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Parents' Education as a Moderator of International School Choice in Saudi Arabia: A Theory of Planned Behavior Perspective

Shahad Saleh AlMogbel[1*] Zaid Ahmad Ansari[2]

1. Department of Business Administration, College of Business and Economics, Qassim University, Melaida, Buraidah, Qassim, Saudi Arabia
2. Department of Business Administration, College of Business and Economics, Qassim University, Melaida, Buraidah, Qassim, Saudi Arabia

* E-mail of the corresponding author: z.ansari@qu.edu.sa

Abstract

This study examines the factors influencing parents' intention in Saudi Arabia to enroll their children in international schools offering foreign-language (English) instruction and curricula, drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Specifically, the study investigates the effects of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on parents' intention to enroll their children in international schools and examines the moderating role of parents' educational attainment. Data were collected from 323 parents in Saudi Arabia using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire administered online through Google Forms and distributed via WhatsApp groups. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS. The findings indicate that all three TPB constructs—attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—have a significant positive influence on parents' intention to enroll their children in international schools. Collectively, these factors explain 75.2% of the variance in parents' intention. However, parents' educational attainment does not significantly moderate the relationships between the TPB constructs and their intention to enroll their children in international schools. The findings provide empirical support for the applicability of the TPB in explaining parental school-choice intentions in the Saudi Arabian context and offer insights for international schools and education policymakers seeking to understand the factors shaping parental demand for international education.

Keywords: International Schools, Theory of Planned Behavior, Saudi Arabia

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1. Introduction

International education is the process by which education is reachable to learners of various cultures and countries. International schools differ from public and private schools in their national contexts in terms of curriculum. Drake (1998) explained international schools through five criteria which includes international students, international teachers, international curriculum, a broad non-academic program, and broad governance representing mixed cultural views. International schools have unique characteristics as identified by Hayden et al. (2000), which includes, global learners, which brings international mindedness, flexibility of thinking, tolerance, competence, open-mindedness, and respect for others. International education may be perceived as possessing distinct characteristics or attributes that differentiate it from other types of educational institutions. In a survey conducted by Hayden and Thompson (1998) among international school educators, the curriculum was deemed to be the most significant distinguishing factor, followed by extracurricular opportunities, such as clubs, societies, and excursions. There is growth in international schools due to increased global mobility of people such as diplomats and professionals, the movement of employees of multinational commercial institutions, international bodies, as well as the global economy and technology-oriented businesses creating more mobile professionals (Dolby and Rahman, 2008).

Parents' inclination to enroll their children in international schools can be attributed to the decline in public schools in certain circumstances due to inadequate administration, substandard facilities, and a high student-teacher ratio (Tooley and Dixon, 2005). However, the perception of international education may not always align with this viewpoint among students and educators, particularly among those who are nationals of the host country. Brummitt and Keeling (2013) reported in their study that West Asia is one of the regions experiencing substantial growth in the number of international schools. This phenomenon is noteworthy, and it is evident that the rise in these schools can be attributed to parents' preference for this type of education for their children. This

preference is exhibited not only by expatriate parents but also by affluent local parents. Additionally, the study revealed that most of the growth in international schools is concentrated in the Middle East (Bunnel, 2019) and is typically geared towards the local population.

Al-Salihi and Al-Mohsen (2021) examined the actuality of international schools. They explored the factors that led parents to enroll their children in such schools and provided insights into various questions. Some of these questions aimed to determine the reasons behind parents' decisions to enroll their children in international school. The findings revealed that the most significant motivations for parents to choose international education institutions were the nature and content of the courses, competence of the teachers, and the school's preparedness and administrative follow-up. In a separate study, Noor, Mariana, and Syahirah (2014) investigated the factors influencing parents' choices when selecting private schools for their children. Numerous studies have examined parents' intention to send their children to these schools. For instance, Flatley et al. (2001) discovered that parents rely on various sources of information and not on a specific system when making their decisions. Similarly, Bosetti's (2004) study introduced rational choice theory, which suggests that parents seek to maximize the benefits and make deliberate decisions that serve their children's best interests. This study revealed that parents employ a combination of rationality when making school choices. There have been numerous studies done on factors influencing parents and students' decisions to select a school. However, a search on google scholar through different keywords, showed that for more than a decade very limited work on the topic has been done. In the context of Saudi Arabia, no such study has been conducted. Also, there is no study conducted in this context using theory of planned behaviour, which investigates the intention from attitude, social norms, and perceived behavioural control perspective. The study is important in the context of Saudi Arabia because the country is home to numerous international schools, and with the development and modernization brought about by Vision 2030, almost every sector, including education, has undergone significant advancement. Recent developments have led to an increase in the number of international schools in the country. However, there is a lack of comprehensive studies exploring why parents opt to send their children to international schools. Therefore, the present study holds great importance in the Saudi Arabian context.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Attitude and Intention

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) proposed attitude as an acquired inclination to consistently respond in either a favorable or unfavorable manner to a specific object (p.15). According to Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), attitude towards behavior is defined as "the extent to which an individual evaluates or appraises the behavior in question favorably or unfavorably" (Ajzen, 1991, p.188). Generally, when the attitude towards a behavior is favorable, an individual's intention to engage in that behavior becomes stronger (Ajzen, 1991). The present study focused on Saudi parents' intention to enroll their children in international schools. Based on the definitions, the strength of a parent's favorable or unfavorable sentiment towards sending their children to international schools was assessed. Previous research conducted in various industries, such as online shopping, has demonstrated that attitude has a positive impact on intention to make online travel purchases (Bigné, Sanz, Ruiz, & Aldás, 2010; Lee et al., 2007; Morosan & Jeong, 2008). Additionally, Bigné et al. (2010) discovered that attitude had the most significant influence on intention to make online travel purchases. Similarly, a study conducted by MacKenzi et al. (2003) regarding the choice of international education indicated that attitudes and impressions play crucial roles in selecting international schools. Another study by Lucy et al. (2021) highlighted the necessity for a deeper comprehension of the factors influencing parents' choice of international schools. Existing literature provides support for the impact of attitude on behavioral intentions in various settings. Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1*: Parents attitudes influence their intention to send their children to study in international schools.*

2.2 Subjective Norms and Intention

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991, p. 188) introduced a significant determinant of individual intentions known as "subjective norm". According to this theory, subjective norm refers to the perceived social pressure that influences an individual's decision to engage or refrain from engaging in a particular behavior. Numerous studies have established the role of subjective norms in shaping intentions, particularly in situations where the behavior in question offers tangible benefits to the consumer (Taylor and Todd, 1995). The opinions and approval of friends, family, and other significant individuals can significantly impact an individual's behavioral intentions (Choi et al., 2015; Han et al., 2010). Venkatesh et al. (2003) demonstrated, in their Unified Theory of Acceptance and Usage of Technology, that subjective norms derived

from social influence play a crucial role in determining user intentions. Additionally, subjective norms have been found to influence online purchase intentions (Pavlou and Fygenson, 2006), online gaming (Hsu and Lu, 2004), and trust in organizational information systems (Li et al., 2008). Zhou (2011) discovered that subjective norms significantly affect users' participation intentions in online communities. These studies collectively highlight the critical role of subjective norms in shaping purchase intentions across various industries. However, the effect of subjective norms on parents' intention to send their children to study in international schools remains largely unexplored. Nevertheless, drawing from the findings of previous research, which consistently demonstrate the influence of subjective norms on intentions, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2*: Subjective norms influence parent's intention to send their children to study in international schools.*

2.3 Perceived behavioural control and Intention

Perceived behavioural control (PBC) is the third construct in the TPB model posited by Ajzen (1991, p. 188) to elucidate involuntary conduct. It is operationally defined as "the subjective appraisal of the ease with which an individual can perform a given action" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 183). It is crucial to note that PBC pertains to an individual's perception of control, rather than objective reality. An essential facet of this theoretical framework is expectancy of success, which refers to an individual's perceived likelihood of achieving success in a particular task. According to the theory of planned behaviour, PBC and behavioral intention can be directly utilized to predict behavioral performance (Ajzen, 1991). Drawing upon a study conducted by Ahmed and Yasser (2017) on the motives behind parents' selection of schools, this research reveals that external factors exert an influence on parents' behavioral outcomes. This study demonstrates a correlation between perceived behavioral control and the intention to enroll children in international schools, particularly considering statistics indicating an upward trend in investment in the private education sector driven by rising income levels and the establishment of such schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The National Education Office, now responsible for monitoring and assessing foreign schools, may lead parents to believe that they possess control over resources and the capacity to achieve desired behavior. From this vantage point, we can derive the following theory regarding perceived behavioral control:

H3*: Perceived behavioural control influences the parent's intention to send their children to study in international schools.*

2.4 Moderating role of Parents' Education

School choice is significantly associated with the characteristics of parents, as indicated in many studies. Van Pelt and Allison (2007) found that parents' demographic characteristics, such as their level of education, influenced their decision to enroll their children in private schools. Goldring and Rowley (2006) revealed that American parents who choose private schools often have high incomes and a strong academic background, as demonstrated by their parents' education at a young age. Similarly, Dronker and Avram (2009) confirmed that parents' profession and education greatly impact the choice of private schools over public schools in different countries. Therefore, understanding the demographics of parents is crucial when considering school choices in any national context, including Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the literature emphasizes the importance of curricula and language of instruction in relation to parents' characteristics and their intention to enroll their children in international schools. Chaiyut and Thomrat (2016) demonstrated the significant role of parents' attitudes towards education. Another study highlighted the impact of parents' attitudes towards their children's education on the development of students' personalities. Parents' positive attitudes towards education are reflected in their intentional beliefs, feelings, and behavior. Moreover, parents' attitudes towards education influence their involvement in educational matters. Rao (1991) showed that parents' academic level and interest in education significantly affect their attitude towards school enrolment, particularly in international schools. Subjective norms, which refer to what others believe and the perceived pressure to conform to certain behaviors, also play a role in parents' decision making. Parents with a higher academic level actively participate in their children's educational matters as they are motivated to keep up with others. Self-standards, which are influenced by parents' motives, are important considerations. The study conducted by Swanson and Power (2005) specifically focused on first-time mothers and demonstrated that the culture and educational level of parents impact their personal criteria. The influence of perceived behavioral control has been demonstrated in numerous studies. These studies have revealed that social status and educational background significantly contribute to perceived behavioural control. Consequently, perceived behavioral control ultimately impacts parental intentions when making educational decisions for their children. As a result of this discourse, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4*: Parent's educational qualification moderates' the relationship between attitude and their intention to send*

the children to study in international schools.

***H5**: Parent's educational qualification moderates' the relationship between subjective norms and their intention to send the children to study in international schools.*

***H6**: Parent's educational qualification moderates' the relationship between perceived behavioural control and their intention to send the children to study in international schools.*

3. Research Framework

Based on a review of the literature, researchers developed a research framework as shown in Figure 1. The current study was primarily based on the Theory model proposed by (Ajzen 1991). The model in this study was extended with parents' educational qualifications as a moderating variable between the independent and dependent variables.

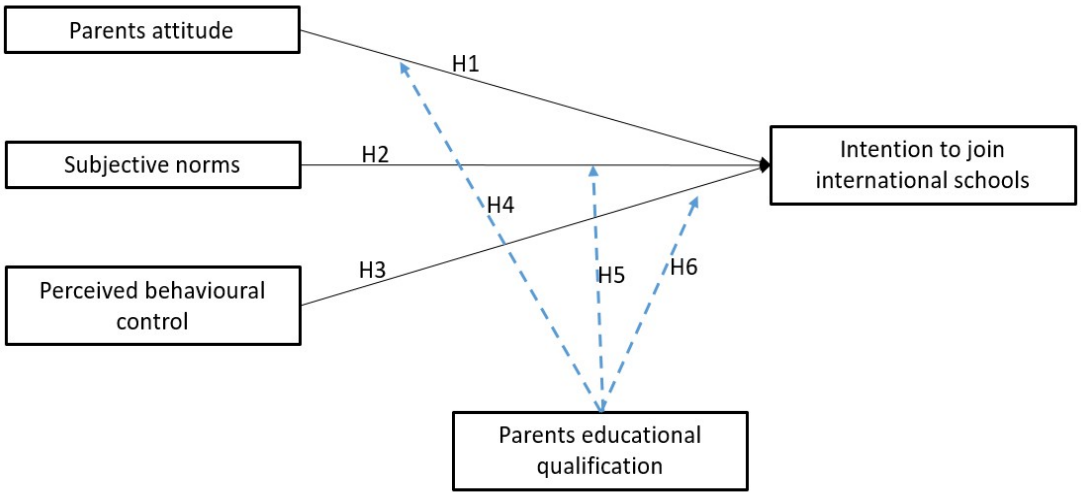


Figure 1: Parents' Education as a Moderator of International School Choice in Saudi Arabia: A Theory of Planned Behavior Perspective

4. Methodology

The primary aim of this study was to determine the variables that impact parents' desire to enroll their children in international schools. The factors within the TPB model were utilized to gauge their influence on the intention to join international schools in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the study sought to examine how parents' educational qualifications affect their intention to enroll their children in international schools, as depicted in figure 1. The model was analyzed using partial least squares structural equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

4.1 Data Collection

Data was acquired for the present investigation via online surveys. The initial 25 parents of students attending international schools in Saudi Arabia responded to a pilot test of the questionnaire. The pilot study respondents were requested to provide feedback to enhance the clarity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire to subsequent participants. The Google form questionnaire was distributed randomly through various media, such as emails and social media groups (particularly WhatsApp and telegram groups). In addition, schools were approached to assist in disseminating the questionnaire to the parents of their students. A total of 323 responses were received, which were deemed suitable for the analysis.

4.2 About the respondents

Demographic information, such as gender, education, and monthly income, was collected from the respondents in the initial section of the questionnaire to determine their identities. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 3. The data revealed that 61.3% of the respondents were female, over 90% possessed a bachelor's degree or higher, and more than 80% had a monthly income exceeding SAR 5000.

Table No 1 - Demographic data of respondent (N=323)

Items	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	125	38.70%
Female	198	61.30%
Qualification		
High School Degree	10	3.10%
Diploma's Degree	17	5.30%
Bachelor's Degree	244	75.50%
Master's Degree	41	12.70%
Doctorate's Degree	9	2.80%
Others	2	0.60%
Monthly income		
Less than SAR* 5000	54	16.70%
SAR 5000 to SAR 10000	128	39.60%
More than SAR 10000	103	31.90%
No income – not working	38	11.80%
Total	**323**	
*SAR stand for Saudi Arabian Riyals		

4.3 Questionnaire and Measurement

A structured questionnaire, divided into two sections, was created to collect data on the specified constructs in accordance with the proposed model. The data were collected from respondents in Saudi Arabia. To promote greater participation and ensure the reliability of responses, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic, as the respondents in this study were mainly Arabic speakers. The first section of the questionnaire focused on gathering demographic information from the respondents, while the second addressed the constructs outlined in the model, such as parents' attitudes, parents' subjective norms, and parents perceived behavioral control. These constructs are further detailed in table 4. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement for each item on a 5-point Likert scale, where 5 represented "strongly agree," 4 represented "agree," 3 represented "somewhat agree," 2 represented "disagree," and 1 represented strongly disagree.

Table No 2: Adjusted statement to collect data

Variables	**Question**
Attitude	**Attitude - Adapted from Ajzen and Fishbein (1980)**
	ATT1 – Studying in International school is a good idea
	ATT2 - Studying in International school is a wise idea
	ATT3 - I like the idea of studying in international school
	ATT4 – Studying in International school would be pleasant
	ATT5 - Studying in International school is appealing
Subjective norms	**Subjective norms – Adapted from Wang, et al (2016) and Ringle, C.M. et al (2022)**
	SN1-Studying in International school is admirable.
	SN2- Studying in International school makes a good impression
	SN3- Studying in International school improves the perception
	SN4-Most people who are important to me expect that I choose international schools for my kids

Perceived Behavioural Control	**Perceived behavioural control - Adapted from Wang, et al (2016) and Paul, J. et al (2016)**
	PBC1- I can send my children to study in international schools
	PBC2 - I have the cost and time to send my children to study in international schools
	PBC3- If I want, I can choose international school confidently
	PBC4 - I think International schools are in my life
	PBC5- Studying in International schools is entirely decided by myself
Intention	**Intention to choose international school – Adapted from Chen & Tung (2014) and Ajzen (2005)**
	FSI1- I intend to choose international schools for my kids
	FSI 2- I will consider switching to international schools for my kids
	FSI 3 - I expect to make my children study in international schools in the future
	FSI4 - I surely want to choose international schools

4.4 Data analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), using Smart PLS-4 software, was used to validate the model and test the hypotheses (Ringle, et al. 2022). This approach readily incorporates both reflective and formative measures and has less restrictive assumptions about the data (Hair, et al., 2013; Hair, et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2012). For instance, PLS does not require a normal distribution because it uses bootstrapping to empirically estimate the standard error of its parameter estimates (Gefen et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2012). Therefore, the normality of the distribution was not verified.

5. Results

5.1 Scale Reliability and Validity

Scale reliability and validity are critical elements for drawing conclusions from an analysis (Cronbach, 1951). Reliability is the ability of a scale to show consistent results (Ronenthal & Rosnow, 1984). The most consistent measurement of reliability is Cronbach's alpha (Peterson, 1984). The alpha coefficient considers the impact of each variable when assessing overall reliability (Fried & Ferris, 1987). Alpha values over 0.70 are allowed (Hair et al., 1998). As indicated in table 3, the Cronbach's alpha for all variables was above the permitted range.

Convergent and discriminant validity are commonly used to assess the construct validity. The values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) help assess the construct's convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010; Fornell and Larker 1981). AVE values more than 0.5 were found for all constructs in the present study, and the AVE values ranged from 0.649 to 0.884, demonstrating adequate convergent validity (Khan and Adil, 2013; Hair et al., 2010; O'Leary-Kelly and Vokura, 1998). The composite reliability of the construct under investigation was examined as the second criterion for assessing the construct validity. CR is calculated using the squared sum of variable loadings for each construct and the sum of the error variance terms for a construct (Khan and Adil, 2013; Hair et al., 2010). The composite reliability for all factors (table 5) was considerably greater than the minimum desirable value of 0.70, suggesting that all factor correlations are reliable (Malhotra and Dash, 2011; Hair et al., 2010; Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Table No 3: Factor loading, construct reliability, and average variance extracted

Constructs		Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Attitude	ATT	0.929	0.935	0.947	0.78
Subjective Norms	SN	0.853	0.859	0.9	0.693
Perceived Behavioral Control	PBC	0.732	0.8	0.846	0.649
Intention to choose international school	ICI	0.956	0.957	0.968	0.884

5.2 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity refers to the degree to which the measures of the two constructs are empirically distinct (Bagozzi yi & Philips 1991). It refers to the degree to which a concept varies from other constructs (Khan and Adil, 2013; Hair et al., 2010). For discriminant validity, the square root of AVE should be larger than the inter-construct correlations (Malhotra and Dash, 2011; Hair et al., 2010; and Fornell and Larcker 1981). As shown in table 4, the square root of AVE was greater than the inter construct correlations for all components.

Table-4: Fornell-Larcker criterion

	A	ICI	PBC	SN
Attitude	0.883			
ICI	0.783	0.94		
PBC	0.588	0.749	0.805	
SN	0.809	0.722	0.56	0.833

5.3 Model fit

According to Yuan (2005), assessing model fit is a critical step. The model fit results are presented in table 5. The results show the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), which is the difference between the observed correlation and model correlation matrix (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The allowed value for the SRMR index ranges from 0 to 0.08, and according to the analysis, the SRMR value is 0.067, which is within the range (Hensler et al., 2016), indicating the fitness of the model. Subsequently, the normed fit index (NFI) was assessed. NFI is one of the main incremental fit indices introduced by Bentler and Bonnet (1980). The model is assessed by comparing its chi-squared value to the chi-squared value of the null model, which symbolizes the fact that all the variables are uncorrelated. A good match is defined as a value greater than or equal to 0.90 (Hu & Bentler1999). Values greater than 0.80 are acceptable (Baumgartner & Homburg 1996). The NFI value shown in table 5 is 0.877, which is greater than 0.8 and close to 0.9, indicating an acceptable model fit.

Table No 5: Model fit summary

	Estimated model
SRMR	0.067
d_ULS	0.688
d_G	0.311
Chi-square	586.718
NFI	0.877

5.4 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The results in table 6 show that all three constructs of the TPB (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control) significantly influence parents' intention to send their children to study in international schools in Saudi Arabia. As indicated by the R^2 value of the dependent variable, the three independent variables explained 75.2% of the variance (figure 2), which is considered to have strong explanatory power (Chin, 1998).

The path coefficients represent the strength and direction of the relationship between each predictor and outcome variable. The standardized path coefficients and significance levels provide evidence of the quality (Hair et al.,

2012). The path coefficient between attitude and intention was 0.411 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a positive and statistically significant relationship between the two constructs. The path coefficient between subjective norm and intention was 0.16, ($p = 0.002$), showing a positive and statistically significant relationship between these two variables. Finally, the path coefficient between perceived behavioural control and intention was 0.415 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a statistically significant positive relationship between these two variables. Qualification moderates the relationship between attitude and intention ($p< 0.056$). However, it did show a statistically significant moderating effect between subjective norms and intention, as well as between perceived behavioral control and intention.

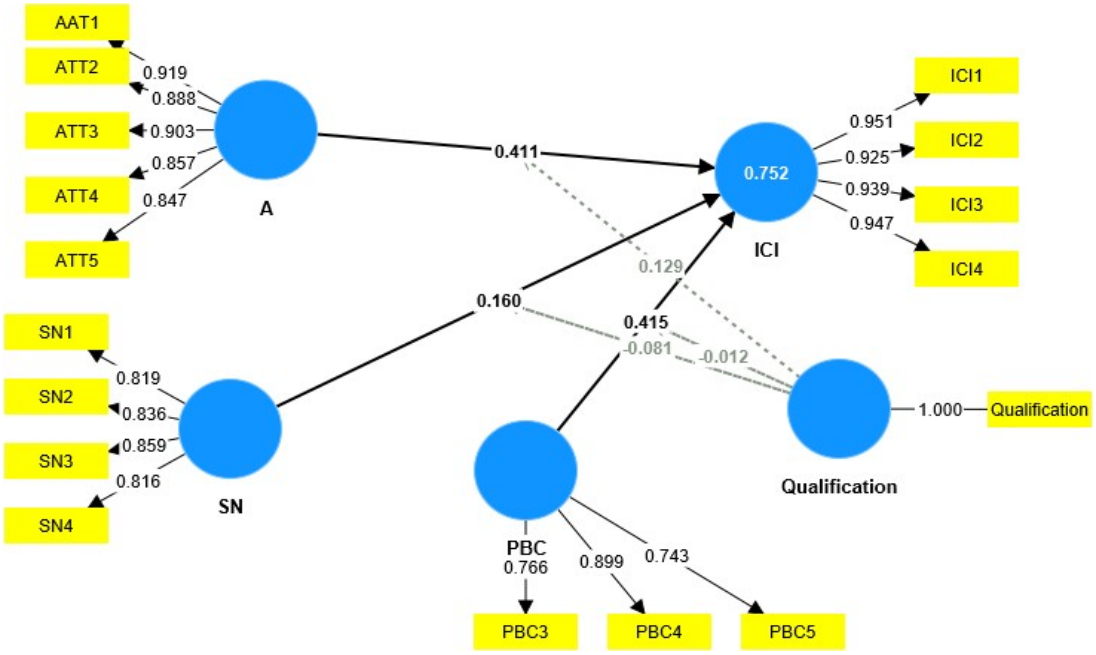


Figure 2: Parents' Education as a Moderator of International School Choice in Saudi Arabia: A Theory of Planned Behavior Perspective

Table 6: Path coefficients

	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Hypothesis
Att -> ICI	0.411	0.405	0.057	7.177	0.000	Supported
PBC -> ICI	0.415	0.421	0.047	8.903	0.000	Supported
SN -> ICI	0.16	0.161	0.052	3.07	0.002	Supported
Qualification x Att -> Intention	0.129	0.125	0.067	1.91	0.056	Supported
Qualification x SN-> Intention	-0.081	-0.082	0.043	1.859	0.063	Not supported
Qualification x PBC -> Intention	-0.012	-0.005	0.053	0.222	0.824	Not supported

6. Discussions

The main objective of this study was to investigate the factors that influence parents' decisions to choose international schools for their children in Saudi Arabia. The study proposed six hypotheses for direct effects and three for the moderating effects of parents' educational qualifications. The first hypothesis proposes that parents' attitude has a positive relationship with intention. The findings suggest that attitudes toward social norms and perceived behavioral control positively influence intention. These findings are consistent with those of previous

studies (Han et al., 2010; 2013; Zahedi et al., 2019). This finding is consistent with those of previous studies related to various industries. (Xu, Wang & Yu, 2020) found that attitude, social norms, and perceived behavioral control influence the intention to purchase green furniture, Hsu et al. (2017) found that TPB factors influence individuals' intention to visit green hotels, and Wang et al. (2016) found the appropriateness of TPB in explaining the intention to buy electric vehicles. Thus, the findings of the current study are like those of other studies in explaining the influence of the TPB model's independent variables on intention.

However, the study did not find a significant direct effect of parents' educational qualifications on their Intention to Choose International School. This implies that individuals' qualifications, such as academic achievement or language proficiency, may not be significant determinants of their intention to choose an international school. The findings suggest that parents' educational qualifications significantly moderate the relationship between attitude and intention, implying that educational qualification influences parents' attitudes, which in turn influences their intentions. The study also identified two marginally significant interaction effects between qualification and PBC as well as qualification and subjective norms. These results suggest that the relationship between Qualification and Intention to Choose International School may depend on an individual's attitude towards international schools and the perceived social norms regarding the choice of an international school.

6.1 Implications

This study's findings provide important insights into managerial decisions. The findings revealed that parents' attitudes have a positive relationship with their intention towards international school. The other two primary factors, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, are also positively related to intentions. International schools in Saudi Arabia can attract students by influencing their parents' attitudes by emphasizing the advantages of studying in international schools, such as quality of education, exposure to international curriculum, learning a foreign language mainly English, and learning international cultures. These are important in fast-transforming Saudi Arabia. Another important factor influencing the intention is the subjective norm, meaning that members of society influence each other towards a particular behavior. Schools and policymakers can develop a culture of international schools by actively involving parents, friends, and teachers in the school's activities and allowing stakeholders to interact with each other. Relationships with local communities can be developed to engage the society at large. The third factor of TPB also showed a relationship with intention to attend school. By providing detailed and customized information to parents about academic programs, entry requirements, financial aid, and scholarships, schools can build positive perceptions, making education in international schools feasible.

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