

FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS CHOICE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

Kabiru Mohammed Badau, Ph.D

**National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB),
Benin City.**

Abstract

The objectives of this study is to explore the factors influencing student's choices of programmes and examine the importance of the factors on students selection of tertiary education programmes in North East, Nigeria. A total of five hundred and twelve (512) students were selected through simple random sampling. Data was collected through questionnaires and analysed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A series of analysis, including descriptive and factors analysis were conducted on the data. Results show that parents, school counselors, mass media, friends, high school courses and working professionals are the factors influencing choice of programme of study. Parents, school counsellors, mass media and friends are the most important factors influencing students choice of programmes. High school courses and working professionals are least important influential factors for choice of the programmes. The implication of the study was that tertiary education students should consider positively and significant influential factors when choosing a programme for better career opportunities on the labour market. Recommendations on factors influencing students choice of tertiary education programmes were proffered.

Tertiary education programmes are arguably a high involvement product (Kotler, 1976). For many students, it represents a substantial investment in monetary and temporal terms. Hence, tertiary education students and their sponsors will look carefully into the programme options available in the tertiary education institutions.

Globalization, economic, technological and demographic changes, tends to influence labour market developments in Nigeria. Furthermore, today students have a broad range of educational career opportunities in higher education. However, the continuous growing developments in education and employment tend to increase the competition and the complexity of the labour market (Michailidis, Constantion, Kyriakidon, 2012). These students must be very selective and careful in choosing their programmes of study to meet the demand of the labour market. Their decision process is not an easy one. The complexity of the labour market requires student's choice of

programmes for better career opportunities. There are at least numerous important factors which influence their decision. It has therefore become pertinent to explore the factors influencing tertiary education student's decision to choose programmes and to examine its importance on selection of the programmes.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the factors that influence student's choice of tertiary education programmes. Specifically, the study sought to:

- a. explore the factors influencing students choices of tertiary education programmes.
- b. examine the importance of the factors on students selection of tertiary education programmes.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- a. What are the factors influencing students choice of tertiary education programmes?
- b. How important are the factors on student's selection of tertiary education programmes?

Proposed Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on the findings presented by Michalidis, Constantiou & Kyriakidou (2012). The proposed conceptual framework for this study is illustrated in figure 1 below:

Independent Variables

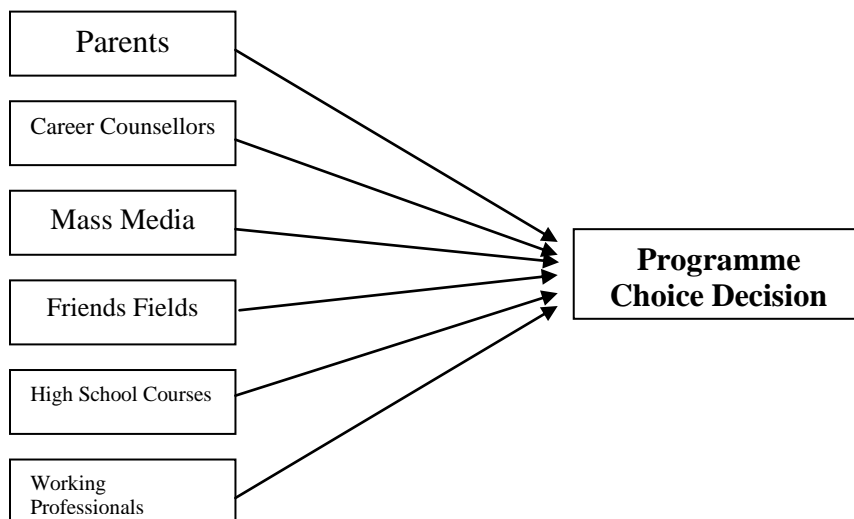


Figure 1: A Conceptual Framework of Students Choice of Programme.

Review of Literature

Studies of programme choice decision have typically focused on the issue of factors influencing student's decision about students choice of programmes in tertiary education institutions is related to institution characteristic and the type of programmes offered by the institution (Sia, 2011). Hooley and Lynth (1984) suggest that the suitability of programmes is the most important consideration in students programme choice. Kramp and Heinlein (1984) find that post-secondary students compared programme offered by various institutions to assess their suitability. Students evaluate programmes according to the following criteria: Selection of courses (Qureshi, 1995); availability of courses and entry requirements (Bourke, 2000 Al-fattah 2010), quality and variety of education (Shauka, Quintal and Taylor, 2005); and quality and flexibility of degree/courses combinations (Holdsworth and Nind, 2005).

A study conducted in Malaysia by Yusuf, Ahmad, Tajudin & Ravindran (2008) found that availability of the required programme as the very important attributes for first year university students to choose a particular higher education institution. Ford, Joseph & Joseph (1999) & Sidin, Hussin & Soon (2003) indicated that programme issues such as range of programmes of study, flexibility of degree programme, major change flexibility and range of degree options are the most important factors for students to choose higher education institutions.

Alfred (2012) opined that tertiary education applicants consider many factors before they finally settle on a particular programme of study. However, their subject combination at the Senior High School level, to a very large extent, determines the variety of programmes that they could pursue at the universities or polytechnics. Some applicants have more programmes to choose from than others as a result of their subject combination.

Some of the factors that tertiary education applicants consider before choosing a particular programme of study include personal interest in the programmes that they could pursue a particular career in life (Karren, 2007; Saunders, Hamilton, & Lancaster, 1978 and Al-fattal, 2010). Others also choose particular programmes because they believe that they are likely to get a job if they pursue such programmes (Jon, 2006; Barr, 1998, Al-fattal 2010). Besides the above factors, some applicants decide to pursue certain programmes as a result of the expectation of their parents (Jon, 2006; Schweitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999 and Al-fattah, 2010). The labour market demand, requirements and needs of the different programmes, where these particular programmes and faculties are more popular and more sought after by prospective students is responsible for student's choice of programme (Al-fattah, 2010). Some programmes show social respect and esteem and lead to a respectable and rewarding career. There is a link between programme hierarchy and future career as some careers

are viewed better (Mubara & Fatoki, 2012). Michailidis, Coustantou & Kyriakidou (2013) conducted a study on the impact of factors such as parents, career counsellors, mass media, and friends, higher school courses, working professions and student's aspirations on high school student's choices for selecting university programmes of study. The finding revealed that my opinion and aspirations, my family, high school courses, friends, working professionals, mass-media and school counselor influence students choice of programmes. Other contributing factors were student's grade point average, parental occupation and career/vocational guidance testing.

Methodology

Research Design

The primary methodology was quantitative descriptive approach. Traditionally, educational research has emphasized the qualitative approach; especially in the field of programme choice research (Leo, Ismeul, Cheu, Lim & Ng, 2007). Quantitative descriptive research describes what is describing, recording, analyzing and interpreting conditions that exist. It involves some type of comparison or contrast and attempts to discover relationship between non-manipulated variables. Some type of statistical analysis is used to describe the results of the study.

Population for the Study

The population for the survey consists of those tertiary education students in North eastern Nigeria who are at Certificate, Intermediate certificate, Advanced Certificate, pre-degree, pre-ND, Matriculation, Pre-NCE and not yet enrolled in undergraduate programmes. In other words, these students will be able to select their programme of study if they complete all academic requirements in tertiary education institutions. Students who will be completing their post-secondary education and who were at the cross-roads in choosing a programme of study to further their studies are used in this study, in an effort to capture their opinions regarding programme choice decisions because they are experiencing the process of choosing programmes.

Sampling

Targeted sample of this study were students who are currently attending or have completed Certificate, Intermediate Certificate, Advance Certificate, pre-ND, pre-NCE, Pre-degree and Matriculation. The targeted sample is defined as these groups of students who have the highest possibility of continuing their programmes at public federal tertiary education institutions in North east Nigeria. Five hundred and twelve (512) were selected through simple random sampling. The numbers are considered effective based on the research question investigated (Uzoagulu, 1995).

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument of the study is a structured self-administered questionnaire tagged ; Factors Influencing Students Choice of Programmes Assessment Questionnaire (FISCPSAQ). It was distributed to the respondents in the form of survey and then collected back after five days for use as the primary data. Basically, the questionnaire contained two sections:

Section A: Respondents demographic information

Section B: Factors that influence student’s choice of programmes

The four-point Likert scale of students in increasing order range from 1 as Strongly disagree (2) as Disagree (3) as Agree and (4) as Strongly Agree was used in the questionnaire. This format can be found in section B of the questionnaire.

Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot study was conducted at one university outside the North east zone to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability by inter-correlating item of the questionnaire (Cronbach, 1951). The mean score of 34 items were first analysed. All the 34 items have a mean score of more than 3. Therefore, all the items were included for each construct.

The study started with one run for each construct. All items are maintained as Cronbach Alpha Value for the six construct are greater than 0.7 as shown in table 1 which is consistent Derellis (2003).

Table 1: Reliability Test

Factors	Cronbach Alpha
Parents	0.898
School Counsellors	0.917
Mass Media	0.912
Friends	0.935
High School Courses	0.838
Working Professionals	0.889

Subsequently, factors analysis is conducted. To begin with the data reduction process of the six construct, principle component analysis with varimax rotation is carried out on 34 items, suppressed at 0.5. To obtain the orthogonal rotation factors, varimax method is the best analytical approach (Hair,Bush and Ortinau,1998). The Kaiser-Meyer-olkin (Kimo) measure of sampling adequacy of this analysis shows the score of 0.916 for independent variables and 0.710 for dependent variables indicating

that the degree of inter correlation and the appropriateness of using factor analysis as meritorious (Hair et al, 1998). As a result, all the variables survived; 6 items for parents, 5 items for school guidance counsellor, 5 items for mass media, 6 items for friends, 7 items for high school courses, 5 items for working professionals and 3 items for importance of factors for programme choice decision.

Data Analysis

SPSS version 16 was used to analyse the collected data. The data was screened and cleaned in order to identify any significant outlier and missing value. Descriptive statistics was employed to calculate the mean of the response to each of the indicators or the variables in the questionnaire as shown in table 3. The frequency is also calculated to understand the breakdown of the respondents. As the research question is to analyse the underlying dimensions of the variables, factor analysis were used.

Respondents Characteristics

The findings reveal that 39.6 percent of the respondents are males and 60.4 are females. Therefore it could be said that female respondents are one third of the total respondents. In terms of ethnicity, it is found that the majority of the respondents are Hausa speaking dialect. The percentage of Hausa respondents is 80.7 percent, 8.4percent were non-hausa speaking dialects within the North east zone, 4.7 percent are languages spoken outside the zone and 6.2 percent are categorized as others.

From the finding of educational level of the respondents, 44.5 percent of the respondents are certificate holders, 17.2 are intermediate certificate holders, 2.5 percent of the respondents are advance certificate holders, 1.2 percent of the respondents are pre-degree holders, 14.3 percent of the respondents are pre-ND holders, 0.6 are matriculation holders and 19.1 percent are pre-NCE holders. The result indicates that most of the respondents are certificate holders.

Regarding the degree programme that respondents intended to enroll, 28.1 percent of the respondents intended to enroll in Faculty of Social Science, 17.4 percent of the respondents intended to enroll in Faculty of Arts, 13.3 percent of the respondents intended to enroll in Faculty of Engineering, 4.7 percent of the respondents intended to enroll in Faculty of Technology, 17.4 percent of the respondents intended to enroll in Faculty of Science, 10.0 percent intended to enroll in Faculty of Administrative Studies and 9.2 percent of respondents intended to enroll in degree programme other than the above mentioned.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Gender Ethnicity, Respondent’s Highest Level of Qualification, and Degree Programme to Enrol

	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	203	39.6
	Female	309	60.4
Ethics	Hausa	413	80.7
	Dialects within the zone	24	4.7
	Dialects outside the zone	43	8.4
	Others	32	6.2
Respondents highest level of qualification	Certificate	228	44.5
	Intermediate certificate	88	17.2
	Advance certificate	13	2.5
	Pre-degree	6	1.2
	Pre-ND	73	14.3
	Matriculation	3	0.6
	Pre-NCE	98	19.1
Degree Programme intended to enroll	Faculty of Social Science	144	28.1
	Faculty of Arts	89	17.4
	Faculty of Engineering	68	13.3
	Faculty of Technology	24	4.7
	Faculty of Science	89	17.4
	Faculty of Admin. Studies	51	10.0
	Others	47	9.2

Table 3: Average Mean Score

Factors	Average Mean Score of the factor
Parents	3.79
Career Counsellors	3.75
Mass Media	3.68
Friends	3.52
High School Courses	3.43
Working Professionals	3.42

Table 3 shows Average Mean Scores of factors that influence student’s choice of programmes in tertiary institutions. The most important factor is “parents” with average score of 3.79. The leading most important factor is parental involvement in the

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student's decision making as far as higher education programme choices are concern. This indicates that the key motivation that influences choice of programmes is facilitating role of parents. Their parents act as their career counselors and they were greatly influenced by their parent's preferences who were the main decision makers.

While acknowledging that parents influence is the most important in student's choice of programmes, students are very mindful of school guidance counsellors. This is evident from the second most influential factor that is school guidance counsellors. This factor has the mean score of 3.75. This provides the evidence that the next major motivation that drives the student's choice of programme is career counselors. Students are assumed to be conscious of school counsellors in their institutions. They should be willing to visit them for guidance on choice of programmes. The third important factor is mass media with mean score of 3.68. It is noted that employer advertisements and websites about graduate job/careers are influential factors. The fourth important key factor is friends which has the average mean scores of 3.52. Thus, student's choice of programmes decision is influenced by friends. They discuss the importance of university education among themselves. Thus, students programme choices is influenced by significant group of friends. The fifth key important factor is high school courses with average mean score of 3.43. It is advanced from higher school courses from universities. The last important factor is the working professionals with average mean score of 3.42.

Conclusion

The study aims to explore the factors influencing student's choice of programmes in Nigerian tertiary education institutions and establish the rank of importance of the influencing factors. Based on the factor analysis result, four factors are significant and positively influence student's choice of programmes in higher learning institutions namely: parents, school counsellors, mass media and friends. It is established that in order of importance, students consider parents, school counsellors, mass media and friends to be most influential factors in making decisions on choice of programmes in higher learning institutions. High school counselors and working professionals are less important influential factors on student's choice of programmes.

Implication of the Study

Students of tertiary education institutions must take the positive and significant influential factors into consideration when choosing a programme. This will give them a priority and better career opportunities in the labour market.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and implication of this study, the following ecommendations are made:

1. Parents should be encouraged to guide and support their children into careers. With parental guidance and support, children are able to make the right career choice.
2. School career counsellors should continue to encourage successful career development by identifying sources of psychological support for students.
3. Mass media should be utilized for advertising various career opportunities so that students can select career of their choice.
4. Students should be encouraged to interact with their friends so that they can be guided towards career path.
5. Career guidance programmes in high school studies should guide learners in making their career choices and aspirations before entering tertiary education.
6. Professionals should provide students with experiences that expand the exploration process and wide range of career information on all the available careers so that they can be able to explore widely before making their choices.

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