Factors Influencing the Choice of Tertiary Education Institutions in Nigeria

By

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Abstract
Tertiary education institutions are facing increasingly complex challenges like changing demand patterns, intensifying national competition and declining in federal government funding. Such context demands deeper understanding of the factors which prospective students resort to when choosing tertiary education institutions. This research centres on students decision making basis for choosing tertiary education institutions focusing on general expectations on the institutions. The study aims at contributing to a deeper understanding of the choice factors that students resort to when applying to tertiary education institutions. An exploratory study was carried out in four (4) tertiary education institutions based on group of conceptual model of five choice factors which influences students’ decision on choosing tertiary education institutions. A survey was applied to conveniently sample 2,200 prospective students, parents of prospective students and first year tertiary education students. Findings include finance, location, physical infrastructure and industrial expectations were significant factors influencing choice of tertiary education institution. Promotion was not a significant factor. Finally, implications and conclusions were presented.

Key Words: Tertiary education institutions, influencing students, choice factors

Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIS) in Nigeria are facing complex challenges like changes demand patterns, intensifying national competition and decline in government funding. The federal government funding of tertiary education is declining in real terms owing to the interaction of variables, rising enrolment levels, inflation and depreciation of the national currency, naira (Jibril and Obaje, 2008). Such contexts demand a deep understanding of student’s decision making factors in
choosing TEIS of their choice. The challenges increase competition among the institutions to attract quality students. Consequently, TEIS as service providers require restructuring themselves in order to survive, (Kesewuawati, 2010). Competitive pressure should force them to look for more competitive marketing strategies in order to compete for students in their respective admission markets. As the tertiary education sector is growing, it is imperative that they understand the factors that influence students and parents’ selection of institution in order to remain competitive, market-oriented and customer-focused (Yusuf, Ahmed, Tajidin and Ravindra, 2008). Managers of the system will be compelled to utilize the factors to generate revenue, take crucial actions that could raise up their academic rating and prestige in global league of institutions (Jibril and Obaje, 2008).

Tertiary education is defined here as all forms of post secondary education that take place in universities, polytechnics, colleges of education (Munzali, 2007). Tertiary education encompasses all organized learning activities at the tertiary level. It is the non-compulsory form given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and monotechnics, including those institutions offering correspondence courses (Makoju, 2005). The National Policy on Education (2004) defines tertiary education to include universities, polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria Higher Education. Tertiary education generally results in the receipts of national certificates of education, diplomas or academic degrees.

Problems Statement

The federal government allocation to tertiary education is dwindling (Munazali, 2007). In Nigeria, funding for TEIS has consistently fallen short of financial needs thereby, constraining the institution’s ability to expand their facilities and recruit competent local and international faculty who will improve quality in the system (Jubril and Obaje, 2008). They are expected to internally generate funds to cater for their needs. One of the major sources of generating funds is through student’s tuitions and accommodation fees. The higher the enrolment of students attracted in a competitive market, the better the internally generated revenue in the institutions. In order generate adequate funding needs to manage TEIS, they must strengthen their ability to attract prospective students through a market strategy. TEIS must understand that factors that influence students and their parents choice of a particular institution to that competes with other institutions on the admission market. Therefore, to study the factors that influence student choice of TEIS has become pertinent on the part of marketing strategy planning for student’s recruitment of TEIS.
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Purpose of the Study
The main purpose of the study is to identify and examine factors influencing student’s choice of TEIS in Nigeria. The specific objectives were to empirically-

a. Determine the influence of financial factors on student’s choice of TEIS.
b. Determine the influence of location factors in influencing student’s choice of TEIS.
c. Determine the influence of physical infrastructure factors in influencing student’s choice of TEIS.
d. Determine the influence of expectations factors in influencing student’s choice of TEIS.
e. Determine influence of promoting factors in influencing student’s choice of TEIS.

Hypotheses
The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 alpha level of statistical significance.

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the opinions of prospective students and first year tertiary education students on financial factors influencing choice of TEIS.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between the opinions of parents of prospective students and first year tertiary education students on location factors influencing choice of TEIS.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in opinions of parents of prospective students and prospective students in physical infrastructure factors influencing choice of TEIS.

Ho4: There is no significance difference among the opinions of prospective students, parents of prospective students and first year tertiary education students on industry expectations factors influencing choice of TEIS.

Ho5: There is significance difference among the opinions of prospective students, parents of prospective students and first year tertiary education students on promotion factors influencing choice of TEIS.

Review of Related Empirical Studies
General empirical studies reported factors which influence student’s choice of TEIS in many countries. There is still a dearth of related literature on choice factors in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Sid, Hassin and Soon (2003) reported that student’s selection of colleges actually depends on general criteria, including academic quality, facilities, campus surrounding and personal characteristic. The study further validates the contention that income affects the choice of students along the public education. Wagber and Fard (2009) utilized emerging categories of Higher Education Institutions
(HEIS) choice conceptual model of economic, sociological and combined to carry out a study on factors influencing student’s intention to study at HEIS. Pampaloni (2012) surveyed high school students at college operations to identify the factors most influential to their college application decision-making process. The results revealed that size, housing and knowing someone who attended a school influenced students’ view of the school atmosphere.

Kusumawati (2010) used semi-structured and focused group discussions to conduct a study on first year undergraduate students from Indonesian Public University. The result indicated that the total expenses (cost reputation, proximity, job prospect, parents’ academic quality, friends, psychological pre-selected motive), facilities and campus environment affect student’s decisions choice of university.

Mudholkar (2012) conducted a study on student’s choice factor for selecting b-schools with special reference to numbers. He used percentile and ranking method for analyzing data collected from students through questionnaire and interview method. The findings of the study include that male students attach high importance to factors such as the placement, image/reputation, infrastructure, specialization and facility teaching. The study indicated that female students attach high importance to the image/relation, faculty/teaching, fees, structure, location and placements.

A study was conducted by Chia (2012) on factors influencing students’ selection of private education institutions in Singapore. A self administrative questionnaire was used on target a sample of 245 students. Factors analysis shows that seven factors identified was discovered, including academic reputation and recognition, campus enrolment, reference group, influence programmed, relevancy, promotional information, financial cost, accessibility and location.

Miny (2012) used a conceptual approach to conduct a study on model of higher education institutions choice in Malaysia. The criteria with which students select their Higher Education Institutions (HEIS) and build a conceptual model to suit to the local higher education industry explored. Factors which influence students’ choices of HEIS are students characteristics, external influences and college attributes.

Wiese (2008) also used a sample of 1241 students from six higher education institutions to conduct a study on higher education marketing perspective on choice factors considered by south African first year university students. The top ten factors respondents regarded as important in the selection of a higher education institutions are quality of teachers, employment prospect, possible job opportunities, campus safety and security, academic facilities (Libraries, laboratories, workshops) international links (study and job opportunities), language policy, image of higher education institutions, flexible study mode (evening classes and use of computers) academic reputation (prestige) and a wide choice of subjects/courses.
Of particular significance to this paper is a survey study conducted by Yusuf, Ahmad, Tajudin and Ravedran (2008) on factors influencing the selection of HEI. He administered questionnaire to 402 respondents with a five percent scale response. The study identified four very important attributes expected from a particular higher education institution of choice. These attributes were availability of required programme, the academic reputation of the university, the quality of faculty or lecturers and the financial assistance offered by the university. The study utilized a conceptual model influencing students choice decision-making process clustered on financial, location, physical infrastructure, industry expectations, provisions.

Maria and Claudia (2012) sampled 1641 respondents to identify student’s perceptions about choice factors through questionnaire. Findings show that geographical proximity is the most important choice factor for a HEI. Other additional relevant factors were academic reputation and guidance from vocational advisors, guidance from teachers, current students influence and family influence.

Alfred (2012) conducted a study on factors which influence students to select TEIS in Kumasi Polytechnic, Ghana. The findings of the study include that good reputation and availability of quality lecturers and facilities are the primary reasons why applicants choose Kumasi Polytechnic. The study recommended that extension of the existing lecture rooms, laboratories and retention of quality of staff should be the focus of management of the polytechnic to retain the good reputation.

Mabara and FAtoki (2007) distributed 200 questionnaires to respondents who were conveniently selected to investigate the determinants of choice of universities by foreign business students in South Africa. Twenty four items were generated with likert response scale of “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” Findings of the study include that financial factors with a means score of 4.39, a five point shows no significant difference in the mean scores on financial information, quality, attractiveness, diversity, facilities, opportunities and social factors.

Al-faltal (2012) used three phases of research designs namely exploratory, survey and multi case studies to conduct a study on student choice of university and marketing strategies on three universities in Syrian Private Higher Education. Questionnaire was developed on a seven point scale ranging from unsatisfied to satisfied, with 110 sent to each of the three universities. The findings showed that career and security were influential factors for student choice of private universities in Syria.
Methodology
Design
This research adopted a survey design. The survey resulted in a conveniently selected sample of 2,200 respondents made up of 381 prospective students, who completed their secondary schools last two years and came to National Business and Technical Examinations Board for registration to make up their papers, 76 parents of prospective students who are educated, and 1743 first year tertiary education students from four tertiary institutions in Adamawa State. According to Mubara and Fatoli (2009), convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and accessibility to the researcher. The selection of sample and convenience method depends on the researcher’s personal judgment.

Instrumentation
Student Choice of Tertiary Education Institution Measurement Questionnaire (SCTEIMQ) was developed with a five point response scale of “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” to collect data. The questionnaire was divided into six sections. These include respondent’s personal data group of give conceptual models of five factors influencing students’ choice of tertiary institutions namely: financial, location, physical infrastructure, industry expectation and promotion choice factors.

Data Collection
A total of 30 items were developed and pilot tested. Cronbach Alpha gave overall reliability coefficient of 0.96. A common questionnaire was administered to the three groups through enumerators who were NABTEB examination officers. Two questionnaires were given to prospective students and instructed to handover one copy to their educated parents for their response. The two copies were returned to the enumerators by the prospective students. The questionnaires to the first year tertiary education students were personally administered during registration by the enumerators in four tertiary education institution in Adamawa State. Hundred percent (100%) of the questionnaire were returned.

Data Analysis
Z-test was used to test hypothesis 1 – 3, ANOVA were used to test hypotheses 4 -5. Computer data analysis was done using (SPSS) and stat plus.

Result
Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the opinions of prospective students and first year tertiary education students in financial factors influencing students’ choice of TEIS
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Table 1: Z-test Difference between Opinions of Prospective Students and First Year Tertiary Education Students on Financial Factors Influencing Student’s Choice of TEIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>X</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Z-cal</th>
<th>Z-critical</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X₁</td>
<td>76.20</td>
<td>108.613</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>63.128</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>4.315</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X₂</td>
<td>348.60</td>
<td>455.407</td>
<td>1743</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X₁ for prospective students
X₂ for first year education students

Table 1 above shows that z-test calculated (2.00) is lower than critical or table Z-value. Therefore with hypothesis which state there is no significant difference in the opinions of prospective students first year tertiary education students on financial factors influencing students’ choice of TEIS in not rejected. This result shows no significant difference between the opinions of prospective students first year tertiary education students on financial factor influencing student’s choice of TEIS. Finance is a significant factor influencing student’s choice of TEIS.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference between the opinions of parents of prospective students and first year tertiary students on location factors influencing student's choice of TEIS.

Table 2: Z-test Differences in the Opinions of Parents of Prospective Students and First Year Tertiary Education Students on Physical Infrastructure Influencing Student’s Choice of TEIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>X</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Z-cal</th>
<th>Z-critical</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X₁</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>5.028</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1.184</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>6.606</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X₂</td>
<td>348.60</td>
<td>455.407</td>
<td>1743</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X₁ for prospective students
X₂ for first year education students

In table 2, the z-calculated was 1.98 while z-critical was 6.607. Since z-calculated was lower than the z-critical, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The result of the z-test showed that there is no significant difference between the opinions of parents of prospective students and first year tertiary education students on location factors influencing student’s choice of TEIS. Location is a significant factor on student’s choice of TEIS.
Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between the opinions of prospective students and first year tertiary education students on physical infrastructure influencing student’s choice of TEIS.

Table 3: Difference between the Opinions of Parents of Prospective Student’s and First Year Tertiary Education Students on Physical Infrastructure Influencing Student’s Choice of TEIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variations</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>Fcalc</th>
<th>Fcrit</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4,264,361</td>
<td>1,421,453.786</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>9.469</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1,774,751</td>
<td>54,512.737</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>9.469</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6,203,633</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 4, the F calculated was 8.54 while the F critical was 9.469. Since the F
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calculated was less than F critical, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Thus, the difference between the opinions of the three groups was not significant. Industry expectations are significant factor on student’s choice of TEIS.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significance difference among the opinions of prospective students, parents of prospective students and first year tertiary education students on promotion factors influencing student’s choice of TEIS.

Table 5: ANOVA Result Comparing the Opinions of Prospective Students, Parents of Prospective student and First Year Tertiary Education Students Choice of TEIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variations</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>Fcal</th>
<th>Fcrit</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4,312,886</td>
<td>442,988</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>122,067753</td>
<td>54,512.737</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>9.469</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>15,319,065</td>
<td>9.469</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The F-calculate in table 5 showed a value of 40.798 while F-critical was 19.49

Thus, the F-calculated was far above the F-critical which reject the null hypotheses. This indicates that there is significant difference among the opinions of the three groups. Promotion is not a significant factor on student’s choice of TEIS.

Findings of the Study
The following is the summary of findings of the study:

1. There is no significant difference (2.00) between prospective students and first year tertiary education students on financial factors influencing student’s choice of TEIS
2. Parents of prospective students and first year tertiary education students do not differentiate significantly (1.98) on location as a factor influencing student choice of TEIS.
3. The opinions of prospective students and first year tertiary education students do not differ significantly (2.358) on physical infrastructure factors influencing students choice of TEIS.
4. There is no significant difference (8.54) between the opinions of prospective students, parents of prospective students and first year tertiary education students on industrial expectation factors influencing student’s choice of TEIS.
5. The opinions of prospective students, parents of prospective students and first
year tertiary education students differ significantly (40.378) on promotion factors influencing students choice of TEIS.

Discussion of Findings

This study was undertaken to determine the significant factors between and among the opinions of prospective students, parents of prospective students and first year tertiary education students on factors influencing students of TEIS. The study produced several interesting observations and results. Nevertheless, the findings of this study are limited in terms of their generalizability to the entire population of prospective students, parents of prospective students and first year tertiary education students given that the group samples were taken sine from just Adamawa State of Nigeria, the size of the sample and sampling technique used.

Among the five groups of factors to influence the decision on a TEIS in the model of this study finance was found to be a significant factor to choose of TEIS. This finding correspondence to reality given that tuition fees and cost of living have increased considerably over the years. Fees charged by higher education institutions and other expenses are quite high and many people may not be able to afford to pay them. Financing was a significant factor because respondents were worried about the cost of education and its affordability. This means that they may not be willing to pay and bear high cost of education when adequate financing was not available.

The location of institutions was a significant factor between respondents. Not surprisingly, the factor influence students who are first generation in their family or female students. They prefer the emotional security of remaining close to the family and friends while acquiring education in the institution. Attending college also allows students to maintain more easily ties with family as supported by earlier study (Mubara and Patoki, 2012). Location factors influence potential student’s decision to apply and enroll. Some students may be looking for an institution close to their home town or place of work for convenience and accessibility (Servier, 1992). A study by Mina (2011) stated that an influential factor in student predisposition to attend higher education is the close proximity of the institution to home.

Physical infrastructure factors influence student’s choice of tertiary education institutions. These are educational facilities such as classrooms, equipment, computer, laboratories, software and libraries etc. It is not surprising that the infrastructural facilities of tertiary institutions constitute a significant factor among the three groups. The respondents may be have understood that it actually includes important items. The author had thought this attribute would not be a significant factor influencing choice of tertiary institutions but it seems to otherwise.

Industry expectation was a significant fact in this study. The graduate u-employment issue may have influence the minds of prospective students, parents and existing tertiary education students. Nowadays, people are more concerned about the
Promotion by tertiary institutions was not a significant factor that influences student’s choice of tertiary institutions among the three groups. It seems that promotion is not a significant factor because it has less to do with the future careers of students. It is normal for tertiary institutions to promote their products by educating on about the available programmes and other activities. It may not be directly related to their programme of study.

**Implication of the Study**

The results of the study show that the respondents exhibited similar responses for choosing (TEI) – finance, location, infrastructure facilities and industrial expectation factors as key drivers to consider in choosing a TEI. The implication is that TEI may address those factors more effectively so that it can influence the choice process among potential students. It will also help TEI to promote their institutions and to have a greater knowledge about the underlying motivations of students for further study in TEIS. Promotion was not a significant factor in influencing choice of TEIS. This does not mean that it will be discarded, but it should be focused on their marketing strategies on the real consumers of students.

**Conclusion**

Given the nature of TEI market, which may become monopolistically competitive, TEIS will be aggressively competing for students. Some institutions have actually spend a lot of money in offering infrastructural facilities and conducting a lot of promotional activities such as advertisements, participation in education fairs and exhibitions and marketer to realize that the target groups have become very selective and are better informed and decisive in making their choices. Further research is encouraged along the same lines and parameters to enable institutions understand students’ perception and behavior concerning the choice of tertiary education products and institutions.
References


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