*Research Article*

# Factors Influencing Parents in Choosing SD IT Cahaya Bangsa in Semarang City with Trust as a Moderating Variable

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**Abstract:** Choosing an elementary school is a complex decision for parents, influenced by multiple factors. This study aims to analyze the determinants of parents' decisions in selecting an Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT), identify the most dominant factor, and examine the moderating role of trust. The research was conducted at SDIT Cahaya Bangsa, Semarang City, using a quantitative approach with multiple regression and Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA). Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire from 244 parents and analyzed using SPSS software. The findings indicate that religious values (B = 0.363), school services (B = 0.259), character education (B = 0.186), and school quality (B = 0.167) significantly influence parents' decisions. Conversely, potential development (B = 0.017; p = 0.814) shows no significant effect. Trust significantly moderates the influence of potential development (B = 0.017; p = 0.013) but weakens the effect of school services (B = -0.022; p = 0.000). Religious values emerge as the most dominant factor. This research contributes theoretically by incorporating trust into the educational decision-making model, addressing a gap in studies on Integrated Islamic Schools. The results provide practical insights for schools to enhance their strategies and build stronger relationships with parents in supporting student development.

**Keywords:** Determinants of School Choice; Parental Decision; Trust.

## 1. Introduction

Basic education is a crucial early stage in shaping a child's character and competencies. In facing the challenges of the global era, marked by technological advances and rapid social change, education is not only required to produce intellectually intelligent students, but also those with moral and spiritual integrity. In this regard, the role of parents as the primary decision-makers in choosing an educational institution is highly strategic. The choice of school is not only considered from a geographical or cost perspective, but also from the aspects of educational quality, the values taught, and an environment that supports children's growth and development.

The Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) has become a popular alternative among the public, particularly urban Muslims seeking an education that integrates general knowledge with Islamic values. SDIT offers a comprehensive approach to educating children by integrating the national curriculum with Islamic education and character development based on moral values. This choice is considered capable of balancing children's intellectual and spiritual intelligence from an early age. SDIT Cahaya Bangsa in Semarang is one of the educational institutions that promotes this concept and has attracted the attention of many parents.

However, parents' choice of SDIT is not random. There are various factors that influence this decision. Factors such as educational quality, school reputation, service quality, child development, school vision and mission, learning environment, and religious values are the main considerations. Each parent has different preferences and backgrounds in making their choice, so the decision is complex and multidimensional. Therefore, a more systematic study is needed to identify the dominant factors in this context.

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The uniqueness of this study lies in the inclusion of a moderating variable, namely trust, in the relationship between the determining factors and parents' decisions. Trust in educational institutions, school administrators, educators, and the learning system has the potential to strengthen or weaken the influence of other factors. In consumer behavior science, trust is recognized as a crucial psychological aspect in decision-making, especially in the context of long-term educational services that concern children's futures.

Despite its importance, previous research specifically addressing the role of trust as a moderating variable in school selection, particularly for SDIT, remains limited. Previous studies have primarily focused on individual factors in isolation without considering how trust can strengthen the interconnections between these factors. Additionally, contextual research on specific schools such as SDIT Cahaya Bangsa in Semarang City has been scarce, despite the school's unique characteristics in management, organizational culture, and communication strategies with parents.

Based on this background, this study aims to comprehensively analyze the factors influencing parents' decisions in choosing SDIT Cahaya Bangsa in Semarang City, identify the most dominant factors, and test the role of trust as a moderating variable. It is hoped that the results of this study will not only contribute theoretically to the development of educational management science and consumer behavior in educational services but also provide practical benefits for the school in improving its promotional strategies, service quality, and building public trust in a sustainable manner.

## 2. Theoritical Study

### 2.1 Grand Theory

The bounded rationality model explains that individuals in decision-making do not always have the ability or resources to evaluate all information and alternatives thoroughly. This concept was first introduced by Herbert A. Simon in his book Models of Man: Social and Rational (1957), which emphasizes that individuals tend to make decisions that are "satisfactory" (satisficing), not the most optimal. Rationality in this case means that decisions can still be considered reasonable if they are in line with the goals of the decision maker (Rahmat, 2016; Simon, 1957). In the decision-making process, individuals set goals in sequence, weigh alternatives based on existing limitations, and choose the option that provides the best results with minimal effort or cost. In the context of education, parents as decision-makers also use a limited rationality approach by considering various factors and their trust in the school, even though the information obtained may be incomplete or uneven.

### 2.2 Decision-Making in Choosing a School

Decision making is defined in the Kamus Besar Ilmu Pengetahuan (Great Dictionary of Science) as the selection of decisions or policies based on certain criteria. This process involves two or more alternatives because no decision will be made if there is only one alternative (Erijanto & Fibrianto, 2018). According to Jaarvis (2021), decision-making is defined as the selection of a series of alternatives from several available options, made based on predictions of what will happen.

### 2.3 School Quality

School quality is a comprehensive picture of the extent to which an educational institution is able to meet predetermined standards and expectations, both in terms of internal school aspects and national education policies. According to Danim, school quality is not only seen from the final results, such as students' academic grades, but also includes educational inputs such as teacher quality, facilities and infrastructure, and school management; the learning process that takes place in the classroom; and the results felt by students and the community after the educational process has taken place (Danim, 2008). In other words, educational quality must be viewed holistically, starting from what the school has, how the learning process is carried out, to how the school's graduates contribute meaningfully to society. Therefore, a quality school is one that not only produces academically intelligent graduates but also shapes character and competencies relevant to the demands of the times.

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## 2.4 Potential Development

Potential development refers to a planned process to help individuals explore and optimize their abilities, whether intellectual, emotional, social, or spiritual. According to Tarmudji, potential development is an effort to nurture and maximize all aspects of a person's abilities so that they can develop comprehensively in accordance with their capacity and personal characteristics (Tarmudji, 2006). This potential encompasses various dimensions such as intelligence, talent, interests, personality, and moral values that need to be guided through meaningful education. Therefore, in the context of education, potential development is not only about improving academic achievement but also includes the formation of attitudes, life skills, and a strong sense of self-awareness so that students can adapt and contribute positively to society.

## 2.6 Service

Service in the context of education is a form of activity or action provided by educational institutions to students and parents as service users, with the aim of meeting their needs, expectations, and satisfaction. According to Dewi and Suparno, service is defined as the process of providing assistance to others, either directly or indirectly, with the aim of creating a pleasant experience and meeting predetermined quality standards. Good service does not only focus on the end result, but also on the friendly, communicative, and professional interaction between education service providers (teachers, staff, and school management) and service recipients (students and parents) (Dewi & Suparno, 2021). In a school environment, effective service includes various aspects such as transparency of information, ease of access, speed in responding to complaints, and attention to the individual needs of students.

## 2.7 Religion

Religion is a very important aspect of an individual's life because it serves as a moral and spiritual foundation for thinking and acting. According to Zanki, religion is a set of values, beliefs, and religious practices that serve as guidelines in a person's life. Religion not only reflects a person's relationship with God, but also guides an individual's attitudes and behavior in social life. Religious values shape a person's character and personality and form the basis for decision-making, including choosing an education for their children. In the context of education, the presence of religious values is often a major consideration for parents because they hope that schools will be able to provide spiritual reinforcement in line with their religious beliefs (Zanki, 2014).

## 2.8    Character Education

Character education is an essential part of the educational process that aims to shape students to have strong personalities, noble character, and the ability to act in accordance with moral values. According to Mulyasa, character education is a conscious and planned effort to shape students' character through learning values, reinforcing positive behavior, and setting an example in daily life. He emphasizes that character education must be integrated into all school activities, not only in formal classroom instruction but also through school culture, social interactions, and the learning environment. Good character traits such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and respect for others will make students not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally and spiritually mature (Mulyasa, 2011).

## 2.9    Parental Trust

Parental trust in the context of choosing an educational institution can be explained through the perspective of Yamagishi, a Japanese social psychologist. He views trust as the result of the expectation that others will act cooperatively and not harmfully, even though there is a chance they might do the opposite. In the context of education, this means that parents trust schools because they are confident that schools will fulfill their responsibilities in educating their children optimally, honestly, and professionally. Yamagishi also distinguishes between general trust (trust in fellow human beings) and assurance-based trust (trust based on systems, rules, and experience). In the case of school selection, parents' trust is

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usually a combination of both: they trust the school because they see that the system is good (assurance-based trust), and also because they build emotional trust in the teachers or school leaders (general trust) (Yamagishi, 2001).

## 3. Research Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method to analyze the factors that influence parents in choosing the Cahaya Bangsa Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) in Semarang City. The population in this study is all parents/guardians of SDIT Cahaya Bangsa students, totaling 627 people. The sampling technique used stratified random sampling, with a sample size of 244 respondents, determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% error rate.

Data collection was conducted using a closed questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, which had been tested for validity and reliability. Data analysis was performed using multiple linear regression and moderated regression analysis (MRA) to determine the direct effect of the independent variable and the moderating effect of the trust variable. All data were analyzed using SPSS version 20 software.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Factors Influencing Parents in Choosing SD IT Cahaya Bangsa in Semarang

The results of this study indicate that several factors play an important role in influencing parents' decisions in choosing an Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT). Of the five variables studied, four were found to be significant, namely school quality, school services, religious values, and character education. Conversely, student potential development did not show a significant influence. These findings can be further explained by referring to previous theories and research results.

**a.     School Quality**

The finding that school quality significantly influences parents' decisions is in line with Edward Sallis' (2002) idea that perceptions of the quality of educational institutions are crucial in attracting public interest. Parents tend to choose schools that they consider to have adequate facilities, competent teaching staff, and a good academic track record. Research by Fitria (2017) also found that parents' perceptions of school quality greatly determine their choices. This reinforces the findings in this study, where the higher the perceived quality, the more likely parents are to choose that school.

**b.     Potential Development**

Unlike other variables, the development of children's potential, such as interests in the arts, sports, or specific academic fields, does not have a significant influence. This indicates that this aspect is not yet a major consideration for parents when choosing an SDIT. In this context, it is possible that parents are more focused on other aspects than their children's individual achievements. This finding differs somewhat from the results of Nurhasanah's (2020) study, which states that the development of students' personal potential is an important factor in choosing a public school. This difference can be interpreted to mean that in integrated Islamic schools, parents' priorities are more inclined toward the formation of their children's character and spirituality.

**c.     School Services**

School services have a very significant influence on parents' decisions. This includes the communication system between the school and parents, administrative management, and the comfort of the learning environment. Professional and responsive services create a sense of security and trust among parents. This finding supports the Total Quality Management (TQM) approach in education, which emphasizes the importance of service quality as a determinant of user satisfaction. In line with this, Hasibuan (2019) states that good services can strengthen the community's interest in choosing certain educational institutions.

**d.     Religious Aspect**

Religious values have proven to be the most dominant factor in determining parents' choice of SD IT Cahaya Bangsa. The habit of worship, a strong Islamic atmosphere, and the integration of Islamic values in learning are the main attractions of integrated Islamic schools. This finding aligns with Tilaar's (2002) view that the education system cannot be separated

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from the values and culture of society. In Muslim societies like Indonesia, education that is integrated with religious values is considered a form of spiritual investment for children. Research by Sari and Kurniawan (2021) also confirms that religiosity is the most important factor in choosing an Islamic school.

### e.    Character Education

Character education also significantly contributes to parents' decisions. Schools that instill moral values, discipline, and social responsibility are seen as capable of shaping children who are not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally and spiritually mature. This aligns with the direction of character education policy outlined by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2010), which states that education should not only focus on knowledge but also on values and attitudes. Setiawan (2018) also found in his research that schools emphasizing character development are more likely to be chosen by parents. Overall, the findings of this study illustrate that parents in choosing SD IT Cahaya Bangsa consider religious aspects, service quality, school quality, and student character education more. Conversely, the development of children's academic potential or personal interests is not yet a primary focus. This indicates a stronger orientation toward spiritual and moral values in the process of selecting an Islamic-based elementary school.

### 4.2 The Most Dominant Factors Influencing Parents in Choosing Cahaya Bangsa Islamic Elementary School

Based on the results of the regression analysis, it can be concluded that of the five independent variables studied, four of them have a significant influence on parents' decisions in choosing an Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT), namely: religious aspects, school services, character education, and school quality. Meanwhile, potential development does not show a statistically significant influence.

The regression analysis results indicate that parents do not consider all factors equally when choosing an Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT), but rather tend to prioritize certain aspects, such as religious values, services, and character. This phenomenon can be explained through Herbert A. Simon's (1957) theory of Bounded Rationality.

According to this theory, individuals do not always make perfect and rational decisions due to limitations in information, time, and cognitive abilities. Instead, they make decisions that are "good enough" to satisfy them, not "perfect," by selecting factors that are considered most important and easily recognizable. The following table shows the most dominant variables influencing parents in choosing SD IT Cahaya Bangsa:

**Table 1.** the most dominant variables influencing parents in choosing SD IT Cahaya Bangsa

| No | Variable | Beta | Significance (p) | Explanation |
|----|----------|------|------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Religion (X4) | 0.306 | 0.000 | Most dominant, highly significant |
| 2 | School Services (X3) | 0.255 | 0.000 | Dominant, highly significant |
| 3 | Character Education (X5) | 0.184 | 0.015 | Significant |
| 4 | School Quality (X1) | 0.152 | 0.035 | Significant |
| 5 | Talent Development (X2) | 0.017 | 0.814 | Not significant |

With a beta value of 0.306 and significance p = 0.000, religion is the factor that has the greatest influence on parents' decisions. This shows that religious practices, Islamic values, and a strong religious atmosphere are decisive factors in choosing an IT elementary school. Within the context of limited rationality, parents may not thoroughly analyze all the advantages of a school but instead rely on values that hold the most emotional and cultural significance for them, namely Islamic values. Religious practices, a religious environment, and an Islamic curriculum are seen as a shortcut (a mental shortcut) indicating "this school is good." This shows that parents' decisions are more influenced by considerations of values and identity, not solely by rational logic, as explained by Simon (1957).

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**b.   School Services (X3)**

A beta value of 0.255 (p = 0.000) indicates that the quality of services such as communication systems, administrative management, and environmental comfort are highly considered by parents. This is supported by the principles of Total Quality Management (Deming & Sallis, 2002) and Hasibuan's (2019) study, which states that quality services increase parental satisfaction. Good services such as smooth communication, a well-organized administrative system, and school comfort meet parents' practical needs. In bounded rationality theory, this is a form of decision-making based on the availability of information that is easiest to assess directly. Parents do not always evaluate all technical aspects of the school but are more sensitive to daily service experiences.

**c.   Character Education (X5)**

With a Beta of 0.184 and p = 0.015, this variable also has a significant effect. Parents believe that schools should shape children's personalities, instill moral attitudes, responsibility, and good character. This aligns with the Ministry of Education and Culture's (2010) policy and Setiawan's (2018) research, which show that character is the main attraction of value-based schools.

Character Education is one of the primary considerations in decision-making: if a school can instill good morals and values, it is deemed sufficient to meet parents' expectations. They do not evaluate the entire learning process but focus on the outcomes, such as the child's attitudes. This is part of a "sufficiently rational" decision-making process under conditions of limited time and information.

**d.   School Quality (X1)**

Beta 0.152 and p = 0.035 indicate a significant influence, although not as significant as the previous three variables. School quality remains an important consideration, especially in terms of teacher quality, facilities, and academic achievement. School quality does have an influence, but it is not a dominant factor. This suggests that under conditions of rational constraints, parents may lack the data or ability to evaluate quality comprehensively, for example through accreditation scores, curriculum, or teacher background. As a result, quality becomes a secondary consideration.

**e.   Student Potential Development (X2)**

Beta 0.017 and p = 0.814 indicate no significant influence from the development of student potential (interests, talents, arts, sports). This aspect may not be understood or directly visible to parents, so it does not form the basis for decision-making. According to bounded rationality theory, information that is difficult to access or whose impact is unclear is typically ignored in the decision-making process.

Parents' decisions in choosing a school are not always based on a comprehensive analysis of all aspects. Instead, they use considerations that are deemed most relevant, easy to understand, and aligned with personal values, such as religion, services, and character. This is a concrete example of bounded rationality, where parents make decisions that are adequate and satisfying, not necessarily the most objectively optimal.

**4.3 Factors Influencing Parents in Choosing Cahaya Bangsa Islamic Elementary School with Trust as a Moderating Variable**

In this study, parental trust was tested as a moderating variable in the relationship between five independent variables and parental decisions in choosing an Islamic Elementary School (SD IT). The interaction results indicate that trust only moderates two of the five relationships, namely in the variables of potential development and school services, with different directions of moderation. These findings can be explained through trust theory, decision-making theory, and are supported by several previous studies.

**Table 2.** Factors Influencing Parents in Choosing Cahaya Bangsa Islamic Elementary School

| No | Interaction | Coefficient (B) | Sig. | Moderation Significance | Moderation Direction | Explanation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | School Quality × Trust | -0.008 | 0.300 | No | Not Relevant | Trust does not moderate the influence of school |

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| | | | | | | quality on parents' decision. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Talent Development × Trust | 0.017 | 0.013 | Yes | Strengthen | Trust strengthens the influence of talent development on parents' decision. |
| 3 | School Services × Trust | -0.022 | 0.000 | Yes | Weaken | Trust weakens the influence of school services on parents' decision. |
| 4 | Religion × Trust | -0.003 | 0.763 | No | Not Relevant | Trust does not moderate the influence of religious values on parents' decision. |

Based on the table above, it is explained that:

**1.    nteraction: School Quality × Trust (Coefficient: -0.008, Sig.: 0.300 Not significant, Moderation = Not relevant)**

Although school quality generally affects parents' decision, trust does not strengthen or weaken the relationship. This indicates that parents' assessment of school quality is independent of the level of trust they have in the school itself. According to Mayer et al. (1995), trust plays a stronger role in the context of interpersonal and organizational relationships, such as in service aspects, rather than technical qualities such as the quality of facilities or curriculum. This explains why trust does not act as a moderator in the context of school quality.

**2.    Interaction: Potential Development × Trust (Coefficient: 0.017, Sig.: 0.013 Significant, Moderation:=Strengthening)**

This finding is interesting, because potential development does not have a significant effect directly, but becomes meaningful when moderated by parental trust. This suggests that when parents have high trust in schools, they will be more confident that schools are able to develop children's potential in academics, arts and sports. Supported by the theory from McAllister (1995), that trust creates perceptions of competence and goodwill, so parents tend to assess school programs (including potential development) more positively. A study by Widiastuti (2019) also found that parents' trust strengthened their perceptions of the effectiveness of children's interest and talent development programs at school.

**3.    Interaction: School Services × Trust (Coefficient: -0.022, Sig.: 0.000 Significant, Moderation = Weakening)**

Trust actually weakens the effect of school services on parents' decisions. That is, the higher parents' trust in the school, the less influence the service quality has on their decision. It can be interpreted that trust replaces the role of service: when trust is high, parents tend to be less critical of the school's procedures, administrative system or communication. Their decisions are based more on beliefs than on actual service experiences. Luhmann's (1979) social theory states that trust reduces the need for formal control and evaluation. Therefore, under conditions of high trust, service becomes a less decisive factor. Suwandi & Arifin (2020) found that high trust in schools made parents more permissive of technical deficiencies in services.

**4.    Interaction: Religion × Trust (Coefficient: 0.003, Sig.: 0.763 Not significant, Moderation = Not relevant)**

Although religious aspects are the most dominant factor in parents' decision, trust does not moderate this relationship. This can be explained because religious values have become the basic beliefs of parents in choosing SDIT, and do not depend on the level of trust in the institution. According to Ajzen (1991) in Theory of Planned Behavior, internal values such as

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religion play a direct role in intention and behavior, without always going through external perceptions such as trust in the institution.

**5.** **Interaction: Character Education × Trust (Coefficient: -0.007, Sig.: 0.369 Insignificant, Moderation = Not relevant)**

Trust also did not act as a moderator between character education and parental decision. This indicates that the formation of children's character is considered a basic obligation of integrated Islamic schools, so parents do not need additional confidence to trust the school's role in this regard. Fitriani (2020) points out that character education in SD IT is often assumed to be a core value, rather than a component that is still rationally considered or proven through prior beliefs. In general, Bounded Rationality theory (Simon, 1957) can also explain that parents do not evaluate the entire interaction as a whole, but focus on the most important and easily understood aspects. Trust plays a selective role: strengthening aspects that are difficult to see directly (potential development) and weakening the role of formal aspects (school services).

## 5. Conclusions and Suggestion

Based on the results of data analysis and discussion that have been carried out, a number of important conclusions can be drawn regarding the factors that influence parents in choosing Cahaya Bangsa Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SD IT) in Semarang City with Trust as a Moderating Variable: Overall, the findings of this study illustrate that parents in choosing SD IT Cahaya Bangsa consider more religious aspects (B = 0.363), school services (B = 0.259), school quality (B = 0.167), and student character education (B = 0.186). In contrast, potential development (B = 0.017) has not been the main focus. This indicates a stronger orientation towards spiritual and moral values in the selection process of Islamic-based primary schools. Then from the five independent variables studied, the most dominant factor is: religious aspects (beta coefficient of 0.306 and significance level p = 0.000), school services (beta of 0.255 and p = 0.000), character education (beta of 0.184 and p = 0.015), and school quality (beta of 0.152 and p = 0.035). Meanwhile, potential development (beta of 0.017 and p = 0.814) showed no statistically significant effect. Finally, parents' trust in the school played a moderating role, although not in all relationships. This trust strengthens the effect of potential development on decisions (B = 0.017; p = 0.013), but weakens the effect of school services (B =-0.022; p = 0.000). Meanwhile, the effects of quality, religion, and character education were not significantly moderated by trust.

Theoretically, the results of this study corroborate the theory of bounded rationality decision-making, in which parents do not evaluate all aspects thoroughly, but focus on those that are considered most important and easily recognizable, such as religious aspects and the convenience of school services. In addition, trust was shown to have a strategic role in strengthening or weakening the influence of a factor on parents' decisions. The suggestion for schools is that it is important to continue to strengthen religious programs and worship habits as the main attraction. Schools are also advised to improve service quality and information transparency to gain more trust from parents. Potential development programs should be clarified and packaged attractively to make the benefits more visible. Parents are expected to dig deeper into the information before making school choices for their children. Not only on the religious aspect, but also on services, character building programs, and talent/potential development. And for future researchers, it is recommended to develop this research model by adding other variables, such as school reputation, tuition fees, peer influence, or parents' education level. In addition, the scope of locations can be expanded so that the research results have higher generalizability.

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