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## PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to explain the expectations parents have in sending their children to study in international schools in Nonthaburi, Thailand, in terms of teaching and learning courses, management reputation, the building location, and the schools' adaptation to the digital age. A qualitative approach was employed as a research strategy. Purposive sampling was used in in-depth interviews. The data were analysed using content analysis. The results showed that parents have expectations in sending children to study in international schools in the digital age, in Nonthaburi, Thailand, in four aspects. For teaching and learning courses, parents expect that these courses will teach students to be creative and assertive. For the management reputation, parents expect that the school will have a good reputation with a quality of teaching that is reliable. They expect a good image of effective and clear management policies. For the building location, parents expect to have a safe building with sufficient facilities. For the adaptation to the digital age, parents expect that there will be lessons on how to use electronic devices and various online media. Children should be taught how to avoid dangers from using them. Children will get the opportunity to use modern technological equipment. This study may be beneficial to education business groups and international schools, which can use data from the research in planning, improving, or formulating business strategies, as well as developing the education system to adjust to improvements in technology and beyond.*

**Keywords:** parental expectations, international schools, digital age, Thailand, basic education

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## INTRODUCTION

Education in the twenty-first century is critical. Moreover, in the digital era, there is a growing trend of international schools (Bunnell, 2021; Limna et al., 2022). These have a clear goal, which is to promote education in a global environment that is not tied to any particular country's educational system (Soisuwan & Chayanuvat, 2019). The first international school was established in the late nineteenth century to support the children of multinational businesspeople, private organisation volunteers, and embassy staff who were working outside their home countries. Credits earned from subjects taken at international schools can be transferred to further studies in their home countries. Early on, English or French was used as the language of instruction and communication in international schools. In summary, the market for international education was thus focused on providing ongoing opportunities for children who had to follow their families abroad to continue their education. Previously, few people made use of this service (Sylvester, 2002). International schools in Thailand are open for teaching from kindergarten, primary, and secondary education. They are supervised by the Ministry of Education's Office of Private Education. The majority of teachers come from countries where English is the native language, as well as countries with a reputation for being leaders in education and teacher professional development, such as England, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, and South Africa. According to the Education Act, in 2022, there are a number of international schools in Nonthaburi province, Thailand, with more and more international schools expected to open, demonstrating a growing need for children to be enrolled in such schools (Soisuwan & Chayanuvat, 2019). Parents in the digital era have higher expectations for their children's school choices than in the past because they can search for information more widely, broadening the scope of study, and send their children to international schools. Tuition fees for an international school are higher than in a normal school because of the need to hire personnel from other countries to teach students from various cultural backgrounds in Thailand (Deveney, 2005; Karong'o, 2014). In the digital age, education contributes to the advancement and development of human resources. As a result, selecting a school for your child is extremely important. It is critical for many parents to give careful thought to the school where their child will be enrolled. This study aims to explain the expectations parents have in sending their children to study in international schools in Nonthaburi, Thailand, in terms of teaching and learning courses, management reputation, the building location, and the schools' adaptation to the digital age.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the current digital age, the world has become borderless. People can move from one place to another much more easily, resulting in an increase in the popularity of international schools. In addition, in today's world, international schools are rapidly expanding in every country because it is widely accepted that those who graduate from an international school will have received a good education through the use of a foreign language as a means of instruction, the most common of which is English. International schools are also becoming increasingly popular among parents as an alternative to attending a local government school or a boarding school in another country that is far away from their families. Furthermore, the importance of education and the demand for English contribute to the popularity of international schools. They have massive support in Thailand from the government, the private sector, and foreign investors (Soisuwan & Chayanuvat, 2019). International schools, particularly those that follow American, British, and Canadian curricula, primarily teach in English so many international school students speak English fluently and confidently. Furthermore, international school students are encouraged to learn a second and third language, encouraging them to become polyglots at a young age (Dagoon, 2005; Nagrath, 2011; Lehman, 2022). Moreover, international schools offer a wide range of curricula and programs that are adaptable in terms of preparing students for future careers. Because these subjects are specialised and focused, students can ensure that they are appropriate for their tertiary education and intended careers. At the same time, this allows students to participate in other classes and activities that they find interesting (Brouwer et al., 2020; Öztapak, 2022). When selecting an international school for a child, it is critical to understand exactly what to look for. A truly great school is a confluence of factors such as its teachers,

learning environment, personal development opportunities, academic outcomes, and university destinations for students. A great international school should prioritise academic excellence; parents should look for a school with an internationally focused curriculum. It is also critical to select a school that can attract and retain the world's best teachers by providing professional development opportunities and a global network for teachers to share best practices. Along with academic rigour, students should have access to a variety of opportunities outside of traditional education. It is essential to look for a school that collaborates with professional organisations to transform learning and instil in students a sense of adventure and compassion for making the world a better place (World School, 2021).

Parents are treated as customers in the education industry (Ogunnaike, Tairat, & Emmanuel, 2014). Customers are logical beings: if they have a positive buying experience, they perceive it as a gain and return to repurchase. If they have a negative experience, they perceive it as a loss and avoid returning. Thus, customers' expectations are based on previous experiences. If they have had a good experience, they will most likely expect the same level of satisfaction (Pungbangkradee & Eamoraphan, 2015). The term "parental expectations" has been defined in a variety of ways. Most researchers define parental expectations as realistic beliefs or judgments that parents have about their children's future achievement as reflected in course grades, the highest level of schooling attained, or college attendance. Parental expectations are based on an evaluation of the child's academic abilities as well as the resources available to support a given level of achievement. Most researchers operationalize parental expectations by asking parents "how far" they believe their child will progress in school or forecasting what grades a child will receive that year. Researchers have occasionally enquired about student perceptions of parental expectations as a proxy for parental expectations themselves (Jamwal & Singh, 2018).

Siripipattanakul et al. (2022) explored the impact of the marketing mix (4Cs) on Thai people's decision to pursue an online master's degree. Students pursuing an online master's degree ranked cost as the most important factor, followed by convenience, communication, and customer (student) service. The marketing mix (4Cs) should be considered by educators and program directors because these factors influence the decision to pursue an online master's degree. Moreover, Kaewbuadee and Kraiwanit (2022) investigated the factors influencing willingness to pay for children's education in the digital era in Bangkok and vicinity in Thailand. It is recommended that both parents and children be educated on the use of digital media for the sake of application. Developing learning and giving advice to children is critical for building understanding and motivating parent-child interactions. Technology can also be modified to better suit the lifestyles of city dwellers and members of the community. In addition, Siripipattanakul et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) model (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behaviour control) and its impact on students' decision to pursue an online degree during the COVID-19 pandemic, using perceived effectiveness as a moderator. Perceived effectiveness is a significant mediator between the TPB model and the intention to choose an online degree. The attitude and subjective norm have the greatest influence on perceived effectiveness.

Furthermore, Turra and Melinda (2021) investigated the entrepreneurial intentions of high school students who are and are not enrolled in entrepreneurship education at an international school. Subjective norm, personal attitude, and perceived behavioural control all influenced the students' entrepreneurial intentions when they participated in a co-curricular activity, "Enterprising", versus students who did not participate in this activity. There was a significant difference in entrepreneurship intentions between those involved in "Enterprising" and those who were not. Pungbangkradee and Eamoraphan (2015) investigated parents' expectations and satisfaction with school management at Nopparatpattanasas School in Bangkok, Thailand. The hypotheses research discovered a significant difference between parents' expectation and satisfaction with school management, and the four dimensions, as well as a significant difference between parents' expectation and satisfaction with school management at both the kindergarten and elementary levels. In terms of human resource management and general management, the majority of parents were pleased with the school administration. According to Chanchairassamee (2011), a prestigious school reputation, the environment, the curriculum, teaching and learning, and personnel were all deciding factors for parents. Parents preferred teachers and instructional assistants who genuinely cared about their children

and focused on effective interaction and communication with them. Makchiew (2015) confirmed that the most important marketing mix influencing parents' school selection decisions was teachers and staff. The quality of teaching and learning influenced the parents' choice of education for their children.

## METHODOLOGY

The goal of qualitative research is to investigate every context in which people or groups make decisions and act, as well as to explain why that specific observed phenomenon occurred (Siripipattanakul et al., 2022). Hence, in this study, the qualitative approach was used as a research strategy. In-depth interviews were conducted to determine what parents expect from international schools in Nonthaburi, Thailand, in terms of teaching and learning courses, management reputation, building location, and school adaptation to the digital age. Eight Thai parents who send their children to international schools in Nonthaburi, Thailand, were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research with the goal of learning everything you can about a particular phenomenon or population (Limna & Kraiwanit, 2022). Thus, the researchers used purposive sampling to select the most useful sample. In addition, to achieve the primary data results, the researchers reviewed secondary data using the documentary method for appropriate key survey questions via in-depth interviews. The data were collected in September and October, 2022. According to Limna, Siripipattanakul, and Auttawechasakoon (2022), content analysis is a qualitative method for systematically and objectively describing and quantifying specific phenomena by making valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data. Therefore, content analysis was employed for data analysis.

## RESULTS

**Table 1.** Respondents' demographic profile

No.	Age	Gender	Occupation	Date and time of interview
Respondent 1	44	Female	Master of ceremonies (MC)	September 05, 2022 at 08:30 am
Respondent 2	44	Female	Lecturer	September 07, 2022 at 9:00 am
Respondent 3	45	Female	Architect	September 07, 2022 at 11:00 am
Respondent 4	47	Female	Gold shop owner	September 10, 2022 at 09:00 am
Respondent 5	47	Female	Accounting office owner	September 10, 2022 at 11:00 am
Respondent 6	47	Female	Director of finance	September 11, 2022 at 09:00 am
Respondent 7	49	Female	Private business owner	September 11, 2022 at 11:00 am
Respondent 8	49	Female	Private business owner	September 11, 2022 at 01:00 pm

As shown in Table 1, respondent one, a 44-year-old, worked as a master of ceremonies (MC). Respondent two, a 44-year-old lecturer, worked at a university. Respondent three was 45 years old and worked as an architect. Respondents four, five, and six were all 47 years old and worked as a gold shop owner, accounting office owner, and director of finance, respectively. The seventh and eighth respondents were 49 years old, and both were private business owners. All of the respondents were women with children attending an international school in Nonthaburi Province, Thailand. Therefore, it can be seen that all of them were over the age of 18, had a stable career, and earned enough money to send their child to an international school.

For teaching and learning courses, parents expect that these courses will benefit students to be creative and assertive. They are looking for a modern curriculum that adheres to international standards and can be tailored to the abilities of the students themselves.

*"It is critical to have a course in which students can learn on their own through creativity, and assertiveness. This will help children survive when they are alone, such as when they go to study abroad."* – Respondent 1

*“Students enrolled in the modern curriculum will be able to take entrance exams to reputable universities abroad and will be able to choose where they want to study based on their aptitude.” – Respondent 2*

For the management reputation, parents expect that the school will have a good reputation for effective and clear management policies with a quality of teaching that is reliable.

*“A school with a credible image in teaching will attract more students, and when your children graduate from a school with a credible image in teaching, it will create a profile of the students themselves.” – Respondent 1*

*“A well-organised administration can assist parents in finding the right school. When parents have questions, they can go directly to the right place, which allows them to get answers quickly and promptly.” – Respondent 5*

For the building location, parents expect to have a safe building with sufficient facilities. Children are encouraged to learn and there should be enough building space for all students.

*“Because parents pay exorbitant tuition fees for international schools, it is critical for international schools to provide facilities to assist students and parents, such as comfortable classrooms, advanced teaching equipment for learning in the digital age, and so on.” – Respondent 6*

*“The school should be a very safe place. As parents have placed their trust in choosing a school for their children, in my opinion, it is the school's duty and responsibility to ensure that the location is safe at all times and worth the tuition fees that have been paid.” – Respondent 7*

For the adaptation to the digital age, parents expect that there will be lessons on how to use electronic devices and various online media. Children are taught how to avoid dangers from using them and will get the opportunity to use modern technological equipment.

*“Education is important in the digital age. Also, it is essential for all international schools to have good digital equipment, modern information systems, and all, for students to learn to keep up with the world.” – Respondent 3*

*“Schools must be a medium for teaching students how to use various technological devices, as well as for making students aware of and alert to the digital age.” – Respondent 8*

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that parents have expectations in four areas when sending their children to study in international schools in the digital age in Nonthaburi, Thailand, including teaching and learning courses, management reputation, building location, and digital age adaptation. Parents expect teaching and learning courses to help students be more creative and assertive. They look for a modern curriculum that meets international standards and can be tailored to the students' abilities. Parents also expect the school to have a good reputation with dependable teaching quality. They expect a positive image of effective and transparent management policies.

Furthermore, parents expect a secure building with adequate facilities, where children are encouraged to learn and that there should be enough building space for all students. Parents require that lessons on how to use electronic devices and various online media will be provided to help children adapt to the digital age. Children should be taught how to use them safely and have the opportunity to use cutting-edge technological equipment. These findings coincided with Chanchairassamee's (2011) study, which found that a prestigious school reputation, the environment, the curriculum, teaching and learning, as well as personnel, were deciding factors for parents. Parents preferred teachers and instructional assistants who showed genuine concern for their children, focused on effective interaction and communication, and showed respect for them. Makchiew (2015) confirmed that the teachers and staff were the most important

marketing mix that influenced parents' school selection decisions. The parents' choice of education for their children was based on the quality of teaching and learning.

Moreover, Soisuwan and Chayanuvat (2019) revealed that it is essential to have knowledge of teaching, such as teaching techniques for effective delivery. Furthermore, the highlighted professional needs are critical for constantly updating knowledge about information and communication technology (ICT), learning about teaching techniques, and being well-versed in their main subjects.

This study could be beneficial to education business groups, as well as international schools, which could use the study to plan, improve, or formulate business strategies, as well as develop the education system to adapt to technological advancements and beyond. In terms of policy recommendations, it is suggested that international school directors, principals, and teachers implement appropriate strategies to meet the needs and expectations of parents who wish to send their children to an international school. However, a limitation throughout the study is that the respondents were all Thai parents who already send their children to international schools in Nonthaburi, Thailand.

This single province may not be representative of Thailand as a whole. It is therefore recommended to expand further into more areas. Moreover, a quantitative study, such as questionnaires, should be considered in future research to explain the general relationship phenomena in a larger group.

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