

Parents' Perceptions of the Institutional Image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools

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The aim of this study is to identify parental perceptions of the institutional image of Imam Hatip secondary schools, which are not bound by the address-based enrollment system and allow registration based on parental preference, as well as the factors influencing these perceptions. The research population consists of the parents of students enrolled in 14 independent Imam Hatip secondary schools operating in the province and districts of Bolu, with a total of 1,759 students. The sample comprises 500 parents randomly selected from this population. The study employed a survey model, and data were collected using the "Institutional Image Scale" developed by Gürbüz (2008). Findings shows that, the institutional image perceptions of Imam Hatip secondary schools are high, and these perceptions are not influenced by gender or income level. Finally, it was found that the institutional image perceptions of parents whose children attend Imam Hatip schools are higher than those whose children do not attend such schools, whereas the perceptions of parents of students enrolled in project-based Imam Hatip schools that implement a Hifz (Qur'an memorization) curriculum alongside academic courses are not higher compared to those of other Imam Hatip schools.

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INTRODUCTION

When the past forty years are examined, it is observed that until 1997, the number of Imam Hatip schools and their student populations followed a steadily increasing trend, reaching up to six hundred thousand students. In parallel with this numerical increase, students graduating from these schools achieved notable success in university entrance exams (Aşlamacı, 2014). These achievements contributed positively to the institutional image of Imam Hatip schools and were reflected in student enrollment figures. However, the positive perception of these schools began to decline following a policy decision taken at the 15th National Education Council in 1996. In line with this decision, Law No. 4306 was enacted in 1997, introducing an uninterrupted eight-year compulsory education system and resulting in the closure of the middle school sections of Imam Hatip schools.

In addition, the implementation of the coefficient system in university entrance exams further affected the number of students enrolling in these schools. According to this policy, the weighted high school grade point average was multiplied by a coefficient of 0.5 for general high schools and 0.2 for Imam Hatip and vocational high schools; in the 2003–2004 academic year, these coefficients were updated to 0.8 and 0.3, respectively (Çakır, Bozan, & Talu, 2004). This created a disadvantage of up to 50 points in university entrance exams for Imam Hatip and vocational high school graduates. Consequently, the institutional image of Imam Hatip schools deteriorated, leading to a decline in enrollment and the closure of some schools due to insufficient student numbers (Bilecik, 2016).

Following an amendment to the Basic Law of National Education on March 30, 2012, compulsory education was extended to 12 years, but the uninterrupted eight-year model was abolished. Instead, a 4+4+4 model was adopted, consisting of four years each for primary school, middle school, and high school. This change allowed for the re-establishment of the middle school sections of Imam Hatip schools, and Imam Hatip Secondary Schools (İHO) resumed student admissions. The reopening of these schools brought about a renewed institutional image, prompting this study to investigate how this image is perceived by parents. Under the compulsory education system in Turkey, students generally attend schools assigned based on their residential address, known as the address-based enrollment system. However, Imam Hatip schools are excluded from this system and allow enrollment based on parental choice regardless of residence. It is assumed that factors such as educational quality, academic or athletic achievements, and the overall quality of services offered influence the preference for these schools. Promoting these features to the community, constructing a strong institutional image, and effectively managing that image are essential to maintaining and enhancing the perception of these schools.

Institutional Image

Although the concept of image is commonly perceived as outward appearance or characteristic structure, it has been conceptualized with various definitions across different disciplines. In general terms, image can be

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defined as the mental and emotional perception of a person or an entity, shaped by information derived from real or imagined evidence (Çorakçı, 2007). Image possesses the power to influence individuals' perceptions, decisions, and their ability to interpret the world and events around them. In other words, individuals acquire preliminary information about people or institutions through their image, and this preliminary information guides their decision-making. The influence of image on human decisions can be explained through several key functions. According to Geçikli (2012), these functions include:

Decision-Making Function: Image influences individuals in determining which product or service to choose (Derin & Demirel, 2010). The more positive the perceived image of a product or service, the more likely it is to be preferred.

Simplification Function: Image allows individuals to evaluate products or services based on their perceptions (Aksoy & Bayramoğlu, 2008). Since this evaluation is made using information provided by the image, external assessments are typically disregarded.

Regulation Function: This refers to the ability of individuals to integrate their perceived image of a product or service with their own real-life experiences.

Orientation Function: Even if the individual's perception of the image is insufficient for a full evaluation, they are still able to make judgments based on their own subjective interpretation (Akay, 2005).

Generalization Function: Similar to the orientation function, this refers to the individual's tendency to generalize their limited perception of a specific product or service to others about which they have no knowledge.

Institutional image refers to the impression formed by institutions in the eyes of individuals or other organizations with whom they interact. More specifically, it can be defined as the perception of an institution by its target audience, influenced by the institution's identity (Okay, 2005). Although the term is commonly used in relation to commercial enterprises, institutional image plays a crucial role not only in achieving competitive advantage and profitability but also in fostering uniqueness, establishing leadership in a particular field, and driving innovation.

Institutional image does not emerge spontaneously; it is shaped through interaction with the social environment (Güzelcik, 1999). The formation of institutional image is a complex process, shaped by environmental conditions. Institutions strive to construct and emphasize their image in order to become more visible and distinguishable from competitors (Güzelcik, 1999). Environmental factors influencing institutional image can be examined in two categories: internal and external elements. Internal elements include management, personnel, and institutional activities. External elements consist of factors such as customer satisfaction and the quality of services provided.

The reopening of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools (İHO) in the 2012–2013 academic year—following major reforms in the Turkish education system and ongoing social and political debates—has made the reasons behind parental preferences, their hesitations, and acceptance of these schools a matter of concern. In this context, institutional image has become a significant issue for both school administrators and researchers. This study aims to evaluate the institutional image of İHO in light of parents' perceptions, particularly in the context of the educational changes and socio-political dynamics that have affected these institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine parents' perceptions of the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools based on various variables.

Problem Statement

What are parents' views regarding the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools?

Sub-Problems

What is the level of parental perception regarding the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools?

Do parents' perceptions of the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools significantly differ according to the following variables?

a) Gender, b) Educational background, c) Whether or not they have attended an Imam Hatip school, d) The environment in which they were born and raised

METHOD

In this study, which investigates parents' perceptions of the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools, a survey model was employed. The study population consists of parents whose children attend Imam Hatip Secondary Schools operating in the province and districts of Bolu. The names and student enrollment figures of these schools are provided in the table below. The sample comprises 500 parents randomly selected from this population. Data were successfully collected from 457 participants, and it was concluded that this sample size is representative of the population. This conclusion was supported by referencing the sampling table developed by Krejcie & Morgan (1970), which indicates that a sample of 317 is sufficient for a population size of 1,800.

Among the participating parents, 40.9% were male and 59.1% female; 25.4% had completed primary school, 22.1% middle school, 27.8% high school, 21.9% university, and 2.8% held a postgraduate degree (Master's/PhD). Additionally, 35% had previously attended an Imam Hatip school, while 65% had not. In terms of upbringing, 52.5% were raised in a village, 20.4% in a district town, and 27.1% in a city. Regarding income levels, 40.3% reported a monthly income of 0–2,500 TL, 42.7% reported 2,501–5,000 TL, 12.4% reported 5,001–7,500 TL, 2.4% reported 7,501–10,000 TL, and 2.2% reported an income above 10,000 TL. Concerning the type of school attended by their child: 31.1% were enrolled in a project-based İHO, 9.4% in a girls' İHO, and 59.5% in a standard İHO.

Data Collection Tools

To better understand parents' perceptions of the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools, a two-part scale was used in the study. The first part included demographic questions related to gender, educational background, whether the respondent had attended an Imam Hatip school, the environment in which they were raised, income level, and the type of Imam Hatip Secondary School their child attended. The second part utilized the "Institutional Image Scale" developed by Gürbüz (2008), which was used with permission.

The items in the scale were subjected to factor analysis, Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient analysis, and item-total correlation by Gürbüz. The scale was divided into seven sub-dimensions: Service Quality, Management Quality, Financial Soundness, Working Environment, Social Responsibility, Emotional Appeal, and Corporate Ethics. Gürbüz (2008) found that the alpha reliability coefficients for each sub-dimension and for the overall scale were above 0.70, indicating the scale's reliability.

According to the literature, a Cronbach's Alpha value between 0.61 and 0.80 is considered moderately reliable, while values between 0.81 and 1.00 are considered highly reliable (Özdamar, 1999). In this study, the Institutional Image Scale showed the following alpha values: Financial Soundness (.75) and Social Responsibility (.73) were found to be moderately reliable; Service Quality (.86), Management Quality (.82), Working Environment (.82), Emotional Appeal (.92), Corporate Ethics (.83), and the total scale (.97) were found to be highly reliable. These results confirm that the scale used is a reliable measurement tool.

The scale was structured as a five-point Likert-type scale with the following options: Never (1 point; 1.00–1.79), Rarely (2 points; 1.80–2.59), Sometimes (3 points; 2.60–3.39), Often (4 points; 3.40–4.19), and Always (5 points; 4.20–5.00).

Data Collection Process

Permission to use the "Institutional Image Scale" was obtained from its developer. Additionally, approvals were secured from the Ethics Committee of Sakarya University and the Bolu Provincial Directorate of National Education. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of remote education in schools, the scale was adapted for online use by the researcher.

Between December 8 and 27, 2020, school principals of the Imam Hatip Secondary Schools listed in Table 3, located in the province and districts of Bolu, were visited. The link to the online version of the scale was then distributed to the mobile phones of 500 randomly selected parents. A total of 457 responses were collected, and all responses were included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using computer-based statistical software. Prior to the analysis, the reliability of the scale was tested by calculating Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. To determine the distribution of the data, normality tests—Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk—were conducted. Since the results indicated that the data did not follow a normal distribution, non-parametric tests were employed for further analysis.

Descriptive statistics such as percentage, frequency, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation were used. For inferential analysis, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were applied. The sub-problems examining whether parents' perceptions of the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools differ significantly by gender and by their own attendance at Imam Hatip Schools were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test, as both involved two variables. Other sub-problems, which involved three or more variables (educational background, upbringing environment, income level, and type of school attended by their child), were analyzed using the Kruskal-Wallis test.

Table 1. Normality Test Results of the Data Collection Tool

Dimension	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Shapiro-Wilk
Service Quality	.09 (p=.00)	.94 (p=.00)
Management Quality	.11 (p=.00)	.92 (p=.00)
Financial Soundness	.13 (p=.00)	.91 (p=.00)
Working Environment	.13 (p=.00)	.90 (p=.00)
Social Responsibility	.12 (p=.00)	.92 (p=.00)
Emotional Appeal	.12 (p=.00)	.91 (p=.00)
Corporate Ethics	.17 (p=.00)	.85 (p=.00)
Overall Scale	.09 (p=.00)	.93 (p=.00)

FINDINGS

Table 2. Parental Perception Levels of the Institutional Image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools

Dimension	N	Mean	SD	V
Service Quality	457	4.01	.74	18.49
Management Quality	457	4.05	.79	19.75
Financial Soundness	457	4.14	.73	17.79
Working Environment	457	4.30	.63	14.74
Social Responsibility	457	4.14	.71	17.30
Emotional Appeal	457	4.12	.72	17.48
Corporate Ethics	457	4.26	.78	18.45
Overall Scale	457	4.13	.66	16.03

As shown in Table 2, parents consistently rated the schools as “always good” in the sub-dimensions of Working Environment (\bar{x} =4.30), Emotional Appeal (\bar{x} =4.26), and Corporate Ethics (\bar{x} =4.26). For Service Quality (\bar{x} =4.01), Management Quality (\bar{x} =4.05), Financial Soundness (\bar{x} =4.14), and Social Responsibility (\bar{x} =4.14), as well as overall institutional image (\bar{x} =4.13), their evaluation fell under “mostly good.” Furthermore, the coefficient of variation (CV) being below 25 indicates consistency in participant responses. Overall, the results suggest that parents perceive the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools positively.

Table 3. The Effect of Gender on Parental Perceptions of Institutional Image

Dimension	Gender	N	Mean Rank	p
Service Quality	Male	187	231.49	.73
	Female	270	227.28	
Management Quality	Male	187	216.72	.09
	Female	270	237.51	
Financial Soundness	Male	187	227.73	.86
	Female	270	229.88	
Working Environment	Male	187	229.81	.91
	Female	270	228.44	
Social Responsibility	Male	187	228.24	.91
	Female	270	229.53	
Emotional Appeal	Male	187	220.83	.27
	Female	270	234.66	
Corporate Ethics	Male	187	227.33	.81
	Female	270	230.16	
Overall Scale	Male	187	224.70	.56
	Female	270	231.98	

Table 3 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in parental perceptions of the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools based on gender ($p>0.05$). Both male and female parents expressed similar views on the schools' image.

Table 4. The Effect of Educational Background on Parental Perceptions of Institutional Image

Dimension	Education Level	N	Mean Rank	p
Service Quality	Primary/Middle School	217	223.82	.00
	High School	127	214.36	
	University and Above	113	250.71	
Management Quality	Primary/Middle School	217	234.76	.00
	High School	127	196.15	
	University and Above	113	239.89	
Financial Soundness	Primary/Middle School	217	224.50	.38
	High School	127	221.22	
	University and Above	113	247.30	
Working Environment	Primary/Middle School	217	219.81	.00
	High School	127	225.28	
	University and Above	113	208.63	
Social Responsibility	Primary/Middle School	217	228.77	.05
	High School	127	208.51	
	University and Above	113	208.95	
Emotional Appeal	Primary/Middle School	217	227.29	.05
	High School	127	206.93	
	University and Above	113	244.70	
Corporate Ethics	Primary/Middle School	217	224.50	.00
	High School	127	203.02	
	University and Above	113	248.47	
Overall Scale	Primary/Middle School	217	225.38	.01
	High School	127	206.43	
	University and Above	113	245.88	

As seen in Table 4, parental perceptions of the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools significantly differ according to their educational background across all sub-dimensions—except Financial Soundness—and for the overall scale ($p<0.05$). Based on mean rank scores, the observed differences mainly originate from parents who are high school graduates. Although high school graduates also rated the schools'

institutional image positively (see Table 2), both primary/middle school and university-level graduates rated them more favorably.

Table 5. The Effect of Parents' Attendance at Imam Hatip Schools on Their Perceptions of Institutional Image

Dimension	Attended	N	Mean Rank	p
Service Quality	Yes	160	245.96	.044
	No	297	219.87	
Management Quality	Yes	160	237.45	.313
	No	297	224.45	
Financial Soundness	Yes	160	245.48	.048
	No	297	220.12	
Working Environment	Yes	160	242.37	.110
	No	297	221.80	
Social Responsibility	Yes	160	242.18	.114
	No	297	221.90	
Emotional Appeal	Yes	160	235.56	.435
	No	297	225.47	
Corporate Ethics	Yes	160	238.48	.250
	No	297	223.89	
Overall Scale	Yes	160	241.70	.131
	No	297	222.16	

According to Table 5, a statistically significant difference was found in the sub-dimensions of Service Quality ($p < .05$) and Financial Soundness ($p < .05$) based on whether parents had attended an Imam Hatip school. The mean ranks indicate that parents who had attended such schools had more favorable perceptions in these two dimensions. No significant differences were found in the other sub-dimensions or the overall institutional image score ($p > .05$).

Table 6. The Effect of the Environment in Which Parents Were Raised on Their Perceptions of Institutional Image

Dimension	Upbringing Environment	N	Mean Rank	p
Service Quality	Village	240	224.35	.02
	District	93	260.65	
	City	124	214.27	
Management Quality	Village	240	229.73	.96
	District	93	230.48	
	City	124	226.48	
Financial Soundness	Village	240	221.36	.14
	District	93	252.40	
	City	124	226.23	
Working Environment	Village	240	225.20	.00
	District	93	267.91	
	City	124	207.18	
Social Responsibility	Village	240	230.21	.11
	District	93	248.76	
	City	124	211.84	
Emotional Appeal	Village	240	225.13	.21
	District	93	250.18	
	City	124	220.60	
Corporate Ethics	Village	240	227.64	.97
	District	93	230.28	
	City	124	230.67	
Overall Scale	Village	240	225.54	.14
	District	93	252.28	
	City	124	218.23	

As shown in Table 6, statistically significant differences were found in the sub-dimensions of Service Quality ($p<.05$) and Working Environment ($p<.05$) based on the environment in which parents were raised (village, district, city). The mean ranks suggest that parents who were raised in districts had higher institutional image perceptions in these sub-dimensions compared to those raised in villages or cities.

RESULT and DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that parents' perceptions of the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools are generally high. However, the slightly lower ratings in the sub-dimensions of Service Quality and Management Quality suggest that targeted efforts in these areas could help improve and more effectively manage the overall institutional image. It is evident that enhancing the quality of management and services would make a positive contribution to the already favorable image perceived by participating parents.

A review of the existing literature reveals that no prior studies specifically focus on the institutional image of Imam Hatip Secondary Schools, making direct comparisons difficult. However, studies on parents' perceptions of the institutional image of private or primary schools do exist. For instance, Duman (2012) conducted a study comparing the institutional image of primary schools from the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators. The findings indicated that parents generally have a more positive perception of institutional image compared to teachers and administrators. Despite differences in school types and regions, such studies suggest that parents tend to perceive school images positively, similar to the results of the current research.

The study also found that gender does not significantly influence perceptions of institutional image. However, when mean ranks for the overall scale are considered, female participants showed slightly higher perception scores than males. This is consistent with other research in the literature. For example, Duman (2012) reported that gender did not affect institutional image perceptions in primary schools. Similarly, a study by Kılıçaslan (2011), which also used the same "Institutional Image Scale" as the current study, found no significant gender differences among teachers in terms of institutional image. The discrepancy in findings between the two studies may be attributed to differences in participant profiles.

In terms of upbringing environment, parents who were raised in district centers demonstrated higher institutional image perceptions in the Service Quality and Working Environment sub-dimensions than those raised in villages or cities. Although the difference between those raised in villages and cities was not statistically significant, participants from villages exhibited slightly higher scores in these sub-dimensions. Overall institutional image scores, when ranked, followed the order: district > village > city.

Additionally, parents who had previously attended Imam Hatip schools themselves reported significantly higher perceptions of Service Quality and Financial Soundness compared to those who had not. This may be attributed to a stronger sense of identification or emotional attachment to these schools among alumni parents.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed by the author(s) with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Ethics Approval

The formal ethics approval was granted by the Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Sakarya University. We conducted the study in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration in 1975.

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Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the research team's university ethics committee of the Sakarya University (Approval Number/ID: 27/10/2020/28/15). Hereby, we as the authors consciously assure that for the manuscript the following is fulfilled:

- This material is the authors' own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere.

- The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner.
- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly disclosed.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

Both authors contributed equally.

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