การตัดสินใจเลือกโรงเรียนในการศึกษาต่อระดับมัธยมศึกษา: การวิเคราะห์ร่วม

HIGH SCHOOL SELECTION DECISION: CONJOINT ANALYSIS

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บทคัดย่อ

ในขณะที่ตลาดการศึกษามีการแข่งขันที่รุนแรงขึ้นเรื่อย ๆ ผู้กำหนดนโยบายในสถาบันการศึกษาจำเป็นต้องเข้าใจความต้องการของนักเรียนในการตัดสินใจเลือกสถานศึกษาในการเข้าศึกษาต่อ เนื่องด้วยทรัพยากรที่มีจำกัดในสภาวะเศรษฐกิจในปัจจุบันผู้บริหารโรงเรียนจำเป็นต้องเพิ่มขีดความสามารถในการดึงดูดใจนักเรียนที่คาดหวัง เพื่อให้เลือกศึกษาในสถาบันการศึกษาของตนเอง เพื่อให้บรรลุเป้าหมายนี้ ผู้กำหนดนโยบายในสถานศึกษาจำเป็นต้องตระหนักถึงปัจจัยสำคัญที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจของนักเรียนในการเลือกเข้าศึกษาต่อ การศึกษาวิจัยในครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจเลือกโรงเรียนระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลาย 2) แสดงระดับความสำคัญของแต่ละปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อการตัดสินใจเลือกโรงเรียนระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลาย และ 3) เปรียบเทียบลักษณะส่วนบุคคลของนักเรียนในการตัดสินใจเลือกโรงเรียนระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลาย

การวิจัยในครั้งนี้ เริ่มจากการสัมภาษณ์กลุ่มกับนักเรียนที่กำลังศึกษาอยู่ระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 4 จากโรงเรียน 4 แห่งในเขตกรุงเทพมหานคร ทั้งสิ้นจำนวน 20 คน โดยทำการสัมภาษณ์กลุ่มจำนวน 4 กลุ่ม กลุ่มละ 5 คน เพื่อกำหนดคุณลักษณะและระดับของปัจจัยเพื่อใช้ในการสร้างสถานการณ์จำลองในวิเคราะห์ร่วม จากนั้นได้มีการเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างอีกจำนวน 246 คน จากนักเรียนที่กำลังศึกษาอยู่ระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 4 ทั้ง 4 แห่งในเขตกรุงเทพมหานคร ผลการศึกษาพบว่า 1) ปัจจัยที่สำคัญ 4 อันดับแรก ในการเลือกโรงเรียนระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาในการศึกษาต่อ ได้แก่ โครงสร้างพื้นฐานด้านเทคโนโลยี ความสะดวกในการเดินทาง ชื่อเสียงในด้านวิชาการ และคำแนะนำจากบุคคลอื่น ตามลำดับ 2) นักเรียนที่มีรายได้เฉลี่ยของครอบครัวต่อเดือนมากกว่า 60,000 บาท ให้ความสำคัญกับปัจจัยด้านชื่อเสียงในด้านวิชาการ มากกว่านักเรียนที่มีรายได้เฉลี่ยของครอบครัวต่อเดือนน้อยกว่า 20,000 บาท และ 20,001-60,000 บาท และ 3) นักเรียนที่มีรายได้เฉลี่ยของครอบครัวต่อเดือน 20,000-60,000 บาท ให้ความสำคัญกับปัจจัยด้านความสะดวกในการเดินทาง มากกว่านักเรียนที่มีรายได้เฉลี่ยของครอบครัวต่อเดือนมากกว่า 60,000 บาท

การวิจัยในครั้งนี้ได้ให้ข้อเสนอแนะ เพื่อเป็นแนวทางให้ผู้บริหารโรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษาให้ได้เข้าใจถึงปัจจัยต่าง ๆ ที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจของนักเรียนในการตัดสินใจเลือกโรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษาในการศึกษาต่อ ซึ่งอาจทำให้ผู้กำหนดนโยบายสามารถนำไปปรับปรุงหลักสูตร และพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานด้านเทคโนโลยี ให้ตรงกับความต้องการของนักเรียนที่ต้องการเข้าศึกษาต่อในระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลายได้ดียิ่งขึ้น

คำสำคัญ: มัธยมศึกษา การเลือก การตัดสินใจ การวิเคราะห์ร่วม

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Abstract

As the education market grows increasingly competitive, it is crucial for education policymakers to develop a better understanding of prospective students' preferences when choosing an institution. With limited resources in the current economic climate, education policy makers must maximize the effectiveness of their efforts to attract prospective students. To achieve this, education policymakers need to be keenly aware of the priorities and significant factors that influence a prospective student's decision in selecting a high school to attend. The purposes of this study were (1) to identify major factors influencing students in their choice of a high school, (2) to investigate the relative importance attached to high school selection attributes, and (3) to compare the personal characteristics of students who prefer a given high school selection.

Initially, focus group interviews were conducted with 20 grade 10 students from four selected high schools in Bangkok. A total of four focus group sessions took place, each group consisting of five participants, to determine the appropriate set of attributes and levels for the conjoint experiment. For the conjoint experiment, a sample comprising 246 respondents was purposively chosen from grade 10 students from four selected high schools in Bangkok. The finding revealed the following: 1) the four most important attributes for selecting a high school were, in order of importance, technology infrastructure, commuting convenience, school reputation, and advice from others, 2) students from families with average monthly incomes higher than 60,000 baht place more emphasis on academic reputation than students from families with an average monthly income between 20,001-60,000 baht and less than 20,000 baht, and 3) students whose families have an average monthly income from 20,000 to 60,000 baht tend to prioritize the convenience of commuting to school more than those whose families earn an average monthly income higher than 60,000 baht.

These results have several implications for high school policymakers seeking to understand the factors shaping elementary students' choice of high school. Policymakers can better tailor high school offerings and support Technology Infrastructure to meet the needs and aspirations of prospective students.

Keywords: High school, Selection, Decision, Conjoint analysis

Introduction

Studying during high school is a critical phase in a student's educational journey, laying the foundation for future academic and personal success. It is a crossroads where personal interests, academic strengths, and aspirations converge, making it a critical juncture in a young individual’s life. In Thai society, elementary students predominantly opt for public high schools over private ones due to several factors. Firstly, public high schools in Thailand receive substantial government subsidies, rendering them significantly more affordable than private high schools, which often have exorbitant tuition fees. Secondly, while certain elite private schools boast excellent reputations, numerous top-ranked schools in Thailand, and most prestigious high schools, are public institutions. These public schools are highly competitive and offer high-quality education. Thirdly, public schools in Thailand tend to reinforce and reflect traditional Thai cultural values and norms, which families may prefer, over certain private schools. Consequently, this study concentrates exclusively on public high schools in Bangkok, Thailand's capital and largest metropolis.

As a diverse urban center, Bangkok serves as an ideal representative for exploring school selection dynamics in major metropolitan areas, potentially offering valuable insights into urban educational decision-making processes.

Several academic literature reviews have highlighted numerous important factors that students consider, including academic reputation (Rudhumbu et al., 2017; Ahmad et al., 2016; Sukhawatthanakun et al., 2010), location (Alonderiene & Klimaviciene, 2013), cost (Wang, 2009), advice from others (Chen et al., 2024), level of competition (Praditsuwan, 2015) and job prospects (Praditsuwan, 2015; Alonderiene & Klimaviciene, 2013) However, in the age of technological transformation, and amidst the COVID-19 crisis, the importance of technology infrastructure has become even more pronounced. As such, when considering high school options, students may evaluate the institution's commitment to technology integration, the availability of contemporary technological resources, and the overall technological ecosystem. A high school with a well-developed technology infrastructure can provide students with a competitive advantage, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the digital age.

The process of selecting a high school appears to be influenced by an intricate interplay of numerous key variables (Whitehead et al., 2006). In practice, prospective students do not make decisions by evaluating one attribute at a time. Rather, they evaluate an entire bundle of attributes simultaneously when making their choice. This encourages the need to consider assessing the decision making in different ways. Conjoint analysis emerges as a suitable approach to examine the trade-offs prospective students make among various attributes when selecting a high school.

To date, while conjoint analysis has been applied in various industries, its utilization within the education sector remains limited (Kusumawati, 2011; Sohn & Ju, 2010; Soutar & Turner, 2002; Praditsuwan, 2015). Moreover, no prior research has employed conjoint experiments to explore the high school preferences of students in Thailand. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap in the literature by investigating the high school institution choice of grade 10 students in Thailand using a conjoint experiment. The results of this study can provide valuable insights for education policy makers, helping them understand the preferences of their target student and make informed decisions about school offerings, strategies, or policy changes.

Aims

The objectives of this study were

1. to identify major factors influencing students' high school selection decisions.
2. to examine the relative importance attached to high school selection attributes.
3. to compare the personal characteristics of students who prefer a given high school selection.

Literature Review

Relevant Theories

1. Rational Choice Theory:

Rational choice theory proposes that individuals evaluate alternative options by weighing their potential benefits against potential costs, ultimately choosing the alternative with the highest perceived utility or

usefulness (Broda et al., 2018). This theory assumes that grade 10 students make decisions based on a rational evaluation of costs and benefits. Students are expected to weigh factors such as academic quality, extracurricular offerings, school reputation, proximity, and tuition costs before making a choice.

2. Social Capital Theory:

This theory emphasizes the importance of social networks, relationships, and resources in decision-making processes. When selecting high schools, students may rely on information and recommendations from their social networks, such as friends, relatives, students' counselors or community members (Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016).

3. Expectancy-Value Theory:

This theory suggests that students' choices are influenced by their expectations of success and the value they attach to a particular task or goal. Students may consider factors such as perceived academic fit, future career prospects, and alignment with personal values (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

The integration of these three theoretical frameworks enables researchers to analyze the school selection process through diverse lenses—rational, social, and psychological. This multifaceted approach captures both extrinsic influences and intrinsic drivers, offering a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the intricate dynamics of educational choice-making.

Relevant Literature:

Ullah & Mukherjee (2023) studied the school choice decisions of middle-class parents in urban India. Using qualitative research methods, they investigated the rational decision-making process of middle-class parents in contemporary India when choosing to send their children to government-run public schools. This study challenges the common perception that public schools provide low-quality education and that no one willingly chooses them. Instead, the study suggests that Indian parents make rational decisions about which school to send their children to by gathering information, weighing various options, and then selecting what they consider to be the best school for their children.

Chen et al. (2024) developed a model that allows for heterogenous and contemporaneous peer effects among different types of agents endogenously selected into different peer groups. They implemented their approach by studying migrant and local students in Shanghai. Results indicated that local students always attend public schools, which are widely perceived as of higher quality, while migrant students are endogenously selected into either public schools or lower-quality private schools. The results suggest large contemporaneous peer effects among all student groups.

Ahmad et al. (2016) studied the factors that motivate adult learners in the tourism and hospitality field to study abroad, examining how various personal criteria influence their decision-making process when selecting a host country and host institution for their studies. This study aimed to understand various factors that adult learners consider when choosing an international study destination and educational institution by applying both qualitative and quantitative methods. They indicated that the appeal of the host country itself emerged as the top deciding factor, with the prestige of the educational institution being the next most influential consideration.

Alonderiene and Klimaviciene (2013) examined factors influencing first-year management and economics students' choices of university and program in Lithuania, both public and private. Results indicated that students' personal characteristics, along with career opportunities and program reputation, were the greatest influences when selecting a study program. Furthermore, the opinion of others was not particularly important in making a decision, as responses suggested that students largely relied on their own judgments when selecting a university.

Rudhumbu et al. (2017)examined the factors influencing undergraduate students' choice of university. The study revealed that the most important factors in selecting a university were the academic programs offered, the institution's reputation, advertising, career fairs, quality of staff, and employment prospects for graduates.

Wang (2009) investigated the factors influencing undergraduate students' choice of Canada as an education destination. Data was gathered through interviews with university leaders and international students, as well as an online survey of international students at the two case study universities. The study's results showed international students primarily chose a university based on its reputation, program quality, degree recognition in their home country, tuition and expenses, and the university's prompt responsiveness.

Kusumawati (2011) utilizing conjoint analysis, conducted a study to evaluate the relative importance students placed on various factors influencing their choice of an Indonesian public university. The findings indicated the following order of priority for students in selecting a public university: 1) advice from family, friends, and/or teachers, 2) reputation, 3) job prospects, 4) total expenses, 5) campus atmosphere, and 6) proximity. The most influential attribute was the advice received from family, friends, and/or teachers, while proximity was deemed the least important factor.

Sukhawatthanakun et al. (2010) investigated the influential factors for Grade 12 students in Thailand's upper northeastern region when selecting a university. The findings revealed five key factors: the quality and reputation of institution, the academic and management system, the location and environment, tuition fee and welfare, and motivation based on future career opportunities. Furthermore, the internet served as a primary tool for students to gather information about institutions. Although most students consulted their parents regarding university selection, the final decision was ultimately made by the students themselves.

In sum, the potential factors identified in the literature review were used to ensure key attributes and levels that were achieved from conducting focus groups.

Research Methodology

The Proposed Sample

The Focus Group Interview

To ensure an appropriate set of attributes and levels for the conjoint analysis exercise, focus group interviews were conducted. The participants were grade 10 students from four selected high schools in Bangkok (Wachirathamsatit School, Srinakharinwirot University Prasarnmit Demonstration School, Bangkapi School, and Debsirinromklao School). These high schools were selected to represent a range of academic profiles and geographical locations within the city, ensuring a varied sample for the research.The study

conducted four focus group sessions, each comprising five participants from the selected high schools. Student participation was voluntary, and participants received compensation as an incentive for their involvement.

For Conjoint Experiment

For the conjoint experiment study, the participants were a purposively sampled group of students recruited from four selected high schools in Bangkok as previously mentioned. The sample consisted of 10th grade students who were recent high school enrollees , making them suitable participants as they had just gone through the decision process of selecting their high school. Participation in the surveys was voluntary for the students.The sample of 246 respondents came from 4 public high schools in Bangkok (Wachirathamsatit School, Srinakharinwirot University Prasarnmit Demonstration School, Bangkapi School, and Debsirinromklao School).

Conjoint Scenario

Conjoint Analysis

As a multivariate technique, conjoint analysis enables researchers to gain insights into how respondents formulate preferences for products or services, as well as the trade-offs they make in their decision-making process (Hair et al., 2014) Conjoint analysis operates on the assumption that respondents do not evaluate attributes independently, but rather assess a set of stimuli (e.g., high school choice) as a comprehensive bundle of attributes (Agarwal et al., 2015) Initially, focus group interview results were analyzed and an experiment was designed incorporating the appropriate attributes and levels. The traditional conjoint method was applied in this study, as the set of attributes was fewer than ten (Hair et al., 2014). Table 1 lists the final set of attributes and levels included in the conjoint experiment.

Four attributes, each with two levels, were used to construct a series of profiles. Though there were sixteen ($2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$) possible profiles, it was not necessary to evaluate them all to obtain the desired trade-offs (Malhotra, 2007), so a decision was made to reduce the task by using a fractional factorial design. The SPSS program was used to generate a main-effects orthogonal array of the number of profiles utilized in the study.

Table 1: High School Institution Attributes and Levels.

Attributes	Level
Academic reputation	High Average
Commuting Convenience	High Average
Advice from Others	High Average
Technology Infrastructure	High Average

Results

Personal Demographic Profile of Respondents

Most of the respondents were female, had graduated from a government secondary school, were studying in an arts program, had a GPA above 3.50, and had an average family income between 20,000-60,000 baht.

Part-Worth Utilities

Table 2 Part-Worth Utilities

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error
Academic Reputation	High	.348	.028
	Average	-.348	.028
Commuting Convenience	High	.482	.028
	Average	-.482	.028
Advice from Others	High	.343	.028
	Average	-.343	.028
Technology Infrastructure	High	.529	.028
	Average	-.529	.028
(Constant)		6.686	.028

Table 2, the part-worth utilities suggest a stronger preference for high academic reputation, high commuting convenience , high reliance on advice from others, and high technology infrastructure.

Table 3 Relative Importance of High School Institution

Attributes	Relative Importance	Rank
Academic Reputation	23.968	3
Commuting Convenience	26.183	2
Advice from Others	21.506	4
Technology Infrastructure	28.343	1

“Relative importance” indicates the importance attached to each attribute relative to the other attributes. As can be seen in Table 3, technology infrastructure was considered the most important attribute, followed by to commuting convenience, academic reputation, and advice from others, respectively.

Inferential Statistics Results for Hypothesis Testing

1. Respondents of Different Genders Showed a Different Degree of Preference for High School Selection Attributes.

Table 4 The Comparison of Gender Difference towards each Attribute.

Attributes	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Academic Reputation	.215	244	.830
Commuting Convenience	.138	244	.890
Advice from Others	-.273	244	.785
Technology Infrastructure	-.065	244	.948

Table 4, respondents of different genders showed no difference in the relative importance of all of the high school attributes, with respect to academic reputation, commuting convenience, advice from others, and technology infrastructure, within the statistically significant 0.05 level.

2. Respondents from a different type of secondary school showed a different degree of preference for high school selection attributes.

Table 5 The Comparison of Type of Secondary School Studied towards each Attribute.

Attributes	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Academic Reputation	-.023	244	.982
Commuting Convenience	-1.260	244	.209
Advice from Others	-.579	244	.563
Technology Infrastructure	1.579	244	.116

Table 5, respondents from a different type of secondary school showed no difference in the relative importance attached to high school selection attributes, with respect to academic reputation, commuting convenience, advice from others and technology infrastructure, within the statistically significant 0.05 level.

3. Respondents in a Different Program of Study Showed a Different Degree of Preference for High School Selection Attributes.

Table 6 The Pair Comparison of Study Program Difference towards Academic Reputation, Commuting Convenience, Advice from Others, and Technology Infrastructure Attributes

Attributes	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Academic Reputation	-1.112	244	.267
Commuting Convenience	-.457	244	.648
Advice from Others	-.012	244	.990
Technology Infrastructure	1.472	244	.142

Table 6, respondents in different study programs showed no difference in the relative importance attached to high school selection attributes, with respect to academic reputation, commuting convenience, advice from others, and technology infrastructure, within the statistically significant 0.05 level.

4. Respondents with a Different GPA Showed a Different Degree of Preference for High School Selection Attributes.

Table 7 The Comparison of GPA Difference towards Each Attribute by One Way ANOVA

Attributes	F	Sig.
School Reputation	.873	.419
Commuting Convenience	.327	.721
Advice from Others	2.679	.071
Technology Infrastructure	.949	.388

Table 7, respondents with different GPA showed no difference in relative importance attached to all high school selection attributes with respect to academic reputation, commuting convenience, advice from others, and technology infrastructure, within the statistically significant 0.05 level.

5. Respondents with a Different Average Family Income Monthly Showed a Different Degree of Preference for High School Selection Attributes.

Table 8 The Comparison of Average Family's Income Monthly towards Academic Reputation, Commuting Convenience, and Advice from Others Attributes by One Way ANOVA

Attributes	F	Sig.
Academic Reputation	5.469*	.005
Commuting Convenience	3.777*	.024
Advice from Others	2.396	.093

* Statistically significant at 0.05 level

Table 8, respondents with a different average family income monthly showed a difference in relative importance attached to high school selection attributes, with respect to academic reputation, and commuting convenience, within the statistically significant 0.05 level. While the aspect of advice from others, respondents with different average family income monthly showed no difference in the relative importance attached to high school selection attributes, within the statistically significant 0.05 level.

Table 9 The Comparison of Average Family's Income Monthly towards Technology Infrastructure Attributes.

Attributes		Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Technology Infrastructure	Brown-Forsythe	2.063	2	104.727	.132

Table 9, respondents with different average family income monthly showed no difference in relative importance attached to high school selection attributes, with respect to technology infrastructure, within the statistically significant 0.05 level.

Table 10 The Pair Comparison of Average Family Income Monthly Difference towards Academic Reputation Attributes by LSD

Academic reputation	Less than 20,000 Baht (22.05)	20,0001-60,000 Baht (22.24)	More than 60,000 Baht (29.54)
Less than 20,000 Baht (22.05)	-	0.21, (.944)	-7.49*, (.023)
20,0001-60,000 Baht (22.24)		-	-7.70*,(.002)
More than 60,000 Baht (29.54)			-

Table 10, respondents with an average family income monthly of more than 60,000 baht and less than 20,000 baht, and 20,001-60,000 baht showed a difference in the relative importance attached to high school selection attributes, with respect to school reputation, within the statistically significant 0.05 level. The rest of the pairs showed no difference in relative importance attached to high school selection attributes, within the statistically significant 0.05 level.

Table 11 The Pair Comparison of Average Family Income Monthly Difference towards Commuting Convenience Attributes by LSD

Commuting Convenience	Less than 20,000 Baht (30.18)	20,0001-60,000 Baht (27.18)	More than 60,000 Baht (21.81)
Less than 20,000 Baht (30.18)	-	3.00, (.607)	8.37*, (.044)
20,0001-60,000 Baht (27.18)		-	5.38, (.089)
More than 60,000 Baht (21.81)			-

Table 11, respondents with an average family income monthly of more than 60,000 baht and less than 20,000 baht showed a difference in the relative importance attached to high school selection attributes, with respect to commuting convenience, within the statistically significant 0.05 level. The rest pairs showed

no difference in relative importance attached to high school selection attributes, within the statistically significant 0.05 level.

Conclusions and Discussion

Conclusions

The findings revealed that the four most influential factors determining high school choice for students are, in rank order, technology infrastructure (28.34%), commuting convenience (26.18%), academic reputation (23.97%), and advice from others (21.51%). Contrary to the findings of several prior studies that highlighted school reputation as a key factor (Wang, 2009; Tirumalai & Kumari, 2017), the present study revealed a surprising result. Technology infrastructure emerged as the most important attribute for these new generation students when choosing high school institution. Today's students have grown up immersed in technology from a very young age. They are accustomed to using digital tools, apps, and online resources for learning, communication, and accessing information. Having robust technology infrastructure at their high school is likely a priority to support their technologically-driven lifestyles and learning preferences. Technology infrastructure also strengthens social capital by enabling robust connections and seamless information exchange within social networks.

Commuting convenience was the second most important attribute (26.18%) for students in this study. High school students have limited financial resources and rely on their parents for transportation. High school institutions that are closer to their homes allow them to save money on commuting costs like gas, public transit fares, etc. It also reduces the time spent traveling back and forth, which is appealing for students balancing academics with other commitments. This finding aligns with numerous studies that highlight location as a critical factor influencing students' decisions when selecting an institution to attend (Sukhawatthanakun et al., 2010; Kusumawati, 2011).

Academic reputation of the institution emerged as the third most influential attribute (23.97%) for students in choosing their high school. This finding contradicts several past studies, which indicated that academic/university reputation was the most crucial determinant for students when selecting an educational institution. (Alonderiene & Klimaviciene, 2013; Wang, 2009). Traditionally, numerous studies in the literature have highlighted university reputation as the preeminent factor influencing students' choice of institution. However, this study indicated a shift, where university reputation is no longer regarded as the most critical determinant in the high school selection process.

Advice from friends (21.51%) was found to be the least important attribute for high school choice. As students reach the beginning of high school and prepare for college, they tend to assert more independence and ownership over decisions like choosing a high school. While input from loved ones is valued, they may be inclined to make this choice primarily based on their own criteria and preferences. Students may also prioritize finding the right individual fit aligned with their interests, career goals, and lifestyle rather than defer to external advice. This finding contradicts the study by Chen et al. (2024) which demonstrated significant contemporaneous peer influence among both local and migrant students in Shanghai. In Chinese culture, there is a strong emphasis on cultivating close peer relationships and social

bonds from a young age. Peers may play an important role in shaping values, behaviors and decisions, especially during the school-going years. This cultural context could amplify peer influence when it comes to major decisions like school choice. For migrant students in Shanghai, the experience of relocating and adapting to a new environment could heighten their reliance on peer networks. Local students who already have established friend groups may exert influence by sharing information and shaping perceptions about different schools.

Students with an average family income higher than 60,000 baht place more emphasis on academic reputation compared to students with average family income between 20,001-60,000 baht and less than 20,000 baht. Families with higher incomes may have greater resources and may place more value on attending institutions that are highly ranked or have strong academic reputations. There may be a perception that a reputable school will provide better opportunities and connections, which parents from higher-income brackets may prioritize for their children. Students from higher-income backgrounds may view attending a strong academic school as a way to maintain or enhance their social and economic status. According to the expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), individuals may perceive attending a strong academic high school as offering a better opportunity to gain admission into a top-ranked university, which they view as a gateway to promising career prospects and an elevated socioeconomic status.

Students whose families have an average monthly income ranging from 20,000 to 60,000 baht tend to prioritize the convenience of commuting to school more than those whose families earn an average monthly income higher than 60,000 baht. For the former group, factors such as proximity to the educational institution, access to affordable transportation options, and minimizing time spent in transit are likely to carry greater weight in their decision-making process when selecting a school. In contrast, students from more affluent family backgrounds with a monthly income higher than 60,000 baht may place less emphasis on commuting convenience, potentially owing to their ability to afford alternative transportation options or conveniently commute by having their parents drive them to and from the educational institution in a private car.

Discussion

Despite the ranking, the relatively small differences between each attribute suggest that education policymakers should give balanced consideration to all factors (technology infrastructure, academic reputation, convenience to commute, and advice from others) in order to effectively attract prospective students.

Education policy makers should allocate significant funding to upgrade and maintain state-of-the-art technology infrastructure in schools. This includes high-speed internet connectivity, up-to-date computer hardware and software, interactive whiteboards, and other digital learning tools. They should develop a strategic plan for integrating technology into the curriculum and classroom instruction. They should also offer ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their technological skills and knowledge. This will enable them to effectively incorporate technology into their teaching methods and create engaging learning experiences for students.

Education policy makers should work closely with local authorities to address infrastructure issues that may impact commuting, such as road maintenance, traffic light synchronization, and parking facilities

near schools. They should also explore the feasibility of offering transportation subsidies or incentives for students who rely on public transportation. This can ease the financial burden and encourage the use of more convenient transportation options. In addition, they may regularly assess the commuting patterns and needs of students, and adjust transportation policies and infrastructure accordingly to ensure ongoing convenience and accessibility.

Education policy makers should implement policies and initiatives that prioritize academic rigor, high-quality teaching, and a challenging curriculum. Ensure that schools have the resources and support necessary to maintain high academic standards. They should develop a comprehensive and transparent system for evaluating academic performance at the school and student levels. This could include standardized testing, assessments, and external evaluations, allowing students, parents, and the community to gauge the academic reputation of schools. Highly qualified and effective teachers are also essential for maintaining a school's academic reputation.

Education policy makers should engage alumni to serve as advisors and role models for current students. Their experiences and insights can provide valuable perspectives on academic and career pathways, as well as life lessons. They should encourage active parental involvement in the educational process by providing resources and opportunities for parents to engage with school staff and participate in decision-making. This can facilitate open communication and ensure parents can offer informed advice to their children. They should also explore the use of virtual platforms or online forums where students can seek advice from counselors, teachers, or trained advisors. This can provide convenient access to guidance, as well as a virtual campus tour.

Education policy makers should consider increasing the availability and accessibility of need-based financial aid, such as scholarships, grants, and work-study programs, to support students from low-income families in attending reputable academic institutions. They should explore strategies to address the affordability concerns of students from low-income families attending reputable institutions, such as tuition assistance, and affordable transportation options. For schools with strong academic reputations, the policy makers should adopt diverse recruitment strategies that actively seek out and support students from low-income backgrounds who demonstrate academic potential and merit. They should implement policies that allow students from different socioeconomic backgrounds to attend schools outside their designated neighborhood or district, providing greater flexibility in choosing schools based on commuting convenience.

Suggestion

Future research directions could include:

1. Expanding the study to diverse geographic locations to investigate the impact of cultural factors on high school selection criteria.

2. Broadening the participant pool to encompass parents, teachers, and school administrators, allowing for a comparative analysis of their preferences alongside those of students.

3. Examining how personality traits or cognitive styles influence high school selection criteria.

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