


## Private Schools' Marketing Tactics, Parents' Loyalty and School Image: A Structural Equation Model

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### Abstract

*This research aimed to reveal the relationship between the "marketing tactics" used by private schools, "school image" and "parent loyalty". Participants consisted of 812 parents, whose children were enrolled to private schools during the 2019-2020 academic year in Sivas. The research data were collected using "Marketing Tactics Scale", "School Image Scale", and "Parent Loyalty Scale". For the analysis of the data, descriptive statistics, correlation tests and structural equation modeling were used. The results of the analysis confirmed all the hypotheses developed in the theoretical model. Results showed that "marketing tactics" regarding "products and services", "school employees", "physical facilities", "price and payment" directly and indirectly affect "school image" and "parents' loyalty". It was also found that "school image" and "school employees-oriented marketing tactics" were perceived as the most effective predictors of the "parental loyalty".*

### Article Info

#### Article History:

**Received:**

March 25, 2022

**Accepted:**

August 23, 2022

#### Keywords:

Marketing of education, private schools, school image, parents' loyalty.



**Cite as:**

Mermer, S., Özer, N. & Şad, S. N. (2022). Private schools' marketing tactics, parents' loyalty and school image: A structural equation model. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*, 7(4), 787-824. <https://doi.org/10.30828/real.1093128>.

### **Introduction**

Like other organizations, schools and educational institutions have to change in order to meet the changing needs of the society, in an era of rapid and relentless change (Fullan, 2012). Besides parental demands and higher expectations for quality in education, increasing population paved the way for the rise of the private education sector. Many other factors including scarcity of public schools, crowded classrooms, inadequate teaching staff and physical school environments, and school safety-security concerns also led to an increase in the ratio of private education institutions in Turkey (Dönmez, 2016; Ergül, 2013; Korkut ve Doğan, 2002; Parlar, 2006; Uysal, 2017; Yirci ve Kocabaş, 2013). The increase in the number of private schools over time has led to competition among private schools, leading the parents to be able to choose from among several alternatives. The competitive environment created by the diversity of private schools both in terms of quantity and quality has inevitably directed private schools to try new "marketing tactics" in order to survive. Therefore, owners of the private schools began to take initiatives to attract their new customers and also to promote and increase the loyalty of their present or former customers (Gautam, 2005; Malik, Mustag, Jaswal & Malik, 2015).

Marketing of education is defined as identifying the needs and wishes of parents and students and dedicating to producing high quality services to ensure them (Zeybekoğlu, 2005). Private sector involvement in the education system has resulted in an increased



number of educational institutions to serve the growing population, program quality and overall innovation in modern education practices. This “profit-oriented” move has led to institutions competing for students and finding creative ways to meet the needs and preferences of students and parents (Uchendu, Nwafor & Nwaneri, 2015). For schools, education is the main service and the quality of education is the main competitive tool. It is a necessity for school administrators to focus on the quality of education, as the competition among private schools helps to improve the quality of education. Parents are always in search of effective schools where their children can get quality education. On the other hand, educational institutions seek to raise awareness about their schools for successful students and to attract their attention (Gautam, 2005). While private schools try to increase the quality of the educational services they offer, they also want to increase their profit regarding the services they offer (Malik et al., 2015). As a general marketing rule, the main purpose of educational marketing is to attract more students or parents. To attain this goal, schools should be marketing-oriented and give great importance to seeking for innovative ways to attract parents. Therefore, administrators of private schools should create an outstanding brand image for their schools (Birch, 1998).

There are five steps for service providers to follow in planning educational marketing: 1) market research, 2) analysis of the product environment, 3) preparation of the mission and development of the marketing plan, 4) development of strategy and promotional materials, and finally 5) monitoring, e.g. evaluation of the marketing process (Bunnel, 2005; Oplatka & Brown, 2004). There are different marketing mix approaches such as 5P and/or 7P. While 5P model includes the components of "product, price, promotion, place, people"



(Gautam, 2005; Li & Hung, 2009), the 7P model includes component of 5P plus “process and physical evidences” components (Bümen, 2017; Harvey, 1996; Ivy, 2008; James & Philips, 1995; Malik et al., 2015). In this research, four components of marketing mix are used: 1) products and services-oriented, 2) school employees-oriented, 3) physical facilities-oriented, and 4) price-oriented and payment-oriented marketing.

The main purpose of marketing is to introduce the parents to all aspects of the service they will buy and to persuade them to get it. In this context, the product dimension of marketing includes all kinds of teaching materials, learning areas and training options offered to the student. It is important that schools present their product portfolio and what the school promises for students during marketing. It is expected to express what makes the school's products special (high quality), and to reveal the school's supply power in response to exam results and parents' other expectations (James & Philips, 1995). The dimension of school employees covers a wide range from school administrators to teachers, from all support staff to parents. The human element of the service marketing mix consists of staff, their skills, expertise, and satisfying students and parents (Malik et al., 2015). Teachers' abilities, skills, knowledge, expertise and communication are important aspects that affect students' satisfaction (Li & Hung, 2009). The physical facilities dimension includes all the infrastructure facilities of the school, classrooms, workshops and laboratories, sports fields, the environment where the school is located, and even transportation facilities. In this context, it is very important to take care of the school entrance, the garden and the places where parents and visitors are accepted, to decorate the school corridors with boards, various paintings and posters where the students' works are exhibited, to have



all kinds of educational materials and tools that the students may need ready in the classrooms (Zeybekoğlu, 2007). The price dimension includes the fee that the school demands in return for the education service it provides, as well as scholarship and discount opportunities. These factors, which are integral part of communication between the school and parents starting from the registration of the student to the school, provide a concrete picture of the school against the parents. Marketing activities carried out from the admission of students to their graduation create a perception regarding the quality of school in the eyes of parents and the community. Therefore the image of a school is a cumulative result of school activities, formed over time by many different factors including different information and marketing processes. The image of an organization seen as the basis for developing customer loyalty to that organizations' products and/or services. Organizational image, the boosting force of marketing activities, provides greater customer loyalty, greater market share, and increased profit. Previous research results suggest that the organizational image is associated with the costumers' accumulated experiences regarding products and service of the organization. In this respect, based on their image about the school parents respect to the school, want their children to be educated in the same school in the future and recommend to their acquaintance (Li & Hung, 2009). Besides, the content of admission interviews, advertisement and public relation activities, and approaches used through social relations are very effective in the formation of the first image of schools, and this perception plays an important role in parents' decision to enroll their children in a school (Collins & Stevens, 2001). Karahan (2000) states that private schools need to try to make a difference compared to their competitors and make the education service they offer to their customer something unique and cannot be easily replicated.



Parents' loyalty to a school refers to a strong commitment to enroll their children to a preferred school. Parents having higher loyalty would recommend the school to their acquaintance and encourage them to take the educational service they get regardless of any formal contract or burden (Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998; Dick & Basu, 1994; Li & Hung, 2009; MacMillan, Money, Downing & Hillenbrand, 2005; Malik et al., 2015; Oliver, 1997; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasulaman, 1996). Badri and Mohaidat (2014) state that since a loyal student population is a source of competitive advantage, students' loyalty is one of the main goals of educational institutions. They also stated that schools concentrating on parent satisfaction can improve its reputation among parents that will lead "*parental loyalty*". Satisfaction from the school services is a necessary condition to gain school loyalty (Söderlund & Öhman, 2005). Parents, who see education as a key to future success, are motivated to make the necessary investment for education when they believe that private schools can provide a better future for their children (Galab, Vennam, Komanduri, Benry & Georgiadis, 2013).

Marketing activities offered by a school also determine the image of the school in the eyes of parents. Moreover, marketing activities carried out by school employees and administrators are of critical importance in terms of increasing parents' loyalty and the school's ability to compete with other private schools. Because the parents who are satisfied with the products and services offered by the school and have a positive school image will not only stay connected to the school, but also will contribute voluntarily to the marketing of school by promoting the school to their friends and relatives. Thus, private school administrators want to create a commitment among their new clients, and also maintain and improve the commitment of their



existing clients (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Dick & Basu, 1994; Zeithaml et al., 1996).

There is a large bulk of studies suggesting that marketing components are the predictors of the school image (Badri & Mohaidat, 2014; Bunnell, 2005; Gautam, 2005; Göktaş & Parlı, 2016; Malik et al., 2015; Uchendu et al., 2015), there is a significant relationship between the adoption of marketing strategies and student admission (Uchendu et al. 2015), and school image is positively related to students' and/or parents' loyalty (Andreassen & Lindestand, 1998; Badri & Mohaidat, 2014; Dick & Basu, 1994; Eger, Egerova & Pisonova, 2018; Friedman, Bobrowski & Markow, 2007; Gautam, 2005; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias & Rivera-Torres, 2005; Meier, 2018; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001; Palacio, Meneses & Perez, 2002; Skallerud, 2011). In addition, there are also studies that deal with "marketing tactics", "school image" and "parents' loyalty" together. For example, Malik et al. (2015) stated that the product, "people and process oriented marketing tactics" create a positive and significant relationship with "parents' loyalty", and the "school image" has a mediating effect in establishing the relationship between "marketing tactics" and "parents' loyalty". Li & Hung (2009) found that parents form an image about the school based on the school's characteristics, corporate structure, lived experiences about the communication, products and services of the school, and perceived image leads the loyalty to the school.

The ratio of private schools among all schools in Turkey has increased gradually. Ministry of National Education (2019) statistics show that private institutions make up 19.16% of all formal education institutions. In contrast with this increase, research on private schools is limited in Turkey. This study aims to reveal the relationships between three important variables related to private schools:



*“marketing tactics”*, *“school image”* and *“parents’ loyalty”*. In the studies of Gautam (2005), Li & Hung (2009) and Malik et al. (2015), which form the theoretical basis of this study, the relationship between *“marketing tactics”* and *“loyalty”* with the mediating effect of *“school image”* was revealed by multiple regression analysis and results showed that various dimensions of *“marketing tactics”* affect *“school image”*, and *“school image”* predicts *“parents’ loyalty”*. Although not in the field of education, it was determined in the research of Yürük & Kayapınar (2016) that there are significant relationships between marketing components, organizational image and customer commitment.

In this study, it is aimed to explain the relationship between these three variables with a structural model by revealing the current situation regarding the marketing components, school image and parental loyalty used in the marketing of private schools. In the field of private school services, it is considered important to reveal the relationship between marketing tactics, school image and parental loyalty, especially the providers of this service, and the whole education process in general. It is thought that this research will contribute to the literature, since there has not been any research that tries to reveal the relationships between the variables covered in the research using Structural Equation Modeling. In the light of these explanations, the main research question of this study is "What is the relationship among the *“marketing tactics”* used in private schools, *“school image”* and *“parents’ loyalty”*?". Accordingly, following hypotheses were tested in this research:

H1. *“Product and service-oriented marketing tactics”* are significant predictors of *“school image”*.

H2. *“School employees-oriented marketing tactics”* are significant predictors of *“school image”*.





H3. *"Price and payment-oriented marketing tactics"* are significant predictors of *"school image"*.

H4. *"Physical facilities-oriented marketing tactics"* are significant predictors of *"school image"*.

H5. *"School image"* is a significant predictor of *"parents' loyalty"*.

H6. *"Product and service-oriented marketing tactics"* are significant predictors of *"parent loyalty"* through *"school image"*.

H7. *"School employes-oriented marketing tactics"* are significant predictors of *"parent loyalty"* through *"school image"*.

H8. *"Price and payment-oriented marketing tactics"* are significant predictors of *"parent loyalty"* through *"school image"*.

H9. *"Physical facilities-oriented marketing tactics"* are significant predictors of *"parent loyalty"* through *"school image"*.

In this study, it has been revealed that the four dimensions of marketing "product and service", "school employees", "price and payment" and "physical facilities" affect the image of the school and therefore form the basis of parents' loyalty. With this study, it is thought that it will contribute to the establishment of loyalty and to the planning of marketing activities in private education institutions serving in our country.

## Method

### Research Design

In this study, a baseline cross-sectional survey design was used followed by a main associational research design to examine the relationships among "marketing tactics" used by private schools,



"school image" and "parents loyalty" based on parents' perceptions. Associational research aims to reveal the relationship among two or more variables, and whether and how these variables change together, examining the clues about the cause and effect between them (Büyüköztürk et al., 2015; Creswell, 2014). Structural equation modeling was used to determine the relationships between the variables in this study. SEM is a comprehensive statistical approach used to test models that have causal and inter-relationships between observed and latent variables (Yılmaz & Çelik, 2009). In this approach, a series of structural equations (such as regression equations) between the variables are tested via a model in order to better understand the hypotheses developed theoretically, and direct and indirect multiple relationships are measured by testing the observable and latent variables simultaneously on the model. The analysis of structural equation modeling is to reveal how well the model fits to the available data. If the fit indices obtained by testing the model reveal the absence of such a fit, the hypotheses are rejected (Meydan & Şeşen 2011). In this study, descriptive analyzes were also carried out.

### **Sampling**

The population of the research consisted of parents who bought private education services from kindergarten to high schools in the city center of Sivas-Turkey in the 2019-2020 academic year. During this research was conducted, there were 9 private schools serving at all education levels in the central district of Sivas province. All of these schools were intended to be included in the research, however, two of the administrators of these schools did not want to participate in the research. In the remaining 7 private schools, data collection tools were tried to be administered to parents of all students (n= 3325) using "self-sampling" method (Çilenti, 1984, p. 137), instead of selecting a sample.



Accordingly, questionnaire forms were sent to parents via their children. As a result, a total number of 854 instruments were returned. However, after 42 forms were excluded because they were filled incorrectly or incompletely, data gathered from 812 parents were included in the analysis.

### **Data Collection Tools**

In this research, a test battery consisting of three different data collection tools were used to collect data: "Marketing Tactics Scale (MTS)", "School Image Scale (SIS)" and "Parents' Loyalty Scale (PLS)". Information on each scale is given below.

*Marketing Tactics Scale:* This scale was developed in Mermer (2020, pp. 63-67) based on the relevant literature on "marketing tactics" (Badri & Mohaidat, 2014; Birch, 1998; Gautam, 2005; Harvey, 1996; Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015; James & Philips, 1995; Li & Hung, 2009; Malik et al., 2015; Nohutçu, 1999; Oplatka, 2004; Tercan, 2016; Uchendu et al., 2015; Uysal, 2017). But in this research a four dimensional factor structure was used respectively: product, people, price and place. Considering this dimensions initial scale items developed using relevant literature, and the items were sent to panel of expert. After this stage the scale was administered on the 397 parents and gathered data was analysed using explanatory factor analysis (EFA). Results showed that four factor scale explained 65.56% of the total variance, and factor loadings vary between ".52" and ".86". Using data gathered from 832 parent a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was also conducted. Results revealed acceptable goodness-of-fit values for the four-factor scale which consists of 24 items (Çokluk, Şekercioğlu, & Büyüköztürk, 2010; Meydan & Şeşen 2011; Şimşek, 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013; Yılmaz & Çelik, 2009):  $\chi^2/df=4.62$ , GFI=.89, AGFI=.87, NFI=.91, NNFI=.91, CFI=.92, RMSEA=.06, RMR=.06 SRMR=.05. The



Cronbach Alpha internal consistency (reliability) coefficients for each dimension of the scale was calculated as “.90” for the “Product and Service Oriented Marketing” factor, “.92” for the “School Employees Oriented Marketing” factor, “.84” for the “Price and Payment Oriented Marketing” factor, and “.86” for the “Physical Facilities Oriented Marketing” factor.

*School Image Scale:* This scale is an adapted by Mermer (2020, pp. 67-70) from "Perceived Organizational Prestige" scale developed by Mael & Ashford (1992). During adaptation process first items were translated in Turkish, and two items were added and some minor revisions was done in terms of Turkish education system and private schools according to experts opinions. After this stage the scale was administered on the 604 parents (state= 217, private=387). A single factor scale consisting of six items was obtained by EFA performed with the data received. Results showed that single factor scale explained 58.5% of the total variance and factor loadings of the items vary between “.56” and “.85”. To assess the model-data fit also CFA was conducted with the data gathered (n=812). Results obtained showed that the model-data fit was good:  $\chi^2/df=4.09$ , GFI=.98, AGFI=.96, NFI=.98, NNFI=.97, CFI=.99, RMSEA=.06, RMR=.02, SRMR=.01). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated as “.85”.

*Parental Loyalty Scale:* This scale was developed by Mermer (2020, pp. 70-73) based on previous literature (Altay, 2018; Friedman et al., 2007; Güldiken, 2017; Li & Hung, 2009; Skallerud, 2011). After initial scale items developed using these literature, the items were sent to a panel of experts. After this stage, the scale was administered to the 604 parents (State= 217, Private=387), and gathered data was analyzed using EFA. Results showed that single factor scale explained 64.87% of



the total variance, and factor loadings of the six items vary between “.63” and “.89”. To assess the model-data fit also CFA was conducted with the data gathered (n=812). The CFA revealed good index values for the single-factor scale:  $\chi^2/df=1.98$ , GFI=.99, AGFI=.98, NFI=.99, NNFI=.99, CFI=.99, RMSEA=.03, RMR=.01, SRMR=.01. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated as “.85”.

### Data Analysis

Univariate and multivariate normality tests were performed on the data set before doing structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. The skewness and kurtosis coefficients used to test the univariate normality distribution of the data. These results are presented in Table 1:

Table 1.  
*Skewness and Kurtosis Values for the Variables*

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
PSOM	-.21	-.59
SEOM	-.98	.73
PPOM	-.59	-.09
PFOM	-.56	-.24
SI	-.23	-.18
PL	-.51	-.13

(PSOM: “Product and Service Oriented Marketing”, SEOM: “School Employees Oriented Marketing”, PPOM: “Price and Payment Oriented Marketing”, PFOM: “Physical Facilities Oriented Marketing”, SI: “School Image”, PL: “Parents’ Loyalty”)

The values in Table 1 show that univariate normality is satisfied (Büyüköztürk, 2010; Can, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). For



Multivariate normality assumption, multivariate skewness, kurtosis and critical ratio (c.r.) values were checked. In order to assess the extreme values, the Mahalanobis distance was calculated by performing multiple regression. After calculating the Mahalanobis distance a total number of 8 cases were deleted due to violating the multivariate normality assumption (Field, 2009, p.512). The results of final multivariate normality analysis are given in Table 2:

Table 2.  
*Multivariate Normality Analysis*

Variable	Skewness	c.r.	Kurtosis	c.r.
PSOM	-.20	-2.36	-.60	-3.52
SEOM	-.58	-6.75	-.14	-.83
PPOM	-.92	-10.69	.54	3.14
PFOM	-.55	-6.45	-.23	-1.36
SI	-.23	-2.70	-.15	-.89
PL	-.50	-5.83	-.17	-.99
<b>Multivariate</b>			6.79	9.83

When the values in Table 2 are examined, the skewness and kurtosis values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) of each variable in the data set and the critical ratio (c.r.) value of the multivariate normality kurtosis value were found to be between acceptable ranges (Bayram, 2010, p. 109). The endogenous variables included in SEM analysis were “school image” and “parental loyalty”; while exogenous variables were “product and service oriented marketing”, “school employees oriented marketing”, “price and payment oriented marketing” and “physical facilities oriented marketing”.

## Results

Descriptive statistics regarding the research variables and intercorrelation coefficients for these variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.  
*Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Results for Scores Taken from Scales (n=812)*

Scale/ Dimension	Min.	Max.	$\bar{X}$	S	2	3	4	5	6
1. PSOM	7.00	35.00	23.66	6.55	.57*	.57*	.69*	.51*	.49*
2. SEOM	7.00	35.00	28.69	5.81		.67*	.64*	.55*	.61*
3. PPOM	5.00	25.00	19.24	4.36			.58*	.48*	.50*
4. PFOM	5.00	25.00	18.58	4.65				.50*	.48*
5. SI	6.00	30.00	21.35	4.74					.78*
6. PL	6.00	30.00	22.04	5.43					

\*p<.05

As in Table 3, the mean values of the study variables were calculated as follows:  $\bar{X}$ =23.66 (sd=6.55) for PSOM,  $\bar{X}$ =28.69 (sd=5.81) for SEOM,  $\bar{X}$ =19.24 (sd=4.36) for PPOM,  $\bar{X}$ =18.58(sd=4.65) for PFOM,  $\bar{X}$ =21.35(sd=4.74) for SI,  $\bar{X}$ =22.04(sd= 5.43) for PL. In addition, there were significant and positive correlations between “marketing tactics”, “school image” and “parental loyalty”. Accordingly “school image” is positively and significantly correlated with “school employees-oriented

*marketing*" ( $r=.55$ ), "*product and service-oriented marketing*" ( $r=.51$ ), "*physical facilities-oriented marketing*" ( $r=.50$ ) and "*price and payment-oriented marketing*" ( $r=.48$ ). Thus, it can be stated that as the qualifications of school employees are emphasized during interviews with parents, more positive perceptions about the school image develop. The same is also true for "*product and service-oriented marketing*", "*physical facilities-oriented marketing*" and "*price and payment-oriented marketing*" respectively. In the relationship between "*parental loyalty*" and the dimensions of "*marketing tactics*", "*parental loyalty*" is positively and significantly correlated with "*school employees-oriented marketing*" ( $r=.61$ ), "*price and payment-oriented marketing*" ( $r=.50$ ), "*product and service-oriented marketing*" ( $r=.49$ ), and "*physical facilities-oriented marketing*" ( $r=.48$ ). The remarkable finding here is that highlighting the qualifications of school employees in the marketing process has the highest correlation with both "*parental loyalty*" and "*school image*". In this study, it was concluded that there is a high level of positive significant relationship ( $r=.78$ ,  $p<.05$ ) between parents' perceptions of school image and their loyalty to school. According to this finding, it can be said that as the parents' perceptions on school image increases, their loyalty to the school also increases.

## Results

In the theoretical model tested in the research, it was predicted that "*product- and service-oriented marketing*", "*school employees-oriented marketing*", "*price- and payment-oriented marketing*" and "*physical facility-oriented marketing*" predict "*school image*", and finally "*school image*" predicts "*parental loyalty*" (Figure 1).



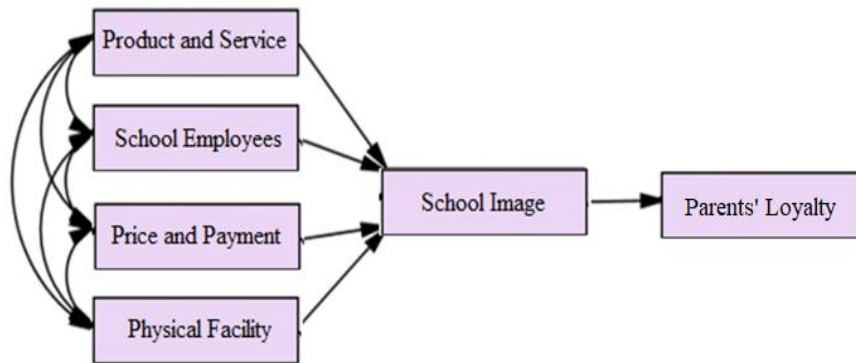


Figure 1. Theoretical Model Tested in the Research

In the model in Figure 1, direct and indirect effects between variables were tested by structural equation modeling. The results are given in Table 4.

Table 4.  
*Analysis Results for the Theoretical Model Tested*

Variables	Non-Standardized Regression Coefficient (B)	Standard error	Standardized Regression Coefficient (β)	C.R. (t)	P
SI <--- PSOM	.15	.02	.21	5.39	.000*
SI <--- SEOM	.24	.03	.29	6.99	.000*
SI <--- PPOM	.09	.04	.09	2.24	.020*
SI <--- PFOM	.10	.04	.10	2.33	.010*
PL <--- SI	.91	.02	.79	36.84	.000*

$\chi^2= 112.871$ ;  $df=4$  (\* $p<.05$ )

In the analyzes presented in Table 4, the goodness of fit values of the analyzes related to the theoretical model were  $\chi^2/df=28.21$ , GFI=.95, AGFI=.78, NFI=.96, NNFI=.85, CFI=.96, RMSEA=.18, RMR=1.58, SRMR=.05. In terms of model-data fit, it was determined that the goodness-of-fit values were not within acceptable limits, thus the modification suggestions for the model were examined as suggested by Meydan & Şeşen (2011). Since there was a high level of direct relationship between “school employees-oriented marketing” and “parent loyalty” (Modification Index=69.86 and Parameter Change=.17,  $p < 0.05$ ), a new direct path was added between these variables in the final model.

**Results of the Final Model**

In addition to the relationships tested in the theoretical model, the proposed relationship was added to the model (Figure 2).

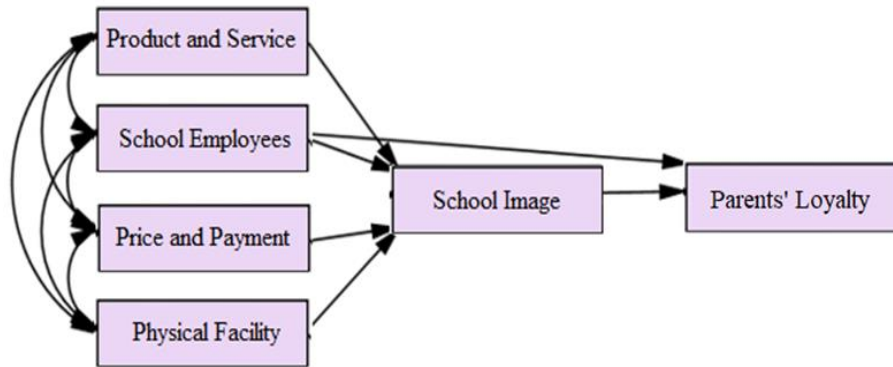


Figure 2. Final Model of the Research

The analysis results regarding the final model of the research are given in Table 5.

Table 5.  
*Analysis Results for the Final Model*

Variables	Non-Standardized Regression Coefficient (B)	Standard error	Standardized Regression Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	C.R. (t)	p
SI <--- PSOM	.15	.02	.21	5.39	.000*
SI <--- SEOM	.24	.03	.29	6.99	.000*
SI <--- PPOM	.09	.04	.09	2.24	.020*
SI <--- PFOM	.10	.04	.10	2.33	.010*
PL <--- SI	.74	.02	.64	26.85	.000*
PL <--- SEOM	.24	.02	.25	10.73	.000*

$\chi^2= 5.169$ ;  $df=3$  (\* $p<.05$ )

According to the final model confirmed by the analysis results in Table 5 all of the dimensions of “marketing tactics” are direct and positive predictors of “school image”. In addition, “school employees-oriented marketing” has a direct positive effect on “parental loyalty” ( $\beta=.25$ ;  $t=10.736$ ;  $p<.05$ ), and “school image” positively affects “parental loyalty” ( $\beta=.64$ ;  $t=26.856$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Goodness of fit values of the final model ( $X^2/df=1.72$ ,  $GFI=.99$ ,  $AGFI=.98$ ,  $NFI=.99$ ,  $NNFI=.99$ ,  $CFI=.99$ ,  $RMSEA=.03$ ,  $RMR=.16$ ,  $SRMR=.00$ ) obtained from the analyzes showed that the model has acceptable fit values. In Figure 3, the path diagram of the final model, standardized path coefficients (regression coefficient) and coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ) are given.

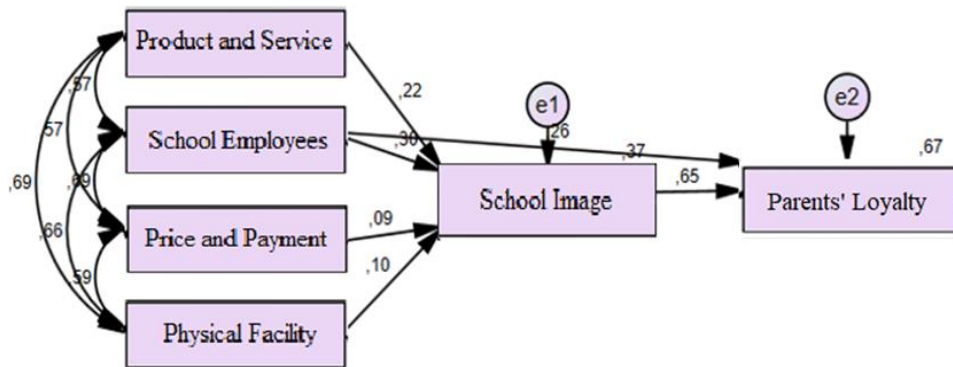


Figure 3. Path diagram of the final model

According to Figure 3, “product- and service-oriented marketing”, “school employees-oriented marketing”, “price- and payment-oriented marketing” and “physical facilities-oriented marketing” together account for 37% of the variance in “school image”; while all variables together explain 67% of the variance in “parental loyalty”. In addition, it was found that the “school image” (SI) plays a mediating role in the relationship between “marketing tactics” (PSOM, SEOM, PPOM, PFOM); and “parental loyalty” (PL).

#### Direct and indirect effects on the final model

While interpreting the results of the SEM, direct, indirect and total effects were used. Standardized direct, indirect and total effects for the variables in the SEM are given in Table 6.



Table 6.  
Standardized Direct, Indirect and Total Effects of the Final Model

	PSOM			SEOM			PPOM			PFOM			SI		
	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total
SI	.21*		.21*	.29*		.29*	.09*		.09*	.10*		.10*			
PL		.14*	.14*	.25*	.19*	.44*		.05*	.05*		.06*	.06*	.64*		.64*

\*p<.05

The direct effects in Table 6 showed that “product and service-oriented marketing” (.21), “school employees-oriented marketing” (.29), “price and payment-oriented marketing” (.09), and “physical facilities-oriented marketing” (.10) tactics directly and significantly affect the “school image”. It has been revealed that “school employees-oriented marketing” (.25) and “school image” (.64) directly and significantly affect “parental loyalty”. When the indirect effects were examined, it was found that “product and service-oriented marketing” (.14), “school employees-oriented marketing” (.19), “price and payment-oriented marketing” (.05), “physical facilities-oriented marketing” (.06) tactics indirectly affected “parental loyalty”.

### Conclusions and Discussion

The main purpose of this research was to explain the relationship between “marketing tactics”, “school image” and “parental loyalty” through SEM. After descriptive analysis, it was found that dimensions of “marketing tactics” have positive and significant relationships with “school image” and “parental loyalty”. This result is quite similar with

relevant literature. Gautam (2005) states that marketing elements such as product, place, people, promotion and price are significantly and positively related to the image of the educational institution. Factors affecting the "school image" are listed in the literature as brand recognition, academic success, admission conditions, academic programs, quality of teaching staff, social and sports opportunities, social responsibility projects, campus features and other physical facilities or physical environment (Arpan, Raney & Zivnuska, 2003; Kazoleas, Kim & Moffitt, 2001; Polat, Abat & Tezyürek, 2010). Considering the correlation coefficients of this study, the highest relationship was between "school image" and "parental loyalty" ( $r=.78$ ), while relatively the lowest relationship was between "parental loyalty" and "physical facilities-oriented marketing" ( $r=.48$ ). Another important point to be emphasized here is that most strong "marketing tactic" was "school employees oriented marketing" for both "school image" and "parental loyalty". Some research results confirm that the quality and commitment of the teaching staff and academic success are the variables that has the most impact on the parents' private school preferences and also school image (Bozyiğit, 2017; Çelikten, 2010; Hesapçioğlu & Nohutçu, 1999; Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015).

The first hypothesis of the research, "*Product and service-oriented marketing tactics*" are significant predictors of "*school image*." was accepted as a result of the analysis. This result is quite similar with relevant literature. Research by Helgesen and Nettet (2007) states that student satisfaction is an important prestige for high premise. There are studies in the literature suggesting that safety, quality teaching and additional activities to the curriculum increase the performance of schools and encourage parents to receive services (Birch, 1998; Çelikten, 2010; Friedman et al., 2007; Parlar, 2006). Again, Gautam

(2015) states that the quality of education for schools is the main competitive tool and plays a vital role in attracting more service buyers. According to this result, private school administrators should consider increasing the quality of the products they offer to students in order to create good school image.

The second hypothesis of the research, "School employees-oriented marketing tactics are significant predictors of school image." was accepted as a result of the analysis. There are studies in the literature stating that teachers' expertise, abilities and experiences, communication skills and school image are positively related with student satisfaction (Badri, 2014; Gautam, 2015; Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Immelman & Roberts -Lombard, 2015; Li & Hung, 2009; Meier, 2018). However, it is stated that not only teachers but also all school staff interacting with students affect the image of the school as a marketing element with their areas, personal characteristics and even physical appearances (Malik et al., 2015; Oplatka, 2007). According to this result, private school administrators should pay attention to the employment of expert teachers in their fields, and competent school personnel in the field for which they are responsible, in order for the school to have a good image.

The third hypothesis of the research is "Price and payment-oriented marketing tactics are significant predictors of school image." accepted as a result of the analysis. There are studies in the literature stating that school enrollment prices are an important factor in school selection and play a key role in student satisfaction compared to the quality of services provided (Gautam, 2005; Harvey, 1996; Lansigan, 2006; Li & Hung, 2009; Malik et al., 2015). The quality of service provided is accepted as an indicator of the school' right to demand higher prices (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Accordingly, private school



administrators should develop strategies such as scholarships, discounts, etc. that can make the fee reasonable.

The fourth hypothesis of the study, "*Physical facilities-oriented marketing tactics* are significant predictors of *school image*." was accepted as a result of the analysis. Parents consider many factors in their school preferences including class size, computers, libraries, etc. Physical facilities of schools consisting of teaching tools used in classes, the characteristics of the school campus and even the transportation to the school (Avest, Troost & Miedema, 2015; Birch, 1998; Çelikten, 2010; Gautam, 2015; Harvey, 1996; Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015; Lansigan, 2016; Li & Hung, 2009; Meier 2018; Parlar, 2006). It is stated that school facilities such as school's equipment, infrastructure, playgrounds, buildings, etc. essentially affect parents' perceptions of the school and overall school image (Friedman et al., 2007). According to this result, private school administrators should pay attention to the order and cleanliness of the physical facilities, which are the first face of the school, to be interesting and functional.

The fifth hypothesis of the research is "School image is a significant predictor of *parents' loyalty*" was accepted as a result of the analysis. In the literature, it is stated that student engagement is one of the goals of educational institutions, as a loyal student population is a source of competitive advantage (Bush, Ferrell & Thomas, 2001). It has been found that the reputation and image of the educational institution strongly affect the retention behavior and enrollment rate (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Meier, 2018; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001). Besides, some research results showed that school image is an important antecedent of parental loyalty and satisfaction from school (Avest et al., 2015; Badri & Mohaidat, 2014; Birch, 1998; Gautam, 2005; Li & Hung, 2009; Malik et al., 2015; Skallerud, 2011). Therefore, private school





administrators should try to find new ways to strengthen the image of the school in order to increase student and parent loyalty.

The sixth hypothesis of the study, "*Product and service-oriented marketing tactics are significant predictors of parent loyalty through school image*" was accepted as a result of the analysis. According to Dick and Basu (1994), the marketing of an organization's products and services is often seen as central to service buyers' engagement. Satisfaction with products and services positively affects the image of the institution, meaning high market share and loyalty. Malik et al. (2015) stated that positive word-of-mouth communication of service users improves the school's enrollment rates by attracting potential parents. Accordingly, increasing the quality and functionality of the products of the private school will contribute to parental loyalty.

The seventh hypothesis of the study, "*School employes-oriented marketing tactics are significant predictors of parent loyalty through school image.*" was accepted as a result of the analysis. There are studies indicating that teachers' expertise, teaching skills and experience, communication skills are positively related with school image (Badri, 2014; Gautam, 2015; Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015; Li & Hung, 2009; Meier, 2018). Therefore, it can be asserted that if private school employ qualified and skilled teachers parental loyalty will increase. Accordingly, the private school administrators should consider the importance of the teaching staff to increase the enrollment rate.

The eighth hypothesis of the research, "*Price and payment-oriented marketing tactics are significant predictors of parent loyalty through school image.*" was accepted as a result of the analysis. The school's enrollment price is one of the main factors associated with parents' willingness to receive services. The positive relationship between the



service provided and the price demanded and payment has an impact on student and therefore parental satisfaction. Thanks to this satisfaction, parents also direct other parents to the school (Marzo-Navarro et al., 2005). The quality service provided by the school is also accepted as an indicator of the school's right to demand higher prices (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). According to this result, the price of private school is another factor that has an effect on parental loyalty. Private schools should always attract the parents' attention during registration periods using strategies such as scholarships and discounts. Private schools should also ensure that parents are going to get their money's worth.

The ninth hypothesis of the research, "*Physical facilities-oriented marketing tactics are significant predictors of parent loyalty through "school image."* was accepted as a result of the analysis. Important issues that parents focus on when choosing a school include availability of transportation the physical appearance, school safety, the presence of art and sports facilities, hygiene conditions, etc (Malik et al., 2015). Quality and sustainable service delivery of the institution can increase the enrollment rate of the school (Malik et al., 2015). Informal information plays an important role in the school selection process. Parents rely on what they hear from their family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances etc. Parents with favorable experiences with the physical environment will recommend the school to others, thus helping the school to attract the attention of new parents (Avest et al., 2015). These results in the literature support our results. Accordingly, private school administrators should consider factors such as the school's physical equipment, environment and transportation, and safety as factors that ensure the loyalty of parents to school.

As a result of the model tested in the study, it was found that while “school employees-oriented marketing tactic” was the most effective variable on the “school image”, “price and payment-oriented marketing tactic” was the least effective variable. On the other hand, it was revealed that “school image” and “school employees-oriented marketing tactic” were the most effective variables on the “parental loyalty”. It was also found that the “physical facilities-oriented marketing” and “price and payment-oriented marketing tactics” were the least effective variables on “parental loyalty”. High relationship between “school image” and “parental loyalty” found in this research coincides with the results of studies in the literature (Avest et al., 2015; Badri & Mohaidat, 2014; Birch, 1998; Gautam, 2005; Malik et al., 2015; Li & Hung, 2009; Skallerud, 2011). Meier (2008) states that parents who have positive image about the school and are satisfied with the services provided are less tend to change schools. Skallerud (2011) also state that a school that meets and exceeds the expectations of the parents will increase the loyalty of the parents to the school along with this good reputation. There are studies in the literature that conclude that safety, quality teaching and additional activities to the curriculum increase the performance of schools and encourage parents to receive services (Birch, 1998; Çelikten, 2010; Friedman et al., 2007; Parlar, 2006).

As a result of the research, it was revealed that the “product and service”, “school employees”, “physical facilities”, “price and payment-oriented marketing tactics” directly and indirectly affect the “school image” and “parents’ loyalty”. According to the results of this research, private schools should consider the image of the school before “parental loyalty”. There are also many studies in the literature stating that “school image” is an antecedent of parental satisfaction and “loyalty”. (Avest et al., 2015; Badri & Mohaidat, 2014; Birch, 1998; Gautam, 2005;



Li & Hung, 2009; Malik et al., 2015; Skallerud, 2011). Reputation and image of the educational institutions strongly affect the retention behavior and loyalty of parents (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Meier, 2018; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001). When it comes to “*school image*”, private schools should give a high priority to the quality and commitment of teaching staff in order to create a positive school image. Teachers' expertise, skills and experiences, communication skills and “*school image*” are positively correlated (Badri, 2014; Gautam, 2015; Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015; Li & Hung, 2009; Meier, 2018). Therefore private schools should give more importance to the teaching staff selection process and consider and support the professional development needs of their teachers.

The increase in the number of private schools in education investments constitutes the agenda in the recent development plans of our country. Renewed curriculum to increase the quality of education physical infrastructure, equipment and teachers in accordance with the curriculum and teaching methods the need to improve the quality of education and to use the resources allocated to education more effectively continues is doing. Accordingly, the increase in the number of private schools in education investments development is related to its economic and social dimensions. It is a very important issue to attract students and ensure their continuity for private schools, the number of which is increasing rapidly among formal education institutions in Turkey and has reached the level of 1 in 5. According to the results of the research, private school administrators should use the quality of school staff as the most important marketing tool as well as image improvement in order to increase the preference level of their institutions. In addition to a positive school image, private schools should consider that having a staff of expert educators and well-

equipped school personnel is an important requirement for parental loyalty.

The result obtained from this research should be considered within some limitations. First of all this study conducted in a small city located in central Anatolia region of Turkey with a rather small number (n=9) of private schools. Although all parents in this schools participated in this research, the generalizability of the results to the private school sector in Turkey is limited. Also in this study the analysis unit was selected as the individual parents. However, marketing tactics, parental loyalty and school image can be investigated at school level using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM).

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Mermer, Özer & Şad (2022). Private Schools' Marketing Tactics, Parents' Loyalty and School Image: A Structural Equation Model.

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