



Children's' Travel to School and Parents' Criteria in the School Selection: Gombak District

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Abstract

School is a nucleus of the society. School development should be planned based on the sustainable concept. The purpose of this paper is to determining parents' criteria in selecting the suitable public school for their children. There are various factors underlying in determining the school selection which are location, distance, school facilities, academic school's performance, extra-curricular and school environment. The findings showed that academic school's performance is the most important criteria of parents in selecting school for enrolling children. Hopefully, the paper will benefit the local authority, parents as well as children in term of public school development in the community.

Keywords: school; school development; parents; criteria

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1.0 Introduction 11AN bold

Globally, human capital is developed by the school education to interact with the environment and knowledge (Cheng, 2013). This brief summarizes research on public school development and planning as well as determines parents' criteria in selecting public school. Over the past few years, traffic safety of the students when going to school has been a concern in the metropolitan area. Therefore, this paper also explores factors that influence transportation modes of the students during a trip to school. This study is a vital aspect for school planning, and as such the paper focuses for the future development of public schools.

1.1 Research Problems

School location affects how students going to school by given them various transportation modes (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2003; The Oregon School Siting Handbook, 2005; McKoy et al, 2008). Ewing et al. (2004) and McDonald (2007) both mentioned that the primary obstacle for students to walk to school is because of the increased distances between school and home. In addition, Sri Maryati, et al (2002) stated travel distance to primary school normally within walking distance. According to Roya Shokoohi et al (2012), students are more likely to use automobiles as transportation modes during a trip to school. De Boer (2005) and Vigne (2007) stated that traffic congestion and accident are some of the significant problems associated with traffic safety in school involving children during a school trip.

1.2 Research Background

The research aims at determining parents' criteria in selecting the suitable public school for their children. The duration of study is twelve months. The scope of the study is only focusing on the transportation modes of the students during a school trip and factors influencing criteria in school selection. This study only covers on the selected primary and secondary public schools in Gombak District.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Terms

It is important to understand the meaning of school in order to derive the understanding of the function of school and its significance towards the society. However, in the context of this research paper, public schools that need to be taken into account are those schools under the management of the government. Table 1 below shows several components and their definition in relation with the topic.

Table 1. Definition of Terms

Components	Definitions
Parent	“Parent” includes a guardian and any person who has legal or actual control of a p
Pupil	“Pupil” means a person of any age for whom education or training is being provided in an educational institution.
Teacher	“Teacher” means a person who – a) teaches pupils in an educational institution; or b) prepares or issues lessons or corrects returned answers in, for or through a distance education centre
School	“School” means a place where ten or more persons gain knowledge whether in one or more classes, but does not include any area where there is a restriction in teaching exclusively to the teaching of any religion.
Government School	“Government school” or “government educational institution” means a school or educational institution established and fully maintained by the Minister “government-aided school” or “government-aided educational institution” means a school or educational institution in receipt of capital grant and full grant-in-aid.

(Source: Malaysian Education Act, 1996)

2.2 School choice

School choice is parents’ rights of selecting the most preferred school for their child to attend (Burgess, 2009). Students who are getting access to their favourable school will have better academic achievement than students who are not receiving access to school (Cullen et al, 2003; Cullen et al, 2005). The essential of school choice is from numerous policies which allowing students to be transferred out from the current school to a new school within the neighbourhood area (Rabovsky, 2011). However, there is also an argument where school choice would create racial segregations in terms of ability, income, ethnicity and religion (Cullen et al. 2005; Böhlmark and Lindahl, 2007; Rabovsky, 2011).

2.3 Planning guidelines for school development

In Malaysia, the development of school is using the planning standards and guidelines are as reference in planning a school. Based on the Table 2, it showed that the location of both primary and secondary schools are within the walking distance.

Table 2. Planning standards and guidelines for schools

Types of school	Primary School	Secondary School
Population	3,000 – 7,000 residents	> 9,000 residents
Allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.4 – 0.8 km • 5 – 10 minutes walking distance from the furthest house • Far from the intersection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.4 – 0.8 km • 5 – 10 minutes walking distance from the furthest house • Far from the intersection

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct access to the road 20.1m /66' (within a residential area) • Has public transportation routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct access to the road 20.1m /66' (within a residential area) • Has public transportation routes 		
Acreage (minimum)	<u>Flat Surface</u> 2.4 hectare (6 acre)	<u>Hilly area</u> 3.2 hectare (8 acre)	<u>Flat Surface</u> 2.4 hectare (6 acre)	<u>Hilly area</u> 3.2 hectare (8 acre)
Setback				
- Facing road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.2 m (40') 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.2 m (40') 	
- Boundary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.1 m (20') 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.1 m (20') 	
Parking Area				
- Car	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 car parking lot/2 staffs + 20% of car parking lot for visitors 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.5 car parking lot/ 2 staffs + 20% of parking lot for visitors 	
- Motorcycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional 20% of motorcycle parking lot 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional 1 motorcycle parking lot/30 students 	
- Disabled			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional 2% parking area with the provision of ramp for disabled 	
Facilities Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fences • Signage and school address • Toilet • Field/Court • Canteen • Hall • Flag post • Library • Musolla • Gazebo 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus stop • Electrical substation • Pedestrian walkway with roof • 1 main gate • Post guard • Lay-by (3.5 m width) used for drop-off and pick-up for school bus and car • Bicycle parking with roof 	

(Source: Town and Country Planning Department of Selangor, 2010)

2.4 Factors influencing parents' criteria in choosing public school

Parents' perception on school criteria is necessary because these criteria will help them to select the most suitable school for their children. School distance is one of the attributes in choosing school (Beavis, 2004; O'Mahony, 2008; Burgess et al, 2009). Kaiser et al (1995) and Ewing et al (2004) both mentioned that school location influenced by the built environment factors because location will determine the accessibility and transportation mode of students going to school.

As school is an essential institution, it needs a conducive physical and social environment in order to provide a positive impact on students' academic performance (Tremblay, 2001; Asikhia, 2010; Nurul Syakima, 2011). School's organizational health plays a significant part in academic achievement of students and their excellence (Mohsen Farmahini Farahani et al, 2014). In term of learning environment, majority of the students prefer a calm environment; adequate lighting; fresh temperature; sitting in soft chairs; and in casual setting (Lorenzo and Lorenzo, 2013). Although education focuses on academic, most students enjoy the participation in co-curricular activities (Lawhorn, 2008). Wilkinson et al (2004) and Zainurin

and Mohd Sabri (2011) both agree that relevant criteria for parents in choosing a school for their children is because of the extra co-curricular activities offered by the school.

3.0 Methodology

The primary data collected through a questionnaire survey in order to obtain information regarding the research. The questionnaire survey consists of three main sections:

- Section 1: Respondents' profile
- Section 2: Transportation modes to school
- Section 3: Parents' perception in criteria of choosing school

There are a total of 400 questionnaire forms distributed to the selected primary and secondary schools within Gombak District. The sampling method implemented in this study is convenience sampling. The targeted group for this research was the parents of students from the selected primary and secondary schools in Gombak District. Table 3 shows the distribution of the questionnaire surveys among the selected schools.

Table 3. Questionnaire survey distributions

Schools	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary Schools		
SK Gombak Utara	65	16.25
SK Gombak 1	38	9.5
SK Gombak 2	16	4.0
SK Gombak Setia	75	18.75
SK Taman Setia	16	4.0
SK Taman Seri Gombak	20	5.0
Secondary Schools		
SMK Sg Pusu	49	12.25
SMK Gombak Setia	91	22.75
SMK Seri Gombak	30	7.5
Total	400	100.0

(Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2013)

4.0 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Transportation modes of students to the school

Table 4 shows the transportation modes of children to school. There are several modes of transport that been used by children to go to the school such as walking, cycling, school bus, private vehicles and public transport. The identification of reasons in using transportation mode is identified in this study. The usage of particular transportation modes vary due to many reasons. From the survey, the reasons for children used certain types of mode choices are for them to be physically active, for their safety, to save cost, the unavailability of other transportation option, closer distance to home, closer distance to their parents' workplace

and lastly to save time. From the survey, the most transportation mode that been used was private vehicles with the percentage of 54.75% (219) from the total number of respondents. Table 4 summarizes the transportation modes and reasons of using the particular transportation modes.

Table 4. Cross-tabulation between transportation modes and reasons of using the particular transportation modes

Reasons	Transportation Modes					Total
	Walking	Cycling	School Bus	Private Vehicles	Public Transport	
Physically active	7.25	1.25	0	0	0	8
Safety of the children	0.25	0	6.5	40	0	46
Save cost	3.5	0.75	1.75	0	0	6
No other transportation system	1.75	0	3.25	0.75	6.5	12
Close to home	9.75	2.75	0	0.5	0	13
Close to workplace	0	0	0	5.75	0	5.75
Save time	0	0	0	7.75	0	7.75
Total	22.5	4.75	11.5	54.75	6.5	116

(Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2013)

A Chi-square test was made in order to test the relationship between transportation modes and school distance. Hypothesis #1: "There is a relationship between transportation modes and distance". The results of this test are shown in Table 6 below.

Table 5. Summary on hypotheses tested

Variables	Hypotheses Tested				Significant
	Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. (2-sided)	Sig.	
Transportation modes VS Distance between School and Home	57.534	4	.000		Significant
Transportation modes VS Distance between School and Workplace	48.245	4	.000		Significant

(Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2013)

4.2 Parents' perception in criteria of selecting school

R.I.I. analyses parents' perception in criteria of selecting a school for their children. R.I.I. method transforms the answer's choice of in Likert scale to assess the ranking of each factor by using the following equation:

$$RII = \frac{\sum w}{AN}$$

W is the weighting given to each factor by the respondents, ranging from 1 to 5, A is the highest weight (i.e. 6 in the study) and N is the total number of samples. The parents' perception towards the criteria in selecting school has been scaled by; 1=1st choice, 2=2nd choice, 3=3rd choice, 4=4th choice, 5=5th choice and 6=6th choice. The six-point scores ranging from 1 to 6 are transformed to the relative importance indices for each of the school criteria. In the questionnaire survey, respondents are required to rank the most important criteria in selecting school to enroll their children. Based on the literature review, there were six primary criteria in the school selection namely school academic performance, school location, school distance, school facilities, school environment and extra co-curricular activities. Parents' perception towards school criteria analyzed using Relative Importance Index (RII). The mean results derived were listed in the ranking order to determine the most important criteria in the school selection for students' enrolment.

Table 6. Parents' perception in criteria of selecting school (n=400)

Criteria	Frequency of Respondents						RII
	Choice 1	Choice 2	Choice 3	Choice 4	Choice 5	Choice 6	
Academic Performance	175 (6)	59 (5)	98 (4)	29 (3)	32 (2)	7 (1)	0.790 (1)
Location	94 (564)	84 (420)	72 (288)	53 (159)	67 (134)	30 (30)	0.652 (2)
Distance	93 (558)	112 (570)	41 (164)	32 (96)	49 (98)	73 (73)	0.650 (3)
School Facilities	24 (144)	60 (300)	95 (380)	127 (381)	54 (108)	40 (40)	0.547 (4)
School Environment	14 (84)	37 (185)	66 (272)	93 (279)	67 (134)	121 (121)	0.448 (5)
Co-curricular activity	0 (0)	48 (240)	27 (108)	67 (201)	130 (260)	128 (128)	0.390 (6)

(Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2013)

Based on the findings, academic performance is the most preferred criteria for parents in choosing a school for their children, with R.I.I scores of 0.79 highlighted in the Table 6. There were 43.75% (175) of the respondents chose academic performance of the school as their first choice while there were only 1.75% (7) of the respondents chose school academic

performance as the sixth choice for the most important criteria in school selection. This is followed by location with R.I.I scores of 0.652, distance with R.I.I scores of 0.65, school facilities with R.I.I scores of 0.547 and school environment with R.I.I scores of 0.448. The co-curricular activity has the lowest R.I.I scores with 0.39. Based on the survey, there were 32% (128) of the respondents chose extra co-curricular as their sixth choice whereby there was zero number of respondents chose extra co-curricular activities as their first choice in the school selection.

5.0 Discussions and Conclusion

The research was aimed at determining parents' criteria in selecting the suitable public school for their children. There are two main objectives for this research. Firstly, to identify the transportation modes of students when going to school and secondly to examine parents' criteria in selecting school for their children.

From the findings, the transportation modes that had been used by students going to school are walking, cycling, school bus, private vehicle and public transportation. Several reasons of using mode choices are health, safety, cost, distance and time. Most of the parents send their children to the school by using private vehicles. This is because they are concerning about the children's safety. Besides, the distance is closer to their workplace. Roya Shokoochi et al (2012) mentioned that neighbourhood safety becomes a concern of parents which leads them to use private vehicles to send their children to school. Some students are walking and cycling to school because the location of the school is closer to home. According to Ewing et al., 2004; the shorter distance between school and home encourages children to walk or cycle during a school trip. The relationship between distance and transportation modes was tested using chi-square test. The result shows that the critical value (0.000) is less than 0.05 which concluded that there is a relationship between transportation modes and distance. Mode choice to school may differ from one place to another because it influenced by parents' perception towards factor such as distance and traffic safety (Carlin, 1997; Ewing et al., 2004; McMillan, 2005).

Based on the respondents, there are six primary criteria of parents in selecting school for the children which are academic performance, location, distance, school facilities, school environment and co-curricular activities. From the opinion of the parents, school performance ranked as the most influential criteria in choosing a suitable school for their children. This is followed by location (rank 2), distance (rank 3), school facilities (rank 4), school environment (rank 5) and lastly extra co-curricular activity (rank 6). Based on Schneider (2003), the improvement of educational achievement at national level influences the decision of school choice by the parents. As been mentioned by Burgess (2009), parental demand for academic performance is a crucial element in strengthening school choice that will enhance the school performance. Extra co-curricular activity is ranked as the least important criteria because students only participating in the co-curricular activity because it is compulsory for them.

As conclusion, a good school has always been an important factor for parents in deciding where to send their children. The study is significant for various parties such as local planning authority, parents and students. This study will contribute to the decision making by

local authorities. The decision making includes the preparation in preparing the site of public school location. Parents will get benefits from this research in term of criteria that they need to know in selecting the suitable school for their children. As students, they will get the benefits by having a safe and healthy learning environment of the school. As location is necessary in planning a school, school must be located in the strategic area so that it will promote walking and cycling to school. Apart from the school physical planning, the school system also should be improved in term of the academic performance because it is a key factor for parents to choose the school for their children.

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