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Educational Service Quality and Parents' School-Choice Intentions: Understanding Their Strong Relationship in Public Elementary Education

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ABSTRACT

Educational service quality is an important consideration in parents' decisions to select elementary schools. Beyond academic performance, parents evaluate institutional services through the professionalism of school personnel, administrative management, facilities, and responsiveness to students' and families' needs. This study aims to examine the relationship between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose public elementary schools. A quantitative correlational approach was employed involving 100 parents of elementary school students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistics and non-parametric correlation tests. Kendall's tau-b and Spearman's rho were used to examine the relationship between the two variables because the data did not meet the normality assumption. The findings indicate a positive, statistically significant, and exceptionally strong relationship between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose public elementary schools. Kendall's tau-b produced a correlation coefficient of 0.995, while Spearman's rho reached 1.000, with both tests yielding $p < 0.001$. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening educational service quality through professional human resources, effective service management, adequate facilities, and responsive communication to maintain parental confidence and support school-choice decisions.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational quality has become an important consideration for families and communities because schools shape children's knowledge, character, social development, and future opportunities (Bekele & Kenea, 2024; Harti, 2025). Parents increasingly evaluate schools not only through academic outcomes but also through the quality of services provided at school. This concern is

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particularly relevant to public elementary schools, which serve as the first educational environment for many children and are expected to provide accessible, equitable, and reliable services. Although national education standards establish minimum expectations, the public assessment of school quality is also influenced by interactions, facilities, communication, safety, and responsiveness to family needs (Fikri et al., 2025; Nicholson, 2023). These experiences can strengthen or weaken confidence in a school. Therefore, examining how educational service quality relates to parents' intention to choose a public elementary school is important for continuously improving institutional accountability efforts and sustaining public trust.

Educational service quality can be understood through the service quality perspective, which evaluates the extent to which service delivery meets or exceeds users' expectations. In this study, the concept can be examined through five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Tangibles concern the condition of facilities and learning environments; reliability refers to the school's ability to provide promised services consistently; responsiveness concerns the willingness to assist students and parents; assurance reflects competence, courtesy, and the creation of trust; and empathy refers to individual attention to users' needs (Mahirah et al., 2026; Putri et al., 2026). Parents' intention to choose a school represents a behavioral intention, namely a person's readiness or likelihood to undertake a choice. This intention may be shaped by evaluations of school services, perceived benefits, social influence, and parents' perceived ability to access the school.

Despite the important public responsibility of state elementary schools, maintaining parents' confidence presents a challenge. Families may encounter differences in classroom learning, teacher communication, administrative procedures, student safety, health services, school facilities, and the availability of nutritious food. These elements form a service experience beyond the delivery of lessons. Parents compare schools and expect transparent information, respectful treatment, prompt responses, and consistent attention to children's needs. In areas where several schools operate within the same district, such as Diwek, Jombang, the availability of alternatives may make families more attentive to service quality when selecting a school. Public schools operate within funding and regulation arrangements that limit arbitrary charges, making non-financial service quality important (Aritonang et al., 2026; Wahyuningtyas et al., 2026). Consequently, schools need to understand whether their service performance corresponds with parents' expectations and influences their choice.

Previous research on educational service quality has examined how school facilities, teaching services, administrative support, teacher competence, and school–family communication shape users' overall evaluations of educational

institutions. A related stream of research has considered parents' school-choice decisions through perceived quality, reputation, accessibility, trust, and recommendations from other families (Djazilan et al., 2023; Rahayu et al., 2025). These strands indicate that school choice is not determined solely by tuition costs or academic considerations; it also involves parents' experiences and perceptions of the services surrounding children's education. However, these areas are often discussed separately, with service quality assessed as an institutional performance issue and school choice treated as a matter of parental preference. Connecting the two concepts is necessary to clarify whether the quality of services delivered by public elementary schools is associated with parents' intention to select those schools.

A further limitation in this field concerns the tendency to treat educational service users as a single group, even though students and parents experience school services differently (Lewis et al., 2024; Melvin et al., 2026). Students receive learning and support services directly, whereas parents assess the institution through communication, information, safety assurances, administrative assistance, and their children's experiences. Parents therefore function as external stakeholders whose confidence may affect school selection and recommendations to other families. In addition, findings from private-school settings cannot automatically explain parental decisions concerning public elementary schools, where access, affordability, and public-service obligations create a different context. Evidence focused on public elementary schools locally remains particularly useful for understanding this relationship in its specific institutional setting (Ko, 2024; Manishimwe et al., 2025). This study addresses that need by examining parents' perceptions of service quality and their intention to choose public elementary schools.

The novelty of this study lies in positioning educational service quality as a factor associated with parents' intention to choose public elementary schools, rather than limiting quality assessment to academic achievement or internal school management. It considers the school as a service-providing institution whose performance is experienced through both learning activities and supporting services, including facilities, safety, health support, administration, and communication with parents. The study places parents at the center of the analysis because they participate in school-selection decisions while remaining important partners in the educational process. By focusing on public elementary schools in Diwek District, Jombang, the research provides evidence that may help schools identify service dimensions relevant to parental choice. Addressing this issue is important for strengthening service improvement, institutional responsiveness, and community confidence in public education.

This study aims to examine the relationship between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose public elementary schools in Diwek District, Jombang. It addresses the research problem: is educational service quality related to parents' intention to select these schools? The argument is that parents are more likely to consider a public elementary school when they perceive its services as dependable, responsive, safe, supportive, and attentive to children's and families' needs. In this regard, stronger service quality is expected to correspond with a stronger intention to choose the school. It proposes a positive relationship between educational service quality and parents' school-choice intention. This proposition provides a basis for testing and may offer practical insight for school leaders seeking to improve services and maintain sustainable relationships with parents and community.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose public elementary schools. A quantitative approach was selected because the research measures both variables through structured responses and determines the direction and strength of their relationship (Bellei et al., 2025; Cuddy et al., 2025). The correlational design is appropriate because the study does not manipulate school services or introduce an experimental treatment; instead, it examines parents' existing perceptions and intentions. Educational service quality is treated as the independent variable, while parents' intention to choose a public elementary school is the dependent variable. Data are collected at one point in time, making the study cross-sectional. This design enables the researcher to test the proposed relationship systematically, although the findings are interpreted as associations rather than evidence of causation.

The research was conducted in public elementary schools across Diwek District, Jombang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. This location was selected because the district has numerous public elementary schools, providing a relevant setting for examining how parents evaluate educational services when considering school choices (Dai & Tan, 2025; Roda & Sattin-Bajaj, 2024). The presence of multiple schools within the same administrative area also allows the study to capture parental perceptions across different school environments while maintaining a defined geographical scope. The research focuses on parents or guardians whose children are enrolled in, or are eligible to enroll in, public elementary schools in the district, according to the inclusion criteria. This setting is relevant because parents assess classroom instruction alongside supporting services, facilities, communication, safety, and administrative responsiveness. The location therefore provides an appropriate context for addressing the research objective.

The target population comprises parents or legal guardians associated with public elementary schools in Diwek District. The population and sampling frame should be established using enrolment records and eligible parents across all participating schools. Respondents are selected according to inclusion criteria, such as being a parent or guardian of an elementary-school-aged child and having sufficient experience to evaluate school services. A [sampling technique] is used to recruit participants, while the sample size is determined through [sample-size procedure] based on population size and analytical requirements. Where several schools are involved, respondents should be drawn from participating schools transparently. The final sample consists of [number] parents or guardians. The sampling procedure and sample-size determination should be reported clearly to support the representativeness and reproducibility of the research.

Data are collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to eligible parents or guardians in printed form or online. The questionnaire measures educational service quality and parents' intention to choose a public elementary school. Service quality items cover tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, while school-choice intention items assess parents' willingness, consideration, and likelihood of selecting a school. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Before data collection, the instrument is reviewed for clarity and relevance and tested for validity and reliability. Analysis begins by checking questionnaire completeness, coding responses, and preparing the dataset. Descriptive statistics summarize respondent characteristics and variable responses clearly. Finally, the relationship is tested using Pearson correlation if assumptions are met, or Spearman rank correlation otherwise, as appropriate (Roda & Sattin-Bajaj, 2024; Ruth et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondent Characteristics

The study involved 100 respondents who provided information regarding their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, including gender, age, income level, employment status, length of employment, and educational attainment. In terms of gender, the respondents were predominantly female, comprising 59 individuals (63%), while male respondents accounted for 35 individuals (37%). Six respondents did not provide information regarding their gender. Regarding age, most respondents were between 35 and 50 years old, accounting for 61 individuals (61%). Respondents aged 20–34 years represented

22 individuals (22%), while four respondents (4%) were older than 51 years. One respondent (1%) was younger than 20 years, and 12 respondents did not report their age.

In terms of income, the largest group consisted of respondents earning IDR 1,100,000–3,000,000 per month, representing 42 individuals (42%). Meanwhile, 25 respondents (25%) reported monthly incomes below IDR 1,000,000, and 17 respondents (17%) earned between IDR 3,100,000 and IDR 5,000,000. Sixteen respondents did not provide income information. Regarding employment status, non-civil servant employees constituted the largest category, with 77 respondents (77%), whereas civil servants accounted for four respondents (4%). Based on length of employment, 32 respondents (32%) had more than 11 years of experience, followed by 15 respondents (15%) with 6–10 years, 14 respondents (14%) with 1–5 years, and three respondents (3%) with less than one year. In terms of educational attainment, 71 respondents (71%) had completed junior or senior secondary education, 11 (11%) held a bachelor's degree, one (1%) held a master's degree, and one (1%) held a doctoral degree, while 16 respondents did not provide their educational information.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to identify the central tendency, dispersion, and distribution characteristics of the two research variables, namely educational service quality (X) and parents' intention to choose a public elementary school (Y). The educational service quality variable recorded a mean score of 161.43, a median of 162.00, and a standard deviation of 15.07, with a maximum possible score of 183. The mean score represented approximately 88.21% of the maximum score, indicating that respondents generally reported high evaluations of educational service quality in public elementary schools across Diwek District. The relatively close values of the mean and median indicate that the central tendency of the scores was concentrated around 162. Furthermore, the skewness value of -0.331 indicates a slightly negatively skewed distribution, suggesting that respondents' scores tended to cluster toward the higher end of the measurement scale.

Meanwhile, parents' intention to choose a public elementary school recorded a mean score of 313.91 and a median of 314.50, with observed scores ranging from 240 to 356. The difference between the mean and median was relatively small, indicating that the central distribution of respondents' scores was concentrated around 314. The mean score reflects a relatively high level of parents' intention to choose or continue utilizing educational services provided by public elementary schools in Diwek District. These descriptive results provide an overview of the distribution and general characteristics of both research variables based on the responses collected from the 100 participants.

Classical Assumption Tests

Normality and linearity tests were conducted to examine the statistical characteristics of the research data and determine the appropriate procedure for hypothesis testing. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests for educational service quality (X) and parents' intention to choose (Y) produced statistical values of 0.139 and 0.135, respectively, with significance values of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test applied to the unstandardized residuals produced an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate that the research data did not follow a normal distribution and that the residuals also failed to meet the normality assumption.

The linearity test produced a Deviation from Linearity significance value of 0.038 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the relationship between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose did not satisfy the linearity assumption. The results of both assumption tests demonstrate that the data did not meet the requirements for conventional parametric correlation analysis. Therefore, the hypothesis was tested using non-parametric statistical procedures. Kendall's tau-b and Spearman's rho correlation analyses were subsequently employed to determine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of the relationship between the two research variables.

Hypothesis Testing

Following the assumption tests, non-parametric correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose public elementary schools in Diwek District. Two statistical procedures, namely Kendall's tau-b and Spearman's rho, were applied to assess the correlation coefficient and its statistical significance. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Non-Parametric Correlation Analysis

Correlation Test	Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Result
Kendall's tau-b	Educational Service Quality and Parents' Intention to Choose	0.995	0.000	Significant
Spearman's rho	Educational Service Quality and Parents' Intention to Choose	1.000	0.000	Significant

Source: Primary Data Processing (2026).

Table 2 presents the results of the non-parametric correlation analyses between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose public

elementary schools. The Kendall's tau-b test produced a correlation coefficient of 0.995 with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, the Spearman's rho test generated a correlation coefficient of 1.000 with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). Both statistical tests indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The Kendall's tau-b coefficient demonstrates an exceptionally strong positive correlation, while the Spearman's rho coefficient indicates a perfect positive rank correlation. The positive direction of both coefficients indicates that higher educational service quality scores correspond to higher parents' intention-to-choose scores. Based on these results, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted, indicating a statistically significant positive relationship between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose public elementary schools in Diwek District.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate a positive and statistically significant relationship between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose public elementary schools in Diwek District, Jombang. The correlation coefficients obtained from Kendall's tau-b (0.995) and Spearman's rho (1.000) indicate an exceptionally strong association between the two variables. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that service ethics, service excellence, and institutional responsiveness contribute to positive consumer perceptions and stronger intentions to use educational services (Chami Lindsay, 2025; Singer, 2025). The strength of this relationship suggests that parents' school-choice intentions are closely associated with their evaluations of the services provided by schools. From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the relevance of service quality concepts in educational management, demonstrating that institutional performance is evaluated not only through academic outcomes but also through the overall experiences and services received by students and their families.

The relationship between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose can be understood through five service quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These dimensions provide an integrated framework for understanding how parents evaluate educational institutions through facilities, administrative services, teacher interactions, communication, and attention to students' needs (Csíkos et al., 2024; Lenhoff et al., 2026). The findings indicate that service quality is not merely determined by the availability of physical facilities but also by the consistency and responsiveness of services delivered by school personnel. Reliable administrative procedures, responsive communication, professional teacher

conduct, and supportive learning environments constitute important elements of parents' overall service evaluations. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of friendly, responsive, and attentive services in developing customer satisfaction and loyalty. The theoretical implication is that these dimensions should be understood as interconnected components of educational service quality.

The descriptive findings provide further insight into the condition of educational service quality in public elementary schools across Diwek District. The mean score of 161.43, median of 162.00, and standard deviation of 15.07 indicate that respondents generally provided high evaluations of the services received. These results reflect the importance of institutional governance, teacher and administrative staff performance, and supporting facilities in shaping educational service experiences. From an educational management perspective, these findings highlight the importance of coordinating institutional governance, human resource competence, and instructional practices. School management needs to ensure that academic and non-academic activities are organized effectively, while teachers and administrative personnel maintain professional conduct and responsive communication (Csíkos et al., 2024; Debs et al., 2023). The practical implication is that school leaders should regularly evaluate service performance, identify weaknesses, and implement continuous improvements to maintain service quality and respond effectively to parents' expectations.

Parents' intention to choose public elementary schools is reflected in their willingness to enroll their children, continue using educational services, and recommend schools to other families. The descriptive results show a mean score of 313.91 and a median of 314.50, indicating a relatively high level of parental intention. This finding illustrates the importance of parental evaluations in educational decision-making, particularly when families consider different school alternatives. Positive experiences involving teachers, administrative personnel, facilities, and communication may strengthen parents' willingness to select a particular institution. Furthermore, positive word-of-mouth communication can become an important channel through which parents share their experiences with other families. This finding extends the understanding of school-choice intention by highlighting the role of interpersonal communication and institutional trust. Practically, public elementary schools should strengthen parental confidence through transparent information, consistent communication, and meaningful parental involvement in school activities.

The findings also reveal an important contextual distinction between educational institutions and other service sectors (Guo et al., 2025; Zhong, 2024). Previous studies in business settings have sometimes reported that service quality does not necessarily produce a direct improvement in customer loyalty,

indicating that consumer responses may depend on additional factors. In contrast, the present findings demonstrate an exceptionally strong positive association between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose public elementary schools. This difference may reflect the distinctive nature of educational services, in which parents consider children's development, safety, learning experiences, and long-term educational opportunities. The practical implication is that public schools should not rely exclusively on their institutional status or affordability to maintain public confidence. Instead, they need to demonstrate service excellence through effective governance, professional personnel, appropriate learning approaches, and constructive relationships with parents. Institutional reputation should emerge from actual service performance rather than promotional communication alone.

The principal contribution of this research is its empirical examination of the relationship between educational service quality and parents' intention to choose public elementary schools within a public education context. The findings extend the application of service quality concepts to educational management by positioning parents as important external stakeholders whose perceptions are associated with school-choice intentions. Theoretically, the study provides evidence supporting the relevance of service quality in understanding parental educational decisions. Practically, it provides school principals and education administrators with a basis for strengthening institutional governance, improving teacher and administrative staff performance, maintaining adequate facilities, and developing responsive communication with parents (Nicholson, 2023; Zhong, 2024). Nevertheless, the correlational design and geographical focus limit causal interpretation and broader generalization. Future research should examine additional factors, including institutional reputation, parental satisfaction, trust, and school accessibility, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of parental school-choice behavior. These implications emphasize the importance of continuous service improvement in sustaining public confidence in elementary education.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that educational service quality has a positive, significant, and exceptionally strong relationship with parents' intention to choose public elementary schools in Diwek District, Jombang. The key lesson is that parents' school-choice decisions are closely associated with their perceptions of institutional service quality, particularly the professionalism of school personnel, effective service management, and responsiveness to students' and parents' needs. This study contributes to the field of educational management by extending the application of service quality concepts to public elementary

education and highlighting parents' perceptions as an important consideration in understanding school-choice intentions. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its correlational design and geographical scope, which restrict causal interpretation and the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve broader geographical coverage and examine additional factors, such as parental satisfaction, institutional reputation, trust, and school accessibility. The practical implications emphasize that public elementary school administrators should continuously strengthen human resource professionalism, improve public service management, maintain responsive communication, and develop services that address the needs and expectations of students and parents.

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