

Student Preference on Choice of Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of Royal University of Bhutan, Bhutan

ABSTRACT

Aims: To uncover the factors that students deem crucial related to their preference of higher education institutions and desired courses

Study design: Cross sectional survey design was employed.

Place and Duration of Study: First year undergraduate students from four government higher education institutions, Royal University of Bhutan, Bhutan.

Methodology: We included 287 respondents (124 male, 163 females; age range 18-38 year) with undergraduate students from four government colleges. Stratified random sampling technique was used to collect structured questionnaire based on 5-point Likert scale. The study applied simple descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression model to verify the importance given by students to the influencing factors and predict the relationship between the predetermined factors and students' choice of higher education institutions.

Results: R value is 0.678 and the Durbin Watson test statistic is 1.723. Factors including student attribute, social influence, financial aid, and higher institute characteristics all were identified to have a positive influence on the students' preference of higher education institution choice.

Conclusion: Some strategies including the promotion of the higher education institution including learning environment and the enhancement of various media channels should be emphasized to strengthen higher education institution effectiveness of recruitment.

Keywords: Higher education institution, programme, preference, student

1. INTRODUCTION

Choosing a suitable higher education institution is a crucial decision of any students. It not affects students' orientation of future career but also influences student's motivation to study, commitment and interaction with the higher education institution. Students should have a choice in how they want to learn knowledge and display it in accordance with their requirements and preferences (Khahro et al., 2022). In fact, not being rational in choosing a higher education institution, students may have difficulties in maintain learning motivation, achieving high academic results and getting a desirable job. Exploring factors which drives to students' choice of higher education institutions is, therefore, necessary to consult them for the more informed decision. As to educational institutions, understanding factors impacting students' choice of university is the basis for recruiting strategies and the implementation of training programs, which decides the survival and development of each higher education institution in the competitive environment of higher education provision.

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This is also the situation that the Royal University of Bhutan, Bhutan, has been currently coping with. Aiming at exploring significant factors which influence students' choice of higher education institution, particularly the choice of government higher education institutions based on students' various personal characteristics and socio-economic background, the objective of this study, therefore, is to uncover and identify the factors affecting the preferences of higher education institution by students.

Selecting a higher education institution is very critical decision for a student because higher study has the potential to change a person's life (Kusumawati, Yanamandram and Perera, 2010). Moreover, making a right choice of higher education institutions is a highly complex issue (Hieu et al., 2020). Choosing a particular university is important factor by respondents for higher education (Shahid, Shafique and Bodla, 2012). A lot of criteria can work in choosing higher education institutions (Soysal et al, 2018; Anam 2019; Le at al., 2020; Sung et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2023). Some researches show the importance of parents' decision on students' choice (Moogan and Baron, 2003; Domino, Libraire, Lutwiller et al., 2006; Yamamoto, 2006; Raposo and Alves, 2007; Al-Yousef, 2009). It is also found that a student's choice can be affected by their siblings, friends, peers, relatives, teachers and other influential people (Ceja, 2004; Ceja, 2006; Yamamoto, 2006; Pimpa and Suwannapirom, 2008; Wagner and Fard, 2009). Mohammad et al., (2016) studied on what factors influences students choose university in Bangladesh and they found that factors including cultural, social, psychological and organizational factors influences the student's preference decision. Mbawuni and Nimako (2015) identified seven factors that determines students' decision on selecting university and study concluded that geographical location, student support, lectures and staff recommendations and personal intention factors greatly influences in students' higher education institution decision making process. Adefulu et al., (2019) studied on students' choice criteria for universities selection using semi-structured interview with first-year postgraduate students at a private university in South-West, Nigeria. They concluded that geographical location, the courses, influence of stakeholder were identified as the key factors which influences the desire to study in a higher education institution. HungQuang, L. (2020) used stratified sampling of 500 students from five private universities in Vietnam and applied regression technique to identify the main factors affecting the choice of a university by a student. The findings of the study concluded that geographical location, facilities, programme and prestige of the university prove to be the main determinants in terms of students' decision making of university preference.

Provide a factual background, clearly defined problem, proposed solution, a brief literature survey and the scope and justification of the work done.]

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS / EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS / METHODOLOGY

2.1 Sampling

The research process began with the elaboration of research objectives and the proposed research question. A cross-sectional study design was employed for this study. Sampling was based on stratified sampling technique collected from four government higher education institutions under the Royal University of Bhutan. A total of 300 sample were collected for the study.

A two-page questionnaire with two sections was administered within the first weeks of the start of each program. In the first part of the questionnaire, information about the students' personal and family background was gathered using multiple choice questions. Responses to the influences were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly agree). The variables presented were selected based on a literature review and discussions among the research team, and then subjected to a validation process, which included handling the questionnaire to students to check for item appropriateness and comprehensiveness. Variables listed in the survey questionnaire were modified based on this review. Primary data was processed using SPSS 22.0 software to measure the Cronbach's Alpha and multiple linear regression analysis.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to measure the internal consistency of each factor. The value of alpha of 0.6 or higher is decided to be acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). Multiple linear regression analysis was applied to investigate whether those selected factors could affect the preference of students' choice over higher education institution.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Scale Reliability

In Table 1, five Cronbach's alphas, which range from 0.701 to 0.923 demonstrate high reliability measurement scales (SI 6 and SI 7 variables was omitted in the second analyzing to increase Cronbach's alpha to 0.769).

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha of Influencing Factor Scale

Factor	Observed Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Student attribute	SA1, SA2, SA3, SA4, SA5	0.847
Social influence	SI1, SI2, SI3, SI4, SI5	0.763
Financial aid	FA1, FA2, FA3, FA4, FA5	0.900
HEI characteristics*	HIC1, HIC2, HIC3, HIC4, HIC5	0.876

Note: HEI=higher education institution

3.2 Regression Analysis

Before conducting the regression analysis, mean values for the consistent items of the dependent and independent variables were identified. Then, the regression analysis was conducted by taking the mean values of the dependent variable and independent variables. R value is 0.678 > 0.5. So, this model is appropriate for evaluating the relationship between dependent and independent variables. In addition, the R² is 0.695. this means the multiple linear regression model is constructed in accordance with the 69.5% data. In other words, 69.5% students' preference in university choice decision is explained by the multiple linear regression model. The rest is due to errors and other factors. The Durbin Watson test statistic is 1.723. It is in the range (1<D<3). So, there is no correlation of the residuals. The results of regression analysis is given below (Table 2).

Table 2. Statistical Parameters of Regression Model

Model	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
	Beta			VIF
(Constant)		1.543	0.101	
STARTB	0.124	3.124	0.000	1.367
SOINFL	0.235	4.875	0.000	1.896
FINAID	0.126	2.926	0.004	1.765
HINSCH	0.248	4.689	0.002	1.983

Note: VIF=Variance Inflation Factor

Based on Table 2, from the result of Standardized coefficients, the multiple linear regression equation of the factors influencing the students' preference of higher education institution is as follows:

$$\text{Student Preference} = \alpha_0 + 0.124 * \text{STARTB} + 0.235 * \text{SOINFL} + 0.125 * \text{FINAID} + 0.248 * \text{HINSCH}$$

Thus, student attribute, social influence, financial aid, and higher institute characteristics factors all have a positive influence on the students' preference of higher education institution choice. It means that the higher social influence, higher financial aid and better higher education institution characteristics, the more the students' preference over the higher education institution will increase. Among those four factors, the most influential one is higher education institution characteristics, because its standardized coefficient is highest ($\beta = 248$). Following are social influence, financial aid and student attribute.

4. CONCLUSION

The study mainly focuses on factors which affects students' choice of higher education institution. The evaluated questionnaire reveals four possible influencing factors. Results from statistical analysis reveal that four independent factors of student attribute, social influence, financial aid, and higher institute characteristics factors all have a positive influence on the students' preference of higher education institution choice. Higher education institution characteristics is found to be the most influential in students' choice of higher education institution. Besides, other determinants like social influence, financial aid and student attribute are also a significant factor in students' higher education institution choice decision making.

Based on these study findings, some strategies including the provision of training information, the promotion of the higher education institution including learning environment and the enhancement of various media channels should be placed an importance in order to strengthen higher education institution effectiveness of recruitment. It would be beneficial if research on factors influencing students' choice of higher education institution is conducted periodically by the university.

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