



Factors Influencing the Choice of College Among Undergraduate Students in Public Universities in Kenya. A Case Study of the University of Eldoret

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Abstract

Objective: To investigate factors influencing College choice among undergraduate students in the University of Eldoret.

Methods: This was a cross-sectional study design. The study site was University of Eldoret with its target population being undergraduate students. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select respondents for study from each hostel and final sample size chosen using convenience sampling.

Both structured and unstructured questionnaires were used as the main tools for data collection. The researchers interviewed respondents by asking them prompt questions on issues observed when making decisions to join a particular college. Data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. To describe factors influencing College decision, factor analysis method was employed.

Results: A sample of 200 participants were successfully interviewed. The population comprised of 54% male and 46% female with overall mean age of 22.7 years. A higher proportion of the study participants were singles 181(89.6%) when compared to their counterparts who were married with a proportion of only 21(10.4%). Majority of the study subjects were Christians by religion 195 (96.5%) with only a smaller proportion being Muslims 6 (3%). The principal finding of this study was that parents were particularly influential persons reported to affect the process of college selection. University of Eldoret students value influence of the parent and friends, education quality, job opportunities, reputation of the institution, socialization and campus location and flexibility in the course requirements as important factors in their choice.

Conclusions: A range of factors such as influence of the parent and friends, job opportunities, well structured programmes, quality of teaching, socialization and flexibility in the course requirements were identified to influence the choice of college.

Key Words: University; Higher Education; Choice; Factors, Marketing

1 Introduction

College selection is one of the many important choices students make in determining future career plans. The governance of the higher education system throughout the world has changed considerably in the recent years. The main driver of this change being the decreased role by governments to fund these institutions. Higher education has been transformed from the dependency of funding by government to the competitive markets [1]. Some universities respond by engaging in structural reforms to become more efficient and effective in decision-making and operations and to be more economical within the limits of available resources[2]. In spite of these efforts, there are still calls for universities to improve the quality of education services and the efficiency of education expenditures [3]. As a result, the motivating factors for students in choosing a university have undergone a series of



changes and the role of marketing in student recruitment has become increasingly important.

The transformation in higher education has also been influenced by intensifying global competition, declining funding and changing demand patterns [4,5,6,7]. As competition increases in the higher education institutions, public and private universities increasingly view students as clients and try to market their institution intensively[8]. Institutions of higher education possess all the characteristics of a service industry, which shows education as “people based”, and this emphasizes the importance of relationships with customers. The transformation of higher education from complete dependency on government funding to the competitive market also indicates that universities have to compete for students in the recruitment markets.

In order to survive and to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, higher education institutions should use a marketing framework [9] and should satisfy the need of their customers by adding value [8]. Parental involvement in the selection process may vary from negligible to significant. Parents generally provide guidance and financial assistance. The results of this study may help parents to understand the process, the factors involved, and the contribution which they make. Many researchers have concluded that the student makes the final decision regarding the choice of institution [10]. However, the student seldom makes the final decision alone since the choice process most likely involves dialogue between and among students, parents, advisors, teachers, friends, relatives, and representatives from institutions [11]. By determining what proportion of the decision is assumed by the student and what proportion is assumed by significant other individuals, major decision makers can be identified. This information may assist in developing more appropriate communication between the decision makers and the information sources.

In the Australia study[12], factors such as field of study preferences, course and institutional reputations, course entry scores, easy access to home and institutional characteristics were significantly found to influence applicants' choice of institution. The identified range of factors influencing course preference included; graduate employment rates from the course among employers, graduate satisfaction from the course, the quality of teaching in the course, approaches to teaching, learning and assessment from the course including opportunities for flexible study. Foskett et al [13] in their study found out that students consider more carefully economic factors in times of distress and financial difficulty. These factors include job opportunities to supplement their incomes, accommodation costs and family home proximity.

Two different perspectives to understanding the complex college selection criteria have emerged. One approach focuses on how aspiring students develop a college choice set, decide where to apply considering admission criteria, and make their enrollment decisions[14]. Geography also imposes constraints on college choices. It's evident that most students attend public, in-state institutions where college options are circumscribed by state of residence [15]. The second approach emphasizes institutional characteristics such as cost, size, distance, the quality of programs, and availability of financial aid. However, factors most commonly associated with a comprehensive college choice model include Student background characteristics[16], aspirations [16,17], educational achievement [16,18], and social environment [16,18].

Water et al [19], in their Lipman Hearne report claimed that parents are deeply involved and influential to their high-achieving children's college choices. The report also found out that dialogue with college friends, alumni, and students admitted to the same programs to be extremely influential. The results obtained in this study will be useful for college administrators to consider the management and presentation of its resources to the wide market and for future student career needs.

1.1 Problem Statement

Searching for a college to study is a big challenge among most students in Kenya and the world at large. In terms of academic interest, the study has the potential to contribute to what is already known about the process of choosing a college or university. Characteristics of decisions made by students to apply and enroll at particular colleges or universities are not well understood [20]. Many of them do not make adequate research on their own choice nor do they receive adequate directions from their friends and parents. Many youth go into unsuitable careers due to ignorance, peer pressure, advice from friends and parents or as a result of the prestige attached to certain jobs without adequate vocational guidance and career counseling.

Tertiary education is arguably a high-involvement product. For many students and their parents, it

represents a substantial investment in monetary and temporal terms. Hence, we might safely deduce that prospective students and their sponsors would look carefully into the options available in terms of tertiary institutions.

There has been a continuous demand for education in Kenya, and the university system has been forced to be more innovative to meet this increasing demand. This therefore leaves the student with a tough choice to make on which institution they would wish to apply for. The current study seeks to identify factors that highly influence students college of choice.

1.2 Objectives

Main Objective

To identify factors influencing decision on the choice of college among undergraduate students in the University of Eldoret.

1.2.1 Specific Objectives

1. To examine socio-demographic factors of the study population.
2. To assess factors influencing decision making regarding choice of college.
3. To determine the effects and degree of influence of these factors.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

1.4 Study Design

A cross-sectional type of study was used.

1.5 Study Area

The case study area was University of Eldoret, Kenya.

1.6 Target Population

The target population was undergraduate students from different schools in the University of Eldoret. We only considered second, third and fourth year students who were in session during the period of January to February 2014 when the interview was conducted.

1.7 Sampling Procedure

Multistage sampling technique was employed to select respondents for study. At first stage, all student hostel residences were listed and simple random sampling technique used to select five hostels. At second stage, three hostels were randomly selected. Since the three hostels chosen were appropriate for our study, convenience sampling was used by choosing approximately 67 students in each hostel.

1.8 Data Collection Instruments

Both structured and unstructured questionnaires were used as tools for data collection. The researchers interviewed respondents by asking them prompt questions on issues observed when making decisions to join a particular college. The data collected were entered into an Access 2000 database.

1.9 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. To summarize categorical variables, frequencies together with their respective percentages were reported. Bar graphs were as well utilized to visualize the data. For continuous variables such as age, normality assumption was assessed using frequency distribution plots and tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Where normality assumption was satisfied, parametric methods such as t-test were used to summarize the data. Conversely, non parametric methods were employed where the data was skewed. To assess factors affecting college decision, factor analysis was used and to obtain factors that could explain variables affecting college choice, factor loadings were rotated using Varimax method. Only five factors were retained which had Eigen values greater than 1. Data analysis was done using STATA version 11 statistical software.

1.10 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is a statistical tool that is useful for investigating variable relationships for complex

concepts such as socio-economic status, dietary patterns, or psychological scales. It allows researchers to investigate concepts that are not easily measured directly by collapsing a large number of variables into a few interpretable underlying factors. The key concept of factor analysis is that multiple observed variables have similar patterns of responses because of their association with an underlying latent variable and the factor, which cannot be easily measured.

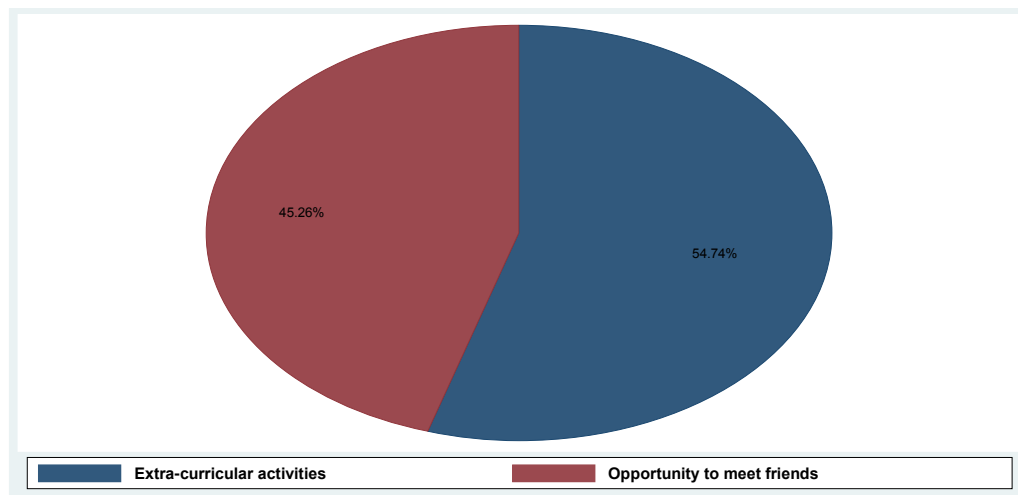
Results and Interpretation

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the study population

Variables	n (%)
Age , mean (sd)	22.7 (3.1)
Gender	
Male	109 (54.0)
Female	93 (46.0)
Marital status	
Single	181 (89.6)
Married	21 (10.4)
Type of sponsorship	
Government Sponsored Programme (GSSP)	128 (63.4)
Privately Sponsored Programme(PSSP)	74 (36.6)
Religion	
Christians	195 (96.5)
Muslims	6 (3.0)
Other	1 (0.5)

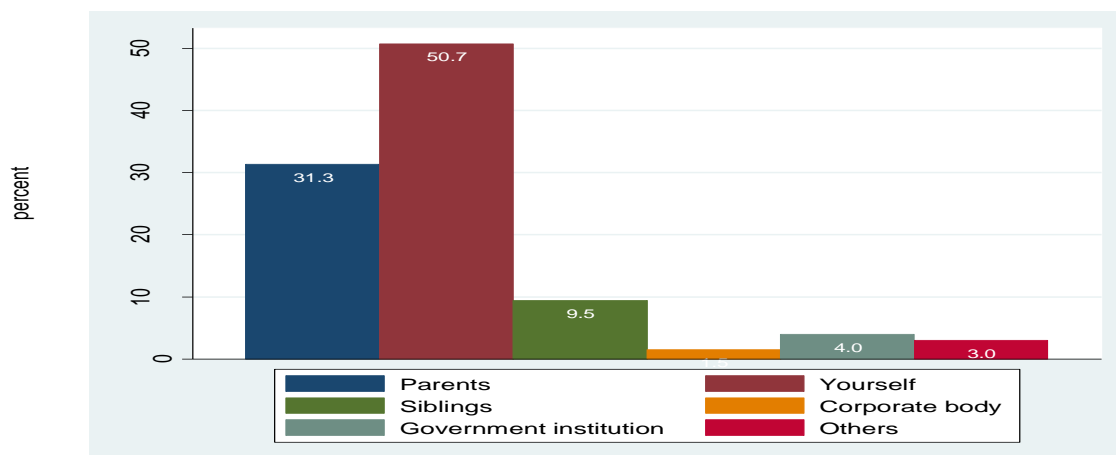
The overall mean age of the study subjects was 22.7 (sd=3.1). There was relatively higher proportion of males compared to females in the study population (54% vs. 46% respectively). Majority of students were under Government Sponsored Programme (GSSP) with quite a significant lower proportion being privately sponsored students (PSSP) (63.4% vs. 36.6% respectively). Christianity was the most predominant religion among the study population 195 (96.5%).

Figure 1: what social factors led to the choice you made?



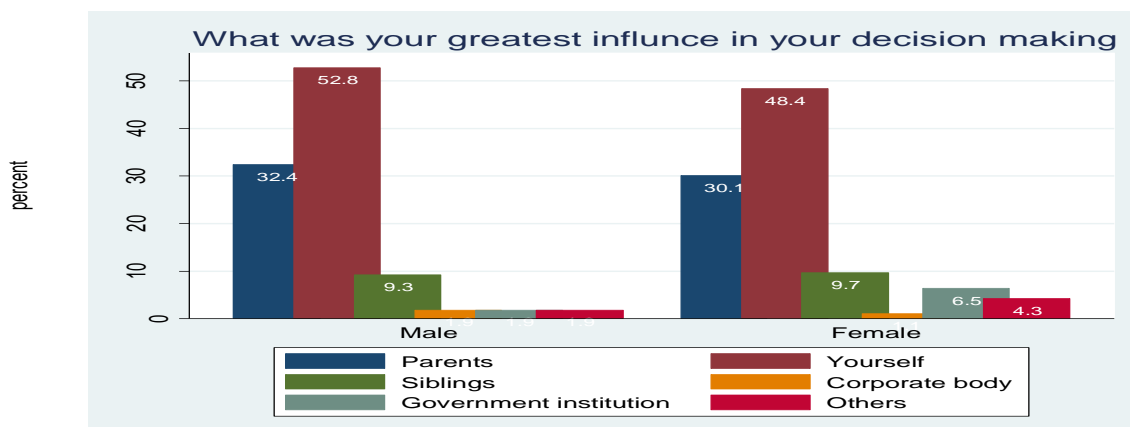
From the pie chart in figure 1, it is clear that most students made their choice based on the extra-curricular activities available in the college of choice while a considerable number are mainly attracted because of the opportunity of meeting friends, (54.7 vs. 45.3% respectively).

Figure 2: Main reason for the greatest source of influence in the choice of college



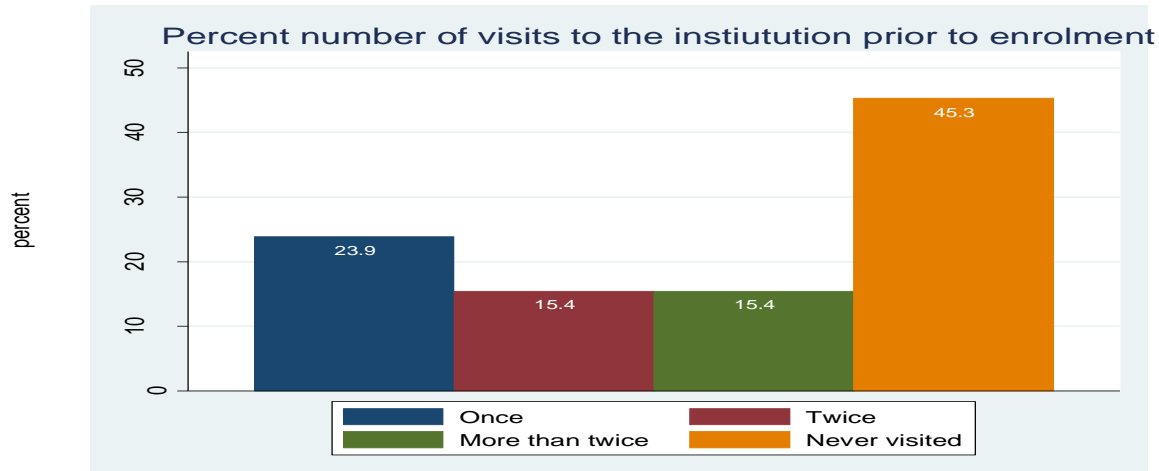
It can be deduced from the bar graph in figure 2 above that the greatest influence on decision making was through self as opposed to parents who also had a slightly significant influence on the decision making process (50.7% vs. 31.3% respectively) .

Figure 3: Percent distribution of greatest source of influence stratified by gender



As shown in figure 3, stratification by gender (male vs. female) showed self to have the greatest source of influence in college decision making (52.8% vs. 48.4% respectively).

Figure 4: Percent distribution on the number of visits to the institution prior to enrolment



Evident from figure 5, most students made their college choice without any prior visit to the institution (45%). It is strange though, that few students who had previously visited the Institution of choice before, had a lower percent of enrollment compared to their counterparts who had never visited the Institution (45.3% vs. 23.9% respectively).

Table2: Degree of source of influence

Source of influence	n (%)
Education affairs	67 (33.2)
Parents and relatives	66 (32.7)
Friends and schoolmates	38 (18.8)
Media	14 (6.9)
Secondary school counsellor	7 (3.4)
College counsellors and representatives	4 (2.0)
College promotional material	3 (1.5)
School teachers	3 (1.5)

Education affairs and parents are key factors of influence and is followed by friends and schoolmates (33.2%, 32.7%, vs. 18.8% respectively) in this study. Existence of media has a considerable source of influence and so was the availability of secondary school counsellors (6.9% vs. 3.4% respectively). College promotional material and school teachers had the least source of influence in this study population with both having an influence of less than 2% in the overall population. All these are displayed in table 2.

Table 3: Summary of Principal component factors

Factor	Eigen Value	Proportion of variance	Cumulative variance
Factor 1	4.9315	0.2740	0.2740
Factor 2	1.7406	0.0967	0.3707
Factor 3	1.4783	0.0821	0.4528
Factor 4	1.1554	0.0642	0.5170
Factor 5	1.1002	0.0611	0.5781

Factor analysis was used to analyze the interrelationships among the variables (college choice criteria). Through this analysis, five major components were extracted from the 18 variables. These components represent 57.8% of the variance. Only factors with Eigen values of more than 1.00 were selected as this could explain much variability in the model. Table 4 presents the five factor components as derived from the Varimax rotation method of factor analysis with each given an 'interpretative' name. Only factor loadings greater than .5 were considered.

Table 4 shows that the first institution choice decision factor has been named as “Academic quality and well established facility factors”. There are 5 variables in this factor component, namely; 'Quality of teaching', 'Institution reputation', 'Facilities', 'Campus size and layout', and 'Campus attractiveness'. In total, they account for 27.4% of the variance. The second factor is named as “Well-structured programs” to reflect variables such as “Time required for completion”, 'Availability of part-time studies', and 'Program structure'. This second factor group explains 9.7% of the total variance. The third group representing 8.2% of the variance is named “Socialization and campus location” as it contains variables such as 'Extra-curricular activities', 'Opportunity to meet friends', and 'Campus location'. The fourth factor which has been named as, “Flexibility in the course requirements” refers to 'Availability of courses', 'Entry requirements', and 'requirement of tuition fees'. It represents 6.4% of the variance and the fifth factor includes variables such as 'job opportunities' and 'marketability of the course' and this explains 6.1% of the total variance.

Figure 6: A display of Scree plot of Eigen values for choice of college decision

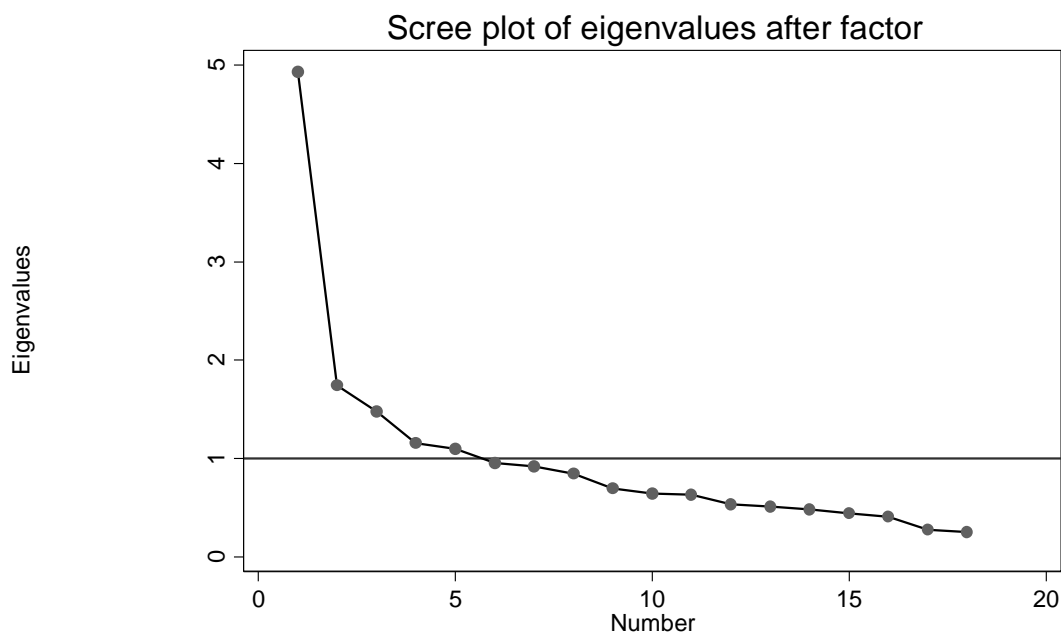


Table 4: Rotated factor Loadings

Variable	Factor1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor4	Factor 5
Job opportunities					0.7610
Availability of courses				0.6538	
Time required for completion		0.5379			
Tuition fees				0.7535	
Entry requirements				0.5356	
Availability of part-time studies		0.7332			
Marketability					0.6758
Quality of teaching	0.5739				
Library collection					
Institutions reputation	0.6591				
Facilities	0.6563				
Program structure		0.5304			
Campus size and layout	0.7399				
Campus attractiveness	0.7567				
Number of students					
Extra-curricular activities			0.5474		
Opportunity to meet friends			0.7777		
Campus location			0.7245		

The following five factors were identified to explain major reasons for a college decision among undergraduate students at the University of Eldoret;

Table 5: Summary of factors identified to explain major reasons for choice of college.

1. Academic quality and well established facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of teaching • Institutions reputation • Facilities • Campus size and layout • Campus attractiveness
2. Well-structured programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration of study • Availability of part-time studies



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program structure
3. Socialization and campus location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra-curricular activities • Opportunity to meet friends • Campus location
4. Flexibility in the course requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of courses • Tuition fees • Entry requirements
5. Importance of the course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job opportunities • Marketability

Conclusion

This study identified several factors influencing choice of college among undergraduate students. The main factors included the effect of parents, self, quality of teaching, institution reputation, availability of extra-curricular activities and campus location, course marketability and flexibility in the course requirements. The study confirmed that most students join campus due to availability of extra-curricular activities rather than meeting friends and other activities. These results are similar to the study conducted by Jackson G. [16] and Hanson and little [18] which showed presence of social environment as playing a major role in the choice of college/institution of higher learning. College students make most decisions by themselves rather than in consultations with parents, siblings or friends. This finding is comparable to the study conducted by Murphy [10] which found out that students themselves make final decisions without involving their parents. Furthermore, most students chose a particular college without ever visiting the institution of choice.

The results also show marketability of the course, course entry requirements, location of the campus, reputation of the campus and availability of job opportunities as some of the important factors in the choice of college. These findings are similar to studies conducted elsewhere [12,13]. However, availability of family support and friends were significantly important factors when choosing an institution of choice and these findings are similar to the study conducted by change and Water et al [11,19] which indicated parents to have the strongest source of influence in their college choice. The main reason might have been as a result of parents being seen as the driving force in terms of availability of finances to fund their children higher education.

An interesting finding of the study also revealed media as another strong source that influence students to make college choices. This indicates media can play an important role in attracting students as they have limited access to college information. Particularly, over the past year, University of Eldoret has become much more recognized in Kenya due to media impact. The result is consistent with findings from a study conducted by Dimitrios [21], in US (Southeast Missouri State University) which showed media and academic programmes as the main choice factors.

Therefore, college administrations should consider the use of media as a means of marketing these programmes which are being offered in their institutions.

1.11 Recommendations

1. Due to low numbers of self-made decisions accounting to only 50%, the institutions should consider making enormous advertisement on the media to increase self-made college joining decisions
2. Further research into the role of high school counselors and university representatives would be beneficial, through outreach teams.



3. Universities in Kenya have standardized programme entrance requirements for regulatory purposes. This factor may have a profound effect on the development of existing institutions and the creation of new institutions in the future.
4. The list of factors investigated was not exhaustive, and therefore there are several other factors that can influence college choice. Further analysis of these other factors that are known to influence college choice is required.
- 5.

Acknowledgements'

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