

## PRESCHOOL EDUCATION HAS BECOME MORE IMPORTANT IN PREPARING CHILDREN

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### **Abstract**

*Numerous variables can be found that impact parents or guardians in picking kindergartens for kids, for example, the educational program offered, expenses, versatility and the capacity to send their kids to the kindergarten or preschool, existing great connections, etc. This investigation meant to recognize the components of parents in Marang locale, Terengganu chose Islamic private kindergartens to meet the instructive requirements of preschool kids. This research utilizes a subjective methodology through contextual analysis plan. The example in this examination were 3 guardians sources who sent their kids to the Kindergarten in Marang region, Terengganu. The translated distinct information were broke down through Jefferson System discussion examination. This study assembles data on the components of picking a preschool particularly for guardians who care about pre-school Islamic training for their youngsters. The aftereffects of this examination can add to the data on the advantages of preschool through the rundown of subjects that surface toward the finish of the investigation as far as early childhood education, transit services or administrations, nursery administrations, Islamic schooling, experienced instructors and sensible charges. The last topics found in this examination can trigger guardians' inclination to pick preschool for kids. All in all, this examination is required to help fill the information as far as preschool choice factors, the assortment of preschool accessible in Malaysia, the advantages of preschools particularly preschools that are Islamic in Malaysia and then some.*

**Keywords:** *kindergarten selection, preschool, early childhood education, parenting, islamic*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Preschool education has become more important in preparing children aged five to six years old for the school atmosphere. Education toward children at the early age especially at the preschool level is crucial in developing a perfect future. Preschool education does not only serve toward emotional stability and social growth of the children, but for other aspects as well. Parents need to make a proper decision before choosing preschool for their children. The task of babysitting children would be more challenging to both parents that have to work outside of their home, even though they are fully responsible for the task. (Azizi Yahya, 2018).

Malaysia Ministry of Education had prepared various preschool educations to allow children aged four to six years old to enter preschool earlier. These preschool institutions are under the management of certain agencies such as KEMAS, Felda, Darul-Arqam, Pertiwi,

Malaysia Kindergarten Association, Royal Malaysia Police, and private kindergartens. All these preschool institutions have their own mission, vision, and objective. They provide education that prepare children for healthier development. Thus, the children would be able to adjust themselves properly with more effective role upon entering school later.

The environment of the children who attend preschool covers the surrounding environment and household, which is the main factor in fostering and encouraging the development of children as a whole and balanced. To reach the purpose of a whole and balanced development, parents are responsible in enrolling their children aged four to six years old to the preschool of choice with guaranteed comfort, safety, and affectionate care. However, there are various factors affecting parents in their choice of kindergarten for children. Nowadays the factors affecting parents' choices in determining the proper kindergarten for children are ease of logistics, affordable fees, transit facilities, and so on. In ensuring the selection of kindergartens match the parents' need, charging reasonable fees and providing options for parents to send their children, parents should make consideration on which kindergarten that would fit their preferences. This study aims to identify the factors of selection of Islamic private kindergartens by parents in Marang, Terengganu as meeting the needs of preschool children's education.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Parents play an important role in choosing kindergarten or preschool for their children. They wish for the best education for their children. Thus, there are various factors which will affect them such as offered curricular, fee cost, mobility, and the easiness for parents to send their children to the kindergarten and preschool, pre-existing good relationship, and others.

There are kindergartens that charge affordable yearly and monthly fee. According to Safiek (2019), the study was conducted through interview with parents, and majority of parents are satisfied with the fees charged by their preferred kindergarten. In addition, there are kindergartens that provide various fee packages that parents can choose from such as half-day preschool fee or preschool with transit. According to Lily and Azman (2013), such facilities are convenient for working parents in choosing preschool with transit or to send their children for the period of school time only. Transit service for preschool children is very helpful for parents who work for nine hours per day, from 8.00 in the morning until 5.00 in the evening (office hours). Regardless of that, parents still scrutinizing over reasonable fee for that purpose.

Communicating with neighbours on various issues will ensue them to give their opinion on the best kindergarten for their children. According to research by Sofia, Kamarul and Akmaliza (2019), most parents will recommend kindergarten close to their neighbourhood. Safety factors is a major issue, in addition the kindergarten or preschool should be registered with the authorities. At the same time, kindergarten and preschool that are convenient and available in many locations are the main choice of parents in community area. Indirectly, this shows that kindergarten with many branches is trusted to be chosen by parents as main preschool for their children.

The aspect of convenience in bringing their children to and from the kindergarten or preschool is one of the factors considered by the parents when enrolling their children to the preschool. According to Hamid (2017) most working parents need to pay attention to their office's break time to fetch their children from kindergarten or preschool. Parents also need to consider distance from their house or office with the location of their children's kindergarten or preschool. Other than that, parents also opted for the convenience of transit service to send their children home. If this happened, parents need to consider from safety aspect; was the transportation used by the driver is up to the safety standard, knowing the transit driver, and the van should be insured.

The existing knowledge that the parents have on teaching and learning process and as well as teacher's curriculum in school, is also one of the factors considered by the parents in selecting kindergarten or preschool for their children. This is due to the tremendous responsibility of parents in the effort to educate children, and it has a direct influence on the learning and teaching process to children at home. However, the discontinuity of home education with school education can inhibit children's development either in cognitive, psychomotor, or affective aspects (Mohd Nazri Abdul Rahman, 2014). Parents nowadays seems to hand over the responsibility of educating and teaching their children to the early childhood education centre, and this had reduced parents' involvement to moderate level during children's education stage (Irma Yanti Mahamud, Norliza Che Hasan & Fathiyah Mohd Fakhrudin, 2018).

Research made by Marhamah Abdul Rahman (2019) stresses that PASTI curricular is the factor for PASTI kindergarten to be selected by parents to execute the responsibility of providing early childhood education. Research by Marhamah also proposes few appropriate methods to help the parents in increasing their understanding of PASTI's education curriculum and then applies it on children as young as four years old. At the same time, findings from this research allows other parties who are directly involved with PASTI's curriculum, especially the school and PASTI teachers to apply this curriculum at home, and increase their knowledge of PASTI's curriculum.

## **OBJECTIVE**

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To identify the factors of the selection by parents in Marang, Terengganu for Islamic private kindergartens in meeting the needs of children's preschool education.

## CONTEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

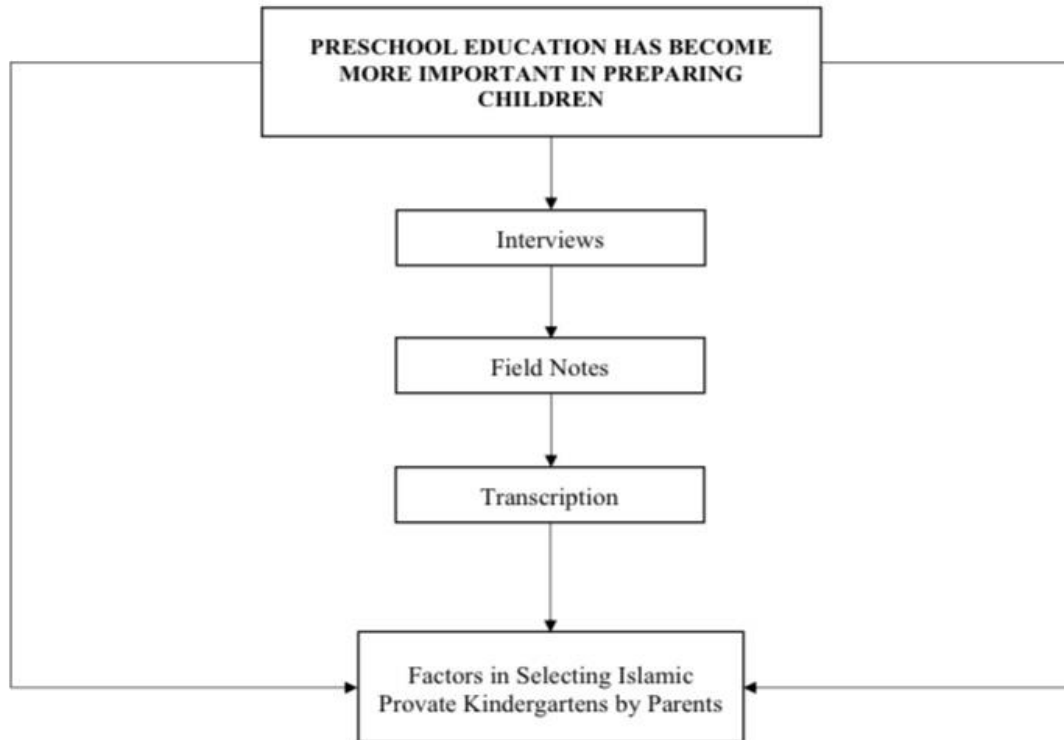


Chart 1: Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative approach that was used in this study is through case study design. A case study is a study that involves a particular case, or a certain specific location. A case study is also about observation of a specific phenomenon for a particular individual or group of individuals. Case studies are made to explore, make findings as well as interpretation, rather than just to test hypotheses (Ghazali Darusalam & Sufean Hussin, 2016). The method of this case study is aimed at identifying the factors of parents in Marang, Terengganu for Islamic private kindergartens in meeting the needs of children's preschool education.

Sample selection technique chosen for this study is the "snow ball" technique as suggested by Patton (1990), which is a good strategy to identify the actual study sample starting with one sample then increasing the number of samples until it is sufficient to obtain maximum information or data. In this study, a mother is chosen as the first informant for the interview, and as the study proceed on the number of informants is increased based on suggestion from the first informant. This method is repeated until it reached the number of required informants. The type of sample used in this study is the *purposive* sample. Creswell (2008) stated that choosing *purposive* sample in a qualitative study is appropriate, as the chosen sample has the

information required by the researcher. It also aims to uncover the development and the process of a phenomenon at the location where the study is conducted.

Informative sample are the one which involved the informants who were identified to have information and arguments on the factors of selection for Islamic private kindergarten by the parents. Easy sample attainment refers to this study informants which can be easily acquired among parents with the help of “snow ball” technique used in this study. Sample with experience in this study refers to the study informants who were interviewed based on their own experiences. There are no specific rule specifying the number or size of study samples in qualitative, however normally small samples; 1 to 7 peoples are sufficient to meet the sampling criteria (Ghazali Darusalam & Sufean Hussin, 2016). For the reason of acquiring informants who meets the sampling criteria, proper procedures had been conducted in this study to obtain the written permission from the informants, permission, and voluntary consent from the informants, as well as obtaining the consent for the interview protocol. The sample size for this study are 3 informants who are parents that send their children to PASTI kindergarten in Marang district, Terengganu. The selected samples are in small quantities and not randomly selected, thus the outcome for this study is not representative of the population and at the same time it cannot be generalize to the findings of study conducted in other locations.

The process of obtaining data through meeting a person or small group via face to face as well as conducting question and answer, or two-way communication with the intention to solicit views, opinions and confessions from a person is called an interview (Ghazali Darusalam & Sufean Hussin, 2016). Robson (2000) states that interview is a form of conversation with specific purpose. Every researcher that utilizes interview as a method would undeniably want something from the respondent’s answer. The type of interview used in this study is unstructured interviews where few topics were documented without certain arrangement (unstructured) or also known as exploratory interviews which were conducted with open-ended questions without any preparation, it is asked spontaneously by giving opportunity to informants to give a response or answer. Answers given by the informants are not tied-up with any kind of prepared choices.

The interview process will go through two phases. The first phase is an introductory session with the informant, which aims to establish a close relationship through public conversation related to background, interests, career, and matters related to the issue of parental’s factors in sending their children to Islamic private kindergartens to attend school. The second phase was conducted on a different date than the first phase, and the questions involved are more focused to the issue of parental’s factor in sending their children to Islamic private kindergarten to attend preschool. Conducted interviews were recorded to ensure the safety of all information and findings. Recording is done using a mobile phone recorder application. The interviews were conducted individually. The interview protocol conducted included aspects such as titles, topics, and notes. In this study, recording of interviews and field note were taken to obtain the important contents that will be matched with the transcript of the interview.

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interviews which were conducted with open-ended questions without any preparation, it is asked spontaneously by giving opportunity to informants to give a response or answer. Thus, there are no specific questions build as these questions were given spontaneously during the interview. The data collection method used in this study is the field note method. Field note were documented in paragraphs, using landscape techniques as in the following example:

Theme	Category	Line Number	Coding	Transcript Text	Conclusion / report

Table 1: Field Note Documentation

The data analysis steps used are as follows:

- i. While reading and examining the manuscript text; words, phrases, sentences, and expressions that give meaning or that are desired will be coloured / underlined / marked.
- ii. Types of coding for each meaningful word, phrase and sentence will be determined.
- iii. Words, phrases, and sentences as well as important meanings are transferred into the table.
- iv. A reassessment is made of the original transcript for any missing important information.

Data planning and management on the other hand will go through three steps, which are data management, data comprehension, and data analysis. The first phase of data sorting begins with writing transcript from recordings obtained through audio-video to verbatim form (sentences) of all study informants. The process of preparing a copy of the transcript were made by the researchers.

Upon completing the transcript copying process, each completed transcript is written and indexed either on the left or right side of the text. Indexing process of the transcript is performed by labelling a specific code to the informants in this study, according to their transcript. To understand the data, the collected interviewed data must be comprehended to ensure that the data answers the research questions through the following process:

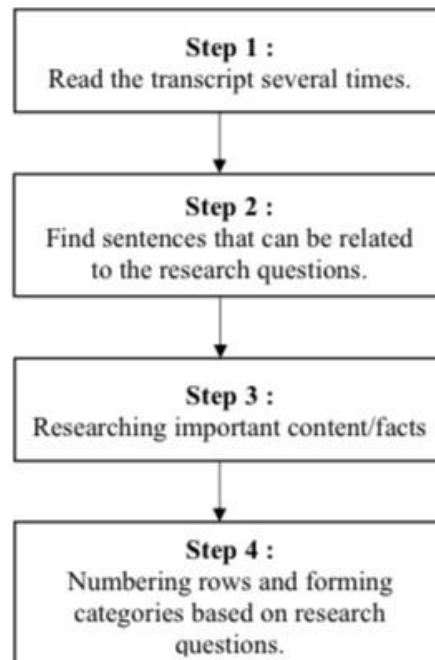


Figure 1: Data Understanding Process

Meriam (2001) states that verbatim transcript is the best database to be analysed. Once the interview transcription is completed, it will be distributed to the informants for content re-evaluation purposes. This process is known as validity or confirmation of content is to ensure the level of validity for the data obtained. If there is any error, correction will be made between the informants and the researchers. A certificate of review will also be provided. Next, each transcribed unit is selected to be grouped under a theme and category, with specific subthemes and subcategories by using predefined codes. The process of reading transcripts and selecting specific themes is repeated until all the units with meaning have been grouped, while units without meaning are eliminated.

Themes and subthemes were identified through the highlights of past research, evidences found in the studied field, and through experiences of the researchers from the informant's view in this study. All gathered information will be recorded and labelled systematically. Grbich (2007), argues that transcribed data should be marked with main notation based of *Jefferson System* so that the data can be read and understood through conversation with informants as per said examples:

Research	Notation
><	Words in between these signs are pronounced quickly
(.)	Momentary stop
(0.4) , (0.5)	Stop for a certain period
>>	Read fast (Content is less important)
<<	Read slowly (Content is important)
Word	High volume / increase voice volume / intonation
word	Low volume / decrease voice volume / intonation
<u>Word</u>	Words spoken loudly
WORD	Screamed words
(( ))	Sneeze, cough, yawn
( )	Fuzzy terms
.emm	Inhale
xxx	Terms / unintelligible words

Table 2 : Example of Conversation Analysis Using the *Jefferson System*

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The data collection of this study also involved the background notes of the informants. The following is the background profile information of the informant who was interviewed in Marang, Terengganu

Informan	Age	Husband's Job	Wife's Job	Level of Education	Number of Children
A	30 years	Cleaner	Online Business	Diploma	3
B	29 years	Driver	Self-employed	Certificate	4
C	34 years	Lecturer	Teacher	Master Degree	5

Table 3 : Informants Profile

## FINDINGS

Based on the interview, there are multiple factors encouraging parents to enrol their children at PASTI kindergarten preschool in Marang, Terengganu. Finding with six themes have been discovered from there interviews with the informants. The first theme is early age education factor. Two of the interviews conducted found that respondents tend to provide early education to their children as early as four years old. Opting for PASTI kindergarten is in line with their intent for the children to go through early preschool age education process. One of them is confident in the choice because he has personally visited the PASTI administration first in ensuring acceptance for students of four years old. Later, a decision was made to send the child to the relevant PASTI kindergarten in Marang district. Meanwhile, one of them found out about the early education at PASTI through conversation with fellow parents who have enrol their children at PASTI preschool.



The second theme is the transit service factor. One of the conducted interviews had decided to send their children to PASTI kindergarten due to the transit service provided by that PASTI kindergarten. Although there are many PASTI kindergarten branches in Malaysia, not all branches offer the transit service for students who are not able to return home once the teaching and learning process is over. The transit service offered by Marang PASTI kindergarten is a strong justification to support the decisions made for their children due to the factor of commitment as a working parent. They must abide by the agreed schedule, which is to send the children as early as 7.00 am to 7.15 am and pick them up at 5.30 pm or 6 pm regardless of the additional fee cost that they need to pay. The transit service is needed as parents do not have any better alternatives to leave their children after the school session is over. In addition, there is no need for the parents to rush over the time in picking up their children at the school during the afternoon (lunch hour at the office) with only one hour allocated by their employer. They believed that it is better to utilize the hour by performing Zohor prayer and having lunch to energize themselves for the rest of their working hour until the evening. The nursery service factor is the third theme discovered in the finding of this study. Two of the interview informants decided to enrol their children at PASTI kindergarten based on the offered nursery service factor. They deliberately search for educational centre that offer preschool and nursery service at once. The aim is to save time and travel distance when sending their children, as two or three children can be sent together at once to the same place without having to organize a trip to another location before heading to work. Those parents opted for Marang PASTI kindergarten as it offers nursery service for babies aged 2 to 3 years old. The service is very important for them as they need to send their children to the preschool too. If they have opted for a different kindergarten without the service, they will waste time and car fuel cost as they must reach two different places before going to work. Although there are many PASTI kindergarten branches throughout Malaysia, not all PASTI kindergartens offer nursery services for children aged 3 years and below.

The fourth theme is the factor of Islamic education. The three parents interviewed in Marang district opted for PASTI kindergarten due to the Islamic education offered for students aged four to six years old. The parents' knowledge of Islamic education in PASTI was found to be the result of a census conducted by themselves as an effort to determine the best curriculum for their children. The PASTI kindergarten chosen in the Marang district begin their learning hours at 7.30 am by memorizing readings for prayer in mass. Then at 8.30 am to 10.00 am, students will pursue Iqraa and Al-Quran reading lesson in their own classes. Islamic virtue (Ahklah Islamiah) is one of the compulsory lessons for the students based on their respective schedules. In addition, students are required to memorize daily routine prayer until they are good at it.

Meanwhile, the fifth theme discovered is the factor of experienced teacher. One of the interviewed informants believed that the teachers at PASTI kindergarten in Marang are experienced in educating and teaching preschool students. The opinion was proposed by the parents founded on past experience through their observations as that PASTI kindergarten is quite close to their home. The informants made daily observations on the approach and skills used by the teacher at PASTI attracting students so they will eagerly come to school and engage

with the lessons in the classroom. A common situation is when teachers successfully persuade crying children from following their parent home after arriving at the kindergarten. Other than that, the respondents observed how the teachers handled and supervised a huge number of preschool students when they are conducting activities outside of the classroom.

The last theme is the affordable fee factor. Two of the interviewed informants believed that the fees charged by PASTI kindergarten was reasonable. The PASTI kindergarten charges a preschool fee of RM75 per month and transit fee is RM2 per hour. Parents only pay transit fees according to the number of hours recorded. While, for nursery services, the fee charged is RM180 per month. According to the informants, a census of fees has been made in some PASTI kindergartens, however the rate charged varies from preschool fees, transit service fees or nursery service fees for babies aged 2 to 3 years old. In fact, they similarly discovered that the fees cost in PASTI kindergartens in other states were also different.

## **DISCUSSION**

The objective of this study is to identify the factors of selection by parents in Marang, Terengganu in choosing the Islamic private kindergarten to meet the needs for children preschool education. The findings of this study directly reveal these factors, further showing the importance of this study to the parties. Amongst them is the importance of this study to the parents. In term of benefit to the parents, this study can provide information on Islamic kindergarten based on experiences of the respondents in this study. Inputs gathered from this study can be used by parents as a guideline and consideration in selecting the preschool programs for their children.

Looking from the significance perspective of this study toward Islamic private kindergarten teachers and preschool education teachers, Islamic private kindergarten teachers in particular, and other preschool education teachers in general, the findings of this study help to further improve the teaching performance and skills in dealing with preschool children. In terms of literature, this study will expand the literary resources for future researchers in studies involving the selection of preschool among parents. The diversity of preschool institutions makes it necessary for parents to make the best and wisest for their children. This study had gathered information for selections made by parents in deciding preschool kindergartens, especially for parents who care about Islamic preschool education lessons for their children. The findings of the study have shown the themes obtained based on the conducted interviews. These themes can prompt parents' tendency in choosing preschool for their children. The finding of this study can also provide information on the advantages of preschool to them through a list of existing themes namely; factors of early childhood education, transit services, nursery services, Islamic education, experienced teachers and reasonable fees.

Future researchers in the field of preschool would undeniably requires the latest references in assisting them to accomplish the study in their respective fields. Thus, this study is expected to improve the preceding research and literatures in terms of parents' preschool selection factors, the diversity of preschools available in Malaysia, the advantages of preschools, especially Islamic preschools in Malaysia and others. The six themes obtained from

this study had reach the study objective which focuses on factors of selection in private Islamic kindergarten by parents in Marang, Terengganu with effort to meet the children preschool education needs. In a study conducted by Barbarin in 2006, the finding shows that contentment factors such as school hours, location, transportation, and cost were often mentioned by parents as the main consideration for childcare and preschool. The theme of school time in that study is quite similar to the results of this study when parents prefer transit services as they want their children's school hours to match with their return time from work. Location factor is also similarly related in the context of parents choosing the same location to send their children for nursery, preschool, and transit services at the same time.

Early and Burchinal (2001) research finding shows that low-income families are more prone to consider aspects of treatment that affect daily life such as cost, location, numbers of hours associated with positive child developmental characteristics. Study done by Johansen et al. (1996) states that parents who value the convenience factor are more likely to prefer home care. Care from family or may be considered as more flexible and convenient compared to the formal care centres.

However, in this study the parents interviewed were not able to choose home babysitting because they were involved with work commitments. Consequently, the theme of transit services and nursery has surfaced because of the study conducted in the district of Marang, Terengganu. Pianta (2009) in his study found that from the perspective of practical care, parents also cite various aspects of educational care that differs from specific school policy for more amorphous needs especially about personality traits of the kindergarten teacher. Structural indicator is a set of programmatic consideration related to the program quality and the child achievement improvement. These indicators describe the obvious factors about program organization, management and training that develop the learning environment that support the children. These factors are the ratio of teachers to children, training expertise among teachers as well as health and safety aspects. These factors have been expressed by parents when explaining the quality preschool programs selected for their children (Johansen et al., 1996). A study in Marang, Terengganu found the theme of experienced teachers as a factor influencing parents to choose Islamic preschool kindergarten. Finding of the study shows that parents feel that these teachers can handle outdoor learning environment properly based on their own observation. This is clearly related to the possible strategy from the kindergarten in providing training to teachers to develop a learning environment that supports children.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION**

The quality of a kindergarten not only rests in the ability to educate students effectively, but also to be able to interpret the curriculum aim outlined practically. The quality referred at the early childhood education level includes the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of services offered in aspects related to learning, teaching and services required by parents as well as students in the learning environment (Workman & Utrich, 2017). Consequently, it is appropriate for parents to choose the best preschool to be pursued by their children. However,

this study only focusses on Islamic preschool kindergarten in Marang, Terengganu. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be wholly generalized for all preschools and other areas.

The limitations in this study only focus on parents as respondents and Islamic preschool kindergartens only. Among the focus for the proposed study is to identify the perspectives of teachers or administrators in Islamic private kindergarten preschools on the factors of parents' preschool selection. Preschool teachers or administrators may have a variety of experiences from observation during the period of handling the parents and preschool students in kindergarten.

Based on their experiences and observations, they may have found various traits of parents, when they are choosing for the best and appropriate preschool for their children. The results of interviews conducted with teachers will show their views on the factors of selection for preschool kindergartens by parents, especially when it comes to Islamic preschool education. Their opinions are also relevant to be considered as perspectives that can be used as a reference for future studies. This input will be significant to those who are researching about preschool in the future to complete their research in related topics. Other than that, future studies can focus on other topic than Islamic kindergartens, such as the study of factors for selection of private preschool kindergartens that emphasize on the use of English as the medium of language by parents, and its implications toward preschool children themselves, parents and other parties related.

The environment of children who attend preschool includes the surrounding environment and household which became a major factor in nurturing and encouraging a balance and comprehensive children development. In achieving the aim of such a comprehensive and balance development, parents are responsible for enrol children aged four to six years old to the selected preschool which includes a guarantee of comfort, safety, and loving care.

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