



**PUBLIC SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT AND
PLANNING: PARENTS' CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL
SELECTION AND ENROLLMENT**

BY

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Science (Built Environment)**

**Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design
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AUGUST 2015

ABSTRACT

The research aimed at determining parents' criteria in selecting the suitable public school to enroll their children. The three problems highlighted in this research based on the literature review were; the location of school in the remote area without accessibility to public transport (Beaumont and Pianca, 2002; McKoy et al., 2008; Bukhari et al., 2010), a school that is far from the residential area that leads to increased distance between home and school (Cullen et al., 2003; US Environmental Protection Agency, 2003; Ewing et al., 2004; The Oregon School Siting Handbook, 2005), and the traffic safety problems around the school area (De Boer, 2005; Mustafa, 2005; Vigne, 2007; Masuri et al., 2011). The study proposed to identify the distributions and catchment areas of public schools in the case study areas, to examine the requirements and planning standards or guidelines of public school development, to assess the parents' criteria in selecting public schools for their children in the case study areas, and to propose improvement for the development of public schools in Gombak district. According to the literature, there are various factors underlying the decision of parents in selecting a school, such as academic performance of the school, school location, school distance, school facilities, school's environment, and extra-curricular activities (Beavis, 2004, Bernal, 2005; Denniss, 2004; Wilkinson et al., 2004, ISCA Research Report, 2008; O'Mahony, 2008; Burgess et al., 2009; Chakrabarti and Roy, 2010; Yusuf and Adigun, 2010; Dahari and Mohd Sabri, 2011). The data for this research were collected through site observations of the selected schools. This includes the physical conditions of the schools and facilities. Survey questionnaire was distributed to 400 respondents, and interviews with the administrators of the selected schools to validate the findings of the site observations. The study also found that the academic performance of the school was the most important criteria perceived by the parents when selecting schools for their children, followed by school location, school distance, school facilities while the extra co-curricular activities were the least important criteria for them. The recommendations for the study are to provide allocation for physical expansion in the high performance school to cater its demand and capacity. The school with lower academic performance to be provided with trained and quality teachers to improve the academic achievement. The problem of unsuitable school location can be solved by locating the school in the strategic area with the availability of public transportation system. The security measures need to be enhanced in order to improve the safety level of the children. Finally, this research is hoped to benefit the local authority in the planning of the school, as well as the parents and their children in choosing the suitable public school.

خلاصة البحث

ويهدف هذا البحث إلى تحديد معايير الآباء في اختيار المدارس الحكومية المناسبة لتسجيل أولادهم فيها. أبرزت ثلاث مشاكل في هذا البحث بناء على مراجعة أدبية وهي؛ موقع المدرسة في المنطقة النائية دون إمكانية الوصول إلى وسائل النقل العام (بيمانوت وبينكا، 2002م؛ إيم سي كوي والآخرين، 2008م؛ بخاري والآخرين، 2010م) المدرسة بعيدة عن المنطقة السكنية والتي تؤدي إلى زيادة المسافة بين البيت والمدرسة (كولين والآخرين، 2003م؛ وكالة حماية البيئة الأمريكية، 2003م؛ يوينغ والآخرين، 2004م؛ كتيب الإرشادات اليدوي لشركة أوريغون، 2005م)، ومشاكل السلامة المرورية في المنطقة المدرسية (دي بوير، 2005م؛ مصطفى، 2005؛ وبجني، 2007؛ مسوري والآخرين 2011م). واقتترحت الدراسة إلى التعرف على دوائر نشاط المدارس الحكومية وتوزيعها في مناطق دراسة الحالة لدراسة المتطلبات والمعايير التخطيطية لتطوير المدارس الحكومية أو إرشاداتها، وتقييم معايير الآباء في اختيار المدارس لأولادهم في مناطق دراسة الحالة، واقتراح التحسين لتطوير المدارس في منطقة جومبوق. وفقا للأدب، هناك العديد من العوامل الكامنة وراء قرار الآباء في اختيار المدرسة مثل الأداء الأكاديمي للمدرسة، وموقع المدرسة، ومسافتها، وتسهيلات، وبيئتها، والأنشطة اللاصفية (بيفيس، 2004م، برنال، 2005م؛ دينيس، 2004م؛ ويلكنسون والآخرين، 2004م، تقرير البحث لجائزة الشركة الإستراتيجية الدولية (ISCA)، 2008م؛ أو ماهوني، 2008م؛ بيرجس والآخرين، 2009م. . تشاكرابارتي وروي، 2010م؛ يوسف وأديفون 2010م؛ دهاري ومحمد صبري، 2011م). وقد تم جمع البيانات لهذا البحث من خلال ملاحظات الموقع للمدارس المختارة. وهذا يشمل الظروف المادية للمدارس وتسهيلات. تم توزيع الاستبيان على 400 مجيب وإجراء المقابلات مع مديري المدارس المختارة ليتأكد من صحة نتائج ملاحظات الموقع. وجدت الدراسة أيضا أن الأداء الأكاديمي كان أهم المعايير التي ينظر بها الآباء عند اختيار مدارس لأولادهم، ويليه موقع المدرسة، ومسافتها، وتسهيلات بينما كان معيار الأنشطة اللاصفية الإضافية أقل أهمية بالنسبة لهم. وتوصيات للدراسة هي توفير المخصصات للتوسع المادي في مدرسة عالية الأداء لتلبية الطلب وطاقتها. أما مدرسة ضعيفة الأداء الأكاديمي فهي وفرت بالمعلمين والمدرسين والممتازين لتحسين الإنجاز الأكاديمي. يمكن حل مشكلة عدم ملائمة موقع المدرسة من خلال تحديد موقعها في المنطقة الإستراتيجية مع توفر نظام النقل العام. وتحتاج اجراءات الأمن إلى تعزيزها لتحسين مستوى سلامة الأولاد. وأخيرا، يأمل هذا البحث إلى إفادة السلطة المحلية وكذلك يساعد الآباء وأولادهم في اختيار المدارس الحكومية المناسبة.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful. Alhamdulillah. First and foremost, I would like to thank ALLAH SWT whom with His willing giving me the health, strength, and opportunity to complete this thesis. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Mariana Mohamed Osman and my co-supervisor, Dr Syahriah Bachok for their guidance and support throughout the journey in finishing the research. They have been wonderful teachers, role models, and counselors of mine for the past three years.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my family members for their encouragement and love. Special thanks go to my parents, Mohd Ibrahim Abu Hassan and Nooradiah Ramli, who always allowed me to choose my path, supported me along the way and helped me up when I faltered, my siblings (Hayani, Aina, Azah, Zhafri and Zharif), my brothers-in-law (Ihsan and Badrul), and my nephews (Adam, Adeeb and Auni). There is no better support system to get through this thesis without their love.

My deepest thanks go to Zulfadly Azizi and all my colleagues in MSBE (Adibah, Aida, Aina, Aisyah, Alyani, Aulia, Aqilah, Azza, Farah, Izzati, Shazwani, Syazwani, Tuminah, and Zakiah) for their assistance and encouragement during my time at IIUM. Without their moral support, guidance, laughter, and love I would have never gotten to this point. And last but not least, thanks to the lecturers and staff of KAED, all my friends, and those people who I have not mentioned here for aiding me through this study.

Thank you for all the guidance, support, and love. Only Allah SWT can repay all your kindness.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
DV	Dependent Variable
ISCA	Independent Schools Council of Australia
IV	Independent Variable
GIS	Geographic Information System
MOE	Ministry of Education
NKRA	National Key Results Areas
PIBG	Parent-Teacher Association
RII	Relative Importance Index
RM K-10	Tenth Malaysia Plan
RSE	Road Safety Education
SJK (C)	Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina
SJK (T)	Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil
SPSS	Statistical Package of Social Sciences
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A school is an educational facility that is an important place of learning. The planning of a school is one of the major elements in a comprehensive development planning process as the school is part of the community facilities development towards social sustainability. Indeed, the physical planning of a school involves the effective use of skill and knowledge by the relevant authorities involved. The main aim of the provision of a school is to provide a venue for education at various levels in order to enhance the quality of life of the youth in a community.

The school becomes the focal point of a neighbourhood area, where it functions as a recreational area for children and a gathering area for parents (Kaiser et al, 1995; The Oregon School Siting Handbook, 2005). In most developing countries, the number of school children is lower as compared with children in developed countries because children in developing countries do not have access to schools due to their demographic backgrounds (Glewwe and Kremer, 2005).

A school must be planned with other types of land use such as residential, transportation and commerce in order to provide mobility and accessibility for children to go to the school (McKoy et al., 2008). Elements such as safety, convenience and adequacy must be included in school development planning as these elements would contribute to improving the quality of education at all levels (Ahmad, 1998).

1.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

A school is a public facility that serves the needs of a community. Apart from this, the building structure of a school is also an important factor in the school's physical planning as it can affect the learning and teaching process within the school. The academic achievement of students may be improved by providing a quality of school facilities and quality teachers in the schools (Tremblay et al., 2001; Cellini et al., 2008; Kunje et al., 2009).

The decision to build a new school and renovate an existing school is challenging as it requires multiple stages and views from various agencies. In the physical planning of a school, the distribution and catchment area of the school is determined from planning guidelines based on requirements as stated in the Town and Country Planning Department of Selangor (2010). This includes physical facilities provided by the school authority to improve the learning-teaching environment. Students spend at least five to eight hours at school every day. Thus, the school should be designed with a safe, healthy and educational environment to adequately serve the needs of these children (Mohamed, 2000 and Bukhari et al., 2010).

The provision of a school is associated with social planning. As a school is an educational facility, the location, design, and physical condition may well be one of the most important determinants of a neighbourhood's quality. The school is linked with the community as it acts as the neighbourhood's focal point. The school can be easily accessible and serve the community if it is located at the centre of the residential area (Chung, 2005). In schools, social interaction is formed between students, teachers and parents, which provides a stronger support system for children so that they feel more engaged in the society (Willms, 2000, Chung, 2005 and UNICEF, 2009).

School choice provides an opportunity for parents to choose the best school in which to enrol their children. The criteria that are given to the parents are the most common criteria in the school selection. In Malaysia, parents need to submit an application to select the school for their children attending primary education. This application is submitted to Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah (PPD) for approval. There are several factors influencing the decision of the PPD to approve the application: distance between the school and the home address, where the children attended their pre-school education, and the number of enrolments to the school (Gombak Education Office, 2013). The application will be approved by the PPD if there is a vacancy in the school; otherwise, the PPD will suggest other schools with availability and are also closer to the home address. However, in reality, some parents are willing to make use of an address from other people in order to be able to enrol their children into high performance schools.

This research studies the perception of parents towards the factors that determine school criteria. Furthermore, the physical conditions of school facilities and structures will also be assessed in the research. The respondents are parents who are enrolling their children into public school in the selected primary and secondary level in Gombak District. Parents sometimes do not have much choice in selecting schools to enrol their children. Therefore, the research will explore the opinion among parents on their choice of most preferred schools to enrol their children if they were given the opportunity based on the given criteria. All the criteria are associated with school planning, such as academic performance of the school, school location, school distance, provision of facilities and school environment. Finally, the research provides suggestions for the improvement of public school development and planning in Malaysia.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENTS

Parents' decision in selecting a school in which to enrol their children has constantly become a problem (Gibbons et al., 2006; Gibbons and Silva, 2009; Dahari and Ya, 2011). Some schools are in great demand while some schools are not. A school with high academic achievement, provided with adequate facilities and has quality teachers is always in high demand from parents as they want their children to receive the best education in school. There are many criteria of schools that will be good reference for parents before deciding on a suitable school to enrol their children. Some parents want their children to go to high performing schools, while some parents might want to choose a school that is closer to their home. This research studies the criteria that influence parents' decision in selecting a school to enrol their children.

The research focuses on three problems. Firstly, school locations in remote areas without the ease of accessibility of public transport (Beaumont and Pianca, 2002; McKoy et al., 2008; Bukhari et al., 2010). This problem arises when school siting choices do not align with local land use and transportation plans. This issue causes the second problem, where the school is located far from the existing housing area that leads to an increasing distance between home and school (Cullen et al., 2003; US Environmental Protection Agency, 2003; Ewing et al., 2004; The Oregon School Siting Handbook, 2005). Because of the increased distance due to the remote school area, students must travel farther to reach their schools. This is also associated with the issues of traffic safety around school areas (De Boer, 2005; Mustafa, 2005; La Vigne, 2007; Masuri et al., 2011). Parents have to drive their children to school, which leads to an increased number of private vehicles and traffic congestion. These problems will be further discussed in the next section.

1.3.1 The School Location in the Remote Area without the Accessibility of Public Transportation

The school selection involves many agencies and requires a lot of processes to be conducted (McKoy, 2008; Bukhari et al., 2010). In Malaysia, the site selection for a school involves departments such as the local district education office, the local planning authority, the state education department and the state planning authority, which requires many approvals before it is built. The layout plan must be submitted to the local, state and federal levels for approval. The approved building plan then needs to be submitted to the Ministry of Works (JKR) for development supervision (Bukhari et al., 2010). These various levels of approval consume a substantial amount of time and sometimes the information received from these different agencies are not properly organized. This sometimes results in the school being built in an improper location close to conflict land uses, such as landfill sites, lowland areas that are prone to flooding and commercial areas with issues like heavy traffic (McKoy, 2008; Abdul Manan and Poi, 2009; Bukhari et al., 2010). The suitability of the proposed site for a school should be considered to ensure that the school is not established at an inappropriate location.

In Malaysia, schools are also used as a temporary shelter for natural disasters such as flood. Other than schools, buildings commonly used as evacuation centre during flood are mosques, churches, and community halls (US Agency for International Development, 2005; Said et al., 2013). Therefore, schools must be readily available in the event of a sudden disaster in order to accommodate those with no homes. These schools are located in hilly or highland areas, which makes it difficult for walking and cycling. In the future, new evacuation centers need to be

identified as preparation for a sudden disaster rather than using schools as temporary shelters during flood.

Schools should be facilitated with proper accessibility such as road networks and public transportation systems. According to the Town and Country Planning Town Department of Selangor (2010), both primary and secondary schools should be located in areas that have the availability of public transportation routes. Public transportation offers mobility options for the community. However, rural or remote areas have lower levels of public transport access. Therefore, some schools have access problems because they are located in remote areas without the availability of public transportation networks (Beaumont and Pianca, 2002; McKoy et al., 2008).

1.3.2 The Increasing Distance between Home and School

The distance of a school is related to the school's location. Distance between the school and home affects the accessibility and mobility of the school (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2003; The Oregon School Siting Handbook, 2005; McKoy et al., 2008). Many parents may have difficulty taking their children to school over such distances. The closest distance between home and school will encourage students to use non-motorized transportation such as walking and cycling. This not only encourages students to be physically active but also helps to reduce traffic congestion by reducing the number of vehicles on the road (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2003; The Oregon School Siting Handbook, 2005). On the other hand, students who live too far away to walk or bike to the school would travel by motorized vehicles such as private vehicles and school bus (Rhoulac, 2005). Thus, the location of the school in a remote area will lead to the increasing vehicles travelled on the road.

Based on the Town and Country Planning Town Department of Selangor (2010), the catchment area for both primary and secondary schools are from 0.4 to 0.8 km radius and within five to ten minutes walking distance. However, a school with a wider catchment area increases the distance between school and home, which prevents students from walking to the school (Ewing et al., 2004; The Oregon School Siting Handbook, 2005). Therefore, parents choose private vehicles to send their children to the school as the school distance is located far from home (Beaumont and Pianca, 2002; Ewing et al., 2004; Bukhari et al., 2010, Shokoohi et al., 2012). Parents getting to and from schools to drop off and pick up their children create traffic congestion during rush hours.

1.3.3 Traffic Safety Problems around the School Area

The far distance between school and home causes parents to drive their children to school, which leads to the increased number of private vehicles and road congestion. The other significant reason why parents are willing to send their children to school by private vehicles is because they are concerned about the safety of their children (Ziviani et al., 2004; Abdul Manan and Poi, 2009).

Parents' concern with their children's safety, affects the mode choice of their children to go to school (De Boer, 2005; La Vigne, 2007). The travel mode to school may vary depending on parents' perception towards various factors such as distance, population density, school size and road safety (Ewing et al., 2004; McMillan, 2005). However, parents are more concerned about the safety of their children, especially when the children are walking to school and from school. Therefore, the Road Safety Education (RSE) programme was implemented in order to reduce children pedestrian

injuries and accidents around the school area (Hashim and Syed Mohamed Rahim, 2009; Abdul Manan and Poi, 2009).

The safety of school children is a major concern to parents, teachers, law enforcement agencies and the general community (De Boer, 2005; Mustafa, 2005; La Vigne, 2007; Masuri et al., 2011). Parents are sending their children to school by private vehicles because they are concerned about their children's safety if they had to walk or use public transportation to school. By doing so, parents have the opportunity to monitor their children on the journey to school. Because of that, the roads surrounding the school are congested with traffic because parents are dropping off and picking up their children around the school area (La Vigne, 2007; McKoy et al., 2008).

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the statements of the problem, six research questions were generated for this research. The following research questions are as below:

- i. What are the distribution and catchment areas of public schools in the Gombak District?
- ii. What are the policies and guidelines regarding the distribution and development of public schools?
- iii. What are the criteria that influence parents' perception in selecting schools for their children?
- iv. What are the issues and problems regarding the school development?
- v. What are the recommendations that need to be proposed in order to improve the development of public schools in the study area?

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is to assess parents' criteria in selecting a public school to enrol their children in the district of Gombak.

The research explores current issues and problems faced by parents in choosing the best public school for their children. Therefore, several objectives have been formulated to achieve this aim. The objectives are:

- i. To identify the distribution and catchment areas of public schools in the case study area.
- ii. To examine the requirements, planning standards and guidelines of public school development.
- iii. To assess parents' criteria in selecting public schools for their children.
- iv. To provide recommendations in order to improve the development of public schools in Gombak district.

1.6 SCOPES OF RESEARCH

The scope of the research is important to ensure that the overall study aim and objectives can be achieved. The main focus of this research is to assess the public school development and planning. The details of the scopes of research are shown below: