



Marketing in School: Identifying Characteristics and Indicators in School Selection

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Abstract

In recent years, the intensification of competition among schools—particularly in the non-governmental (private) sector—has significantly heightened the importance of educational marketing and the determinants influencing school selection by families. This growing emphasis underscores the strategic role of marketing practices within educational institutions. The present study aims to identify key indicators and attributes influencing school choice from the perspective of academic literature. This qualitative research employed a summative content analysis approach. The study population comprised ten peer-reviewed domestic and international scholarly articles published in the domains of educational marketing, school choice, and educational management, which were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through a systematic literature review and analyzed via qualitative content analysis involving coding, categorization, and abstraction. The findings revealed nine core components as the principal criteria considered by students and their parents in school selection: quality of education, infrastructure and facilities, temporal and spatial proximity to the school, financial costs, academic reputation, curriculum modernity, institutional credibility, developmental services, and positive feedback

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Introduction

In recent decades, the education system has undergone fundamental transformations. With the growth of social interactions, education has developed a deeper connection with both society and families. Education today is emphasized not only for its instructional role but also for its broader functions such as social supervision, innovation and transformation within society, promoting mental health and well-being, and educating responsible, law-abiding, participative, and self-confident citizens. It thus plays a significant role in improving the quality of life. Schools are no longer solely institutions for formal instruction, but have come to be recognized as social, cultural, and psychological institutions that play a vital role in the development of human and social capital (Bozorginejad et al., 2020).

In this regard, school selection has become one of the most important decisions made by parents and students, marking the starting point of students' educational and developmental journey. Choosing an appropriate school plays a key role not only in academic success but also in the formation of students' personality, attitudes, and social skills (Farhadi-Rad, Elhampour & Doosti, 2019).

Alongside the increasing diversity of schools in terms of type, mission, services, and educational quality, and the growing awareness of parents regarding educational rights and learning quality, school choice has entered a competitive phase (Dâmaso & De Lima, 2019). In such a setting, schools must demonstrate competitive performance not only in educational areas but also in marketing, branding, complementary services, communication with parents, and cultural activities (Aidi, Bazdar & Vahidzadeh, 2024). This is especially true in non-governmental (private) schools, whose financial resources are primarily funded through tuition fees. Therefore, efforts to attract and retain students by accurately identifying family preferences and planning targeted educational marketing strategies are vital (Mosleh & Rezaei Fard, 2023).

Educational organizations—especially schools—are competing with one another to attract applicants, similar to other market sectors. With the increasing intensity of competition in this field, marketing has gained growing significance. One of the key challenges schools face is the declining number of students (Aidi, Bazdar & Vahidzadeh, 2024). Thus, teachers, educational centers,

universities, and other educational service providers continuously strive to introduce their brand to prospective audiences, attract more students to their programs, and gain a competitive edge by increasing enrollment rates. Various schools—particularly in the private sector—are compelled to engage in increasing competition for student recruitment, making the concept of “educational marketing” one of the key components of school management (Dinary & Andishmand, 2020; Mosleh & Rezaei Fard, 2023).

Educational institutions are actively seeking to attract more students, enhance service quality, ensure operational transparency, and utilize their capabilities and strengths (Bozorginejad et al., 2020). For educational service providers, including public and private schools, understanding the characteristics that influence the decisions of current and prospective students and their families is both valuable and essential. They are aware that students choose schools that align with their cultural, academic, social, and financial criteria. Furthermore, parents may select private schools due to specific features such as higher educational quality, religious programs, or a particular language of instruction (Marinede Talance, 2020).

Despite the increasing importance of educational marketing and school choice in the competitive education landscape, a review of domestic and international literature indicates that most studies have focused on the marketing strategies of schools. However, there is still a limited number of studies that specifically and purposefully examine the characteristics and indicators influencing school choice from the perspective of families and students. This gap not only complicates the decision-making process for parents but also leads to confusion among schools in designing effective strategies, sometimes resulting in wasted resources on initiatives that are misaligned with the real needs of the target community.

Therefore, there is a growing need for research that, with a scientific and realistic approach, identifies the exact features and indicators influencing school choice from the perspective of students and their families. The present study has been designed with this goal in mind, aiming to provide a comprehensive picture of the factors that affect school selection decisions and to outline an optimal path for school administrators and educational

policymakers to improve service quality and increase stakeholder satisfaction, thereby supporting the retention and attraction of students.

Research Background

Aidi, Bazdar, and Vahidzadeh (2024), in a qualitative study titled "Investigating the Effective Educational Marketing Strategies in Attracting Students in Private Schools," employed thematic analysis and conducted 12 in-depth interviews with school administrators and educational experts. They identified five main themes as key factors in successful school marketing: physical layout of the school, preferred promotional activities, human resources, effective interaction and communication, and core missions and objectives.

Mosleh and Rezaei Fard (2023), in their article "Factors Affecting Educational Marketing in Non-Profit Schools in Tehran," used a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) to identify and prioritize the components influencing school marketing. Their findings indicated five primary internal factors affecting effective marketing: financial resources, educational processes, internal educational policies, the status and role of teachers, and the school's physical resources and facilities.

Greaves, Wilson, and Nairn (2023), through a systematic literature review entitled "Marketing and School Choice: A Systematic Literature Review," examined 81 international articles in the field of primary and secondary school marketing. Their study revealed that despite increasing competitive pressures in education systems, school marketing research has largely remained within the educational domain and has not been seriously examined by marketing specialists or other social science fields.

Dâmaso and De Lima (2019), in their article "Marketing the School? How Local Context Shapes School Marketing Practices," explored the impact of local structures and environmental competition on the implementation of marketing in schools. Their findings show that although the educational market is competitive, schools often conduct marketing informally, intuitively, and without structured planning due to restrictive government policies. Factors such as government policies, structural competition level (number of schools, vacant capacity), and behavioral

competition (managers' perception of competition with other schools) were introduced as key variables influencing school marketing behavior. The researchers argue that managers' understanding of the environmental conditions and tailoring marketing strategies according to the local context play a crucial role in schools' success in student recruitment.

Fahey (2019) reviewed the opinions of 1,010 parents of students, achieving priorities including 29% of facilities and equipment, 24% extracurricular activities, 18% staff support, 15% teacher salaries, and 14% hiring teachers.

Zakeri (2016) showed that schools that do not pay attention to the needs of students have higher student displacement rates, and fewer parents choose these schools for their child's education.

Shokri (2015) showed that high efficiency and efficiency, low costs, proximity to public schools and importance of educational dimension in schools are factors that determine which school's students tend to choose.

Ming (2010) considers the school's location, curriculum, school reputation, educational facilities, cost, access to scholarships, job opportunities and advertising as the most important factors influencing school choice.

Research Method

The present study is a qualitative research employing a content analysis method with a summarizing approach. This method is one of the common techniques used for analyzing textual and documentary data, aimed at extracting key concepts, categorizing themes, and developing a conceptual framework. Content analysis enables the researcher to systematically examine textual sources to identify patterns, concepts, and latent indicators within the data.

The study population consists of a collection of scholarly written sources (articles and books) in the fields of educational marketing, school choice, and educational management. More specifically, 10 domestic and international research articles constitute the textual corpus of this study. These sources were selected from reputable academic databases. Sampling was purposive and criterion-based, meaning only sources that directly addressed the topics of school

choice or educational marketing and held scientific credibility were included in the analysis.

During the data analysis phase, the texts were initially studied thoroughly, and key concepts related to school choice were extracted. Then, using qualitative

content analysis, the data were coded, and similar codes were grouped into preliminary conceptual categories. In the subsequent step, by aggregating synonymous concepts, intermediate themes and main components related to school choice criteria were identified.



Table 1) Codes extracted from sources.

Effective Factors on School Selection	Title	Years	Researcher
Friends, teachers, training methods and programs, hours of attendance for students at school, costs	An investigation of factors affecting high school student's choice of university in Thailand	2013	Kitaswad
Availability of suitable facilities	Deconstructing School Choice: Problem Schools or Problem Students?	2011	Rabovsky
School location, curriculum, school reputation, educational facilities, fees, scholarship access, job opportunities, advertising	Institutional Factors Influencing Students' College Choice Decision in Malaysia: A Conceptual Framework	2010	Ming
Pay attention to the needs of students	The effectiveness and relative importance of choice in the classroom	2010	Patall, Cooper & Wynn
High efficiency and efficiency, low costs, proximity to schools	An investigation into Tehranian families' viewpoint to choose public/nonprofit schools	2015	shokri
Use of new technologies, presence of empowered teachers, educational facilities, reinforcing control and evaluation	Identifying the features of high schools and the flexibility of high schools in Tehran	2012	Imani & Mohammadi
Teacher characteristics, facilities and equipment, school principal, student characteristics, educational goals and teaching content, resources, and teaching methods	Assessing the quality of schools and identifying its factors, mixed research	2017	Pahang, Mahdiun & Yarigholi
Geographical location of the school, Courtyard facilities, Standard sports facilities, independent library, gym, use of new technologies, having adequate sports equipment, teaching experience of teachers, classes, etc. Smart, having educational and educational counselor, health and sports coach, educational camps, scientific visits, the proportion of students and teachers, national and world ranks, festivals, average final exam scores, one-to-three-digit points of the entrance exam.	Identifying the Ranking Criteria and Indexes of Non-Governmental Schools from the Perspective of Strategic Factors	2020	Bozorginezhad et al
Continuous evaluation, the use of information technology, the results of the end of the course and entrance exam, the use of cultural and educational goods and services, the quality of teachers' teaching, motivational affairs, physical and educational facilities, the existence of welfare facilities, the continuous communication of teachers with the parents	Investigating the Views of Female High School Students about Socio-Educational Criteria of Choosing a Non-Governmental School	2019	Bozorginezhad and Zarei
Having an educational space with appropriate facilities, having a rich and active library, academic reputation, educational quality, registration fee, friends' suggestion, acquaintance experience, number of students in each class, use of experienced instructors, educational counseling services, high number of accepted entrance examiners	Modernization in School Selection Mechanisms: A Study of School Selection Criteria by High School Students	2018	Farhadi Rad, Elhampour and Doosti

Table 2) Components affecting school selection.

Primary codes	Basic Parameters	Main Component
Training Method and Program	Quality of education	School Selection Indicators and Criteria
Teacher Teaching Experience		
Training level		
Teacher Empowerment		
Educational Objectives and Content of Teaching		
Teaching Quality		
Teaching Resources and Methods	Facilities and equipment	
Suitable training facilities		
Schoolyard Facilities		
Facilities and equipment		
Rich and independent library		
Gym		
Sufficient sports equipment	Distance and distance from the school.	
Amenities		
Geographical location of the school		
Time to get to school.		
Close to schools	Costs	
Registration fee		
Low cost of training.	Scientific reputation	
High efficiency and efficiency		
Top Statistics of Admitted Kankoor		
Average final exam scores		
Top 3 Ranking in kankoor		
National and Global Rankings		
Winning in Festivals	Being up to date	
Smart Classes		
Use of new technologies		
Use of Information Technology	reputation	
Friends Suggestion		
Acquaintance Experience		
Advertising	Foster care	
Motivational Affairs		
Educational Camps		
Scientific Visits		
Academic Counselling Services	Appropriate feedback	
Constant communication between teachers and parents.		
Continuous evaluation		

Conclusion

Marketing in schools, especially in private (non-profit) schools, plays a crucial role as a key component of educational management in attracting and retaining students. Given the social, cultural, and economic transformations within societies, schools today are no longer merely formal education centers but have evolved into educational brands competing in a competitive market to gain greater market share and reputation. This development has led school administrators and

educational policymakers to place increasing emphasis on school marketing and branding.

The findings of this study revealed that parents and students, when choosing a school, consider not only the quality of education but also a range of factors including educational facilities and equipment, geographic and temporal accessibility, tuition costs, academic reputation, up-to-date technology and teaching methods, school credibility and prestige, extracurricular and

cultural services, as well as the quality of feedback and communication with families. Each of these components plays a pivotal role in attracting and retaining students, and neglecting any of them may negatively affect school choice and, consequently, the school's performance and sustainability.

Educational marketing in schools, particularly private ones, is recognized as a strategic approach that goes beyond merely attracting new students. It also aims to maintain and enhance the satisfaction of current students and families and to build a positive image within the community. Successful marketing schools are those that deeply understand the needs and preferences of their target communities and design and implement tailored, systematic marketing programs. From the perspective of educational marketing, these findings indicate that schools must respond to both the explicit and implicit needs of families to attract and retain students by differentiating themselves through factors such as qualified teachers, modern technologies, excellent academic outcomes, and effective communication with parents. Additionally, softer factors such as the school's reputation, positive experiences of previous families, and counseling services play a key role in parental decision-making and should be incorporated into schools' communication and promotional strategies.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates that schools cannot rely solely on educational quality to succeed; sustainable success is achieved when a school transforms into a learning, responsive, and dynamic institution, using marketing as a tool for accurate understanding of the target community, managing mental image, and increasing stakeholder satisfaction. In other words, marketing in schools becomes meaningful when it is based on a scientific understanding of the selection criteria of parents and students rather than superficial advertising or intuitive practices. Educational marketing thus transcends a simple promotional activity; it is a strategic and managerial process encompassing all parts of the school and plays a fundamental role in the sustainability and development of schools. Therefore, training school managers and staff in marketing, developing coherent and scientific educational

marketing plans, and continuously monitoring their outcomes are indispensable necessities in today's educational systems.

The findings of this study can assist school administrators, educational policymakers, and practitioners in the education sector to develop more targeted programs for improving service quality and enhancing their competitive advantage in the education market by utilizing a detailed analysis of the key factors influencing school choice.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the process of student attraction and retention in schools:

1. **Designing a Targeted Educational Marketing System:** Schools can identify the needs and priorities of parents and students through market research and develop effective, audience-centered marketing strategies accordingly.
2. **Investing in the Improvement of Teacher Quality and the Teaching-Learning Process:** Recruiting and continuously training qualified and up-to-date teachers is one of the most influential factors in school selection, ensuring long-term satisfaction of families.
3. **Developing Complementary and Extracurricular Services:** Providing services such as academic and psychological counseling, skill-building classes, cultural, artistic, and sports activities serves as a significant competitive advantage in parental decision-making.
4. **Transparency in Performance and Educational Outcomes:** Publishing periodic reports on academic progress, success in important exams, and students' research and cultural achievements can significantly strengthen a positive mental image of the school.
5. **Focusing on Parent Experience and Word-of-Mouth Marketing:** Utilizing the experiences of satisfied parents in the form of videos, orientation sessions, school visits, and social media can increase the trust of prospective families.

6. Increasing Flexibility in Tuition and Financial Support: Offering incentives such as discounts, installment payment options, or scholarships for talented but underprivileged students contributes to building a socially responsible image of the school.

7. Optimizing Location or Providing Safe Transportation: In areas where geographic distance is a concern, providing reliable and regular transportation services can alleviate parental worries and make schools accessible to a broader range of families.

Resources

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