Factors Influencing Students' Choice Of An Institution Of Higher Education

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Abstract

This study examined key factors that have affected high school students' choices of higher education institutions (HEIs). It provides a deeper insight into the voice of their key stakeholders. There are approximately 90 respondents who participated in both the qualitative and quantitative studies. In- depth interviews and self-administered questionnaires were part of this triangulation study. The results suggested that there is a significant relationship between programme, university reputation, employment opportunity, pricing, security, education and campus facilities, events, location, peers, mentoring, satisfaction and college choice. Gender played a moderating role in the developed model. The research conducted was limited to only 90 respondents which is considered very small compared to other research studies. The target population was limited to a number of

high schools hence the findings were not representative of the high school students' population. The findings of this research is to aid higher education authorities to review and develop appropriate strategies in order to promote their particular institutions through better knowledge by focusing on the key factors that could significantly affect college choices.

Keywords: College Choice, Student, University, Malaysian Education

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent studies on tertiary education in the past decade have shown an intense competition among universities on a global and local scale (Rust and Kim, 2012; Grapragasem et al., 2014; Ling et al., 2021). According to CSIC (*Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas*) – the largest public research body in Spain, revealed that there are more than 26, 000 universities globally in 2017 (CSIC, 2018) thus creating an intense competition in the education market place to attract students to higher education institutions (HEI).

In the context of higher education, Malaysia practices dualistic tertiary education system by permitting participation from both public and private HEIs among 20 public universities and more than 460 private universities. Based on statistics released by the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia in 2017, it was revealed that student enrollment numbered more than 500,000 Malaysian students and more than 100,000 of non-Malaysian students (MOHE, 2018). Statistics also show that there is a total of 51 universities (271, 854 students), 10

foreign universities (29,207 students), 38 university colleges (77, 660 students), and 336 colleges (158, 713 students) in Malaysia (DOSM, 2020). As of March 2021, MIDA (2021) revealed Malaysia has more than 400 private colleges that offer various programmes and more than 1.3 million students pursuing their higher education in Malaysia while more than 50% of these students are enrolled into public HEIs and around 48% of students were in the private HEIs. All these statistics forecast that the potential growth of revenue that is expected to be generated from these HEIs will be around RM65 billion (USD14.8 billion) by 2026 thus creating a competitive local education marketplace to attract students.

Past studies have attempted to investigate key factors that could influence high school students' university choice decisions (Lai et al, 2014; Alfattal, 2017; Nuseir & El Refae, 2021). Jaya, Nora and Naziz (2013) revealed that quality of education, campus facilities, atmosphere, financial factors, advertisement, and publicity are key factors that could affect university choice decision among students.

Haron et al. (2017) concluded that financial aid, program content and structure, facilities, resources, promotion, and social influences are major factors that could influence students' decision to further their studies at their preferred private HEIs. Apart from these studies on local students, past studies conducted among international students revealed that tuition fees, diversity of culture, language, communication channel, programme, teaching facilities and quality, accommodation, transportation, and cost of living are key factors that influence international students to study in private HEIs in Malaysia (Edrak, Nor and Maamon, 2015). However, except for a few recent studies (Alfattal, 2017; Nuseir & El Refae, 2021), there has been a general lack of strong empirical studies to enable the establishment of models to explain the factors that can influence university choice decision amongst Malaysian high schoolers.

With the nation's focus on the development of higher education, stakeholders not only focus their efforts on the financial aspects of the institutions but also aim to expand the growth of the institutions itself. In light of these studies, institutions are encouraged to improve the quality of education hence this study helps to determine and analyze the major factors that can potentially influence high school students' university choice decision.

The purpose of this study is to fill the existing research gap by empirically establishing a model to determine key factors influencing university choices in Malaysia. An empirical analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses influencing university choices. This paper is organized as follows:

- providing a literature review on factors influencing university choices;
- developing a research model based on literature review;
- determining the research methods;
- discussing the research findings; and
- discussing the practical and managerial implications of this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hossler, Braxton and Coopersmith (1989) defined the term "student college choice" to describe the longitudinal and cumulative decision-making process that is carried out by a student at a higher education level. Consequently, Chapman (1981) presented an article postulating a model of student college choice decision which was not only limited to identifying and analyzing factors that influence students' college choice decision but was also able to provide college stakeholders a guideline to develop relevant recruiting policies.

Jillian et al. (2004) noted that college choice awareness started in the early 20th century when stakeholders begun recognizing the value

of education. According to their research, people have begun to understand that "a good college choice could influence one's future" however the concern during that time was centered on the uncertainty of factors that could influence the correct decision in selecting a suitable college. Chapman's model of college choice played a significant role by identifying internal and external influences with the intention of having a clearer picture for each step of the decision made (Chapman, 1981).

In Malaysia, the Education Ministry established an education compliance authority that is known as the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in 2007 to play the role as a regulator and provide guidance for national qualifications by monitoring and overseeing quality assurance in higher education as well as taking the responsibility to provide accreditation (MQA, 2018). Moreover, MQA developed a rating system for higher education institutions termed as 'SETARA' in order to measure the performance of universities or university colleges in Malaysia.

Currently, SETARA 2017 has realigned its assessment metrics to Malaysia's 10 year Education Blueprint from the year 2015 until 2025 and divided Malaysia's Higher Learning Institution (HLI) into three major categories such as Mature University, Emerging University and University College which will be categorized according to the research

capacity, services, income generation, institutional profile, teaching and learning.

Taking a contrary view, Stephen (2013) argued that college choice decision does not commensurate with jobs and earnings as the unemployment rate remained high as baccalaureate degree holders not only face financial loan debt issues but half of the students with bachelor's degrees were actually looking for jobs that do not require higher academic achievements thus better college choice does not provide guaranteed positive economic returns after graduation. From this argument, it enhances the point of view that high school students were more motivated instead to enroll in occupationally oriented vocational and technical courses to gain more practical skills that would help them in training for better skills and industry-related knowledge that could help them in future workplace rather than to study theoretically.

Nevertheless, Haron et al. (2017) viewed that students enrolled in higher education institutions today are considerably different from previous generations and this point of view is supported by Naidu and Derani (2016) whereby the Malaysia government has intention of developing Malaysia continuously through various exchange programs in terms of culture, transfer of knowledge and international trade in order to achieve its 2020 goal.

2.1 Programme

Availability and accreditation of programme by professional bodies play an important role in affecting high school students' college choice decision as the students tend to make their college choice only when they are confident with the courses they preferred could guarantee them better job opportunities in the future (Chapman, 1981). Meanwhile, Wagner and Fard (2009) also concluded that programme acknowledgement as an important criterion. For instance, Malaysian and New Zealand students are concerned more on the programme structure and course content coverage of the programme offered by the universities. Matzdorf et al., (2003) stated that the majority of the students' ranked availability of the desired course as the "top" dimension that influenced final college choice decision. Recently, the provision of e-learning was also an attraction point for students as online learning modes not only help the students to complete the full course from remote regions but is suitable for working adults who found challenges in accessing tertiary education physically. Hence, the emergence of e-learning programmes in private higher education institution and its continued growth will improve access and participation for more students (Shah, Nair and Bennett, 2013; Konstantoulaki et al., 2021).

H₁: The relationship between programme and college choice are significantly and positively related.

2.2 University Reputation

Universities are motivated to implement better marketing strategies to attract local and international students. In this aspect, a good brand reputation of HEIs also potentially elevates the university to achieve a higher university ranking. Stakeholders expect a good ranking of the university in terms of its reputation (Loon and Saring, 2012). In addition, Kusumawati (2013) and Qazi et al., (2021) studies found that university's reputation also influences students' college choice decision based on the university status and achievement whereby a majority of parents strongly believe that local universities are able to offer their children with better job guarantees upon their graduation due to the university's reputation in the global education market place.

H₂: The relationship between university reputation and college choice are significantly and positively related.

2.3 Employment/Internship Opportunity

According to Christopher (2018), graduate unemployment rate in Malaysia currently is alarmingly high due to the tremendous number of graduating students, numbering around 880, 000 graduates every year. In addition, Malaysia is strongly reliant on a low cost, low wages and low skill workforce that challenges the employment opportunities of graduates. Hence, Kusumawati (2013) stated that job prospects as one of the key factors that influence the policies and practices among tertiary education systems as students consider employment or job

opportunity as one of their key consideration before joining a HEI. In addition, the Malaysian government offers study loans to motivate the younger generation to further their studies in HEIs to obtain higher academic qualification. Leading private universities are also offering scholarships to attract students to join their colleges. Loans and scholarship are more readily available for programs with better job opportunities.

H₃: The relationship between employment opportunity and college choice are significantly and positively related.

2.4 Pricing

Globally, a majority of the Y generation are facing challenges in terms of paying higher fees for their higher education compared to the previous generations (Chung et al., 2009). University fees are a more pressing issue amongst undergraduates as they are solely dependent on their family for financial support. In comparison, postgraduate students are less sensitive to fees pricing as most of them are actively employed. However, postgraduate students are also reported to be partially sensitive towards tuition fees, flexibility of payment time, as well as alternative payment methods as compared to undergraduates. (Thorpe, 2015). On the other hand, a marketing mix study on education by Kotler and Fox (1995) had emphasized the importance of marketing. The study revealed that fee pricing is one of the more important factors considered by high school students when making college choice decisions. This result supports further argument on the importance of fees price offered by higher education institutions which can affect students' perceptions of value and quality at the same time. Meanwhile, the research also revealed that while local students tend to have more access towards education loan through government supported initiatives, in contrast international students can only depend on scholarships offered through institution itself (Alfattal, 2017) thus attesting the importance of pricing as a key influential factor.

H₄: The relationship between pricing and college choice are significantly and positively related.

2.5 Security

Following the complexities that go along with college choices decision, security factor is more likely to be emphasized by the public compared to the other factors. Jillian et al. (2004) pointed out that national prosperity and security as one of the factors that potentially influence college choice decisions, especially amongst parents when they consider college suitability for them to enroll their children. This point of view is further enhanced whereby universities take the responsibility in providing additional care and security for students within the college area whereby higher education institutions have to maintain security records by publishing their annual reports in order to

disclose their college security policy for students and employers (Chekwa, Thomas and Jones, 2013).

H₅: The relationship between security and college choice are significantly positive.

2.6 Education and Campus Facilities

A number of studies have indicated that facilities are a potential pull factor that influences students' college choice decisions. Matzdorf et al. (2003) focused on the importance of university-owned accommodation, self-catering accommodation, availability of electronic appliances as well as high-tech teaching and learning, library and computers facilities which also received high importance ratings on students' college choice decision. According to Veloutsou and Paton (2004), education and campus facilities are based on existing students' evaluations of the accommodation, quality of teaching and other services provided by the university. Apart from that, the study also concluded that respondents tend to value a number of the university's infrastructure and facilities such as the library and the computer facilities which might influence students' perceptions where such facilities will be adequate for their learning process in the institution. Joseph et al. (2009) pointed out that higher education institutions can enhance the quality of education through tangible provision

H₆: The relationship between education and campus facilities and college choice are significantly positive.

2.7 Events/Clubs

Exciting and beneficial events organized by higher education institutions especially for international colleges and are an important factor. Exchange information and cultural events allow students to gain an enriching experience. Sidin, Hussin and Soon (2003) noted that extra-curricular activities as one of the important among potential factors that influences college choice decision. According to Edrak, Nor and Maamon (2015), students with high sensitivity towards cultural differences have better prospects in obtaining better jobs. Events or club activities organized also provide students with the opportunity to communicate with people from different cultures. In contrast, extracurricular events and quality of student life which is also categorized under university related factors are ranked the least influential factor (Jafari and Aliesmaili, 2013).

H₇: The relationship between events and clubs and college choice are significantly positive.

2.8 Location

The strategic location of the higher educational institution should be supported with access to nearby convenience stores and accessible in terms of transportation. Location is also one of the main consideration that influence students' college choice decisions especially for

institutions that are enrolled with international students since many of them are unfamiliar with the environment (Das et al., 2009). Moreover, a study by Kusumawati (2013) found that proximity between the distance of the campus and resident place is one of the highest concerns for students since attending nearby HEIs allows them to have more family time. According to Brown (2015), geographical proximity is an important factor as some of the students take proximity to home as a key factor influencing college choice decisions. Malaysia is rising towards becoming a leading higher education hub in Asia and its 11th ranking worldwide as an ideal country for international students to visit and study supported by adherence to higher education standards and comfortable study facilities is key in attracting international students (Singh, 2016). Based on the report from Malaysia Investment Development Authority – MIDA (2017), Malaysia is on track to become an International education hub. Additionally, the latest survey conducted by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) ranked Malaysia as the 9th preferred destination for tertiary education among foreign students.

H8: The relationship between location and college choice are significantly positive.

2.9 Peers and friends

According to a study by Chapman (1981), influential parties might persuade the students in shaping their college choice decisions. Students with good academic achievement tend to receive more recommendation for furthering their study from their parents, teachers, and counselors as they stand a higher opportunity in obtaining scholarships. These students might be strongly persuaded by the advice from their peers and friends whereas the advice from their parents is most influential among these groups and has a direct effect on students' college choice decision. Furthermore, a study by Loon and Saring (2012), revealed the importance of the relationship between family and peer influence. Interpersonal influence from parents and peers provide positive support towards the students which can affect their college choice decisions directly. For instance, a majority of parents try to seek information from a family member or close friends who have experienced college life before in order to get insights about the preparation for their own child while making college choice decisions. Thus, parent's involvement is considered one of the critical factors for college choice decisions (Hines et al., 2014). Apart from that, one of the studies emphasize the importance of convenience in the context of being together with one's spouse or sibling as an attractive personal factor to encourage students to select Malaysia as their study destination.

H9: The relationship between peers and friends and college choice are significantly positive.

2.10 Mentoring

Within the context of higher education institution, the term "mentoring" has been recognized repeatedly as a crucial factor influencing college choice decisions. The role of mentor is considered as one of the core functions within the education sector (Crisp and Cruz, 2009). A study by Wuetherick (2017) indicated that mentoring is vital in supporting the development and achievement of students either directly or indirectly since the mentoring function not only encourages the students to attend university but to also, provides academic advice and sufficient support in order to help the students minimize their concerns while studying. At the moment, although the mentoring factor is mostly overlooked by most researchers, conducting effective mentoring within the higher education institution could potentially be another factor that influences students' college choice decisions.

H_{10}: Th relationship between mentoring and college choice are significantly positive.

2.11 Moderating Effects

Moderating effects in the context of PLS path modeling describes the influence of a moderating relationship within the structural model. This means that one construct moderates the direct relationship between two other constructs (Fassott, Henseler and Coelho, 2016). In this study, there was a moderating effect by gender on programme, pricing, facilities and college choice decisions. There are a few features in PLS-SEM such as continuous moderators that allows researchers to execute further analysis with better understanding of data relationships by providing additional statistical evidences which can be used for the explanation of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) (Hair et al., 2017). Typically, moderating effects tend to have a influence which in turn has led some researchers to question the usefulness of contingency theory and the need to detect interaction effects towards the theories developed. (Chin, Marolin and Newsted, 2003). Therefore, the following hypotheses of on moderating effects will be tested:
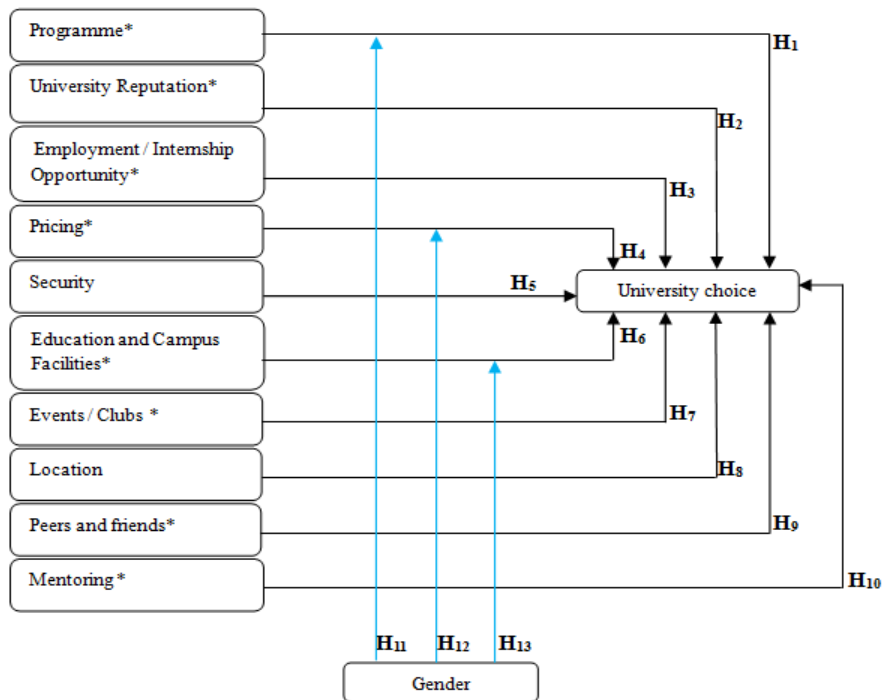
H_{11}: The relationship between programme and college choice is moderated by gender.

H_{12}: The relationship between pricing and college choice is moderated by gender.

H_{13}: The relationship between facilities and college choice is positively moderated by gender.

PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Figure 1.0: Research Model

The framework illustrated above shows the theoretical relationship between the independent variables (programme, university reputation, employment or internship opportunity, pricing, security, education and campus facilities, events or clubs, location, peers and friends and mentoring) and the dependent variables (university choice). Gender was selected as a moderating variable between program, pricing, education/ campus facilities and college choice.

3. METHODOLOGY

Given the nature of this research, this study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing high school students' college choice decisions.

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a triangulation research methodology by combining a qualitative study by conducting focus groups comprising of high schools to understand factors influencing college choices and also a quantitative survey by using self-administered questionnaires. In the first stage, a qualitative study was chosen as it tends to be more exploratory, as this process can produce satisfactory evidence or definitive results that exceed the expectations of researchers for the continued support of the theory. Qualitative research allowed this study to be detailed, descriptive and subjective as the data depends on the individual's interpretation (Langkos, 2014). In the second stage, a

quantitative approach was selected with the primary purpose of measuring, investigating, predicting and testing the hypothesis to explain the collected data set (Walliman,2011). Quantitative research also allowed classifying, assessing, and measuring characteristics and creating statistical models (Langkos, 2014). All the dimensions were measured using a 5-point Likert scale from strongly dissatisfied (1) to strongly satisfied (5). The data was analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) by using Smart PLS (Rahman et al., 2017).

3.2 Population of study

The population of this study consists of final year high school students. The selection of this group is justified due to the fact that they will be making their college choice decisions in the upcoming year. In other words, these group of high school students were sharing the same concerns in terms of making college choice decisions. The target population selected for this study were students that have completed their high school education with ages ranging from 17 – 18 years.

3.3 Sample size

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2}$$

n = Sample Size

z = Percentage point for the Standard Normal Probability Distribution at the specific confidence interval (1.96 for 95% Confidence Level)

p = Percentage picking a choice

q = Percentage not picking a choice (1-p)

e = Margin of Error (%5)

According to Emel Yarimoglu (2011), the above formula is to calculate the "p" value and "q" value where the "p" value refers to the percentage of samples that respond to the significant relationships between dependent variables and independent variable while the "q" value refers to the percentage of sample that respond to no significant relationships between dependent variables and independent variable. There are a few criterias that need to be specified when determining the appropriate sample size for a study in terms of precision level, confidence level or risk and the variability in attributes being measured (Israel, 1992). Furthermore, Gogtay (2010) stated that "sample size" is used to regulate the undersize of effect, probability of mistakenly rejecting a genuine null hypothesis and probability of failing to reject a false null hypothesis. Data obtained for this study was collected from a total of 90 respondents.

3.4 Research instrument

This study used a self-administered questionnaire that was distributed to the respondents as part of the the research instrument. The questionnaires had a total of 17 dimensions that was categorized under the following sections.

a) Section A: Demographic information of respondents

b) Section B: Potential factors influencing college choice decisions

c) Section C: College satisfaction and the possibility of college choice

From the questionnaire designed, respondents were required to answer each question related to the level of satisfaction and importance in the form of a five-point Likert that ranged between 1 to 5 (Brown, 2010).

1 – Very dissatisfaction / Not a priority

2 – Dissatisfaction / Low priority

3 – Not sure / Medium priority

4 – Satisfied / High priority

5 – Very satisfied / Essential

Likert scale tends to be commonly used among researchers since the data collected is able to measure broader attitudes and values that generally range from a negative point of view to positive point of view hence this allows the respondent to select their opinions based on the dimensions measured in the most straightforward notion. (John, 2011).

4. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ANALYSIS

This section summarizes the qualitative analysis conducted on a group of respondents consisting of high school students preparing to enroll in higher education institutions ages ranging between 17 and 18 years old.

4.1 Programme

The following comments given by the respondents highlighted the importance of the programme as a key influential factor:

"Offer programme for a particular area which can benefit our future." (Male, 17)

"College should offer various programmes which are attractive to me." (Female, 17)

"Courses available from this university should provide us better job prospects" (Male, 17)

On the other hand, a few respondents provided negative comments.

"What a pity that the programme I would like to join is not offered by this university such as cabin crew academy, modeling courses, and pharmaceutical courses." (Female, 17)

"Hope there could have more programmes related to technology" (Male, 17)

"Universities should offer culinary based programmes." (Female, 17)

"I wish music or dancing courses are made available." (Female, 17)

Based on the comments provided by the respondents, it can be concluded that students nowadays are expecting institutions to offer programme which they are interested in since the students prefer to enjoy their study while pursuing higher education achievements at the same time. According to Joseph (2011), post-secondary students in Sarawak, Malaysia were found to be more motivated to study if the university is able to offer programmes they

desired which could stimulate the students' interest and ambition in an effective way.

4.2 University Reputation

The following comments given by the respondents highlighted the importance of the university reputation as a key influential factor:

"I was really glad to know that this university is collaborating with foreign universities." (Male, 17)

"The certificate provided by this university is accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education which is really important for me" (Female, 17)

"I feel confident with the university's reputation." (Female, 17)

On the other hand, a few respondents gave contrasting view as follows.

"Its the first time I heard about this university, it's still new for me." (Female, 17)

"The university reputation is not good and therefore I will not enroll here." (Male, 17)

Based on the comments mentioned above, the majority of the students have shown their interest towards collaborative based programme offered by universities. Universities' reputation and quality of the institution is the most influential factor when the university ties up with foreign universities (Jafari and Aliesmaili, 2013).

4.3 Employment/Internship Opportunity

The following comments given by the respondents highlights the importance of employment and internship opportunities as a key influential factor:

"Based on the MOU signed by this university, I believe the university is able to provide better job prospects." (Female, 17)

"With the internship provided by this university, I think I will be able to obtain better jobs in future." (Female, 17)

On the other hand, few respondents give other views as follows.

"The lack of internship will affect my job prospects." (Male, 17)

Based on the comments mentioned above, high school students are looking forward to joining a university where they would likely gain employment opportunities immediately. According to the findings by Maringe (2006), higher education institutions are encouraged to revise their strategic mission by meeting students' expectation of being provided employment or internship opportunities.

4.4 Pricing

The following comments given by respondents highlighted the importance of the pricing as a key influential factor:

"I'm glad to hear this university is offering both scholarship and education loan for students-this is what I'm looking for." (Female, 17)

"This is my first time I heard about this private university but I'm very satisfied with the scholarship offered." (Male, 17)

"Basically, I thought private universities are expensive, but this college goes beyond my expectation in terms of education fees." (Female, 17)

On the other hand, a few respondents gave contrasting view points as follows.

"I prefer to get a scholarship from this college rather than waiting for PTPTN loan." (Male, 17)

"I am interested to know more about the scholarship being offered." (Male, 17)

"The terms and conditions to qualify for a scholarship should be state so that we could have a clearer picture in deciding our choice of college." (Female, 17)

Based on the comments mentioned above, the majority of the respondents considered pricing as one of the significant criteria influencing college choice. A study conducted by Kitsawad (2013), concluded that students tend to focus on the availability of scholarships, loans or even part-time jobs within campus and this factor could influence their college choice decision.

4.5 Security

The following comments given by the respondents highlighted the importance of the security factor:

"When I entered the campus, I could notice there were many security guards at each entrance of the college and within the campus which provides safety for the students." (Female, 27)

"I not only noticed security guard posted within the campus, but CCTVs were also installed at a few places even in the classrooms." (Male, 17)

"I think it's quite safe since both security guards and CCTVs are available and there is also an ID card system at the entrance of the hostel area." (Female, 17)

On the other hand, a few respondents gave different views as follows.

"Although there are security guards around the campus area, I found most of them are foreigners and that's a concern for me." (Female, 17)

"I wonder if there is any time restriction at the guarded entrance." (Male, 17)

According to the comments mentioned above, the majority of the female respondents showed their concern towards security factors and the majority of them are satisfied with the security facilities after their observation during the on-campus site visit. According to the research conducted by Carrico (2016), students had indicated that their parents were their primary influencers. Therefore, parents will consider a safe environment for their children to study hence security is an important factor that potentially influences college choice decision.

4.6 Education and campus facilities

The following comments given by respondents highlighted the importance of education and campus facilities:

"There is a lot of engineering labs, workshops and art studios available in this college." (Female, 17)

"I'm actually enjoying myself in the new café as it serves delicious food and has a comfortable environment." (Female, 17)

"The classrooms and examination halls are well equipped with air-conditioners, neat tables and chairs and even has digital smart boards which really attracted me." (Male, 17)

On the other hand, a few respondents gave improvement suggestions as follows.

"It would be ideal if there were gym facilities available within the college." (Female, 17)

"I hope the institution could have gaming facilities which not only helps students to relieve stress but could also explore potential talent in gaming." (Male, 17)

"It's nice to be surrounded by an eco-urban landscape and it would be really nice if the college could design more recreational facilities for students to relax themselves during free time." (Female, 17)

From the comments above, respondents take education and campus facilities as a key factor in considering college choice decisions. Respondents are basically satisfied with the existing facilities whereas some of the respondents suggested that institutions could combine the leisure activities with the current facilities to improve the overall study life.

4.7 Events/Clubs

The following comments given by the respondents highlighted the importance of events or club factor:

"I'm looking forward to participating in the outing activities which could help me relieve stress." (Female, 17)

"It's really nice to know that this university is actually organizing industrial visits which would be beneficial for students." (Male, 17)

"I'm satisfied with the sports facilities since we can have some sports activities during free time." (Male, 17)

"I'm looking forward to joining the movie night events at the auditorium." (Female, 17)

On the other hand, a few respondents provided comments as followings.

"It would be interesting for me if there are some music, dancing or singing events which I would actively participate." (Female, 17)

"It would be great if the institution could develop gaming events and send the potential students to participate in related competition either within or outside the college." (Male, 17)

According to the comments given above, students nowadays prefer to have team building activity or on-site learning in order for them to enrich their study life since they discovered that this mode of learning can help them to gain experience practically rather than theoretically. Higher education institutions should take note of conducting events or club activities covering

various cultures since diversity culture is viewed as being important by the students (Agrey and Lampadan, 2014).

4.8 Location

The following comments provided by the respondents' highlights the importance of the location factor:

"I think the location of this university is really suitable for studies due to its peaceful environment that is free from pollution." (Female, 17)

"The university is located between major cities which are quite convenient since there is a good accessibility to transportation such as trains, bus stops, taxis, airport and even e-hailing services." (Male, 17)

"I was being told that the lecture hall is designed to prevent noise from outside which I believe will help students to focus in the class." (Female, 17)

On the other hand, a few respondents provided comments as follows.

"The shops and food courts seem to be quite distanced from the hostel area and it would be ideal if there are more shops or restaurants near the hostel area." (Male, 17)

"None of the shopping mall or supermarket is available within a walking distance except for some grocery shops." (Female, 17)

Based on the comments mentioned above, the majority of the respondents felt comfortable

while being at the campus however some of them are concerned with the convenience factor in daily life especially when their homes are a far distance from the institution. According to Joseph (2011), the geographical location of a higher learning institution that is closer to the student's home is also another factor that influences students' college choice decisions.

4.9 Peers and friends

The following comments given by respondents highlighted the importance of peers and friends:

"Basically, I prefer to ask some advice from my parents before making my decision." (Female, 17)

"I would discuss with my friends about which college to enter or which course they are going to study in the future." (Male, 17)

"Whenever I get some information regarding the university or college of my choice, I will share with my friends to gather their opinions." (Female, 17)

On the other hand, a few respondents gave the following comments.

"In my view, I think I will just choose the university that my parents prefer." (Female, 17)
'
"I will meet the school counselor for some recommendations if needed if not then I tend to make my own decisions. (Male, 17)

From the comments above, the opinions from parents has been selected by a majority of the respondents as the most important factor in making their college choice decisions. In other cases, they might take the recommendations from their friends and school teachers especially when they are confused as to which college to enroll in. Family influences in terms of advice or recommendation is the most important factor influencing college choice decisions as well as their classmates where students prefer to enroll in the same college as their classmates. (Haron et al., 2017)

4.10 Mentoring

The following comments given by respondents highlighted the importance of mentoring:

"For my situation, I can't really make the decisions on my own, hence I think the mentoring sessions could really help me a lot." (Female, 17)

"I think mentoring sessions could be really helpful especially when we're having a problem in terms of education" (Male, 17)

"Sometimes, when we're unable to reach our parents who are far from us, then I believe the mentor could help us with problem-solving." (Male, 17)

On the other hand, a few respondents provided comments as following.

"I wonder if the mentoring session is really essential since there are some issues which are difficult for us to talk with the mentors." (Male, 17)

"Mentoring session could be useful if the mentors are really ready to help." (Male, 17)

"So far, I've never experienced mentoring session before even with the school counselors so I'm uncertain on how it's going to benefit my studies." (Female, 17)

According to the comments mentioned above, only half of the respondents considered mentoring as important for them towards college choice decisions whereas another half of them are having uncertainty on how the mentoring session would influence their college choice. Crisp et al., (2017) found that the mentoring factor has become a key factor especially for the undergraduate student that is often looked by the faculty of the institution as it plays a key role to connect students with their academic experience.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

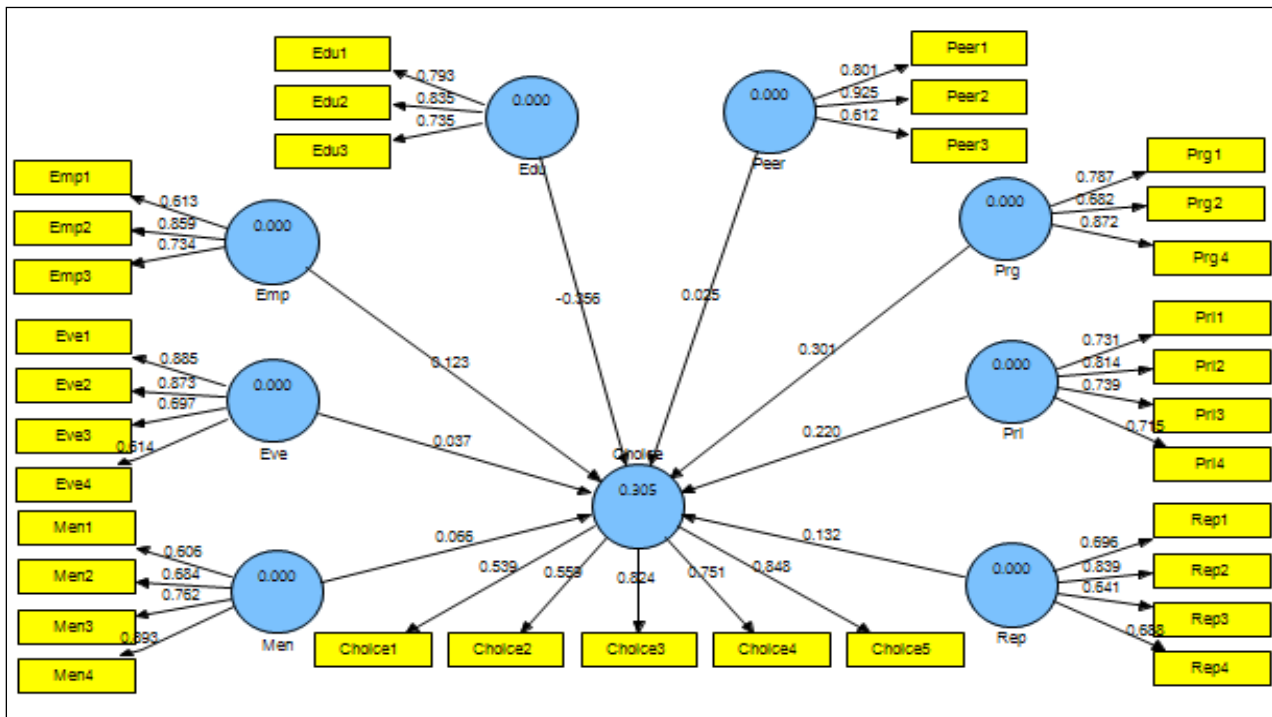**Figure 2.0:** Structural Measurement Model

Figure 1: Structural Measurement Model

The overall results for the proposed model are shown in Figure 1. The model's good fit is supported with an acceptable R2 and a high construct reliability (Gefen et al., 2000). Another key element in the model is the model's capability to forecast as revealed by the R2 value (Chin, 1998; Komiak and Benbasat, 2004). The two (2) key measurements in this study for reliability are composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) assessment, as indicated in Table 1. According to Chin (1998), since composite reliability does not assume that all indicators are equally weighted thus it may be a more appropriate way to evaluate reliability. An acceptable value is that the composite reliability should be greater than 0.7 (Barclay et al., 1995; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The other metric, AVE is used to indicate how much variance a construct confines from its indicators in comparison to the amount due to measurement error (Chin, 1998). For linear coefficients, the recommended minimum critical value for AVE is 0.5 (Hu et al., 2004). Table 1 shows the composite reliability and AVE values that meet these standards.

Table 1: *Constructs Validity & Reliability*

AVE	AVE sqrt	Composite Reliability	R Square	Cronbach's Alpha
0.513	0.716	0.836	0.305	0.761
0.622	0.789	0.831	0.000	0.696
0.551	0.742	0.783	0.000	0.616
0.602	0.776	0.855	0.000	0.796
0.553	0.744	0.829	0.000	0.748
0.624	0.790	0.829	0.000	0.721
0.615	0.784	0.826	0.000	0.681
0.564	0.751	0.837	0.000	0.742
0.518	0.720	0.810	0.000	0.684

Convergent validity refers to the ability of elements on a scale to reach or load at the same time as a single construct. It is calculated by testing each loading for each indicator block. The standardized loadings shall be greater than 0.7 which means that the indicator shares more variance with each latent variable than error variance. A lower bound of 0.50 may be adequate (Chin, 1998). The validity of the discrimination indicates how well the elements of each item are linked to the composition of the hypothesis compared to other elements (Kerlinger, 1973; Swafford et al., 2006). The validity of the discrimination is approximated by the correlation between cross-loading and the linear structure and the square root of AVE (Chin, 1998; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows the cross-loading for each variable is more than 0.7.

Table 2: *Variable Correlation Matrix Against AVR Square Root*

	Choice	Edu	Emp	Eve	Men	Peer	Prg	Pri	Rep
Choice	**0.716**								
Edu	-0.099	**0.789**							
Emp	0.290	0.239	**0.742**						
Eve	0.182	0.299	0.323	**0.776**					
Men	0.202	0.391	0.400	0.194	**0.744**				
Peer	0.129	0.340	0.280	0.157	0.233	**0.790**			
Prg	0.382	0.251	0.299	0.237	0.259	0.315	**0.784**		

Pri	0.294	0.284	0.347	0.325	0.403	0.273	0.229	**0.751**
Rep	0.237	0.332	0.309	0.396	0.355	0.116	0.379	0.141	**0.720**

The cross-loadings in Table 3 reveal that each construct has sufficient discriminant validity levels. Each item factor denoted in bold in Table 3 has a high loading value for the corresponding latent construct and a low loading value for the others. The correlation between the AVE square root value and the potential primary structure leads to similar conclusions. The correlation between the AVE square root value and the potential primary structure leads to similar conclusions. Table 2 above clearly shows that the square root of the AVE (bold numbers on the diagonal) is higher than the correlation between the components (off-diagonal values).

Table 3: *Cross-Loading*

	Choice	**Edu**	**Emp**	**Eve**	**Men**	**Peer**	**Prg**	**Pri**	**Rep**
Choice1	**0.539**	-0.113	0.038	0.077	0.043	0.096	0.134	0.179	0.046
Choice2	**0.559**	0.011	0.039	0.073	0.103	-0.122	0.092	0.136	0.317
Choice3	**0.824**	-0.185	0.229	0.092	0.108	0.207	0.394	0.191	0.150
Choice4	**0.751**	-0.003	0.297	0.256	0.261	0.141	0.195	0.257	0.196
Choice5	**0.848**	-0.025	0.304	0.146	0.188	0.032	0.394	0.276	0.206
Edu1	-0.079	**0.793**	0.129	0.264	0.357	0.242	0.158	0.228	0.230
Edu2	-0.085	**0.835**	0.190	0.212	0.271	0.157	0.133	0.162	0.290
Edu3	-0.071	**0.735**	0.256	0.236	0.302	0.433	0.322	0.297	0.267
Emp1	0.114	0.296	**0.613**	0.186	0.220	0.311	0.374	0.261	0.119
Emp2	0.284	0.166	**0.859**	0.353	0.280	0.139	0.255	0.252	0.257
Emp3	0.199	0.147	**0.734**	0.136	0.399	0.270	0.113	0.293	0.279
Eve1	0.192	0.183	0.291	**0.885**	0.160	0.134	0.185	0.289	0.382
Eve2	0.160	0.314	0.256	**0.873**	0.170	0.187	0.228	0.291	0.358
Eve3	0.094	0.257	0.210	**0.697**	0.135	0.079	0.149	0.226	0.205
Eve4	0.053	0.234	0.283	**0.614**	0.158	0.015	0.194	0.168	0.214
Men1	0.072	0.295	0.282	0.250	**0.606**	0.214	0.193	0.218	0.219
Men2	0.124	0.289	0.238	0.055	**0.684**	0.240	0.246	0.178	0.296
Men3	0.085	0.352	0.246	0.243	**0.762**	0.071	0.196	0.396	0.302
Men4	0.230	0.300	0.386	0.139	**0.893**	0.181	0.183	0.388	0.276

Peer1	0.090	0.258	0.287	0.218	0.136	**0.801**	0.234	0.237	0.123
Peer2	0.140	0.356	0.222	0.103	0.250	**0.925**	0.317	0.254	0.078
Peer3	0.037	0.086	0.158	0.031	0.136	**0.612**	0.141	0.119	0.106
Prg1	0.309	0.238	0.145	0.146	0.181	0.261	**0.787**	0.145	0.168
Prg2	0.270	0.154	0.191	0.135	0.169	0.159	**0.682**	0.125	0.370
Prg4	0.317	0.195	0.360	0.268	0.254	0.309	**0.872**	0.261	0.363
Pri1	0.230	0.228	0.188	0.281	0.346	0.241	0.234	**0.731**	0.211
Pri2	0.232	0.252	0.295	0.230	0.325	0.266	0.221	**0.814**	0.113
Pri3	0.178	0.173	0.351	0.130	0.267	0.117	0.089	**0.739**	0.008
Pri4	0.233	0.192	0.228	0.307	0.264	0.176	0.124	**0.715**	0.070
Rep1	0.184	0.210	0.127	0.223	0.238	0.007	0.161	0.079	**0.696**
Rep2	0.150	0.259	0.221	0.383	0.256	0.147	0.378	0.088	**0.839**
Rep3	0.163	0.178	0.280	0.247	0.334	-0.008	0.196	0.208	**0.641**
Rep4	0.176	0.301	0.261	0.291	0.191	0.191	0.361	0.034	**0.688**

5.1 Discussion

The hypothesis validation shown in the model was performed using R2, regression weights, bootstrapping (t-value), and path variance (Table 4). Among the eight (8) hypotheses relationship tested, only five (5) were found to be significantly supported. The hypothesis validation shown in the model was performed using R2, regression weights, bootstrapping (t-value), and path variance (Table 4). Among the eight (8) hypotheses relationship tested, only five (5) hypotheses were found to be significantly supported. For H1, the programme is expected to influence college selection positively while Table 4 supports this hypothesis with a path coefficient of 0.301 and a t-value of 7.275. In the meantime, H2 confirmed that university reputation is expected to have a significant impact on college choice. The results in Table 4 show that H2 is supported, with a path coefficient of 0.132 and a t-value of 2.218. Employment opportunities are expected to have a significant impact on college choice in H3. With a path coefficient of 0.123 and a t-value of 2.519, the results presented in Table 4 supported H3. Besides, H4 assumed that education had a positive impact on college choice and the results show a path coefficient of 0.356 and a t-value of 4.345 which supports the hypothesis. On the other hand, H6 hypothesized that price has a significant impact on college choice, and this hypothesis is supported with a path coefficient of 0.220 and a t-value of 4.665. In contrast, results of the hypotheses testing, reveals there are three (3) hypotheses,H5, H7, and H8 not

being supported. H5 has a path coefficient of 0.025 with a t-value of 0.537, H7 has a path coefficient of 0.037 with a t-value of 0.795, and H8 has a path coefficient of 0.066 with a t-value of 1.486. From the three moderating hypotheses tested, only H10 is found to be supported. H10 is hypothesized to predict that gender has a significant moderating effect on price and college choice relationship. The Lower Level of Confidence Interval (LLCI) is 0.2880 and the Upper Level of Confidence Interval is 0.3478. The other two moderating hypotheses, H9 and H11 are found not to be significant with the Lower Level of Confidence Intervals (LLCI) calculated at -0.2967 & -0.6032 and Upper Level of Confidence Intervals calculated at 0.2837 & 0.1411 respectively.

Table 4: *Hypotheses Result*

Hypothesizes Relationship	Path Coefficient	T-value	Conclusion
H1: Program➜ Choice	0.301	7.275	Supported
H2: Reputation➜ Choice	0.132	2.218	Supported
H3: Employment Opportunity➜ Choice	0.123	2.519	Supported
H4: Education➜ Choice	0.356	4.345	Supported
H5: Peer➜ Choice	0.025	0.537	Not Supported
H6: Price➜ Choice	0.220	4.665	Supported
H7: Event➜ Choice	0.037	0.795	Not Supported
H8: Mentoring➜ Choice	0.066	1.486	Not Supported
Moderating Relationship	LLCI	ULCI	Conclusion
H9: Program➜Gender➜ Choice	-0.2967	0.2837	Not Supported
H10: Price➜Gender➜ Choice	0.2880	0.3478	Supported
H11: Education➜Gender➜ Choice	-0.6032	0.1411	Not Supported

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Theoretical Implication

This study contributes to the current literature on the key factors that influence high school students' college choice decisions by looking into the relevant dimensions such as programme, university's reputation, employment or internship opportunity, pricing, security, education and campus facilities, events or clubs, location, peers and friends and mentoring whereas each dimension plays a different role that could influence a student's college choice decision. This study provides key stakeholders (management, staff, investors, government, parents and potential students) a model which details information that outlines factors which significantly affects students' college choice decision.

6.1 Managerial Implication

In this study, a majority of the respondents are influenced by the programs offered by the universities. They are attributed to difficult to find programs such as automobile design, gaming design, pre-school education or even music related programmes since the young generation nowadays belief that a combination of interest in study life could help them to achieve better academic results. Hence, this finding suggests that institutions should consider the programme factor in order to attract more potential students.

Besides that, the respondents of this study exhibited a high concern towards the pricing factor since they want to receive the best offer with the lowest cost hence a few of the respondents are highly reliant on scholarships instead of education loans which will allow them to reduce their financial burden even when they would like to further studies in private education institutions. Therefore, this result encourages institutions to maintain their existing scholarship packages that are offered to motivate more potential students.

In addition, the findings show that university reputation is an important factor that potentially influences high school students' college choice decision where the respondents tend to be more confidence with the universities if the institution is committed to offer programme that have been accredited by the education ministry. Respondents believed that the university reputation will be enhanced with the acknowledgement by either national or international education authorities.

Apart from that, the findings also imply that education and campus facilities are another key factor to be considered before students finalize their college choice as the respondents expect the institution to provide better facilities such as high-speed internet connection, as well as leisure facilities such as gym or gaming spaces which not only helps the students to relieve stress but also it could be another effective way to encourage potential students to spend more time on campus.

On the other hand, this study points out that employment or internship opportunities as another potential factor that influences high schools' students' college choice decisions. Majority of the respondents are expecting the higher education institutions to assist them in preparing for future work challenges.
In a similar manner, the results of this study not only allows respondents to explore relevant criteria that should be considered for college choice but also offers the institution with various recommendations on how to be more attractive to students.

Hence, with a better understanding of the importance of each dimension that influences college choice decisions, may encourage the institutions to either improve or revise their

strategies by providing better services to potential students.

7. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations refer to the problems or weakness that could be found in this research whereby the limitations can help to improve future studies within a similar area (Naidu and Derani, 2016). In this study, the sample size is limited to only 90 respondents which is considered very small compared to previous studies. Moreover, the respondents that received this survey were from the same regional high schools hence the findings are not representative of the high school students' population. Future research are encouraged to study other factors such as culture,family background and decision-making processes. Therefore, a follow-up research is encouraged by including a larger sample size for better accuracy and future research could also explore wider areas which have not been touched upon by this study. To conclude, although these findings are limited, the overall results of this research can be considered useful as it provides insights on how high school students examine factors that prospectively influence college choice decision as well as offers the higher education institutions insights in terms of strategies that could impact potential students' college choice decision.

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