

Factors That Determine Student's Preferences in Selecting Courses in Higher Learning Institution: A Study among Boarding Dan Daily Students from Secondary School in Mukah



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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influence students' decisions regarding which institution to enroll in for higher education. The research was carried out among students from three public secondary schools. The quantitative technique was used to collect and evaluate the data. The responses of the 220 participating students to the questionnaire are primarily described using descriptive statistics. Statistical Results of the study indicate that the parents play the major role in influencing the choices of courses and higher learning institutions among students. For the selected courses aimed to be taken at higher institutions, boarding students are well prepared compared to daily students who claim to have little knowledge on the courses selected. Daily students preferred higher education institutions with good courses offered while boarding students considered institutions based on location. Boarding students continue their study at a higher level because of their own interest while daily students want better job opportunities in future. The results of the study can be utilized by the educational marketers to produce appropriate marketing strategies to attract students' interest and promote their products.

KEYWORD: Higher learning institution, secondary school students, boarding students, daily students, preferences

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, there are five stages under the education system which are preschool education, primary education, secondary education, post-secondary education and tertiary education. Primary and secondary education is compulsory in Malaysia according to the law. Post-secondary education is the level after they completed their secondary school and it is not compulsory. Malaysia currently has 43 universities, 31 private university colleges, 9 foreign university branch campuses and 414 private colleges and the number keeps on increasing.

Mukah is a coastal town that is located on Borneo Island, Sarawak, by the South China Sea. Mukah has been declared as Mukah Division effective on 1st March 2002 by the Most Honorable Pehin sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud, Chief Minister of Sarawak at that time.

Every year, most of the higher learning institutions all around Sarawak will conduct many marketing activities to market their product and institutions to attract students who have graduated from secondary school. To help with these marketing activities, simple study has been done during *Misi Akademik* in 2023 (on the day of Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia 2022 result was announced) at several secondary schools in Mukah.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research was conducted to identify the factors that influence students' choices in selecting courses and higher learning institutions after secondary school in the Mukah area. The study is based on the following objectives:(i)to identify the factors that influence the selection of courses; (ii)to identify the characteristics or attributes influencing the selection of higher learning institutions; and (iii)to identify the main motivation for continuing the study to a higher level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Government research has found that 72.1 % of graduates in 2022 have no plans to continue their education. They are more likely to work as influencers, e-hailing car drivers or food delivery riders. Lack of exposure and student debt are among the reasons why

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some youth prefer to pursue a career without continuing their education after sitting the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) exam. (Aliah, 2022)

The number of students enrolling in public higher learning institutions in 2019/2020 has decreased. In the 2018/2019 academic session, 182,722 candidates out of 351,288 SPM 2018 candidates secured a place in a public institution. However, in the 2019/2020 academic sessions, 347,982 16 candidates sat for the 2019 SPM, and only 182,536 were offered a place in a public institution (Ministry of Education, 2020). The number of students enrolled in public universities fluctuated between 2015 to 2019. Likewise, the number of participating students in 2019 declined in social sciences, business and law programs. (Khalid, H. et al, 2023)

According to Ayra (2023), students have a variety of further study options, including enrolling in pre-university programs such as A-Levels, Foundation courses or the Malaysian Matriculation Programme.

The students independently decide on their tertiary education. (Syahnberg et al.,2008). Khalid, H. et al,(2023) said that personal interest, academic programs, institution's reputation, social influences, employment opportunities, financial factors and religious factors affect student's decision on their tertiary education after completing their SPM.

Alcantara et al. (2014) revealed that self-actualisation was the primary motivator for students to enroll in tertiary education programs. Students aim to self actualise by accumulating practical knowledge and experience rather than theoretical information. Curriculum design in Malaysia, must meet specific accreditation. The curriculum of the programs and the range of courses offered by the tertiary institutions are also essential factors that potential students consider (Ürer Erdil et al., 2021).

Students consider the programs offered and the reliability and reputation of a brand while choosing a higher institution (Fernandez, 2010; Munisamy et al., 2014). Parents are the essential personal sources of information for making university decisions, and students should consult their parents about their university and program selections (Johnston, 2010).

DATA ANALYSIS

Questionnaires were circulated to SPM 2022 graduating students. A total of 220 questionnaires were returned. The completed data was analyzed using Statistical Software for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows. To describe, summarize and present a set of data, descriptive statistics are used to analyze the data collected.

FINDINGS

Based on table 1, 86 students (39.09%) are boarding students and 134 are daily students (60.91%).

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Boarding student	86	39.09
Daily student	134	60.91
Total	220	100.0

All numerical data is described using mean.

		M	M
		Boarding student	Daily student
People influencing course selection at higher education institution	Parents	3.42	3.42
	Friends	3.20	2.83
	Counselors	3.09	3.12
	Self	3.14	3.03
Factors influencing course selection at higher education institution	Course of choice for parents	3.37	3.47
	Recommended by the teacher / counselor	3.20	3.35
	Following interest	2.90	2.69
	Following friends	2.78	2.54
Knowledge about the selected course	Has made sufficient study	3.12	2.56

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	Little knowledge	3.03	3.34
	Knowing nothing	3.05	3.01
Criteria taken into account in the selection of higher education institution	Courses offered in IPT	3.22	3.45
	Location	3.32	3.25
	Cost/Fees	2.78	3.02
	University Ranking	2.80	3.05
	Promoted by family member/friend	3.10	3.10
Encouragement to continue studying	Interest	3.40	3.28
	All family members continue study	3.08	3.36
	Better job opportunities	3.20	3.47
	Asked by parents	3.17	3.21

N= 220

Table 2 shows the mean values of responses ranging between 2.8 to 3.47. From the study, the selection of courses at higher learning institutions for boarding students and day students respectively is most influenced by parents which is 3.42. friends (3.2 for boarding students and 2.8 for daily students), counselors (3.09 for boarding students and 3.12 for daily students) and own choice (3.14 for boarding students and 3.03 for daily students). This average score shows that parents are the biggest influence in influencing course selection at higher learning institutions.

For the factors that influence the selection of courses at higher learning institutions, the highest average is parents, which are respectively 3.37 for boarding students and 3.47 for day students. The average score of both shows that the course chosen by parents is the biggest influence in influencing the choice of course at higher learning institutions. The second highest factor is the course recommended by the school teacher/counselor which is 3.2 for boarding students and 3.35 for day students. The next factor is according to interests or ambitions where each boarding student's mean score is 2.9 while daily student's is 2.69. As for following friends, the mean score is 2.78 for boarding students and 2.54 for daily students.

For "Knowledge about the selected course", the mean score is 3.12 for having made sufficient study for boarding students and 2.56 for daily students. Daily students score higher on little knowledge with the mean score of 3.34 while boarding students score 3.03. As for the criteria taken into account in the selection of higher learning institutions, the criteria "courses offered in higher learning institutions" has the highest mean score for daily students at 3.45 compared to 3.22 for boarding students. As the criteria of location, boarding students score the highest mean at 3.32 compared to daily students at 3.25. Fees has a mean score of 2.78 (boarding students) and 3.02 (daily students). University ranking has a mean score of 2.80 for boarding students while mean score for daily students is 3.05. Both boarding students and daily students score 3.10 for criteria promoted by family members or friends.

Discussion

The study has taken into consideration results from boarding students and day students. There are differences in terms of considering the factors and this is caused by their daily interaction and associations with people surrounding them. Boarding students are more associated with friends, teachers and counselors while day students are more interacting with parents, family members and friends from outside.

Based on the descriptive statistics conducted for this study, both boarding and daily students agreed that parents are the most influential people in influencing the course selection in higher education institutions. Parents are the ones who provide the financial support to the students. Students normally seek advice from their parents before making a final decision on anything.

For the knowledge about the selected courses, boarding students are more well prepared with the course selected. This is because they might have better discussions with counselors and friends on courses of interest. Spending more time with friends and teachers gives them benefits on getting and sharing more knowledge in this matter. Daily students have little knowledge in courses selected because of lack of time spending time with friends to have discussion. Normally it is limited to discussion with parents or family members at home.

In choosing the higher learning institution, some of the criterias taken into consideration are courses offered at the institution, location of the institution, the fees, the university ranking and institutions that are being promoted by family members or friends. Both boarding and daily students choose the location of the institution and courses offered at the institution are the best criterias. Location is important for some students who might prefer to be close with their family or prefer to go and seek a higher learning institution at their preferred location to gain more knowledge and experiences they are looking for. Courses offered at the institutions

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can become a major reason for the institution's choices. Not all institutions have the courses the students preferred and each institution has their specialties in the courses they offered.

On top of that, boarding students have the encouragement to continue their study by following their interests. They are more independent in making decisions for their own future. Better job opportunities have become the main factors in encouraging daily students to continue their study. They are more exposed to outside information through association, observation and daily news on current job opportunities trends.

There are limitations for this study. It has no variables indicated in the study. The study lacks a conceptual framework. The interpretations of the study are rather limited.

CONCLUSION

This study shows the results from the view-points of students. In conclusion, parents are the most influential factors in affecting or influencing student's choices of higher learning education and courses to be taken. Knowledge about the interest courses can be gained better by more exposure from all parties such as parents, school counselor, friends and from the institutions themselves. Information givers should be more active in helping students to get the information better. Locations and courses offered at the institutions are another main factors in choosing the higher learning institutions. Based on the study, the main reasons that encourage students to continue with their study are because of their own interest in the courses or knowledge and also hoping or seeking for a better job opportunity with better certificates. Above all. This study has limitations and more studies can be conducted to provide more coverage to educational marketers and administrators.

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