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FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' CHOICE OF INSTITUTIONS FOR HIGHER LEARNING: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine factors that influence students in their choice of institutions for higher learning/professional course of studies. The study also focuses on determining whether or not the factors correlate with age of the student and parental income. The sample for this study consisted of 541 students from different institutions of professional studies in Uttarakhand State. A survey questionnaire adapted from a previous study and an interview schedule were used to collect the data for this study. The study found that vital information regarding the course of studies was the most influential factor when students make a choice of higher institution of learning. This is followed by financial affordability considerations and the institution's infrastructure & facilities. Sports activity was found to be the least important factor. The study also found that generally age of the student and parental income were not significant in influencing the students' choice. ***However, father's income was found to be relevant with respect to the location of the institution.***

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INTRODUCTION

India aims to become a leader among industrialized nations by the year 2020. The government has been making serious efforts to achieve this goal. In the effort to achieve a developed nation status, one of the strategies undertaken by the government is the development of human resources (Lee, 2000). Education is one of the main instruments in developing human resources. It is thus not surprising that education and skill developpment training are accorded high priority and it is hoped that through education, a sufficient pool of well-educated, highly-skilled and strongly-motivated labor force can be developed. As a result of the emphasis on education during last two decades, one can witness mushrooming of new institutions of higher learning in India, especially in the private sector (Lee, 2000). Such a development is a positive sign for the country as it facilitates choice of educational institutions for parents and students. Each year, thousands of school leaving students have to make a choice as to what they would like to do for further education and studies. Some join the job market while quite a number choose to further their studies. For these students and their parents, they are faced with a rather critical choice. Which higher institutions of learning should the students enroll in? Should they enroll in a public or a private institution? What are the criteria that help them make their final choice? Thus far, there have been few studies on what criteria students resort to when selecting a higher institution for professional study. As such, it has become difficult for public and private institutions to hazard a guess on what to emphasize in order to attract students to their institutions. Further, because of the lack of information on how and what parents and students look for, before making their final choice, many parents and students are left without any guidelines and often make choices which turn out to be ill-informed.

Review of literature

The concepts of aspirations are rooted in psychology and guided by the theory of achievement motivation (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). Achievement motivation theory postulates that people can learn to establish and acquire goals. Teachers, peers, parents, and other people who have a relationship with a person may affect that person's motivation. Thus, education contributes to the process of aspiration formation. Education helps people become more knowledgeable about the world, more sensitive and understanding of their relationship to it, and more eager to contribute to the civilizing process. It helps people develop the ability to discern opportunities and options that they may confront in their day-to-day activities. The formation of educational and occupational aspirations is integral to

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education, enabling students to better understand who they are and how they can function effectively for their own well being and for the betterment of society (Kozol, 1984).

The study of aspirations is also rooted in sociology and social comparison theory (Collier, 1994). People tend to compare themselves to groups with similar beliefs and abilities.The definition of aspirations has undergone development and refinement. Social comparison theory described the need and the pressure to assess beliefs and abilities which develop uniformity in a group (Festinger, 1954), and achievement motivation theory describes a conscious desire to perform well and reach high standards of excellence (McClelland, 1961). The definition of aspirations developed from these theories is the "student's ability to set goals for the future while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals" (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996, p. 130).

Objectives of the study and Methodology

This study seeks to determine the factors that contribute to the final decision of students in their choice of a higher institution for professional studies. Specifically, this study aims to answer the questions like: How do students choose a professional institute, and do they use different criteria in comparison among the students of other professional categories. Another objective is to know what are the factors that influence students in their choice of higher institutions for Professional studies. An attempt is made to assess the relationship between factors that influence students in their choice of higher institutions of professional studies with demographic characteristics of respondents. For this 541 students from different institutions of professional studies in Uttrakhand state were selected for the sample. 5 of them were from institutions offering business management courses, 3 from Science/arts degree colleges, 2 were engineering colleges, 1 medical and one law college. In order to collect the data for this study, the survey questionnaire method was adopted. An interview schedule was also developed based on the analysis of the responses in the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire and interview schedule were validated to ensure that the instruments were appropriate for their purposes. The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.922indicating that the questionnaire would measure what it was purported to measure.Before the questionnaire was distributed to the sample, it was piloted on twenty five students to obtain feedback on the clarity of the items. A few minor errors were detected. After the errors were corrected, the questionnaire was administered to the sample. The responses to these parameters were gathered, coded, tabulated and analyzed. To test the

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hypothesis various statistical techniques like Mean, standard deviation, factor analysis and χ^2 test and ANOVA was applied.

Table 1 demonstrates the breakdown of the sample by demographic categories

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	Categories	Count	Percentage
Age	Upto 20 years 20 to 25 years More than 25 years	219 311 11	40.5 57.5 2.0
Gender	Male Female	290 251	53.6 46.4
Education Level	Upto Matric Upto Intermediate Upto Graduation PG and others	26 191 287 37	4.8 35.3 53.0 6.8
Family Income	Upto Rs15000PM Rs.15000 to rs.25000PM More than Rs25000PM	284 136 121	52.5 25.1 22.4

The data presented in the above table indicates that sample is dominated by male respondent as it is indicated by 53.6% respondent in the sample. Age analysis of respondents indicates that most of respondents fall in the age group of 20-25 years as it was indicated by 57.5 percent respondents in the sample. The information related to educational qualifications of the respondents indicates that majority of the respondent falls in those categories who are educated up to graduation or having professional degree to their credit. Information pertaining to level of income of respondents reveals that sample is dominated by those respondents with monthly income up to Rs. 15000.

Table 2-Nature of present course of studies:

Sl NO	Nature of course	No of respondents	Percentage
A	Business Management	355	65.6
B	Graduation	70	12.9
C	Engineering	81	15.0
D	Medicine	4	.7
E	Law/other course of study	31	5.7
	Total	541	100.0

Research published to date indicates that many factors can influence the choice of a traditional and non-traditional field of study. Some studies have examined the influence of professional aspirations on academic and career choices or have analyzed men's and women's realisations in this context. With this in mind, an attempt was made to know nature of course the student is doing at present. Study indicated that majority of the students (65.6%)

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have opted Business Management. It was followed by those students who have opted engineering course. Medicinal and law/other course of study was opted by very less students in the sample.

Table 3Major Influencers

Sl. NO	Nature of course	No of respondents	Percentage
A	Media	60	11.1
B	Parents	186	34.4
C	Friends and Relatives	156	28.8
D	Teachers	78	14.4
E	Others	61	11.3
	Total	541	100.0

Research published to date indicates that many factors can influence the choice of a traditional or non-traditional field of study, including social representations, social and cultural origins, motivation, family, peers, previous and current academic experiences, and the individual's gender. With this in mind an attempt was made to know the major influences to the student in choosing particular institute for professional study. The study reveals that parents (34.4%) are the main influencers in selecting particular institute for professional study. Ii was followed by the friends/relatives(28.8%) who influence student in choosing an institute for study. Teacher also play a significant role in selecting particular institute as it was indicated by 14.4% student in the study. Influence of Media and other source were also indicted by 22.4% student in the study.

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is a method of data reduction. It does this by seeking underlying unobservable (latent) variables that are reflected in the observed variables. The purpose of factor analysis is to discover simple patterns in the pattern of relationships among the variables. In particular, it seeks to discover if the observed variables can be explained largely or entirely in terms of a much smaller number of variables called factors. In our case suppose each of 541 students, who are all familiar with different kinds of motivating factor in

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selecting a particular institute for professional studies, rate each of 24 variables on the question. We could usefully ask about the number of dimensions on which the ratings differ.

Table No 4: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.922	.923	24

In order to accurately capture the respondent's perception reliability analysis is carried out. So first reliability analysis was carried out with the help of Reliability Test Here, the reliability is shown to be good using all 24 items because alpha is .922 (Note that a reliability coefficient of .60 or higher is considered "acceptable" in most social science research situations

Table 5 KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.821
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6574.455
	df	276
	Sig.	.000

The above table indicates KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity . This measure varies betweenand 1, and values closer to 1 are better. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. These tests provideminimum standard which should be passed before a factor analysis (or a principal components analysis) should be conducted

Analysis and Discussion

Understanding students' behavior in selection of institute has been of major interest for education planners and entrepreneurs of institutions. Marketing and operations decisions are significantly based on the students ' preferences and likings. These decisions are also

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influenced by exogenous factors such as economic conditions and government policies, and market interaction among the major players like students , educational institute owners and government. The empirical study indicates that students make decision based on their own personal attributes such as age and education, and their professional aspiration as well as well as institute attributes such as fee structure , infrastructure and its past performance. Institutes design their courses and curriculum and set course Fee according to students' response and behavior. These components are viewed together since they are highly interdependent and together represent forces that influence how the students will react to the subject. Keeping these into consideration, an attempt was made to assess the student's satisfaction from the different factors influencing their choice. For this respondents were asked to give their views on a rating scale on the following statements such as *Simplicity of Screening process attracts me, Simplified Application Process attracts me, Hidden costs associated with course completion is an important consideration, Scholarship and fee concessions will definitely attract me, Overall Living expenses for the duration of the course affects my choice, Quality of labs and library is vital for my selection of institute, I look future Job opportunities before selecting an institute of higher learning, Opportunity for International student exchange programs attracts me, Opportunities for co-curricular development activities is an important consideration for me., Variety Fields of Specialisation as per market trend attract me most for choice of institution, Results of previous batches is important for me, Financial Consideration is important for me, Fees structure of entire program is a vital factor for decision, I look at the faculty profile before making institute selection., I see the placement record before seeking admission, Infrastructural ambience attract me very much, I consider the ranking of the institution by a good agency of Repute, I seek Opinion of Friends before selecting the institute, General Profile of students seeking admission helps me in making decision, Interaction with senior students gives vital information, I will consider Inter-active , audio-visual instruction methods for selecting the institute, I look those institutes which give tailor made study programme as per the student need., Distance from Home to institution is an important consideration, Location with connectivity is given due consideration etc.* For this purpose, respondents were asked to rate the various statement on a scale of 1 to 5 in order of their preference. The exploratory factor analysis was used in order to identify the various motivational factors of selecting particular course. Principal Component analysis was employed for extracting factors and orthogonal rotation with Varimax was applied. As latent root criterion was used for extraction of factors, only the factors having latent roots or Eigen values greater than one were considered

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significant; all other factors with latent roots less than one were considered insignificant and disregarded. The extracted factors along with their Eigen values are shown in Table 6. The factors have been given appropriate names on the basis of variables represented in each case. The names of the factors, the statements, the labels and factor loading have been summarized in Table 6. There are six factors each having Eigen value exceeding one for motivational factors. Eigen values for six factors are 8.788, 1.571, 1.443, 1.199, 1.153, and 1.041 respectively. The index for the present solution accounts for 63.310% of the total variations for the motivational factors. It is a pretty good extraction because we are able to zero-in on the number of choice factors (from 25 to 6 underlying factors), we lost 36.690 % of information content for choice of variables. The percentages of variance explained by factors one to six are 36.616%, 6.545%, 6.013%, 4.994%, 4.805%, and 4.337%, , respectively. Large communalities indicate that a large number of variance has been accounted for by the factor solutions. Varimax rotated factor analysis results for motivational factors are shown in table 5 which indicates that after 6 factors are extracted and retained the communality is .700, for variable1, .653 for variable 2, 0.648 for variable 3 and so on. It means that approximately 73 % of the variance of variable1 is being captured by extracted factors together. The proportion of the variance in any one of the original variable which is being captured by the extracted factors is known as communality (Nargundkar, 2002).

Table 6: Principal Component analysis with Rotated Component

Factors	Component						Communality
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Simplicity of Screening process attracts me	.732						.799
Simplified Application Process attracts me	.731						.653
Hidden costs associated with course completion is an important consideration	.718						.646
Scholarship and fee concessions will definitely attract me	.594						.554
Overall Living expenses for the duration of the course affects my choice	.527						.612
Quality of labs and library is vital for my selection of institute		.599					.609
I look future Job opportunities before selecting an institute of higher learning		.589					.636
Opportunity for International student exchange programs attracts me		.588					.609
Opportunities for co-curricular development activities is an important consideration for me.		.583					.551
Variety Fields of Specialisation as per market trend attract me most for choice of institution		.553					.559

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Results of previous batches is important for me			.716				.682
Financial Consideration is important for me			.657				.695
Fees structure of entire program is a vital factor for decision			.650				.780
I look at the faculty profile before making institute selection.			.539				.639
I see the placement record before seeking admission				.698			.606
Infrastructural ambience attract me very much				.681			.700
I consider the ranking of the institution by a good agency of Repute				.629			.580
I seek Opinion of Friends before selecting the institute					.746		.665
General Profile of students seeking admission helps me in making decision					.644		.604
Interaction with senior students gives vital information					.617		.613
I will consider Inter-active , audio-visual instruction methods for selecting the institute					0-404		.535
I look those institutes which give tailor made study programme as per the student need.						.750	.635
Distance from Home to institution is an important consideration						.680	.578
Location with connectivity is given due consideration						.667	.655
Eigen Values	8.788	1.571	1.443	1.199	1.153	1.041	
% of Variation	36.616	6.545	6.013	4.944	4.805	4.337	
Cumulative % of Variation	36.616	43.161	49.174	54.168	58.973	63.310	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a Rotation converged in 8 iterations.

Table 7 Principle components and Associated Factors

Simplicity and cost effectiveness (F 1)	**Opportunity for Extra and Co-curricular Activity (F 2)**	**Quality and affordability (F 3)**	**Placement , infrastructure Facility (F 4)**	**Opinion feedback (F 5)**	**Convenience and location factor (F 6)**
Simplicity of Screening process attracts me	Quality of labs and library is vital for my selection of institute	Results of previous batches is important for me	I see the placement record before seeking admission	I seek Opinion of Friends before selecting the institute	I look those institutes which give tailor made study programme as per the student need.

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Simplified Application Process attracts me	I look future Job opportunities before selecting an institute of higher learning	Financial Consideration is important for me	Infrastructural ambience attract me very much	General Profile of students seeking admission helps me in making decision	Distance from Home to institution is an important consideration
Hidden costs associated with course completion is an important consideration	Opportunity for International student exchange programs attracts me	Fees structure of entire program is a vital factor for decision	I consider the ranking of the institution by a good agency of Repute	Interaction with senior students gives vital information	Location with connectivity is given due consideration
Scholarship and fee concessions will definitely attract me	Opportunities for co-curricular development activities is an important consideration for me.	I look at the faculty profile before making institute selection.		I will consider Inter-active , audio-visual instruction methods for selecting the institute	
Overall Living expenses for the duration of the course affects my choice	Variety Fields of Specialisation as per market trend attract me most for choice of institution				

Principal components & associated Variables(Ref: Table 7) indicates that first factor (F1) influencing the student in choosing an institute is the **Simplicity and cost effectiveness**.This factor is the combination of Simplicity of Screening process attracts me, Simplified Application Process attracts me, Hidden costs associated with course completion is an important consideration, Scholarship and fee concessions will definitely attract me and Overall Living expenses for the duration of the course affects my choiceand accounts 36.616% variance of the total variances.

The second Factor (F2)is the **Opportunity for Extra and Co-curricular Activity** which is the combination of various factor like Quality of labs and library is vital for my selection of institute I look future Job opportunities before selecting an institute of higher learning, Opportunity for International student exchange programs attracts me, Opportunities for co-curricular development activities is an important consideration for me., Variety Fields of specialisation as per market trend attract me most for choice of institution and accounts 6.545% variance of total variance.

Third factor(F3) is the **Quality and affordability** which is the combination of factors like Results of previous batches is important for me Financial Consideration is important for me Fees structure of entire program is a vital factor for decision I look at the faculty profile before making institute selection. And account 6.013 % variance of the total variances.

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Fourth factor(F4) is the **Placement , infrastructure facility of the institute** which is the combination of variable like I see the placement record before seeking admission Infrastructural ambience attract me very much I consider the ranking of the institution by a good agency of Repute and account to 4.944% variance of total variance**.**

Fifth factor(F5) **is the opinion and feedback of the students which is the combination of** I seek Opinion of Friends before selecting the institute General Profile of students seeking admission helps me in making decision Interaction with senior students gives vital information I will consider Inter-active , audio-visual instruction methods for selecting the institute And account to 4.805% of total variance.

Sixth factor(F6) is the **Convenience and location factor** which is the combination of I look those institutes which give tailor made study programme as per the student need. Distance from Home to institution is an important consideration Location with connectivity is given due consideration And 4.337% of total variance.

Table 8

Nature of course doing at present	Simplicity and cost effectiveness (F1)	Opportunity for extracurricular activity(F2)	Quality and affordability (F3)	Placement infrastructure facility (F4)	Opinion feedback (F5)	Convenience and location factor (F6)
Business Management	3.4772	3.5713	3.5972	3.5108	3.1838	3.2075
Graduation	3.4314	3.2886	3.4893	3.3952	3.3536	3.3952
Engineering	3.5778	3.3975	3.6451	3.1893	3.1049	3.5638
Medicine	2.0000	3.6000	3.7500	3.3333	2.7500	2.6667
Law/other course of study	3.2387	3.9032	3.7661	3.3011	3.5161	4.0108
Total	3.4617	3.5279	3.6012	3.4344	3.2098	3.3272

Inference:

As is evident from the mean ratings of various factors across five different professional courses, law and other student have given more weightage to quality and affordability among all the factors for choosing an institute.

Table 9
Nature of course ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Simplicity and cost effectiveness	Between Groups	11.328	4	2.832	3.262	.012
	Within Groups	465.290	536	.868		
	Total	476.618	540			
Opportunity for extracurricular activity	Between Groups	10.442	4	2.610	4.085	.003
	Within Groups	342.547	536	.639		
	Total	352.989	540			
Quality and affordability	Between Groups	1.970	4	.493	.476	.754

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	Within Groups	555.177	536	1.036		
	Total	557.147	540			
Placement infrastructure facility	Between Groups	7.637	4	1.909	2.103	.079
	Within Groups	486.617	536	.908		
	Total	494.254	540			
Opinion feedback	Between Groups	6.332	4	1.583	1.750	.138
	Within Groups	484.981	536	.905		
	Total	491.313	540			
Convenience and location factor	Between Groups	26.173	4	6.543	8.027	.000
	Within Groups	436.917	536	.815		
	Total	463.091	540			

After comparing the mean one way ANOVA was carried out to test the hypothesis that factors considered by students while choosing an institute does not differ significantly across the different courses. y. From the table it is clear that calculated value of F is greater than the tabulated value of F (2.37) at ($p< 0.05$) level of significance in the case of factor 1, factor 2 and factor 6. Hence null hypothesis is rejected indicating that there is significant difference in the mean of different factor across the different courses. In comparison to this calculated value of F is lesser than the tabulated value of F (2.37) at ($p< 0.05$) level of significance in the case of factor 3, factor 4 and factor 5. Hence null hypothesis is accepted indicating that there is no significant difference in the mean of different factor across the respondents of different professional courses.

Table 10
Perceived association of Institute value enhance value in society

Sl. NO	Description	No of respondents	Percentage
A	To a great extent	338	62.5
B	To some extent	110	20.3
C	To a considerable extent	58	10.7
D	To a little extent	33	6.1
E	Not at all	2	.4
	Total	541	100.0

One purpose of professional education is to introduce students to the norms and values of their chosen profession (Stark et. al., 1986).Professional socialization refers to the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, and values of a professional subculture (Siegel et al., 1991). Socialization helps shape the person. The socialization of accounting students is an important issue because failure to transfer professional values to accounting students may hurt both students and the profession (Clikeman and Henning, 2000).

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Table 11
Nature of course doing at present * Perceived association of Institute value enhance value in society - Cross tabulation

Count

		Perceived association of Institite value enhance value in society					Total
		To a great extent	To some extent	To a considerable extent	To a little extent	Not at all	To a great extent
Nature of course doing at present	Business Management	228	73	29	23	2	355
	Graduation	38	11	16	5	0	70
	Engineering	45	22	9	5	0	81
	Medicine	4	0	0	0	0	4
	Law/other course of study	23	4	4	0	0	31
Total		338	110	58	33	2	541
Pearson Chi-Square		23.128(a)	16	.110			

An attempt was made to assess degree of association between students perception regarding association of institute value with their value in society with the nature of course they are doing at present The calculated value of the Chi Square test statistics (χ^2)= 23.128 at 5 percent level of significance is greater than the tabulated value (22.362) with 16 degree of freedom. Hence the hypothesis is rejected indicating that students perception regarding association of institute value with their value in society is associated with the nature of course they are doing at present

Table 12 Perceived Mismatch

Sl. NO	Description	No of respondents	Percentage
A	To a great extent	111	20.5
B	To some extent	231	42.7
C	To a considerable extent	95	17.6
D	To a little extent	84	15.5
E	Not at all	20	3.7
	Total	541	100.0

Higher education has experienced vast changes as a result of global political and economic developments. Cultural and social changes in the last decade have also added to the continuing evolution of higher education. These changes inevitably lead to changing expectations of students entering higher education. An adequate understanding of student expectations is crucial in ensuring a good fit between higher educational institutions and their

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students. Keeping this into consideration , an attempt was made to know the mismatch **between the student expectation and their achievement from the chosen professional institute. Analysis indicates that majority of the student are of the opinion that there is mismatch in their expectation and institute offering as it was 96.3% respondent in the sample with varying extent.**

Nature of course doing at present * Perceived Mismatch Cross tabulation

	Perceived Mismatch					Total
Nature of course doing at present	To a great	To	To a	To a little	Not at all	To a
Business Management	61	127	76	71	20	355
Graduation	29	26	9	6	0	70
Engineering	21	44	10	6	0	81
Medicine	0	4	0	0	0	4
Law/other course of	0	30	0	1	0	31
Total	111	231	95	84	20	541
Pearson Chi-Square	92.130(a)	16	.000			

An attempt was made to assess degree of association between students perceived mismatch with the nature of course they are doing at present The calculated value of the Chi Square test statistics (χ^2)= 92.130 at 5 percent level of significance is greater than the tabulated value (22.362) with 16 degree of freedom. Hence the hypothesis is rejected indicating that students perception regarding mismatch is associated with the nature of course they are doing at present

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the data analysis and interpretation thereof we can make the following conclusions: The sample surveyed was dominated by youngsters in the age group of 20-25 with a family income of about Rs.15000. We can say the responses reveal the aspirations of this category of middle-class people. Considering the traditional fields of study and the emerging aspirations it was found that the majority of aspirants were interested in pursuing a professional course of studies and particularly Business Management. Simplicity of the screening process is one of the main considerations for choosing the course of studies (consider the background!). Along with the above, students are concerned about any hidden costs involved.(They are looking for value for money!).Students expect good library and laboratory facilities. Co-curricular activities and the corresponding opportunities for better personality development and consequent placement opportunities play an important role in their choice of institutions. Parents and peer group have the major influence in the students'

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selection of the institution for pursuing the course of studies. With respect to the first research question, our findings showed that Course Information was the most influential factor when students are choosing a higher institution of learning. The second and third most important factors were Financial Considerations and Institution's Facilities. The least important factor was Sports Activities. With respect to the second research question, the findings of our study showed that generally age and father's income were not related to the factors influencing the choice of a higher institution of learning. However, father's income was found to be relevant to the location of the institution.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings show that Course Information is the most important factor in helping students select a higher institution of learning. The findings imply that higher institutions of learning should pay special attention as to how they describe (packaging!) the courses offered so as to attract the students. They should provide as much information as possible so that potential applicants will be able to differentiate appropriately to make a final selection. Thus, the best decision could be made and the students can avoid any mistakes that may cause them to fail or feel frustrated with the course they have chosen.

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