



Entrepreneurial Leadership and Parents' Private Schooling Intention: A Study in Malaysian Education Landscape

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses a research gap in Malaysia's private schooling sector by investigating how entrepreneurial leaders, specifically private school principals, influence parents' attitudes and behaviors towards private education. The study aims to understand the implications of increasing social segregation due to the growth of private schools. It provides a unique perspective on how entrepreneurial principals shape parents' intentions and actions regarding private schooling. The research employs qualitative methods, including interviews with private school principals, to gather insights directly from school leaders. The interviews are transcribed and analyzed using Atlas.ti software, revealing three main themes: "maintain," "improve," and "implement." These themes highlight the importance of upholding the school's reputation, enhancing educational quality and facilities, and using innovative strategies to attract and retain students. The study's findings have significant implications for educational policies, shedding light on both the positive aspects of private schools and their potential impact on social segregation. The insights contribute to establishing a more accessible, comprehensive, and fair national school system. Moreover, the study advances the understanding and application of entrepreneurial leadership in Malaysia's education landscape.

Keywords: *entrepreneurial leadership, parents' intention, parents' behaviour, private school, school choice*

1.0 Introduction

The recent proliferation of private schools in Malaysia has brought about a significant transformation in the educational landscape, renewing interest in the area of private school choice within education leadership. While advocates highlight potential improvements in academic performance and competition associated with private schools (Abdulkadiroğlu et al., 2020; Ghavifekr & Ramzy, 2020), critics express concerns about potential exacerbation of educational disparities and erosion of public education quality (Henseke et al., 2021; Jheng et al., 2022). Consequently, understanding parents' intentions and the broader implications of private school choice has become a priority for educational policymakers and school leaders aiming for equitable and high-quality education for all students.

Understanding the underlying reasons behind parents' preference for private schools is essential for entrepreneurial leaders aiming to tailor their programs to align with families' aspirations,

ultimately fostering a culture of academic success. This understanding not only supports the creation of tailored educational experiences but also underpins the overall success of private schools.

In contrast to government schools constrained by financial limitations due to limited autonomy, private schools have greater financial flexibility, allowing them to respond promptly to changing market dynamics (Davies & Davies, 2014; Hahn et al., 2018). Here, entrepreneurial leadership plays a pivotal role in addressing parental preferences within the realm of private education. It's noteworthy that within the Malaysian context, there is an increasing recognition of the significance of entrepreneurial leadership in managing centralized schools (Ghazali et al., 2022). This recognition underscores the need for innovative funding models similar to those employed by entrepreneurial leaders in private schools.

Entrepreneurial leadership goes beyond administrative capabilities; it serves as a catalyst for change within educational institutions (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2020). This leadership style requires educational leaders to balance economic acumen with pedagogical vision, fostering an ethos of innovation within the educational context. Given the adaptability of private schools to evolving educational paradigms, a comprehensive exploration of entrepreneurial leadership within these institutions offers valuable insights that can inform and inspire government school systems.

1.1 Problem Statement

The evolving landscape of private education, at the intersection of business and academics, underscores the need for entrepreneurial leadership to effectively address the multifaceted needs and preferences of parents (Ariyani et al., 2021; Bagheri & Harrison, 2020; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2020; Hisrich & Kearney, 2017). However, while existing studies explore the impacts of entrepreneurial leadership on school innovation, operational efficiency, and fundraising efforts, a notable research gap remains—one that investigates the intricate interplay between entrepreneurial leadership and parents' complex decisions regarding school choice.

Furthermore, the proliferation of private schools that cater to privileged families potentially exacerbates the issue of social segregation. This study underscores the urgency of investigating the distinct characteristics that enable certain private schools to consistently attract a growing number of parents. As highlighted previously, the unique attributes of private schools are closely intertwined with both their business and educational contexts, which in turn promote the cultivation of entrepreneurial leadership traits among school principals. Consequently, the focus on exploring entrepreneurial leadership in private schools gains prominence.

However, the significance of this study lies in its endeavour to uncover the ways in which entrepreneurial leadership significantly influences parents' decision-making—an aspect that has been relatively neglected in the existing literature. By shedding light on the strategies employed by private school principals to implement entrepreneurial leadership, fostering an environment conducive to learning, this study aims to elucidate the consequential effects of these strategies on parents' attitudes, intentions, and behaviours pertaining to private education. Through this research, an attempt is made to bridge a gap in scholarly inquiry, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic relationship that exists between entrepreneurial leadership and the decisions parents make regarding school choice.

In conclusion, the central concern addressed here is the increasing presence of private schools in Malaysia and their potential impact on the educational landscape, particularly the concern

of social stratification and educational disparities. This research study focuses on the correlation between entrepreneurial leadership and parents' decisions, aiming to address a gap in current research and provide insights that could guide policy efforts to enhance Malaysia's education system.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Entrepreneurial Leadership

Entrepreneurial leadership has become an increasingly needed type of leadership in all organizations (Hisrich & Kearney, 2017; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2020). This leadership behaviour allows school principals to improve the performance of the school, enhance the school quality by creating positive school climate, to creatively solve problems that may occur and to seize new opportunities to use resources effectively (Helvacı & Özkaya, 2020; Ariyani et al., 2021; Imran & Aldaas, 2020; Wibowo & Saptono, 2018). Entrepreneurial leaders have the capacity to develop ingenious ideas, the tendency to explore new opportunities, the desire to maximize organizational performance, the ability to face challenges, and the ability to influence people to be innovative (Hisrich & Kearney, 2017; Bagheri & Harrison, 2020; Kongjinda et al., 2020; Pontoh et al., 2021; Renko et al., 2015). Through entrepreneurial leadership skills, school principals and leaders help each member of the school perform the best work, see the need for transformation in the organization, add innovative alternatives to traditional practices, and identify and eliminate main barriers (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2020b; Majid et al., 2019; Pontoh et al., 2021). They also involve all school members in the process of organizational improvement and growth (Helvacı & Özkaya, 2020).

In addition, entrepreneurial leadership plays a crucial role in creating a positive learning environment in schools by adapting to dynamic needs and global challenges. It involves motivating, optimizing, and fostering creativity and innovation to enhance the learning experience. Entrepreneurship in schools aims to generate innovative ideas for societal economic improvement (Hisrich & Kearney, 2017; Majid et al., 2019; Mohd Kasim & Zakaria, 2019). For all these reasons, entrepreneurial leadership stands out as the most effective and up-to-date leadership style that school principals and other organizational leaders and managers should possess especially in this ever-changing era (Helvacı & Özkaya, 2020).

In Thornberry's (2006) entrepreneurial model, he emphasizes the responsibility of leaders to identify market opportunities and actively engage stakeholders in organizational management. Similarly, schools adopt a top-down leadership approach, where entrepreneurial practices, like collaborating with the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) for external networking, are essential for sustaining and expanding external connections. These practices play a crucial role in establishing strong external networks, fostering parent engagement, and promoting overall school development. This significance is particularly evident in private schools, which often have closer connections with external networks and more resources to offer better education and opportunities for children, potentially influencing parents' preferences for private schooling over public schooling.

In conclusion, an entrepreneurial leader identifies opportunities, initiates projects, manages resources, sets goals, and guides subordinates towards achievement. Overall, entrepreneurial leadership in schools involves strategic changes in managing school activities, including modifying the school's climate, conditions, and structure, with a focus on emphasizing value addition and achieving organizational goals through risk-taking and effective management.

Therefore, it is essential to examine the impact of school leaders who adopt entrepreneurial leadership practices on parents' intention towards private schooling.

2.2 *Factors affecting School Choice*

Previous research has identified several factors which will influence parents' school choice. The various parameters on which parents take their final decision are proximity, quality education, peer group, curriculum, learning activity, teacher quality, exposure given to a child, achievements of the school, school's goodwill, curriculum and co-curriculum activity, technology-based learning, healthy environment, etc. (Abdulkadiroğlu et al., 2020; Diwakar, 2016; Rowe & Lubienski, 2017).

On the other hand, Bedaso Merga & Shobisso Sofamo (2020) found that parents' perceptions of school quality, cost of school, and teacher performance emerge as key determinants of private school choice. Additionally, age of the child, monthly income of household, distance from home to school, and numbers of children in family have a significant impact on parents' probability of choosing a private school for their child (Potterton, 2020; Rowe & Lubienski, 2017).

In the context of Malaysia, the majority of research conducted on school choice primarily focuses on the medium of instruction, which plays a significant role in shaping cultural identity. Particularly, the selection of a primary school holds substantial importance as it significantly influences a child's cultural identity. As a result, most parents prioritize schools that provide cultural enrichment and preservation in alignment with their respective race and culture.

Extensive research reveals that Chinese parents, in particular, display a strong preference for Chinese vernacular schools. The key factors contributing to this preference include the medium of instruction and the emphasis on Chinese cultural appreciation within these schools. By choosing Chinese vernacular schools, parents aim to uphold and preserve their Chinese cultural heritage and identity (D. P. Lee et al., 2017; D. P. Lee & Ting, 2015; Ting & Lee, 2019). Conversely, Malay parents exhibit a greater inclination toward national primary schools, emphasizing the preservation of their cultural identity within a broader national context (Kampulin, 2009; D. P. Lee et al., 2017). It is worth noting that similar patterns of preference are also observed among Chinese parents when it comes to selecting secondary schools. They often opt for Independent Chinese High Schools, which advocate for the preservation of Chinese culture and utilize Mandarin as the primary medium of instruction for most subjects. (Siah et al., 2018).

However, as highlighted by Kamaludin (2020), cultural and religious factors play a significant role in motivating parents when selecting schools for their children. It is crucial to acknowledge that parental school choice has the potential to contribute to socio-economic polarization within society. Therefore, it is imperative to thoroughly examine the primary factors that influence parents' intentions and behaviours regarding private schools, as this could potentially exacerbate social segregation.

Moreover, while previous studies conducted worldwide have extensively investigated various factors that influence parents' school choice, such as academic performance, school reputation, and location, the Malaysian context has predominantly focused on the role of culture and medium of instruction. The specific relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and parents' intention to choose private schools has received limited attention. Thus, there is a compelling need to address this research gap by investigating the extent to which

entrepreneurial leadership influences parents' decision-making processes when selecting private schools for their children.

While it is evident from previous studies that school principals can establish strong relationships with stakeholders, including parents, there is a lack of detailed analysis on how these relationships specifically impact parents' intentions to choose private schools. Hence, this study aims to delve into the specific characteristics of entrepreneurial leadership that are most valued by parents during the school selection process. Additionally, it seeks to explore how school culture and organizational citizenship behaviour impact parents' perceptions of school effectiveness. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate the interplay between entrepreneurial leadership and other influential factors, such as cost, location, and academic reputation, in shaping parents' decision-making.

Brauckmann and Pashiardis (2020) have discussed the potential benefits of entrepreneurial leadership in education and its role in driving innovation and change within educational organizations. However, their study falls short in addressing how this approach specifically influences parents' intention to choose private schools. Thus, there is a compelling need for further research to explicitly explore this relationship. It is important to note that their study primarily focuses on school management and leadership practices rather than on the intricacies of parents' decision-making processes. While effective entrepreneurial leadership practices could potentially influence parents' perceptions of private schools and their decision-making, a more comprehensive examination of this relationship is warranted. In conclusion, while the existing literature provides valuable insights into the concept of entrepreneurial leadership in education, the current research aims to contribute to the field by elucidating its specific role in shaping parents' intentions and behaviours regarding private schooling.

3.0 Method

This study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the impact of entrepreneurial leadership characteristics on parents' intention towards private schooling. Qualitative methods are well-suited for examining complex phenomena, allowing for the exploration of interconnected factors, relationships, and processes. By employing these methods, the study uncovered the intricate dynamics between entrepreneurial leadership and parents' intentions, shedding light on underlying mechanisms.

The research utilized a semi-structured interview method to delve into how entrepreneurial leadership influences parents' decision-making regarding private schooling. This approach allowed for a flexible yet focused data collection process, enabling the capture of in-depth and real-life data. By using an interview guide aligned with the research objectives, the researchers could ask open-ended and probing questions based on the participants' responses. The adaptability of the semi-structured interview facilitated a comprehensive exploration of participants' viewpoints, capturing emergent themes and unexpected insights. This participant-centered qualitative approach ensured that research findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the impact of entrepreneurial leadership on parents' intention for private schooling.

The population for this study was limited to private school principals in the Klang Valley region. This decision was based on several factors. Firstly, the Klang Valley region is known to have a high concentration of established private schools, as supported by data from the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2020). According to the data, out of the 65 private academic secondary schools in Malaysia, 21 are located in the Klang Valley. This indicates that the Klang

Valley region not only represents a significant proportion of private schools in Malaysia but also attracts a substantial number of parents who choose private schooling for their children compared to other states.

Furthermore, the Klang Valley is home to a large number of well-established private schools, which contribute to the overall ecosystem of private schools in Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur, the largest metropolitan area and the capital of Malaysia, is situated within the Klang Valley. This city serves as the educational hub and plays a leading role in shaping the private school landscape in Malaysia. By focusing on private school principals in the Klang Valley, the study can gain valuable insights into the experiences, perspectives, and practices of individuals who are at the forefront of private education in Malaysia. This targeted approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the entrepreneurial leadership dynamics within the region's private school ecosystem, thereby contributing to the broader knowledge and improvement of private schooling in Malaysia.

The research employed a purposeful sampling method, intentionally selecting individuals and sites to deepen the understanding of private schooling. Private school principals managing schools with more than 500 students and showcasing a successful implementation of entrepreneurial leadership practices were chosen. This criterion was essential as larger student enrollment signifies greater popularity and attractiveness to parents, suggesting certain characteristics that enhance parents' preference for private schooling. Additionally, principals who possessed a deep understanding of the private schooling context in the Klang Valley region were specifically chosen. This criterion allowed participants to provide insights specific to the region's private school ecosystem, aligning with the research focus on the Klang Valley. Their unique experiences enriched the understanding of factors influencing parents' intention for private schooling in the sought-after Klang Valley region. This strategic approach ensured research findings were informed by experienced principals who exhibit entrepreneurial leadership, providing valuable insights into fostering parental intention for private schooling in the Klang Valley.

To enhance participant recruitment, potential private school principals meeting the selection criteria were identified. Contact was established through professional channels, providing comprehensive information about the research. Their consent was sought through a consent form outlining their rights. Interviews were conducted with sensitivity, ensuring a safe environment. Privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained by securely storing and anonymizing data. Concerns were monitored and addressed promptly to ensure a positive research experience. By upholding these principles, the research maintained ethical standards and safeguarded participants' rights and well-being.

The interviews were audio-recorded, and verbatim transcriptions were created to convert the spoken content into written text. The transcriptions were carefully generated by listening closely to the recorded interviews, ensuring the accurate capture of the participants' responses. This meticulous process aimed to preserve the depth and intricacies of their insights.

Thematic analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti version 8.0 software to interpret the qualitative data from interview transcripts. The process involved becoming familiar with the data, assigning descriptive labels through initial coding, and identifying recurring themes. Through critical examination and iterative refinement, a comprehensive understanding of how entrepreneurial leadership impacts parents' attitudes and behaviours towards private schooling

was achieved. The utilization of ATLAS.ti software has facilitated efficient data management and exploration, enhancing the accuracy and efficiency of the analysis process.

The study employed cross-analysis as a technique to examine data across different participants, comparing and contrasting their perspectives on entrepreneurial leadership and private schooling. This approach identified common patterns and themes, establishing the prevalence and significance of certain factors. It also revealed disparities and variations in participants' viewpoints, enriching the analysis by capturing the complexity and diversity of experiences. Overall, thematic analysis revealed strategies and principles, while cross-analysis highlighted diversity and dynamics. Together, they provided a comprehensive understanding of principals' strategies and their impact on parents' choices in private schooling.

Result

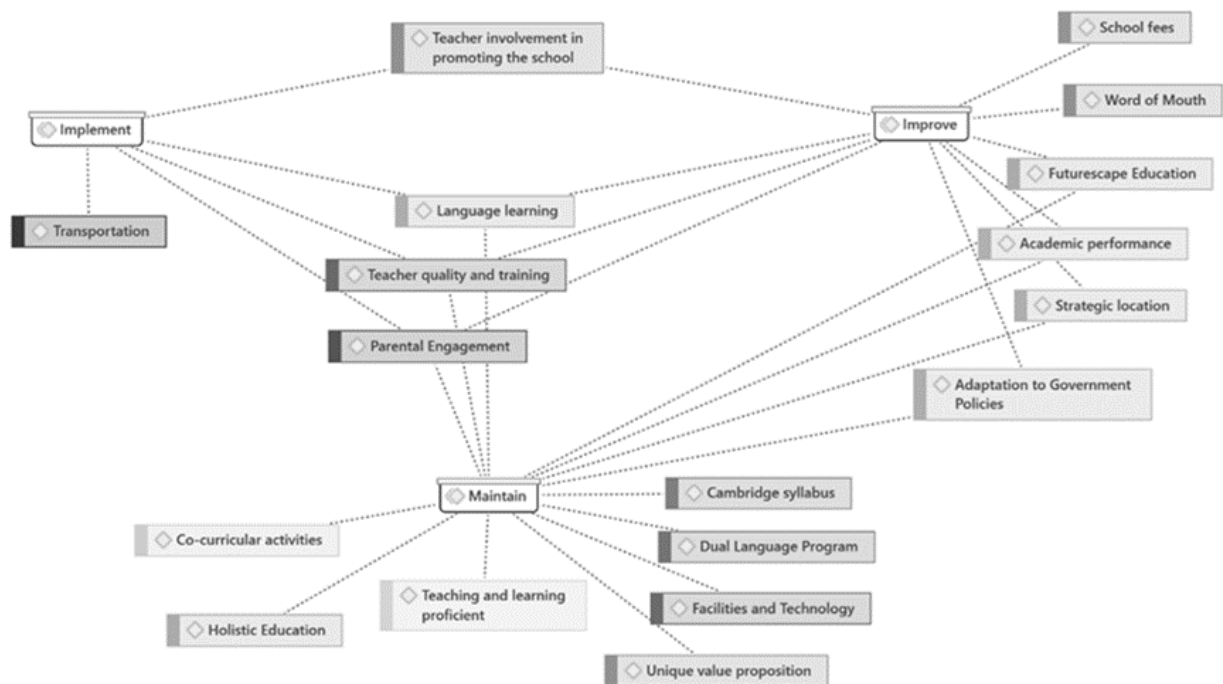
The qualitative findings derived from the data that has been coded can be sub-divided into three sub-themes: maintain, improve, and implement. These sub-themes capture important aspects of the data and provide a structured framework for analysing and reporting the findings.

In this research context, maintain refers to the ongoing efforts made by the school principal to preserve the established policies, direction, and unique characteristics of the school that are deemed valuable in enhancing parents' intention and behaviour towards private schooling. This includes ensuring that these policies, direction, and characteristics are consistently implemented and maintained to provide a high-quality education that meets the expected standards. The ultimate goal of maintenance is to foster a positive perception among parents towards the school, thereby promoting their confidence in it as a reliable and desirable educational option.

Improve, on the other hand, refers to the deliberate actions taken by the school principal to enhance the school's policies, direction, and unique characteristics to further enhance parents' intention and behaviour towards private schooling. This involves identifying the most critical areas that require improvement and taking targeted measures to address them. The ultimate goal of improvement is to strengthen the school's reputation, thereby increasing parents' confidence in it as a reliable and desirable educational option. It is worth noting that improve and maintain are complementary activities that work together to ensure the long-term success of the private school.

In the context of this research, 'implement' refers to the process of planning and executing specific policies or strategies in the future that have not been done before, aimed at addressing critical areas identified for improvement. These policies and strategies are designed to enhance the school's policies, direction, and unique characteristics, thereby further strengthening parents' intention and behaviour towards private schooling. The successful implementation of these policies and strategies is crucial to achieving the desired outcomes and ensuring the long-term success of the school. The three themes of 'maintain,' 'improve,' and 'implement' form a cycle that works together to strengthen the quality of private schools, ultimately enhancing parents' intention and behaviour towards private schooling. The maintenance of established policies, direction, and unique characteristics, coupled with deliberate efforts to improve and implement targeted policies and strategies, helps private schools to continuously enhance their reputation and increase parents' confidence in them as a reliable and desirable educational option. The successful implementation of these strategies not only benefits the students but also supports the role of private school principals as entrepreneurial leaders, as these schools can generate more income from tuition fees. This cycle of improvement and innovation is

critical for private schools to maintain a competitive edge and achieve long-term success. Figure 1 below shows cyclic from between the three identified themes.



Maintain

Fig 1. Thematic Analysis

Private schools require consistent maintenance to ensure they remain an attractive alternative to public education. In the context of entrepreneurial leadership, the private school principal plays a critical role in identifying and prioritizing the areas that require maintenance to enhance the intention and behaviour of parents towards private schooling.

The identified codes under the theme of “maintain” include academic performance, adaptation to government policies, Cambridge syllabus, co-curricular activities, dual language program, facilities and learning technology, futurescape education, holistic education, language learning, parental engagement, strategic location, teacher quality and training, teaching and learning proficient, and unique value proposition. These areas require constant attention and maintenance to ensure that the private school is providing the best possible educational experience to its students, meeting the needs of parents and stakeholders, and remaining competitive in the education sector. The findings from the cross-sectional analysis revealed a consensus among all the principals regarding the maintenance codes that are frequently referenced.

As noted by Principal 1, academic performance is one of the aspects which need to be maintained in order to attract more parents.

All the while, parents think that private school is good. In fact, we try to maintain our standard of SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, Malaysia Certificate of Education). For example, our SPM result. Last year one, 24% of our students actually get straight A's. We are talking about straight As. And about half of our candidate get at least five As

and then 36% gets seven A's and above. So, our result has always been really, really good. And our GPS (grade purata sekolah, school average grade), we are among the top three in our Petaling Perdana District. So, we have to work very hard, teachers work very hard to maintain that standard.

On the other hand, Principal 2 pointed out that school facilities and learning technology is another aspect which need to be maintained to enhance the parents' intention toward private schooling.

Let's say swimming pool, for example. That could be one of the things that will be a value added to the facilities that are in private school. So that has to be maintained. So that when parents came, like for example, let's say during our Open Day, we bring the parents around and they see oh, you have swimming pool so that that could be one thing. And then so in my school, our swimming pool is indoor. So that could that was even enhanced parents' behaviour.

Principal 3 emphasized that, as a private school, upholding the provision of holistic education is paramount, serving as a valuable complement to public schools. This aspect is deemed crucial and should be maintained.

In here, as a private schools compared to government schools, we should not be a very strong curriculum focused and we will need to use a lot of elements, a lot of solutions to supplement our curriculum. So, it means to form the entire part of holistic education. It could be comprised from curriculum and something that is unwritten This is what we have been doing and it need to be maintained.

Improve

According to the principals, certain aspects of private schools need to be maintained, while others need improvement. The principal of the school has specified a few items from the "Maintain" list that have been examined through a cross-sectional thematic analysis to determine key areas for improvement. The analysis identified several significant areas for improvement, such as academic performance, adapting to government policies, futurescape education, language learning, parental engagement, strategic location, and teacher quality and training. Additionally the principal also identified specific areas that require improvement, which are not in the "Maintain" list such as word of mouth, school fees, and teacher involvement in promoting the school. These findings underscore the importance of addressing these areas to improve the overall performance of the school and enhance its reputation among potential parents.

Principal 1 noted that high school fees serve as one of the deterrents for private schooling. As an entrepreneurial school leader, she is committed to improving the balance between school quality and cost, striving to provide an optimal educational experience within reasonable financial considerations.

Fees a bit difficult because cost of living also great right. We need to pay our teachers. School fees will definitely go up. But we try our best not to increase our fee every year. Because we have to make it competitive. Yeah, it has to remain competitive and affordable. So, it is always a struggle, and we are trying to improve it.

Principal 2 further highlighted that improving parental engagement is one of the aspects that require attention in order to raise awareness among parents about what private schools are able to offer.

There should be some awareness. There should be some initiatives to educate the society like this is what we do, and why we do it. Because most of the time I think private schools focus so much on getting more students, but they do not have the initiative to actually share things with parents to make the parents aware.

As noted by Principal 3, language learning is an area that needs improvement, as parents who send their children to private schools are concerned about their children's language performance.

One of the demand or one of the need areas that the school and the parents are always looking for is the improvement in terms of the Bahasa Melayu (BM). So as a private school, we are supposed to have good quality of teachers, providing high quality of education cetera. But in Malaysia, we cannot deny that Bahasa Melayu is the ruler by the end of the day. Because if the students fail in BM, that's the end of the story, as a Malaysian. So, here's something that our community here is actually quite paying attention to the it, and the school need to improve in it.

Implement

Entrepreneurial leadership is a crucial factor in the success of private schools, especially in implementing strategies to enhance parental intention and behaviour towards private schooling. While "maintain" and "improve" are essential themes, the theme of "implement" is equally important as it involves concrete actions that the school's entrepreneurial leader plans to execute in the future to enhance the school's performance and reputation.

In the present study, the analysis identified key areas for implementation, including parental engagement, language learning, teacher involvement in promoting the school, teacher quality and training, and transportation. These areas represent potential opportunities for the entrepreneurial leader to enhance the school's value proposition and distinguish it from competitors.

Principal 1, being an entrepreneurial leader, has identified congestion as a prominent challenge encountered by the school. Recognizing the significance of resolving this issue, she has identified transportation strategies that need to be implemented to effectively address and alleviate the congestion.

It's in our plan. At the moment one of the problems, we are facing is actually congestion. Because our campus is not very big. So, one the plans that we have is actually having our own buses.

Principal 2, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of implementing a 'teachers' involvement in promoting the school' strategy. In private schools, which operate as business institutions, teachers are not only responsible for delivering quality teaching but also need to acquire skills in effectively engaging with parents during school marketing initiatives.

Because most of the time if you look at all the other private schools, the ones that always talk, that always reaching out to potential parents will be principal. So, in the future I

would like to involve my academic team in the process as well so that they are aware, we are a school, we have the purpose to educate children, but at the same time, we are private school, therefore, we also run a business. So, what we do affect our business. So, if we are not able to provide quality of teaching and learning proficient, if you don't have enough facilities if you don't act fast enough to respond to parents' queries, this will be effective in the long run. This will affect us in the long run, in terms of student enrolment, in terms of student customer satisfaction to our service.

Principal 3 places a strong emphasis on teaching quality and training. Recognizing that private schools face competition from government schools, which often have a larger pool of teachers, Principal 3 acknowledges the need to address the shortage of talent in private schools. Consequently, providing ongoing training to teachers is deemed crucial in order to enhance their skills and capabilities.

I think any private school should have and should provide continuous professional development for their own staff. This is to ensure that number one exist. Number one is the quality of teaching and learning proficient, right? So, in order for you to have quality teaching and learning proficient is for the school to be able to offer continuous professional development for their staff, especially the academy staff.

In summary, the findings reveal three major themes: "maintain," "improve," and "implement." These themes encompass various aspects that have been identified by the private school principals, who serve as entrepreneurial leader, as crucial for enhancing parents' intention and behaviour towards private schooling.

Throughout the interviews, all principals unanimously acknowledged the paramount importance of entrepreneurial leadership in maintaining, improving, and implementing strategies. They emphasized that these efforts play a crucial role in shaping parents' intentions and behaviours towards private schooling. They emphasized that word-of-mouth recommendations, which served as the primary source of customers (parents) for their schools, relied heavily on their schools' outstanding reputation. As one of the principals eloquently stated,

Our parents would recommend our school to their friends through word of mouth based on the aspects that we diligently maintain.

The principals recognized that their entrepreneurial leadership qualities played a pivotal role in establishing and nurturing this reputation. To uphold high standards of quality and differentiate their schools from others, the principals stressed the need for continuous improvement and the implementation of innovative strategies. They exhibited a proactive approach in addressing challenges and seizing opportunities, showcasing traits associated with entrepreneurial leadership. By diligently maintaining distinctive aspects and continuously striving for improvement, the principals aimed to generate positive word-of-mouth recommendations from satisfied parents.

Furthermore, the principals acknowledged the direct impact of their entrepreneurial leadership efforts on parents' intentions and behaviours regarding private schooling. They understood that through innovation, value creation, and meeting evolving needs, by implementing innovative strategies, they could maintain a competitive edge in the education sector. Their entrepreneurial

mindset enabled them to identify and capitalize on opportunities, adapt to changing circumstances, and foster a positive and favourable learning environment.

Discussion

The themes of "maintain," "improve," and "implement" serve as a guiding framework for school principals to drive positive changes and maintain their schools' competitive edge. By embracing entrepreneurial leadership, principals can enhance parents' perceptions and attitudes towards private schooling, leading to an increased intention and willingness to choose their schools.

The findings from Miller's (2018) research on the "Nature of School Leadership," which involved 61 school leaders from 16 countries, align with the current study. Miller's study emphasized the significance of entrepreneurial skills and behaviours, such as teamwork, responsiveness to market forces, risk-taking, innovation, and business thinking, in leading schools to success. These traits enable principals to effectively manage private schools and address realistic challenges. Furthermore, Miller's study highlighted the importance of marketing strategies, including teachers' qualifications, safety records, and academic results, in driving enrollment in private schools. The current study's findings are consistent with these insights, emphasizing the value parents place on the entrepreneurial leadership of private school principals in creating a positive educational experience.

As noted by Hisrich and Kearney (2017), the successful implementation of innovative strategies by entrepreneurial leaders relies on their comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths, weaknesses, and the needs and preferences of parents. In addition, as proposed by Mohd Kasim and Zakaria (2019), effective leaders must possess the skills to develop and implement these innovative solutions, aligning them with the school's vision and goals. Moreover, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the implemented strategies are essential, with adjustments made as necessary. These findings align with the current study's observations, further underscoring how entrepreneurial leaders adeptly identify the school's weaknesses and strengths. By adopting innovative approaches in alignment with the school's vision and goals, they effectively shape and enhance parents' intentions and behaviours towards private schooling. These strategies involve adding value to the school by promoting its unique value proposition, effectively distinguishing it from competitors. Moreover, these approaches are also in alignment with the principles of entrepreneurial leadership, which emphasize the importance of creativity and innovation, as proposed by authoritative figures in the field of entrepreneurial leadership such as Stevenson (2000), and Timmons (1978).

Furthermore, Rohde et al., (2019) found that parents often prioritize teacher quality when selecting schools for their children. This highlights their focus on relevant teacher competence and overall school outcomes in choosing their child's education. These findings align with the study's results, which emphasize the pivotal role private school principals play as entrepreneurial leaders responsible for maintaining and improving teaching quality. As expressed by one principal, 'Sustained professional growth among staff, particularly teachers, stands as paramount for fostering quality education.' The present study also underscores that inspiring, well-informed educators with the necessary skillset significantly contribute to addressing students' social, emotional, academic, and developmental needs. One of the principals emphasized that a 21st-century skillset and perspective are vital for teachers to proficiently convey these competencies, stating, "If teachers themselves do not believe in these skills, we cannot expect them to implement them in the classroom." This idea resonates with

Ustinoff-brumbelow (2019) findings, which suggest that investments in teacher training and support by principals lead to increased teacher effectiveness and overall school improvement.

Kumar & Choudhury (2020) study indicates that families prefer private schools with robust parental involvement in associations or meetings. This aligns with the current study's findings, where private school principals emphasize the effectiveness of parent engagement meetings and webinars in fostering parents' interest and behaviour towards private schooling. These entrepreneurial leaders highlight the significance of honing marketing skills and implementing strategies to actively expose parents to private education. Such strategies encompass parent awareness webinars and teacher involvement in school promotion, aiming to educate parents about private schooling's advantages. This perspective is reinforced by Miller (2018), who asserts that entrepreneurial school leaders employ well-established marketing methods. It's important to acknowledge that parents who lack exposure to private schooling within their social networks might not actively seek information (Bennett et al., 2010). In the present study, private school principals demonstrated entrepreneurial leadership traits by employing awareness webinars and involving teachers, potentially enhancing parental awareness and interest in private schooling and subsequently increasing enrollment.

It is important to note that various factors, such as financial ability, familiarity, convenience, and proximity, consistently emerge as strong predictors of parents' intention to enrol their children in private schools, as supported by multiple studies (Anders et al., 2020; Andersen, 2008; Hofflinger et al., 2020; Siddiqui, 2017). Private school principals, acting as entrepreneurial leaders, acknowledge the importance of maintaining competitive and affordable school fees. However, there are variations among the principals interviewed. One principal emphasized that none of the students left the school due to financial constraints. As an entrepreneurial leader, he faced the challenge of balancing school quality and cost, and he chose to prioritize the former. He emphasized the significance of maintaining, improving, and upholding existing strategies, as the school was already performing well in terms of enrolment.

Research indicates that entrepreneurial leaders possess the ability to identify potential challenges and opportunities, and they take initiative in addressing challenges and seizing opportunities (Hisrich & Kearney, 2017; Renko et al., 2015; Sandybayev, 2019). In demonstrating entrepreneurial leadership, some principals have taken proactive measures to address issues such as traffic congestion by implementing their own bus services. As one principal highlighted, "One of the problems we currently face is congestion due to our limited campus size. One of our plans is to have our own buses to address this issue." This emphasizes the importance of private school principals being proactive and implementing strategies to enhance the quality and convenience of their schools.

Understanding the criteria that parents value when choosing a school for their children is crucial in order to comprehend how competition based on choice can influence both school quality and student enrolment patterns. Kamaludin (2020), in a study on school choice and national unity, argued that private schools tend to attract high-performing students, leaving weaker students primarily in public schools. This kind of segregation is often associated with ethnic divisions. However, a more optimistic perspective suggests that competition from private schools can benefit all stakeholders, including public schools, as it motivates them to enhance their efficiency (DeAngelis, 2017). Therefore, examining the reasons why parents opt for fee-charging private schools instead of free public schools that offer the same curriculum holds significant implications for the education system.

In this study, all principals concurred that the primary source of enrolment in private schools comes from parent recommendations, which is a testament to the high quality and standards upheld by these schools. The findings align with the suggestion made by Reimann and colleagues (2021) that public school leaders face more limitations in their actions, whereas private school principals enjoy greater autonomy and can better align their schools' orientation with the ideals of families (Reimann et al., 2021).

Consequently, good reputation of private school is more likely to benefit from competition because a good reputation may increase the demand for spots at that school and may enable the school to select “desirable” students. This explains the recent growth of private schooling in Malaysia. Even though the growth rate of private schools surpasses public schools, private schools are still very small in relation to scale (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013). Meaning that limited numbers of private schools are desired by a great amount parents. This may lead to greater competition among private schools as well as between private schools and public schools. This notion is substantiated by the current research findings, as none of the private school principals interviewed expressed any intention to reduce their school fees or offer any discounts. This is likely due to the limited number of private schools, which allows them to be selective in their student enrolment process, often targeting families from more privileged backgrounds who can afford their fees. As a result, private school principals may feel little pressure to lower fees, instead focusing on maintaining their reputation for high-quality education and catering to families who are able to pay and ultimately exacerbating social segregation.

Conclusion

In summary, the research findings indicate that a significant factor contributing to the recent surge in the popularity of private schooling is the positive attributes inherently linked to private schools. These attributes are closely intertwined with the entrepreneurial leadership characteristics demonstrated by private school leaders. The positive attributes are strongly associated with the high standards upheld by private schools.

The study identified three primary themes that emerged from interviews with private school leaders: "maintain," "improve," and "implement." Through a commitment to maintaining and enhancing the standards and quality of private schools, parents are naturally drawn to these educational options, largely due to positive word-of-mouth circulating within privileged social circles.

These findings provide valuable insights into the role of entrepreneurial leadership within the Malaysian education system. Additionally, they shed light on the practical implications of private schooling, encompassing their influence on the national educational landscape and potential threat to social segregation.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

The present study operates under the assumption that all private school leaders inherently possess entrepreneurial leadership qualities. Given that private schools operate as business entities, the application of entrepreneurial characteristics becomes essential for effective management. However, this study did not extensively delve into the precise degree and level of these entrepreneurial leadership traits.

In light of this, future research could greatly benefit from adopting a quantitative approach. This would allow for a thorough examination of the extent to which private school leaders exhibit entrepreneurial leadership traits and explore potential correlations with parents' intentions and behaviours towards private schooling.

Furthermore, it's worth noting that the current study relied on qualitative methods, deriving findings primarily from the subjective perspectives of private school principals. Consequently, there may be biases introduced by contextual factors, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Future research could pivot towards a parental perspective to capture a more comprehensive depiction of the prevailing phenomenon of private schooling.

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