

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

ABSTRACT

Making a right choice for tertiary level education is very crucial. This paper aims to uncover the factors that students deem crucial related to their preference of higher education institutions and desired courses. Cross sectional survey design was adopted for this study. A total of 287 data(124male, 163 females; age range 18-38 year) of first year undergraduate students were collected from four government colleges under Royal University of Bhutan. 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 showed a model fit R value of 0.678 and the Durbin Watson test statistic was 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. Strategies like promotion of the higher education institution need to be emphasized through various media channels to strengthen effective recruitment in higher education institution.

Keywords: Higher education institution, programme, preference, student

1. INTRODUCTION

Tertiary level education is important for every student who wants to pursue a higher education level in one's life. Choosing a right higher education institution therefore, becomes a crucial decision. Making a right preference of the higher education is important for the students' career future, motivation, and students' commitment. Students should have choice in learning knowledge and displaying it according to their requirements and preferences (Khahro et al., 2022). Student should be able to decide and choose a higher education institution as per their needs and choice. On the other hand, not selecting a right higher education institution by the students may lead to low motivation in learning, less commitment and poor academic performance. Hence, making a rational choice decision about choosing right appropriate higher education institution for tertiary education is important. There are various factors which could influence the choice decision making of higher education institution by students. It is therefore, significant to investigate the factors that could influence the choice decision making of higher education institution by students. This will not only allow one to understand the factors behind students' choice of higher education institution but also will provide a very important information to the higher education institution policy makers in terms of formulating and designing a student recruitment strategies and implementation training programs, which forms the survival and development of each higher education institution in the competitive environment of providing tertiary level education to students today. Therefore, the paper aims to investigate the factors influencing the choice of higher education institution by Bhutanese students under Royal University of Bhutan.

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 et 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.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Sampling

The research paper adopts quantitative approach. 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.

Students' personal information and students' family background data were included in the survey questionnaire. A 5-point Likert scale was used to gather the responses of the questions in the questionnaire. There were twenty questions in the questionnaire categorized into four sub-themes that covers influencing factors in terms of choosing higher education institution. Cronbach's Alpha and multi-linear regression method was applied to analyze the objective of the study. Cronbach's alpha coefficient allows to measure the internal factor consistency in the study. While, multiple linear regression method allows us to investigate the influencing factors which could affect the preference of students' choice. Data were analyzed using SPSS software version 22.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Scale Reliability

Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranged between 0.701 to 0.923 (Table 1) which explains high reliability of the measurement scales.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha

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

Table 2 shows result of regression analysis. For the purpose of regression analysis, in the first stage, all average values of dependent and independent variables were estimated. Value of R was recorded at 0.678, meaning almost 67 percent of the explanatory variables can explain the dependent variable in the model.

Table 2. Statistical Parameters of Regression Model

Model	Standardized	t	Sig.	Collinearity
	Coefficients			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

Regressing student preference on STRTB, SOINFL, FINAID, HINSCH gives:

$$\text{Student Preference} = \alpha_0 + 0.124*STARTB + 0.235*SOINFL + 0.126*FINAID + 0.248*HINSCH$$

All the explanatory variables including student attribute, social influence, financial aid and higher institute characteristics positively affected 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. This is consistent with the studies by (Briggs et al., 2006; Adeyanju et al, 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

Given the current education reform taking place in Bhutan, it is clear that selection of higher education institution by students will play a huge role in terms of tertiary education level in the country. It is therefore, crucial to explore what factors might influence the student's decision choice of higher education institution in Bhutan.

The study shows that factors like student attribute, social influence, financial aid, and higher institute characteristics all influences positively in helping students to make higher education institution choice decision. Among all explanatory factors, factors relating to characteristics of higher education institution is found to be the most influential factors in the study in terms of influencing students' decision choice making 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.

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