Strategy To Enhance Enrollment In Private Primary Schools By Influencing Parental School Choice Decisions

Annisa Shabrina Nugroho[1*], Lilik Noor Yuliati[2], Asep Taryana[3] (iD)

[1,3]School of Business, IPB University, Bogor, Indonesia
[2] Faculty of Human Ecology, IPB University, Bogor, Indonesia

ABSTRAK

Setiap tahunnya jumlah SD swasta semakin meningkat, menunjukkan adanya persaingan. Berbagai upaya dilakukan oleh sekolah untuk mempertahankan eksistensinya. Salah satu fokus penelitian yang dilakukan terkait keputusan pemilihan sekolah. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menganalisis faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi keputusan pemilihan sekolah dasar swasta dan menyusun strategi untuk meningkatkan jumlah siswa melalui keputusan pemilihan sekolah dasar swasta. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif melalui metode survey yang dilakukan kepada 87 orang tua atau wali siswa SDIT Mauritaniyyah untuk analisis PLS-SEM. Survey juga dilakukan kepada lima pakar untuk teknik AHP melibatkan kepala sekolah, wakil kepala hubungan masyarakat, pengawas sekolah dasar, praktisi pendidikan, dan akademisi pendidikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bauran pemasaran secara signifikan memengaruhi citra sekolah dan keputusan pemilihan sekolah dasar swasta. Religiositas dan kelompok referensi tidak secara signifikan memengaruhi keputusan pemilihan sekolah dasar swasta, sementara citra sekolah secara signifikan memengaruhi keputusan pemilihan sekolah dasar swasta. Strategi untuk meningkatkan jumlah siswa melalui keputusan pemilihan sekolah dasar swasta memprioritaskan pengembangan citra sekolah mengenai sumber daya manusia yang kompeten di bidangnya, fokus pada aspek "orang" dalam bauran pemasaran, dan menekankan pengembangan guru berkualitas tinggi.

ABSTRACT

Annually, private elementary schools increase, signifying heightened competition. Schools make diverse efforts to sustain themselves. One research focus is school choice decisions. The research objectives are to analyze the factors influencing the private school choice decision and develop strategies to increase the number of students through the choice decision of private primary schools. They are employing a quantitative approach through a survey method with 87 parents or guardians of SDIT Mauritaniyyah students for PLS-SEM analysis. Surveys were also conducted with five experts for the AHP technique, involving school principals, vice heads of public relations, primary school supervisors, education practitioners, and academic educators. The research results indicate that the marketing mix significantly influences the school image and the choice decision of private primary schools. Religiosity and reference group do not significantly influence the choice decision of private primary schools, whereas the school image significantly influences the choice decision of private primary schools. In order to increase student enrollment, strategies prioritize enhancing the school image, exceptionally competent human resources in their fields with a focus on the people aspect, and emphasizing the development of high-quality teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the aspects that can support the sustainability of community life. Education plays a role as a driver of personal development, citizen development, cultural development, and national development (Agustian & Salsabila, 2021; Annisa, 2022). Various forms of education are available, including formal educational institutions such as schools. In Indonesia, schools are not only run by the government but also by private entities. In the academic year 2021/2022, the primary education level in Indonesia is predominantly public, accounting for 87.18%. West Java Province is the region with the largest number of

*Corresponding author
E-mail addresses: annisashabrina16@gmail.com (Annisa Shabrina Nugroho)

primary schools. The primary education level in West Java Province is dominated by public schools, reaching 87.90%, and Bogor Regency is the area with the highest number of primary schools. The Ministry of Education and Culture data indicated that most formal educational institutions in Indonesia are public primary schools (Kemdikbudristek, 2022; Rizal et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there are different findings in one district in Bogor Regency. Bojonggede District, among 39 other districts, is the only area in Bogor Regency predominantly characterized by the number of private elementary schools, at 60%. The region dominated by private elementary schools indicates a relatively high level of competition among them to establish their advantages and be more preferred by consumers. The emergence of various educational institutions competing with each other highlights the growing competition among these educational institutions, necessitating management skills for these institutions (Shofia Hattarina et al., 2022; Syukur, 2021).

The Mauritaniyyah Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT Mauritaniyyah) is one of the private elementary schools in Bojonggede District that has been operating since 2016 but was formally registered in 2022. This condition indicates that SDIT Mauritaniyyah is a newcomer in the formal education unit in Indonesia, particularly in Bojonggede District, Bogor Regency. Since its inception, SDIT Mauritaniyyah has experienced fluctuating graphs of new student enrollment and student transfers. In the academic year 2022/2023, there was a 61% decrease in new student enrollment and an 18% decrease in student transfers out of the school. If these issues persist, it may hinder the increase in the number of students. The number of students, especially in private schools, determines the sustainability of the educational institution. Therefore, nowadays, private educational providers make efforts to organize their institutions, much like running a business (Husni & Wahyudiati, 2022; Kholik & Laeli, 2020). Schools make various efforts to face this competition to maintain their existence. One focus of research is related to school choice decisions. In the era of school choice, open enrollment, and competition between schools to increase student enrollment, school leaders must maintain a clear understanding of exactly what parents are looking for when deciding which school best meets their child's needs (Cantu et al., 2021; Najmy Hanifah & Istikomah Istikomah, 2022). The school choice decision is a stage for students to register at a school, and it can influence the school's enrollment. The issue of school choice is multifaceted, encompassing factors such as the amalgamation of religion, practical demands, and corresponding opportunities. Decision-makers express a desire for increased influence in school-related choices, more responsive educators, and more transparent information about school performance (Ermaya, 2020; Tarkhnishvili et al., 2022).

Making a good school choice decision requires specific criteria to be considered. Schools can meet these criteria to become the chosen educational institution for parents, ultimately leading to more students. School choice decisions can be explained using the concept of consumer decision-making when purchasing goods or services. A consumer decision model is the decision-making process in buying and consuming goods and services. This process is influenced by three main factors: individual differences, environmental factors, and marketing strategies (Mahbub et al., 2023; Sadjali, 2022). Regarding individual differences, religion is one aspect that influences consumer decision-making. Furthermore, religion serves as a guide on what is permissible and what is not for its followers. There is a related aspect of religion, namely religiosity, which is defined as the extent to which an individual believes in and reveres practices what the religion preaches and participates in relevant activities (Prasetyaningrum & Marmoah, 2022; Urfatullaila et al., 2021). In terms of environmental factors, there is the aspect of reference group that influence consumer decision-making. Reference group consist of two or more people interacting to achieve the same goal. From the marketing perspective, each consumer influences the purchasing and consumption behavior of others. A marketing strategy is concerned with achieving goals such as market targets, required value proposition, desired positioning, and timing. These goals can be achieved through various marketing tools known as the marketing mix (Firinta Togatorop et al., 2022; Wicaksono, 2021).

In school research, in addition to the consumer decision model, another factor that affects school choice decisions, is the school's image or reputation. The school image refers to the feelings and beliefs about the school and its educational programs held by the school public (parents) (Hofflinger et al., 2020; Kumar & Choudhury, 2021). A previous study stated that the school image is essential in parents' decisions to choose a primary school (Moschetti & Verger, 2020; Potterton, 2020). The school image is also an intermediary between the marketing mix and parents' loyalty in the school choice decision (Gille et al., 2022; Hofflinger et al., 2020). This study uses a consumer decision model with three main variables: religiosity, reference group, and the marketing mix, and combines the school image variable as factors influencing school choice decisions. One type of private primary school growing in Indonesia is the Integrated Islamic School concept. The concept initiated by the founders of Integrated Islamic Schools in Indonesia aims to combine Islamic religious subjects with general subjects within one system (Gille et al., 2022; Perwita & Widuri, 2023). In the consumer decision model, several studies in educational institutions show that religiosity is one factor influencing parents' decisions to choose a school. Previous studies

indicate that religiosity can moderate parents' decisions in choosing an integrated Islamic elementary school Parents with strong religious beliefs often prioritize choosing a religion-based school for their children as a critical factor in shaping their self-image or considering practical and qualitative aspects. Reference group also influence parents' decisions to choose a school. In choosing a private school, parents with a more comprehensive social network and access to information are more likely to participate in the school choice process (Ismuratno et al., 2021; Pracipta, 2021). In the process of selecting a school for their children, parents tend to gather sufficient information and advice from various sources, placing more trust in recommendations from friends and family members compared to the information provided by the school. Previous research on Islamic-based schools in Mojokerto stated that reference group are one social factor influencing parents' decisions regarding their children's educational institution(Akbar et al., 2022; Mukmin, 2020).

Regarding school choice decisions, the marketing mix can directly and indirectly influence decisions. Research on Integrated Islamic Schools shows that the marketing mix of services directly influences parents' decisions to choose a school (Adilah & Suryana, 2021; Afridayani & Mu'arif, 2020). Other research shows that the school image mediates between the marketing mix and school choice decisions. Previous research on the management of Islamic primary schools indicates that marketing strategies result in a positive image of the school, increased customer loyalty, more vital community trust, support from the community, and effective collaboration between the school and parents. Supported by a study on an Islamic school in Bandung, in general, shows a positive and significant impact of service marketing management on the school image (Fradito et al., 2020; Ibrahim & Umuhani, 2021) Other research findings stated that the school image influences parents' decisions to choose an educational service in private primary schools. Furthermore, religiosity is one of the factors that influence parents' decisions in choosing an Islamic school. The combination of marketing mix variables and the school image influences parents' decisions when choosing a school for their children (Nafindra & Rifqi, 2022; A. P. Putra et al., 2023).

While there is a wealth of research on factors influencing parents' school choice decisions, these studies often need a core concept related to the consumer decision model. They may not recommend increasing the number of students at the end of the research. This study is conducted to address these limitations. The research objectives are to analyze the factors influencing the private school choice decision and develop strategies to increase the number of students through the choice decision of private primary schools.

2. METHOD

The research design uses a quantitative approach through the survey method. The survey method is a quantitative research approach used to gather data on past or present occurrences related to beliefs, opinions, characteristics, behavior, and the relationships between variables (Mohajan, 2020; Sugiyono, 2018). This research was conducted at SDIT Mauritaniyyah, in the Bojonggede Subdistrict, Bogor Regency, West Java. The survey involves the distribution of questionnaires to respondents, including parents of students, to obtain data on factors influencing the decision to choose private primary schools. Surveys were also conducted with expert respondents to determine priority assessments in strategies to increase the number of students through the decision to choose private primary schools.

The sampling technique for this research is divided into two parts: respondents for PLS-SEM analysis and the AHP technique. Respondents for the PLS-SEM analysis were chosen through a census approach, making the entire population a part of the sample. The sample in this research consists of parents or guardians who have chosen SDIT Mauritaniyyah. This sampling choice is also informed by research, which revealed that parents are discovering improved educational environments for their children and emphasizing the significance of parental involvement in decisions related to school selection (Asad, 2019; Mwase et al., 2020). The total population consisted of 107 respondents, including parents or guardians of active students at SDIT Mauritaniyyah for the academic year 2023/2024 and alums. After excluding data for siblings, the planned population was reduced to 92 respondents. 87 parents were willing to participate as respondents during the data collection process.

The sampling technique in the AHP method involves selecting five experts based on several criteria to provide priority weight assessments. The experts consist of two main groups, namely internal and external experts. Internal experts include the school principal and the vice heads of public relations. External experts consist of the supervising officer for primary schools in the Bojonggede Subdistrict, a private primary school education practitioner in Bojonggede, and a doctoral academic in educational management.

There are two groups of latent variables: endogenous and exogenous. Endogenous variables consist of school image (Y1) and school choice decisions (Y2), while exogenous variables consist of the marketing

mix (X1), religiosity (X2), and reference group (X3). Based on a review of the literature and expert opinions, operational definitions are formulated to define variables with specific meanings and purposes. Each variable has several indicators based on references from previous research. These indicators are given codes to facilitate further data processing. In this study, there are five latent variables with 28 indicators. The indicators are measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 means strongly disagree and 5 mean strongly agree).

Data processing and analysis techniques include descriptive statistical analysis, Partial Least Squares Modeling (PLS-SEM), and Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP). Descriptive statistical analysis is used to describe the characteristics of respondents. PLS-SEM is used to examine the influence of measurable variables on latent variables and the influence of latent variables. This research uses the SmartPLS 3.0 application. AHP is used to determine priority strategies in decision-making. This research uses the Expert Choice 11 application.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The characteristics of the respondents include distance to school, family position, age, gender, highest level of education, occupation, and monthly income. The respondent characteristics can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Quantity (people)	Percentage (%)
Distance to School		
0 – 3 km	59	67.8
3,1 – 5 km	26	29.9
>5 km	2	2.3
Family Position		
Father	13	14.9
Mother	72	82.8
Guardian	2	2.3
Age		
Millennial Generation (27–42 years)	64	73.6
Generation X (43–58 years)	23	26.4
Gender		
Male	14	16.1
Female	73	83.9
Highest Education		
High School or Equivalent	30	34.5
Diploma	15	17.2
Bachelor's Degree	35	40.2
Master's Degree	3	3.4
Doctorate	1	1.1
Other	3	3.4
Occupation		
Housewife	46	52.9
Private Sector Employee	19	21.8
Civil Servant/Military/Police	8	9.2
Self-Employed	6	6.9
Other	8	9.2
Monthly Income		
< Rp 1.000.000,00	5	5.7
Rp 1.000.000,00 – Rp 1.999.999,00	8	9.2
Rp 2.000.000,00 – Rp 4.999.999,00	34	39.1
Rp 5.000.000,00 – Rp 20.000.000,00	40	46.0
> Rp 20.000.000,00	0	0.0

Table 1 showed that the distance from the respondents' homes to the school is mainly within the 0–3 km range (67.8%); this indicates that most parents choose primary schools close to their residences.

Regarding family position, most are mothers (82.8%); respondents are predominantly mothers because they are more actively involved in school matters. All the respondents are adults, with millennials (ages 27–42) making up the majority at 73.6%. The majority of respondents have a Bachelor's degree (40.2%); this indicates that the parents or guardians of SDIT Mauritaniyyah students have a high level of education. Most of the respondents' occupations are housewives (52.9%). The monthly income for respondents is primarily in the range of Rp5,000,000.00–Rp20,000,000.00 (46.0%); this indicates that parents or guardians of SDIT Mauritaniyyah students have a relatively high to middle-income level.

The measurement model is conducted to assess the validity and reliability using the analysis algorithm method. Several approaches were used in the measurement model: (1) Convergent validity: All indicators were found to be valid with loading factors >0.7; (2) Internal Composite Reliability (ICR): Reliability values were assessed based on Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha. Values >0.7 are acceptable, and values >0.8 are very satisfactory. In this study, all variables are reliable; (3) Average Variance Extracted (AVE): An AVE value of at least 0.5 indicates good convergent validity. This study has an AVE >0.5, meaning that the latent variables in the study can explain more than half of the indicator variance on average; (4) Discriminant Validity: In this study, The Fornell-Larcker Criterion was used to measure discriminant validity. This approach compares the square root of AVE for each latent variable, and good results indicate that the square root of AVE for each latent variable is higher than that of other variables. The results of the measurement model can be seen in Figure 1, Table 2, and Table 3.
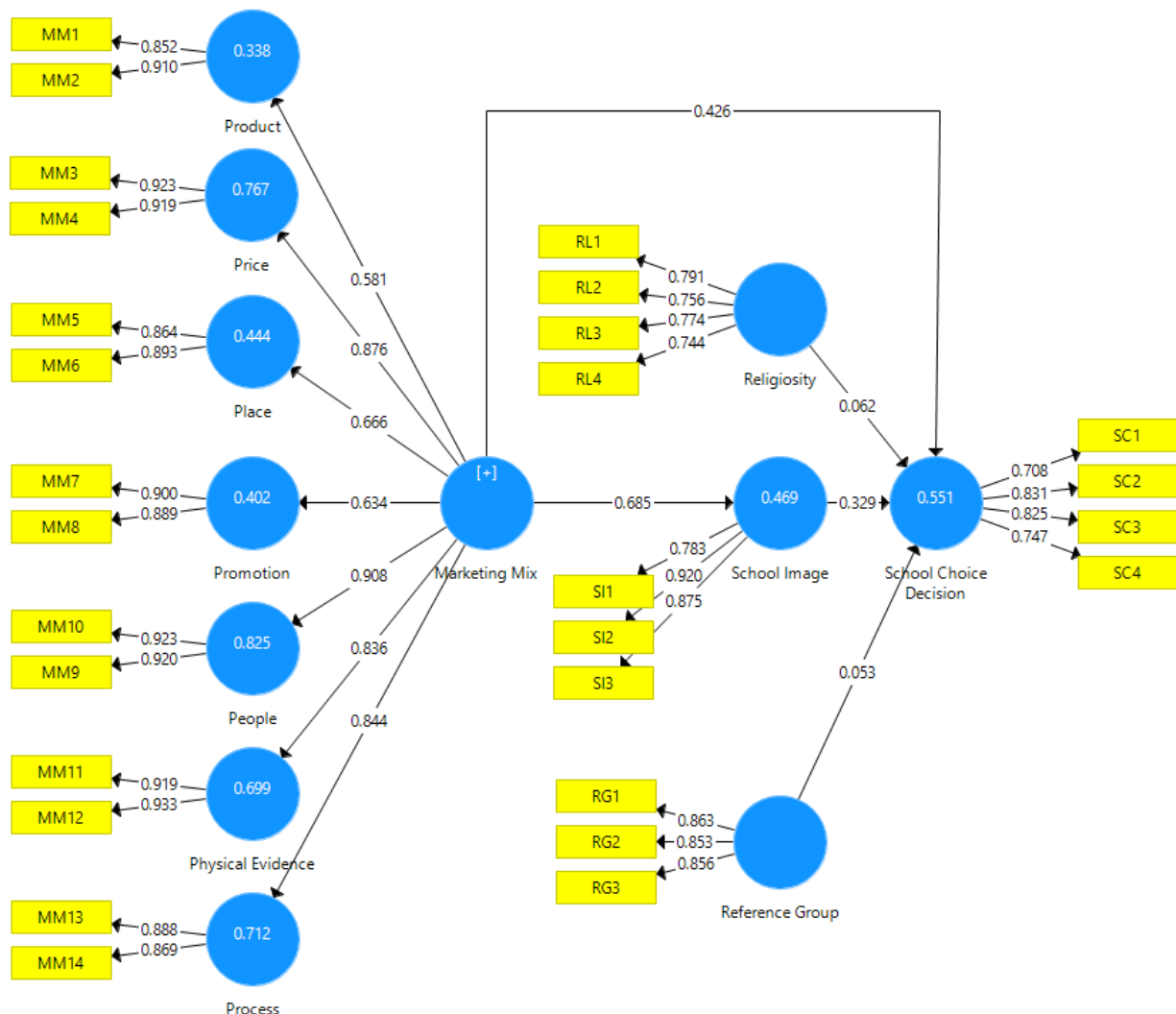

Figure 1. Loading Factors

Table 2. Measurement Model Output

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Marketing Mix	0.914	0.916	0.625
Product	0.717	0.745	0.777
Price	0.821	0.821	0.848
Place	0.706	0.712	0.772
Promotion	0.751	0.752	0.801
People	0.822	0.823	0.849
Physical Evidence	0.835	0.840	0.858
Process	0.704	0.707	0.771
Religiosity	0.782	0.760	0.588
Reference Group	0.821	0.833	0.735
School Image	0.824	0.839	0.742
School Choice Decision	0.789	0.804	0.608

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	Marketing Mix	School Image	Reference Group	School Choice Decision	Religiosity
Marketing Mix	0.790 [a]				
School Image	0.685	0.861 [a]			
Reference Group	0.506	0.437	0.857 [a]		
School Choice Decision	0.692	0.662	0.423	0.779 [a]	
Religiosity	0.214	0.289	0.164	0.257	0.767 [a]

The structural model is conducted for regression by depicting the influence among latent variables. This approach uses R-squares and path coefficient tests to test research hypotheses. The R-squares value is interpreted as the amount of variability in the endogenous variable that exogenous variables can explain. Based on Table 4, the R-squares value is more than 0.33, indicating a moderate level of influence of exogenous variables on the endogenous variable. The path coefficient test illustrates the significance of relationships among latent variables. Path coefficient results are obtained through bootstrapping (resampling method). The significance of the relationships among variables can be seen in the T statistics. T statistics >T Table (1.99) indicate significant hypotheses with a 95% confidence level. The original sample values show the direction of the relationship among latent variables, whether positive or negative. The path coefficient results indicate direct effects among variables. The result of the path coefficient can be seen in Table 5.

Table 4. R-Squares Value

Variabel Endogen	R-squares
Marketing Mix	0.469
School Choice Decision	0.551

Table 5. Path Coefficient

| Path of Influence	Original Sample	T Statistics	Decision
Marketing Mix → School Image (H1)	0.685	9.414	Accepted
Marketing Mix → School Choice Decision (H2)	0.426	4.360	Accepted
Religiosity → School Choice Decision (H3)	0.062	0.746	Rejected
School Image → School Choice Decision (H4)	0.329	3.393	Accepted
Reference Group → School Choice Decision (H5)	0.053	0.583	Rejected

The mediation model test measures the relationship between exogenous and endogenous latent variables through a mediating variable. The mediator variable tested in this study is school image. The significance of the indirect effect is measured and obtained from bootstrapping results. The indirect effect of marketing mix variables and school choice decisions mediated by school image is significant, indicating that the school image is a mediator between the marketing mix and the school choice decision. The result of the indirect effect can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Specific Indirect Effect

Path of Influence	Original Sample	T Statistics	Decision
Marketing Mix → School Image → School Choice Decision	0.225	3.108	Accepted

The AHP technique begins by defining the research problem and determining the type of knowledge sought. The problem in this research is determining alternative strategies for increasing the number of students through parental school choice decisions. The research proceeds by structuring a decision hierarchy formed according to the ultimate research objective to develop strategies for increasing the number of students through private primary school choice decisions. The hierarchy structure in this research is based on the previous PLS-SEM analysis, which showed a significant influence between the marketing mix and school image, as well as school choice decisions. The research also indicated that school image mediates between the marketing mix and school choice decisions.

Based on the results of the PLS-SEM analysis, four levels are constructed in the hierarchy framework, consisting of four criteria: the focus, objectives, alternatives, and sub-alternatives. The focus in this hierarchy is the strategy for increasing the number of students by choosing private primary schools. The next level is the objective criteria structured based on valid indicators of school image from the previous PLS-SEM analysis. These indicators are organized into three aspects: (1) school shapes students with good personalities, (2) high-quality school programs, and (3) competent human resources in their fields. The next level includes alternative and sub-alternative criteria, which are also structured based on the dimensions and valid indicators of the marketing mix. At the alternative level, seven valid dimensions are organized: product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process. Each of these dimensions has two valid indicators as sub-alternative criteria. The final step in the AHP technique is to determine priorities based on the weight values obtained. The AHP technique also validates the overall priority assessments by measuring the Consistency Ratio (CR). The research results show a CR value of 0.045; this indicates that the priority assessments are valid with CR < 0.10. The hierarchical framework can be seen in Figure 2.
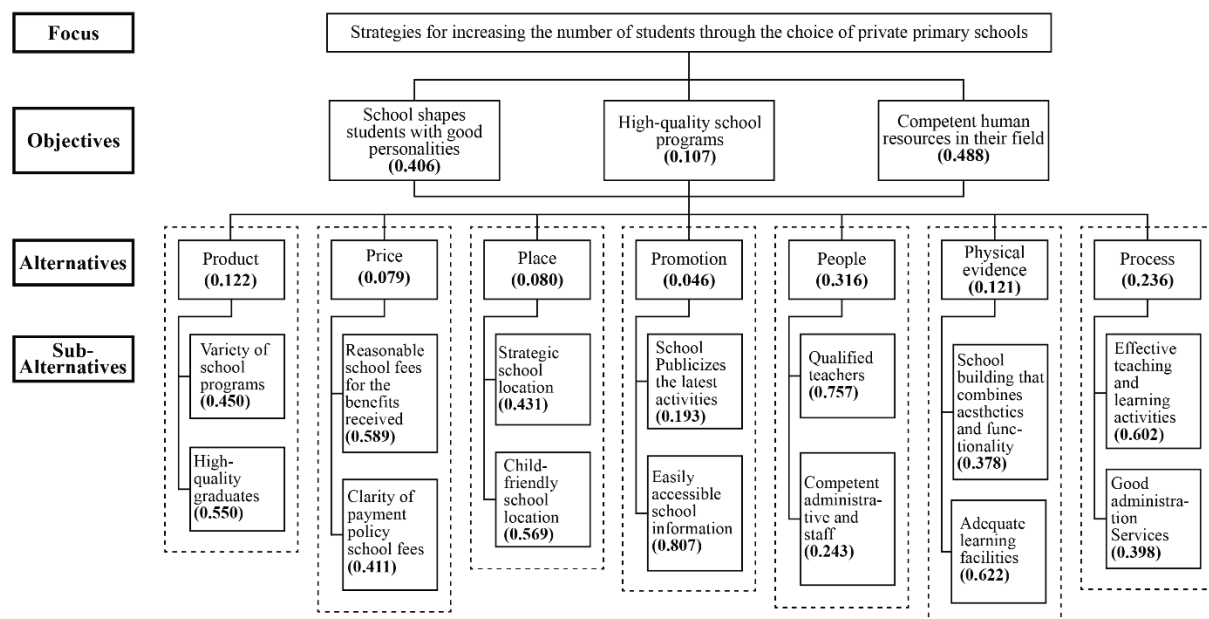
Figure 2. The Hierarchical Framework of AHP

In order to support the research focus and achieve the objectives, elements are prioritized based on their weight. The top priority is competent human resources in their fields (0.488), followed by School shapes students with good personalities (0.406) and high-quality school programs (0.107). This result indicates that private primary schools, especially SDIT Mauritaniyyah, need to focus on building the school image through competent human resources in their fields to increase the number of students through the decision-making process.

In order to support the role of alternatives in achieving the research objectives, elements are prioritized based on their weight. The top priority is "people" (0.316), followed by "process" (0.236), "product" (0.122), "physical evidence" (0.121), "place" (0.080), "price" (0.079), and "promotion" (0.046).

This result indicates that private primary schools, especially SDIT Mauritaniyyah, need to focus on marketing alternatives through the "people" aspect to increase the number of students through the decision-making process.

In order to support the role of sub-alternatives in achieving the research alternatives, elements are prioritized based on their weights. In the "product" alternative, the top priority is high-quality graduates (0.550), followed by a variety of school programs (0.450). In the "price" alternative, the top priority is reasonable school fees for the benefits received (0.589), followed by clarity of payment policy school fees (0.411). In the "place" alternative, the top priority is a child-friendly school location (0.569), followed by a strategic school location (0.431). In the "promotion" alternative, the top priority is easily accessible school information (0.807), followed by the school publicizing the latest activities (0.193). In the "people" alternative, the top priority is qualified teachers (0.757), followed by competent administrators and staff (0.243). In the "physical evidence" alternative, the top priority is adequate learning facilities (0.622), followed by school buildings that combine aesthetics and functionality (0.378). In the "process" alternative, the top priority is effective teaching and learning activities (0.602), followed by good administration services (0.398).

Discussion

Three main variables: religiosity, reference group, and the marketing mix, and combines the school image variable as factors influencing school choice decisions. The result shows that the marketing mix influenced the school image, and the marketing mix influenced the choice decision of private primary schools. Religiosity and reference group did not influence the choice decision of private primary schools, whereas the school image influenced the school choice decision.

The results of this study found that the marketing mix influenced the school image. The marketing mix provides educational services the schools offer. The marketing mix offered by a school can shape the school's image in the public. The marketing practices of schools are an area of increasing interest, with a focus on market segmentation and targeting, or instead of supporting pedagogical innovation, creating real differentiation, and, therefore, genuine choice in the education marketplace (Directive, 2020; Greaves et al., 2023). Schools need to offer the best services to establish differentiation and cultivate a positive image. This study aligns with research in one private school that shows the influence of the marketing mix on the school image (Fadhli, 2022; Siagian et al., 2017). Previous studies demonstrated a positive and significant influence of service marketing management on the institution's image (Hofflinger & von Hippel, 2020; Ibrahim & Umuhani, 2021).

The results also show that the marketing mix influenced the school choice decision. The marketing mix in schools is a set of tactical marketing tools that a school combines to generate the desired response from parents and students. Parents can assess the quality of a school by evaluating the services offered by the school. School Choice is a policy that seeks to provide families with a degree of discretion in the selection of the school for their children, with parents able to express a preference regarding which school they would like their children to attend (Fradito et al., 2020; Wilson & Bridge, 2019). This study aligns with research in an integrated Islamic primary school that shows the positive and significant influence of the marketing mix on parents' decisions in choosing a school (Afridayani & Mu'arif, 2020) (Tarkhnishvili et al., 2022). Previous studies also indicated that the marketing mix influences parents' decisions in choosing a primary school (Irawan, 2017; Iskandar et al., 2021).

The results also show that school image influenced the school choice decision. A good school image will encourage parents to make school choice decisions. The school image, also known as the school's reputation, depicts how the public perceives the activities and educational programs of the school. One of the most influential factors in the decision to send children to school is the school's reputation (Boonchan & Nopakun, 2020; Eger et al., 2018). A previous study found that parents prefer private schools for children because of the shown image. This study aligns with research in one primary school that shows a strong positive relationship between school image and parents' decisions in choosing a school(Enjina & F, 2019; Hina et al., 2023; D. G. A. A. S. Putra et al., 2022). Additionally, previous research also indicated the influence of the school image on consumers' decisions in choosing a school (Ermaya, 2020; Tareq et al., 2022).

The result of the indirect effect can be interpreted as the school image mediating between the marketing mix and the school choice decision. The research results indicate that the indirect effect has a lower influence (original sample 0.225) compared to the direct effect between the marketing mix and school choice decisions (original sample 0.426). This result suggests that schools can focus more on improving the marketing mix in the hope of increasing parents' school choice decisions. If marketing efforts are prioritized, a positive school image will automatically form in line with the improvement of these school choice decisions. Previous research supports that the school image serves as an intermediary between the marketing mix and parents' loyalty in the school choice decision(Mermer et al., 2022; Siagian et al., 2017).

Based on the results of this study, there are two variables that did not influence the school choice decision, namely the religiosity and reference group. Religiosity as individual differences did not influence the school choice decision. This result indicates that the level of religiosity among parents does not influence parents' decisions in choosing a school. This finding contradicts research that indicates religiosity is one of the factors that influence parents' decisions in choosing an Islamic school (Ajayi, 2022; Najmy Hanifah & Istikomah Istikomah, 2022). This study rejects the findings of a previous study that suggested religious beliefs influenced parents' decisions regarding the choice of schools for their children. The earlier study posited that parents felt it was their responsibility to instill godly principles in their children through their choice of schools (Perwita & Widuri, 2023; Pracipta, 2021).

The reference group as environmental factors did not influence the school choice decision. This result indicates that external influence, in the form of reference group, is unable to affect parents' decisions in choosing a school. This finding contradicts research in private primary schools that indicates reference group as an external factor that plays a role as a variable influencing parents' decisions in selecting primary schools (Nurfadhillah et al., 2021; Vhalery et al., 2022). It also contradicts a previous study on the Islamic schools in East Java that reference group influence parents' decisions in choosing a place of study for their children. This study rejects the findings that parents may be willing to act on school choice decisions under the influence of information from someone they perceive to have affinity or authority (Ermaya, 2020; Firinta Togatorop et al., 2022).

Based on the results of the PLS-SEM analysis that analyzes the factors influencing the private school choice decision, there is an influence between the marketing mix and school image, as well as school choice decisions. The research also indicated that school image mediates between the marketing mix and school choice decisions. The results serve as a basis for developng strategies to increase the number of students through the choice decision of private primary schools through the AHP technique.

The results of the AHP technique showed that the alternative that private primary school needs to prioritize is building the school image regarding competent human resources with a focus on the "people" aspect in the marketing mix and an emphasis on developing high-quality teachers. Human resources in educational institutions can be managed through recruitment and choice processes, employee competence improvement, career development, employee performance assessment, and compensation (Antariksa, 2017; Hasdiana, 2018). The role of teachers at the primary school level is crucial because children's understanding of what they see and hear is still developing, and they need guidance. In order to achieve competent human resources in their respective fields, teachers need to be nurtured to improve the quality of education (Kholik & Laeli, 2020; Yestiani & Zahwa, 2020).

The managerial implications of this research recommend that private primary schools need to pay attention to the marketing mix aspects they offer, which consist of product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process. They can focus on providing programs that can create high-quality graduates with students who have a solid religious understanding and good character. They must also balance the facilities and school fees provided to students. Creating a child-friendly location with support facilities to protect children from harm is essential. Promotion efforts can also be enhanced by maximizing online advertising. Regarding human resources, the school can establish a regular performance assessment program for its staff. They can also accelerate the development and provision of adequate learning facilities. Choosing enjoyable learning methods for students is another option. Furthermore, the aspects of the school image, which include shaping students with good character, providing quality school programs, and having competent human resources, need to be maintained with the support of all stakeholders. The top priority in the strategy to increase the number of students through the choice decision of private primary schools can be achieved by improving teacher quality.

4. CONCLUSION

The marketing mix significantly influences the school image, and the marketing mix significantly influences the choice decision of private primary schools. Religiosity and reference group do not significantly influence the choice decision of private primary schools, whereas the school image significantly influences the choice decision of private primary schools. The strategy to increase the number of students through the choice decision of private primary schools prioritizes the development of the school image regarding competent human resources in their fields, focusing on the "people" aspect in the marketing mix and emphasizing on the development of high-quality teachers. Human resource management can be done through recruitment and choice processes, competence enhancement, career development, performance assessment, and compensation.

5. REFERENCES

Adilah, H. G., & Suryana, Y. (2021). Manajemen Strategik Dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. *Jurnal Isema : Islamic Educational Management*, *6*(1), 87–94. https://doi.org/10.15575/isema.v6i1.11037.

Afridayani, & Mu'arif, S. (2020). Pengaruh Bauran Pemasaran Jasa terhadap Keputusan Orang Tua dalam Memilih Sekolah Dasar (SDIT) Permata Gemilang. In *Prosiding Senantias: Seminar Nasional Hasil Penelitian dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* (pp. 599–606). Universitas Pamulang. http://openjournal.unpam.ac.id/index.php/Senan/article/view/9040.

Agustian, N., & Salsabila, U. H. (2021). Peran Teknologi Pendidikan dalam Pembelajaran. *Islamika*, *3*(1), 123–133. https://doi.org/10.36088/islamika.v3i1.1047.

Ajayi, K. F. (2022). School Choice and Educational Mobility: Lessons from Secondary School Applications in Ghana. *Journal of Human Resources*, 0417-8714R2. https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.0417-8714r2.

Akbar, H., Simanjuntak, M., & Asnawi, Y. H. (2022). Pengaruh Keputusan Pemilihan Pada Sekolah Islam Terpadu Terhadap Kepuasan dan Positive Word of Mouth. *Jurnal Aplikasi Bisnis Dan Manajemen*, *8*(2), 503–514. https://doi.org/10.17358/jabm.8.2.503.

Annisa, D. (2022). Jurnal Pendidikan dan Konseling. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling*, *4*(1980), 1349–1358.

Antariksa, W. F. (2017). Analisis Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia di Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Dasar*, *10*(1), 47–55. https://doi.org/10.18860/madrasah.v10i1.5096.

Asad, N. (2019). Parental Preferences and Choices in Selection of Private Primary Schools. *Pakistan Administrative Review*, *3*(3), 117–131. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-67653-6.

Boonchan, B., & Nopakun, A. (2020). Factors Affecting School Choice: Observations from Nakhon Ratchasima Municipality. *Human Behavior, Development and Society*, *21*(3), 69–76. https://so01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/hbds/article/view/220993/165152.

Cantu, N., Varela, D. G., Jones, D., & Challoo, L. (2021). Factors that Influence School Choice: A Look at Parents' and School Leaders' Perceptions. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, *3*(1), 19–41. https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2021.2.

Directive, R. E. (2020). *Factors Influencing Students' Choice of a Federal University: A Case Study of a Nigerian Federal University*. *2020*, 108–129. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240040496%0.

Eger, L., Egerová, D., & Pisoňová, M. (2018). Assessment of School Image. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, *8*(2), 97–122. https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.546.

Enjina, S., & F, K. (2019). Pengaruh Citra Merek Terhadap Keputusan Orangtua Memilih Jasa Pendidikan di Sekolah Dasar Amkur Bengkayang. *Jurnal Produktivitas: Jurnal Fakultas Ekonomi Universitas Muhammadiyah Pontianak*, *6*(1), 75–79. https://doi.org/10.29406/jpr.v6i1.1647.

Ermaya, S. K. (2020). Analisis Aspek-Aspek Keunggulan Bersaing di Sekolah Dasar Swasta Nugraha Bandung. *Coopetition: Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen*, *11*(1), 61–68. https://journal.ikopin.ac.id/index.php/coopetition/article/view/78/73.

Fadhli, R. (2022). Implementasi Kebijakan Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Elementaria Edukasia*, *5*(2), 147–156. https://doi.org/10.31949/jee.v5i2.4230.

Firinta Togatorop, Daulat Nathanael Banjarnahor, & Doris Yolanda Saragih. (2022). Sosialisasi Pengaruh Teknologi dalam Pendidikan di Era Globalisasi di Sekolah Dasar (SD) Swasta HKI 3 Pematangsiantar. *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Indonesia*, *1*(2), 68–76. https://doi.org/10.55606/jpmi.v1i2.232.

Fradito, A., Suti'ah, & Muliyadi. (2020). Strategi Pemasaran Pendidikan dalam Meningkatkan Citra Sekolah. *Al-Idarah: Jurnal Kependidikan Islam*, *10*(1), 12–22 10 24042 10 1 6203.

Gille, M., Moulignier, R., & Kövesi, K. (2022). Understanding the factors influencing students' choice of engineering school. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, *47*(2), 245–258. https://doi.org/10.1080/03043797.2021.1993795.

Greaves, E., Wilson, D., & Nairn, A. (2023). Marketing and School Choice: A Systematic Literature Review. *Review of Educational Research*, *93*(6), 825–861. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543221141658.

Hasdiana, U. (2018). Merdeka Belajar dan Kampus Merdeka. In *Analytical Biochemistry* (Vol. 11, Issue 1). http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-59379-1.

Hina, S., Zafar, J. M., & Naeemullah. (2023). Effect of Parent's Social Background and Income Level on Decision-Making for School Selection of Their Children. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *4*(3), 99–107. https://doi.org/10.55737/qjssh.872899622.

Hofflinger, A., Gelber, D., & Tellez Cañas, S. (2020). School choice and parents' preferences for school attributes in Chile. *Economics of Education Review*, *74*(February 2020). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2019.101946.

Hofflinger, A., & von Hippel, P. T. (2020). Does Achievement Rise Fastest with School Choice, School Resources, or Family Resources? Chile from 2002 to 2013. *Sociology of Education*, *93*(2), 132–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040719899358.

Husni, F., & Wahyudiati, D. (2022). Relevansi Manajemen Strategik Kepala Sekolah dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Pendidikan dan Daya Saing di Sekolah Dasar. *Dirasat: Jurnal Manajemen Dan Pendidikan Islam*, *8*(1), 34–47. https://doi.org/10.26594/dirasat.v8i1.2796.

Ibrahim, T., & Umuhani, P. (2021). Pengaruh Manajemen Pemasaran Jasa terhadap Citra Lembaga Pendidikan di Madrasah Tsanawiyah Ma'arif Cikeruh Jatinangor Sumedang. *Jurnal Isema: Islamic Educational Management*, *6*(2), 221–230. https://doi.org/10.15575/isema.v6i2.12023.

Irawan, I. C. (2017). Analisis Pengaruh Bauran Pemasaran Jasa terhadap Keputusan Wali Murid Memilih Sekolah Dasar. *Journal of Business & Banking*, *7*(2), 263–276. https://doi.org/10.14414/jbb.v7i2.1382.

Iskandar, A. S., Ilham, B. R., & Rahmat, R. (2021). The Role of Service Marketing Mix on The Decision to Choose A School: An Empirical Study on Elementary Schools. *JPPI (Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia*, *7*(3), 469–476. https://doi.org/10.29210/020211177.

Ismuratno, I., Hamdani, M. K., & Prahastiwi, E. D. (2021). Implementasi Strategi Pemasaran Jasa Pendidikan Di Lembaga Sekolah Dasar Islam Insan Cendekia Pacitan. *KREATIF: Jurnal Studi Pemikiran Pendidikan Agama Islam*, *19*(1), 16–29. https://doi.org/10.52266/kreatif.v19i1.685.

Kholik, A., & Laeli, S. (2020). Keunggulan Bersaing Berkelanjutan Sekolah Alam Berbasis Model Resource-Based View. *Tadbir Muwahhid*, *4*(1), 73–97. https://doi.org/10.24246/j.sw.2012.v28.i2.p137-146.

Kumar, D., & Choudhury, P. K. (2021). Determinants of Private School Choice in India: All about the Family Backgrounds? *Journal of School Choice*, *15*(4), 576–602. https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2020.1852517.

Mahbub, M. A., Jayawinangun, R., & Amaliasari, D. (2023). Pengaruh Citra Sekolah terhadap Keputusan Orangtua Memilih Sekolah di SDIT Zaid bin Tsabit. *Jurnal Riset Public Relations*, 85–94. https://doi.org/10.29313/jrpr.v3i2.2482.

Mermer, S., Özer, N., & Şad, S. N. (2022). Private Schools' Marketing Tactics, Parents' Loyalty and School Image: A Structural Equation Model. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*, *7*(4), 787–824. https://doi.org/10.30828/real.1093128.

Mohajan, H. K. (2020). Quantitative Research: A Successful Investigation in Natural and Social Sciences. In *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People* (Vol. 9, Issue 4). https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v9i4.679.

Moschetti, M. C., & Verger, A. (2020). Opting for Private Education: Public Subsidy Programs and School Choice in Disadvantaged Contexts. *Educational Policy*, *34*(1), 65–90. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904819881151.

Mukmin, B. (2020). Manajemen Pemasaran Jasa Sekolah Dasar Terpadu. *Jurnal Isema : Islamic Educational Management*, *5*(1), 97–112. https://doi.org/10.15575/isema.v5i1.6076.

Mwase, D., Simuyaba, E., Mwewa, G., Muleya, G., & Simui, F. (2020). Leveraging parental involvement in the education of their children as a conflict resolution strategy in selected secondary schools, Zambia. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, *4*(7), 356–365.

Nafindra, I. B., & Rifqi, A. (2022). Strategi Kepala Sekolah Dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Pendidikan Pada Jenjang Sekolah Dasar dan Menengah. *Jurnal Inspirasi Manajemen Pendidikan*, *10*(3), 551–565.

Najmy Hanifah, & Istikomah Istikomah. (2022). Branding Sekolah Swasta Dalam Menghadapi Kebijakan Zonasi. *Idaarah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, *6*(2), 274–286. https://doi.org/10.24252/idaarah.v6i2.32759.

Nurfadhillah, S., Ramadhanty Wahidah, A., Rahmah, G., Ramdhan, F., Claudia Maharani, S., & Muhammadiyah Tangerang, U. (2021). Penggunaan Media Dalam Pembelajaran Matematika Dan Manfaatnya Di Sekolah Dasar Swasta Plus Ar-Rahmaniyah. *EDISI : Jurnal Edukasi Dan Sains*, *3*(2), 289–298. https://ejournal.stitpn.ac.id/index.php/edisi.

Perwita, D., & Widuri, R. (2023). Telaah pendidikan: preferensi orang tua memilih sekolah swasta daripada sekolah negeri. *EQUILIBRIUM : Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi Dan Pembelajarannya*, *11*(1), 64. https://doi.org/10.25273/equilibrium.v11i1.14779.

Potterton, A. U. (2020). Parental Accountability, School Choice, and the Invisible Hand of the Market. *Educational Policy*, *34*(1), 166–192. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904819881155.

Pracipta, K. I. (2021). Faktor-Faktor Determinasi Keputusan Orang Tua Memilih Sekolah Dasar Swasta Untuk Anak Di Kota Yogyakarta. *Spektrum Analisis Kebijakan Pendidikan*, *10*(3), 65–79. https://doi.org/10.21831/sakp.v10i3.17458.

Prasetyaningrum, A., & Marmoah, S. (2022). Analisis SWOT Manajemen Peserta Didik dalam Penerimaan Peserta Didik Baru di Sekolah Negeri. *Jurnal Basicedu*, *6*(4), 5598–5604.

https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i4.2771.

Putra, A. P., Yetri, & Ayu, S. M. (2023). Implikasi Marketing Mix dan Citra Sekolah terhadap Keputusan Orang Tua Memilih Sekolah Anak. *Tapis: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmiah*, *7*(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.32332/tapis.v7i1.6762.

Putra, D. G. A. A. S., Mitariani, N. W. E., & Imbayani, I. G. A. (2022). Pengaruh Lokasi, Persepsi Harga dan Citra Sekolah Terhadap Keputusan Orang Tua Murid Memilih Jasa Pendidikan Di Sekolah Dasar Jambe Agung Batubulan. *Jurnal Emas*, *3*(4), 194–201. https://e-journal.unmas.ac.id/index.php/emas/article/view/4105.

Rizal, R., Wilade, S. J., & Herlina, H. (2020). Peningkatan Inovasi Layanan Pendidikan Melalui Implementasi Manajemen Grid Di Sekolah Dasar. *Educate: Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan*, *5*(2), 43–53.

Sadjali, I. (2022). Efektifitas Komunikasi Persuasif Guru dalam Meningkatkan Kepercayaan Orang Tua Murid. *Multidisplin Ilmu*, *1*(2), 205–214.

Shofia Hattarina, Nurul Saila, Adenta Faradila, Dita Refani Putri, & RR.Ghina Ayu Putri. (2022). Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Di Lembaga Pendidikan. *Seminar Nasional Sosial Sains, Pendidikan, Humaniora (SENASSDRA)*, *1*, 181–192. http://prosiding.unipma.ac.id/index.php/SENASSDRA.

Siagian, H., Wijaya, S., & Karnia, P. (2017). The Influence Of Marketing Mix on The Parent Loyalty through School Image. *Proceeding of The 2017 International Multidisciplinary Conferences on Productivity and Sustainability*, 89–93. https://repository.petra.ac.id/17883/6/III.A.2.a.1_6.

Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif*. Alfabeta.

Syukur, F. (2021). Model Strategi Pemasaran Jasa Pendidikan Islam pada SD Nasima Semarang. *Jurnal Studi Masyarakat, Religi, Dan Tradisi*, *7*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.18784/smart.v7i01.1084.

Tareq, A. M., Deny, R. D., & Rendra, W. (2022). Pengaruh Citra Sekolah dan Kualitas Layanan Pendidikan melalui Perilaku Wali Murid terhadap Keputusan Memilih Sekolah Menengah Pertama Islam Terpadu Imam Syafii 2 Kota Pekanbaru. *Journal Online Mahasiswa FEB*, *9*(2), 1–14. https://jom.unri.ac.id/index.php/JOMFEKON/article/view/33971.

Tarkhnishvili, A., Tarkhnishvili, L., & Strielkowski, W. (2022). Factors Influencing The Choice of Private or Public Schools: Evidence from Georgia. *Frontiers in Education*, *7*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.910593.

Urfatullaila, L., Rahmawati, I., Lestari, H., & Ismail, Z. (2021). Reslaj : Religion Education Social Laa Roiba Jornal Reslaj : Religion Education Social Laa Roiba Jornal. *Reslaj: Religion Education Social Laa Roiba Jornal*, *3*(1), 14–22. https://doi.org/10.47476/reslaj.v4i1.435.

Vhalery, R., Setyastanto, A. M., & Leksono, A. W. (2022). Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka: Sebuah Kajian Literatur. *Research and Development Journal of Education*, *8*(1), 185. https://doi.org/10.30998/rdje.v8i1.11718.

Wicaksono, A. K. (2021). Strategi Marketing Mix dalam Menarik Minat Peserta Didik Baru pada Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Swasta. *Attractive : Innovative Education Journal*, *3*(2), 152. https://doi.org/10.51278/aj.v3i2.189.

Wilson, D., & Bridge, G. (2019). School Choice and The City: Geographies of Allocation and Segregation. *Urban Studies*, *56*(15), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098019843481.

Yestiani, D. K., & Zahwa, N. (2020). Peran Guru dalam Pembelajaran pada Siswa Sekolah Dasar. *Fondatia: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar*, *4*(1), 41–47. https://doi.org/10.36088/fondatia.v4i1.515.