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SCHOOL SELECTION BEHAVIOUR AND DEMOGRAPHIC SEGMENTATION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL USERS IN KUWAIT

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This marketing-oriented investigation is concerned with Kuwaiti parents' behaviour of school selection. The results demonstrated that selecting a public, Arabic private, or foreign private school is more likely to be influenced by treatment, efficiency, expenses, school activities, location, school image, and word-of-mouth communications. The results also revealed that the perceived relative importance of some of the school selection determinants vary across the education stages. Public, and private school users were found significantly different in certain demographic characteristices. Lastly, the study suggested several implications for public policy makers to increase public school use among Kuwaiti parents.

In reality, consumers are now faced with a great deal more complexity in deciding which product/brand is best suited to meet their different economic, social, and psychological needs. Consumer selection behaviour has always been of great concern to marketing researchers, practitioners, and public policy makers in most of the wealthy industrial countries. Success in marketing depends on full understanding of patterns in consumer choice behaviour. Since consumers must deal with a multiplicity of alternatives, the choices they make represent preferences for particular product attributes (McDonald, 1993). Information on how consumers make these distinctions is essential to capturing and maintaining a strong product/brand positioning in the marketplace.

Over the last 35 years, or so, numerous attempts have been made to sharpen knowledge of the effect of product attributes on consumer choice behaviour. Most investigations have focused on brands, retail stores, restaurants, catalogs, banks and international accounting firms (e.g.,Denton and Chan, 1991; Franklin, 1959; Fry,1967 and 1971; Hansen and Deutscher, 1977-78; Harry, 1982; Jacoby *et al*,

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1974; Khzeh and Decker, 1992-93; Laroche *et al*, 1986; Lewis, 1981; May, 1974; Martenson, 1985; McDonald, 1993; McNeal and Zeren, 1981; Monoroe and Guiltinan, 1975; Roberts and Urban, 1988; Scott and Walt, 1995; Susan, 1992). According to Engel *et al* (1986), the store-choice decision can be of high or low involvement. At times it will be a very important decision, especially if high involvement products are being purchased. At other times, especially with convenience products, the decision is much simpler : the consumer has well-formed evaluative criteria and shops at the most convenient store as long as the store continues to satisfy those criteria (Engel *et al*, 1986).

Monore and Guiltinan (1975) speculated that choosing a store as a process is based on interaction between the marketing strategies of the store and the individual and situational characteristics of buyers. The determinants of choice decisions vary by product class or store type (May, 1974-75). Nevertheless, salient attributes usually fall into the following categories: Location, nature and quality of assortment, price, advertising and promotion, sales personnel, service offered, physical store attributes, nature of store client, store atmosphere, and post-transaction service satisfaction (Anderson *et al*, 1976; Engel *et al*, 1986; Hansen and Deutscher, 1977-78; Khazeh and Decker, 1993; Laroche *et al*, 1986).

Recent studies on bank selection decisions (e.g., Denton and Chan, 1991; Kaynak *et al*, 1991; Khazeh and Decker, 1992-93; Leonard and Spencer, 1991; Yue and Tom, 1994-95) have concluded that the consumer choice of a bank depends primarily on service change policy, reputation, convenience of location, interest charge on loans, quick loan approval, courteous personnel, interests on savings, and operating hours. Earlier to these studies, Laroche *et al* (1986) reviewed intensively the literature, and generated a list of 25 factors on bank selection included in their survey research. They concluded that the most important criteria for bank selection in Canada are convenient location, friendliness of staff, size of waiting lines, operating hours, efficiency of personnel, speed of processing items, parking, and interest on savings. Other studies (Susan, 1992; Lewis, 1981) found that the main factors of restaurant choice are: food type, food quality, value for money, atmosphere, location, and speed of service.

Finally, Scott and Walt (1995) investigated the choice criteria in the selection of international accounting firms. They concluded that the choice dimensions of accounting services involve accessibility of key staff, ability to offer personal service, reputation for fast and efficient sevice, providing expertise not feasible to provide in - house, and fees competitive with other firms.

Consistent with the literature of consumer choice behaviour, the school selection decision could be considered as one of high-involvement decision models because it tends to be related to a high-involvement product (i.e., education service), and it is rarely easy to make. Probably similar to the store-choice decisions, selecting a school is based on interaction between the school attributes and the individual and situational characteristics of parents. Examining the determinant factors used in making school selection decisions by Kuwaiti parents is of central concern to the

present study. Demographic segmentation of public and private school users in Kuwait is also investigated in this study.

In Kuwait, the education service is generally provided by both public and private schools. The first government school was established in 1912, with two stages. The primary stage was six years duration while secondary stage was two years duration. Kindergarten was set up with only two-schools in 1954. Other technical, commercial and religious schools and institiutes were founded in the period of 1955-1963. The Kuwaiti education system has become primary, intermediate and secondary of four years each since 1962. By 1994, there were 126 kindergarten schools, 169 primary schools, 153 intermediate schools and 106 secondary schools at the public education with 22,847 pupils (Ministry of Education 1993 and 1994).

Private education was initially started in Kuwait in 1959. It involves Arabic and foreign schools, as well as other private institutes. By 1994, there were 146 Arabic schools with 38,033 pupils, and 78 foreign schools with 22,843 pupils (Ministry of Education 1993 and 1994). The confidence in the education system reached its peak in 1989 in Kuwait, to be followed by a set of setbacks which have had their negative effects on both educational establishments and customers.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to (a) examine the underlying factors affecting school selection behaviour of Kuwaiti parents, (b) profile school selection behaviour across the primary, intermediate, and secondary stages of education, and (c) discriminate among the users of public, Arabic private, and foreign private schools in terms of their demographic characteristics.

In meeting the last two objectives of this study, the following hypotheses were examined:

H_{o1} : Kuwaiti parents' judgements about the relative importance of school selection criteria at the three education stages (i.e., primary, intermediate, and secondary) are not significantly different.

H_{o2}: Users of public, Arabic private, and foreign private schools cannot be discriminated significantly in terms of their demographics (i.e., age, education, occupation, mother's nationality, family size, and family income).

Methodology

Sampling

The population of interest to this study should be all Kuwaiti pupils' parents as consumers of the education service delivered by both public and private schools. Two key reasons can explain our decision of selecting parents rather than pupils, as consumers of the education service. First, students at various levels of education (i.e., primary, intermediate and secondary) are not in a position to choose between public and private schools; it is their parents' decision. Second, parents are the only

reliable respondents to judge and evaluate the quality of the education service because of their past experience , familiarity with the education systems, and their responsibilities for their children.

A random sample of 687 subjects was chosen from three large governorates in the state of Kuwait. The single sampling unit was the pupil's custodian or, if any, the closest relative. Thirty different public and private schools, ten in each of the three selected governorates, representing the three levels of education (i.e., primary, intermediate, and secondary) were chosen randomly and served as the sampling sites. The proportion of public schools to Arabic private schools and to foreign private schools in the sample was 6:3:1. The over representation of pubic schools in the sample is believed not to bias seriously the results of this investigation because these schools are the majority in the education industry in Kuwait.

Following the procedures of the multistage stratified sampling, the whole sample was divided into three strata to represent the three selected governorates in Kuwait on the basis of the number of schools in each governorate. Each stratum was in turn divided into subsets to the chosen schools in each governorate on the basis of school size, level of education and pupils gender (i.e.,boys and girls are sometimes in separate schools). For each school, Kuwaiti parents were selected randomly, using the pupils name records provided by the school administration. In cooperation with each school administration, parents were interviewed individually or in groups. Couples who attended together were counted as one unit.

Data Collection Process

The required data for this study was gathered via the survey research method. A structured questionnaire was prepared in both Arabic and English and pretested to make sure that the questions was fully understood by the prospective respondents. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections. The first part was designed to elicit information on the criteria used by Kuwaiti parents to choose a school (public or private) for their childern. Respondents were asked to rate the relative importance of 22 potential influencing factors on their decision to select a school on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 "not important at all" to 5 "very important". Most of the school selection factors were adopted from the literature of consumer choice decisions. The remaining factors were generated particularly for school selection decisions through personal and focus-group interviews with pupils' parents of both public and private schools (see table 1).

The second part of the questionnaire involved a multiple-choice question regarding the education stages (primary, intermediate, and secondary)to which the school selection factors used. The last part was designed to gather relevant demographic data from each respondent, including age, education, occupation, family size, mother's nationality, and family income. The surverys were administered at the selected school sites by well-trained persons. Responses to the surveys were collected via the personal interview method. The completed usable questionnaires were 600, representing a response rate of 87 per cent. Non - responses to the survey were mainly because of refusals.

Analysis and Results

Reliability Assessment

Reliability analysis including examination of item-total correlations and calculation of alpha coefficients was performed on the school selection scale. Items with total correlations below 0.30 were eliminated (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally, 1967). Because the school selections scale is supposed to measure separately a number of hypothesized dimensions, alpha coefficients had to be computed among the sub-scale items which intend to measure each of these dimensions; one at a time. In addition, alpha coefficient was computed among all items of the entire scale of school selection behaviour.

Table 1

Measures of the School Selection Behaviour

Dimensions	Attributes
I. Location:	Convenience of tne school location. - Parking areas. - Availability of safety and security in the school - location.
II. Treatment:	Good treatment with parents by school staff. - Good treatment with pupils by school teachers.
III. Efficiency:	- Efficiency of school teachers. - Modern education methods employed by the school. - Appropriateness of the school curriculum to - pupil needs. Quality of the school Curriculum. - Type of language used in teaching (i.e., Arabic or English, or - others). Efficiency of the follow-up system employed in the school. -
IV. Additional Services and Activities:	Variety of services provided to pupils (e.g., health care, social - services, library, ..etc). Types of activities offered by schools (e.g., entertainment, pic- - nics, athletic games, arts ...etc).
V. Image:	The school reputation. - Teacher's nationality (i.e., Kuwaitis, Arabs, or Foreigners). - Types of pupils in terms of their social classes. - Separation between boys and girls. -
VI. Cost:	Tuition. - Bus fare. - Additional fees for school activities. -
VII. Word-of-mouth Communications	Recommendations by relatives and friends. - Favorable word-of-mouth among parents who were impressed - with integrity of the school.

The initial results of reliability analysis demonstrated that item-total correlations were above 0.04 for all items within each sub-scale except three items related to the two dimensions of "efficiency" and "image". Item-total correlations for the latter items were less than 0.30, and should be omitted.

Table 2 presents the final results of reliability analysis of the school selection scale, including definitions of the scale dimensions, number of items per dimension, and alpha coefficients for each sub-scale and the entire scale. As shown in table 2, alpha coefficient of each dimension was not less than 0.70 except the dimension of "image" which had alpha 0.45. Additionally, alpha coefficient for the entire scale was 0.82 - quite well within the acceptable limits of reliability in social sciences (Nunnally, 1967). A second run of reliability analysis was performed in attempt to improve alpha coefficients particularly after reducing the number of the scale items from 22 to 19. The results of the second run indicated that alpha of both " efficiency" and "image" was improved to be 0.83 and 0.66; respectively. Also, alpha coefficient for the entire scale of school selection behaviour was increased from 0.82 to 0.89.

Table 2

Reliability Coefficients for the School Selection Scale

Scale Dimensions	Run # 1		Run # 2	
	Number of Items	Alpha Coefficient	Number of Item	Alpha Coefficient
• Location	3	0.76	3	0.76
• Treatment	2	0.70	2	0.70
• Efficiency	6	0.80	5	0.83
• Activities	2	0.75	2	0.75
• Cost	3	0.82	3	0.82
• Image	4	0.45	2	0.66
• Word-of-mouth	2	0.72	2	0.72
All dimensions	22	0.82	19	0.89

Determinants of School Selection Behaviour

Principal components analysis with rotated varimax was performed in this study to extract the underlying factors affecting Kuwaiti parents' behaviour in selecting a public or private school for their children. The original variables of school selection behaviour were 19, and the sample size was 600 subjects. Variables or items with Loadings greater than 0.60 on more than one factor or with loadings above 0.60 on any factor were eliminated.

The resulting factors, factor loadings, explained variance and factor names are shown in Table 3. Public or private school selection behaviour is more likely to be influenced by five main factors: treatment and efficiency, cost, school activities,

location, and image and word-of-mouth communications. These derived factors involve fifteen items (or attributes), and explained about 76 per cent of the total variance in the original variables of school selection behaviour. Only four out of the nineteen original variables were eliminated according to the criteria mentioned abve. The 5-school selection factors in order of their contributions to the total variance are presented at the bottom of Table 3. More explanation for each of these factors is reported below.

Factor I: Treatment and Efficiency

The first derived factor involves 6 items and explains about 30 per cent of the total variance in the data of school selection behaviour. According to the first factor, the selection behaviour of public, or Arabic private or foreign private schools is more likely to be affected by good treatment with pupils and their parents by school staff and teachers, efficiency, of school teachers, modern education methods and techniques employed, appropriateness of the school curriculum to the pupils needs, and type of language used in teaching.

Factor II: Cost

The second derived factor includes 3 items and explains about 20 per cent of the total variance in the same data. This factor reveals that school selection behaviour by Kuwaiti parents seems to be influenced by tuition, bus fare, and any additional fees required for school activities.

Factor III: School Activities

The third derived factor comprises only 2 items and explains about 10 per cent of the total variation in the same data. This factor indicates that both types of activities offered by schools and variety of services provided to pupils are of particular concern to Kuwaiti parents in making their school selection decisions.

Table 3

The Underlying Factors of School Selection Behaviour:
(Outputs of Principal Components Analysis with Varimax Rotation)

Original Variables	FI	FII	FIII	FIV	FV
1. Good Treatment with pupils by school teachers.	.84	0.3	.16	.05	.02
2. Good treatment with parents by school staff.	.82	.09	.15	.03	.34
3. Efficiency of school teachers.	.77	.01	.25	.05	.10
4. Modern education methods employed.	.76	.10	.24	.03	.01

Table 3 (cont.)

The Underlying Factors of School Selection Behaviour:
(Outputs of Principal Components Analysis with Varimax Rotation)

	Original Variables	FI	FII	FIII	FIV	FV
5.	Appropriateness of the school curriculum to pupils' needs	.69	.12	.26	.06	.15
6.	Type of language used in teaching.	.66	.13	.20	.04	.13
7.	Parking areas.	.39	.10	.33	.32	.12
8.	Tuition.	.05	.87	.02	.11	.05
9.	Bus fare.	.02	.86	.10	.04	.09
10	Additional fees for the school activities.	.11	.86	.17	.07	.00
11.	Types of activities offered by the school.	.12	.05	.83	.04	.13
12.	Variety of services provided to pupils.	.23	.12	.78	.07	.03
13.	The school reputation.	.21	.08	.53	.01	.07
14.	Availability of security and safety in the location.	.05	.09	.11	.92	.04
15.	Convenient location.	.01	.09	.06	.90	.10
16.	Separation between boys and girls.	.27	.05	.08	.35	.76
17.	Efficiency of the follow-up system.	.40	.08	.45	.05	.12
18.	Recommendations by relatives and friends.	.06	.32	.15	.10	.26
19.	Favorable word-of-mouth among parents who were impressed with the integrity of the school.	.19	.06	.04	.13	.84
-	% of Variance explained	29.48	19.46	10.31	9.20	7.00
-	Cumulative variance explained	29.48	48.94	59.25	68.45	75.45

- Factor I: Treatment and efficiency (V1,2,3,4,5, & 6)
- Factor II: Cost (V8, 9 & 10)
- Factor III: School activities (V11 & 12)
- Factor IV: School location (V14 & 15)
- Factor V: Image and Word-of-mouth Communications (V16 & 19)

Factor IV: School Location

The fourth extracted factor consists of only 2 items and explains about 9 per cent of the total variance in the original data. This factor shows that school selection behaviour tends to be affected by school location convenience and availability of security and safety in this location.

Factor V: Image and Word-of-Mouth Communications

The last derived factor includes only 2 items and explains about 7 per cent of the total variance in the original data. It reveals that school selection behaviour is more likely to be influenced by the school image in terms of serving either males, or females, or both. This factor reflects the influence of culture impact on school selection behaviour of some Kuwaiti parents, which could be regarded to the impact of their beliefs (i.e., females should be separated from males in receiving the education services or any other services in the public). The same derived factor reveals that school selection behaviour tends to be affected by favorable word-of-mouth among Kuwaiti parents who were impressed with the integrity of the school.

Profiles of School Selection Behaviour Based on the Various Education Stages

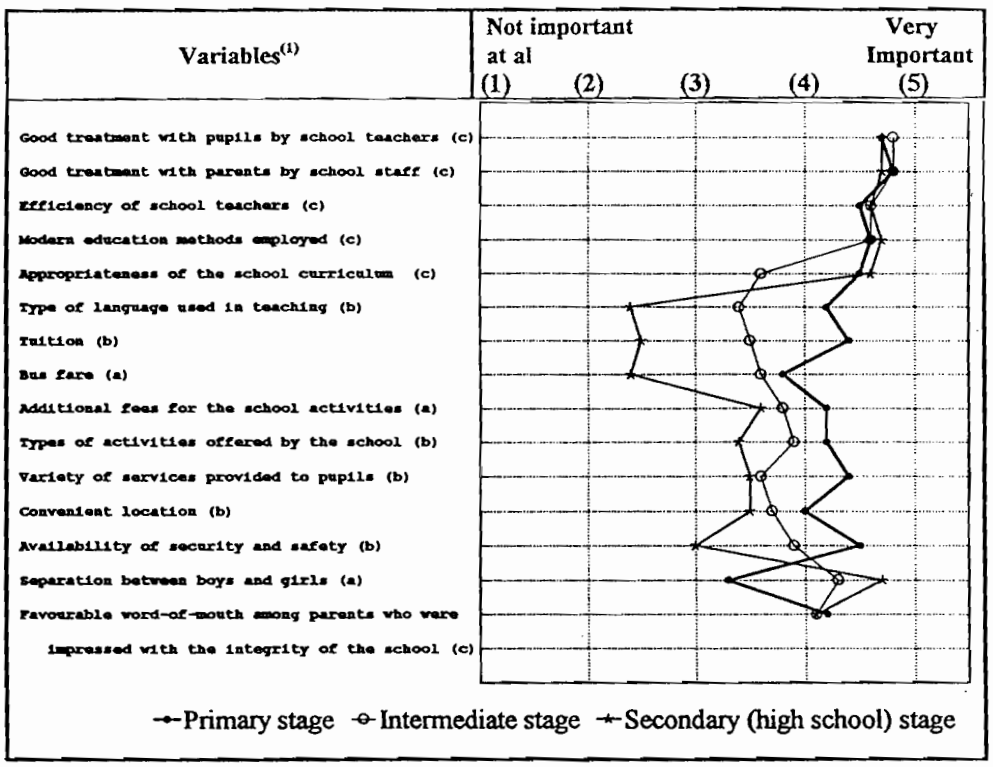
An additional way to explore the behaviour of school selection is to compare the criteria used by parents to choose an appropriate school for their children across the three education stages (i.e., primary, intermediate, and secondary stages). This section, therefore, is concerned with: (a) profiling the relative importance of school selection criteria across the various education stages; and (b) testing whether parents' judgements about the relative importance of each of these criteria are different across the three education stages. Figure 1 depicts the results of profile analysis of school selection behaviour based on the education stages.

Based on the education stages, parents tend to be different in their judgements about the relative importance of some of the school selection criteria previously extracted by factor analysis, but they tend to be similar in their judgement about the others. Nine attributes were rated differently by Kuwaiti parents in terms of their relative importance to school selection decisions across the three education stages (see Figure 1). Regardless of the education stage, good treatment with both parents and pupils, efficiency of school teachers, modern education methods employed, appropriateness of the school curriculum to pupils' needs, and word-of-mouth are more likely to be very important in selecting a school by Kuwait parents. Of particular importance to choose a school for the primary education stage are type of language used in teaching, variety of services and activities provided, convenient location, availability of security and safety, tuition, bus fare, and additional fees for the school activities.

As shown in Figure 1, separation between boys and girls, and variety of services provided to pupils tend to be important factors in selecting a school for the intermediate stage. Finally, separation between boys and girls, and additional school fees are more likely to be of great importance to choose a school at the secondary stage (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Profile Analysis of School Selection Behaviour Based on the Education Stages



(1) These variables represent the 5 factors extracted by principal components analysis, and explained about 76 per cent of the total variance in the school selection behavior (see Table 8).

a = P < .01

b = p < .05

c = not significant

The above findings reveal that there are a number of attributes that are of particular importance to Kuwaiti parents in selecting an appropriate school for their children regardless of the education stage. Such school attributes mainly relate to school efficiency, treatment, reputation, and word-of-mouth. Meanwhile, there are some other school attributes that vary in their relative importance to the behaviour of school selection according to the education stage. The latter attributes mainly pertain to school expenses, image, activities and services, location, security and safety, and teaching language.

Demographic Segmentation of Public and Private School Users

Of particular interest to this study is to find out whether Kuwaiti parents of public, Arabic private and foreign private schools can be correctly classified into three distinguishing segments in terms of their demographics. In addition, the study is concerned with these demographic characteristics that might best discriminate among the three segments of the education service market in Kuwait.

The 3-group discriminant analysis (MDA) was selected to achieve the above objectives. This multivariate technique was performed on the prior classification of Kuwaiti parents as a dependent variable (i.e., G1, G2, and G stand for parents of public, Arabic private, and foreign private schools; respectively). A nine demographic characteristics (i.e., age, education, and occupation of pupils' mothers and fathers; mothers' nationality; family size; and family income) with 39 categories was employed in the MDA model as independent variables. Because the demographic variables were categorical data in nature, it was decided to transfer them into dummy variables (Churchill, 1995). The results and interpretations of the stepwise MDA are reported below.

The MDA provided us with two discriminant functions (see Figure 2), but the first function was more significant; with eigenvalue of 0.796 and a relative percentage contribution of 72.30 (0.796/1.101). The eigenvalue of the first discriminant function indicated that the explained variance in the data was about 80 per cent. The discriminant scores on the first function,, therefore, account for a large proportion of the discrimination power of the whole analysis. The canonical correlation in the first function represented 0.56, indicating that there is a moderate relationship between the discriminant scores on the first function and group member ship (see figure2). Consequently, the three segments of school parents are significantly discriminated in terms of their demographics.

Figure2

Discriminant Functions and Classification Matrix of Public, Arabic Private, and Foreign Private School Users

(a) Discriminant functions

Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Canonical Correlation	Wilk's Lambda	Chi-Square	D.F
1	0.796	80.01	0.56	0.52	201.05*	32
2	0.305	19.99	0.40	0.67	43.48**	15

(b) Classification Matrix

Actual Groups (Users)	No. of Cases	Predicted Group Membership			Total
		(1)	(2)	(3)	
-Group (1): Public schools	360	238 (66.1%)	43 (11.9%)	79 (21.9%)	360 (100%)
Group (2): -Arabic private schools	180	62 (34.4%)	84 (46.7%)	34 (18.9%)	180 (100%)
-Group (3) Foreign private schools	60	13 (21.7%)	10 (16.7%)	37 (61.7%)	60 (100%)
Total	600				600
Percent of "grouped" cases correctly classified: 59.83%					

* $P < .01$
** $P < .05$

The classification matrix (see Figure 2) shows that all school parents under investigation are 60 per cent correctly classified into three separate segments (i.e., parents of public, Arabic private, and foreign private schools) on the basis of their demographic characteristics.

Lastly, the MDA results revealed that the three segments of Kuwaiti parents can be discriminated significantly based on only 11 demographic variables (see Table 4). Examination of the absolute values of the standardized discriminant coefficients listed in Table 4 shows that the best discriminators among these three groups are related to: family size, father's age, mother's nationality, father's occupation, mother's education, annual family income, and mother's occupation.

Table 4
Group Means and Standardized Discriminant Coefficients: Demographic segmentation of Public, Arabic private, and Foreign Private School Users

Best Discriminators	Group Means			Discriminant Coefficients
	G(1) PS	G(2) APS	G(3) FPS	
Family size:				
- Large family	0.25	0.21	0.08	0.60[a]
Father's age:				
- 31- 40 years	0.17	0.14	0.12	0.49[a]
Mother's nationality:				
- Kuwaiti	0.95	0.79	0.67	0.44[a]
- Foreigner	0.01	0.00	0.20	0.40[a]
Father's occupation:				
- Professional (lawyers, medics.. etc.)	0.01	0.06	0.10	0.39[a]
Mother's education:				
- Intermediate school or less.	0.36	0.21	0.25	0.35[a]
- University or a higher degree.	0.11	0.12	0.32	0.33[a]
Annual family income (KD):				
- 20,001 - 30,000	0.15	0.16	0.27	0.30[a]
- < 10,000	0.19	0.16	0.05	0.29[a]
Mother's occupation:				
- Works for private business.	0.11	0.26	0.35	0.26[b]
- Housewife.	0.36	0.11	0.05	0.20[b]

[a] = $p < .01$
[b] = $p < .05$

Demographic Profiles of School User Segments:

On the basis of their demographic characteristics, parents of public schools are more likely to have large families with a lower or moderate annual inome. Pupils' fathers in this segment tend to be of middle age or more than 40 years old, and not professional (i.e., medics, lawyers, judges, engineers...etc). Pupils' mothers in the same segment are more likely to be Kuwaiti who have lower levels of education.

They also tend not to work for private businesses, but to be mostly housewives.On the other hand, parents who favour private schools seem to have opposite demographics in comparison with their counterparts, and tend to have smaller family size with higher annual income. Pupils' fathers of foreign private schools are likely to be young, and profesional. Pupils' mothers in this segment tend to be Kuwaitis or foreigners who have higher education levels. They also tend not to be housewives, but they are mostly professional or work for the private sector. Finally, pupils' parents of Arabic private schools are more likely to be in the middle between the other two segments of parents for most of the above mentioned demographics.

Conclusion

The results of data analysis demonstrate that public or private school selection behaviour is more likely to be influenced by five underlying factors: treatment and efficiency, expenses, school activities, location, and image and word-of-mouth communications. The first factor relates to courteous staff and teachers, efficiency of school teachers, education methods employed, school curriculum, and type of language used in teaching. The second factor pertains to tuition, bus fare, and other additional fees. The third factor reflects school activities and services provided by schools. The fourth factor relates to convenience of location, and availability of security and safety. The last factor reflects school image in terms of serving only girls, or boys, or both, and word-of mouth among parents.

The results also indicate that the perceived relative importance of some of the school selection determinants vary from one education stage to another. This is especially true with regard to school expenses, image, services and activities, and teaching language. Other determinants of school selection behaviour are viewed by Kuwaiti parents as having equal importance regardless of the education stages. Among these common criteria are courtesy of school staff and teachers, location, education methods, school curriculum, and word-of-mouth communications. For example, type of language used in teaching, location, availability of security and safety, and variety of school services and activities are of particular importance to select a school for the primary stage. More likely, separation between boys and girls and types of school activities are important to choose a school for the intermediate stage. Finally, separation between boys and girls, and additional fees for school activities are important to select a school for the secondary stage.

Kuwaiti parents of public, Arabic private, and foreign private schools are correctly classified into three distinguishing segments in terms of their demographics. Moreover, the results reveal that the best discriminators among these three segments, in order of importance, are family size, father's age, mother's nationality, father's occupation, family income, and mother's occupation. For instance, parents of public shools are more likely to be of large families with low or moderate annual income. Pupils' fathers in this segment tend to be of middle age or more that 40 years old, and not housewives with lower levels of education.

Implications

This marketing-oriented research raises some interesting questions about Kuwaiti parents' school selection behaviour. These questions pertain to the determinants of school selection behaviour, the perceived relative importance of school selection factors across the various education stages, and the discrimination among users of public, Arabic private, and foreign private schools in terms of their demographics.

The study sheds important insight into an area of consumer behaviour that is of great concern to public policy makers in Kuwait. Evidence indicates that, as the competition in education service industry in Kuwait has intensified, parents use certain criteria in selecting a school for their children. Kuwaiti parents are keenly aware that either public or private schools vary in certain attributes that reflect the quality of education service provided. Public or private schools in Kuwait should differentiate themselves through improved education service with reasonable fees. Education policy makers in Kuwait would benefit from the results of this study by emphasizing upon the determinants of school selection in any attempt to improve the quality of education service provided by public schools. To be selected by Kuwaiti parents, public schools should be differentiated in terms of efficiency of teachers and staff, friendliness, location, activities, curricula, teaching methods, and fees.

The study provides demographic information on the user segments of both public and private schools. This information would help education service providers design education policies and programs that would satisfy the needs of each segment. For example, private schools are increasingly demanded, but they are very costly particularly for large size families with lower income. On the other hand,the preferred attributes of private schools (e.g., modern education methods, foreign language, and activities) should be available in public schools for those parents who cannot afford private education services for their children.

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