

## Marketing of Educational Services: Factors Influencing Private School Choice in Türkiye

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Educational Services Marketing Private Educational Institutions Private School Choice Türkiye</p> <p>Received 29 September 2025 Revised 28 January 2026 Accepted 15 February 2026</p> <p><b>Article Classification:</b> Research Article</p>	<p><b>Purpose</b> - Due to the approximately sixfold increase in the number of institutions with private school status in Türkiye over the past two decades, and the limited number of studies in the fields of educational sciences and marketing addressing private school choice within the context of educational services marketing, this study aims to identify the factors influencing the preference for private schools through the lens of the 7Ps services marketing framework, thereby providing a structured conceptual basis for understanding school choice as a multidimensional service marketing phenomenon.</p> <p><b>Design/ methodology/approach</b> - This study was conducted using a phenomenological research design, one of the qualitative research methods frequently employed in social sciences. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that they had purchased educational services from private-status schools at the preschool, primary, secondary, or high school levels. Attention was paid to achieving maximum variation in the distribution of participants. After identifying the research problem and reviewing the related literature, a semi-structured interview form titled "Factors Influencing School Preference", which included content capable of addressing the research problem, was developed by the researcher. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis in order to reveal common themes and shared meanings related to school choice.</p> <p><b>Findings</b> - When the results of the research are evaluated holistically, the factors influencing the preference for private schools are categorized as follows: educational quality, physical facilities, teachers, cost, brand-image, expectations, social status, school administrators/decision-makers, and underlying reasons for preference. Among these factors, educational quality, teachers, and brand image appear to be the most prominent determinants shaping parental decision-making.</p> <p><b>Discussion</b> - When the research findings related to educational services marketing and the factors influencing school choice are evaluated, it is observed that the results obtained in this study are largely consistent with prior literature, and that the factors identified as influencing school choice in this study are similarly expressed in other studies. Based on the study findings, recommendations were developed for decision-makers/administrators, sector representatives, and researchers. Beyond this alignment, the study contributes to the educational services marketing literature by providing context-specific insights from Türkiye, where the rapid increase in the number of private K-12 schools has intensified competition and transformed school choice into a strategic marketing issue.</p>

### 1. Introduction

Education is a process that enables individuals to gain knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Education contributes to the development of individuals by using various tools, methods, and techniques (Korucuk, 2025, p. 104; Öztürk, 2005, p. 2). Education is not limited to the academic field; it also covers a wide range of areas such as professional skills, personal development, social responsibility, and lifelong learning. Education is a sector of critical importance for social development and is necessary for individuals to gain a competitive advantage in the information age (Ecer, 2024, p. 17). Educational services are systems and organizations that enable individuals to gain knowledge and skills in various fields. Educational services can be offered in various areas such as schools, universities, private lessons, and online education platforms. These services are generally based on the knowledge and skills provided by a teacher or trainer (Taşkın and Kurubaş, 2015, pp. 7-8). From a marketing perspective, education can be conceptualized as a high-involvement service characterized by intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability. In such services, perceived value is shaped not only by learning outcomes but also by experiential and relational dimensions, including

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interactions with teachers, administrators, and the institutional environment throughout the service delivery process (Zeithaml et al., 2018).

Marketing of educational services is performed similarly to marketing of other services. However, the education sector offers a different approach due to the influence of factors such as the intangible structure of the service, student satisfaction, quality of teaching, and future success (Bümen, 2015, p. 29). Marketing in educational services requires unique strategies to appeal to students, parents, and communities. The marketing mix in educational services is the set of basic elements that determine the marketing strategies of educational services, similar to the 4P model (Esen, 2017, p. 56). Marketing mix dimensions in educational services (Bıradlı Bal, 2024, pp. 15-17; Rohmansyah, Bahaf, and Zohriah, 2023, pp. 1823-1824; Ivy, 2008, p. 289) include the *product*, which involves the quality and content of educational services, the knowledge and skills that the student will gain, the *tuition*, which involves factors such as pricing of educational services, scholarships and financial support, the *place*, which involves the places where educational services are offered (school, university, online platforms, etc.), and the *promotion*, which involves the promotion of educational services, advertisements, and announcements made through social media and other communication tools. In educational services, consumers usually consist of students or families of students. These consumers consider many factors when choosing educational institutions, such as quality of education and reputation, tuition and financial options, location and ease of access, technological opportunities, etc. (Galeeva, 2016, p. 332). Marketing of services is an extremely important area, especially in education. Since the education sector provides an intangible service, the effectiveness of marketing strategies largely depends on customer satisfaction and experience (Favaloro, 2015, p. 491). Educational institutions can stand out in the competition in the sector by developing strong marketing strategies and prioritizing service quality and student satisfaction. In line with consumer behavior theory, school choice can be understood as a multi-stage decision-making process involving need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and final selection. Within this process, parents evaluate both tangible and intangible service attributes, while perceived service quality, risk, trust, and brand-related cues play a critical role in reducing uncertainty and facilitating decision-making (Blackwell et al., 2006). Building on this perspective, private school choice can be further explained through a conceptual framework centered on perceived risk, trust, and brand image. Within the context of educational services marketing, private school choice can be conceptualized as a risk-sensitive decision-making process in which parents seek to minimize uncertainty related to their children's future academic and social outcomes. Due to the intangible and long-term nature of educational services, perceived risk plays a central role in shaping parental evaluations. In this process, trust is conceptualized as an important mechanism associated with lower levels of perceived risk and greater confidence in the school's ability to deliver promised educational outcomes. Brand image is described as a cognitive cue through which parents may infer quality, reliability, and institutional competence. Accordingly, brand image is interpreted as being associated with higher levels of trust and lower perceptions of risk, rather than acting as a purely symbolic or status-driven motive in the K-12 private education context. Building on the services marketing literature, the present study adopts an implicit 7Ps framework to structure and anticipate the factors influencing private school choice. In this study, the 7Ps framework serves as an analytical lens guiding the categorization and interpretation of themes, rather than as a formally tested model. Within this perspective, teacher-related characteristics such as experience, communication skills, and pedagogical competence correspond to the People dimension, emphasizing the central role of human interaction in educational service delivery. Teaching-learning practices, exam preparation activities, and guidance services reflect the Process dimension, highlighting how education is designed, delivered, and experienced over time. Physical facilities, hygiene conditions, and class size align with Physical Evidence, functioning as tangible cues through which parents assess service quality in an otherwise intangible context. Tuition fees represent the Price dimension and capture parents' evaluations of affordability and value for money, while promotional activities and brand-related perceptions correspond to the Promotion dimension by shaping expectations and reducing uncertainty. By organizing expected determinants of school choice through this services marketing framework, the study provides a coherent conceptual basis for interpreting parental decision-making and establishes a clear linkage between marketing theory and the empirical themes examined in the findings section.

This study was contextualized within the literature by examining national and international sources on educational services. In this context, Sütlaş (2010) analyzed the marketing strategies of universities, Bümen (2015) investigated the determinants influencing the university choices of international students, and

Kalenskaya et al. (2013) conducted research on the satisfaction levels of educational service providers. Raj et al. (2013) aimed to identify strategies for enhancing consumer satisfaction in educational services, while Sekerin et al. (2018) focused on improving the quality of educational services for university students through interactive marketing methods. Furthermore, AL-Ghaswyneh (2020), Brookes (2003), Gordillo et al. (2020), Gryshchenko et al. (2021), Helgesen (2008), Nadiri (2006), Oana (2019), and Russell (2005) continue focusing their research on the marketing of educational services, specifically within the higher education context. This study focuses on educational services offered in private preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school level educational institutions. In other words, this study aims to contribute to the literature and assist professionals in marketing and educational sciences by analyzing the determinants influencing the selection of private schools prior to higher education, an area with limited research in the existing literature concerning service marketing. Although these studies provide valuable insights into educational services marketing, they predominantly focus on higher education institutions and adult learners. As a result, parental decision-making processes in private K–12 school contexts remain underexplored, despite the fact that school choice at this level involves higher perceived risk, long-term consequences, and stronger emotional and financial commitments (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Bümen (2015, p. 31) and Özdemir (2011, p. 24) state that the consumer decision-making process in purchasing educational services is no different from that of other goods or services and that the purchasing process takes place in five stages: recognition of the deficiency, research, determination of alternatives, selection, and purchase. In addition, the factors affecting purchasing decisions include cultural, social, individual/personal, and psychological factors. Recently, educational services, traditionally delivered by the public sector, have begun to be provided by the private sector, creating heightened expectations among consumers (students and their families) (Sütlaş, 2010, p. 89; Torlak, 2001, pp. 397-398). This has brought about competition in the marketing of educational services, while at the same time, it has significantly increased the importance of consumer expectations (Çelik, 2000, p. 115; Ensari, 1999, pp. 25-27). Given the rising preference for private educational institutions to fulfill educational needs, it is essential to thoroughly identify the factors influencing the choices of students and parents, who are the key decision-makers in the acquisition of educational services (Kalenska, Gafurov and Novenkova, 2013, pp. 369-370). This study is significant as it examines the factors influencing private school preferences within the scope of educational services marketing. Additionally, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge by focusing on preferences related to universities. In private school choice, parents tend to prioritize functional attributes such as academic quality, teacher competence, class size, and examination preparation. While symbolic motives such as social status, prestige, or signaling value are frequently discussed in the literature, these factors may remain secondary in contexts where educational outcomes and future academic success are perceived as more critical than conspicuous consumption.

To better understand the situation in Türkiye regarding education services, data shared by official authorities regarding public and private formal education institutions were examined. According to the 2024 data of the Ministry of National Education (MEB), education services are provided for 18,710,265 students in 75,459 formal education institutions with 1,168,896 teachers in Türkiye. While 61,107 of these institutions are public, 14,352 have private school status. According to the Ministry of National Education (MEB) data, of the 14,352 institutions with private school status, 6,820 have preschool, 2,082 have elementary school, 2,232 have middle school, and 3,218 have middle education (high school) distribution (Ministry of Education, 2025). Considering that the current population of Türkiye is 86,907,367 according to the data of the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change (Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, 2025), 21.5% of the population actively benefits from the educational services in the country, and 1,631,192 of this population (approximately 9%) receive education services in institutions with private school status. Moreover, the number of private school institutions in Türkiye has increased approximately sixfold over the past 20 years, from 2,395 in 2002–2003 to 14,352 in 2023–2024. Given the limited research on private school preference in the context of educational services marketing within both educational sciences and marketing literature, this study aims to identify the factors influencing private school preference within this scope. In this context, this study is guided by the research question: "What are the factors that affect private school preferences within the scope of education services marketing?" Accordingly, the present study addresses a clear research gap by examining private K–12 school choice through an educational services marketing perspective. By adopting a phenomenological qualitative design and drawing on data collected from parents in different regions of

Türkiye, the study offers context-sensitive insights that extend existing school choice research beyond higher education settings.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological design, a qualitative research approach that is interpretative, inductive, and flexible. It allows for an in-depth exploration of phenomena and events (Çarpar, 2020, pp. 691–693; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016, p. 67) and is frequently used in social research (Özdemir and Tuti, 2023, p. 217). The phenomenological design seeks to explain a phenomenon through the lived experiences of individuals (Van Manen, 1990, p. 177). A phenomenological design was appropriate for this study as it aims to investigate the factors affecting private school preference from the perspective of parents within the context of educational services marketing. In the phenomenological design, the research process consists of several key stages: identifying the problem, developing the data collection tool, gathering data, coding and analysis, and reporting the findings (Creswell, 2018, pp. 81–82). In this study, the stages specified by Creswell (2018, pp. 148-151) were followed, and detailed information was provided about the data collection tool, participants, data collection process, coding and analysis, and reporting stages. This ensured the validity and reliability of the research findings. Although phenomenological studies are commonly analyzed through phenomenological or thematic analysis approaches, content analysis was employed in this study as an analytic strategy compatible with the phenomenological aim of identifying shared meanings derived from lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990; Creswell, 2018). In this context, content analysis was used not merely as a frequency-based technique but as an interpretative process that enabled the transformation of participants' lived experiences into codes, sub-themes, and overarching themes.

### 2.2. Population and Sample

In phenomenological studies, participants should be individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon being investigated (Yalçın, 2022, p. 220). While there is no definitive consensus on the ideal number of participants in the relevant literature, Creswell (2018, p. 155) suggests a maximum of 25 individuals for data collection, whereas Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016, p. 127) recommend a maximum of 10 individuals. Therefore, this study was conducted with 16 participants, all of whom were selected from individuals who were customers of private schools. Using the purposive sampling method, careful consideration was given to ensuring that participants had purchased educational services from special status schools at the preschool, elementary school, middle school, or high school level. Attention was paid to capture maximum diversity in the distribution of participants. To ensure maximum diversity in the participant distribution, the study included four participants from each educational level: preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school, all of whom had purchased educational services. With this approach, the study aimed to determine the factors that affect the preference of educational services offered at each level of education prior to higher education. Additionally, it was given importance to select the participants from among the customers of private schools in different cities of Türkiye, and online interviews were conducted with participants residing in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Rize, Mersin, Muğla, Erzurum, Samsun, Kars, Aydın, Kayseri, and Kocaeli. The records of all interviews were archived. In addition to methodological recommendations regarding sample size, data saturation was adopted as a central guiding principle in determining the adequacy of the sample. Data collection was conducted iteratively and continued until recurring patterns, themes, and meanings began to emerge across interviews. At this stage, additional interviews no longer produced substantially new insights or conceptual variations related to private school choice. Saturation was observed across participant groups representing different educational levels, indicating that the sample size was sufficient to capture the shared and divergent lived experiences required for the phenomenological purpose of the study (Guest et al., 2006).

To support the claim of maximum variation sampling, the demographic characteristics of the participants—including parental age, education level, income range, city of residence, child's educational level, and type of private school attended—are systematically presented in Table 1. Presenting these characteristics in a tabular format allows for a clearer demonstration of participant diversity and provides transparent evidence that the sample reflects variations across different educational levels and regional contexts, thereby strengthening the methodological rigor of the study.

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile of the Participants

	Variables	n	%
Parental Age	20–30	3	18.75
	31–40	6	37.50
	41–50	7	43.75
Parental Education Level	Higher Education	11	68.75
	Secondary Education (High School)	5	31.25
Parental Income Level	High (120,000 TL and Above)	13	81.25
	Low Level (119,000 TL and Below)	3	18.75
City of Residence	Ankara	2	12.5
	Aydın	1	6.25
	Erzurum	1	6.25
	İstanbul	3	18.75
	İzmir	1	6.25
	Kars	2	12.50
	Kayseri	1	6.25
	Kocaeli	1	6.25
	Mersin	1	6.25
	Muğla	1	6.25
	Rize	1	6.25
	Samsun	1	6.25
	Educational Level	Preschool	4
Primary School		4	25
Middle School		4	25
High School		4	25

As presented in Table 1, the participant profile reflects diversity across key demographic and educational dimensions. The inclusion of parents from different age groups, educational backgrounds, income levels, cities, and educational stages of their children supports the use of maximum variation sampling. This diversity enabled the study to capture a broad range of perspectives and lived experiences related to private school choice, thereby enhancing the depth and credibility of the qualitative findings.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

This study involved identifying the research problem, reviewing pertinent literature, and developing a “Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Identifying Factors Influencing School Preference.” During the preparation process of the guide, the perspectives of five academicians were solicited, specifically from Turkish Language (1), Educational Sciences (2), and Marketing (2). The guide was revised according to the recommendations of the academicians before the interview guide was piloted. At this stage, interviews were conducted with three participants and the clarity of the questions in the interview guide was evaluated. The interview guide developed following the expert consultation and pilot stages included 9 basic and 10 probing questions. In addition, during the evaluation of the interview results, the perspectives of various experts were consulted to ensure consistency in the assessments, and all interviews were recorded and archived. To establish the reliability of the study, the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was employed:  $[\text{Agreement} / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}) = \text{Reliability Coefficient}]$ . According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a reliability coefficient of 70% or higher is considered sufficient. In this study, the reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.75 (75%), indicating that the data obtained can be regarded as highly reliable. The coding process was conducted by two independent coders with expertise in educational sciences and marketing. Initially, interview transcripts were coded independently, followed by consensus meetings to compare codes, resolve disagreements, and establish a final coding scheme. The inter-coder reliability coefficient of 0.75 was calculated based on this agreement process, which is considered acceptable in qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, during the analytical phase, the categorization and interpretation of emergent themes were guided by the 7Ps services marketing framework, which functioned as an analytical lens rather than a formally tested model. In line with the phenomenological design, the analysis went beyond surface-level categorization and aimed to capture the underlying meanings attributed by parents to their school choice experiences. Particular attention was given to identifying shared essences and interpretive patterns reflecting how participants made sense of private school preference within their lived experiences. The interviews were

conducted online via a secure digital communication platform, with each interview lasting approximately 35-50 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent and transcribed verbatim by the researcher to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, researcher reflexivity was systematically maintained to minimize the potential influence of personal assumptions, expectations, and biases related to private school choice. The researcher continuously engaged in critical self-reflection regarding positionality and interpretive role, and this reflexive approach was adopted to enhance the credibility of the qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### 2.4. Data Analysis-Trustworthiness

Following Guba and Lincoln's (1994, pp. 171-172) recommendation to employ the term credibility in lieu of validity and reliability in qualitative research, this study refers to validity and reliability measurements as credibility. In this context, measures were implemented to maintain the study's credibility. The study's credibility was established by the following measures:

- The purpose of research, the research question, method, data collection tool, data collection, participants, and data analysis processes are explained transparently in the study.
- The maximum diversity sampling method, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods and aims to reach individuals with different characteristics as much as possible (Yagar and Dokme, 2018, p.5), was used. As a result, consumers residing in different cities who had purchased educational services at different education levels were reached.
- Expert opinions were sought in the development of the data collection tool. In addition, opinions of different educational sciences and marketing experts were sought in the evaluation of the results obtained in the interviews, the creation of themes-subthemes-codes, and the reporting processes.
- While the interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, each participant was informed about the research topic and purpose before the interview.
- Before organizing the data, participant responses were read to the relevant participant, and participant confirmation was obtained.
- The recordings of the interviews were archived.
- In order to ensure transparency in the presentation of the findings, tables and figures were used, and direct quotes from participant responses were frequently used.
- All stages were carried out in accordance with scientific ethical principles. The Kafkas University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board approved the study with decision number 66-39, dated 19.02.2025.

As a frequently used analysis approach in social sciences, content analysis allows for in-depth analysis of interviews and has an understandable, systematic, objective, and transparent analysis structure with codes-subthemes-themes (Baltacı, 2019, p.377; Metin and Ünal, 2022, pp.277-278; Wimmer and Dominick, 2000, pp.135-136), which is why the data obtained in this study were analysed using content analysis. During the analysis process, firstly, the interviews were transcribed. Then, different consumer comments/responses given to each research question were examined, and themes, sub-themes, and codes were created. While the created themes, sub-themes, and codes were presented in an understandable way through tables and figures, the interview data was included into the text via direct quotations from participant responses. In the presentation of the findings, participant identity information was kept confidential, and participants were coded according to the level of formal education they represented (Preschool: PS, Elementary School: ES, Middle School: MS and High School: HS). As a result, the abbreviations can be exemplified as PS<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub> and HS<sub>2</sub>.

#### 3. Findings

To answer the research questions, the responses given to the 9 basic and 10 probing questions in the interview guide were analyzed. The interview questions are addressed in detail in the findings section, and the themes, subthemes, and codes that emerged are presented in detail. The themes that emerged in the marketing of educational services include education-training, physical facilities, teachers, tuition, brand-image, expectation, status, manager/decision maker, and reasons for preference. Tables, figures, and direct quotations from the

interviews are shared to substantiate the findings. In order to provide a clearer picture of the data, frequency counts are included in the findings to show how often certain views were mentioned by participants. These frequencies are not intended to suggest that themes mentioned more often are necessarily more important than others. Rather, they are presented to support the transparency of the analysis. The interpretation of the findings therefore focuses primarily on the meanings and experiences shared by the participants, which is consistent with the qualitative and phenomenological nature of the study.

### 3.1. Findings in Relation to the First Interview Question

To answer the first interview question, what are the elements of education-training processes that affect private school preference?, the participants' responses to the questions are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Findings Pertaining to the First Interview Question

Subthemes	Codes	Education Theme	
		Participant	f
Content	Rich Content	PS <sub>1</sub> , PS <sub>2</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub>	4
	Use of Supplemental Resources	ES <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub>	4
	Academic Success	MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	6
Learning-Teaching Processes	Game-oriented teaching	PS <sub>1</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub>	2
	Personalized flexible education	PS <sub>2</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub>	6
	Active education	ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	6
Activities	Contribution to Social Skills	HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub>	10
	Learning natural-cultural values	HS <sub>4</sub> , PS <sub>1</sub>	2
	Opportunity to practice/experience	MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub>	4
	Opportunity to alleviate exam stress	MS <sub>4</sub>	1
Exam Preparation	Providing foundation/preparation for the exam	ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub>	4
	Additional exam-focused activities (study, mock exams, course, guidance, etc.)	MS <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	7

Participant responses presented in Table 2 were analyzed and the analysis yielded four sub-themes under the education-training theme: Content, teaching-learning processes, activities, and exam preparation. Within the scope of the content sub-theme, it was determined that the participant opinions focused on the codes rich content (f<sub>4</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>2</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>), additional resource use (f<sub>4</sub>: ES<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>), and academic success (f<sub>6</sub>: MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>). This finding suggests that private schools are preferred for reasons such as having rich content, using additional resources, and increasing academic success for these reasons. On the other hand, in the content sub-theme, private school preference is primarily based on academic success at the secondary and high school levels, whereas it is influenced by the richness of content and the use of additional resources in primary and preschool levels. Some participant quotes related to the content sub-theme are presented below:

"Yes, it does affect our choice because private schools use resources and content in addition to the ministry's sources." ES<sub>1</sub>

"The content provided affects my school choice. The materials provided by the school will help the students understand the subjects better and contribute to the learning process, thus increasing their academic success. Therefore, it affects my private school choice." MS<sub>1</sub>

Within the scope of the **learning-teaching processes sub-theme**, it was determined that the participants' opinions centered on the codes of game-oriented teaching (f<sub>3</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>), individualized flexible teaching (f<sub>6</sub>: PS<sub>2</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>), and active teaching (f<sub>6</sub>: ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>). This finding suggests that the learning-teaching processes being game-oriented, personalized, flexible teaching, and active teaching-oriented can have a positive effect on private school preference. On the other hand, in the sub-theme of

teaching-learning processes, it was found that while game-oriented teaching-learning processes have an important place in the preschool education level, personalized, flexible teaching and active teaching come to the fore in other education levels. Examples of direct quotes from participant comments in the teaching-learning processes sub-theme are as follows:

“I chose this school not because it offers options in terms of academics but because it is more of a school focused on gardens and games.” **PS<sub>1</sub>**

“We chose a school where education is fundamental, and students actively participate in the teaching processes.” **MS<sub>2</sub>**

It was determined that the activities sub-theme involved the codes of contributing to social skills (f<sub>10</sub>: HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>), learning natural-cultural values (f<sub>2</sub>: HS<sub>4</sub>, PS<sub>1</sub>), opportunity to practice/experience (f<sub>4</sub>: MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>), and opportunity to relieve exam stress (f<sub>1</sub>: MS<sub>4</sub>). These findings reveal that private schools are preferred by consumers because they provide out-of-school activities that support student development in natural, cultural, and social aspects, distract students from exam anxiety, and provide opportunities for practice/experience. Examples of direct quotes from participant comments on the activity sub-theme are as follows:

“Of course it did. These activities help my child develop social skills and learn teamwork.” **ES<sub>2</sub>**

“These types of activities provide an opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge learned at school in the real world. They contribute to the social development of the child.” **MS<sub>1</sub>**

Within the **exam preparation sub-theme**, the participants’ opinions were mostly on the codes of providing foundation/preparation for the exam (f<sub>4</sub>: ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>) and extra exam-focused work (study, preparation tests, course, guidance, etc.) (f<sub>7</sub>: MS<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>). These findings demonstrate that participants prefer private schools, particularly at the secondary and high school levels, due to their exam preparation and extracurricular activities. When the opinions of parents at the preschool education level were evaluated, it was determined that preparation for national exams was not effective in choosing a private school. Examples of direct quotes regarding participant comments in the exam preparation sub-theme are as follows:

“Courses or extracurricular activities aimed at national exams are not an important factor in kindergarten.” **PS<sub>3</sub>**

“Weekend study sessions and frequent mock exams, which are called extracurricular studies for national exams, are the factors that make us choose them.” **MS<sub>2</sub>**

Overall, the findings indicate that parents’ evaluations of education–training processes are shaped by a dynamic balance between developmental and performance-oriented considerations across different educational levels. While parents at the preschool and primary school levels emphasize experiential learning, rich content, and flexible, game-oriented teaching approaches that support social and cognitive development, parents at the middle and high school levels place stronger emphasis on academic success and exam preparation. This shift reflects a gradual reorientation of parental priorities from holistic development toward measurable educational outcomes as children progress through the education system. Accordingly, private school preference is not driven by a single educational attribute, but rather by how well educational processes align with parents’ evolving expectations at different stages of their children’s educational trajectories.

### 3.2. Findings in Relation to the Second Interview Question

To answer the second interview question, “What are the factors regarding physical facilities that affect private school preference?”, the participant responses to the second interview question and related probing questions are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Findings Regarding the Second Interview Question

Sub-Themes	Codes	Physical Structure Theme	
		Participant	<i>f</i>
Physical Elements	Impacts school choice	PS <sub>1</sub> , PS <sub>2</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	15
	Does not impact school choice	PS <sub>1</sub>	1

<b>Class Size</b>	More interest/more efficient learning	PS <sub>1</sub> , PS <sub>2</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	16
<b>Cleanliness/Hygiene</b>	Healthier environments	PS <sub>1</sub> , PS <sub>2</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	16
<b>Location</b>	Impacts school choice	PS <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub>	8
	Does not impact school choice	PS <sub>2</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	8
<b>Food and Beverage Service</b>	Healthy and balanced diet	PS <sub>1</sub> , PS <sub>2</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	16

Participant responses presented in Table 3 were examined and it was determined that there were five sub-themes under the theme of "Physical Structure": Physical elements, class size, cleanliness/hygiene, location, and food and beverage services.

In the context of the physical elements sub-theme, participant opinions were predominantly categorized into the codes indicating that physical elements influence school choice (f<sub>15</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>2</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>) and those suggesting that physical elements do not influence school choice (f<sub>1</sub>: ES<sub>1</sub>). These findings support the preferability of private schools having physical areas such as gyms, libraries, open areas/gardens, canteens, classrooms, laboratories, etc. Examples of direct quotes from participants' comments on the physical elements sub-theme are as follows:

"Since my child spends most of the day at school, the physical conditions of the school, the campus environment, and the facilities have affected me." **PS<sub>4</sub>**

"The physical facilities of the school are not important; what is important is the quality of education." **ES<sub>1</sub>**

Within the context of the **class size sub-theme**, it was determined that the participant opinions were predominantly aligned with the code of more interest/enhanced learning efficiency (f<sub>16</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>2</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>). These findings reveal that class size is one of the basic criteria for choosing a private school because it increases the attention given to each student and supports learning. Examples of direct quotes from participants regarding the class size sub-theme are as follows:

"Class size affects my school choice. Because I do not believe that quality and healthy education and learning can be achieved in a very crowded class." **PS<sub>1</sub>**

"In private schools, class sizes are very small, which makes my child's learning environment more productive. The teacher's time with the student increases." **MS<sub>2</sub>**

Within the scope of the cleanliness/hygiene sub-theme, it was found that the participant opinions were predominantly aligned with the code of healthier learning environments (f<sub>16</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>2</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>). These finding suggests that one of the reasons why private schools are preferred is that their cleanliness/hygiene-focused arrangements make learning environments healthier. Examples of direct quotes from participants' comments on the cleanliness/hygiene subtheme are as follows:

"The health of our child is very important to us, and having high standards of hygiene in school is of great importance in terms of protecting the health of both our child and other students." **ES<sub>3</sub>**

"I think there should be a healthy learning environment. The canteen, dining hall, restrooms, and classrooms should be cleaned in accordance with hygiene rules so as not to endanger the health of children." **HS<sub>4</sub>**

In relation to the location sub-theme, participant responses were predominantly aligned with the codes indicating that location influences school choice (f<sub>8</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>) and that location does not influence school choice (f<sub>8</sub>: PS<sub>2</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>). These finding suggests that the location of private schools influences the decision process when choosing a school. Examples of direct quotes from participants' comments on the location sub-theme are as follows:

"We chose a school that is of high quality in terms of education. Distance is not important as long as success is achieved." **MS<sub>4</sub>**

"I think the quality of education is more important than the location of the school." **HS<sub>1</sub>**

In relation to the **food and beverage services sub-theme**, it was determined that the participant opinions were predominantly focused on the code of healthy and balanced nutrition (f<sub>16</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>2</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>). These finding suggests that the food and beverage services provided support healthy and balanced nutrition plays a role when choosing private schools. Examples of direct quotes from participants' comments on the food and beverage services sub-theme are as follows:

“As it is very important for children in their developmental age to have a healthy diet, it affects my school choice.” PS<sub>1</sub>

“Providing food and beverage services in hygienic conditions and preparing a balanced and healthy menu are very important for us because this protects the health of our children.” ES<sub>2</sub>

Overall, parents' accounts highlighted physical facilities as salient tangible cues through which they make sense of and evaluate the quality of educational services. Elements such as class size, hygiene, and food services are perceived as essential prerequisites for a safe and effective learning environment, particularly given the long hours children spend at school. In contrast, location appears to be evaluated more flexibly, as parents are willing to tolerate distance when they believe educational quality justifies the cost. This pattern indicates that physical conditions are not evaluated independently, but rather in relation to perceived educational value and child well-being.

### 3.3. Findings in Relation to the Third Interview Question

To answer the third interview question, "Do the characteristics of the teacher (age, professional experience, graduated school/field, etc.) affect your school choice? Why?", the participant responses are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Findings Related to the Third Interview Question

Sub-Themes	Teacher Theme	
	Participant	f
Pedagogical Formation Competence	PS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub>	2
Communication Skills	PS <sub>1</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub>	7
Experience	PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	9
Field Knowledge	ES <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub>	7

The participant views in Table 4 were examined and it was determined that there were four sub-themes under the theme of teacher: Pedagogical formation competence (f<sub>2</sub>: PS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>), communication skills (f<sub>7</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>), experience (f<sub>9</sub>: PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>), and field knowledge (f<sub>7</sub>: ES<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>). When the findings were evaluated, it was determined that the pedagogical formation, field knowledge, experience, and field knowledge competencies of the teachers were effective in the participants' private school preferences. The participants' expectations of the teacher at the preschool and primary school levels emphasized communication skills and experience, whereas at the secondary and high school levels, the expectations included communication, subject knowledge, and experience. Examples of direct quotations related to participant comments on the teacher subject are as follows:

“For me, the only criterion would be the relationship between the teacher and the child. Age, the alma mater of the teacher, and experience are not very important to me.” PS<sub>1</sub>

“The teacher is an important factor for us. An experienced teacher can better understand the needs of students and use effective methods to best reveal the potential of each student. At the same time, the teacher's knowledge in the field will make our child's learning process more efficient.” ES<sub>2</sub>

Overall, the findings indicate that teachers occupy a central role in parents' private school preferences, primarily through their relational and professional competencies. Rather than focusing on formal credentials alone, parents emphasize communication skills, experience, and pedagogical competence as indicators of effective teaching. Expectations regarding teachers also vary across educational levels, with relational qualities being more salient at early stages and subject-matter expertise gaining importance at secondary and high school levels. This suggests that parents' evaluations of teachers evolve in line with their children's changing educational needs.

**3.4. Findings in Relation to the Fourth Interview Question**

Table 5 provides an overview of participant responses to the fourth interview question: "Does tuition affect your school choice?" Why?"

**Table 5.** Findings Related to the Fourth Interview Question

Sub-Themes	Tuition Theme	
	Participant	f
<b>Influences school choice</b>	PS <sub>1</sub> , PS <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	9
<b>Does not influence school choice</b>	MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub>	3
<b>Partially influences school choice</b>	PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub>	4

The perspectives of participants presented in Table 5 were analyzed, revealing three sub-themes under the overarching theme of tuition: It influences school choice (f<sub>9</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>), it does not influence school choice (f<sub>3</sub>: PS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>), and it partially influences school choice (f<sub>4</sub>: PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>). Participants frequently described private school tuition as an important consideration shaping their school preference decisions. Examples of direct quotations related to participant comments on tuition are as follows:

"Tuition is important. Since education is such an important area for our children, getting a quality education is always our priority, but our budget is also a factor to consider." **ES<sub>2</sub>**

"We did not consider the tuition when choosing a school. We chose the school that provided the best educational service. Although it was a school that was way above our budget, it was worth it for our child." **MS<sub>4</sub>**

Overall, the findings reveal that tuition is evaluated by parents through a conditional and comparative lens rather than as an isolated criterion. While cost sensitivity is evident, parents tend to assess tuition in relation to perceived educational quality, institutional reliability, and expected long-term benefits for their children. In this respect, higher fees are more likely to be accepted when they are justified by strong academic outcomes and service quality. This indicates that private school choice reflects a value-for-money logic rather than a purely price-driven decision.

**3.5. Findings in Relation to the Fifth Interview Question**

Participant responses to the fifth interview question, "Does the brand and/or image of the school influence your school selection?" are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Findings Related to the Fifth Interview Question

Sub-Themes	Brand and/or Image Theme	
	Participant	f
Establishes standard in quality	PS <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub>	4
Does not influence school choice	PS <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	7
Influences school choice	PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub>	5

The perspectives of participants presented in Table 6 were analyzed, revealing three sub-themes within the overarching theme of "Brand and/or Image": Establishes quality standards (f<sub>4</sub>: PS<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>), does not influence school selection (f<sub>7</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>), and influences school selection (f<sub>5</sub>: PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>). Parents' narratives highlighted the brand and image of the private school as central elements in how they perceive and interpret school preference. Examples of direct quotations from participant comments about brand and/or image are as follows:

"The brand name is not very important to me." **PS<sub>1</sub>**

"No, it did not affect. Because many schools ask for unreasonably high tuition because their brand image is high." **HS<sub>4</sub>**

Overall, participants' accounts indicated that brand and image are primarily experienced as signals of quality and trustworthiness, rather than as markers of prestige or social status, in the context of private school preference. Parents appear cautious toward schools whose brand value is perceived to inflate tuition without

a corresponding increase in educational quality. In this sense, brand image functions as a cognitive shortcut that helps parents manage uncertainty and perceived risk. Thus, brand-related considerations are closely tied to functional evaluations rather than symbolic motivations.

### 3.6. Findings in Relation to the Sixth Interview Question

Table 7 presents participant responses to the sixth interview question: "When you evaluate your situation today, what is the level of your expectations being met on a scale of 1 to 10? Why?"

**Table 7.** Findings Related to the *Sixth* Interview Question

Sub-Themes	Expectation Theme	
	Participant	f
5-8 points	PS <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	8
9-10 points	PS <sub>2</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub>	8

The perspectives of participants presented in Table 7 were analyzed, revealing two sub-themes under the "Expectation" theme: 5-8 points (f<sub>8</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>) and 9-10 points (f<sub>8</sub>: PS<sub>2</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>). Participants' accounts indicated that their expectations from private schools were generally experienced as being met. Here are examples of direct quotations related to participant comments on expectations:

"I give it 10 full points because it is a school that meets all my expectations and makes me happy." ES<sub>2</sub>

"I rate the level of my expectations being met as 10 points. We have been very satisfied for 2 years." MS<sub>3</sub>

Overall, the expectation scores indicate a high level of alignment between parents' initial expectations and their subsequent experiences with private schools. This alignment suggests that parents' school choices are largely validated through service delivery and perceived educational outcomes. At the same time, variations in expectation levels point to differences in individual standards and prior assumptions about private education.

### 3.7. Findings in Relation to the Seventh Interview Question

Table 8 presents participant responses to the seventh interview question: "Do you think that choosing private schools confers you and/or your family a different social status? Why?"

**Table 8.** Findings Related to the *Seventh* Interview Question

Sub-Themes	Status Theme	
	Participant	f
Does not Confer a Social Status	PS <sub>1</sub> , PS <sub>2</sub> , PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>1</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>3</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	16

The perspectives of participants presented in Table 8 were analyzed, revealing a sub-theme within the overarching subject of "Status": "Does not confer status (f<sub>16</sub>: MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>2</sub>, PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>1</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>3</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>)". When the findings were evaluated, the participants stated that the private schools they preferred did not confer any social/societal status. Examples of direct quotes regarding participant comments on the status theme are as follows:

"No, I don't think so." MS<sub>2</sub>

"Never, there can never be such a situation." MS<sub>4</sub>

Overall, the findings demonstrate a clear absence of status-oriented motivations in private school choice among the participants. Parents consistently reject the idea that private schooling confers social prestige or symbolic advantage. This uniform pattern suggests that private school preference is grounded in functional, child-centered considerations rather than in social signaling or identity construction.

### 3.8. Findings in Relation to the Eighth Interview Question

Table 9 presents participant responses to the eighth interview question: "If you were a manager/decision maker, what changes would you implement in the school?"

**Table 9.** Findings Related to the *Eighth* Interview Question

Sub-Themes	Administrator/Decision	Maker
	Theme	
	Participant	f
I would give importance to language education	PS <sub>3</sub>	1
I would lower the tuition	PS <sub>2</sub>	1
I would improve counseling services	ES <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub>	2
I would improve cleanliness/hygiene	ES <sub>3</sub>	1
I would reduce class sizes	ES <sub>3</sub>	1
I would do more advertising/promotion	ES <sub>3</sub>	1
I would improve food and beverage services	ES <sub>4</sub>	1
I would increase extracurricular activities	ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	7
I wouldn't make any changes	PS <sub>1</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub>	5

The views of participants presented in Table 9 were analyzed, revealing nine sub-themes under the overarching theme of "Manager/Decision Maker." These sub-themes include: I would give importance to language education (f<sub>1</sub>: PS<sub>3</sub>), I would reduce tuition (f<sub>1</sub>: PS<sub>2</sub>), I would improve counseling services (f<sub>2</sub>: ES<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>), I would improve cleanliness/hygiene (f<sub>1</sub>: ES<sub>3</sub>), I would reduce class sizes (f<sub>1</sub>: ES<sub>3</sub>), I would do more advertising/promotion (f<sub>1</sub>: ES<sub>3</sub>), I would improve food and beverage services (f<sub>1</sub>: ES<sub>4</sub>), I would increase extracurricular activities (f<sub>7</sub>: ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>) and I would not make any changes (f<sub>5</sub>: PS<sub>1</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>). Based on the findings, participants suggested that private schools could make improvements in the areas of language education, tuition, counseling services, cleanliness/hygiene, class sizes, advertising/promotional activities, food and beverage services, and extracurricular activities. Examples of direct quotes regarding participant comments related to the administrator/decision maker theme are as follows:

*"I am currently satisfied with the general state of our school, perhaps I would have spent a little more time on language education."* PS<sub>3</sub>

*"I would focus on improving counseling services."* ES<sub>2</sub>

*"I am very pleased that our school administrators are focused on family issues. I would be such an administrator."* HS<sub>1</sub>

Overall, parents' responses as hypothetical decision-makers highlight areas where they perceive room for improvement rather than fundamental dissatisfaction. Suggestions related to extracurricular activities, counseling services, language education, and hygiene reflect expectations of continuous service development. These views indicate that parents evaluate private schools as evolving service organizations that should adapt to changing needs rather than as static institutions.

### 3.9. Findings in Relation to the Ninth Interview Question

In response to the ninth interview question, "Which of the following factors most influences your preference for private schools?", participant responses are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10.** Findings Related to the *Ninth* Interview Question

Sub-Themes	Reason For Preference Theme	
	Participant	f
a. Education and training implemented (plan, process, material, evaluation, etc.)	PS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>1</sub> , MS <sub>3</sub> , MS <sub>4</sub> , HS <sub>1</sub> , HS <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>3</sub>	7
b. Physical facilities of the school (cleanliness, temperature, school location, class size, etc.)	PS <sub>3</sub> , PS <sub>4</sub> , ES <sub>4</sub> , MS <sub>2</sub>	4
c. Teacher qualifications (age, professional experience etc.)	PS <sub>2</sub> , ES <sub>2</sub> , HS <sub>4</sub>	3
d. Tuition	ES <sub>1</sub>	1
e. The brand and/or image of the school	ES <sub>3</sub>	1

In Table 10, participant opinions were analyzed within the theme of "Preference." Seven participants ( $f_7$ :PS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>1</sub>, MS<sub>3</sub>, MS<sub>4</sub>, HS<sub>1</sub>, HS<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>3</sub>) expressed a preference for private schools due to the quality of education and training. Four participants ( $f_4$ :PS<sub>3</sub>, PS<sub>4</sub>, ES<sub>4</sub>, MS<sub>2</sub>) favored them for their physical facilities, three participants ( $f_3$ : PS<sub>2</sub>, ES<sub>2</sub>, HS<sub>4</sub>) for the teachers, and one participant each for tuition (ES<sub>1</sub>) and the brand/image (ES<sub>3</sub>).

Overall, the findings indicate that educational quality and instructional processes constitute the primary drivers of private school preference. While physical conditions, teacher qualifications, tuition, and brand image contribute to the decision-making process, they play a secondary role compared to education-related considerations. This hierarchy suggests that parents ultimately prioritize how effectively schools support their children’s learning and development.

Figure 1 presents the results of the interviews conducted with the participants transparently and the research findings comprehensively.



**Figure 1.** Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes Developed from the Parent Interviews

Figure 1 presents the factors influencing private school selection in a clear thematic framework based on the perspectives shared by the participants. The figure shows that parents’ school preferences are shaped by a combination of educational, organizational, and contextual considerations rather than a single dominant factor. In this respect, the elements guiding private school preferences are organized under nine interrelated themes: teacher, physical structure, education and training, brand and/or image, expectation, manager/decision-maker, price, status, and reasons for choice. Together, these themes illustrate the complex and multi-layered nature of private school selection. Although the status dimension did not emerge as an influential factor in private school choice, it was retained in the final thematic framework to ensure analytical consistency and to transparently reflect parents’ explicit rejection of status-based motivations.

Participants’ narratives highlighted teachers’ qualifications-such as communication skills, pedagogical formation, professional experience, and field knowledge-as central elements in how they evaluate and interpret school choice. Similarly, the school’s physical conditions, including class size, cleanliness and hygiene standards, location, and food and beverage services, emerge as significant variables influencing the selection process. In the dimension of education and training, instructional content, the quality of teaching and learning processes, organized activities, and exam preparation are identified as prominent factors. Furthermore, the standards provided by the school and its perceived brand value and image are also influential in shaping parents’ perceptions. Participants’ expectations, along with administrators’ approaches toward language education, tuition policies, guidance services, promotional activities, hygiene conditions, and extracurricular programs, are also considered complementary factors affecting private school preference. Overall, the figure demonstrates that teacher quality, physical conditions, and educational standards constitute the primary determinants in private school selection, while the school’s image, administrative

practices, and individual expectations play a complementary yet significant role in the decision-making process.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study was conducted due to the significant increase in private schools in Türkiye, which have risen approximately sixfold over the past 20 years, and the scarcity of research in educational sciences and marketing that identifies the determinants influencing private school selection in the marketing of educational services. In this study employing a phenomenological design within qualitative research, data were obtained from 16 participants using the "Semi-Structured Interview Form to Determine the Factors Affecting School Preference". Content analysis was used in the data analysis process to analyze the interviews in depth. To address the research question "What factors influence private school preference in the context of education services marketing?", participants were asked to respond to 9 basic and 10 probing questions. Consequently, the presentation of the research findings was organized according to the interview questions. At this point, the findings are discussed rather than reiterated. The results indicate that parents' private school preferences are shaped by a combination of educational practices and everyday service experiences. In particular, the emphasis placed on instructional quality, learning processes, and student development suggests that school choice in the K-12 context is evaluated as a long-term investment rather than a short-term consumption decision. From an educational services marketing perspective, this implies that parents focus primarily on how education is delivered and experienced in daily practice, instead of relying solely on formal indicators or promotional claims. Therefore, the discussion of the findings is framed around meaning, experience, and perceived value, rather than the frequency with which themes were mentioned.

When the findings obtained from the first research question in the interview form, "What are the elements of education-teaching processes that affect private school preference?" and the related probing questions were evaluated, it was found that the content, learning-teaching processes, extracurricular activities, and exam preparation studies under the education-teaching theme directly affect consumers' private school preference. In summary, it has been determined that consumers favor private schools for several reasons, including the utilization of enriched resources, an emphasis on game-based learning, the implementation of individualized and flexible teaching methodologies, the availability of exam-oriented preparatory programs, particularly at the middle and high school levels, and the offering of extracurricular activities that enhance student development in natural, cultural, and social contexts, reduce exam-related stress, and facilitate practical experience. The analysis of the findings from the second research question in the interview, "What elements related to physical facilities influence private school preference?" along with the associated probing questions revealed that physical attributes, including gymnasiums, canteens, classrooms, workshops, cafeterias, and laboratories, categorized under physical structure, as well as class size, cleanliness/hygiene, school location, and food and beverage services, significantly impact consumers' preferences for private schools. In other words, consumers consider the quality of physical spaces, including classrooms, workshops, gyms, cafeterias, and laboratories; class sizes; cleanliness and hygiene of classrooms and general school areas; school location; and the quality of food and beverage services when selecting a private school. When the findings obtained from the third research question in the interview form, "Do the characteristics of the teacher (age, professional experience, alma mater, etc.) affect your school choice? Why?" were evaluated, it was concluded that the teacher's experience/experience, the teacher's communication skills, the teacher's field knowledge and pedagogical formation competence are effective in consumers' private school choices. When the findings obtained from the fourth research question in the interview form, "Does tuition affect your school choice? Why?", were evaluated, it was concluded that school tuition was quite effective in choosing a private school and only three out of 16 participants stated that it was not effective in school choice. When the findings obtained from the fifth research question in the interview form, "Does the brand and/or image of the school affect your school choice? Why?" were evaluated, it was determined that the brand and/or image of the school was partially effective in school choice. While participants believed that schools with a brand and/or image established a standard for the quality of education and training services, seven out of 16 participants suggested that the school's brand and/or image did not influence their choice of institution. When the findings related to the sixth research question, "When you evaluate your situation today, what is the level of your expectations being met out of 10? Why?" were evaluated, it was concluded that the average score of the participants' level of expectations being met was 8.5 and that their expectations from the private schools they received education

services from were met at a high level. Based on the findings derived from the seventh research question, "Do you think that choosing private schools gives you and/or your family a different social/societal status? Why?", it was found that while the participants stated that the private schools they preferred did not confer any social/societal status, it was concluded that the concern for gaining social/societal status did not affect their preference of a private school. This finding requires further interpretation, as the role of status and prestige is frequently emphasized in school choice literature. The limited influence of social status observed in this study may be related to the characteristics of the K–12 education context in Türkiye. Parents appear to prioritize functional outcomes such as academic progress, safety, teacher quality, and daily educational practices over symbolic or prestige-based considerations. In addition, parents bear both the financial and developmental responsibility of the decision, which may lead them to focus on tangible educational benefits rather than social signaling. In this sense, private school choice emerges as a pragmatic decision shaped by perceived value and trust, rather than by status consumption. This pattern may also reflect broader socio-educational dynamics in Türkiye, where access to private schooling has expanded beyond elite groups and increasingly represents a strategy for securing academic stability rather than signaling social distinction. As private education becomes more widespread, its symbolic exclusivity may diminish, shifting parental motivations from prestige-oriented considerations to concerns about educational reliability, safety, and long-term developmental outcomes. Based on the findings obtained from the eighth research question, "If you were the manager/decision maker, what would you change in the school?", it was concluded that the participants wanted more importance to be given to language education, tuition to be reduced, guidance services to be improved, class sizes to be reduced, more advertising/promotion to be done, food and beverage services to be improved, extracurricular activities to be increased, and cleaning/hygiene to be improved. The findings obtained from the ninth research question, "Which of the following factors affects your private school preference the most?" revealed that the factors affecting the participants' private school preference were education-training activities, physical facilities, teacher characteristics, tuition, and brand and/or image, respectively. Upon comprehensive evaluation of the research findings, the following factors influence preference for private schools:

- Content used: Use of above-standard enriched content, and additional resources
- Implemented teaching-learning processes: Implementation of game-oriented, active and individualized teaching,
- Frequent inclusion of extracurricular/outside school activities,
- Implementation of exam preparation activities (study, tutoring, guidance, etc.),
- Having sufficient physical elements such as gyms, cafeterias, classrooms, workshops, dining halls, laboratories,
- Small class size,
- Attention to the high level of cleanliness/hygiene,
- Giving importance to the quality of food and beverage services,
- Teachers: The teacher must have high levels of experience, communication skills, field knowledge, and pedagogical formation,
- Affordable private school tuitions,
- Having a good brand and/or image,
- Emphasis on foreign language education,
- Carrying out advertising/promotion activities.

When these factors are considered as a whole, they can be meaningfully interpreted within the framework of the extended marketing mix for services. Several themes identified in the study correspond directly to the People, Process, and Physical Evidence dimensions, which are particularly salient in high-contact and high-involvement services such as education. Teacher characteristics reflect the People dimension, while teaching-learning practices and exam preparation activities relate to Process. Physical facilities, hygiene, and class size represent Physical Evidence. Tuition aligns with the Price dimension, whereas promotional activities function

more as supportive mechanisms than primary decision drivers. This integrative perspective allows the findings to be discussed in a coherent structure without reducing them to a hierarchy based on frequency.

In the literature of marketing and educational sciences, studies focusing on educational services marketing and factors influencing school choice highlight the role of multidimensional factors in school selection. The findings obtained in this study largely align with previous research and provide significant insights from both academic and practical perspectives. A growing body of research emphasizes that communication strategies, physical and social facilities, teacher quality, tuition fees, and school location jointly shape school choice decisions (Al-Abdallah & Ababakr, 2025; Collins et al., 2022; Ecer, 2024; Kara, 2019; Ming, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). These studies collectively underline the multidimensional and service-oriented nature of school selection. In line with this broader pattern, the present study similarly identifies teacher expertise, physical infrastructure, extracurricular activities, tuition fees, promotional activities, and school location as central elements in parents' decision-making processes. Furthermore, prior research has highlighted the importance of peer recommendations, school image, prestige, and academic quality in shaping school preference (Özcan & Tunca, 2020; Judson et al., 2004; Soutar & Turner, 2002; Bumen, 2015; Güney, 2010; Anderson, 1999; Torlak, 2001). Rather than emerging as isolated determinants, these factors are generally discussed in the literature as interrelated components of perceived service value and institutional trust. The findings of the present study resonate with this integrated perspective, reinforcing the view that private school choice is embedded in a complex evaluation process combining academic, relational, economic, and symbolic considerations. Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research. When the existing literature and the findings of this study are considered together, the results can be more clearly interpreted through an integrated discussion framework rather than through individual study comparisons. In particular, the factors identified in this study largely align with the extended marketing mix for services. Teacher-related findings correspond to the People dimension, highlighting the central role of human interaction and expertise in educational services. Teaching practices, exam preparation activities, and guidance services reflect the Process dimension, emphasizing how education is delivered and experienced on a daily basis. Physical facilities, hygiene conditions, and class size relate to Physical Evidence, serving as tangible signals of service quality in an otherwise intangible service. Tuition fees represent the Price dimension and reflect parents' sensitivity to perceived value and affordability. Viewed through this framework, participants' narratives portray private school choice as a multidimensional experience centered on experiential quality, trust, and long-term value, rather than on isolated factors or promotional messages alone. This pattern becomes particularly evident in the way tuition is evaluated by parents. While tuition emerges as a critical price-related consideration, parents do not appear to assess it in isolation. Instead, tuition is evaluated in relation to perceived educational quality, teacher competence, and overall service value. In the K-12 context, where educational decisions are long-term and high-stakes, parents seem willing to tolerate higher tuition levels when the perceived benefits justify the financial investment. Teacher quality, physical and social facilities, extracurricular activities, tuition fees, school location, promotional activities, and prestige emerged as primary determinants of school choice. From a policy and practical perspective, these findings offer important implications. School administrators can develop strategies to enhance the quality of educational services; prioritize teacher expertise and diversity in extracurricular activities; and implement promotional and marketing activities effectively through digital and traditional channels to increase school attractiveness. Educational policymakers can consider these factors to design measures that ensure equitable access to education and enhance quality. Therefore, the findings of this study provide not only academic contributions but also actionable recommendations for educational institutions and policymakers. Beyond these practical and policy-oriented implications, it is also important to clarify the theoretical and scholarly contributions of the study. The present study contributes to the literature in four main ways. First, by focusing on private school choice at the K-12 level, the study extends a body of research that has largely concentrated on higher education institutions and university selection. Second, the study explicitly frames private school choice as a service marketing decision, emphasizing experiential, relational, and quality-related dimensions rather than treating education merely as an institutional or administrative issue. Third, through a phenomenological research design, the study provides an in-depth exploration of parents' lived experiences, illuminating how trust, perceived risk, and service quality are constructed and interpreted within long-term educational decision-making processes. Finally, by incorporating participants from multiple cities in Türkiye through a maximum variation sampling strategy, the study enriches the contextual understanding of private school choice and offers insight into how such

decisions unfold across different regional and social settings. Taken together, these contributions position the study as one of the limited qualitative investigations integrating service marketing theory with K-12 private school choice in the Turkish context.

## 6. Recommendations

In line with the study results, recommendations were offered for decision makers/administrators, industry representatives, and researchers. Based on these findings, private schools can strengthen their appeal by enriching their educational content and incorporating additional resources. They can benefit from implementing game-oriented, active, and individualized teaching approaches, integrating frequent extracurricular activities, and prioritizing exam preparation support. Additionally, improving physical facilities such as classrooms, cafeterias, dining halls, laboratories, and gyms, while ensuring that class sizes remain manageable, is crucial. Maintaining high standards of cleanliness and hygiene across all areas, ensuring quality in food and beverage services, and employing experienced, pedagogically trained educators with strong communication skills can further enhance their reputation. Moreover, setting tuition fees at an affordable level, conducting effective advertising and promotional activities to strengthen their brand and image, and emphasizing foreign language education can contribute to increased preference for private schools. In addition, further research on the topic conducted with different populations or samples is recommended. A validated and reliable scale can be created to determine the factors influencing customer preferences in the marketing of educational services. This study employed a phenomenological design within qualitative methodologies. To facilitate more comprehensive assessments, studies employing mixed methodologies may be conducted, or similar studies can be performed across several educational levels (e.g., higher education, etc.). Beyond these general recommendations, the findings of this study indicate that private schools should translate service quality claims into concrete and observable practices tailored to specific parent groups. For example, for parents at the preschool and primary education levels, communication strategies may focus on clearly defined class size limits, daily hygiene routines, teacher–student ratios, and regular feedback mechanisms regarding children’s development. At the middle and high school levels, schools may emphasize measurable academic support practices such as structured exam preparation programs, frequency of mock exams, guidance services, and monitoring of student progress. In terms of pricing, rather than presenting tuition as a single figure, schools may improve perceived value by explicitly linking fees to specific services offered, such as instructional hours, counseling support, extracurricular activities, and language education. Similarly, improvements in physical conditions may be communicated through transparent information about classroom capacity, safety standards, and facility usage rather than through generic promotional messages. Such targeted and practice-oriented recommendations may help private schools align their marketing strategies more closely with parents’ actual decision-making criteria.

## 7. Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample consists of 16 participants, which is appropriate for a phenomenological design focusing on depth rather than generalization; however, it limits the transferability of the findings. Second, the data were collected through online interviews, which facilitated access to participants from different cities but may have restricted the observation of non-verbal cues and contextual interactions. Third, although maximum variation sampling was employed, differences related to income levels, school segments, and regional characteristics were not examined in a comparative manner. In addition, a substantial proportion of participants belonged to the high-income group (81%). Given that the study focused specifically on parents who actively chose private schooling, this distribution reflects the socioeconomic profile typically associated with private education in Türkiye. Nevertheless, this concentration may have limited the socioeconomic diversity of the sample and resulted in findings that predominantly reflect the perspectives of relatively advantaged families. Therefore, caution is warranted when interpreting the results in relation to lower- and middle-income groups. Finally, the study reflects only the parental perspective in private school choice. While parents are the primary decision-makers in K–12 education, the inclusion of students, school administrators, and teachers in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of school choice dynamics.

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