

DETERMINANTS OF STUDENTS' CHOICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY, GHANA

Rexford Owusu Okyireh¹,

School of Business – Marketing, Procurement and Supply Chain Department
University of Education, Winneba.
okyirehjoe@yahoo.co.uk/rookyireh@uew.edu.gh

Marijke A. Adobea Okyireh PhD²,

Faculty of Management Studies
University of Professional Studies, Accra
Marijke.Okyere@upsamail.edu.gh

Isaac Nyarko Adu³,

School of Business – Human Resource Department
University of Education, Winneba.
Email:inadu@uew.edu.gh

ABSTRACT: *The quest to seek higher education continues unabated and this is seen in the number of private universities in Ghana. These universities offer programs targeted at students hence, all marketing activities are student-centered which also makes them attractive. Higher institutions try different strategies to be seen as an ideal destination for students who desire a place for learning but are often beset with selection issues. The study used a sample of 327 with a convenient sampling technique to solicit views from respondents. The study revealed that both Anglophone and Francophone countries ranked university infrastructure as the most important factor when it comes to students selecting a private university. Quality teaching was ranked second and the least ranked factor was ease of movement. The study further revealed that students got to know about the university through advertisement followed by the alumni. The study discussed implication for theory and practice.*

KEYWORDS: higher education, student's choice, private university, education in Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Universities play vital role in development of many nations and in the quest to do this they develop facilities to enable them disseminate knowledge through research, scholarship and community services (Agabi & Igbozuruike, 2019). Additionally, these facilities are geared towards the building of skilled manpower. The introduction of these facilities require huge investments and this compels management of these facilities to increase student intake in order to recoup the funds invested.

Higher Education (HE) across the globe has over the past few decades intensified strategies for becoming destination of choice for potential students (Hazelkorn, 2015). This partly, is as a result of the increase of institutions of higher learning hence offering students the opportunity to select institutions of their choice. Furthermore, the influx of private universities across West

Africa, each one has made it a policy to attract students with juicy offers such as state of the art facilities, introduction of market-driven programs and scholarship schemes among others, to attract prospective students. This has increased competition in the educational sector given the fact that students have bargaining power due to the availability of substitutes (Musellin, 2018). In Ghana for example, there have been attempts by private universities operate regular, evening and weekend school sessions in order to woo potential students to their universities. These options exist to give students the best that suits either working lifestyle or mode of learning. It is worthy to note that private universities in Ghana have increased over the years with foreign student enrolment constituting 18percent of student population (Tertiary Education Statistics Report, 2015). According to reports in 2015, there are about 65,890 students enrolled in private universities across the country.

These issues have given rise to the current study to establish the factors students consider when selecting a place for HE. More importantly, there seems to be the interest of West African countries choosing Ghana as an ideal place for higher learning and the study seeks to understand what also account for the choice factors of international students. In addition, the inconsistencies in literature on the choice factors need deeper understanding in order to have a justification on whether gender differences exist in choice factors as well as relevant source of information from prospective students.

Econometric and Sociological Models on University Selection

The economic/econometric model assumes that individuals will select a particular college or university if the benefits of attending outweigh a non-college (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1985). The model further states that students consider the cost and benefits in every stage of the decision-making in order to have the best option since human beings are rational. To this model, the current study is underpinned by the econometric model as it explains how students opt for the best option available. Mbawuni and Nimako (2015) have used the model to explain the critical factors underlying students' choice of HE. Sociological models are related to attainment or status level which postulates that students go through social and individual factors which ultimately lead to occupational and educational aspirations (Jackson, 1982). Sociological models of college choice have primarily concentrated on the identification and interrelationship of factors including parental encouragement and academic performance (Chapman, 1981; Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969). Chapman's model focuses on the influencers in the decision making process which include friends, family, teachers and parents. A scan through the literature indicates that the sociological models have been used to underpin various studies in HE (Maniu & Maniu, 2014; Sing, 2016).

Related Studies in HE

A plethora of studies (e.g. Atarah & Peprah, 2014; Mbawuni & Nimako, 2015) have investigated the determinants of choice of higher education amongst students. Atarah and Peprah (2014) assessed the influence of advertising on student enrolment in Ghana. The study concluded that advertising influences choice in enrolment in HE and the study further noted that family, friends and current students greatly affect the decisions of potential students. Similarly, Mbawuni and Nimako (2015) assessed the critical factors underlying students' choice for graduate programs in Ghana. Their study sampled the views of students and observed that cost, student support quality, attachment to institution and recommendation from lecturers and other staff accounts for the choice of Ghanaian students in choosing graduate

programs. This implies that, the way an institution manages academic procedures and information from a student's academic network has an enormous effect on a student's aspiration to join a specific institution.

Additionally, Arkane and Sloka (2015) examined the factors influencing the choice of HE in Latvia and conclude that state budget financing, accreditation and international possibilities are the most important factors for students choice. However, less important factors are availability of hostels, recommendations of relatives and friends, as well as sports facilities. Demographic factors such as age and gender are not statistically significant to students' choice of HE. Other studies done on the subject also identified several institutional factors. For instance Dao and Thorpe (2015) examined Vietnamese students' choice of university and opined nine key variables that students' consider in choice set in highest order; facilities and services, program, price, offline information, opinions, online information, ways of communication, program additions, and advertising. It is worthy to note that there were significant correlations in the Vietnamese context between the factors of price and facilities, and services and program, and differences between genders and types of students in choosing university.

Segbenya, Oduro, Peniana & Ghansah (2019) examined the proximity factors and choice of students for college of education centers for university of Cape Coast. A sample size of 2077 students were given questionnaires to assess whether they considered proximity to the centers before choosing the the facility and the extent to which it affected their absence from work on days before lecture sessions and afterwards. The results showed that the students who were mostly teachers absented themselves on days prior to their lecture sessions and days afterwards because of distance to and from the study centers and this also affected their employers.

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015) studied university choice of students and grouped the results in thematic areas; demographic and academic factors, institutional factors, outcomes and benefits, facilities, and characteristics of the institution. Moreover the research unearthed vital information regarding factors that affect both the institution and students; price and price sensitivity, information and information sources, and travel and geographical factors accounting for variations in choice of students. Ahmad and Hussain (2017) investigated factors that determine student destination of choice in higher education in United Arab Emirates (UAE) and opined that, there are three main factors that makes international students study in UAE; learning environment, cost issue and institutional reputation. This implied that the choice of higher education may vary from one research setting to another. In the same vein, Sing (2016) examined socio-economic, environmental and personal factors in the choice of a country's higher education. The study revealed that low cost of living and tuition fees make Malaysia a study of choice for students and potential ones as well. The study further concludes that lecturers, quality of teaching and high satisfaction levels accounts for the high rate of student enrolment in most universities in the country. On the third variable, personal factors are crucial in the decision-making process of an individual and that recommendation by others can influence a decision. In summary, all three variables are essential in influencing foreign nationals to study in a particular country.

Shah, Nair and Bennet (2013) conducted a study in Australia on the factors influencing student choice in a private university. It is important to note that six main factors were dominant: student perception, access and opportunity, learning environments, quality of teachers, course

design, and graduate success. Thus, the result implies that the determinants of tertiary education are influenced by the individual himself as well as situational factors in which knowledge is imparted to the students.

The study of Maniu and Maniu (2014) and Lai and Muthaly (2014) were no exception as they assessed the factors affecting the selection of universities. Maniu and Maniu (2014) assessed the factors influencing the choice of universities in Romania. The results showed that, institutional reputation, cost, employment opportunities, parents' influence, educational offer and location are the key factors students consider in the choice of HE. In the same light, Lai and Muthaly (2014) surveyed the decision making of students in Hong Kong and report that, parents have no influence in the college choice of their wards despite the parents' ability to pay for their education. In addition, potential students found previous students as highly influential in the college choice and these findings are very profound. Lastly, counsellors and teachers were considered to also influence the decision making of students. The research noted that counsellors are gatekeepers and students benefit from their advice.

Although the studies reviewed earlier highlighted personal factors and situational factors as determinants of choice of higher education, Zain, Jan and Ibrahim (2013) identified the extent to which these factors were related to each other. Using structural equation modelling, the findings of the study reveal that there is a positive effect between factors such as perception and promotion on the students' choice of private institutions for HE. The results also reveal a significant positive effect of perception on influence and promotion on influence.

On the other hand, Kusumawati, Yanamandram and Perera (2010) explored student choice factors in a public university with the use of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that the major factor influencing choice is cost, which is followed by reputation, proximity, job prospects and parents respectively. Cost according to the study of Kusumawati et al (2010) are the tuition fees and cost of living of the entire academic program. The authors are of the view that, students and parents consider the financial position of the family before engaging in any venture. Hence, institutions that charge more fees are likely to be chosen by students from high earning income families whilst those that charge lower fees will appeal to low income earning families. Contrary to the results of Kusumawati et al. (2010), Shah, Nair and Bennett (2013) examined the factors influencing student choice at a private university and reveal that, 60percent of students consider reputation as the most salient factor in influencing decisions in a private university. In addition, the location and access to transportation is important in students choosing a particular private university. Shah et. al. (2013) study makes it clear that apart from the reputation and location, there are other factors such as courses offered and quality teaching staff.

Additionally, the works of Padlee, Kamaruddin and Baharun (2010) who assessed international students' choice behaviour on a private university revealed seven main factors. The most important factors are customer focus and facilities which is deemed to be necessary for international students in influencing decision making. According to the authors, customer focus entails campus life, speaking of English language, carrier advisor and regulations. Thus customer focus greatly influence choices. Again, the facilities in the study have fragments such as design or layout of the university, internet facilities as well as sport recreation. These factors enumerated are what international students are influenced by. Furthermore, Gyasi, Xi, Owusu-

Ampomah and Basil (2017) evaluated determinants of private university choices among applicants in Ghana. The study was on the backdrop that private universities are not very popular and that, branding is the way forward in influencing potential students. The study concludes that, awareness creation is affected by branding hence; private universities ought to pay attention to this problem in order to be seen in the eyes of the students. Gyasi et al (2017) are of the view that the traditional way of advertising is fading away due to the complexities of information sources, and therefore, it is imperative to find other means of attraction to students who want to study in private universities. Similar to this, James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) explored the factors influencing international students' decision to choose higher education and report that, website of the university accounted for the most salient factor on source of information. In addition, environmental cues and educational facilities were the most significant factors that international students consider in their choice of HE.

Finally, Alfattal (2016) investigated international students' choice of higher education and reports that domestic and international students' choice factors are not the same and hence marketing efforts must recognise this difference. According to the study, both domestic and international students ranked course program as the major determinant in choosing HE. Price variations was the second most important factor among the two groups under consideration and that students weigh the costs of learning in relation to other competitors. Other factors that were significantly different from the domestic and international students are; on-campus housing, recommendation from family, reputation of faculty, participation in intercollegiate sports, printed material or video, and need-based financial aid.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sampling

The study used a survey and the population of the study was limited to Wisconsin University, a private university in Ghana, where a number of local and foreign nationals are enrolled in various degree programs. The sample used for the study was 327 out of 450 distributed questionnaires with 73% recovery rate. Convenience sampling technique was used to solicit responses from participants.

Research Instrument

A pre-test was carried out with 10 participants to correct and reduce errors in the questionnaire. The scale of the questionnaire was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD) and were coded from 1-5 respectively. The questionnaire had two sections thus, the variables set which was drawn from literature and demographic set (age, gender, nationality).

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented on Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Factor	Category	<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	177	54.1
	Female	150	45.9
Age	18-25 years	210	64.2
	26-35 years	93	28.4
	36-45 years	24	7.3
Educational Level	HND/Degree	318	97.2
	Post-Graduate	9	2.8
West African Language Blocks	Anglophone Countries	279	85.3
	Francophone Countries	48	14.7
Countries	Ghana	159	48.6
	Nigeria	120	36.7
	Togo	15	4.6
	Cote D'Ivoire	18	5.5
	Cameroon	6	1.8
	Mali	6	1.8
	Gabon	3	.9

A total of 327 students took part in the study of which 54.1% were male students. Their ages ranged between 18 to 45 years, with majority with 64.2% of them between 18 – 25 years. 97.2% of them were pursuing HND/Degree courses. Participants were spread across seven West African countries, with 85.3% coming from Anglophone West Africa. Ghana records the highest number of participants (48.6%), followed by Nigeria (36.7%).

Analytical Procedures

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was first conducted to empirically reduce the items into distinct factors or components. Items that measure the same construct were expected to load onto the same factor (Bro & Smilde, 2014). Factor loading was set at a minimum of .30 (Jolliffe & Cadima, 2016). Eigen values of more than 1 and scree plot were used to determine the number of factors to be extracted (Jolliffe & Cadima, 2016).

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to examine sampling adequacy and inter-correlations among items to help eliminate weak loading factors (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The number of factors extracted was then used for the rest of the analyses in answering the research objectives.

All the research questions sought to rank the factors extracted based on their order of importance to the students in their choice of institutions of higher learning. All the research questions were therefore analysed using the Friedman's test of mean ranking (Pituch & Stevens, 2015). The Friedman's test helps to rank means of different factors by the same sample, by adjusting the mean scores with the number of items per factor and standard deviation to produce mean ranks (Zimmerman & Zumbo, 1993). The mean significance of the mean ranks is then tested with a Chi square (χ^2 statistic) to confirm the order of importance of the factors.

The results of the analyses presented as follows. The results of the PCA are presented first. After that, descriptive statistics of the extracted factors are presented. The findings from the research questions are then presented last.

Principal Component Analysis

The extracted factors are summarized on Table 2. The results showed that KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .712. Bartlett's test of sphericity was found to be significant [χ^2 (276) =2680.741, $p < .001$]. Seven factors were observed to have eigen values above 1 and inspection of scree plot showed it levelled out after the seventh factor. Seven factors were therefore extracted, accounting for a total variance of 62.36%. The seven factors each accounted for 23.093%, 10.914%, 6.534%, 5.989%, 5.826%, 5.118% and 4.885% respectively. All the seven factors were observed to correlate moderately with one another (.30 - .48).

Factor 1 was named as 'University Infrastructure' as items loading on this factor measured infrastructure and facilities that the university has. Factor 2 was named 'Quality Teaching and Relationships' as items loading on to this factor assessed the quality of teaching and relationship students enjoy with faculty and staff. Factor 3 was 'Ease of Movement' as items that loaded onto this factor assessed easiness in accessing the school. Factor 4 was named as 'Reputation and Recognition' as items that loaded on this factor examine the reputation of the school and in the corporate world. Factor 5 was named 'Affordable and Flexible Tuition' as that loaded on to this factor assessed how flexible tuition payment is structured and opportunity to win scholarships. Factor 6 was 'Academic Programs' with loading items assessing kind of courses offered by the university. Factor 7 was named 'Advertisement' with the loading items assessing how the university is advertised. These factors were then used in answering the research questions.

Table 2: Factor Loadings of Students' Choice in Higher Education

Items	Factor						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Well stocked library	.689						
Admission counsellors	.657						
Availability of course materials	.640						
University infrastructure and buildings	.635						
Availability of accommodation options	.607						
Career prospects		.796					
Good student staff relationships		.569					
Teaching methods		.507					
Staff & recruitment team were friendly with me on my first visit		.422					
High calibre lectures		.414					
University distance from home or work			.739				
Transportation cost to and from the university			.642				
International accreditation of qualification offered				.744			
Recognition of qualification by employers				.547			
University reputation				.412			
Relatively affordable tuition fees					.724		
Possibility of getting scholarship					.456		
Possibility of paying fees in instalments					.429		
Having foreign teaching staff						.699	
Majors and specialization of courses offered						.399	
Courses offered						.354	
University website							.597
University leaflets or brochures distributed in public places							.423
Advertisement about the university							.386

Factor 1 = University Infrastructure, Factor 2 = Quality Teaching and Relationships, Factor 3 = Ease of Movement, Factor 4 = Reputation and Recognition, Factor 5 = Affordable and Flexible Tuition, Factor 6 = Academic Programs, Factor 7 = Advertisement

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of scores on the seven factors are presented on Table 3, showing number of items that loaded, minimum score, maximum score, mean and standard deviations.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Scores

Factors	Items	Min.	Max.	M	SD
University Infrastructure	5	5.00	25.00	14.63	3.99
Quality Teaching and Relationship	5	5.00	20.00	11.53	3.19
Ease of Movement	2	2.00	10.00	5.76	1.99
Reputation and Recognition	3	3.00	15.00	6.75	2.34
Affordable and Flexible Tuition	3	3.00	15.00	8.40	2.77
Academic Programs	3	4.00	13.00	7.94	2.13
University Advertisement	3	3.00	14.00	7.85	2.25

Two factors had five items each; University Infrastructure (M = 14.63, SD = 3.99), and Quality Teaching and Relationship (M = 11.53, SD = 3.19). One factor had 2 items; Ease of Movement (M = 5.76, SD = 1.99) and the four remaining factors had three items each; Relationship and recognition (M = 6.75, SD = 2.34), Affordable and Flexible Tuition (M = 8.40, SD = 2.77), Academic Programs (M = 7.94, SD = 2.13) and University Advertisement (M = 7.85, SD = 2.25).

Most Important Factor of Student Choice in Higher Education

The first research question sought to identify the most important factors in students' choice of institutions of higher learning. The seven factors were therefore ranked using Friedman's test and the results are summarized on Table 3.

Table 3: Ranked Factors of Students' Choice of Higher Education

Ranked Factors	Mean Rank	χ^2	df	p
University Infrastructure	6.62	1170.538	6	.000
Quality Teaching and Relationship	5.67			
Affordable and Flexible Tuition	3.89			
University Advertisement	3.63			
Academic Programs	3.62			
Reputation and Recognition	2.65			
Ease of Movement	1.92			

The results show that the ranked factors were significant [$\chi^2(6) = 1170.538, p < .001$]. As shown on Table 3, the most important factor was found to be University Infrastructure. This is followed by Quality Teaching and Relationship, Affordable and Flexible Tuition, University Advertisement, Academic Programs, Reputation and Recognition, and Ease of Movement in that order.

Usefulness of Information Sources by Students

The second research question sought to examine the usefulness of information sources by the students. Five different sources of information were compared and ranked. The results are summarized on Table 4.

Table 4: Order of Importance of Information Sources

Ranked Sources of Information	Mean Ranks	χ^2	df	p
Advertisement about the university	3.45	132.28	4	.000
Recommendation past student (Alumni)	3.31			
University website	3.11			
Recommendation by friends and family	2.70			
University leaflets or brochures distributed in public places	2.43			

The findings showed that the ranked sources of information was statistically significant [$\chi^2(4) = 132.28, p < .001$]. The most useful source of information was found to be advertisement about the university. This was followed by recommendation from past students, university website, recommendation by family and friends, and distribution of university leaflets in that order.

Evaluation of Countries' Determinants of Choice

The third research question sought to examine the importance of the factors based on countries. In order manage the comparison, the countries were grouped into two; Anglophone countries (i.e. English-speaking West African countries) and Francophone countries (i.e. French-speaking West African countries). The results of the ranked factors are provided on Table 4.

Table 5: Ranked Factors of Countries' Determinants of Choice

Nationality	Ranked Factors	Mean Ranks	χ^2	df	p
Anglophone Countries	University Infrastructure	6.58	982.31	6	.000
	Quality Teaching and Relationship	5.70			
	Affordable and Flexible Tuition	3.84			
	Academic Programs	3.68			
	University Advertisement	3.59			
	Reputation and Recognition	2.67			
	Ease of movement	1.94			
Francophone Countries	University Infrastructure	6.88	193.18	6	.000
	Quality Teaching and Relationship	5.47			
	Affordable and Flexible Tuition	4.16			
	University Advertisement	3.88			
	Academic Programs	3.28			
	Reputation and Recognition	2.53			
	Ease of movement	1.81			

The results showed that the ranked factors were significance for both Anglophone countries [$\chi^2(6) = 982.31, p < .001$] and Francophone countries [$\chi^2(6) = 193.18, p < .001$]. Comparing the

factor rankings, it was observed that in both divide, University Infrastructure, Quality Teaching and Relationship, Affordable and Flexible Tuition were the three most important factors. However, while Academic program was ranked 4th ahead of University advertisement for Anglophone countries, University advertisement was ranked 4th ahead of academic programs for Francophone countries. The last two ranked factors (i.e. Reputation and Recognition, and Ease of Movement) were ranked the same way for both language speaking countries.

Gender Differences in the Choice of Higher Learning

The last research question compared the ranked factors for male and female students. The results are provided on Table 6.

Table 6: Ranked Factors Based on Gender

Gender	Ranked Factors	Mean Rank	χ^2	df	p
Males	University Infrastructure	6.54	596.92	6	.000
	Quality Teaching and Relationship	5.64			
	Affordable and Flexible Tuition	3.92			
	University Advertisement	3.63			
	Academic Programs	3.56			
	Reputation and Recognition	2.65			
	Ease of movement	2.06			
Females	University Infrastructure	6.71	575.85	6	.000
	Quality Teaching and Relationship	5.70			
	Affordable and Flexible Tuition	4.86			
	Academic Programs	3.69			
	University Advertisement	3.63			
	Reputation and Recognition	2.65			
	Ease of movement	1.76			

The results showed that the ranked factors were significance for both male students [$\chi^2(6) = 596.92$, $p < .001$] and female students [$\chi^2(6) = 575.85$, $p < .001$]. Comparing the factor rankings, it was observed that the first three factors (i.e. University Infrastructure, Quality Teaching and Relationship, Affordable and Flexible Tuition) and the last two factors i.e. Reputation and Recognition, and Ease of Movement) were ranked the same order for both male and female students. A slight difference was however observed in the 4th and 5th ranked factors. For the male students, University advertisement was ranked 4th ahead of academic programs while for female students, Academic program was ranked 4th ahead of University advertisement.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first objective was to identify the most important factors that determined student choice of higher education. From the study, the results indicated that the most important factor was found to be University Infrastructure. This is followed by Quality Teaching and Relationship, Affordable and Flexible Tuition, University Advertisement, Academic Programs, Reputation and Recognition, and then lastly, Ease of Movement. This finding was inconsistent with

Kusumawati et al. (2010) who observed that students first considered the cost of tuition before other factors when opting for higher education. Mbawuni and Nimako (2015) reported cost as the first determinant of the choice of higher education. Sing (2016) also observed that students considered cost of tuition as a major factor when choosing institutions of higher learning in Malaysia.

Contrary to the report, reputation and recognition was ranked sixth amongst the choice factors. Maniu and Maniu (2014) observed that it was the first factor that informed a student's decision. Reasons that account for the difference in the findings might be due to the students' orientation as to how the architectural presentation of how an institution that offers high education should look like. Furthermore, it is assumed that students might have been informed by alumni who have experienced tertiary education about the factors to consider and this might have accounted for the differences in the findings. Other reasons might be the fact that, most of the private institutions in their quest to increase the rates of students intake communicate messages that place emphasis on the nature of infrastructure before other factors such as the teaching techniques, type of tuition, programs offered and others.

The second objective was to identify the usefulness of information sources by students. It was reported that the most useful source of information was advertisement about the university. This was followed by recommendation from past students, university website, recommendation by family and friends, and distribution of university leaflets in that order. This finding was inconsistent with James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) who found that international students' relied firstly on information done by universities on their website than other sources to make their decisions than other sources. Reasons that accounted for this difference might be as a result of the geographical location where the study was conducted. The research setting has several institutions cited in that area and so it is possible they will find adverts directly from these universities as more authentic than other sources. Additionally, students and potential students might have been more conversant with direct adverts by these institutions and may not accept change more readily.

The third objective was to evaluate of countries' determinants of choice. It was reported that in both divide, University Infrastructure, Quality Teaching and Relationship, Affordable and Flexible Tuition were the three most important factors. However, while Academic program was ranked 4th ahead of University advertisement for Anglophone countries, University advertisement was ranked 4th ahead of academic programs for Francophone countries. The last two ranked factors (i.e. Reputation and Recognition, and Ease of Movement) were ranked the same way for both language speaking countries. This finding was consistent with Gyasi et al (2017) who are of the view that Ghanaian students found the means of advertisement as traditional and therefore, it is imperative to find other means of attraction to students who want to study in private universities. However the same finding was inconsistent with Atarah and Pephrah (2014) who reported that Ghanaian students (Anglophones) considered advertisements by universities before other factors in making their decisions.

The report that francophone students ranked university advertisement 4th before academic programs could be attributed to the fact that being foreigners in Ghana, they needed explicit information about universities before they could make decisions on where to pursue the tertiary education. This explicit information might perhaps include means of communication, hostel

facilities, security within the university and other factors which are not captured in the ranked factors. Reasons that account for the Anglophones responses could be attributed to their exposure to several tertiary institutions thus apart from the first three factors they were particularly interested in considering the academic programs vary from one university to another.

The final objective was to ascertain whether there were gender differences in the choice of higher learning and the results showed that all the factors (University Infrastructure, Quality Teaching and Relationship, Affordable and Flexible Tuition, Reputation and Recognition, and Ease of Movement) were ranked at the same level for both sexes with the exception of university advertisement and academic programs. Reasons that account for females considering academic programs before advertisement by universities and males considering the other way round may be due to cultural factors such as gender roles assigned to either sex. These roles may make females in the research setting conscious of the academic programs to pursue in order to avoid pursuing careers which may be in conflict with careers which are male oriented. There is also the possibility of the females having the perception that academic programs form the core of higher learning and not the content of advertisements done by the universities. On the other hand it is assumed the males were more interested in advertisements done by the universities as it contains both academic programs and other information which are relevant for making decisions about their choice of higher education.

Contribution to Knowledge

The present study on the determinants of choice of higher education builds upon previous researches by comparing the factors which inform the decision of both English and French speaking countries within West Africa on choice institutions of higher learning in Ghana. Additionally, it shows which medium is more useful in communicating information about higher education to prospective students. The results of the study indicates that the most useful source of information was found to be advertisement about the university followed by recommendation from past students, university website, recommendation by family and friends, and distribution of university leaflets in that order. Thus these suggest that the most efficient way of communicating to students in private universities is through adverts. Furthermore, the use of the econometric and sociological models to explain the choice of higher education is under researched hence; the current study throws more light for further debate in the growing literature in HE.

Conclusions

As noted earlier the study sought to investigate factors that inform student's decisions to choose private universities. Using a sample of 327 students from Wisconsin University, it emerged that the choice factors were ranked in a hierarchical order starting from University infrastructure, Quality teaching and relationship, Ease of movement, Reputation and Recognition, Affordable and flexible tuition, academic programs and university advertisement. Furthermore, it was reported that differences existed in the 4th and 5th rankings of choice factors of Anglophone and francophone students as well as males and females. This implies that for private institutions to reach the expected target for recruitment, they should invest in infrastructure such as library, lecture halls, computer laboratory not forgetting state of the art technologies.

Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

Following the outcome of the present study, it is recommended that researchers who seek to conduct studies on determinants of choice of higher education should conduct an explorative study where personal in-depth interviews will be conducted to understand the experiences of students and what informed their choice of high education. Moreover, studies conducted in the same area should include samples from other language speaking countries apart from Anglophone and francophone countries. This is to say that researchers should consider universities with nationals from Europe, Asia in addition to the two language speaking countries and exam whether differences will exist in terms of the factors they consider in choosing higher education. Additionally, a comparative study can be conducted between public and private universities on the factors that determine their choices.

In terms of practice, it is highly recommended that educationists, management of private universities and consultant should consider the factors that were ranked first. For example a universities infrastructure is deemed very important influencing prospective students not forgetting quality teaching and relationship as well as affordable and flexible tuition too. Furthermore the issue of university advertisements was important in influencing students' decisions. Hence, the elements needed to make information from these adverts more explicit should be considered.

References

- Absher, K., & Crawford, G. (1996). Marketing the Community College Starts with Understanding Students' Perspectives. *Community College Review*, 23(4), 59-67.
- Agabi, O. G. & Igbozuruike, U. I (2019) Perceived Private Economic Benefits Of University Education Among Male And Female Undergraduates In Rivers State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative research and Advanced studies*,6(6),115-127.
- Alfattal, E. (2017). International students' college choice is different!. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31(7), 930-943.
- Alhakimi, W. & Qasem, A. (2014). An Analysis of the Use of Marketing Strategies by Private Universities in Less Developed World: the Case of Yemen. *Editorial Team*.
- Alves, H., & Raposo, M. (2007). Conceptual model of student satisfaction in higher education. *Total Quality Management*, 18(5), 571-588.
- Angel Po Cheung Lai, Paul Gibson, Siva Muthaly, (2014) "Becoming an education provider of choice in Hong Kong: an inquiry into student decision making", *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol.28 Issue: 5, pp.590-609.
- Arnett, D. B., German, S. D., & Hunt, S. D. (2003). The identity salience model of relationship marketing success: The case of nonprofit marketing. *Journal of marketing*, 67(2), 89-105.
- Beneke, J., & Human, G. (2010). Student recruitment marketing in South Africa-An exploratory study into the adoption of a relationship orientation. *African Journal of Business Management*, 4(4), 435.
- bin Yusof, M., binti Ahmad, S. N. B., bin Mohamed Tajudin, M., & Ravindran, R. (2008). A study of factors influencing the selection of a higher education institution. *UNITAR e-journal*, 4(2), 27.

- Briggs, S., & Wilson, A. (2007). Which university? A study of the influence of cost and information factors on Scottish undergraduate choice. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 29(1), 57-72.
- Bro, R., & Smilde, A. K. (2014). Principal component analysis. *Analytical Methods*, 6(9), 2812-2831.
- Casidy, R. (2014). Linking Brand Orientation with Service Quality, Satisfaction, and Positive Word-of-Mouth: Evidence from the Higher Education Sector. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 26(142).
- DeShields Jr, O. W., Kara, A., & Kaynak, E. (2005). Determinants of business student satisfaction and retention in higher education: applying Herzberg's two-factor theory. *International journal of educational management*, 19(2), 128-139.
- Enache, I. C. (2011). Marketing higher education using the 7 Ps framework. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov. Economic Sciences. Series V*, 4(1), 23.
- Fisk, R., & Allen, J. (1993). Applying marketing techniques to achieve the strategic objectives of educational institutions: A case study. In *AMA Symposium for the Marketing of Higher Education* (pp. 70-7).
- Fombrun, C., & Shanley, M. (1990). What's in a name? Reputation building and corporate strategy. *Academy of management Journal*, 33(2), 233-258.
- Fosu, F. F., & Poku, K. (2014). Exploring the factors that influence students' choice of higher education in Ghana. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 6(28), 209-220.
- Gajić, J. (2012). Importance of marketing mix in higher education institutions. *Singidunum Journal of Applied Sciences*, 9(1), 29-41.
- Ghana Tertiary Education Statistics Report (2015)
- Hall, R. (1993). A framework linking intangible resources and capabilities to sustainable competitive advantage. *Strategic management journal*, 14(8), 607-618.
- Harrison-Walker, L. J. (2009). Strategic positioning in higher education. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 13(1), 103.
- Hayes, T. (2009). *Marketing of Colleges and Universities: A Service Approach*. England: Haworth Press.
- Hazelkorn, E. (2015). *Rankings and the reshaping of higher education: The battle for world-class excellence*. Springer.
- Inyang, N. E., & Etuk, G. K. (2015). Marketing education for economic survival: The case of University of Uyo. *British Journal of Education*, 3(3), 14-26.
- Ivy, J. (2008). A new higher education marketing mix: the 7Ps for MBA marketing. *International Journal of educational management*, 22(4), 288-299.
- Ivy, J. (2001). Higher education institution image: a correspondence analysis approach. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 15(6), 276-282.
- Jolliffe, I. T., & Cadima, J. (2016). Principal component analysis: a review and recent developments. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. A*, 374(2065), 20150202.
- Kallio, R. E. (1995). Factors influencing the college choice decisions of graduate students. *Research in Higher Education*, 36(1), 109-124.
- Kim, J.K., & Gasman, M. (2011). In search of a "good college": Decisions and determinations behind Asian American students' college choice. *Journal of College Student Development*, 52(6), 706– 728
- Levesque, T., & McDougall, G. H. (1996). Determinants of customer satisfaction in retail banking. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 14(7), 12-20.

- Mai Thi Ngoc Dao, Anthony Thorpe, (2015) "What factors influence Vietnamese students' choice of university?", *International Journal of Educational Management*, 29(5), 666-681,
- Maniu, L., & Maniu, G. C. (2014). Educational Marketing: Factors Influencing the Selection of a University. *Practical Application of Science* 2(3).
- Manuh, T., Gariba, S., & Budu, J. (2007). Change and transformation in Ghana's publicly funded universities. *Partnership for Higher Education in Africa*. Oxford, UK: James Currey and Accra, Ghana: Woeli Publishing Services.
- María Cubillo, J., Sánchez, J., & Cerviño, J. (2006). International students' decision-making process. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 20(2), 101-115.
- Maringe, F. (2005) Interrogation the crisis in the higher education marketing: CORD model. *International Journal of Educational Management*. 19 (7), 564-578
- Maringe, F., & Foskett, N. (2002). Marketing University Education: The Southern African Experience. *Higher Education Review*, 34(3), 35-51.
- Martin, M. C., Moriuchi, E., Smith, R. M., Moeder, J. D., & Nichols, C. (2015). The Importance of University Traditions and Rituals in Building Alumni Brand Communities and Loyalty. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, 19(3), 107.
- McAlexander, J. H., & Koenig, H. F. (2001). University experiences, the student-college relationship, and alumni support. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 10(3), 21-44.
- Moogan, Y. J. (2011). Can a higher education institution's marketing strategy improve the student-institution match. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 25(6), 570-589.
- Musselin, C. (2018). New forms of competition in higher education. *Socio-Economic Review*, 16(3), 657-683.
- Nedbalová, E., Greenacre, L., & Schulz, J. (2014). UK higher education viewed through the marketization and marketing lenses. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 24(2), 178-195.
- Nicolescu, L. (2009). Applying marketing to higher education: scope and limits. *Management & Marketing*, 4(2), 35-44.
- Osei, G. M. (2006). Teachers in Ghana: Issues of training, remuneration and effectiveness. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 26(1), 38-51.
- Pituch, K. A., & Stevens, J. P. (2015). Applied multivariate statistics for the social sciences: Analyses with SAS and IBM's SPSS. Routledge.
- Richardson, S., Nwankwo, S., & Richardson, B. (1995). Strategic issues for higher education strategists in the UK: A political contingency perspective. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 8(6), 7-16.
- Sarkane, G., & Sloka, B. (2014). Higher Education Establishment Choice Influencing Factors. *Business and Uncertainty: Challenges for Emerging Markets*, 65.
- Schertzer, C. B., & Schertzer, S. M. (2004). Student satisfaction and retention: A conceptual model. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 14(1), 79-91.
- Schofield, C., Cotton, D., Gresty, K., Kneale, P., & Winter, J. (2013). Higher education provision in a crowded marketplace. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 35(2), 193-205.
- Segbenya, M., Oduro, G.K.T, Peniana, F. & Ghansah, K.(2019)Proximity and choice of College of Distance Education (CoDE) of the University of Cape Coast for further studies", *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(5) 1012-1034.

- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2007). *Using multivariate statistics*. Allyn & Bacon/Pearson Education.
- Tsinidou, M., Gerogiannis, V., & Fitsilis, P. (2010). Evaluation of the factors that determine quality in higher education: an empirical study. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 18(3), 227-244.
- Varki, S., & Colgate, M. (2001). The role of price perceptions in an integrated model of behavioral intentions. *Journal of Service Research*, 3(3), 232-240.
- Wagner, K., & Fard, P. Y. (2009). Factors influencing Malaysian students' intention to study at a higher educational institution. *E-Leader Kuala Lumpur*.
- Zimmerman, D. W., & Zumbo, B. D. (1993). Relative power of the Wilcoxon test, the Friedman test, and repeated-measures ANOVA on ranks. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 75-86.-+