

Individual and Institutional Factors Influencing Student's Decision to Choose an Education Institution within Kathmandu Valley

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Abstract

The study examines the individual and institutional factors influencing student's decision to choose an education institution within Kathmandu Valley. Student's preference is selected as the dependent variables. The selected independent variables are college fee, location of college, quality education, college reputation, peer influence and academic programs. The primary source of data is used to assess the opinions of respondents regarding college fee, location of college, quality education, college reputation, peer influence, academic programs and student's preferences. The study is based on primary data of 162 respondents. To achieve the purpose of the study, structured questionnaire is prepared. The correlation and multiple regression models are estimated to test the significance and impact of individual and institutional factors on student's preference to choose an education institution.

The study demonstrated a positive impact of college fee on student's preferences to choose an education institution within Kathmandu Valley. It indicates that when students find college fee affordable and fair, they are more likely to increase their preference and report increase in the number of students. Similarly, the study revealed a positive impact of location of college on student's preferences. It indicates that better and safe location of college boost student's confidence, leading to increased number of students. Likewise, the study showed a positive impact of quality education on student's preferences. It indicates that higher and better the quality education higher will be the student's preferences. Further, the study observed a positive impact of college reputation on student's preferences. It indicates that better college reputation influences student's preferences leading to increase in number of students. In addition, the study found a negative impact of peer influence on student's preferences. It indicates that bad level of peer influence decreases student's preferences to choose a particular educational institution. Moreover, the study identified a positive impact of academic programs on student's preferences. It indicates that better academic programs associated with student's preferences lead to increase in student's admissions. These findings underscore the significant role of college fee, location of college, quality education, college reputation, peer influence and academic programs in shaping student's preferences to choose an education institution within Kathmandu Valley.

Keywords: college fee, location of college, quality education, college reputation, peer influence, academic programs, student's preferences

1. Introduction

Students' decision to choose an education institution refers to the process in which students select or choose a school, college or university out of many alternatives to continue the study of subject of their interest that inclines with various individual and institutional factors. Iloh (2018) defined that the process through which students decide whether and where to join college for their undergraduate course is termed as students' college choice decision. According to Hossler *et al.* (1989), choice of higher education institution is defined as a complex, multistage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advanced vocational training. According to Jackson (1982), a utilitarian decision-making process that students go through in choosing a college, specifying

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a variety of social and individual factors leading to occupational and educational aspirations. The relative influence of factors affecting the college decisions of graduate students at a major research university. Similarly, the study found several important factors that influence college choice decisions such as residency status, quality and other academic environment characteristics, work-related concerns, spouse considerations, financial aid, and the campus social environment (Kallio, 1995).

Wickneswary *et al.* (2024) investigated factors influencing college students' educational enrolment choice in private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Klang valley, Malaysia. The study showed that the college students' choice of PHEI in the Klang Valley region are most significantly influenced by brand image. According to Rust and Singh (2020), receiving a graduate assistantship or scholarship was the most influential factor for Indian students to choose their university. The study also showed that faculty at the institution along with campus resources were emphasized among the positive experiences. Likewise, Rico-Briones and Bueno (2019) examined factors affecting the decision of first year students in choosing their degree program and school. The study showed that families and friends are the biggest influences in student choice of school and degree program. The study also showed that well-known high-quality standards, well-qualified professors and the school's ability to become home of board passers are some of the qualities considered by students in choosing their school and their degree program. Moreover, Budur *et al.* (2018) explored students' perceptions on university selection, decision making process. The study showed that there is a positive relationship between students' perception of campus on university selection and IT services, atmosphere, and social activities.

Abubakar (2017) examined the factors students' choice of programs in the faculty of renewable natural resources of the university for development studies, Nyankpala campus-Ghana. The study showed that the factors affecting students' choice of programmes largely depend on the academic reputation of the institution, program quality and size, price/cost, financial aid, geographic location, contact with faculty, and a students' individual characteristics such as academic ability and achievement. Similarly, Ahmad and Hussain (2017) analyzed an investigation of the factors determining student destination choice for higher education in the United Arab Emirates. The study showed that the learning environment, cost issues and institutional reputation is considered as the important factors influencing the international students' decision-making process of selecting the UAE as their study destination. Likewise, Kazi and Akhlaq (2017) assessed factors affecting students' career choice. The study showed that the work environment is also a factor that attracts students towards a choosing a career. In addition, Krezel and Krezel (2017) explored social influence and student choice of higher education institution (HEI). The study showed that the impact of social influence on consumer behavior is of special importance to gain a greater understanding of social influence factors that influence higher education institution selection and reasons that underpin the acceptance of social influence in that context.

Rudhumbu *et al.* (2017) investigated factors that influence undergraduate students' choice of a university. The study showed that institutional factors such as location of the institution, quality of staff, quality of academic program on offer, image and reputation of the institution, quality of educational facilities, prospects of graduates from the institution getting employed, career fairs, and advertising strategies have a very high influence on the decisions of students to choose a university to study at. Similarly, Mbawuni and Nimako (2015) analyzed

critical factors underlying students' choice of institution for graduate programs. The study showed that cost of the program, student support quality, recommendation from lecturers and staff, failure to gain alternative admissions, personal intention to pursue master's program, attachment to university. Further, Wood and Harrison (2014) examined college choice for black males in the community college: factors influencing institutional selection. The study showed that black males who attend colleges select their institutions based upon having a degree in their chosen field, the coursework/curriculum, availability of financial aid, and academic reputation.

Fosu *et al.* (2014) explored the factors that influence students' choice of higher education in Ghana. The study found that courses offered, high caliber lecturers, well stock library and internet, flexible lecture timetable and recognition of qualification by employers were the top important factors that influence students' choice of university. The study also showed that students were satisfied with the student-staff relationship, university environment, flexible timetable etc. In addition, Zain *et al.* (2013) explored factors influencing students' decisions in choosing private institutions of higher education in Malaysia. The study showed a substantial positive effect of perception and promotion on the students' choice of private institutions for higher education. The study also revealed a significant positive effect of perception on influence and promotion on influence. Likewise, Ming (2010) assessed the institutional factors influencing students' college choice decision in Malaysia. The study showed positive relationship between students' college choice decision and location, academic programs, college reputation, educational facilities and cost.

Bin *et al.* (2008) explored the factors influencing the selection of a higher education institution. The study showed that the availability of the required program was chosen as the top most important attribute by all groups. The study also showed that the respondents expected quality in education and not quantity. The study also showed that the infrastructural facilities of the university or college were placed among the 'least expected items' by all groups. The study showed significantly positive relationship between institution selection and finance, industry expectation and location. Further, Shanka *et al.* (2006) investigated factors influencing international students' choice of an education destination-a correspondence analysis. The aim of this study is to examine the major reasons why international students chose an Australian higher education institution (located in Perth, Western Australia) as a study destination. The study revealed that the proximity of the city to the students' home countries, in addition to safety, the educational quality/variety, etc. were the main reason for choosing this city for their study. Likewise, Kim (2004) explained the effect of financial aid on students' college choice: difference by racial groups. This study concluded that financial aid has different effects on attending a first-choice college across racial groups.

In the context of Nepal, Lamichhane *et al.* (2022) analyzed the factors influencing career choice among business administration students of Pokhara University. The study showed that Nepalese university students who are highly dependent on their parents, siblings, and peers who inspire, motivate and pressurize students to choose for a particular career. The study also showed that career counseling programs offered by the college are essential factors influencing career choices. Moreover, Gurung *et al.* (2022) assessed institutional determinants of college decisions among business students in Nepal. The study found that the university's reputation influenced Nepalese business students. The study also showed that age, accreditation, admissions competition, and brand name, was a key impact on

the final decisions of college candidates. The study also showed that the students heavily consider the quality of a school's classrooms, laboratories, and libraries when making their final decision. The study also revealed that academic programs offered by colleges are more significant in the process of college choice. The study also found that total costs were one of the crucial institutional elements that affected business students' decision-making process in college choice. Likewise, Awale (2021) assessed the factors determining the students' choice of private management college in Kathmandu. The study showed that the most important determinant in college choice is image of the college. The study also found that second most important determinant is physical environment of the college. The study also showed that advertisement, fee, convenience location, friends' choice, fun factors have been found irrelevant to students while choosing college of management for student of Kathmandu.

The above discussion shows that empirical evidences vary greatly across the studies on the impact of individual and institutional factors on student's decision to choose an education institution. Though there are above mentioned empirical evidences in the context of other countries and in Nepal, no such findings using more recent data exist in the context of Nepal. Therefore, in order to support one view or the other, this study has been conducted.

The main purpose of the study is to analyze the impact of individual and institutional factors on student's decision to choose an education institution within Kathmandu Valley. More specifically, it examines the relationship of college fee, location of college, quality education, college reputation, peer influence and academic programs with student's preferences to choose an education institution within Kathmandu Valley.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows: Section two describes the sample, data and methodology. Section three presents the empirical results and final section draws the conclusion.

2. Methodological aspects

The study is based on primary data. The data were gathered from 162 respondents through the questionnaire. The respondents' views were collected on college fee, location of college, quality education, college reputation, peer influence and academic programs inside Kathmandu Valley. This study is based on descriptive as well as causal comparative research designs.

The model

The model used in this study assumes that student's preference depends on individual and institutional factors. The dependent variables selected for the study is student's preference. Similarly, the selected independent variables are college fee, location of college, quality education, college reputation, peer influence and academic programs. Therefore, the models take the following forms:

$$SP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CF + \beta_2 LC + \beta_3 QE + \beta_4 CR + \beta_5 PI + \beta_6 AP + \epsilon$$

Where,

SP= Student's preferences

CF= College Fee

LC= Location of College

QE= Quality Education

CR= College Reputation

PI= Peer Influence

AP= Academic Programs

College fee was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "I choose schools/colleges which offers scholarships", "I choose college which offers education at reasonable cost" and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.895$).

Location of college was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "I choose college which is convenient and easily accessible", "I choose college which is located at safe place" and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.848$).

Quality education were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "I choose college which provides high quality education", "I choose college which organizes extra curriculum activities such as sports programs, educational programs", and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.874$).

College reputation was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "I choose college which is nationally and internationally renowned", "I choose a well-known brand name college in the town" and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.879$).

Peer influence was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "The opinions of my peers significantly impact my decision on which college to choose", "I am more likely to consider college that is preferred by my friends and classmates", and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.875$).

Academic program was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly Agree.

There are 5 items and sample items include “I choose programs which are internationally recognized”, “I choose college/university which provides facility of choosing a major subject”, and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = 0.848$).

Student’s preference was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly Agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “I choose programs which are internationally recognized”, “I choose college/university which provides facility of choosing a major subject”, and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = 0.872$).

The following section describes the independent variables used in this study along with the hypothesis formulation.

College fee

College fee refers to the monetary charges that students are required to pay in order to enroll and attend a college or university. Cost of tuition is a moderately important factor considered by parents in selecting a particular institution for their child (Yusof *et al.*, 2008). Likewise, Wagner and Fard (2009) stated that the cost of education, value of education and content and structure or degrees offered are the three most important factors that influence the choice of the students. Similarly, Fernandez (2010) noted that there are a number of factors related to personal and individual characteristics of students, the role of other people, students’ perceptions about value and costs, as well as institutional characteristics that influence students’ decisions to choose a university for study. Moreover, Yusof *et al.* (2008) stated that financial assistance such as scholarships were some of the influential factors in the way students decide to choose a particular university. According to LeBlance and Nguyen (2001), perceptions of price in the form of the price/quality relationship as most important factors. Similarly, Ford *et al.* (1999) recognized cost/time issues and program issues as the determinants of universities choice. The rise of tuition fees charged by most colleges and universities within and around Beijing where the views of parents and academicians oppose one another (Xiaoping, 2002). Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between college fee and student’s preferences.

Location of college

The location of college refers to its physical or geographical setting. It encompasses the specific area or region where the college or campus is located. According to Simões and Soares (2010), geographical proximity was the most important choice factor for a higher education institution. Similarly, Absher and Crawford (1996) stated that students may be looking for a school close to their hometown or place of work for convenience and accessibility. According to Briggs & Wilson (2007), location, fee structure, quality of faculties that influence students’ decision to choose an education institution. Moreover, Kohn *et al.* (1976) found that an important factor in student predisposition to attend college is the close proximity of a higher education institution to home. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between location of college and student's preferences.

Quality education

Quality education is defined as process of giving students the best possible learning experiences to help them grow and succeed in life. It is about teachers teaching well, students learning effectively and succeed in life. According to Anderson (2014), the competence and expertise of academic staff, the teaching expertise of the faculty, the teaching experience of instructors, and the support of administrative staff were all found to be a major influence on students' choice of their host institutions. Educational facilities such as classrooms, laboratories and libraries are important in a student's selection of a college or university (Absher and Crawford, 1996). Moreover, the transformation of quality educational services and satisfied students can be considered critical for the existence of any higher academic institutions (Munteanu *et al.*, 2010). Likewise, Briggs & Wilson (2007) focused on quality of faculties that influence students' decision to choose an education institution. In addition, physical environment, layout, lighting, classrooms, the size of the class, appearance of buildings and grounds and the overall cleanliness of the university campus also significantly contribute to students' perception of quality of institutional performance (Banwet and Datta, 2003). Moreover, Litten (1980) stated that the former evaluation of an institution is primarily based on the quality of the programs. The study also showed that the respondents expected quality in education and not quantity (Bin *et al.*, 2008). Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₃: There is a positive relationship between quality education and student's preferences.

College reputation

College reputation refers to the perception or opinion that people have about a college based on its characteristics, achievements and the experiences of its students and alumni. Keling (2006) found that the university reputation and social status are the influencing measures of students' decision of university choice to study. Likewise, the study found that students look for past results, infrastructure, fee, affiliation, years of experience on identifying factors that determine the choice of the management college in Kathmandu valley (Upriy and Chhetri, 2014). In addition, the study showed that most international students chose a university based on its reputation and program quality, followed by the recognition of the degree in their home country, tuition and expenses, and the quick response of the university (Wang, 2009). Moreover, Rudhumbu *et al.* (2017) concluded that institutional factor such quality of academic program on offer, image and reputation of the institution, quality of educational facilities, prospects of graduates from the institution getting employed, career fairs, and advertising strategies have a very high influence on the decisions of students to choose a university to study at. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₄: There is a positive relationship between college reputation and student's preferences.

Peer influence

Peer influence refers to the impact that individuals within similar age group or social circle have on each other's attitudes, behaviors and decision-making processes. According

to Broekemier and Seshadri (2000), students may be influenced by legacy, admission status, location of the institution, proximity of the institution, socio-economic status, peer or parent influence, advice from school counselors, or successful athletic programs. According to Shrestha (2013), family influence is also eroding because students are getting very independent due to technology, awareness, access to every information. Similarly, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) noted that recommendations from friends and relatives are considered to be push factors in motivating a destination choice for students from Taiwan, India, China and Indonesia. Likewise, Zain *et al.* (2013) found that the influence of family and friends of Taiwanese students as a major factor to study abroad. The study also revealed a significant positive effect of perception on influence and promotion on influence. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₅: There is a positive relationship between peer influence and student's preferences.

Academic programs

Academic programs refer to a structured course of study offered by educational institutions such as colleges or universities that lead to the attainment of specific qualifications, degrees or certifications. According to Yusof *et al.* (2008), availability of the required programmes were the influential factors in the way students decide to choose a particular university. Similarly, students are seeking for the student-centered learning pedagogy, lifelong skills and international standard education in our college but the current outcomes are just embedded in securing high marks without focusing on delivering lifelong skills to our students (Uprety and Chhetri, 2014). Likewise, Silwal and Baral (2021) stated that academic programs offered by colleges are more significant in the process of college choice. In addition, course structure was the second most important factor that influence Malaysian students' choice of university (Yusof *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, Baharun (2002) identified that students' selection of a university is mainly determined by types of academic programs available, quality of education, administration standards, faculty qualification and accessible location. Nichols *et al.* (2020) revealed that employability and academic programs are the major issues for students before choosing their colleges for higher education. Moreover, Dao and Thorpe (2015) revealed the key factors such as facilities and services, college programs, offline/online information, ways of communication and program additions are important considerations. Holdsworth and Nind (2006) revealed that students evaluate programs based on the following criteria: selection of courses, availability of courses and entry requirements, quality and variety education and quality and flexibility of degree/course combinations. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₆: There is a positive relationship between academic programs and student's preferences.

3. Results and discussion

Correlation analysis

On analysis of data, correlation analysis has been undertaken first and for this purpose, Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients along with means and standard deviations have been computed, and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients matrix

This table presents Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients between dependent variable and independent variables. The correlation coefficients are based on 162 observations. The dependent variable is SP (Student's preferences). The independent variables are CF (College fee), LOC (Location of college), QE (Quality education), CR (College reputation), PI (Peer influence) and AP (Academic programs).

Variables	Mean	S.D.	SP	CF	LC	QE	CR	PI	AP
SP	4.298	0.773	1						
CF	4.37	0.733	0.612**	1					
LC	4.086	0.609	0.210**	0.184**	1				
QE	4.448	0.673	0.474**	0.468**	0.147**	1			
CR	4.086	0.663	0.303**	0.293**	0.301**	0.291**	1		
PI	3.309	0.738	-0.083**	-0.093**	0.067**	-0.057**	0.104**	1	
AP	4.146	0.634	0.269**	0.266**	0.160**	0.332**	0.414**	0.096**	1

Notes: The asterisk signs (**) and (*) indicate that the results are significant at one percent and five percent level respectively.

Table 1 shows Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients between the variables. The correlation matrix indicates that college fee is positively correlated to student's preferences. It means that fair and affordable college fee leads to increase in the number of students. Likewise, location of college is positively correlated to student's preferences. It implies that better and safe location of college leads to increase in the number of students. Similarly, quality education is positively correlated with student's preferences indicating that better quality education leads to increase in student's preferences. Furthermore, college reputation is positively correlated to student's preferences. It reveals that better college reputation leads to increase in student's preferences. Likewise, peer influence is negatively correlated to student's preferences indicating that increase in unfavorable peer influence leads to decrease in the number of students. Further, academic programs are positively correlated to student's preferences. It indicates that better academic programs lead to increase in student's admissions.

Regression analysis

Having analyzed the Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients matrix, the regression analysis has been carried out and the results are presented in Table 2. More specifically, it presents the regression results of college fee, location of college, quality education, college reputation, peer influence and academic programs on student's preferences to choose an education institution within Kathmandu Valley.

Table 2

Estimated regression results of college fee, location of college, quality education, college reputation, peer influence and academic programs on student's preferences to choose an education institution within Kathmandu Valley

The results are based on 162 observations using linear regression model. The model is $SP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CF + \beta_2 LC + \beta_3 QE + \beta_4 CR + \beta_5 PI + \beta_6 AP + e$, where the dependent variable is SP (Student's preferences). The independent

variables are CF (College fee), LC (Location of college), QE (Quality education), CR (College reputation), PI (Peer influence) and AP (Academic programs).

Model	Intercept	Regression coefficients of						Adj. R_bar ²	SEE	F-value
		CF	LC	QE	CR	PI	AP			
1	1.068 (4.049)**	0.739 (12.413)**						0.487	0.554	154.081
2	2.079 (5.548)**		0.543 (5.988)**					0.178	0.701	35.854
3	1.128 (3.517)**			0.713 (9.993)**				0.380	0.609	99.869
4	1.908 (5.773)**				0.585 (7.329)**			0.247	0.671	53.709
5	4.176 (14.874)**					0.37 (0.446)		0.005	0.775	0.199
6	2.103 (5.661)**						0.530 (5.979)**	0.178	0.701	35.748
7	0.477 (1.457)	0.665 (10.480)**	0.224 (2.940)**					0.511	0.541	85.041
8	0.167 (0.516)	0.534 (7.675)**	0.87 (1.074)	0.324 (3.865)**				0.550	0.519	66.643
9	-0.046 (0.121)	0.521 (7.312)**	0.060 (0.715)	0.257 (2.757)**	0.060 (0.686)	-0.001 (0.013)	0.104 (1.196)	0.550	0.519	33.800

Notes:

- Figures in parenthesis are t-values
- The asterisk signs (**) and (*) indicate that the results are significant at one percent and five percent level respectively.
- Student's preference is the dependent variable.

The regression results show that beta coefficients for college fee are positive with student's preferences. It indicates that college fee has a positive impact on student's preferences to choose an education institution. This finding is similar to the findings of Yusof *et al.* (2008). Likewise, the beta coefficients for location of college are positive with student's preferences. It indicates that location of college has a positive impact on student's preferences to choose an education institution. This finding is consistent with the findings of Awale (2017). Moreover, the beta coefficients for quality education are positive with student's preferences. It indicates that quality education has a positive impact on student's preferences to choose an education institution. This finding is similar to the findings of Anderson (2014). Further, the beta coefficients for college reputation are positive with student's preferences. It indicates that college reputation has a positive impact on student's preferences to choose an education institution. This finding is consistent with the findings of Keling (2006). Likewise, the beta coefficients for peer influence are negative with student's preferences. It indicates that peer influence has a negative impact on student's preferences to choose an education institution. This finding is similar to the findings of Zain *et al.* (2013). Moreover, the beta coefficient for academic programs are positive with student's preferences. It indicates that academic programs have a positive impact on student's preferences to choose an education institution. The finding is consistent with the finding of Silwal and Baral (2021).

4. Summary and conclusion

Students' decision to choose an education institution refers to the process in which students select or choose a school, college or university out of many alternatives to continue the study of subject of their interest that inclines with various individual and institutional

factors. Students' decision to choose a college is a way of critical thinking that allows students to decide on where to study in what major. The students' college choice decision is favourable if the education institution have the student's desired major. Studies have found that academic programs offered by colleges are more significant in the process of college choice along with other individual and intuitional factors such as college fee, location of college and so on.

This study attempts to examine the impact of individual and institutional factors on student's preferences to choose an education institution within Kathmandu Valley. The study is based on primary sources of data with 162 respondents.

The study showed that college fee, location of college, quality education, college reputation academic programs have a positive impact on student's preferences. Similarly, peer influence has negative impact on student's preferences to choose an education institution. Further, the study concludes that college reputation is most influential factor followed by college fee, location of college and quality education that explains the change in student's preferences to choose an education institution within Kathmandu Valley.

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