Exploring the Factors that Influence University Selection: Insights from College Students

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ARTICLE INFO

ISSN: 2723-1097

Keywords: Choosing university; college; students; reputation; infrastructure; location.

ABSTRACT

Due to the significant pace and divergence in higher education, choosing the university that best suits the student's goals is crucial. The university's ranking may also influence students' decisions in choosing. Universities face rising competition from other institutions, such as new or internationally emerging universities, colleges, and even organizational training courses, on a national and global level. Thus, this study aims to identify the broad categories of determinants in the information required of college students who expect and need when selecting a university to continue their studies.

Using questionnaires, research data was gathered from Omani college students. They addressed their requirements, expectations, and understanding of choosing a university. Using the SEM-PLS software, these data were thematically examined.

The study found that factors like infrastructure and location of the university had little influence on students' decisions. But it was found that the university reputation was significantly influenced by choosing a university. The findings imply that criteria like location and infrastructure may be less significant than a university's reputation, which is crucial in decision-making among college students.

Introduction

The society that educates its inhabitants must have the knowledge and sensibility required for renaissance and for addressing any crises or issues that may arise. In light of technology and the digital transformation sweeping through worldwide life, education and its distribution among society's members attain stability and speed up global advancements and significant changes (Alyamani & Morsi, 2022). One of a student's critical essential life decisions is deciding on a major because it has a direct impact on several phases of his life and determines how satisfied he will be with his future employment as well as how far he will advance and develop professionally (Alyamani & Morsi, 2022).
Students choose the courses to pursue based on their motivation. As a result, it is not unique to analyze trends in the study selection (based on many parameters, mainly quantitative). However, the research of particular circumstances using the case study methodology appears to be just as fascinating, such as people who make decisions that deviate from their typical tendencies. Understanding these individuals' motivations might help one understand the issue from a different perspective and provides crucial knowledge for advancing many knowledge areas in education. With the help of this methodology, one can understand the specifics and intricacies of the decision-making process of the study (Corrales Serrano et al., 2021). Making the incorrect choice, on the other hand, can have two serious repercussions: either the student must start over on a different course and be able to manage the time delay involved, or they must altogether drop out of school, which can have severe repercussions (Areces Martnez, & Rodríguez Muiz, 2022).

For engineering educators, maker spaces in higher education have opened up novel and unforeseen options. At their separate colleges, students can explore their creativity through practical building projects by participating in maker spaces, which are unorthodox locations that house a variety of tools, machinery, and other resources (Hilton et al., 2018). Engineering instructors may discover that their courses frequently do not support these maker spaces even though these non-traditional places are becoming increasingly popular in the university context. Because universities have diverse curricula, physical spaces, needs, visions, and cultures, integrating makers' paces into engineering curricula differs between institutions. (Barrett and others, 2015). These elements affect how a university develops and works with a maker space (Hilton et al., 2018). For example, "prestige" is used by sociologists to refer to the topic of study, whereas "reputation" is used by economists, "image" is used by marketing experts, "goodwill" is used by accountants and attorneys, and "value" is used by corporate managers." However, market forces and research in this area are why it is becoming more popular.

Additionally, reputation is a foundational element of brand equity and is linked to the competitive advantages of the business, resilience in times of crisis, the potential to increase profitability, a complex cognitive-emotional construct that influences consumer behavior, hidden asset, strategic resource, intangible value, and capital (Garvanova, 2020). Since international student mobility has become a movement in recent decades, it has become a common research topic in higher education to examine the college preferences of this population. If there are 8 million overseas students, who are all assumed to be undergraduate students (Altbach, 2004), and if the total cost of
attendance is considered (tuition, housing costs, educational supplies, and meals) (Boyacia et al., 2018).

College choice of international students is essential to student mobility in the international higher education market (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to look into the elements that influence the college decisions made by international students. To look into the aspects that affect international students' decision to study abroad (Boyacia & Ozb, 2018). The main driver behind most activities, including learning, is motivation. In other words, every action has a reason for occurring. The two fundamental pillars of development—basis and interest—could act as triggers for pursuing a particular major and demonstrating a commitment to one's career.

One of the learning needs is academic motivation, which aids in the learner's continuation (Saeedi Tehrani & Asghari, 2018). An essential requirement for expanding Indonesia's human resources is education. Higher education is critical because graduates from tertiary schools are expected to create great human resources and have high competitiveness. The reality is that a person's education affects their work (Jatisidi & Vera, 2021). State universities are the top objective for high school pupils when selecting tertiary colleges. Tuition at state universities is less expensive than at private universities since they are more prestigious; there are more study options available at state universities than at private universities (Jatisidi & Vera, 2021). While selecting a university, specific elements must be considered, and many other aspects also play a role. The primary determinant of a person's decision about a university is either that person or their environment (Jatisidi & Vera, 2021).

For the majority of students, choosing a university is difficult. Getting involved is a wise idea because it frequently determines their future course in life (Veloutsou et al., 2004). Students in their senior year of high school select the institution they want to attend each year. Family, friends, course availability, university reputation, distance from home, and employment prospects were identified as variables influencing students' choice of institution in earlier studies. However, in the digital age, the relative importance of these components may have shifted, and electronic word of mouth was previously disregarded (Wut et al., 2022).

Different elements, including those from the student's family, school, peers, teachers, high school education degrees, and many others in the immediate area, influence this choice (Alyamani & Morsi, 2022). The significance of the study and its most significant findings are demonstrated in identifying the most crucial elements.
influencing students' selection of their university majors, which are naturally thought of as critical future decisions that have a significant impact on the lives of students graduating from the secondary stage who must choose their future and path by choosing the course of their university studies (Alyamani & Morsi, 2022).

Numerous studies have focused on how students' academic prowess, sense of self, and demographic traits influence their decision to major in education. Others have concentrated on how social concerns and family influence kids' critical decision-making (Achamrah, 2022). Today's students face various problems related to misunderstandings and errors in college major selection. In the current 21st century, marked by the "4.0 revolution," it is evident that technology is developing quickly, and there is increased rivalry, particularly in the workplace. On the other side, many students feel lost because they are unsure of their talents and interests (Dela & Wijaya, 2022).

Hence the aim of this study is to examine the factors that influence Omani college students’ decision-making when choosing a university for their further studies. The reasons for carrying out this study are numerous. Making well-informed judgments that are in line with their aspirations is essential for students because the higher education landscape is continually changing and there are plenty of choices accessible. Universities and legislators are better able to meet the requirements of students and increase their competitiveness by looking into the determinants such as university reputation, university infrastructure, and university location, which will give insightful information in a highly competitive field.

Literature Review

A comprehensive examination of university selection studies from 1992 to 2013 was compiled. Common elements were discovered, including student demographics, academic quality, outcomes, benefits, facilities, institution-specific features, price sensitivity, information sources, and geographic locations (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Wut & Lee, 2022). Higher education institutions must present themselves through distinctive qualities that prospective students will find appealing as an instead natural result (Partenie. 2019). A study in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, conducted with over 7000 students revealed that women's interest in the ICT field and CS was comparatively lower than that of men (Bernhardt, Braun & Thomason, 2018). The authors maintained that a similar finding was also seen in higher education, revealing that only 4% of female college students in their first year intended to enroll in ICT-related fields in the USA (Ohei & Brink, 2021).
The reference group is one of the outside forces that can affect how people behave and their views regarding things they see or see. Additionally, family groupings are crucial in developing a person's views toward things that are believed to align with their goals and expectations. Family structure and family makeup are causative factors that are crucial (Wiadi et al., 2022).

Family is frequently understood as two or more people connected through blood, marriage, or adoption. Many types of families exist, including nuclear, extended, single-parent, and families with several partners (Forster & Van De Werfhorst, 2020; Wiadi et al., 2022). Reference groups and family groups mentioned above are significant in deciding how individuals (potential students) feel about selecting a college. This indicates that both organizations can carefully and rationally influence the views of likely pupils during the decision-making process.

According to several explanations, an individual's choice of attitude is a pattern of conduct, anticipatory inclination or preparedness, propensity for social adjustment, or an attitude is a response to socially conditioned inputs (Horowski, 2020; Wiadi et al., 2022). The basic form of this study is stated in terms of variables such as independent variables, University reputation, University infrastructure, University location, and dependent variable, choosing a university, in the below depicted theoretical framework. Therefore, this study examines the determinants of choosing a university among college students. Figure 1 shows the research framework with independent and dependent variables.

**The Link Between University Reputation and Choosing a University**

The fact that the study's object is a university's reputation and that reputation as a strategic resource and competitive advantage in the university information environment is the topic, and the main study focus is no unfortunate incident. As a target consumer group choosing and endorsing universities, students' thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes serve to develop this reputation. Over 80 in 5 of the 6 RQ aspects, the students give the university where they study outstanding grades: Products and Services: 84.36; Vision & Leadership: 82.07; Workplace Environment: 81.13; Social Responsibility: 81.09; Emotional Appeal: 85.31. The university's overall reputation is 81.76, which is very good. The only dimension with a lower rating than the others is Financial Performance (77.26), presumably not a significant determinant of how young people see an organization's reputation. Excellent (index 75-79) and ranked last in relevance (Garvanova, 2020). In addition to helping students perform better academically, advertising is frequently used to boost the reputation and image of
educational institutions. Students' initial perceptions of a university are primarily based on contacts with staff members at education fairs or on-campus visits (Wut et al., 2022). Hence it is hypothesized that:

\[ H_1: \text{University reputation positively affects choosing a university among college students.} \]

**The Link between University Infrastructure and Choosing University.**

Higher education institutions are the source of knowledge and play a significant role in developing building codes and infrastructure designs that must comply with the building codes (Amoah et al., 2023). The physical foundations of a campus, which serves as a social infrastructure, are entwined with the sociabilities it fosters. Pavan et al. (2022) mapped the social infrastructures of a Brazilian public university campus. They determined its morphological features through diagrammatic research to determine the possibilities for integration between the school and its surrounding areas. The Hasanuddin University Agro Complex's current infrastructure complies with SPN infrastructure standards. The complex's existing infrastructure receives an excellent rating from the education personnel. The Hasanuddin University Agro Complex's educational personnel's performance is impacted by this infrastructure (Suratman et al., 2022). Hence it is hypothesized that:

\[ H_2: \text{University infrastructure positively affects choosing a university among college students.} \]

**The Link between University location and choosing a university.**

Sulaksono et al. (2021) aimed to ascertain how cost, location, and institutional reputation affect a student's decision to attend a particular university. The results showed that regional geographical characteristics, such as distance to universities, impacted access to higher education. Mbabazi et al. (2023) found that distance to the institution is one of the critical elements determining access to higher education. Therefore, when selecting a particular college, the location of the institution of higher learning is highly crucial (Harahap & Amanah, 2019). Hence it is hypothesized that:

\[ H_3: \text{University location positively affects choosing a university among college students.} \]

**Methodology**
To analyze the data, descriptive statistics were employed—a quantitative strategy in which a questionnaire was used to acquire quantitative data. Choosing a university was the helpless variable in this study. Independent variables are the factors that influence the university's reputation, University infrastructure, and University location of students at the university and college in Oman. This questionnaire is adapted from Veloutsou et al. (2004).

The population of this study consists of university and college students in Oman. The sample size is 195 respondents. Students at university and college in Oman unit of analysis. The variables in this study were measured using a set of survey methods that included questionnaires. Using the smart PLS 3.0 program to evaluate the data, it was discovered that picking the right university or college significantly impacts education in several subjects in Oman's universities and colleges. The data were displayed by PLS software in tabular and graph formats, which were helpful for additional analysis.

It is recommended that Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability be at least 0.6. (Hair et al., 2014) and achieved in this research. The current research composite reliability is shown in Figure 1.

![Composite Reliability](image)

Figure 1. Composite reliability

However, the values of the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) ratio remained below the recommended threshold of 0.90, as suggested in the existing literature (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019; Zaiț & Bertea, 2011), and achieved in this research. The current HTMT is shown in Figure 2.

![HTMT Ratio](image)

Figure 2. HTMT Ratio
Result and Discussion

Demographic characteristics

Below, Table 1 provides demographic information for the sample selected in the current study.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>26.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-40</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;40</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omani</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>98.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Omani</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-accounting</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>83.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) ratio
Graduation
Graduated
Not Graduated
Total

Total 195 100
Graduation
Graduated 98 50.26
Not Graduated 97 49.74
Total 195 100

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 below describes the descriptive statistics and the average mean of the dependent variable (Choosing University), as shown in the first item, which represents 3.831 the mean, the median is 3.958, the minute is 1, the highest is 5, and the standard deviation is 0.604. As the choice of the university is also related to the university's location, it represents 3.297 from the choice of the university, the median is 3.272, and the standard deviation is 0.735. Infrastructure related to university selection is 3.342, the median is 3.545, and the standard deviation is 0.858. Finally, the university's reputation is a good reason for choosing the right university. It represents 3.780, the median is 3.771, and the standard deviation is 0.620.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choosing University</td>
<td>3.831</td>
<td>3.958</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>0.604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Location</td>
<td>3.297</td>
<td>3.272</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>0.735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Infrastructure</td>
<td>3.342</td>
<td>3.545</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>0.858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Reputation</td>
<td>3.780</td>
<td>3.771</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>0.620</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a standard application to check the reliability of the differentiation. Each variable's root-squared average (AVE) must be highly correlated with all other variables. Fornell and Larcker (1981) noted that each variable's square root in its AVE must be a comparison link between variables for all other variables for the discriminant to be valid. Table 3 below illustrates the discriminatory credibility (choosing the university, location of the institution, infrastructure, and university reputation, which are the factors to consider while selecting the best university and college).

Table 3. Discriminant Validity
R Square ($R^2$) is used to evaluate the internal components' structural model, also known as the internal model. When considering the model using PLS, it begins with an observation of $R^2$ of the latent endogenous construct variable. In the current study, Variable Subjective Structures have an $R^2$ value of 0.269 (confirming the intrinsic value) and an $R$ Square Adjusted value of 0.258. We also note the exogenous variables and their relationship to Endogenous (Accounting Education), where $R$ Square achieves a value of 0.684, while $R$ Square Adjusted has a value of 0.680. The PLS results for $R$ Square and $R$ Square Adjusted are shown in Table 4.

### Table 4. Explanation of the Variance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exogenous Variables -&gt; Endogenous (Choosing University)</th>
<th>$R$ Square</th>
<th>$R$ Square Adjusted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>0.258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis Testing**

The results of the hypothesis testing are shown in Table 5 (Path Coefficients), and both hypotheses are supported. The result revealed that the levels of university reputation on Choosing University have a significant relationship with Choosing University where it was $p<0.001$, $t=6.146$. This result indicates that the levels of university reputation have a significant impact on Choosing University. In addition, the findings showed that the groups of University Location have a significant relationship with the Choosing University where it was $p<0.001$, $t=0.950$. This result indicates that the levels of University Location have a significant impact on Choosing University. Also, the results showed that the P values of both independent variables in Choosing a University, University Location, and University reputation are $p<0.05$, implying that both have a high impact and support the hypotheses. As a result, we get at both the study variables of Choosing a University, namely, University Location and University reputation, which complements each other and increase the level of Choosing University.
Table 5. Path Coefficients

| Hypothesis                        | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T (|O/STDEV|) | P Values | Supported/Not supported |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------|----------|------------------------|
| University Location Choosing University | 0.068               | 0.083           | 0.072                       | 0.950     | 0.342    | Not supported           |
| University infrastructure Choosing University | 0.015               | 0.038           | 0.076                       | 0.191     | 0.849    | Not supported           |
| University reputation Choosing University | 0.486               | 0.489           | 0.079                       | 6.146     | 0.000    | Supported              |

Note: Significance levels: *** P < 0.001 (t >3.33), **p < 0.01 (t >2.33), *p < 0.05 (t >1.605)

Discussion

The impact of university reputation on choosing a university among college students.

The hypothesis was to ascertain the impact of a university's reputation on admissions decisions. The variables' association is somewhat positive, according to the path coefficient of 0.486. This association was statistically supported, which is essential. The p-value of p<0.001 is highly significant, and the t-statistics of 6.146 are over the significance cutoff. Therefore, good evidence supports the notion that a university's reputation strongly influences choosing an institution based on the path coefficients and statistical analysis. Likewise, Khoshtaria et al. (2020) found two categories of university reputation: central and helpful, and they too highlighted the combination of factors crucial to university reputation and found that the combination of critical components to institution branding.

The impact of university infrastructure on choosing a university among college students.

This hypothesis examined how university infrastructure affected students' ability to select a school. The variables appear to have a very slender positive association, as indicated by the path coefficient of 0.015. However, this association is not supported.
by the statistical analysis. The p-value of 0.849 and the t-statistics of 0.191 suggest no significance. Therefore, according to the path coefficients and statistical analysis, insufficient evidence supports the theory that university infrastructure influences students' decisions to attend a particular university. The university's reputation among stakeholders is reflected in rankings and talks with current students and alumni. The student weighs all of this information, examines it, forms an opinion about the university in his mind, and then makes a choice. However, the current hypothesis, 'H2: University infrastructure has a positive effect on choosing university among college students', is not supported.

**The impact of university location on choosing a university among college students.**

The association between university location and enrollment decision was the subject of the hypothesis. The variables have a positive but slender connection, according to the path coefficient of 0.068. However, statistical evidence did not support this association. The p-value of 0.342 was insignificant, and the t-statistics of 0.950 were below the significance level. The conclusion is that little evidence supports the theory that university location influences students' decisions to choose a university, as shown by the path coefficients and statistical analysis. Hence H3: University location does not impact choosing a university among college students.

**Conclusion**

This study's main objective is to identify Omani students' choice of choosing the appropriate university or college after study. This study used one dimension (choosing a university or college) to study the impact of Omani students choosing their next life between university or college.

Data for this study were collected from 195 male and female students from various universities in the Sultanate. The current work relied on students studying or studying accounting from different universities in Oman. It used the 2022 questionnaire to study the effect of choosing Omani students: A study among college students in data collection.

The course of choosing the university or college after the study is a central element in data collection. The data for this study has been collected via Google or WhatsApp. In this study, the researcher will develop a questionnaire with a set of questions that will be distributed via a Google form to students who are studying or not studying accounting in several universities in the Sultanate of Oman. Students' perception of the Management Accounting course and students' choice of university or college is the
sovereign variable, while the university’s reputation is the dependent variable. This study contains assumptions and positive results that show the impact of the reputation of the university or college in the selection process.

The study found that factors like infrastructure and the university's location had little influence on students' decisions. But it was discovered that the decision was significantly influenced favorably by the university’s reputation. The findings imply that criteria like location and infrastructure may be less significant than a university's reputation, which is vital in decision-making.

Implications

This study's conclusions have several theoretical ramifications. First, it highlights the significance of considering various viewpoints, including those of students and parents, when analyzing factors influencing university decisions. A more thorough comprehension of the factors influencing students' decisions can be attained by merging the perspectives of many stakeholders, allowing for a more accurate assessment of similarities and differences in judgments. Second, the study emphasizes the demand for thorough and open information on opportunities and difficulties in higher education. As a strategic resource for the operation of a competitive business model, the university's reputation is also essential, as the research done by the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies highlights.

The results of this study have important practical implications for various parties involved in the university selection process. Understanding the importance of reputation is vital for universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs). Having a good reputation and upholding it can significantly impact students' choices. Universities can improve their reputation by delivering market-oriented specialties, maintaining the quality of vocational training, and enabling possibilities for student professional development. Colleges should also invest in effective leadership, highly qualified teachers, practical resources, and cutting-edge technologies to increase their appeal to potential students. The study emphasizes the significance of considering various viewpoints while choosing a university for students and parents. Students should ask their parents’ perspectives and involve them in decision-making. This may lead to a more thorough grasp of the factors influencing their decisions and promote improved decision-making.

Limitations and future research directions
The study makes use of questionnaire-derived self-reported data. Participants may give socially acceptable replies, or their responses may be influenced by recall or perceptual biases, introducing the possibility of response bias. The study's exclusive focus on Omani college students restricts the findings' applicability to other social environments or student groups. Distinct nations, regions, or demographic groups may have different university selection criteria.

Use qualitative research techniques in addition to the quantitative approach, such as focus groups or interviews, to better understand the motivations and underlying causes of students' decisions. Future research should look into additional elements, including cost, financial aid availability, academic programs, campus culture, and extracurricular activities that may affect students' choice of university.

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