

## PARENTAL SCHOOL CHOICE IN THE EARLY INTERVENTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION: A PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

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### ABSTRACT

*School choice is an important decision that every parent needs to make for their school-age children, especially when it involves children with disabilities. In Malaysia, while school choice options are available to all families regardless of their socio-economic status, parents with special needs children are facing issues of limited school choices to enroll their kids for a reliable special education critically at the early intervention stage. This study is using four variables which are values/attitudes, financial capital, social capital and cognitive capital to measure the extent to which parents of special needs children engaged themselves in choosing school and whether the parents' education and socio-economic status predict the level of their participations at the early intervention stage of special education. Everyday life information seeking (ELIS) behavior (Savolainen, 1995) was adopted as the framework in the study and a set of survey questionnaires from Assefa and Stansbury (2018) were used for data collection. Responses from sixty-seven parents/caregivers of special needs children which represent different educational attainment were able to be collected throughout the study period. Using frequency analysis, the findings revealed that values/attitudes, financial capital, and social capital are significant while cognitive capital is insignificant towards school choice decisions. The outcomes of the study are expected to become an important insight for parents and caregivers of special needs children, policymakers, schools, and future researchers relating to school choice decisions.*

Keywords: Early Intervention, Parental Decisions, Special Education, School Choice, Students with Disabilities

### INTRODUCTION

Enrolling children with disabilities to formal education is obviously a very critical decision for parents. In general, there are various issues that need to be considered in choosing schools for children such as students' scores on achievement tests, teacher quality, school reputation, class size, distance and safety (Walberg, 2007), parental and public opinion and value attached to education (Maddaus, 1990), sociological and cultural factors (Bulman, 2004) and even market forces (Hastings, Weelden & Weinstein, 2007). In the context of this study, while school choice options are available to all families regardless of their socio-economic status, parents with special needs children are facing issues of limited school choices to enroll their special kids for a reliable special education critically at the early intervention stage.

Statistics in *Buku Data Pendidikan Khas*, Malaysia Ministry of Education (2018) shows that in certain years, there are gaps between increment of students' enrolment for preschool special education and the additional number of classes and teachers in the public school. Table 1 shows that the number of students' enrolment had consistently increased since 2016. However, the number of classes and teachers had shrunk. As highlighted by Walberg, 2007, class size and teachers' quality were among the factors that parents are most concerned about in allocating their special kids at the preschool.

**Table 1: Preschool students' enrolment, number of classes and number of teachers for the year 2014 to 2018**

	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Students Enrolment	132	126	123	141	128
Number of Classes	28	28	31	33	30
Number of Teachers	29	28	31	31	29

Source: *Buku Data Pendidikan Khas, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia*

By treating school choice decisions as a problematic situation in the longer arc of "way of life" and "mastery of life," Assefa and Stansbury (2018) had used four major variables in information seeking activity regarding school choice which is values/attitudes, financial capital, social capital and cognitive capital. This study aims to achieve two research objectives: (1) To investigate the level of parents' engagement in school choice decisions at the early intervention stage of special education; (2) To predict the influence of parents' education and socioeconomic status towards their level of participations in choosing school at the early intervention stage of special education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the *Undang-undang* Malaysia (2008), *Akta Kurang Upaya*, "Orang Kurang Upaya (OKU) include those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society". In *Buku Panduan Khas Kod Amali* under *Peraturan-Peraturan Pendidikan (Pendidikan Khas)*, Malaysia Ministry of Education (2013), "students with special education needs" defines as students that had been diagnosed by either the medical practitioner, ophthalmologist, audiologist or psychiatrist as students with hearing disability, visually disabled, speech disability, physical disability, learning disabilities, or multiple disabilities.

School choice is an important decision that every parent needs to make for their school-age children, especially when it involves students with disabilities (SWDs). SWDs are typically assigned to a school by their individualized education program (IEP) team. The balance of power in this placement decision tends to tilt heavily in the direction of school professionals instead of the choice of parents, particularly when parents come from racial minorities and have less social and cultural capital (Harry & Klingner, 2014). There are also multiple factors and issues that need to be considered in choosing schools for children such as students' scores on achievement tests, teacher quality, school reputation, class size, distance and safety (Walberg, 2007), parental and public opinion and value attached to education (Maddaus, 1990), sociological and cultural factors (Bulman, 2004) and even market forces (Hastings, Weelden & Weinstein, 2007).

In the context of this study, while school choice options are available to all families regardless of their socio-economic status, parents with special needs children are facing issues of limited school choices to enroll their kids for a reliable special education critically at the early intervention. Statistics in *Buku Data Pendidikan Khas*, Malaysia Ministry of Education (2018) shows that in certain years, there were gaps between increment of students' enrolment for preschool special education and the additional number of classes and teachers in the public schools. The issue of limited school choices is even more significant to parents when it is seen within the context of rural areas as compared to urban because parents do not have many options for private schools. Furthermore, the number of programs dedicated under special education and public special education schools also seems static since the past ten years. Bari, Abdullah, Abdullah and Mohd Yasin, (2016), in their findings show that there are seven themes identified practices affecting the implementation of early intervention which is the teachers' understanding of early intervention, early intervention program implementation practices, Preschool Special Education curriculum, teacher recruitment, infrastructure, collaboration and monitoring. Due to all these constraints, parents are facing a complex situation in filtering their priorities to come out with the best decision for their special children.

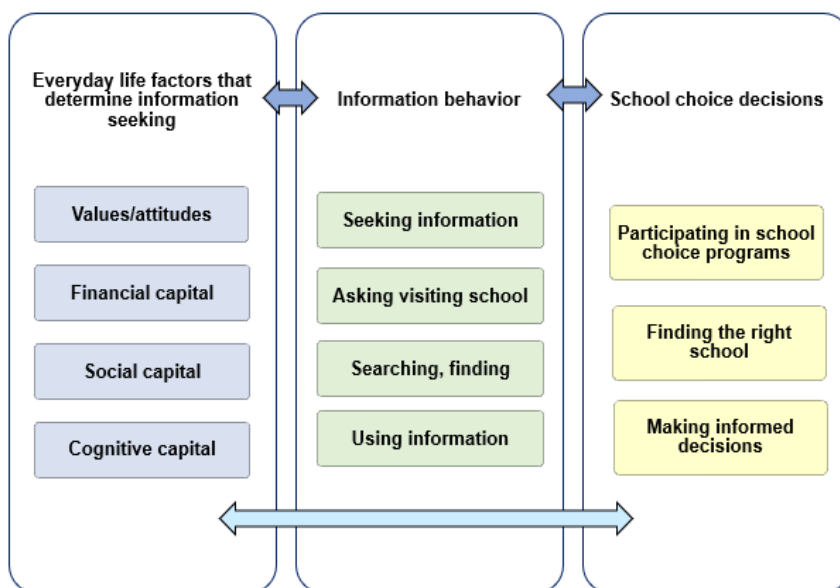
Empirical evidence shows that people who actively participated in information seeking have more information about school options than those who have not (Bulman, 2004). Research in information seeking behaviors uses theories and models to explain how people actively or passively acquire information, the type of information they acquire or trust and their preferences for information channels and sources (formal or informal sources). Traditionally, the domain of information seeking behavior research was dominated by studies that focused on formal sources of information in the context of work or task-oriented activities (Shafique & Mahmood, 2016; Choo, 2013; Halder, Roy & Chakraborty, 2010). However, recent studies suggest that much of the information behaviors practices revolve around non-work-related context such as hobbies and leisure-time practices where interpersonal and intrapersonal channels are preferred than institutional sources (Hartel, Cox, Griffin, 2016; Case, 2009; Julien & Michels, 2004; Xu, Tan & Yang, 2006).

The focus of information seeking behavior studies has been to understand the needs of different user populations and how they seek, use, and manage information for various work and non-work-related activities. In 1995, Savolainen developed a theory of everyday life information seeking (ELIS) behavior (*see Figure 1*). Based on the ELIS theory, Assefa and Stansbury (2018) then investigated on how immigrants and disadvantaged communities seek, acquire, and use information to navigate school choice policy in the city of Aurora, Colorado. These authors had been using the following four major variables as factors that explain the level of school choice participation and whether parents engage in the information seeking activity: (1) parent's attitude or value towards school choice; (2) parent's financial resources; (3) parent's social capital (social circle of friends and families); and (4) parent's cognitive capital (knowledge of school choice). Therefore, this study will be adopting the same variables to measure the extent to which parents of special needs children engaged themselves in choosing school and whether the parents' education and socioeconomic status predict the level of their participations at the early intervention stage of special education.

## METHODOLOGY

The study design is using everyday life information seeking (ELIS) behavior (Savolainen, 1995) as the framework (*see Figure 1*). ELIS behavior offers four dimensions through which to see information seeking behavior tasks: values/attitudes, financial capital, social capital, and cognitive capital. Quantitative study using survey questionnaires adopted from Assefa and Stansbury (2018) were used for data collection using multi item Likert type scale (5 scale- from strongly agree to strongly disagree). The dimension of values/attitudes, financial capital and social capital comprises of five items concerning values/attitudes, financial and social aspects of the participants. Aside from these three dimensions, the cognitive capital is represented by three items. To test the reliability and validity of the questionnaires in the context of Malaysia, the author managed to recruit 67 participants that represented the middle to high-income earners and low-income earners in order to gauge the influence of parents' education and socioeconomic status toward school choice decisions. Participants are the parents/caregivers of school-age special needs children. To reach participants from various states, the questionnaires were distributed through WhatsApp application and the authors managed to get access to participants from states such as Johor, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Sabah, Sarawak, Pulau Pinang, Perak, Kelantan, and Terengganu. Overall, the research process involved pilot tests and eventually a survey in adopting the ELIS framework.

Figure 1: Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) Framework



**FINDINGS**

**(i) PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL CHOICE**

As shown in Table 2, most parents (92 percent) participate in school choice decisions while those who did not participate were small (8 percent). It is conceivable that school choice decisions are necessary for the parents involved in this study. As New Zealand Ministry of Education (2005) claimed that parents were reported as articulating a desire to choose the best learning environment for their children and wanting to play an active part in deciding what happens to their children; they want their voice to be listened to. A follow-up question asked parents the reason(s) why they did not (did) involve in school choice decisions, Table 3 and 4 show why parents did not (did) participate in school choice decisions. Of those who responded negatively to school choice decisions as shown in Table 3, 4 participants (80 percent) indicated that they did not participate because a child (children) was (were) sent to the assigned school while 1 participant (20 percent) said that she liked the current school.

On the other hand, the positive feedbacks as in Table 4 were dominated by 38 participants (61.3 percent) with the reasons for safety, followed by 36 (58.1 percent) who said that having school in the nearest neighborhood were their main concern, 25 (40.3 percent) participated to find a better performing school while 19 (30.6 percent) were due to financial/economic reasons. One interesting result from this study revealed that only 2 participants (3.2 percent) responded that their participation was due to the child (children) has (have) completed the highest level in the current school. This suggests that concerns for safety and school distance are the dominant reasons in school choice participation in the context of the study. As found in a previous literature that keywords in seeking appropriate secondary schooling include safety, security, care, inclusivity, unconditional respect for individual worth and potential (Bagley, Woods & Woods, 2001).

**Table 2: School Choice Participation**

PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL CHOICE	FREQUENCY	(%)
Yes	62	92.0
No	5	8.0
Total	67	100.0

**Table 3: Reasons for Not Participating in School Choice**

REASONS FOR NOT PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL CHOICE	FREQUENCY	(%)
My child/children attend assigned school	4	80.0
I like the current school	1	20.0
I home-school my child/children	-	-
It does not make a difference	-	-
I do not have knowledge on school for special children in my area	-	-

**Table 4: Reasons for Participating in School Choice**

REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL CHOICE	FREQUENCY	(%)
School is in the nearest neighbourhood	36	58.1
For safety reasons	38	61.3
For financial/economic reasons	19	30.6
My child has completed previous school and need to transfer to a new school	2	3.2
To find a better performing school	25	40.3

**(ii) INFORMATION SEEKING ACTIVITY AND SCHOOL CHOICE DECISIONS**

As stated in previous sections, the aim of the study was to get the idea on information seeking practices among the parents of special needs children when making school choice decisions. The following analysis is focusing on those who indicated that they have participated in school choice decisions. As shown in Table 5, 94 percent of research participants said that they gather information when making school choice decisions. Table 6 is showing the information sources and/or where they go to find information. 76.1 percent said that they went for school visits, followed by 64.2 percent gathered information through social media like Facebook, Instagram and the like, 59.7 percent conducted research on the internet, while 49.3 percent said they placed a phone call to the school. These findings are consistent with other studies which indicate that the information seeking behavior is largely dependent on interpersonal channels (Savolainen, 1995; Assefa & Stansbury, 2018).

**Table 5: Seeking Information Before Participating in School Choice**

SEEK INFORMATION	FREQUENCY	(%)
Yes	63	94
No	4	6
Total	67	100

**Table 6: Information Sources and Channels Used**

INFORMATION SOURCES	FREQUENCY	(%)
Social media (such as Facebook, Instagram etc)	43	64.2
Chat (such as WhatsApp, Telegram etc)	31	46.3
Research on the Internet	40	59.7
Go to library	3	4.5
Read local newspapers	5	7.5
Call school	33	49.3
Visit the school	51	76.1
Visit the local education office	18	26.9

**(iii) SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS AS PREDICTORS OF INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR**

The aim of the study was to investigate whether parents of special needs children engage in information seeking tasks regarding making school choice decisions and whether other demographic and socio-economic variables explain this information seeking task. As stated earlier, Savolainen's (1995) ELIS is considered as the theoretical framework to address information seeking behavior. Savolainen's framework includes variables such as values/attitudes, as well as financial, social, and cognitive capital. The authors were adapting the four major variables as previously mentioned as factors that explain the level of school choice participation and whether parents engage in information seeking activity. In addition, the authors also relate parents' educational attainment to information seeking practice to determine whether educational achievement is positively related to participation in school choice decisions.

**(iv) PARENTS' ATTITUDE/VALUE TOWARD SCHOOL CHOICE AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR**

Savolainen's (1995) ELIS framework attached values and attitudes with information seeking activity and it determines how an individual monitors daily events and seeks information to solve specific problems. In operationalizing values and attitudes in this

study, the author adopts four measures as used by Assefa and Stansbury (2018) to determine the parents' attachment to school choice or whether they do everything in their power to participate in school choice decisions. Table 5 shows that 63 of 67 participants (90 percent) answered positively to seeking and using information, and the result for value/attitude construct to school choice is shown in Table 7. Findings in Table 7 reveals that parents have positive value/attitude towards selecting the best school for their special children with 88 percent attach great significance/importance to school choice and 82.1 percent committing every resource at their disposal to send their children to the best school. This is mainly due to the parents' concerns about their children's specific characteristics. It is claimed that child specific characteristics are significant for parents when choosing a school for their disabled child (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart, Kitching & Eloff, 2005; Wooster & Parnell, 2006).

**Table 7: Value/Attitude to School Choice**

VALUE/ATTITUDE TO SCHOOL CHOICE	[1] (%)	[2] (%)	[3] (%)	[4] (%)	[5] (%)
I attach great significance/importance to school choice	-	-	11.9	16.4	71.6
I commit every resource at my disposal to send my child to the best school	-	1.5	16.4	14.9	67.2
I do not think school choice matters for my child success	38.8	22.4	25.4	10.4	3.0
My current life situation (age, health, work, etc.) does not allow me to deliberate on school choice	37.3	11.9	16.4	16.4	17.9
I choose school based on my experience and guts	14.9	11.9	29.9	34.3	9.0

Note: [1]=Strongly Disagree, [2]=Disagree, [3]=Neither Agree nor Disagree, [4]=Agree, [5]=Strongly Agree

**(v) PARENTS' FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR**

Individuals' material capital (such as money) is one of the elements that parents will consider in seeking information regarding school choice decisions where they enroll their children. Some parents prefer to send their children to the school which is the nearest to their residence. However, financial resources are a vital point related to school choice decisions. Table 8 shows the extent to which parents' financial conditions determine their school choices decisions. Findings revealed that 76.1 percent of the respondents agree to commit whatever resources required for their children's education. Also, 76.1 percent of parents agree that financial resources determine where they send their kids. Besides that, financial assistance plays an important role in assisting parents sending their children to preferred schools. As highlighted by Krafft, Elbadawy and Sieverding (2019), inability to borrow against future income means that families may be constrained by fees or other costs when making their school choices. It was proved that 65.7 percent of parents agree that assistance from a third party like *Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat* has helped them in handling the issue. Succinctly, looking into the linkage between financial conditions and school choice decisions, parents are putting priority on the best school option for their special need's children over financial matters.

**Table 8: Parents Financial Conditions and School Choice Decisions**

PARENTS FINANCIAL CAPITAL	[1] (%)	[2] (%)	[3] (%)	[4] (%)	[5] (%)
I commit whatever resource is required for my child education	1.5	4.5	17.9	25.4	50.7
I buy/rent a house to a neighbourhood where I would like to send my child school	25.4	20.9	26.9	14.9	11.9
My financial resource determines where I send my child	1.5	3.0	19.4	22.4	53.7
I do not have the means to send my child to the best school I would have liked	26.9	28.4	20.9	11.9	11.9
Financial assistance from the third party like <i>Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat</i> somehow helps me sending my child to my school choice	-	6.0	28.4	23.9	41.8

Note: [1]=Strongly Disagree, [2]=Disagree, [3]=Neither Agree nor Disagree, [4]=Agree, [5]=Strongly Agree

**(vi) PARENTS' SOCIAL CAPITAL AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR**

Lin (1999), claimed that embedding resources in social networks will enhance the outcomes of actions: it facilitates the flow of information; may exert influence on the agents who play a critical role in decisions; and as certifications of the individual's social credentials. In this study, a parent's social capital is described in terms of parents' contact networks such as families and friends. Therefore, in the context of school choice decisions, this factor through items such as whether parents rely on a social support

system to ask or seek advice when it comes to school choice decisions has been operationalized. The results in Table 9 shows the extent to which parents rely on interpersonal channels as chief sources of information. The findings show that 71.6 percent of respondents agree to which they are seeking information through friends and social media, while 62.6 percent decide on school choice decisions by getting advice from teachers/officers in charge of special education. Further, the results also revealed that 71.6 percent of respondents seek advice from friends while 56.7 percent respondents consult with their family members when it comes to school choice decisions. Meaning to say that by relating parents' social capital with information seeking behaviour in this study, the finding is somewhat significant.

**Table 9: Parents' social capital and school choice decisions**

<b>PARENTS SOCIAL CAPITAL</b>	<b>[1]</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>[2]</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>[3]</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>[4]</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>[5]</b> <b>(%)</b>
I get advice from friends about school choice options	3.0	6.0	19.4	34.3	37.3
I consult with family members when it comes to school choice decisions	3.0	13.4	26.9	31.3	25.4
Siblings follow brother or sister to enroll in the same school	28.4	19.4	17.9	14.9	19.4
I use social media to get opinion about school choice options	7.5	3.0	17.9	37.3	34.3
I get advice from teachers/officers in charge of special education on school choice options	1.5	6.0	29.9	31.3	31.3

Note: [1]=Strongly Disagree, [2]=Disagree, [3]=Neither Agree nor Disagree, [4]=Agree, [5]=Strongly Agree

**(vii) PARENTS' COGNITIVE CAPITAL AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR**

The following empirical results linked the ELIS practices of cognitive capital and information behaviour among parents. According to Noble, Blight, Fajth and Woodhouse (2016), the cognitive capital represents the complete set of intellectual skills (i.e reasoning, problem solving and creative thinking) as well as those non-cognitive and social-emotional. One with cognitive orientation prefers current publications, reads newspapers, watches television programs, and listens to radio programs reporting of current affairs (Savolainen, 1995). However, by linking parents' cognitive orientation and information search in this research seems insignificant. As shown in Table 10, 47.8 percent of participants had neutral knowledge in choosing school for their special need's children. This can be related with parents' information seeking behaviour where most of them are rarely read, ask, and do research about school choice options before enrolling their children. Results for this section also show that parents with reliable educational background and experiences made their own school choice decision (50.7 percent). This result displays parents with good educational background and experiences tend to consider many factors such as teacher quality, curriculum offering, and other value-added elements when choosing their desired schools.

**Table 10: Parents' cognitive capital and information seeking activity**

<b>PARENTS COGNITIVE CAPITAL</b>	<b>[1]</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>[2]</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>[3]</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>[4]</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>[5]</b> <b>(%)</b>
I have adequate knowledge of the different school choice options		7.5	47.8	32.8	7.5
I base school choice decisions on my own educational background and experiences	7.5	7.5	34.3	35.8	14.9
I read, ask, and do research about school choice options before enrolling my child	-	40.3	59.7	-	-

Note: [1]=Strongly Disagree, [2]=Disagree, [3]=Neither Agree nor Disagree, [4]=Agree, [5]=Strongly Agree

**(viii) PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND SCHOOL CHOICE PARTICIPATION**

In conjunction to the cognitive capital dimension of ELIS framework, the questionnaires were designed by including the relevancy of parents' educational attainment with the school choice participation. Referring to Table 2, many of the respondents which is 62 parents (92 percent) out of 67 participated in the school choice decision. Parents who contributed to the school choice selection were then inquired on their highest education achievement and finding is shown in Table 11, 92 percent of parents with various educational attainments (from SPM to professional certificate) had participated in the school choice decisions. The statistics revealed concerns among the parents regarding the school choice of their special needs children regardless of their own educational background with respondents among the undergraduate degree lead the score with 37.1 percent, followed by diploma 27.4 percent and SPM 16.2 percent.

**Table 11: Educational attainment and the level of school choice participation**

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	PARTICIPATE IN SCHOOL CHOICE DECISIONS		
	YES	NO	TOTAL
Professional certificate	3 (4.8%)	-	3 (4.5%)
Postgraduate degree	8 (12.9%)	-	8 (11.9%)
Undergraduate degree	23 (37.1%)	2 (40%)	25 (37.3%)
Diploma	17 (27.4%)	1 (20%)	18 (26.9%)
STPM	1 (1.6%)	-	1 (1.5%)
SPM	10 (16.2%)	2 (40%)	12 (17.9%)
Total	62	5	67

**(ix) PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR**

Previously, respondents were asked on the information seeking activity as shown in Table 5. The outcome indicates that 63 of 67 research participants (94 percent) gathered information before selecting appropriate schools for their children. Respondents were further asked on their educational achievement and the result is presented in Table 12. The result represents that even respondents with different educational attainments, gathering information is important for the school selection of their disabled children. Precisely, respondents among the undergraduate lead with 36.5 percent, followed by diploma 31.7 percent and SPM 15.9 percent. The statistic says that regardless of parents' educational attainment, information seeking activities still take place when it comes to the issue of school choice decisions.

**Table 12: Educational attainment and information seeking**

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	SEEK INFORMATION		
	YES	NO	TOTAL
Professional certificate	3 (4.8%)	-	3 (4.5%)
Postgraduate degree	6 (9.5%)	1 (25%)	7 (10.4%)
Undergraduate degree	23 (36.5%)	2 (50%)	25 (37.3%)
Diploma	20 (31.7%)	-	20 (29.9%)
STPM	1 (1.6%)	-	1 (1.5%)
SPM	10 (15.9%)	1 (25%)	11 (16.4%)
Total	63	4	67

**CONCLUSIONS**

The aim of the study was to investigate whether parents of special needs children engage in information seeking tasks regarding making school choice decisions and whether other demographic and socio-economic variables explain this information seeking tasks. This study was able to find answers to several questions, including to what extent parents of special needs children participate in school choice decisions; how much of the decisions were mediated by information seeking activities; and how significant does demographic and socio-economic variables influence their decisions through Savolainen's (1995) ELIS framework. The results reveal that most research participants (92 percent) were engaged in school choice decisions and the interpersonal channels had become their main information sources (76.1 percent for school visits; 64.2 percent through social media; 49.3 percent place a phone call to the school). It means that parents of special needs children would do everything in their power to see their children succeed in school despite of their limited capacities in performing some of the learning activities.

ELIS behavior offers four dimensions through which to see information seeking behavior tasks: values/attitudes, financial capital, social capital, and cognitive capital. The study found that parents have positive value/attitude towards selecting the best school for their special children with 88 percent attach great significance/importance to school choice and 82.1 percent committing every resource at their disposal to send their children to the best school. The financial conditions dimension revealed that 76.1 percent of the respondents agree to commit whatever resources required for their children's education, whereas another 76.1 percent parent agree that financial resources determine where they send their kids. In the regard of social capital, the findings show that 71.6 percent of respondents agree to which they are seeking information through friends and social media, while 62.6 percent decide on school choice decisions by getting advice from teachers/officers in charge of special education. Conversely, the results for cognitive capital dimension seem doubtful with 47.8 percent of participants having neutral knowledge in choosing school for their special need's children. In conclusion, the findings of this study were mixed: that parents' participation in school choice decisions was high; parents engage in information seeking tasks before enrolling their special needs children in school; and parents' educational attainment has an impact towards school choice and information seeking activities.

The outcomes of this study are expected to become a significant insight to parents and caregivers of special needs children, schools, and future researchers. Parents and caregivers need some guidance on what to consider when enrolling their special needs children especially at the early intervention stage since this is the starting point of the children's cognitive development in formal education. Policymakers, schools, and other learning providers should become more alert on the criteria that the parents are looking for in placing their special needs children for formal education. By taking note of these aspects, learning providers will be able to prepare the necessary and better infrastructures, skills, and curriculum to fulfil the parents' expectations. Further, other researchers will be awakened to explore this area of discussion for future research. This is important because studies on the area of special education in Malaysian context are still under-explored.

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