

Parental Considerations in Choosing Early Childhood Education Institutions in RT/RW Neighborhoods in South Tangerang City

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Abstract The selection of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) institutions represents an important consideration for parents in supporting children's optimal growth and development. This study aims to describe the factors considered by parents in selecting PAUD institutions within their local RT/RW community and to identify their expectations regarding the improvement of PAUD service quality. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire administered via Google Forms to five parents or guardians who served as research respondents. The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis by categorizing the responses into relevant thematic groups. The findings indicate that parents' decisions in selecting PAUD institutions are primarily influenced by the quality of educational services in relation to children's developmental needs, rather than solely by considerations of location and cost. The factors identified include teacher quality and competence, learning methods, educational facilities, school safety and comfort, location and accessibility, educational costs, as well as recommendations and experiences from family members and the surrounding community. Parents also identified several aspects requiring improvement, particularly the enhancement of learning methods, teacher competence, educational facilities, and the safety and cleanliness of the learning environment. Furthermore, parents expressed the need for more effective communication between PAUD institutions and parents. The findings highlight that service quality and parental trust constitute key considerations in the decision-making process for selecting a PAUD institution. This study contributes to providing an overview of the factors that should be considered by PAUD providers in developing services that are more responsive to children's developmental needs and parents' expectations.

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an important component in supporting the growth and development of children aged 0–6 years (Purwani et al., 2019). During this period, physical, cognitive, language, social-emotional, moral, and religious development occurs intensively, requiring children to receive stimulation through an educational environment that is safe, comfortable, and appropriate to their developmental stage (Hanifah, 2024). ECE institutions function not only as places of learning but also play an important role in developing children's independence, character, creativity, and ability to interact with their environment. Therefore, the suitability of ECE service quality to



children's needs is an important consideration in determining which educational institution to choose.

In this process, parents play an important role because decisions regarding children's educational institutions involve considerations of service quality and children's needs (Hanifah & Solehuddin, 2023). The available choices are also increasingly diverse in terms of programs, learning methods, facilities, location, and services offered. This condition means that the process of selecting an ECE institution is not merely related to the availability of an institution but also to how parents assess the suitability of various institutional characteristics with their children's needs and family circumstances. Several studies have shown that these considerations may include teacher quality, learning methods, facilities, location, costs, the school environment, and information obtained from family members and the surrounding social environment (Kinanti & Trihantoyo, 2021; Julio & Shihab, 2024; Riana & Syamsudin, 2024).

Previous studies have also demonstrated that parents' decisions and perceptions regarding ECE are related to the quality of school-family relationships, parental involvement, and the institution's ability to meet children's developmental needs. Anjani and Mashudi (2024) examined parental involvement in early childhood education, while Rahma et al. (2024) and Paripurnawati et al. (2026) emphasized the importance of partnerships between families and educational institutions in supporting ECE services. Meanwhile, Julio and Shihab (2024) highlighted word of mouth and perceived value in parents' decisions to choose schools, whereas Riana and Syamsudin (2024) identified several factors associated with the selection of ECE institutions. The development of these studies indicates that parents' decisions cannot be understood solely from a single aspect of service quality.

Nevertheless, gaps remain in previous research. Some studies have focused primarily on particular factors, such as parental involvement, service quality, word of mouth, perceived value, or school selection factors. These studies have provided an understanding of factors associated with parents' decisions, but they have not sufficiently described how various considerations emerge and are evaluated simultaneously from parents' perspectives, particularly within the context of the RT/RW neighborhood as the immediate environment where families obtain information and become familiar with available ECE options. In

addition, studies that simultaneously identify parents' considerations and their expectations regarding improvements in ECE services remain limited. Based on this research gap, the present study is not intended to determine the single most influential factor statistically, but rather to comprehensively describe the various considerations parents use when selecting an ECE institution and how they obtain and evaluate information before making a decision. This study also identifies parents' expectations regarding improvements in the quality of ECE services. Thus, this research expands the discussion of ECE institution selection from merely identifying factors to understanding parents' patterns of consideration when evaluating early childhood educational institutions.

The novelty of this study lies in integrating various aspects of parents' considerations, including teacher quality and competence, learning methods, facilities, environmental safety and comfort, location, cost, and sources of information within a single study based on parents' open-ended responses. In addition to identifying these considerations, this study relates them to parents' expectations regarding improvements in teacher competence, learning quality, facilities, the learning environment, children's activities, and communication between schools and families. This approach provides a more comprehensive picture of parents' evaluation processes regarding ECE institutions within the context of their residential environment. The practical contribution of this study is to provide input for ECE administrators regarding service aspects that need attention from parents' perspectives, not only in terms of learning and facilities but also safety, comfort, accessibility, information provision, and communication with families. Academically, this study provides a contextual description of parents' considerations in selecting ECE institutions and can serve as a basis for future research to examine these factors more broadly.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to identify and describe the various considerations of parents in selecting ECE institutions within their RT/RW neighborhood, including the sources of information and evaluation processes used before making a choice, as well as to identify parents' expectations regarding improvements in the quality of ECE services.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at providing an in-depth description of parents' various considerations in selecting Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions within their RT/RW neighborhood and identifying parents' expectations regarding improvements in the quality of ECE services. This approach was selected because the research data consisted of open-ended responses, allowing respondents to express their reasons, experiences, considerations, and expectations in detail based on their individual experiences.

The research sample was determined using purposive sampling, a sampling technique in which participants are selected based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives. The sample consisted of five parents or guardians who had young children or were considering enrolling their children in an ECE institution. The sample criteria included parents or guardians who were relevant to the research focus, willing to participate voluntarily, and able to complete the questionnaire through Google Forms. Based on these criteria, five respondents provided information regarding their considerations in selecting an ECE institution, their experiences in obtaining information, and their expectations for improving the quality of ECE services.

The research instrument was an open-ended questionnaire developed based on the research focus and a literature review concerning factors influencing parents' decisions when selecting ECE institutions. The questionnaire covered the main considerations in choosing an ECE institution, the process of seeking information, teacher quality and competence, learning methods, facilities, economic conditions and educational costs, location and accessibility, safety and comfort of the school environment, the influence of experiences and recommendations from family and the surrounding community, reasons for not choosing an ECE institution within the RT/RW neighborhood, as well as parents' expectations and suggestions for improving the quality of ECE services. The use of open-ended questions provided respondents with the flexibility to freely express their views, experiences, reasons, and considerations without being restricted to predetermined response options.

Data were collected by distributing the questionnaire through Google Forms to participants who met the research criteria. The data consisted of written

responses from five respondents. All responses were compiled and reviewed to ensure data completeness before the analysis process was conducted.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive analysis through coding and thematic analysis. The first stage involved repeatedly reading all respondents' answers to obtain an overall understanding of the data. The second stage involved coding, namely identifying portions of the responses relevant to the research focus and assigning codes based on the meanings or issues that emerged. The third stage involved grouping codes with similar meanings into specific categories. The fourth stage involved developing these categories into major themes representing patterns in parents' considerations. The identified themes included teacher quality and competence, learning methods, facilities, safety and comfort, location and accessibility, educational costs, and experiences or recommendations from the surrounding community. Each theme was subsequently interpreted by considering similarities and differences among respondents' answers. The results of the analysis were presented in narrative form, supported by respondents' statements and connected to relevant previous studies.

Data trustworthiness was examined by assessing the consistency among the collected data, coding results, categories, and themes. The researcher reread all respondents' answers to ensure that each code and theme had a clear basis in the research data. In addition, responses across participants were compared to identify similarities and differences in the information and to ensure that the interpretation was not based solely on a single response. The researcher also examined the consistency of the analytical findings with the research objectives and focus. This process was conducted to enhance the credibility and traceability of the analysis and to ensure that the research findings accurately represented the empirical data obtained.

This study applied research ethics principles by maintaining the confidentiality of respondents' identities and personal information. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily without coercion. The data obtained were used solely for research purposes and presented without revealing the respondents' personal identities. Thus, respondents' privacy and confidentiality

were maintained throughout the processes of data collection, processing, analysis, and reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to identify the various considerations of parents in selecting Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions within their RT/RW neighborhood. Data were obtained through an open-ended questionnaire administered to five respondents. The open-ended questions allowed respondents to express their opinions, experiences, considerations, and expectations regarding ECE services based on their individual circumstances and needs.

The analysis was conducted by reading all respondents' answers, identifying statements relevant to the research focus, coding responses with similar meanings, grouping the codes into categories, and subsequently developing these categories into themes. Through this process, the respondents' answers were not merely presented as a list of opinions but were analyzed based on patterns of meaning emerging from the overall data.

The results of the thematic grouping identified three main themes, namely parents' considerations in selecting an ECE institution, sources of information and the evaluation process prior to selecting an ECE institution, and parents' expectations regarding improvements in the quality of ECE services.

Table 1. Thematic Grouping Results Based on Respondents' Responses

Category	Subcategory	Findings Based on Respondents	Interpretation
Sources of Information and Evaluation Process	Information seeking and evaluation	R3 conducted a survey of the teaching and learning process, R4 made a direct visit, while R5 examined the institution's legality, management, activities, and learning schedule.	Parents did not rely solely on the information they received but actively sought and evaluated information before making a decision.
	Information verification	Information obtained from other parties was not always accepted directly but	Parents tended to verify the information they received by directly

Category	Subcategory	Findings Based on Respondents	Interpretation
Evaluation Process		was verified through observations of the institution's actual conditions.	observing the institution's conditions before making a decision.

Based on Table 1, parents' considerations in selecting an ECE institution were formed by several interrelated aspects. The respondents' answers showed that there was no single consideration applied uniformly by all respondents. R1, for example, considered teacher quality as well as cost and distance, whereas R4 placed greater emphasis on the child's comfort, teacher quality, and learning methods. R5 focused on safety, cleanliness, comfort, as well as the quality and character of teachers. These differences indicate that the decision to select an ECE institution is contextual, as parents' considerations are adjusted to their children's needs and their respective family circumstances. One evident pattern was the attention given to teacher quality and competence. R1 considered the quality and educational background of teachers, R4 emphasized the importance of patient and friendly teachers, while R5 considered teachers' ability to respond to children's needs. This pattern can be interpreted to mean that, for the respondents, teacher quality is not only related to the ability to deliver learning activities but also to the ability to establish interactions appropriate to the characteristics of young children. Teachers are viewed as individuals who directly shape children's experiences while attending an ECE institution.

These findings are related to Kinanti and Trihantoyo (2021), who emphasized the importance of parental participation in the provision of quality education. Parents' attention to service quality indicates that they do not merely act as recipients of educational services but also evaluate the quality of the institution. This finding is also related to Anjani and Mashudi (2024), who examined parental involvement in early childhood education. However, the present study provides a more specific emphasis because teachers are evaluated from the stage of selecting an institution, rather than only after children have begun their education. Thus, teacher quality may

become part of the process through which parents develop trust in an ECE institution.

In addition to teachers, learning methods emerged as another consideration in the respondents' answers. R3 mentioned that some learning methods were less effective, while R4 considered monotonous activities in need of improvement and expected learning to be more creative and enjoyable. These findings indicate that parents are concerned not only with whether an institution provides learning activities but also with how those activities provide meaningful experiences for children.

Creative and enjoyable learning is perceived as more appropriate to children's needs because it provides opportunities for children to participate in activities, explore, and gain diverse learning experiences. This finding is consistent with Ismawaty (2023), who examined parents' perceptions of ECE and their motivation to enroll their children in ECE institutions. In the present study, the benefits of education for children also formed part of parents' considerations, but these benefits were reflected in their expectations for learning that is creative, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate. This finding is also related to Dahlan (2024), who highlighted parental involvement in supporting creativity in early childhood learning. The difference is that the present study does not measure children's level of creativity but demonstrates that forms of learning that support creativity and exploration constitute one of parents' expectations when selecting an institution.

Facilities, safety, and environmental comfort were also important considerations. R1 paid attention to the cleanliness and safety of play facilities, R3 mentioned facilities that could no longer be used, while R4 considered some facilities to be in need of renewal. R5 also considered school safety, cleanliness, and comfort. Based on these responses, facilities were not viewed merely in terms of the availability or completeness of resources but also in terms of their condition and suitability for children's use. In other words, facilities have value when they are able to provide a safe and comfortable learning and play environment. This finding can be associated with Widyowaty et al. (2024), who examined parents'

expectations and perceptions of ECE services. The respondents' attention to facilities and the environment demonstrates a relationship between the quality of services expected by parents and the actual conditions that they can observe. Meanwhile, Manalu et al. (2026) showed that facilities are among the factors considered by parents when selecting educational institutions. The difference is that the data in the present study demonstrate more concretely that parents' attention is directed not only toward the availability of facilities but also toward their safety, cleanliness, and physical condition for children's use.

Regarding location, R1 mentioned a distance of approximately 500 meters as a consideration, R2 considered travel time, R4 considered ease of access, while R5 considered travel duration to prevent the child from becoming fatigued. However, R4's response also indicated that a school located somewhat farther away could still be considered if it offered better quality. This demonstrates that location provides practical advantages for families, but proximity is not always the determining factor when differences in service quality exist.

Regarding cost, R1 considered educational expenses as one of the selection criteria, while R2 associated cost with the family's economic circumstances and outing activities. In contrast, R4 placed greater emphasis on whether the costs incurred were proportional to the quality of education, facilities, and services received. This pattern indicates that cost does not have a uniform meaning among respondents. For some respondents, cost was associated with economic capacity, whereas for others, it was understood in terms of the benefits and quality of services obtained. This finding is consistent with Riana and Syamsudin (2024), who identified location, service quality, and cost as factors in the selection of ECE institutions.

However, the findings of this study indicate that location and cost cannot be separated from considerations of quality. In other words, parents do not simply seek the closest or least expensive institution but consider whether the available option is appropriate to their children's needs and family circumstances. In addition to institutional characteristics,

respondents also demonstrated a process of seeking and verifying information before making their decisions.

Table 2. Sources of Information and Parents' Evaluation Process

Respondent	Sources of Information	Evaluation/Verification Process	Findings
Respondent 1 (R1)	Testimonials from parents in the surrounding community	Considering other people's experiences	Other people's experiences were used as an initial reference.
Respondent 2 (R2)	Experience	Experience used as evidence	Experience was considered capable of providing an overview of the institution.
Respondent 3 (R3)	School track record	Survey of the teaching and learning process	Information was assessed through observation of the learning process.
Respondent 4 (R4)	Other parents, friends, neighbors, and social media	Direct visit	Information from various sources was compared with the school's actual conditions.
Respondent 5 (R5)	—	Initial investigation and direct visit; examination of legality, management, activities, and learning schedule	The evaluation was conducted by examining the institution's credibility and actual conditions.

Based on Table 2, the information used by the respondents came from a variety of sources. Information from family members, other parents, friends, neighbors, and social media served as initial sources for becoming familiar with ECE institutions. However, the data also indicate that several respondents conducted verification before making a decision. R3 surveyed the teaching and learning process, R4 made a direct visit, while R5

examined the institution's legality, management, activities, and learning schedule. This pattern indicates that parents do not merely act as recipients of information but also evaluate the information they obtain. Thus, the process of selecting an ECE institution consists of both information seeking and assessment of the institution's actual conditions. This is important because information from the social environment may provide an initial overview, whereas direct experience or observation of the institution provides parents with a more concrete basis for evaluation.

These findings are consistent with Julio and Shihab (2024), who examined the influence of *word of mouth* and *perceived value* on parents' decisions when selecting schools. The similarity lies in the use of information from other people as one of the considerations in decision-making. However, this study shows that *word of mouth* does not always serve as the basis for the final decision. Respondents still conducted surveys, visits, or direct examinations. This difference indicates that, in the context of this study, information from others functions primarily as an initial reference, while the final decision is formed through an evaluation of the institution's actual conditions.

The findings regarding parental involvement in seeking information can also be related to Anjani and Mashudi (2024) and Rahma et al. (2024), who positioned relationships between families and educational institutions as an important component of early childhood education. In this study, such involvement was evident even before children entered the institution, as parents actively sought, compared, and verified information about potential ECE institutions.

In addition to considerations and information-seeking processes, respondents also expressed various expectations regarding improvements in the quality of ECE services.

Table 3. Parents' Expectations for Improving the Quality of ECE Services

Aspect of Expectations	Evidence from Respondents' Responses	Interpretation
Teacher Competence	R1 emphasized teacher quality; R4 suggested teacher training; R5 continuously developed.	Parents expect teachers' competencies to be continuously developed.

Aspect of Expectations	Evidence from Respondents' Responses	Interpretation
	emphasized improving teacher quality.	
Learning Methods	R3 wanted more effective learning methods; R4 be more varied, expected activities to be less enjoyable, and monotonous and more appropriate to children's creative. developmental needs.	
Facilities	R1 emphasized the safety and cleanliness of play facilities; R3 and R4 be adequate, safe, clean, highlighted facilities that and supportive of need to be repaired or children's activities. updated.	
School Environment	R4 and R5 emphasized safety, cleanliness, and comfort.	The environment is expected to provide a sense of safety and comfort during children's learning activities.
Children's Activities and Development	R1 suggested activities outside the school; R4 Parents expect learning expected activities that experiences that support creativity, children's development exploration, independence, more broadly. and socialization.	
School-Parent Communication	R4 expected better communication; R5 expected regular and transparent two-way communication.	Parents expect an open and participatory relationship between the school and families.

Based on Table 3, the respondents' expectations indicate that improving the quality of ECE services is not limited to physical facilities. Respondents also expected improvements in teacher competence, more creative learning activities, a safe and comfortable environment, activities that support children's development, and more open communication with parents. Regarding teachers, expectations for training and competency development indicate that parents consider educators' quality to require continuous improvement. Regarding learning, expectations for less monotonous activities indicate a need for more diverse learning experiences. Meanwhile, expectations concerning facilities and the environment

demonstrate that the physical condition of the institution remains an important component of children's educational experiences.

Expectations regarding children's activities also indicate that parents do not assess the success of ECE solely in terms of academic achievement. R1 suggested activities outside the school, while R4 expected activities that could support creativity, exploration, independence, and socialization. This indicates that parents perceive ECE as an environment that should support children's development more broadly. Regarding communication, R4 expected better communication, while R5 proposed regular and transparent two-way communication. These findings demonstrate that parents expect their relationship with the school to extend beyond the delivery of information and to include opportunities for exchanging information about children's development and school activities. These findings are consistent with Anjani and Mashudi (2024), Rahma et al. (2024), and Paripurnawati et al. (2026), who emphasized the importance of relationships and partnerships between parents and early childhood education institutions. Meanwhile, Widyowaty et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of alignment between parents' expectations and the ECE services they receive. In the present study, these expectations were reflected more concretely in the need for competent teachers, creative learning, adequate facilities, a safe environment, and two-way communication.

The findings concerning creative learning and child development can also be associated with Dahlan (2024) and Panaoura (2026), who positioned learning experiences and support for children's development as important components of early childhood education. In addition, Fono et al. (2026) and Kahar et al. (2026) demonstrated the importance of family support for children's development, while the study by Hande et al. (2026) highlighted the importance of teacher-parent collaboration in supporting children's development and emotional regulation. The present study complements these findings by demonstrating that expectations regarding children's development have already become a consideration for parents when evaluating the quality of ECE institutions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that parents' considerations in selecting ECE institutions are multidimensional and contextual. Teacher quality and learning methods are related to the quality of children's educational experiences; facilities and the environment are associated with safety and comfort; while location and cost are related to practical family circumstances. At the same time, information from the social environment functions as an initial reference that can subsequently be verified through personal experience, surveys, and direct visits.

This pattern indicates that parents' trust in an ECE institution is not formed solely on the basis of one aspect. Trust is developed through a combination of perceptions of service quality, experiences or information from the social environment, observations of the institution's actual conditions, and the suitability of its services to the needs of children and families. This finding reinforces the studies by Riana and Syamsudin (2024) and Manalu et al. (2026) regarding the diversity of factors considered in selecting educational institutions, while also providing a qualitative description of how these factors are understood by parents within the context of the present study.

Thus, the implication of these findings is not that there is a single factor that determines the choices of all parents. Rather, ECE institutions need to pay attention to service quality comprehensively. Improvements in teacher quality, variety of learning methods, adequacy and safety of facilities, environmental comfort, accessibility of location, and open communication with parents are among the aspects reflected in the respondents' experiences and expectations. The findings also indicate that ECE institutions need to provide transparent information regarding their programs, management, activities, and service quality because parents do not rely solely on recommendations but also evaluate the actual conditions of the institution.

The findings of this study should be interpreted in accordance with the characteristics of the research, which involved only five respondents. Therefore, the findings are not intended to generalize to all parents who use ECE services but rather to describe patterns of considerations and

expectations emerging from the respondents' experiences. This limitation also provides an opportunity for future research to involve more diverse respondents and employ in-depth interviews or other methods to obtain a broader understanding of the process through which parents select ECE institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study found that parents' selection of ECE institutions within their RT/RW neighborhood is a multidimensional process, with teacher quality, learning methods, facilities, environmental safety and comfort, location, cost, and sources of information serving as interrelated considerations. The main finding of the study indicates that parents do not rely solely on information from their social environment but also assess and verify the institution's actual conditions before making their decision. Thus, parents' trust in an ECE institution is developed through the alignment between the quality of services offered, children's needs, and family circumstances.

Statement on Generative AI and AI-Assisted Tools

In preparing this manuscript, the authors employed an AI-powered language tool to refine the clarity, grammar, and readability of the text. Afterward, the authors thoroughly reviewed and revised all content and assume complete responsibility for the published version. Generative AI was not involved in data collection, analysis, or interpretation.

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