

Reconceptualizing Students Choice of University in Higher Education Management: Scale Development

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Abstract—Developing on the theory of planned behavior, this paper provides a reconceptualization of student choice of university. The intent of the survey is to spot out elements that affect students' choices of university. A quantitative analysis approach was adapted in providing answers to the study's objective. A survey was carried out on 50 respondents comprising of both undergraduate and postgraduate students cutting across all colleges in a university situated in Ogun state, Nigeria. The sample size was picked using a random stratified sampling approach. All 50 questionnaires were completed and used for factor analysis. Findings from the survey show that elements such as where the institution is located, qualification of faculty, content of programs, prestige of university, standard of facilities at the university, employment rate for university graduates and advertising strategies strongly influence student's choice of university.

Index Terms— accessibility, higher education, reputation, ownership structure, university choice.

I. INTRODUCTION

Highlight There has been an uprising in an individual's quest for tertiary education in the industrial era due to the value placed on training learners with needed skills, abilities, and knowledge. This acquired skills positions individual to take on more challenging roles in the ever-changing corporate world which in the long run aids in promoting economic, social and political development in the country. This need has led to modifications in higher education systems to ensure that universities are equipped with the needed resources to provide an enabling environment for learning. Brochert in his study explains that graduates from senior

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secondary school are faced with the difficult decision of deciding on a career path and what university to attend, universities are however burdened with the responsibility of providing choice factor to influence these decisions [8]. Situations that influence students' choices have been studied by many scholars, and institutions [5]. However, a significant gap that exists is literature that examines the extent to which these choices differ or correspond with students of different gender and academic specializations. The results gotten will provide program and gender specific recommendation to better enhance their enrolment.

Universities exist to train students into becoming experts in their various fields of endeavors, and to produce, high-level specialists, scientists, and researchers to create new knowledge needed for the advancement of any economy. Universities that produce ground breaking research and enhance the nation's competitive advantage in the global knowledge economy are regarded as world class universities. Educational institutions are however tasked with the responsibility of understanding key indicators every student looks out for when making university choices. Gati and Asher define students' choice of university as the process where students compare prospective schools to enable them to make rational choices on the university that best advances their career options [20]. It is closely linked with career development as university choice isn't a means to an end but a means to selecting and developing a career path [21].

A University's characteristics are the qualities assumed to be most important during the university choice stage. Such characteristics include the university's academic reputation, ranges in academic programme, quality of educational facilities, location and social atmosphere etc. Ukpere notes that dimensions such as closeness to the university, its collection of books, papers and records, accommodation options, tuition cost, marketing plans amongst others are regarded key in determining students' choice of university [35].

The Theory of Planned Behavior is a social-cognitive model that recognises intentions as a germane indicator in understanding behavior. Intentions show how behaviors are influenced, they are mirrors of how well an individual is determined to attempt something, and the period of time an individual is willing to give up to act upon a behavior [33]. As such, intentions are originators of actual behavior [1]. Ajzen also suggested three predictive elements of behavioral

intention which include the person's attitude regarding the behavior, Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), and the perceived social pressure to act out or not act out the behavior (Subjective Norm).

In applying the theory to student choice of university, the researcher can identify the intention behind a student's choice, while perceived behavioral control, helps to forecast the possibility of a student making a certain in university. Intention to go to a school in a specific area is influenced by the individual's evaluation of such school. Hence, it is possible for a researcher to predict a student by just observing their intentions.

This study is structured into different parts. A discuss of the theoretical framework theory of planned behavior, an analysis of literary works, and concept measures, after which present qualitative and quantitative studies associated to study are presented. The closing section of this study gives a summary of the conclusion and provides recommendations for further study and practice. This structure would enable researcher to conduct an in-depth assessment of various elements that affects students' decision on what university to registerin while using a selected privately-owned university in Ogun State.

II. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Theory of Planned Behaviour

A prominent model for predicting individual behaviour is theory of planned behaviour[2]. The theory was expanded by IcekAjzen. According to Ajzens' argument, the attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control of an individual are elements that influence the intention of an individual to perform a certain behavior [3]. Through questions or indirect observation, these concepts can be measured directly by participants.

Attitudes and behavioral beliefs are indications of the readiness of an individual to perform a particular behaviour. It is assumed to be an immediate behavioral antecedent. It is based on behavioral attitudes [18]. For example, if a person is assured that a particular behavior can produce a promising result, he / she will be more likely to act on that behavior and vice versa.

Subjective Norm and Normative beliefs are influenced by the beliefs of the individual as to how important others see the particular behavior and whether others are in favor or not of a particular behavior. There is a strong body of literature that implies behaviors are formed by other people's demands [2], [18].

Perceived behavioral control and Control beliefs are defined as the individual's own perception of how easy or demanding it is to act on a behavior [3].

The earlier theory of reasoned action could not explain events if the person's behavior depended on factors outside the internal environment. In cases as such, the individual may want to carry out a certain behaviour, but he is unable to do so due to other influences. These factors limit (or

improve) the use of this behaviour.

The model in this section below covers both; existence of such factors and control that the person subjectively allots them.

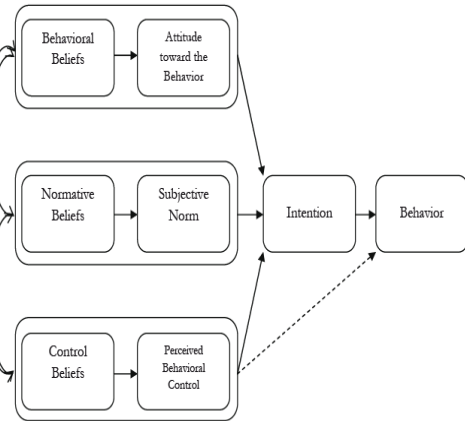


Fig. 1 – Theory of planned behavior. Source: Ajzen (2008), p. 538.

Despite the widespread use of this theory, it was criticized for not reflecting on emotional issues [19], [32]. Ajzen responded by saying that emotions were discussed on the background to his theory and emotions were influenced by intentions and behaviours. The theory of planned behavior is employed to predict students' motives for attending university and how this intention translates into choices [3].

B. Students Choice of University

University Choice has been defined as “the process through which students’ choose where to go to school in order to acquire the knowledge needed to take on challenging roles in their various fields of study” [7].

Students choice of university measures

A variety of studies show that there are numerous factors determining a university decision by students, some of them; the role played by someone else, the attitude of students to the university rate and the nature of their university decisions in terms of university selection [17]. Yusof, Ahmad, Tajudin, and Ravindransurvey showed how the content of the university programs and the policies that support students financially affect their decisions [36]. Keling discovered that the university's reputation, image and fees also contributed to the decision- making process of students [27].

Igbinedion conducted a research in Nigerian Higher Institutions in Edo State. Two research questions and assumptions were tested. Parent, friends, gender and interest were included in the items examined. The study was descriptive in nature, with 191 students selected randomly from 447 students enrolled during 2006/2007 in a stratified sample size. Questionnaire was the tool used for survey. The results showed disparities in the elements observed that influence the choice of professional studies by students. Following results, it was recommended that respondents be encouraged to sign up to such programs despite gender problems [24].

Eremie evaluated the factors influencing students' career decision in river state schools, Nigeria. The adopted method for the research was a simply random sample, 400 students were used for the study and a sample frame of 1,200 in 5 schools. Results showed a clear distinction in relation to society, gender equality and the influence of parents between the choices made for male and female career [15].

A review of literature on university choice factors show common factors such as influence of marketing strategy, closeness of university to residence, family input, cost, and location. This demonstrates that life altering choice made by students' do not happen just like that.

III. METHODS

The field explains procedures adopted in developing measures for student choice of university and to also authenticate the scale used for the study.

A. Item generation and content validity

Study 1

Following descriptions of students' choice of university from reviewed literature, the earliest phase of the development of measures comprised of element formation as well as an assessment of a content validity based on the generated item. Copies of questionnaire were administered to students across all colleges in the institution to generate the item pool. The reason for this choice is because of the recent recognition the university has gained globally and its current positioning as best university in Nigeria by Times Education ranking.

Primary data such as questionnaire is a very resourceful way to get insights into a subject matter, this is because they five precise and background information that cannot be obtained using secondary methods. Data collection through questionnaire began with the gathering of bio-data about the students. The participants were also questioned about the highest degree of their parents and whether any of their family members had attended the university in the past to better measure the reason for their university choice. Probing items such as the influence of ownership structure, administrative policies and procedures, accessibility, reputation, economic factors, and information channel were asked.

SPSS was employed to analyze the data. All questionnaires were coded into SPSS, yielding approximately 50 copies of questionnaire and 45 items were coded in each copy of questionnaire using the quantitative interpretative instrument. Before items were developed existing factors explaining students choice of university was examined, measures developed were also assessed. Based on this assessment, the researcher was able to generate 45 items that best measure students' decisions. After the 45 item were development, the researcher was able to further filter this 45 items to 40 items through the help of research experts and faculty who have to assess the relevance of each item to ensure content validity. The questionnaire adopted the likert scale to measure items.

B. Item proliferation

Study 2

Undergraduate and postgraduate student from across all colleges in the selected university formed the population for the survey. The purpose was to examine the extent to which these choices differ or correspond with students of different gender and academic specializations. A paper survey was used instead of a web survey to ensure questionnaires were returned in a timely manner. If they are not properly organized and discussed, the various data collected will have no significance. Therefore, both descriptive and cross - table data were collected and analyzed, as shown in tables.

Table1: Demography

Table 1 contains the general data on the sex, age, marital status, admission to school, and the educational qualification of the students concerned.

Indicators	Gender		Age		Marital Status		College			
	Male (N=18)	Female (N=32)	16-25 years (N=44)	26-55 years (N=6)	Single (N=48)	Married (N=28)	CBSS (N=28)	CST (N=10)	COE (N=6)	CLDS (N=4)
<u>MnO_s</u>	4.56	4.94	4.77	5.00	4.79	5.00	4.93	4.80	4.75	4.00
<u>MnA_p</u>	4.20	4.38	4.30	4.44	4.34	3.67	4.39	4.40	3.67	4.84
<u>MnA</u>	4.04	3.88	3.89	4.22	3.96	3.33	4.02	4.27	3.25	3.83
<u>MnR</u>	4.33	4.65	4.49	4.75	4.52	4.50	4.61	4.75	3.75	4.88
<u>MnE</u>	3.83	3.99	3.92	4.06	3.94	3.67	4.00	3.83	3.58	4.41
<u>MnI</u>	3.80	4.00	3.90	4.11	3.95	3.33	3.95	4.17	3.54	3.92
TOTAL- \sum of indicators	4.13	4.30	4.21	4.43	4.25	3.92	4.32	4.37	3.76	4.31

It captures the demography of all respondents. Male respondents made up 64% of the sample population while female respondent made up 36% of the sample size. Most of the respondents fell between ages of 16-25 years forming 88% of the survey while the remaining 12% were between the ages of 26-55 years.

Indicators	Educational Qualification			
	SSCE/A level (N=18)	B.Sc. (N=22)	M.Sc./MBA (N=6)	PHD (N=4)
<u>MnO_s</u>	4.56	4.91	5.00	5.00
<u>MnA_p</u>	4.26	4.39	4.00	4.58
<u>MnA</u>	3.93	4.03	3.78	3.67
<u>MnR</u>	4.53	4.45	4.58	4.75
<u>MnE</u>	4.00	3.80	3.83	4.50
<u>MnI</u>	3.78	4.05	3.67	4.33
TOTAL- \sum of indicators	4.18	4.27	4.14	4.47

B.Sc respondents outnumbered SSCE/A level and M.Sc/MBA respondent by 22 (or 44%), followed by SSCE/A level by 18 (or 36%), M.Sc/MBA were 6 in number (or 12%) and then PHD whose respondent were just 4 (or 8%).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

A. Item reduction and exploratory factor analysis

In table 2 captured below, the first dimension is

Administrative policies and procedures which includes policies on comprehensive variety of academic programs offered and providing a conducive learning environment. It also includes other dimensions such as accessibility which implies the university situated at a convenient location; Reputation in terms of academic excellence; Economic factors in areas such as providing scholarship options; Information channel and how policies can enhance choices through media and university websites.

The second dimension is Accessibility which has the singular factor which relies on university's proximity to residence.

The third dimension Accessibility which includes the proximity of student's dormitories and apartments to university. The other dimension is information channel and how information from the school counselor and teachers influences choice.

The fourth dimension Ownership Structure explains how university's affiliation as a religious organization influences choice. Other dimension factors are Economic factor, how tuition fees and ability to spread out payments enhances choice; Information channel, how information about university provided by peers plays a determining factor in deciding university selection.

university, staff quality, the quality of available university programs, the image and reputation of the university, the performance of academic institutions, the prospects of graduate employees, career exhibitions and advertising plans, which are illustrated in this paper.

The study results confirm the study findings on factors influencing the choices of a student when deciding on a university. Studies, by Ariffin, Ahmad, Ahmad, and Ibrahim and Keling, Krishnan, and Nurtjahjashow that the marketing strategies are important [4], [28] while the studies of Keling have shown institutional images, reputations, tuition fees, and university programmes to affect choices [27]. The importance of performance, type, broad range of university programs and the presence of esteemed faculty are a determinant to student choices [22].

Studies on the influence of the reputation of the university on the choices made by students in the university found that it is the major factor in choosing an institution. The University's reputation was discussed in six forms: academic excellence, skilled lecturers, highly employed graduate rates in Nigeria, technology and quality of learning facilities in all its infrastructure. This parameter attracted 54 percent of students. Economic factors such as student applications, loans, part-time jobs on campus had a minimum influence of 7% on students' university choices. These findings are in line with Keling, who claims that students get to decide which university to attend by the image and reputation of a university [27].

Analysis of the university's accessibility to students show that many students were influenced by the location of the university and its proximity to dormitories or apartments; 27 percent of students were influenced by this factor. This finding is supported by Sengupta, who points out that it is easy for students to reach universities near residential areas because it enables them to transport safely with shorter time and energy spent commuting. 4% of student choices were based on their knowledge that the institution was owned by a religious body, while the other 8% were influenced by peers, relatives of school consultants, the website and the university graduates.

The conclusion is that a university's characteristics including staff quality, academic programs, educational establishments such as schools, institutional location and graduating employability have a strong impact on student choices in the university.

VI. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Uncovered findings in the study would make it possible to provide university management to adapt recruitment and marketing strategies so that prospective students can be attracted. These findings have the following implications:

The most important choice factor for respondents regardless of gender, qualifications or specialization is the

Table 2: Exploratory factor analysis for Student Choice of University

Scale Item	Factor loadings
Administrative Policies & Procedures (AP)	
Item 1 The educational institution is all-inclusive, providing quality program content in humanities and science. (AP)	.748
Item 2 The educational institution is an international community. (AP)	.820
Item 3 The educational institution provides quality extracurricular activities. (AP)	.517
Item 4 The educational institution organizes social events. (AP)	.656
Item 5 The educational institution provides an enabling environment for learning. (AP)	.727
Item 6 The university provides students with options to study abroad through exchange programs. (AP)	.663
Item 3 The university is in a convenient location. (A)	.573
Item 1 The educational institution is reputable for academic excellence. (R)	.385
Item 2 The educational institution is equipped with qualified faculty. (R)	.749
Item 3 The university is reputable for its state-of-the-art infrastructure and technology. (R)	.620
Item 4 The university has a good reputation for most employed graduate rates in Nigeria. (R)	.562
Item 1 Affordable living. (E)	.354
Item 2 tuition fees are fair in comparison to other private universities. (E)	.710
Item 3 Scholarship provision for deserving students. (E)	.643
Item 6 Students can work part-time. (E)	.623
Item 2 You consulted with your family relatives. (I)	.538
Item 4 Information about university were gotten from current student. (I)	.657
Item 5 The university abroad provided you with the needed information to make a decision. (I)	.563
Item 6 You learned about the university through university website and media. (I)	.555
Accessibility (A)	
Item 2 The university is not far from your residence. (A)	.631
Accessibility (A)	
Item 3 Residential areas are close to university. (A)	.401
Item 3 University consider providing useful information about the university. (I)	.794
Ownership Structure (OS)	
Item 1 The university is faith based. (OS)	.301
Item 4 Students can apply for loans from university. (E)	.539
Item 5 Students can apply for accommodation loans. (E)	.316
Item 1 You consulted with your peers. (I)	.564

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This section examines the variables that students consider important for a university. Six factors were used in the survey to determine the effect of students' selections. Research results have shown that institutional factors influence the choices of students to study at university very strongly. Institutional factors are the location of the

university reputation, which include records of academic excellence in all its infrastructures and learning facilities, as well as qualified lecturers. Teaching quality concerns the core service that universities sell, namely the education received by the student.

At the core level, students do not buy diplomas, but instead buy the benefits that a degree can provide in terms of work, status and lifestyle, is the core benefit that is sought. The quality of education therefore refers to the quality of the training process (such as curriculum, technology and education methods, and employee skills). A solution to the quality teaching requirements expressed by respondents will be for institutions to maintain or improve their own quality standards or even harmonize them with internationally acceptable standards for quality assurance.

The conclusions also show that factors influencing university choices for sexes differs from each other based on the choice of specific factors, indicating that administration should explore sex-inclusive marketing strategies. For instance, the provision of sports programs and standard facilities in the university would certainly influence future male students' decision to choose the university. Likewise, institutions that choose to attract an increased number of female students to a particular program must ensure that university policies focus on the factor that attracts these groups of people; a safe campus environment could be a way to attract them. This is consistent with findings indicating that women value a safe campus environment over men [13]. Due to recent safety threats, the provision of safe and stable learning environments is essential for universities in the country.

From result gotten it made clear that universities must be familiar with the services they render and continuous identify ways to improve on those services in order to attract the calibre of students it seeks to admit.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study is limited in several ways. First, given the nature of the unlikely sampling method, those involved in the research are not representative of the broad population of Nigerian students because they do not adequately represent universities private, or government owned. Secondly, respondents have already chosen their institution (first-year students) as opposed to high-school students currently making university choices. Future studies are suggested to attempt to sample these students representatively. Despite these limitations, the results of this research should provide university management with helpful guidance when developing marketing strategies.

More questions than answers were affected in this study. More research in this area should be conducted soon, it is an encouraging sign. Future studies can examine members of various cultures as to how their perceptions of the choice of higher education institutions differ and how they perceive the reality of these choices. Researchers may

investigate other aspects of the decision-making process in students, including a follow-up study to look at the relationships and/or discrepancies between the expectations and reality of the students. Similarly, in follow-up studies more buildings can be defined and measured.

Since this study is designed to be exploratory, we feel that we can and should conduct numerous further follow - up studies. More studies in this area in particular need to be carried out before there is a clearer picture of Nigeria's educational industry.

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