

Determinants of School Choice: Parental Perception in Chennai with Reference to Orchids School

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Abstract: This study examines the factors influencing parents' perceptions of school choice in Chennai, with particular reference to Orchids International School at Thoraipakkam. With the rapid growth of private and international schools. Nowadays, parents are facing multiple choices in the school selection process for their children. The study shows the key determination of the analysis for parents while selecting the schools for their children. Primary data was collected from 110 respondents using the structured questionnaire. The research method I used for this study is a descriptive research design, which uses percentage analysis, tabular, and graphical methods for data interpretation. The findings tell us that academic excellence, safety measures, infrastructure, and holistic development are the main factors in school selection. The study suggests that schools should focus on both academic and non-academic aspects to enhance their overall satisfaction.

Keywords: Parental Perception, School Selection, Academic Quality, Infrastructure, Safety and Security, Extracurricular Activities, School Reputation, Marketing Communication, Holistic Development, Chennai.

INTRODUCTION

Chennai is growing quickly in the education sector. Many new private and international schools are opening. Because of this, parents find it difficult to choose the right school for their children. Education plays an important role in shaping a child's future. Most of the parents focus on their child's academic, holistic, social development, and teaching methods. Some parents also check the school activities such as sports, safety, and reputation. Their influence by social media, advertisements, and opinions from friends and relatives for their final decision. This study aims to understand the main factors that influence parents' opinions when selecting schools in Chennai.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study's theoretical foundation is made up of concepts from consumer behaviour, decision making, and marketing theories. Consumer behaviour theory describes how people make decisions based on their preferences, needs, and external factors. Parents act as consumers in school selection, evaluating various options before making a final choice. The theory of rational choice suggests that parents compare the benefits and costs associated with different schools, taking into account factors such as academic quality, infrastructure, safety, and fee structure. Decisions can be influenced by emotional and social factors, even though they are not always purely rational. The marketing mix theory specifies products price, place, and promotion are useful for schools to understand how they can position themselves in the competitive education market. Schools

offer education services, set free prices, make sure accessibility, and use promotional strategies. Understanding the factors that influence parents perception of school selection can be achieved through these perspectives.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Previous research has explored various factors that affect parent's perception when selecting schools. Ullah, Mukherjee, and middendorf 2025 discovered that social networks and word of mouth have a major impact on selecting schools. Priya 2018 stressed that parents preference for private schools is primarily influenced by academic quality. Hossain, Shohel, and jahan 2022 asserted that decision-making is influenced by socioeconomic factors such as income, education, and family background. Anburaj and ravivarman 2022 concluded that school choice is affected by the occupation and education level of parents. In 2020, Jayasubramanian and Manivel identified that academic reputation and infrastructure were the main factors, while Lohan. In 2020, it is crucial to focus on quality and reputation is greater than the fee structure and location. Ved and Pramod Kumar 2021 made a point to highlight the significance of extracurricular activities and holistic development. The studies show that academic excellence, infrastructure, safety, and reputation are factors when deciding.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the factors influencing parents' perception in choosing

schools in Chennai, with special reference to Orchids the International School, Thoraipakkam. The descriptive approach helps in understanding the characteristics, preferences, and opinions of parents regarding school selection and the factors affecting their decisions. The study used a structured questionnaire to collect primary data from parents. Secondary data was procured from research articles, journals, and relevant online sources to support the research. The research was conducted among parents residing in different areas of Chennai. A total of 110

respondents were selected for the study. convenience sampling technique was used to collect responses through an online questionnaire. The study was carried out over a period of three months. Percentage analysis, tabular presentation, and graphical representation were used as statistical tools to analyse and interpret the collected data. This methodology helps in identifying the key factors influencing parents’ perception and provides meaningful insights for improving school services and decision-making.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION
Table 1: Demographic Profile of the respondents

Demographic profile	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Class of Child	Nursery	12	10.9
	Kindergarten 1	10	9.1
	Kindergarten 2	9	8.2
	Grade 1 – Grade 3	19	17.3
	Grade 4 – Grade 6	21	19.1
	Grade 7 – Grade 9	24	21.8
	Grade 10	15	13.6
Parent Educational Qualification	School Level	16	14.5
	Diploma	20	18.2
	Undergraduate	35	31.8
	Postgraduate	25	22.7
	Doctorate / PhD	14	12.7
Parent Occupation	Salaried	34	30.9
	Business	31	28.2
	Professional	28	25.5
	Homemaker	17	15.5
Years associated with Orchid School	Less than 1 year	24	21.8
	1–3 years	39	35.5
	3–5 years	31	28.2
	More than 5 years	17	15.5

Source: Primary data

Interpretation:

From the above table it is interpreted that largest proportion of respondents have children in Grade 7–9 (21.8%), followed by Grade 4–6 (19.1%) and Grade 1–3 (17.3%). This indicates that most respondents are parents of middle and upper primary students. Fewer respondents belong to early education levels such as Nursery (10.9%), Kindergarten 1 (9.1%), and Kindergarten 2 (8.2%). Grade 10 accounts for 13.6%.

This suggests stronger representation from parents of older students, possibly due to increased academic involvement at higher grades. A significant portion of parents are well-educated, with 31.8% holding undergraduate degrees and 22.7% postgraduate degrees. Additionally, 12.7% possess a PhD, indicating a highly educated respondent group. Only 14.5% have education up to school level, and 18.2% hold diplomas. This implies that the majority of respondents are academically qualified, which may influence informed opinions about education and school quality. Most respondents are salaried employees (30.9%) and business owners (28.2%), followed by professionals (25.5%). Homemakers constitute 15.5% of the sample. This shows a good mix of working professionals and entrepreneurs, suggesting varied socioeconomic backgrounds, though with a dominance of income-earning groups. The largest group of respondents (35.5%) have been associated with the school for 1–3 years, followed by 3–5 years (28.2%). About 21.8% are relatively new (less than 1 year), while only 15.5% have been associated for more than 5 years. This indicates that most respondents have moderate experience with the school, providing balanced perspectives, while long-term association is comparatively lower.

TABLE 2: LOCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY PROFILE

Location and accessibility profile	Category	No. Of respondents	Percentage (%)
Distance from School	Very Important	57	51.8
	Important	37	33.6
	Neutral	13	11.8

School Transport Availability	Not Important	3	2.7
	Very Important	29	26.4
	Important	60	54.5
	Neutral	21	19.1
	Not Important	2	1.8
Traffic Safety	Highly Not Important	1	0.9
	Very Important	41	37.3
	Important	51	46.4
	Neutral	17	15.5
Travel Time	Not Important	2	1.8
	Very Important	41	37.3%
	Important	48	43.6%
	Neutral	21	19.1%
Convenience for Parents	Not Important	1	0.9%
	Very Important	39	35.5%
	Important	55	50.0%
	Neutral	15	13.6%
	Not Important	2	1.8%

Source: Primary data

Interpretation:

It is interpreted that the location and accessibility profile reveals that parents place significant importance on factors that ensure convenience and safety in their child’s schooling. A majority of respondents (51.8%) consider the distance from school to be very important, while 33.6% rate it as important, indicating a strong preference for proximity. School transport availability is also highly valued, with 54.5% marking it as important and 26.4% as very important. Traffic safety is another major concern, with 46.4% of respondents considering it important and 37.3% as very important, reflecting heightened awareness of road safety. Similarly, travel time is regarded as a key factor, with 43.6% rating it as important and 37.3% as very important, showing that parents prefer shorter commutes. Convenience for parents is also emphasized, with 50.0% identifying it as important and 35.5% as very important. Overall, the combined percentages across all factors indicate that more than 80–90% of respondents perceive location and accessibility aspects as either important or very important, highlighting their critical role in decision-making.

TABLE 3: SAFETY AND SECURITY PROFILE

Safety and Security	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
CCTV Monitoring	Very Important	68	61.8
	Important	33	30.0
	Neutral	9	8.2
Security Guards	Very Important	37	33.6
	Important	58	52.7
	Neutral	16	14.5
Visitors Management System	Very Important	33	30.0
	Important	57	51.8
	Neutral	20	18.2
Child Protection Policies	Very Important	41	37.3
	Important	55	50.0
	Neutral	15	13.67
Safe Transport Facilities	Very Important	43	39.1
	Important	49	44.5
	Neutral	18	16.4
Emergency Preparedness	Very Important	44	40.0
	Important	55	50.0
	Neutral	11	10.0

Source: Primary data

Interpretation:

The safety and security profile clearly indicates that parents place extremely high importance on measures that ensure their child’s well-being within the school environment. CCTV monitoring emerges as the most critical factor, with 61.8% of respondents rating it as very important and 30.0% as important, showing a strong preference for continuous surveillance. Similarly, the presence of security guards is highly valued, with 52.7% considering it important and 33.6% as very important, emphasizing the need for physical security on campus. The visitors management system is also regarded as essential, with 51.8% marking it as important and 30.0% as very important, indicating concern over controlled access to school premises. In

terms of policy measures, child protection policies are prioritized by parents, with 50.0% rating them as important and 37.3% as very important, reflecting awareness of safeguarding practices. Safe transport facilities are another key concern, with 44.5% considering them important and 39.1% as very important, highlighting the importance of secure travel arrangements. Additionally, emergency preparedness receives strong emphasis, with 50.0% of respondents rating it as important and 40.0% as very important, indicating that readiness for unexpected situations is a major expectation.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

ANOVA TEST

HYPOTHESIS 1

Null Hypothesis (H₀) There is significant association between Institutional factors influences the selection of a school by parents.

Hypothesis (H₁): There is significant association between Institutional factors influences the selection of a school by parents.

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Tuition	Between Groups	5.793	3	1.931	3.627	.015
	Within Groups	56.425	106	.532		
	Total	62.218	109			
Admission	Between Groups	6.483	3	2.161	4.459	.005
	Within Groups	51.371	106	.485		
	Total	57.855	109			
Annual	Between Groups	7.423	3	2.474	3.774	.013
	Within Groups	69.495	106	.656		
	Total	76.918	109			
Transport	Between Groups	6.001	3	2.000	2.765	.046
	Within Groups	76.690	106	.723		
	Total	82.691	109			
Activities	Between Groups	6.382	3	2.127	2.995	.034
	Within Groups	75.291	106	.710		
	Total	81.673	109			
Uniform	Between Groups	6.102	3	2.034	4.011	.010
	Within Groups	53.753	106	.507		
	Total	59.855	109			
Flexibility	Between Groups	4.300	3	1.433	2.190	.093
	Within Groups	69.372	106	.654		
	Total	73.673	109			

(Significant at 0.05 level)

- **Since P value (0.015) is less than 0.05**, the result is significant for tuition fees. Hence we accept the alternate hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis. Hence Tuition fees significantly influences parents' school selection decision.
- **Since P value (0.005) is less than 0.05**, the result is significant for admission fees. Hence we accept the alternate hypothesis and reject null hypothesis. Hence admission fees significantly influences parents' school selection decision.
- **Since P value (0.013) is less than 0.05**, the result is significant for annual fees. Hence we accept the alternate hypothesis and reject null hypothesis. Hence annual fees significantly influence parents' school selection decision.
- **Since P value (0.046) is less than 0.05**, the result is significant for Transport cost. Hence we accept the alternate hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis. Hence transport cost significantly influences parents' school selection decision.
- **Since P value (0.034) is less than 0.05**, the result is significant for Extra-curricular fee cost. Hence we accept the alternate hypothesis and reject null hypothesis. Hence Extra-curricular fee cost significantly influences parents' school selection decision.
- **Since P value (0.010) is less than 0.05**, the result is significant for Uniform cost. Hence we accept the alternate hypothesis and reject null hypothesis. Hence Uniform cost significantly influences parents' school selection decision.
- **Since P value (0.093) is more than 0.05**, the result is significant for flexibility in fees payment. Hence we accept the null hypothesis and reject alternate hypothesis. Hence flexibility in fees payment does not influence parents' school selection decision.

CORRELATIONS

Hypothesis 2

- **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):**
There is **no significant association** between Institution’s Academic Factors and parents’ recommendations of the school.
- **H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):**
There is a **significant association** between Institution’s Academic Factors and parents’ recommendation of the school.

➔ **Correlations**

Correlations

		Recommendation	Board	Results	Teaching	Curriculum	Teacher Quality	Student Ratio	Competitive Exams
Recommendation	Pearson Correlation	1	.365**	.246**	.446**	.319**	.432**	.423**	.225*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.010	.000	.001	.000	.000	.018
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Board	Pearson Correlation	.365**	1	.573**	.539**	.628**	.611**	.605**	.310**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Results	Pearson Correlation	.246**	.573**	1	.593**	.704**	.607**	.665**	.359**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Teaching	Pearson Correlation	.446**	.539**	.593**	1	.652**	.693**	.631**	.323**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.001
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Curriculum	Pearson Correlation	.319**	.628**	.704**	.652**	1	.682**	.687**	.417**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Teacher Quality	Pearson Correlation	.432**	.611**	.607**	.693**	.682**	1	.677**	.366**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Student Ratio	Pearson Correlation	.423**	.605**	.665**	.631**	.687**	.677**	1	.494**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Competitive Exams	Pearson Correlation	.225*	.310**	.359**	.323**	.417**	.366**	.494**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.018	.001	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Data Interpretation and Findings:

The correlation analysis examines the relationship between key factors influencing parents’ school selection, including recommendation, board, results, teaching, curriculum, teacher quality, student ratio, and competitive exams. The results indicate that all variables show positive correlations with each other, and most relationships are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$ or $p < 0.05$), suggesting that improvements in one factor are associated with improvements in others. Recommendation has a moderate positive correlation with teaching ($r = 0.446$), teacher quality ($r = 0.432$), and student ratio ($r = 0.423$), indicating that parents are more likely to recommend a school when these academic and classroom-related factors are strong. It also shows weaker but significant relationships with board ($r = 0.365$), curriculum ($r = 0.319$), results ($r = 0.246$), and competitive exams ($r = 0.225$). The board is strongly correlated with curriculum ($r = 0.628$), teacher quality ($r = 0.611$), student ratio ($r = 0.605$), results ($r = 0.573$), and teaching ($r = 0.539$), suggesting that the choice of educational board is closely associated with overall academic structure and performance. Results show strong positive relationships with curriculum ($r = 0.704$), teacher quality ($r = 0.607$), student ratio ($r = 0.665$), and teaching ($r = 0.593$), indicating that student performance is highly

dependent on teaching quality and curriculum effectiveness. Teaching is strongly correlated with teacher quality ($r = 0.693$), curriculum ($r = 0.652$), and student ratio ($r = 0.631$), highlighting that effective teaching is supported by qualified teachers, structured curriculum, and manageable class sizes. Similarly, curriculum has strong associations with teacher quality ($r = 0.682$) and student ratio ($r = 0.687$), reinforcing its central role in academic delivery. Teacher quality also shows a strong relationship with student ratio ($r = 0.677$), suggesting that better teacher performance is linked with optimal class sizes. Finally, competitive exams have moderate correlations with most variables, particularly student ratio ($r = 0.494$) and curriculum ($r = 0.417$), indicating that exam success is influenced by both academic structure and classroom conditions.

The correlation analysis demonstrates that academic-related factors such as teaching, curriculum, teacher quality, and results are highly interrelated and play a crucial role in influencing parents’ school selection. Additionally, recommendation is moderately influenced by these factors, implying that positive academic experiences drive word-of-mouth promotion. Overall, the findings confirm that quality of education and academic performance are key

determinants in parental decision-making.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that parents' school selection is significantly influenced by academic factors, fee structure, and infrastructure facilities. Academic aspects such as teaching quality, curriculum, results, and teacher quality play a major role in shaping parents' recommendation of the school. Fee-related factors like tuition, admission, annual charges, transport, activities, and uniform also have a significant impact on decision-making, while payment flexibility has a comparatively lesser influence. Infrastructure facilities, including classrooms, safety, library, labs, digital infrastructure, sports, and playground, are considered important by most respondents and strongly affect their choice of school. Overall, parents evaluate both academic quality and supporting facilities before making decisions. Therefore, schools should focus on improving academic performance, maintaining quality infrastructure, and offering reasonable fee structures to enhance parent satisfaction and attract more admissions.

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