presence of market forces is a more efficient mode of allocating scarce resources, making educational providers more responsive to the needs of consumers. It is suggested that the market forces induce competition, innovation and accountability.

Opponents of the school choice movement (Smith and Meier, 1995) suggest that it will lead to the destruction of public schools and the increased segregation of schools by race, class and ability and induce greater inequality. Opponents to the market model suggest that empirical evidence relating to the successes of existing choice-based systems are questionable and that the



theories and assumptions that provide intellectual support for choice are abstract and have never been systematically tested. The new market "model" is often not spelt out in detail nor are the assumptions concerning individual and institutional behaviour that would be required to provide the anticipated efficiency gains, Witte (2000). One prominent critique of the public choice also suggests that it will erode the public forums in which decisions with societal consequences can democratically be resolved, (Henig, 1994)

To date, parental choice research has focused on two primary questions: (1) what are the characteristics of families who choose; and (2) why do parents choose? To a lesser extent, some researchers have attempted to ascertain the interactions between these two questions, as well as the implications of choosing on such outcomes as parent involvement and satisfaction (Goldring and Shapira 1993).

It should be noted that the research base examining these questions is relatively scant, especially if one reviews findings about similar types of choice plans (Goldring and Hausman, 1999). Due to this rather limited empirical research base, present literature review, as well as that of other scholars, reviews research that investigated very different types of choice arrangements: open enrolment plans, voucher plans, interdistrict choice plans, and magnet school plans.

Empirical evidence which answers these questions can be very negative (Gorard, 1997) suggesting that schools are basically very similar, families consider very few schools in reality, selection by mortgage/ house prices operates powerfully, formal sources of information like league tables are of little consequence and choices are often made long in advance by default. Alternative evidence suggests that the consequences of introducing school choice can lead to positive educational improvements in all schools.

## 2.2 The Role of Parents and Students as Decision-makers – Exit or Voice

When parents are dissatisfied with their local school, and unwilling to acquiesce, they have only two options: 'exit' – leaving the school and enrolling in another, or 'voice' – expressing their dissatisfaction to school staff or to their elected representatives (Hirschman, 1970). Some economists maintain that public educational bureaucracies are inefficient and unresponsive to the voices of their clients. They argue for increasing the 'exit' option by using mechanisms such as school vouchers or tuition tax credits that would increase private schooling, or through open enrolment policies within the public sector. They believe that by increasing choice schools will become more competitive, and that this competition will cause them to be more efficient and more responsive to the needs of parents.

But for many parents, the costs of 'exit' are high. Indeed, research has shown that in districts with open enrolment policies, proximity to the school is the most important consideration (Adler and Raab, 1988; McKenna and Willms, 1998), and that parents from less advantaged backgrounds are less likely to exercise choice (Willms and Echols, 1992). Moreover, increasing parent choice results in higher levels of segregation along social-class lines, which ultimately increases inequalities in schooling outcomes (Willms, 1996). This leaves the 'voice' option. The assumption underlying policies that would increase parents' input into school decision-making is that they will be able to achieve a better fit between the needs of their children and the school's policies, practices, and curriculum. This in turn will improve students' attitudes towards school and lead to better schooling outcomes. It may also give parents a sense of ownership of the school, help them to make connections with other parents, and make them more aware of school, district, and provincial policies (Goldring and Hausman, 1999).

If the voice option is to be successful, parents and students must feel that their school will improve through their actions and the actions of others. An analysis of the role of parents and students as decision-makers must address several questions. What specific aspects of school curriculum, policy and practice

will parents and students influence? Will they have only an advisory role, or will they be able to make decisions that will be acted upon? If the latter, what is the legal status of their decisions? Will parents who are making decisions be able to accommodate the interests of a wide constituency of parents and students? Will they make decisions that will maintain or possibly increase levels of equity among social-class groups and ethnic groups, and between the sexes, or will they make decisions that encourage segregative practices such as tracking or offering selective programmes? Will the interests of children with special needs be safeguarded? To what extent and on what issues will the interests of parents and students be at odds with the professional judgment of teachers and administrators? How quickly can schools respond to the concerns of parents, such that a better fit between school policies and practices and the needs of students is achieved? (McKenna and Willms, 1998).

## **2.3 Types of Parents Choose Non-public Schools**

Types of parents choose non-public schools such as private school for their children vary by three types of parental characteristics namely socio-economic status, religion and family structure (Yang and Kayaardi, 2004). In this section, how these factors influence parental choice of nonpublic schools is discussed and pertinent findings from prior studies are reviewed.

### **2.3.1 Socio-economic Status**

The existing literature has established socio-economic status as an important factor in determining parental choice of schools for their children. Parents' education and family income are two indicators often cited in the literature on school choice. Education represents an orientation towards education and a value placed on education (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987). That is, parents with higher educational attainment better understand the importance of education, what different kinds of schools offer and what they want their children to acquire, and therefore are in a better position to make an informed decision. Empirical findings consistently show a positive relationship between parents'



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