

The Value Equation: What Malaysian B40 Communities Seek in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)?

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Abstract

This study examines parents' viewpoints from the B40 socioeconomic group about their beliefs and attitudes towards early childhood care and education (ECCE). An online survey was conducted with 382 respondents, chosen via snowball sampling, and analysed using SmartPLS 4. The results indicate that epistemic and hedonic values impact both attitudes and the perceived relative advantage of ECCE, but utilitarian and monetary values alone influence attitudes. Social values exclusively influence the perceived relative advantage. Parents' perspectives on ECCE are predominantly influenced by epistemic ideals, although their social intents, such as word-of-mouth endorsements, are affected by perceived behavioural control and subjective norms. The research highlights the significance of relative advantage in influencing re-patronage and word-of-mouth intentions. The resulting data will assist in the formulation of inclusive, evidence-based ECCE strategies that align with national education goals and equitable access principles.

Keywords: parents, behavioral intention, consumption values, theory of planned behavior B40, early childhood care and education (ECCE)

1.0 Introduction

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is essential for children's development and learning success. Consequently, providing children with a strong foundation is crucial for their growth and efficacy as human resources in an established nation (Hamid et al., 2019). Parents believe that ECCE can facilitate young children's adaptation to



formal schooling (Pattnaik, 1996). ECCE offers a secure environment that promotes cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth in young children, enhancing their well-being (Ahun et al., 2023). Campbell et al. (2014) asserted that early interventions such as ECCE enhance children's well-being over time.

ECCE is important for social, political, and economic development. Warner (2006) emphasized the economic advantages of child care to child development, parental workforce participation, and regional profitable growth. Edelman (1989) highlighted the advantages of sufficient child care for families, children, and the country. Neuman (2021) observed that, despite its global significance, low and middle-income countries persist in neglecting and underfunding early childhood education. High-quality, accessible ECCE is essential for fostering intelligent, sustainable, inclusive growth and social cohesion (Lazzari, 2014). ECCE guarantees equitable job possibilities and work-life balance for parents, hence playing a vigorous role in enhancing female labour force participation (Kamerman, 2005).

Notwithstanding ample evidence of the enduring advantages of pre-school education, numerous children are marginalized. The World Bank (2023) reports that 40% of young children, equating to 350 million children under the age of five, do not have access to high-quality daycare. Merely 20% of young children in low- and middle-income nations access pre-primary education (World Bank, 2023). The rights towards ECCE hinder personal growth and forfeit possibilities to optimize societal potential. Nonetheless, despite its numerous advantages, hardly 35 million out of 137 million five-year-olds globally participate in ECCE, as per a 2022 UNESCO evaluation. The 2022 Global Education Monitoring Report indicates that 150 out of 209 countries have established targets and are enhancing monitoring efforts. Nonetheless, specific locations may lack universal access by 2030 (UNESCO, 2022).

Correspondingly, attendance rates among children from the B40 (the bottom) group in Malaysia to ECCE remain relatively low, reflecting underlying socio-economic barriers. Nohuddin et al. (2020) highlighted how such disparities affect educational outcomes, particularly among adolescents from lower-income families. Cultural attitudes and little knowledge about the long-term advantages of ECCE can also deter B40 families from ECCE (Lee & Mashita, 2014). Therefore, understanding the various elements that influence parents' decisions to enrol their children in ECCE, especially within disadvantaged



populations, is crucial. This study aims to explore these decisions through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior and consumption values, offering insights into how parental attitudes, perceived norms, and value-based considerations shape engagement with ECCE services.

Another emerging critique pertains to the dominance of Western-centric pedagogical models in ECCE interventions across diverse cultural settings. Penn (2008) warns against the “one-size-fits-all” approach in ECCE, noting that imported frameworks often marginalize indigenous knowledge systems and parenting norms. In regions like Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, there is growing advocacy for localized ECCE models that reflect community values and linguistic diversity (Ngwaru, 2014).

Research in early childhood education has increasingly focused on preschool quality and educator conduct (Oplatka & Stundi, 2010). While parental expectations of preschool programs are generally positive, improvement is still needed to meet these expectations more effectively (Prayukvong et al., 2018). However, limited studies have explored how consumer values interact with parental decisions regarding ECCE, particularly in Malaysia. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) offers a robust framework to understand parental attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influencing ECCE patronage and word-of-mouth communication (Ajzen, 2020; Tran & Nguyen, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). Integrating TPB with consumption values theory further clarifies how educators' psychological factors influence engagement in ECCE programs. Understanding this interplay can help educators better meet children's developmental needs and improve ECCE service quality (Lee et al., 2019; Huriah, 2022).

2.0 Behavioral Intention Towards ECCE

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a prominent framework that explains human behavior through three core components: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, all of which shape behavioral intentions and ultimately behavior (Santor et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2023). TPB has been widely applied to contexts such as sustainable consumption, green purchase behavior, and the adoption of energy-efficient products (Han, 2021; Waris & Ahmed, 2020; Guo et al., 2021). Integrating TPB with consumption values provides a deeper understanding of consumer behavior,



particularly concerning attitudes toward products, social norms, and behavioral control (Canova et al., 2020).

In early childhood education, TPB assists educators in reflecting on their attitudes and norms when promoting consumption values (Rad et al., 2023) and tailoring support for children exhibiting behavioral challenges (Wahman et al., 2020). Moreover, it informs inclusive and equitable practices in early learning environments (Rad et al., 2022). Combining TPB with consumption values theory helps educators embrace diversity and foster cultural identity (Suri & Chandra, 2021; Safita & Suryana, 2022). Positive parental attitudes toward ECCE are often linked to satisfaction and repeat engagement (Famiyeh et al., 2018; Ruangkanjanases et al., 2021), promoting word-of-mouth that enhances program reputation and community belonging. Eventually,

H1a: Positive attitudes of ECCE are linked to re-patronize ECCE

H1b: Positive attitudes of ECCE are linked to the word-of-mouth towards ECCE

ECCE's perceived behavioral control is an individual's conviction in their capacity to undertake a given program-related behavior or activity (Fehr & Schurtenberger, 2018; Raikes et al., 2023). Studies suggested that perceived behavioral control directly influences customer intentions (Kamboj & Sharma, 2022; Vrselja et al., 2022; Ojo, 2022). Re-enrolling their children in ECCE programs is more frequent when parents feel secure in their capacity to participate and have control over their selections. Perceived behavioral control empowers parents to make educated decisions and participate in ECCE programs. Parents are more likely to offer positive experiences and suggestions when they feel secure in their capacity to interact with ECCE programs and feel in control of their decisions. Hence,

H2a: Parental perceived behavioral control towards ECCE is linked to their intention to re-patronize ECCE

H2b: Parental perceived behavioral control towards ECCE is linked to their purpose to spread word of mouth about ECCE

Subjective norm, defined as perceived social pressure from significant others, significantly influences parents' intentions to re-enrol their children in ECCE programs (Lee et al., 2023; Kamboj & Sharma, 2022). When favourable societal norms support ECCE, parents are more likely to re-patronize these programs. Social pressures and

beliefs shape these norms, aligning parental decisions with broader social expectations and enhancing the likelihood of recommending ECCE programs (Ali et al., 2019; Bhutto et al., 2020; Jing, 2018b; Jain, 2020; Shimul et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2019).

Positive subjective norms not only drive re-enrolment but also encourage word-of-mouth (WOM) promotion. Parents who view ECCE programs optimistically are more inclined to share positive experiences, which in turn influence others' decisions (Chen et al., 2021). According to Hwang and Youn (2017), parents are more likely to recommend ECCE programs when they perceive high quality, emotional value, and social connection. WOM is particularly impactful in ECCE as many parents rely on trusted recommendations when selecting childcare (Lee & Littell, 2020). Therefore, strong subjective norms, reinforced by community approval and positive experiences, can increase program advocacy, attracting new families and enhancing ECCE program success and reputation (Chin et al., 2018; Pop et al., 2020). Therefore,

- H3a: Parents' subjective norms about ECCE are linked to their intention to re-patronage
- H3b: Parents' subjective norms for ECCE are linked to their word-of-mouth intentions

Parents' intention to register their children in ECCE programs is positively connected with perceived relative advantages. ECCE programs' perceived advantages over other options influence parents' decisions (Raikes et al., 2023). Research shows that these relative advantages influence parental repurchase intentions and word-of-mouth (Gupta & Sajnani, 2019). When parents see ECCE programs as having more benefits than other options, they re-enrol their children. ECCE programs' superior perceived advantages can enhance parental repurchase intentions and favourable word-of-mouth, boosting their success and reputation (Tang et al., 2021). Consequently,

- H4a: The relative benefits of ECCE are linked to parents' re-patronage intentions
- H4b: The relative benefits of ECCE are linked to parents' word-of-mouth intentions of ECCE

3.0 Consumer Values and Product/Service Attitudes

Recent multidisciplinary studies have increasingly focused on consumption values, highlighting their influence on consumer behavior and purchasing decisions. Mutum et al. (2020) emphasized how consumption values shape green purchasing behavior, underlining the importance of understanding how these values guide consumer decision-making. Similarly, Tanrıkulu (2021) explored consumption value theory in consumer behavior, noting significant theoretical and methodological advancements. Bian et al. (2021) and Silva et al. (2021) emphasized the growing attention on personal values and spending behavior. Moreover, Stringer et al. (2020) and Adil (2021) examined the role of ethical considerations and personal values in shaping ethical consumerism. Geiger et al. (2019) and Kaur and Luchs (2021) further suggested that mindfulness enhances consumption values and supports sustainable consumption, while psychological factors such as awareness and aspiration also influence sustainable behavior.

Sweeney and Soutar (2001) proposed that consumption values consist of five key dimensions—functional, emotional, social, epistemic, and conditional. Functional value relates to a product's utility and practical benefits, emotional value concerns the affective responses it evokes, epistemic value pertains to curiosity and learning, social value connects to identity and status, and conditional value depends on situational factors (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Kaur et al. (2021) and Ali et al. (2019) examined these values in the context of consumer behavior and sustainable consumption, highlighting their relevance for environmentally friendly product adoption. Qasim et al. (2019) also showed that consumption values shape behavioral intentions, focusing on environmental self-identity and organic food choices. Studies by Karjaluo et al. (2021) and Wang et al. (2020) linked consumption values to service quality and green consumption, including in mobile banking contexts.

In the context of ECCE, consumption values also influence educators' practices and parental decision-making. Cumming et al. (2020) stressed that teacher well-being—shaped by values and beliefs—supports the delivery of high-quality education. Educators' integration of consumption values into their curriculum may foster conscientious consumerism and sustainability among children. Suri and Chandra (2021) highlighted the role of indigenous cultural values and character education in early childhood development. Archambault et al. (2019) further emphasized the importance of ECCE in addressing



inequalities and promoting justice for marginalized children. Educators who adopt values-based teaching can instil early social responsibility and ethical consumerism in young learners.

Among these consumption values, epistemic value—defined as the intrinsic worth of knowledge—has a profound impact on parental attitudes toward ECCE. Gjelaj et al. (2020) found that knowledge of program content, instructional strategies, and learning outcomes significantly shapes parents' perceptions of ECCE effectiveness. Similarly, Ghosh and Steinberg (2022) observed that higher parental education levels are associated with more favorable views of childcare services and heightened expectations for academic outcomes. Tang et al. (2022) reported that teaching quality, curriculum design, and policy awareness all contribute to shaping parental perceptions. Furthermore, Melhuish and Moss (2015) revealed that parents who view ECCE programs as opportunities for learning and development express more positive attitudes. Bodrova and Leong (2016) also confirmed that when parents associate ECCE with cognitive growth and exploration, their attitudes improve. Singh et al. (2020) supported this by noting the human tendency for curiosity and learning. As children acquire new knowledge and skills in ECCE settings, parents' emotional satisfaction and cognitive engagement are enhanced. Consequently,

H5a: Epistemic values impact parents' attitudes toward ECCE

H5b: Epistemic values affect the relative benefit of ECCE

Second, utilitarian values, which emphasize the practical benefits and operational efficiency of goods and services, strongly influence consumer behavior and decision-making. Lee and Kim (2018) found that utilitarian principles affect Airbnb user satisfaction and loyalty. In e-commerce, perceived practical worth influences impulsive purchases, especially when influenced by trust and risk (Lavuri et al., 2022). Additionally, service robots' utilitarian and hedonic values in hospitality may influence consumers' behavior. This shows how these values shape customer preferences (Ozturk et al., 2023). Other research has shown that utilitarian values influence purchase intentions in many domains, including smartwatches (Teng et al., 2022), fashion products (Salim & Doraisamy, 2022), and slow fashion (Aprianingsih, 2022). Practical benefits and usability impact consumer decision-making and behavior toward diverse offerings. Additionally, utilitarian values influence customer behavior in the sharing economy



by emphasizing practicality and efficiency (Altnay & Taheri, 2019). Consequently,

H6a: Utilitarian values have an impact on parental attitudes towards ECCE

H6b: Utilitarian values impact the relative advantage of ECCE

Third, ECCE programs' flexibility and adaptability may explain parental attitudes' positive effects. According to Tregenza and Campbell-Barr (2023), parents value flexible, adaptable programs that may meet their child's demands and learning preferences. Studies show that parents of children with diverse learning needs or cultural backgrounds favour ECCE programs that can adjust, boosting contingent value (Tregenza & Campbell-Barr, 2023). Employed parents choose programs with extra hours or flexible schedules. These programs show flexibility to meet family needs, establishing conditional value (Tregenza & Campbell-Barr, 2023). According to Davies (2023), employed parents may prefer programs with extended hours or flexible scheduling since they may suit varied family needs. Eventually,

H7a: Conditional values impact parents' attitudes toward ECCE

H7b: Conditional values affect the relative benefit of ECCE

Fourth, Raikes et al. (2023) stated that early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs are crucial to children's development and behavior and may influence parents' child care attitudes, which include instructor traits and process quality, such as children's interactions and activities. High-quality ECCE improves outcomes for children, especially those from low-income families (McIsaac et al., 2022). Multiple studies have shown that ECCE programs improve child development. Maintaining these beneficial effects on a wide scale is problematic (Augsburg et al., 2022). High-quality programs are needed since the world demands high ECCE standards (Iskandar, 2020). Parental involvement in ECCE is beneficial because community and parent participation are crucial to program success (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Furthermore, ECCE educators' perceptions and motivations affect young children's learning (Lestari et al., 2022). Therefore,

H8a: Functional values impact parents' attitudes toward ECCE

H8b: Functional values impact the relative advantage of ECCE

Fifth, hedonic values—pleasure and enjoyment—influence parents' views of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs. Hedonic values can influence consumer behavior and decision-making, as shown by studies on organic food consumption and emotional preferences (Sarabia-Andreu et al., 2020; Deng et al., 2018). Hedonic values also affect fast-food consumption, where pleasure and enjoyment alter consumer attitudes (Ghoochani et al., 2018b). Positive emotions from consumer evaluations improve brand attitudes, demonstrating the influence of hedonic values in perceptions (Wu et al., 2019). While most study on ECCE focuses on utilitarian values, hedonic values might shed light on parental views and decisions. According to studies on religious advertising and food consumption, hedonic pleasure strongly influences general sentiments, indicating that hedonic values shape consumer preferences (Imtiyaz et al., 2021; Pérez-Villarreal et al., 2020). Thus,

H9a: Hedonic values impact parents' attitudes towards ECCE

H9b: Hedonic values impact the relative advantage of ECCE

Sixth, ECCE cost strongly influences parents' thoughts (Gjelaj et al., 2020). Research shows that parents' views on ECCE's value and quality are affected by affordability (Zakaria et al., 2022). Research shows that parents' socioeconomic position and income affect their views on ECCE program affordability and value (Ghosh & Steinberg, 2022). The cost of ECCE can also affect family engagement and early education decisions (Tang et al., 2022). Policymakers and educators must understand ECCE's financial impacts to provide equitable access to high-quality early childhood programmes (Murphy, 2023). Parents' perceptions of ECCE's cost-effectiveness can also affect their support for initiatives to make it more affordable and accessible (Shah et al., 2022). Undeniably,

H10a: Monetary values impact parents' attitudes towards ECCE

H10b: Monetary values impact the relative advantage of ECCE

Seventh, ECCE social ideals shape parents' views of these programs. ECCE settings' inclusion, diversity, and community engagement can greatly impact parents' views of early education (Santilli et al., 2022). In the social scene of ECCE programs, interactions with educators and peers shape parental opinions on educational experiences (Santilli et al., 2022). Involving families and



communities in ECCE improves social cohesiveness and fosters children's holistic development, affecting parents' views on social interactions and community engagement (Santilli et al., 2022). ECCE settings' inclusivity, diversity, and community engagement can affect parents' views of early education's quality and efficacy (Gjelaj et al., 2020). Thus, ECCE programs foster a sense of community and inclusion among children and parents, creating a pleasant social climate that improves attitudes towards early childhood education (Roldán et al., 2021). Consequently,

H11a: Social values impact parents' attitudes towards ECCE

H11b: Social values impact the relative benefit of ECCE

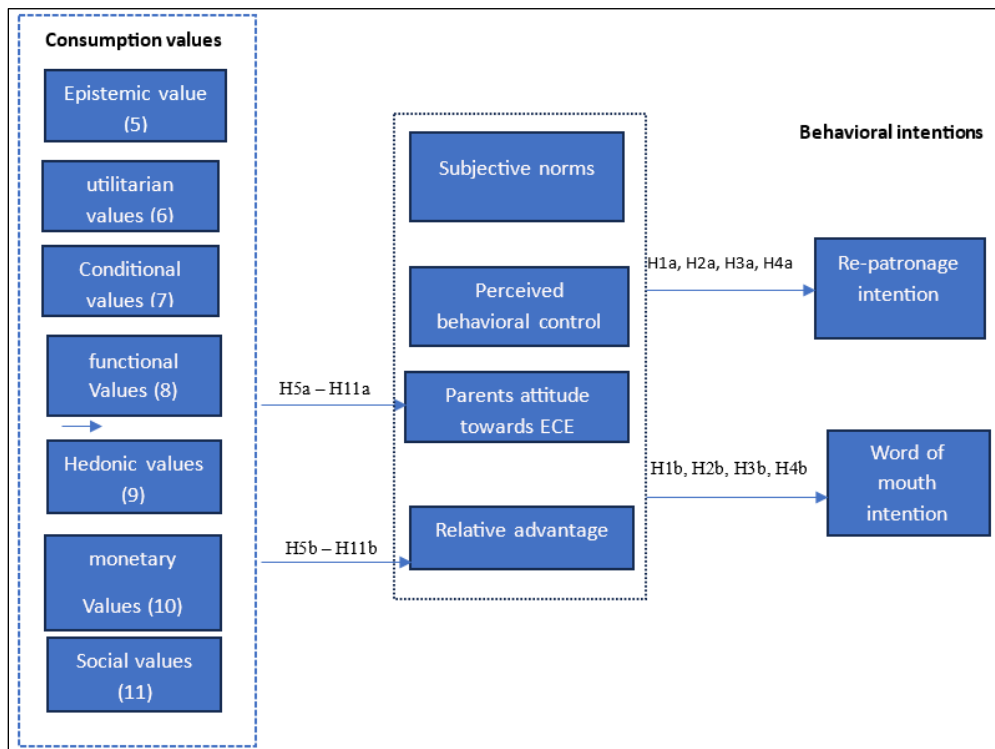


Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework for This Study
 Source: Adapted from Liu, Meng-Lewis, Ibrahim, and Zhu, X. (2021b)

4.0 Research Methodology

4.1 Context, Respondents, and Data Collection Procedure

Following established procedures in consumption behavior research, this study employed a self-administered online survey as the

primary data collection method. To ensure precision and contextual relevance in the ECCE domain, expert validation was sought from individuals with ECCE experience, alongside two professors specializing in early childhood education. To further refine the instrument, a focus group involving parents with children enrolled in ECCE programs was conducted, aligning with the recommendations of Liu et al. (2021). Based on feedback from both the pilot study and focus group sessions, minor modifications were made to the survey to improve clarity and content suitability for the primary data collection phase.

A pilot study using convenience sampling was carried out with 15 parents who had experience with ECCE. Participants were asked to complete the survey and assess the clarity, coherence, and comprehensibility of each item. They were also encouraged to identify issues and suggest improvements. Recruitment was facilitated via WhatsApp, which served as a practical tool for disseminating invitations and survey links. WhatsApp has gained recognition in educational research for its utility in data collection and communication. Studies by Demayani et al. (2021) and Ajetunmobi (2022) highlight its efficacy for educational engagement, parental involvement, and health-related support in various learning environments.

The G*Power application was utilized to ascertain the minimal sample size. Erdfelder, Faul, and Buchner (1996) assert that G*Power is a comprehensive power analysis software frequently utilized in computational and sociological research for statistical evaluations. The F-test of regression was employed for this investigation using the G*Power tool. To ascertain the precise sample size, a power analysis is conducted for multiple regression. The test employed an alpha level of 0.05, a power of 0.80, and a medium effect size of ($f^2 = 0.15$). Given that 80 percent is deemed the minimum acceptable power in the majority of social scientific research (Gefen, Rigdon, & Straub, 2011).

Consequently, a survey centered on the government facilities of ECCE garnered interest from a total of 441 participants. Among them, a group of 54 participants who were unable to transport their children to the assigned ECCE facility were omitted from the study. Furthermore, applicants lacking prior experience at the institution were also excluded. After removing missing or invalid responses, the final sample comprised 382 replies from individuals who had sent their children to these facilities, representing an impressive 87% response rate to the survey. It is worth noting that snowball sampling was



employed in this study, specifically those who were sending their children to an ECCE; thus, initial participants were encouraged to refer other eligible individuals to participate. This method facilitated the expansion of the participant pool and enriched the diversity of perspectives within the study. Additionally, snowball sampling facilitates the identification of key informants and information-rich cases, thereby enhancing the study's theoretical saturation and data quality (Noy, 2008).

4.2 Measures

The study's measurements were taken from previous research, specifically from Lin and Huang (2012) and Pan et al. (2014) for the assessment of functional values; Kaytaz (2005) provided the monetary values, while Kim et al. (2011) presented the social value, Wu and Chang (2016) specified the conditional value, Nystrand and Olsen (2020) stated the utilitarian and hedonic values, and Kim et al. (2011) established the epistemic value. Consequently, repatronage and word of mouth intention, as well as relative advantages, were developed from Liu et al (2021b). Additionally, constructs related to the theory of planned behavior, including parents' attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control towards ECCE, are established from Han et al. (2010) and Hong et al. (2013).

Table 4 indicates findings that each construct has a Cronbach's alpha (α) over 0.70, ranging from 0.746 to 0.962, indicating a high level of dependability (Bollen & Lennox, 1991; Saratakos, 2013). Standardized factor loading estimates surpass the minimum threshold of 0.50, ranging from 0.736 to 0.969, and all variables are statistically significant at $p < .001$ (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2013). Furthermore, all constructs' intraclass correlations produced acceptable values (i.e., $p < .001$).

5.0 Data Analysis and Results

5.1 Participants and Respondents' Profile

The study was conducted among parents from B40 communities who were currently residing in Malaysia and had registered their children in ECCE services, specifically those that have been developed by the government. The participants in the study provided their perspectives on the perceived benefits and advantages of the program, as well as their attitudes, perceived behavioral control, subjective



norms, and behavioral intention towards the distinctiveness of ECCE programs. These opinions were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale. The study involved a total of 382 individuals as the sample of the population. Within the cohort of participants from the B40 communities, it was observed that 15.0% were classified as male, whilst 85.0% were classified as female. The private sector employed 45% of the participants, with the largest demographic including individuals below 25, representing 37% of the sample. Table 1 provides a complete overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1 : Profile of the Respondents

Characteristics		Frequency (n=382)	Percent (%)
Age	Below 25	143	37
	35-44	126	33
	Above 45	113	30
Gender	Male	58	15
	Female	324	85
Occupation	Government sector	139	36
	Private sector	173	45
	Self-employed	43	11
	Not working	27	8
Income	Below -3000	220	57
	RM3001-5000	147	38
	RM5001-8000	0	0
	No income	15	5

Source: Author's creation (data from survey)

5.2 Data Analysis Through the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Method

The study utilized a two-step data analysis technique known as structural equation modeling (SEM), as described by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a widely utilized and important data analysis tool in the field of behavioral research (Zhou et al., 2021). During the preliminary phase, an assessment was conducted to determine the construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the outer model or measurement model. The subsequent stage encompassed the examination of the inner model, also known as the structural model, to ascertain the connections that exist between the independent and dependent variables. The

SmartPLS 4 version of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was utilized for conducting these tests. According to the findings of Cassell and Bickmore (2000), variance-based PLS-SEM is considered more advantageous than covariance-based SEM because of its ability to effectively handle variations in data distribution and collinearity. Partial Least Squares (PLS) can overcome the limitations of multiple regression due to its nonparametric nature. Additionally, PLS is capable of accommodating many constructs, providing clarity in complex connection models, and eliminating undesirable solutions and factor indeterminacy (Fornell, 1982). Non-normality of data is a crucial concern in the context of multiple regression analysis. According to Hair et al. (2011), PLS-SEM can effectively analyze non-normal data and assess hypotheses about the relationships between components, as highlighted by Ashraf et al. (2018).

5.2.1 Measurement Model Assessment

According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the measurement model comprises three key components: convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Convergent validity is ensured when there is a significant correlation between the scores of two instruments that measure the same concept (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). To evaluate the convergent validity of the reflective construct, it is necessary to examine the outer loadings of the variables and the average variance extracted (AVE), as stated by Hair et al. (2017). According to Hair et al. (2017), outer loadings, sometimes referred to as indicator reliability, should have a minimum value of 0.708. Table 2 presents the evaluation of the structural model.

Table 2 : Structural Model Assessment

Construct	Standardized Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	R-square	VIF
Conditional values		0.962	0.954	0.913		1.517
cv2	0.968					
cv3	0.943					
epistemic values		0.923	0.950	0.863		1.356
ev2	0.933					
ev3	0.940					
ev4	0.914					
functional values		0.922	0.941	0.762		2.988



Construct	Standardized Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	R-square	VIF
fv1	0.862					
fv2	0.900					
fv3	0.909					
fv4	0.845					
fv5	0.847					
monetary values		0.866	0.883	0.601		1.745
mv1	0.763					
mv2	0.782					
mv3	0.799					
mv4	0.786					
mv5	0.746					
social values		0.872	0.881	0.887		1.886
sv4	0.935					
sv5	0.948					
hedonic values		0.923	0.924	0.866		2.438
hv2	0.924					
hv3	0.934					
hv5	0.934					
Utilitarian values		0.899	0.904	0.908		1.756
uv1	0.957					
uv2	0.949					
attitude		0.952	0.953	0.841	0.718	2.135
at1	0.917					
at2	0.928					
at3	0.923					
at5	0.896					
perceived behavior		0.734	0.803	0.564		1.886
pbc1	0.736					
pbc2	0.900					
pbc3	0.848					
subjective norms		0.890	0.891	0.820		1.449
SN1	0.897					
SN2	0.910					
SN3	0.909					
relative advantage		0.928	0.929	0.822	0.682	2.348
ra1	0.899					
ra2	0.911					
ra3	0.915					
ra4	0.903					
re-patronage intention		0.713	0.710	0.835	0.712	1.987
ri1	0.906					
ri2	0.900					

Construct	Standardized Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	R-square	VIF
ri5	0.919					
word of mouth		0.892	0.893	0.903	0.611	1.846
wom2	0.952					
wom3	0.948					

Source: Author's creation (data from survey)

Table 2 illustrates that the CR value for each construct satisfied the minimum requirement of 0.7, suggesting satisfactory levels of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2017). The factor loadings, ranging from 0.74 to 0.96, provided support for convergent validity. Additionally, all AVE values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50, as stated by Hair et al. (2017). All items exhibited factor loadings exceeding 0.5 for the corresponding subscales. The constructs demonstrated significant convergent validity, as evidenced by the CR and AVE values surpassing 0.7 and 0.5, respectively. About the concept of discriminant validity, the findings shown in Table 4 (discriminant validity) indicate that the HTMT values fell below the conservative criterion of 0.85, as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015). Hence, the establishment of discriminant validity has been achieved.

According to Hair et al. (2019), it is necessary to examine the R-squared value for each exogenous variable before conducting PLS bootstrapping to determine the coefficient of determination. The R-squared values of all variables exceeded the intended threshold of 0.1 (Hair et al., 2017). For example, the variable of attitude towards ECCE explained 71.8% of the variability seen across components related to the perceived values. Subsequently, relative advantage was found to explain 68.2% of the variability concerning the corresponding constructs related to perceived values. Correspondingly, behavioral attention concerning word of mouth and repatronage was deemed to explain 61.1% and 71.2%, respectively, concerning attitude, subjective norms, relative advantage, and perceived behavioral control. Furthermore, to evaluate the predictive capability, Hair et al. (2017) and Hair et al. (2019) suggested that researchers should employ a blindfolding technique to acquire Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value and thereafter assess the predictive significance of the model. All the Q^2 values in the present model had values greater than zero (Q^2 attitude = 0.375, Q^2 relative advantage = 0.408, Q^2 repatronage intention = 0.482, Q^2 word of mouth intention = 0.347), suggesting a satisfactory level.

Next, we examined our hypothesis results via a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples; path coefficients, beta values, t-values, and p-values are listed in Table 2. Firstly, attitude has an impact on re-patronage intention ($\beta = 0.267$, $t = 4.537$, $p < 0.01$), but it did not have an influence on word of mouth ($\beta = 0.047$, $t = 0.771$, $p > 0.01$), thus, it renders only for H1a, but not for H1b. Second, perceived behavioral control was found not to influence re-patronage intention ($\beta = 0.067$, $t = 1.425$, $p > 0.01$), but it influences word of mouth intention ($\beta = 0.416$, $t = 6.646$, $p < 0.01$), thus, it only renders support on H2b. Third, this study found that subjective norm was found to not influence re-patronage intention ($\beta = 0.005$, $t = 0.095$, $p > 0.01$), but it has an influence on word of mouth, thus, it render support for H3b ($\beta = 0.187$, $t = 4.375$, $p < 0.01$). Relative advantage influences repatronage intention ($\beta = 0.569$, $t = 11.052$, $p > 0.01$), as well as word of mouth ($\beta = 0.230$, $t = 3.640$, $p > 0.01$), which supports H4a and H4b. Table 3 and Figure 2 illustrate the result of the hypothesis.

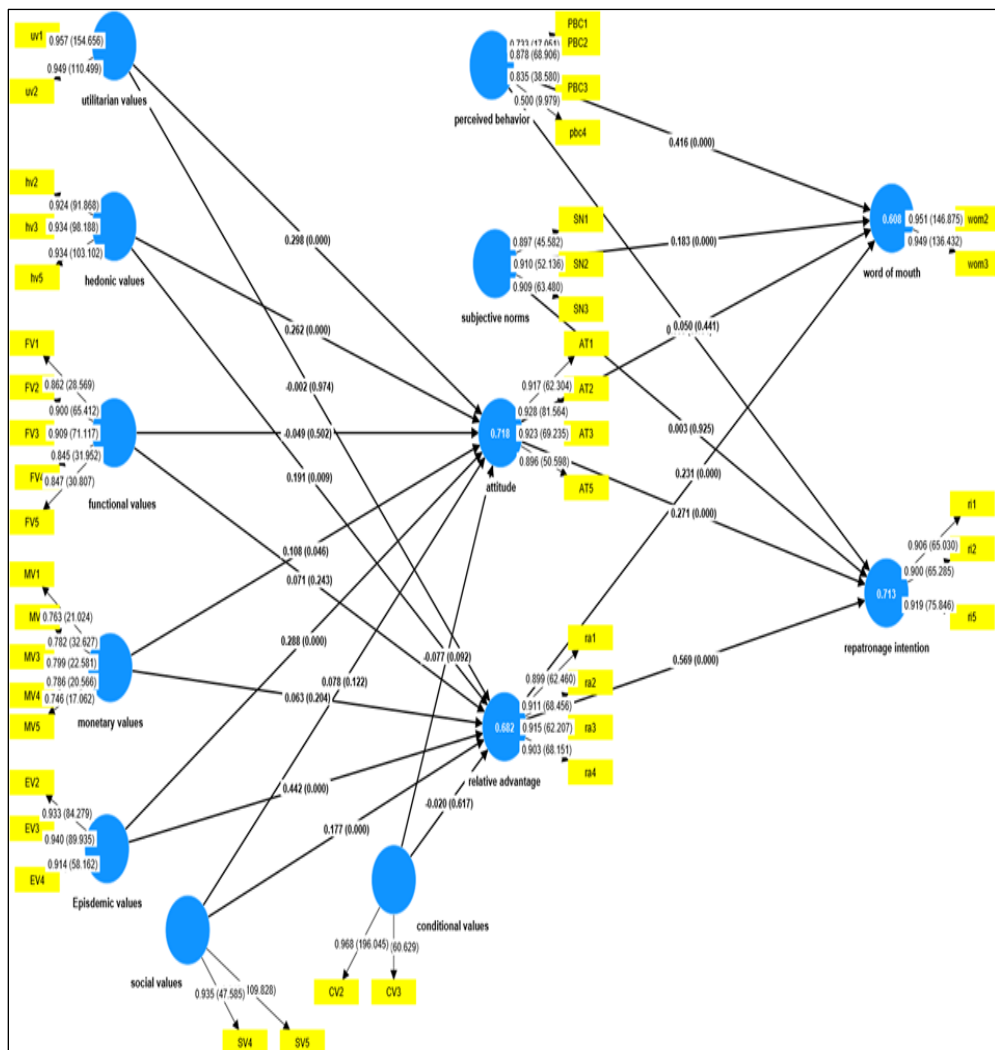


Figure 2 : Results of the Proposed Conceptual Model

Next, epistemic values exerted a positive and significant effect on attitude towards ECCE ($\beta = 0.286$, $t = 4.328$, $p < 0.01$) and relative advantage ($\beta = 0.439$, $t = 6.158$, $p < 0.01$), thus H5a and H5b were supported. Secondly, utilitarian values are positively influenced by attitude ($\beta = 0.292$, $t = 4.093$, $p < 0.01$), but not relative advantage ($\beta = -0.007$, $t = 0.033$, $p > 0.01$), hence, only H6a was supported. Third, conditional values do not influence attitude ($\beta = -0.066$, $t = 1.687$, $p > 0.01$) and relative advantage ($\beta = -0.022$, $t = 0.500$, $p > 0.01$), which does not render support for H7a and H7b.

Forth, functional values was not found to have an impact on attitude ($\beta = -0.042$, $t = 0.672$, $p > 0.01$), and it does not have an

influence on relative advantage ($\beta = 0.079$, $t = 1.167$, $p > 0.01$), thus, H8a and H8b were not supported. Fifth, hedonic values were found to have an influence on attitude ($\beta = -0.261$, $t = 3.773$, $p < 0.01$), and trust ($\beta = 0.188$, $t = 2.625$, $p < 0.01$), hence both H9a and H9b are supported, respectively. Sixth, monetary values were found to influence attitude ($\beta = 0.109$, $t = 1.993$, $p < 0.01$), but not on relative advantage ($\beta = 0.067$, $t = 1.270$, $p < 0.01$), thus, it renders support for H10a, but not H10b. Seventh, social values were not found to influence attitude ($\beta = -0.076$, $t = 1.548$, $p > 0.01$), but it was found to have an impact on relative advantage ($\beta = 0.175$, $t = 3.496$, $p < 0.01$); hence, only H11b was supported.

Table 3 : Result of the Hypotheses for Direct Relationships

	Hypotheses	Beta	Std dev	t-stats	P-value	Result
H1a	attitude -> repatronage intention	0.267	0.060	4.537	0.000	Yes
H1b	attitude -> word of mouth	0.047	0.065	0.771	0.441	No
H2a	perceived behavior -> repatronage intention	0.067	0.046	1.424	0.154	No
H2b	perceived behavior -> word of mouth	0.416	0.064	6.464	0.000	Yes
H3a	subjective norms -> repatronage intention	0.005	0.035	0.095	0.925	No
H3b	subjective norms -> word of mouth	0.187	0.042	4.375	0.000	Yes
H4a	relative advantage -> repatronage intention	0.569	0.051	11.052	0.000	Yes
H4b	relative advantage -> word of mouth	0.230	0.063	3.640	0.000	Yes
H5a	Epistemic values -> attitude	0.286	0.067	4.328	0.000	Yes
H5b	Epistemic values -> relative advantage	0.439	0.072	6.158	0.000	Yes
H6a	utilitarian values -> attitude	0.292	0.073	4.093	0.000	Yes
H6b	utilitarian values -> relative advantage	-0.007	0.074	0.033	0.974	No
H7a	conditional values -> attitude	-0.076	0.046	1.687	0.092	No
H7b	conditional values -> relative advantage	-0.022	0.041	0.500	0.617	No
H8a	functional values -> attitude	-0.042	0.073	0.672	0.502	No
H8b	functional values -> relative advantage	0.079	0.060	1.167	0.243	No
H9a	hedonic values -> attitude	0.261	0.069	3.773	0.000	Yes
H9b	hedonic values -> relative advantage	0.188	0.073	2.625	0.009	Yes
H10a	monetary values -> attitude	0.109	0.054	1.993	0.046	Yes
H10b	monetary values -> relative advantage	0.067	0.049	1.270	0.204	No
H11a	social values -> attitude	0.076	0.050	1.548	0.122	No
H11b	social values -> relative advantage	0.175	0.051	3.496	0.000	Yes

Source: Author's creation (data from survey)

Table 4 : Discriminant Validity

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Attitude													
Conditional values	0.177												
Epistemic values	0.830	0.251											
Functional values	0.733	0.255	0.828										
Hedonic values	0.832	0.175	0.868	0.837									
Monetary values	0.086	0.115	0.051	0.032	0.082								
Perceived behavior	0.886	0.287	0.840	0.859	0.885	0.071							
Relative advantage	0.710	0.248	0.820	0.732	0.708	0.040	0.754						
Social values	0.651	0.445	0.739	0.704	0.664	0.064	0.722	0.702					
Subjective norms	0.730	0.213	0.663	0.644	0.715	0.074	0.730	0.596	0.571				
Utilitarian values	0.830	0.162	0.881	0.864	0.876	0.088	0.849	0.733	0.644	0.686			
WOM	0.807	0.316	0.887	0.782	0.796	0.091	0.799	0.867	0.774	0.639	0.844		
repatronage intention	0.708	0.251	0.704	0.752	0.749	0.028	0.873	0.675	0.675	0.696	0.694	0.728	

Source: Author's creation (data from survey)



6.0 Discussion and Implications

This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the progression of perceived advantages linked to ECCE, shaped by diverse parental value judgments, and how these subsequently influence behavioral intentions. It seeks to elucidate the underlying cognitive processes that drive parents' decisions to enrol their children in ECCE programs and to engage in positive word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. By emphasizing the trade-off effects between perceived advantages and associated costs, as highlighted by Liu et al. (2021), this research underscores the significance of multiple value constructs in shaping parental decision-making.

A positive attitude may lead to re-enrolment (H1a) but does not necessarily result in WOM recommendations (H1b). It typically hinges on whether the ECCE program meets specific familial needs, whereas WOM depends more on generalized perceptions of benefit to others. For instance, even if a parent values the program highly, logistical issues such as location may prevent re-enrolment, but at the same time, they recommend the program to others.

Behavioral control, or a parent's perceived ability to choose the "right" ECCE, influences WOM more than re-enrolment (H2b). When parents feel confident in their decision, they are more likely to share that choice with others. However, re-enrolment may be dictated by external constraints such as changing work schedules or relocation. Similarly, subjective norms—social expectations or peer pressure—appear to affect WOM (H3b) but not re-enrolment (H3a). Parents may recommend a program that aligns with popular opinion or community standards to maintain social credibility, yet prioritize personal and familial needs when deciding on continued enrolment.

Perceived relative advantage emerges as a key determinant influencing both re-patronage (H4a) and WOM (H4b). ECCE programs that offer distinct benefits, such as innovative learning methods or a strong sense of community, tend to foster both continued enrolment and enthusiastic recommendations. This construct encapsulates the comparative benefits parents perceive when evaluating one program over others.

On the other hand, epistemic values, such as intellectual curiosity and exploration, play a significant role in shaping positive parental attitudes (H5a) and enhancing perceptions of relative advantage (H5b). Programs that stimulate children's cognitive development through discovery-based learning environments are



particularly appealing to parents who value intellectual growth (Menning, 2018; Shah et al., 2022).

Utilitarian values, including convenience and safety, are considered baseline expectations and therefore do not significantly contribute to perceptions of relative advantage (H6b). However, they do influence positive attitudes toward ECCE (H6a). Reliable scheduling, flexible pick-up/drop-off, and a focus on child safety contribute to parental peace of mind and reduced stress (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). Conditional values, specifically, situational needs like after-school care, may influence attitudes (H7a) but not perceived relative advantage (H7b). These values are highly individualized and thus do not position a program as broadly superior (Christenson et al., 1992).

Similarly, functional values such as safety and logistical convenience are fundamental but not differentiators. While they can lead to favorable attitudes (H8a), they do not directly affect perceptions of advantage (H8b). Nevertheless, these values may indirectly foster a positive outlook by alleviating parental concerns and stress (Andrew, 2015).

Hedonic values, associated with enjoyment and emotional satisfaction, influence both attitudes (H9a) and perceptions of relative advantage (H9b). When ECCE environments are joyful and emotionally enriching, parents are more likely to feel positively about the program and perceive it as offering a distinct benefit over others. Such programs strike a balance between fun and learning, positioning themselves as particularly attractive options.

Monetary values such as affordability or access to financial aid positively influence parental attitudes (H10a) but do not impact perceptions of relative advantage (H10b). While lower costs make ECCE more accessible and reduce financial burdens, they are not necessarily associated with educational excellence or distinctiveness (Al-Jaber et al., 2021). Thus, while affordability may enhance general appeal, it does not elevate a program above others in terms of quality.

Social values, such as fostering children's social development and sense of belonging, do not uniformly influence parental attitudes (H11a). For some parents, academic priorities may take precedence over socialization. However, programs emphasizing strong community engagement and social interaction influence perceptions of relative advantage (H11b). Parents who value social integration and holistic



development may find such programs uniquely beneficial, enhancing their perceived distinctiveness (Chung & Meuleman, 2016).

7.0 Implications of the Study

While Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has demonstrated long-term socio-economic and developmental benefits, its impact within low-income groups—specifically the B40 (Bottom 40% income group) in Malaysia and similar socioeconomic categories elsewhere—remains uneven. Integrating behavioral and value-based theoretical lenses such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) and the Theory of Consumption Values (Sheth, Newman & Gross, 1991) offers a structured way to understand and enhance ECCE participation among these communities.

Community-based campaigns are needed to raise awareness of ECCE's developmental benefits. They should highlight testimonials from local parents to normalize ECCE participation and counteract misconceptions that early education is unnecessary for low-income children. ECCE may engage local leaders, religious figures, and respected elders as ECCE ambassadors. When influential voices in the B40 community advocate for ECCE, social pressure and approval can positively influence parental behavior. As far as the perceived behavioral control is concerned, ECCE should include subsidized transport, flexible timing for working parents, and simplifying enrolment procedures through mobile platforms or community agents.

In addition, the Theory of Consumption Values suggests that five value dimensions—functional, emotional, social, epistemic, conditional, functional and monetary values can influence decision-making. Functional value can ensure ECCE programs offer visible, measurable developmental progress (e.g., improved communication skills, health monitoring). They need to provide feedback tools (e.g., monthly progress charts or parent-teacher apps) that help parents perceive ECCE as "worth the money."

Emotional Value may create emotionally secure, caring environments. Warm teacher-student interactions, culturally relevant storytelling, and play-based learning can help children form positive emotional attachments, which parents value deeply. Social Value has the impact of normalizing ECCE participation by building peer networks among B40 parents. When a parent sees others in their social circle sending their children to ECCE programs, the perceived social benefit and conformity increase.



Epistemic Value may offer learning opportunities not only for children but also for parents, such as brief financial literacy sessions, parenting workshops, or health briefings, enhancing the perceived knowledge gain from ECCE centres. In addition, conditional value may provide incentives such as food assistance, subsidies, or basic health services tied to ECCE attendance. This conditional benefit can motivate uptake, particularly when ECCE programs are co-located with community support services.

Furthermore, monetary value—another key dimension of the Theory of Consumption Values—is particularly salient for low-income households. Decisions to enrol in ECCE are frequently weighed against affordability and perceived economic return. High fees, hidden costs (such as uniforms or transportation), and opportunity costs can discourage participation. Therefore, ECCE providers must actively lower financial barriers by introducing subsidized or tiered fee structures and partnering with zakat or waqf institutions to support tuition for the most vulnerable. Additionally, visual communication tools that highlight long-term educational and economic benefits can help parents rationalize the cost as an investment rather than an expense. These strategies collectively enhance perceived behavioral control by reducing constraints and increasing parents' confidence in their ability to access ECCE services.

Future research should examine how Malaysian ECCE programs integrate multiculturalism, particularly in celebrating ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. Investigations into teacher practices that promote intercultural respect are needed, especially in monoethnic environments. Moreover, studies should explore barriers faced by underprivileged families, such as cost, accessibility, and awareness, and identify interventions to address challenges like language delays, malnutrition, or social-emotional development. Such work is essential to ensure that all Malaysian children benefit from high-quality, inclusive ECCE. Future studies may incorporate stratified or mixed-method sampling strategies to enhance representativeness while retaining the depth of insights characteristic of snowball approaches or any other method of sampling.

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