

School Choice Influencers towards a Strategic School Development Framework

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Abstract - In an increasingly competitive environment, private educational institutions face the critical challenge of attracting and retaining students while ensuring long-term sustainability and adaptability. This study identifies the school choice influencers of senior high school students' in selecting an educational institution, laying the groundwork for a robust "Strategic Sustainable School Development Framework." Utilizing a modified survey questionnaire, which was adopted from a previous study in Vietnam, the study was conducted across the Cagayan Valley Region, specifically including one private school from each of the provinces of Isabela, Quirino, Nueva Vizcaya, and Cagayan. There were a total of six hundred forty (640) senior high school samples from those chosen schools in Region 2, and stratified sampling was used. The study investigates various influencers on school choice, revealing academic reputation or distinction, marketing and branding strategies, and the overall environment and school culture as primary determinants. While factors such as accessibility and location, previous schooling experiences, and alignment with religious or values-based education also play a role, their influence was found to be minor. Furthermore, personal aspirations, career goals, and the availability of extracurricular activities significantly shape student decisions. The findings offer valuable insights for educational leaders and policymakers, enabling them to better understand student and parent needs, enhance student satisfaction and retention, and strategically prepare students for future endeavors within a dynamic educational ecosystem.

Keywords - Private Educational Institutions, School Choice Influencers, Senior High School, Strategic Sustainable School Development Framework.

I. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, secondary education acts as a crucial link between primary school and further education or job training (Allen, 2020). The global landscape of senior high school education presents a multifaceted array of pedagogical approaches, curriculum designs, and assessment methodologies. This diversity reflects varying national priorities for student preparedness, whether for tertiary education, vocational training, or direct entry into the workforce (Cogal, 2019). Specifically, the K to 12 educational reforms in the Philippines illustrate a strategic approach to making the education system more global and equipping students with a wider variety of academic, technical, and vocational skills (Marín & Natividad, 2025).

This fundamental restructuring aims to equip students with the requisite skills and knowledge for successful future endeavors, whether pursuing higher education, engaging in skills development, or entering employment or entrepreneurship (Calaranan & Corpuz, 2023). This institutional change, especially the introduction of the senior high school in the Republic of the Philippines in 2013, aimed to bring the educational system to a uniform 12-year basic education program to enhance the global competitiveness of Filipino graduates (Irmano et al., 2023) (Kumar & Hirve, 2019).

The government aimed to enhance basic education, transition from senior high school to college, and career opportunities after Grade 12 or College (Ducanes & Ocampo, 2020; Fernandez et al., 2023) through the Senior High School program, which became fully effective in school year 2017-2018. SHS has various tracks that

students may opt for which can be Academic, Technical-Vocational-Livelihood, Sports, and Arts. The academic track has strands such as Accountancy, Business, and Management, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

The decision-making process in selecting a senior high school plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic and personal development (Yuan, 2019). This choice not only affects their immediate educational experience but also has long-term implications for their career paths and future opportunities. As the educational landscape becomes increasingly competitive, understanding the factors that influence students' school choices has become a priority for educators, policymakers, and institutions alike.

This competitive pressure is further exacerbated by the varying educational resources and infrastructure between urban and rural areas, which often leads to disparities in learning outcomes (Gatcho et al., 2024). Furthermore, some countries constitutionally require public schools to be free, which makes innovative curriculum and pedagogical practices in private schools more pressing to justify tuition in some countries (Ali et al., 2022).

This economic concept is especially relevant to the Philippines, which has been increasingly subsidizing universal access to tertiary education through the government, making it more attractive for students to study in public institutions (Lim et al., 2018). Consequently, private schools must strategically differentiate themselves by emphasizing unique academic programs, specialized facilities, or enhanced student support services to attract and retain students amidst the growing appeal of publicly funded alternatives (Yee, 2023). Inevitably, identifying the determinants that guide school choice is essential for crafting strategies to attract and retain students, as well as improving the overall quality of education.

Several factors, including social origins, prior academic achievements, and aspirations, significantly influence a student's transition from high school to higher education. These elements collectively contribute to a student's preparedness and propensity for advanced studies, with involvement in academic and social spheres playing a critical role in retention and persistence (Sá, 2023). In addition, peer influence within the class group in junior high school has a significant influence on the choice of senior high school, as shown by a peer influence which can significantly increase the probability that an individual will attend higher education.

In addition to social factors, psychological factors, academic factors and environmental conditions such as financial status and family responsibilities, affect a student's decision to continue his or her studies (Aljohani, 2016). Family support, though not always significantly different across various student cohorts, remains a crucial element affecting these decisions, while opportunities for career integration and practical experience further bolster student interest in specific programs (Tahil, 2021).

Moreover, the perceived quality of educational offerings, coupled with the institution's reputation and its alignment with individual career aspirations, significantly steers prospective students' enrollment choices. For example, students who have performed well in lower education stages, such as junior high, tend to be more likely to attend senior high school for more advanced academic studies, which affects their choice of the higher education stage to attend (Pfund et al., 2016).

In contrast, the existence of financial aid programs and scholarships may greatly influence a student's choice, especially for those from less affluent backgrounds, as these options help to manage the financial cost of higher education (Española, 2016). In addition to financial factors, parental education levels and students' social networks are also important factors influencing whether students will go to higher education, especially in STEM (Engström & Blom, 2023). These early interests, which may begin as early as before high school, can have a significant influence on future educational and career choices, creating a dynamic where decisions are made and experiences occur one after another (Wang & Degol, 2016).

Beyond these factors, a student's awareness, aspiration, and career choice, significantly influenced by parental guidance and the broader home and school environment, play a critical role in shaping their educational trajectory (Badmus & Jita, 2023). These aspirations are further refined by students' perceptions of specific career

fields, with positive perceptions strongly correlating with career choices, though this link is less explored in secondary school contexts (Mohtar et al., 2019). Furthermore, geographic location and accessibility to educational institutions also play a crucial role in students' enrollment at senior high school, especially in areas with lower educational service availability. Specifically, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds disproportionately experience the impact of educational 'deserts' when their enrollment decisions are highly impacted by distance to senior high schools (Acton et al., 2024).

The strategic use of marketing and branding in educational organizations, especially in the senior high school sector, is also very important in influencing prospective students' perceptions and decisions for enrollment. This is a complex process that requires knowledge of the target audiences, the competition, as well as the special features that set an institution apart in the current competitive educational landscape (Clark et al., 2019). Institutions that are able to clearly articulate their unique brand identity and communicate their academics and extracurriculars effectively will be better equipped to attract and enroll the desired student body (Partenie, 2019).

It is not just about external communication strategies, but also about building internal brand ambassadors among faculty, staff and students, who can help reinforce the image of the institution through their authentic experiences. Such a comprehensive approach to brand management includes strategic communication, as well as internal culture, and ultimately translates into improving institutional reputation and market positioning (Rachmadhani et al., 2018). This comprehensive understanding of students' motivational underpinnings and their interactions with academic and social environments is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems (Sinclair et al., 2018). An understanding of these complex factors enables teachers and administrators to design instruction and outreach that is more inclusive and effective for a wide range of students and populations, increasing student participation and achievement.

The framework is based on Berry's Relationship Marketing Theory that categorizes the types of relationships into customer, competitor, and external influence markets, and the idea is to strategically match the nature of those relationships to improve the institution's longevity and adaptability. This multidisciplinary approach posits that schools can achieve a competitive advantage and secure their long-term viability by cultivating robust relationships with key stakeholders, including prospective students, parents, and community partners (Nugroho & Hati, 2020). In addition, the framework focuses on managing customer relationships proactively so that the financial stability of the organization can be maintained, and sustainable practices can be promoted as part of the organizational culture (Park & Ahn, 2022).

Such an approach necessitates a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing school choice, thereby enabling schools to tailor their offerings and communication strategies to resonate with the evolving needs and preferences of their target audience (Liu et al., 2019). This strategic alignment also applies to the internal workings and the involvement of the informed workforce which is essential for improving the overall performance of the school and its missions, both academic and organizational (Ανδρούτσου & Αναστασίου, 2018). Furthermore, the framework acknowledges that internal factors (the organization of pedagogical work, leadership effectiveness etc.) are just as important as external factors in maintaining the educational effectiveness (Bellei et al. 2019).

This overall view combines the perspective of the internal forces of the organization with the forces of the external market, which serve as a solid basis for the formulation of a sustainable school model. Such a model must acknowledge the dynamic interplay of contextual factors and continuous improvement initiatives, moving beyond singular interventions towards a complex adaptive systems perspective for sustained growth and evolution (Koh et al., 2023). This holistic approach, thus, suggests that school can maximise the use of its value propositions by structuring them around the expectations of different groups and reinforcing both internal coherence and external appeal. This holistic framework, therefore, posits that schools can optimize their sustainability by strategically aligning their value propositions with the expectations of various stakeholder groups, thereby reinforcing both internal coherence and external appeal.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research method using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The quantitative phase involved a survey instrument (multiple questions) that measures the factors identified in the conceptual framework, and a survey was administered to a sample of senior high school students while ensuring the sample size is adequate for EFA.

B. Locale of the Study

The study was conducted across the Cagayan Valley Region, specifically including one private school from each of the provinces of Isabela, Quirino, Nueva Vizcaya, and Cagayan. However, the province of Batanes was not included due to reasons of costs and accessibility.

C. Respondents of the Study

The Cagayan Valley Region (Region II) of the Philippines has a number of senior high schools in each of its five provinces (Batanes, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, and Quirino). As of School Year 2021-2022, Region II (Cagayan Valley) in the Philippines had a total of 638 schools offering Senior High School (SHS) programs. This includes 24 schools exclusively providing SHS education and 331 junior high schools offering SHS programs. Additionally, there were 141 schools offering Kindergarten to Grade 10 education, and 142 schools providing Kindergarten to Grade 12 education. The respondents of the study were Senior High School students enrolled in private schools in Cagayan Valley, Region 2, excluding Batanes (due to cost and time constraints). Selected schools for the study were senior high school students from University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao for Cagayan, Mallig Plains Colleges Inc. for the Province of Isabela, Aldersgate College Inc. for Nueva Vizcaya, and Our Lady of Lourdes School of Alipay, Quirino Province. Those chosen schools were among the established institutions in their respective provinces, which were all operating in the educational landscape for more than fifty (50) years and above. There were a total of six hundred forty (640) senior high school samples from those chosen schools in Region 2. Stratified Sampling was used.

D. Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study utilized a modified survey questionnaire, which was adopted from a previous study in Vietnam titled "Factors Affecting Secondary School Students' Choice of High School in Tra Vinh Province, Viet Nam" to gather data on the factors influencing senior high school students' school choices. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used in the study. The survey questionnaire underwent pilot testing and content validation to ensure the reliability and relevance of the items before administration to the respondents.

E. Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher first sought permission from the University Research and Innovation Office Senior Director to conduct the study. Once approval was granted, an Ethics Clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Board. After securing the clearance, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the respondents through a more targeted approach. Since the respondents are Senior High School students, the questionnaires were administered directly to their classrooms. After the data was gathered, it was analyzed and interpreted.

F. Data Analysis

The study employed a quantitative research method using exploratory factor analysis. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is a statistical technique used to reduce a large number of variables into a smaller number of factors (Taherdoost et al., 2014) and is particularly useful to identify the underlying structure of a set of variables, reduce the dimensionality of the study's data, and create new, composite variables (factors) for further analysis. Exploratory Factor Analysis was used to reduce the dimensionality of the data and identify underlying factors influencing senior high school students' school choices.

G. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical standards to ensure the protection and respect of all respondents. Each of the respondents was informed and given permission to participate. The study's purpose, objectives, and procedures were clearly explained to the participants, emphasizing that their involvement is voluntary and that

they can withdraw at any time without facing any negative consequences. The participants were informed that their contribution will be helpful for the potential enhancement of the entire educational system.

The confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were prioritized throughout the research. No identifying information was collected, and all responses were anonymized to prevent the tracing of data back to individual respondents. Collected data was securely stored, accessible only to the researchers, and destroyed after the completion of the study to maintain privacy. Results were reported in aggregate form, ensuring that no individual responses were identified

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Academic Reputation and Program Offerings Factor in Choosing a School

Indicators	Mean	Description
The admission score / passing rate of the school is high, so it is prestigious to attend the school.	3.73	Important
The school has good academic records	3.97	Important
The school has high expectations and standards for students.	3.93	Important
Students' learning outcomes are high.	3.69	Important
The school has good academic activities like contests, practicums, science research clubs.	3.98	Important
Students have chance to develop their talents, not only in scientific (academics), social and physical well-being, but also in skills development.	4.19	Important
Teachers are dedicated and earnest.	3.94	Important
The school can cultivate students' character of optimism and self- confidence.	3.83	Important
The school can combine fundamental and special curricula properly.	3.71	Important
The school offers plenty of scholarships to outstanding and disadvantaged students.	3.79	Important
Categorical Weighted Mean	3.91	Important

Table 1 describes the school's distinction as a factor in the students' choice of school. The highest mean (4.19) belongs to the opportunity to develop the students' talents across different aspects, such as scientific, social, physical, and skills development. This pertains to the students' propensity to choose a school that provides possibilities for holistic learning. Alongside this finding is the second-highest percentile (3.98), referring to the school's academic activities, like contests, practicums, and science research clubs, perhaps to allow the students to contribute to the academic success and distinction of the school. A large chunk of the findings (3.97) also suggests the importance of good academic records in the students' considerations as to their choice of school. These results affirm the findings of Pfund et al. (2016), Meyer & Cranmore (2019), and Aguado et al. (2015), which placed emphasis on the school's academic performance as an aspect to consider in the students' choice of school. Overall, the school's academic reputation, with a categorical weighted mean of 3.91, is one of the leading factors that affect the students' choice of academic institutions.

Table 2. Marketing and Branding Factor in Choosing a School

Indicators	Mean	Description
The school is well-known.	4.24	Important
The school's logo and visual identity (e.g., colors, design) are distinct in nature.	4.07	Important
The professional appearance of school materials (e.g., brochures, ID laces, signage) is appealing and unique.	4.03	Important
The school uniforms and overall brand presentation suit my perceived self-image.	3.95	Important
The social media presence of the school is engaging and visible to my personal social media accounts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok).	3.80	Important
The school website and online resources are readily available.	3.96	Important
The advertisements (e.g., posters, banners, online ads) are widespread in our town / city / province.	3.78	Important
Word-of-mouth recommendations from peers or relatives are prevalent.	3.92	Important
The school participation in public events or competitions (e.g., academic fairs, sports) is prominent in our town / city / province.	3.90	Important
School-organized outreach programs and community visibility are evident in our area / locality.	3.88	Important
The school's presence at educational expos or student orientation is done regularly.	3.94	Important
Categorical Weighted Mean	3.96	Important

Table 2 illustrates how marketing and branding plays as a factor in the choice of a school. Grossing the highest mean for this factor (4.24) is the overall familiarity of the students of the subject academic institution, which coincides with the importance of academic reputation as described in Table 1. The school's marketing and branding is also largely defined by the uniqueness of the school's logo and visual identity (4.07) and the professional appearance of school materials (4.03).

The school's identity as a factor for this study is confirmed by the study of Sun (2023), and likewise, its manner of advertising, as seen in the study of Clark et al. (2019) and in the work of Partenie (2019). In fine, with a categorical weighted mean of 3.96, the school's popularity, through its aesthetic appeal and overall desirability, plays an essential role in the students' determination of which school to enroll in.

Table 3. Influence of Peer and Family Recommendations in Choosing a School

Indicators	Mean	Description
Recommendations by teachers.	3.11	Rather Important
Advice from parents or a relative.	4.01	Important
Recommendation by an alumnus of that school (e.g. parent, brother or sister, neighbor, etc.)	3.58	Important
Lots of friends have chosen that school.	3.28	Rather Important
The school fees are affordable	3.09	Rather Important
Parents' income pushed for the choice of the school	3.11	Rather Important
Categorical Weighted Mean	3.36	Rather Important

Table 3 shows the influence of peers and family recommendations factor in the choice of schools among students. Not surprisingly, family advice from parents or relatives is the biggest consideration (4.01) in the students' enrollment to a school, followed by the recommendations by an alumnus of that school (3.58). Lots of friends choosing the school also appears to have an impact on their choice (3.28). This affirms the work of Badmus & Jita (2023), where it was found that parents' support was one of the few motivations of the students in choosing their preferred school, and similarly that of Saani & Amonoo (2021) and Andersen & Hjortskov (2019). Although the categorical weighted mean description shows that it is rather important (3.36), this intricate interplay still means that students' choices are not solely driven by rational optimization of long-term outcomes but are significantly swayed by immediate social contexts.

Table 4. Accessibility and Location Factor in Choosing a School

Indicators	Mean	Description
The school is not far away from home.	3.14	Rather Important
The school is in a town where a relative lives.	3.10	Rather Important
The school is located in a developed and modern area.	3.78	Important
Just want to attend the school which is outside region of residence.	2.84	Rather Important
Categorical Weighted Mean	3.21	Rather Important

Table 4 discusses the logistical aspect of the students' decision in choosing a school. The school's strategic location plays a vital part in swaying the students' choice, particularly if it is located in a developed and modern area (3.78). Proximity appears to be much of an issue to students, as more of them are willing to attend a school because of its closeness from home (3.14) and in a town where a relative lives (3.10). This confirms the study of (Ved & M., 2021), which found that school proximity and accessibility is an important factor in the students' choice of school, that of Acton et al. (2024) which enlisted the students' residential area as one of the key considerations, and also that of Puente et al. (2023) which placed distance as a factor for families in urban areas. Although the categorical weighted mean description shows that it is rather important (3.21), geographical proximity and ease of transit considerably influence students' decisions.

Table 5. Personal Aspirations and Career Goals Factor in Choosing a School

Indicators	Mean	Description
Learning results in junior high school are qualified to allow one to take the entrance exam to the school.	3.90	Important
Learning achievements in junior high school make one more confident to study at the school.	3.96	Important
The school has abundant and attractive extracurricular activities.	4.02	Important
The school has modern facilities for playing sports, doing scientific experiments, creating new learning products, etc.	4.02	Important
Students' performance is outstanding in competitions of sports and arts.	3.91	Important
The school organizes exciting field trips out of the province yearly.	3.11	Rather Important
Foreign teachers and volunteers are invited to help students study English and train soft skills.	3.38	Rather Important
The school has plenty of sports and art teams to take part in and to compete with other schools.	3.87	Important
Categorical Weighted Mean	3.76	Important

In Table 5, the personal aspirations and career goals of the students are detailed. Culled data shows the importance of having an abundant and attractive extracurricular activities, as having tied with modern facilities for sports, science, and the creation of learning products (4.02). This affirms the earlier claim in Table 1 that the students' desire for holistic learning is one of the most influential factors in their choice of school, especially since the students' outstanding performance in competitions of sports and arts also scored relatively high (3.91). The above-mentioned findings, which skew towards the students' respective career goals, affirm that such a factor is similar to those found in the studies of Mkude & Mubofu (2022) and Arbabi & Yeh (2024), which found that students value meaningful activities beyond academics. The need for modern facilities for sports, however, is negated by the study of Walean & Koyongian (2018), where the school's sports facilities were given less importance. A categorical weighted mean of 3.76 also conveys that this factor is important and critical for identity formation, where individuals begin to test their career aspirations through novel experiences and extracurricular choices that can significantly impact future educational and occupational trajectories.

Table 6. Community and School Culture Factor in Choosing a School

Indicators	Mean	Description
The school is a fully-equipped educational institution.	4.04	Important
The campus is nice and clean with beautiful mini scenes.	3.87	Important
The school equipment is repaired and upgraded regularly.	3.68	Important
The school has boarding facilities.	3.33	Rather Important
The school has day care facilities (medical staff and clinics).	4.14	Important
The school deals with students' problems with a positive and friendly approach.	3.79	Important
The school regularly keeps parents informed about their children's academic performance.	4.06	Important
Discipline is high in the school.	4.02	Important
The school and the community have a perfect interaction.	3.88	Important
The school organizes a lot of social activities for a better community.	3.98	Important
The school have available tuition fee discounts and scholarship grants.	4.10	Important
Categorical Weighted Mean	3.90	Important

Table 6 refers to the community and school culture as a factor in the students' choice of school. Students value the school's day care facilities, such as medical staff and clinics (4.14) The availability of scholarships and tuition fee discounts also appears to have an impact in their choice (4.10) while regularly keeping parents informed about their children's academic performance (4.06) are also considered which explains their earlier regard in the influence of their parents or a relative in Table 3. The findings are consistent with the study by Saani & Amonoo (2021), which included social network factors as a consideration in the selection of the academic institution of prospective students, and with the studies by Kabashi & Kaczmarek (2019) and Greene (2024), which have social network factors and school environment and culture as important factors. This includes the culture, the relationships between students and staff, and the values that define the school culture.

Table 7. Other Factors that Significantly Influence the Choice of School of Senior High School

Indicators	Frequency
Strand Availability and Career Fit	47
Previous Schooling in Institution	11
Religion and Values Focus	5

Aside from the indicators of tables 1 – 6 shown above which was modified survey questionnaire that was adopted from a previous study in Vietnam titled “Factors Affecting Secondary School Students’ Choice of High School in Tra Vinh Province, Viet Nam”, there are other factors that significantly influence the choice of school of senior high school that are not listed based from the respondents. These are the strand availability and career fit, which have the highest frequency (47) among all the other factors not included, wherein it relates to the availability of specific strands within educational institutions that directly impacts students’ enrollment decisions, as they often align their academic pursuits with anticipated career trajectories (Magdadar, 2020). This alignment is important because the selected strand may have a significant impact on a student’s readiness for college programs and success in their careers (Rubas, 2023).

The next is the previous education in the institution (11), meaning that students who have been educated in the same school for their junior high would find it comfortable to study in the same school and not have to face any adaptation in the new environment (Saani & Amonoo, 2021). This familiarity can help to minimize the complexities of adjusting to a new academic environment, creating a sense of continuity and predictability that is important when students are at a developmental stage. And lastly, religion and values focus (5), which relates to the pursuit of an education that reinforces the students’ spiritual and moral convictions, leading them to prioritize schools with a strong religious or values-oriented focus (Saani & Amonoo, 2021). This often translates into a preference for institutions that integrate faith into their curriculum and foster an environment conducive to spiritual development (Plante, 2020).

IV. CONCLUSION

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that the school’s academic reputation or distinction, its marketing and branding, its environment and school culture, and the personal aspiration and career goals of the students are the key factors in their preference of the academic institutions they would want to enter. Other factors, such as its accessibility and location, previous schooling in institution, as well as religion and values focus, only played a minor role in their choice of school.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publishing of this paper.

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