

The Factors Affecting Parent's Preference When Selecting Islamic Schools

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the factors influencing parental preferences in choosing Madrasah Salafiyah Ibtidaiyah (MSI) 14 Medono, focusing on parental characteristics, selection factors, and parental expectations. MSI 14 Medono was chosen due to its reputation as a religious school with a specialized program. This qualitative descriptive study involved parents, school principal, teachers, and students as respondents. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentation and analyzed using qualitative and quantitative descriptive approaches. Parental preferences in choosing MSI 14 Medono were accounted for by active learning processes, security, conducive school climate, adequate facilities, information technology, effective leadership, extracurricular options, academic achievements, parental involvement, location, costs, as well as the

provision of religious education services such as TPQ and Tahfidz. These findings implies that religious education and character formation are priorities for parents when selecting education for their children. This research also highlights the importance of information technology, effective school leadership, and teacher quality in influencing parental preferences.

Keywords: parental preferences; madrasah ibtidaiyah; Islamic education

INTRODUCTION

Education holds significant importance in molding an individual's character and future success, particularly concerning happiness in both present life and the hereafter. In Pekalongan City, there's a notable inclination among parents to enroll their elementary school-aged children in formal religious education. Recent data indicates that approximately 50% of elementary school children in the city attend formal religious education institutions (Bappeda, 2023). Pekalongan boasts a total of 103 elementary schools, comprising 71 public schools and 32 private schools, alongside 44 Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) establishments (DAPO, 2023; RI, 2023). When combining private elementary schools and MI, the city hosts a total of 75 formal religious education institutions. This demonstrates a balanced comparison between public and private elementary schools in Pekalongan City, deviating significantly from the national statistics, where public elementary schools make up 88.69% of the total 148,673 schools nationwide (Pusparisa, 2020).

In 2008, the Pekalongan city government policy established public elementary schools with an Islamic Religious Education model to create a

religious and moral foundation to attract parents' interest in sending their children to elementary school (Habibi, 2009). However, this policy did not change parental preferences, instead there was a merger of state elementary schools in 2013.

Furthermore, the emergence of the five-day school policy under Minister Muhadjir Eftendy in 2017, as well as the development of formal religion-based schools such as integrated Islamic schools, provided an alternative for working parents (Astuti, Sulisworo, & Purwani, 2018). In Pekalongan, these conditions have encouraged Islamic schools to also launch takhasus (excellent) classes or programs in order to meet parents' preferences such as Madrasah Salafiyah Ibtidaiyah (MSI) 14 Medono.

_ Preferences in education involve a multi-stage process of selecting, deciding, and making school choices, influenced by intrinsic factors like religious beliefs, personal experiences, and extrinsic factors such as socioeconomic status, school quality, and location (Khasanah, 2012; Khasbulloh, 2020; Perwita & Widuri, 2023). Studies have shown that parents' preferences for their children's schooling are shaped by various factors including the quality of education, costs, distance to school, facilities, and school reputation (Bokings, Srinadi, & Suciptawati, 2013; Rosha, Wati, & Surya Dharma, 2017; Khasbulloh, 2020; Warbung & Roswinanto, 2022; Perwita & Widuri, 2023).

This research aims to contribute to existing literature by investigating the factors influencing parental preferences in choosing Islamic schools in Indonesia. Utilizing rational choice theory, which posits

that individual behavior is driven by goals influenced by personal values and preferences, the study seeks to elucidate why parents opt for particular schools, aiming to maximize benefits for their children (Sa'adah, 2022; Rosidin, 2016). Through this exploration, a deeper understanding of parental decision-making processes in selecting educational institutions, particularly Islamic schools, is anticipated.

This research focuses on MSI 14 Medono as a formal religious education institution which has a significant role in developing students' character and spirituality. With an educational concept based on Islamic values, MSI 14 Medono is a relevant choice for understanding parental preferences in the local context. This research is important because it aims to explore and understand the characteristics of parents, the factors that influence preferences in choosing MSI 14 Medono, as well as their perceptions of educational services at this institution. This is important because it can provide information for Islamic schools to improve the quality of their education and attract the interest of more parents.

METHODS

This descriptive qualitative study collected data directly from natural settings to find and analyze parents' preferences in choosing MSI Medono 14. Respondents in this study were parents of MSI Medono 14 students. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, observation and documentation. Data indicators on parental characteristics included religion, gender, education level and income. Characteristic data indicators

of the MSI 14 Medono Institution included facilities, culture, uniqueness, achievements, location and content standards. Data indicators of opinions and expectations related to service attributes that are considered most suitable for MSI 14 Medono included content standards, processes, graduate competencies, educational staff, facilities and infrastructure, management, financing and educational assessment. The data analysis went through two stages of descriptive quantitative and qualitative data analyses. Descriptive quantitative analysis was made by calculating and displaying statistics about parents' preferences in choosing schools for their children, such as frequencies, percentages and averages. Qualitative analysis was carried out by reducing data, displaying data, drawing conclusions, and verifying data. The validity of the data in this research was tested through several aspects, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Thus, this approach is directed at a deep understanding of parental preferences in selecting MSI 14 Medono.

DISCUSSION

Parental Characteristics

The questionnaire distributed to parents of class 1 students yielded responses from 14 parents, revealing certain characteristics. Among the respondents, 13 were women and 2 were men. Regarding education level, 2 had elementary school education, 6 had high school education, and 7 held bachelor's degrees. Occupationally, respondents included homemakers, employees, traders, teachers, and civil servants. In terms of income, 3 earned

Rp. 0-400,000, 3 earned Rp. 1,200,000 - 2,000,000, 8 earned Rp. 2,000,000-4,000,000, and 2 earned Rp. 4,000,000-20,000,000. This data highlights significant income variation among respondents, offering insights into the economic factors influencing parental preferences for formal religious education, particularly in Pekalongan City.

Understanding the income range of respondents enables researchers to delve into how economic factors shape preferences for formal religious education. This includes considering factors such as education costs, accessibility to formal religious schools, and family spending priorities based on income levels. Furthermore, the analysis facilitates exploration of the correlation between income levels and preferences for formal religious education. It raises questions regarding whether parents with higher incomes gravitate towards more exclusive schools with higher educational standards, while those with lower incomes may prioritize religious or cultural values but face challenges in financing education. This underscores the need for inclusive and equitable education policies accommodating various income levels.

Parental Preferences for Choosing MSI 14 Medono

From the results of the questionnaire, an overview of parents' preferences in choosing MSI 14 Medono as an educational institution for their children is obtained as in Figure 5 below.

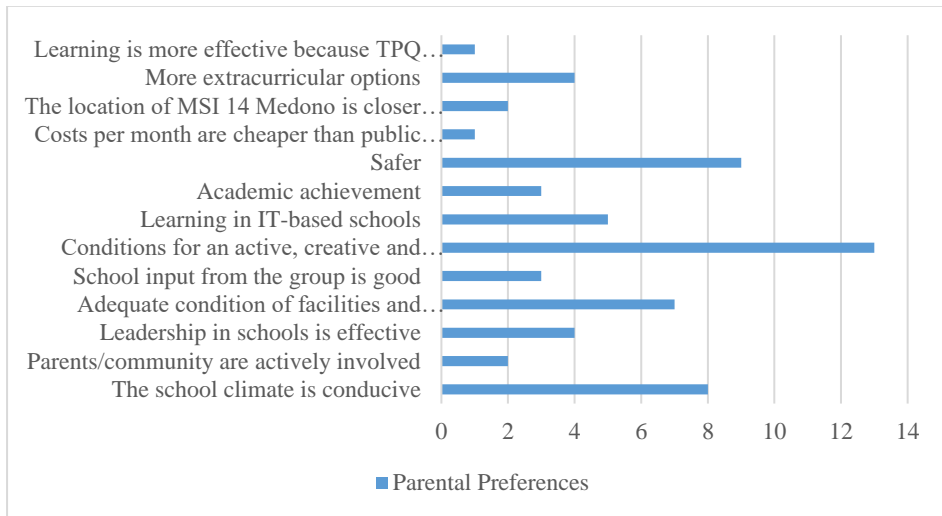


Figure 5. Parental Preferences

Figure 5 above reflects a number of factors that parents consider important in determining their preference for a school. These factors are ranked according to their level of importance, starting from: (1) an active, creative and enjoyable learning process, (2) safer, (3) a conducive school climate, (4) adequate conditions of facilities and infrastructure, (5) use of information technology in learning, (6) effective school leadership, (7) availability of extracurricular options, (8) academic achievement, (9) good school input, (10) parents/community are actively involved, (11) the location is closer, (12) cheaper, and (13) there are TPQ and Tahfidz education services.

In the context of the results of this research, it shows that the factors put forward by parents are more associated with parental satisfaction with their children's learning process at the madrasah. This is in line with the

results of interviews with school principals and teachers that MSI 14 Medono has high accreditation (A) as MSI Takhassus with special content, such as salaf fiqh, salaf morals, character formation, qiroáti, tahfidz, science/calistung, discussion, language intensive Javanese, developing language skills, and caring for children. The learning process uses the PAKEM system which reflects quality standards.

The findings of this study resonate with previous research conducted by Fahmi (2013) and Somayana Wayan (2020), indicating that an active, creative, and engaging learning environment holds paramount importance. Such an approach fosters children's motivation and enhances their participation in the learning process, ultimately promoting academic achievement and personal development (Pertiwi, Nurfatimah, & Hasna, 2022). Additionally, the significance of a conducive school climate, security measures, and the integration of information technology align with the observations made by Sholeh (2018), emphasizing the role of these factors in enhancing the effectiveness and modernity of educational institutions.

Moreover, the study underscores the multifaceted nature of parents' preferences in selecting schools, echoing the insights from Khasbulloh (2020) and Perwita & Widuri (2023). It suggests that parents consider a combination of academic performance, social aspects, and school infrastructure when making educational decisions for their children. Therefore, educational institutions should prioritize these factors in their development and marketing strategies to bolster parental trust and attractiveness towards the institution.

Parents' Perceptions and Expectations of Education Service Standards at MSI 14 Medono

Parents' perception of educational services at MSI 14 Medono is an important aspect in this research. Before understanding the findings that emerge from this perception through a questionnaire, a process of identifying variables, designing a questionnaire, distributing, collecting and analyzing data was carried out. The number of respondent data that was collected was only 14 respondents so that the analysis of the percentage of respondents, for example, if 7 respondents gave maintained responses and 7 respondents gave improved responses to the learning process, then the percentage of respondents would be 50% and 50%. The findings that emerge from parents' perceptions of educational services at MSI 14 Medono are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Parents' Perceptions and Expectations of Education Service Standards at MSI 14 Medono

No	Service Aspect	Expected School Service Conditions	
		Maintained	Improved
1	<i>Competence of graduates</i> Expected increase in graduate competency: "The formation of a mature character, especially in terms of religion. as well as children's independence in solving problems both in social relationships and in school lessons." "Understand and understand the basic principles of the Islamic religion well." "Have good character and knowledge." "Children become smarter and become hafidz hafidhoh". "Characteristics regarding civility and uploading need to be improved." "Forming better children's character so that children can respect each other and appreciate their fellow friends." "It socializes children more." "MI graduates must be able and excel in academic, religious, and sports or arts fields that are tailored to each student's interests and talents."	40%	60%
2	<i>Curriculum</i> Expected curriculum improvements:	53%	47%

"Maximizing the curriculum that is already running in schools, supported by infrastructure and information technology, is even more optimal." "Murajaah is carried out routinely every day." "The best thing for children is tailored to their age, talents and interests." "A curriculum that is thick with religious values." "IT-based curriculum and supported by Islamic religious education." "A curriculum that can make students active, creative and independent, able to express opinions and understand the questions given." "The curriculum must be more focused on the needs of children in the future." "In accordance with the curriculum used". "So that students can understand and have broader insight and gain more knowledge." "Curriculum that keeps up with the times, such as more advanced computer learning." "Which is related to morals/attitude".

3 *Learning process* 53% 47%

Expected improvements in the learning process:

"The learning process maximizes potential, independence, and prioritizes honesty in children." "Engaging students to learn dialogically". "Innovative creative learning, and a fun learning process accompanied by examples of behavior that is close to children's habits." "Learning is good enough, don't give too many assignments to children who are already tired." "It's fun so that children are enthusiastic about school, the learning process is more interactive, two-way discussions between students and teachers." "Development of student talents in learning". "Does not deny child psychology according to age/level and intelligence."

4 *Madrasah climate/atmosphere* 67% 33%

Expected improvement in school/madrasah climate/atmosphere:

"An attitude of mutual respect between fellow school members." "Comfortable, harmonious, disciplined and responsible". "Safe and friendly for students". "Cleanliness must always be maintained." "Class teachers are obliged to convey what children's character needs to be improved/what has not been achieved in the learning process. "Parenting discussions so that the learning process at school is better." "One that is harmonious, safe and comfortable." "Security and comfort are good and can be further improved." "So that teachers can be more thorough and more painstaking in providing instruction to their students and increase supervision of students in order to create a more comfortable atmosphere in school learning." "A healthy school, pays attention to adequate toilets and sanitation, and is child friendly."

5 *Parent/Community Participation in madrasahs* 60% 40%

	Expected participation and collaboration between schools/madrasahs and parents/community: "Optimized active participation of parents". "Improving communication between teachers and student guardians". "Parents, teachers and the community must work together and synergize." "In collecting any fees, there must be approval from all parents." "There are activities for student guardians such as parenting". "Parents play an active role in monitoring their children's academics and talents." "It is good to involve parents in school learning." "In certain events (farewell, TPQ/tahfidz graduation)".		
6	<i>Financing</i>	<i>Free (13%)</i>	<i>Paid (87%)</i>
	expected SPP (Education Development Contribution) rate: "The total monthly fee payment is still 425,000", "Rp. 300,000", "Rp. 350,000". "In accordance with school needs". "Don't raise it again." "Already appropriate". "Follow the school rules." As determined by the madrasa." "50,000 - 100,000". "In accordance with the Madrasa RAB, if necessary involve the student's parents."		
7	<i>Madrasah leadership</i>	<i>60%</i>	<i>40%</i>
	Expected leadership in schools/madrasahs: "Always set an example." "Harmony and healthy competition". "Leadership that protects and sets a good example for the school community." "Leadership is good and needs to be improved." "Frequently conduct evaluations of the performance of teachers and staff to create a comfortable work space." "Trustworthy (inspirational and aspirational)".		
8	<i>Infrastructure</i>	<i>27%</i>	<i>73%</i>
	Improvements in infrastructure in madrasahs are expected: "A more comfortable school. Both cleanliness and air circulation." "Means that support students to be more active in the learning process". "Infrastructure that suits the needs of the school". "Clean toilet facilities, conducive environment." "The cleanliness of the toilets has been further improved." "All the faucets for washing hands can function properly." "The health of the school environment is better for children." "Clean". "Toilet cleanliness is given more attention." "So as not to compete with other schools." "One child one chair table (children sit on their own chairs)". "Additional improvements to facilities in toilets, libraries and madrasa canteens."		

Based on the data in Table 1, parents express a strong emphasis on graduation standards, with 40% indicating a desire for maintenance and

60% advocating for improvement. This underscores their focus on instilling religious values, fostering independence, and promoting academic excellence, including Quran memorization. These findings align with previous research (Wahyudhiana, 2018; R, Arief, Alfaien, & Rashit, 2022), highlighting the positive impact of integrating religious and moral education on character formation, student motivation, and learning outcomes. Overall, the data emphasize the significance of character education and religious values in nurturing well-rounded individuals who contribute positively to society.

Second, parents indicate that 53% of the curriculum standards are maintained and 47% are targeted for improvement at MSI 14 Medono. This reflects a positive view of the existing curriculum, with aspirations to enhance it further, particularly through the integration of infrastructure and information technology. Emphasis on activities like daily murajaah demonstrates a commitment to a specialized learning approach, integrating religious teachings. These aspirations correlate with research (Qomariah, Murtiyasa, & Shidiq, 2023) showing the positive impact of IT and religious-based learning on student motivation and engagement. Additionally, desires for a forward-looking curriculum that caters to future needs and student interests align with studies (Aprima & Sari, 2022; Pitaloka & Arsanti, 2022), emphasizing the importance of tailored curricula in boosting student motivation and academic performance. Overall, these findings reflect parental expectations for an effective curriculum that fosters character

development, unlocks student potential, and adapts to evolving educational needs.

Third, parents indicate that 40% of the learning process standards are maintained, while 60% are targeted for improvement at MSI 14 Medono. They express a desire for a more active, creative, and enjoyable learning environment that focuses on students' potential, independence, and integrity. This aligns with research (Setiawan, 2015; Siregar, Wardani, & Hatika, 2017) suggesting that interactive and creative learning methods enhance student understanding, motivation, and engagement. Parents also emphasize the need to avoid excessive assignments to safeguard student well-being, advocating for age-appropriate tasks tailored to students' cognitive abilities and needs. Additionally, they stress the importance of incorporating principles from child development psychology into lesson design to enhance learning effectiveness and foster holistic student development. These findings resonate with research (Suyatno, 2015; Prieto, Agüero-Valverde, Zarrate-Cardenas, & Van Maarseveen, 2019), underscoring the significance of interactive, creative learning approaches tailored to students' psychological needs in shaping parental preferences and improving educational quality.

Fourth, parents indicate that 67% of their expectations regarding the school climate at MSI 14 Medono are maintained, with 33% targeted for improvement. They prioritize a positive, harmonious, safe, and comfortable school atmosphere where mutual respect among school members is fostered. Parents believe that such a conducive climate

contributes to student welfare and academic performance. Character education and anti-bullying initiatives are seen as essential for promoting respect and wellbeing among students and staff. These findings echo research research (Marini & Hamidah, 2014; Svoboda, Dvo ř á k, Zilcher, Šmíd, & Ku č erová, 2022; Pratama & Anggrainie, 2022) highlighting the influence of school climate on parental school choices and student welfare. Similarly, research (Simonová, 2017) underscores the growing importance placed by parents on their child's wellbeing over academic performance. Thus, parents prioritize a positive and safe school climate to support holistic student development, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts among teachers, parents, and school staff to create an optimal learning environment.

Fifth, parents express that 60% of their expectations regarding parental participation and collaboration with MSI 14 Medono are maintained, with 40% aimed at improvement. They emphasize the importance of maintaining and enhancing the existing good level of participation and collaboration between schools, parents, and the community. Research (Mansir, 2020) suggests that increased parental involvement positively impacts academic achievement and student morale, particularly in monitoring technology use at home. Enhancing parental participation through various activities like parenting sessions and school events fosters stronger ties between schools and families, ultimately improving education quality. These findings align with research (Svoboda et al., 2022) emphasizing the positive impact of inclusive and partnership-

based approaches on parental involvement in student development and achievement.

Sixth, regarding the financing aspect, 87% of parents indicate that they pay the SPP fees, while 13% enjoy free schooling. Most parents find the current SPP rates acceptable, although some express a desire for lower fees. Research (Longfield & Tooley, 2017; Nadzifah et al., 2023) underscores the importance of affordable education costs in school selection, as fixed or reasonable tuition rates enhance educational accessibility. However, parents also stress the need for cost transparency and involvement in financial decision-making processes. Stable tuition rates, flexibility in adjusting costs, and parental participation can create a transparent financial environment, fostering inclusive access to education. Additionally, income analysis reveals a correlation between income level and preference for formal religious education. Parents with higher incomes tend to opt for paid options, favoring exclusive schools with higher standards. Conversely, those with lower incomes prefer free schooling, advocating for cheaper and more inclusive educational policies.

Seventh, regarding leadership in madrasah, 60% of parents express a desire for maintenance, while 40% advocate for improvement. Parents expect school leaders to serve as role models, nurturing, trustworthy, and inspiring figures who can motivate and influence school members positively. They emphasize the importance of leadership in fostering harmony, healthy competition, and staff performance evaluation, which contributes to a conducive school environment. Proactive leadership in performance

evaluation is seen as crucial for creating an effective work culture and supporting staff professional development. These leadership qualities align with research highlighting the significance of harmony, trustworthiness, inspiration, and effective performance evaluation in educational leadership (Muchtar et al. 2013; Azhar, 2016; Riyatuljannah, 2020)

Eighth, regarding madrasa facilities and infrastructure, 27% of parents advocate for maintenance, while 73% call for improvement. Parents prioritize a comfortable and clean environment in madrasas, believing that it positively influences student welfare and academic performance. They emphasize the importance of infrastructure that supports student learning activities, as it enhances learning effectiveness. This aligns with research emphasizing the significance of providing facilities that meet parental preferences and needs, particularly for early grade (Stampfer et al., 2023). Parents perceive the quality of infrastructure as a crucial factor in school selection, reflecting their expectations for a conducive and enjoyable learning environment. Thus, meeting these expectations can enhance students' learning experiences and fulfill parents' desires for quality education provision.

This research provides in-depth insight into the factors that influence parents' decisions in choosing an Islamic school. Apart from that, this research also strengthens rational choice theory which states that parents will choose schools that provide maximum benefits for their children. This theory explains that individual behavior is influenced by the values or preferences they have (Rosidin, 2016); (Sa'adah, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research focus of this research, first, the characteristics of the parents who responded to the questionnaire were mostly working women with high school education level and income level of IDR 2,000,000-4,000,000. Second, parents' preferences in choosing MSI 14 Medono are influenced by various factors, including active learning process, security, a conducive school climate, to adequate facilities and infrastructure. Use of information technology, effective school leadership, and extracurricular choices and academic performance also influence parental preferences. Third, parents expect MSI 14 Medono graduates to have mature character, noble character, and be able to overcome challenges. Islamic religious education and the formation of good character are the main focus of parents. Parents want a curriculum that maximizes religious values, is IT-based, and suits students' interests and talents. The emphasis on improving the learning process includes improving teacher quality, utilizing information technology, and increasing student involvement in extracurricular activities. Strengthening the role of madrasa heads, developing teachers and staff, and improving school facilities are also goals of improving the school climate. Facilities and infrastructure, especially cleanliness, facilities and a conducive environment, need to be improved in line with parents' expectations to create an optimal learning environment for their children. The implications of these findings support the development of educational quality at MSI 14 Medono.

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