MODERN FACTORS DETERMINING PREFERENCE FOR PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN SOUTHWEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract:
The study examined modern factors determining the preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria considering undergraduate students across the Southwest region. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprises the entire malt drink consumers. The study employed sample size of 360 through random sampling. Primary data used for the study were gathered through the administration of well-structured questionnaire. Data gathered were analyzed using regression model. The study found that location positively and significantly affect preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria; Moreso, academic programme was found positive and significant on preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria; Furthermore, reputation was found positive and significant on preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria; finally, finance was found positive and significant on preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria. Thus, it concluded that location, academic programme, reputation and finance positively affects preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria.

Keyword: Determinant Factors, Preference, Institution

Introduction

Recent years have brought about a number of issues for the higher education sector. According to Harden, Davis, and Mengersen (2014), this has led to intense competition among universities for these students at tertiary institutions. In light of this situation, management in these higher education institutions needs to be well-versed in the variables that affect students' decisions about where to attend university.

In light of the aforementioned, Ming and Kee (2010) and Avram (2014) made the case that researching the variables that affect students' decisions about the colleges they attend should be viewed as a crucial part of improving institutional marketing strategy planning for student recruitment. Since their future careers are based on the knowledge they receive from these institutions, students' decisions to enrol at particular universities are also crucial to their lives (Avram, 2014). More importantly, a poor decision could entirely damage the student's life. In contrast, preference is primarily utilized by applicants to institutions to select the option that best satisfies their wants or desires from a variety of options. Among the additional valued options offered, preferences display options. The choice of institution candidates is the result of their behavior during service search, use, and disposal (Rani & Sowmya, 2019). This study therefore, concentrated on contemporary factors influencing undergraduate students' choice of tertiary institution in Southwest, Nigeria.

The ability of an institution to promote itself depends on how well it maintains its quality and standard among colleges of a comparable caliber. However, recent years have seen certain difficulties in Nigerian education. Uncertainty, poor funding, a lackluster labor force, frequent strikes, and geographic restrictions are some of the difficulties. The aforementioned considerations frequently influence students' preferences for public universities in light of the issues that have been raised. Currently, some students, regardless of the distance or location, do prefer to study somewhere else than where they live. Rudhumbu, Tirumalai, and Kumari (2017) only took these characteristics into account in Botswana, where they were shown to be advantageous and important. Therefore, modifications will be done to the aforementioned factors and will also be revalidated in the Nigeria context considering undergraduate students of Public Universities in Southwest, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:
  i.   evaluate the effect of location on the preference of Public Universities in Southwest, Nigeria;
  ii.   examine the effect of academic programme on the preference of Public Universities in Southwest, Nigeria;
  iii.   determined the effect of reputation on the preference of Public Universities in Southwest, Nigeria;
  iv.   investigate the effect of finance on the preference of Public Universities in Southwest, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Modern Factors Determining the Students Choice University Preference

This study emphasized four important variables that should be taken into account when choosing public universities in Southwest, Nigeria. The next paragraph will examine the considerations of location, academic program, reputation, and finances. However, in this study, the terms institution and university are used synonymously.

Location

It becomes important for people where the university is located. Because of the high level of insecurity and inadequate road system, the distance from home to the university location does, nevertheless, become a significant concern. The risk and expense of traveling a very long way might occasionally be prohibitive and demoralizing. Contrarily, the atmosphere of different states or locations influences how popular universities are; as a result, people would rather study in a calm environment than one where there are often crises or a noisy atmosphere. Because of this, choosing a study school in the modern day often involves considering location and commute times.

Academic Programme

Individual preference for such institutions, such as law, medical, engineering, etc., tends to expand due to the availability of modern and competitive programmes. Institutions that do not offer the aforementioned courses are frequently not given precedence. There is no question that a school can only provide courses that have been approved by the National University Commission (NUC), and some universities may not be able to offer certain courses since they are not offered as part of the university's curriculum. The prompt and uninterrupted completion of academic programs remains the primary focus of this section in this regard. As consequence, some people favour particular colleges over others since their programs are completed on schedule and according to the university calendar. This has made academic programs important among the criteria that students at South-West Nigerian universities should take into account.

Reputation

Recent times have made institutional image a key consideration when evaluating reputation. When undergraduate students choose their universities, the reputation of the institution cannot be disregarded. However, educational facilities like cutting-edge ICT, a standard library, a fully-stocked lab, an adequate modern administrative building, comfortable lecture halls that can support academic learning, and qualified staff can help universities maintain the positive reputation they have built over the years. The option of choosing public universities in Nigeria may be influenced by the academic stability and service quality provided to students throughout the years, both of which have a favorable long-term effect.

Finance

One of the key elements influencing a person's preference for public universities is

finances. People typically think about the financial impact of a university's decision and decide whether to move forward or choose a less expensive alternative. The majority of state and federal public universities already charge more than N100,000 in tuition; this is nothing new. Additionally, the price of finding a good hostel, food, and other practicalities cannot be ignored. As a result, while choosing an institution to receive the essential education, a person usually opts for the most affordable option.

In Nigeria, where the standard of life is rising daily, finances are a significant factor in choosing a university.

Preference

Preferences can be seen in a psychological context as a person's attitude toward a group of things, which is often expressed in an explicit decision-making process (Lichtenstein & Slovic, 2006). Contrarily, the word "preference" refers to an evaluation of an object in the sense of liking or hating it (Scherer, 2005). But that does not imply that a preference would necessarily remain the same over time. Decision-making processes, such as choices, have the power to alter preference - even unconsciously (Sharot, Martino, & Dolan, 2009; Coppin, Delplanque, Cayeu, Porcherot & Sander, 2010). According to Schaw, Kelay, Vloerbergh, Chenoweth, Morrison and Lundéhn (2007), customer preference can be characterized as choices among neutral or more valuable options, with acceptance denoting a readiness to tolerate the status quo or certain less preferred possibilities.

Mfon and Uford (2022) opined that consumer preferences are characterized as the subjective (individual) preferences for different product bundles as determined by their utility. These bundles of commodities allow the consumer the option to rank them based on the usefulness they provide. Kontota, Hamalib, and Abdullah (2016) define consumer preference in marketing as the likelihood of selecting one product over another. Additionally, it is a process whereby customers gather pertinent information about the mode of services, analyze that information in light of their preferences, and then give a value to the information before selecting amongst alternatives. Preference is additionally seen in psychology as a person's attitude toward a group of objects that influences their behavior during the decision-making process (Lichtenstein & Slovic, 2006).

According to Sowunmi, Omigie, and Daniel (2014), consumers rate certain services based on their preferences for taste and value. This is crucial for any organization, as they all primarily provide services to clients in order to satisfy their needs (Charles & Uford, 2023). Customers base their decisions regarding the services on their demands, followed by their purchasing power. According to Schaw *et al.* (2007), some people have been forced to accept things they may have disliked as a result of their limited purchasing power. In fact, this is explained by the definition from Javalgi, Radulovich, Pendleton, and Scherer (2005), which said that preference might be a psychological judgment for individuals on whether they feel a certain way about objects (i.e., like them or dislike them). As a result, preference in this

sense refers to picking a public institution in southwest Nigeria among a variety of options.

Conceptual Framework

The relationship between contemporary factors and students' preferences for universities was shown by the model. However, given the setting of the study, four variables - location, academic program, reputation, and finance - were used to view the modern components. Therefore, the study unveils the nexus between these factors and preference for universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria.
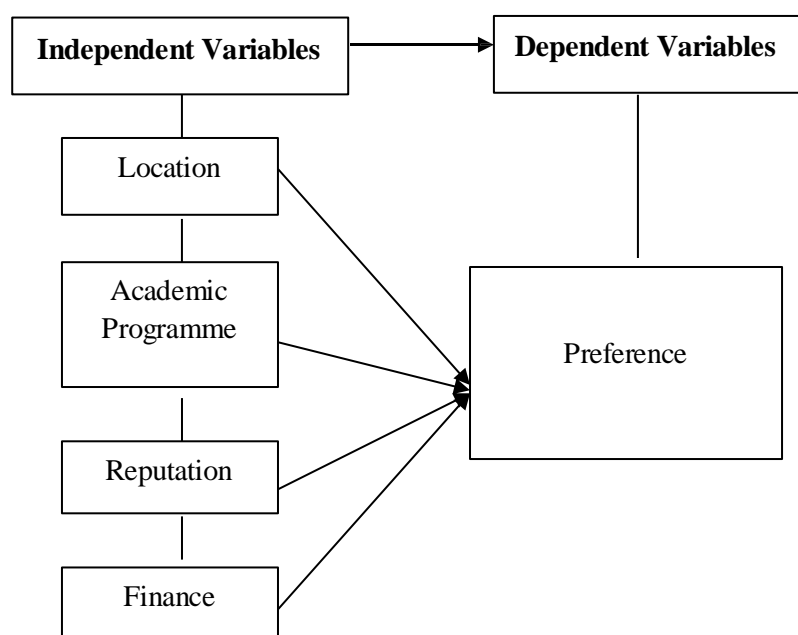
Source: Author's Conceptualisation, (2023)

Methodology

Southwest Nigeria served as the focus of this study. The study used primary data by giving respondents structured questionnaires, which is the survey research design that was chosen for the investigation. In Southwest Nigeria, this study will span six States. Although Southwest, Nigeria has fifteen (15) public universities, this study only looked at two of them in each of the states there. The universities covered are: Ekiti State University, Federal University, Oye Ekiti, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Osun State University, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, University of Ibadan, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago–Iwoye, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Lagos State University and University of Lagos, Akoka. The twelve universities will be covered in Southwest, Nigeria. Each university received thirty (30) surveys, for a total of three hundred and sixty (360) questionnaires, which were then distributed at random to undergraduate students. Descriptive and inferring statistics were used to analyze the data collected. Both inferential statistics and descriptive statistics will be used, with percentage tables serving as the latter.

Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation
Description of Respondents

Questionnaires were administered to 360 respondents while 300 questionnaires were retrieved for analysis representing 83% of the total response rate.

Table 4.1: Respondents Demographic Distribution

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender			
Male	138	46.0	46.0
Female	162	54.0	100.0
Total	**300**	**100.0**	
Level			
100	193	64.3	64.3
200	107	35.7	100.0
Total	**300**	**100.0**	
Religion			
Christian	169	56.3	56.3
Islam	131	43.7	100.0
Total	**300**	**100.0**	
Ethnicity			
Yoruba	177	59.0	59.0
Hausa	84	28.0	87.0
Igbo	39	13.0	100.0
Total	**300**	**100.0**	

Source: Author's Field Survey, (2023).

Table 4.1 shows (138) 46% of the respondents are Male while (162) 54% of the respondents are Female which implies most of the respondents are Female.

From student level distribution, it was shown that (193) 64.3% of the respondents are 100 level students while (107) 35.7% of the respondents are 200 level students thus implied that fresh students are sampled most for the recent study.

Form religion distributions, it was shown that (169) 56.3% of the respondents are practice Christianity while (131) 43.7% of the respondent practice Islam thus implied that majority of the respondent practice Christianity.

Considering ethnic group of the respondents, it was shown that (177) 59% of the respondents are Yorubas, (84) 28% of the respondents are Igbos while (39) 13% of the respondent are Hausas thus implied that most of the respondent in Southwest, Nigeria are Yorubas.

4.2 Interpretation of Results
Table 2: Modern Factors and Customer Preference

Variables	Beta	T-Statics	P-value	Ranking
Constant	2.667	15.401	.000	
Location	.722	11.672	.000	2nd
Academic Programme	.585	8.325	.000	3rd
Reputation	.533	7.175	.000	4th
Finance	.900	20.417	.000	1st
R	**.823**[*]			

R^2	.678*
R^2	.676*
F*	416.842

Source: Author's Field Survey, (2023)

To test this hypothesis, the respondents' scores on location, academic programme, reputation and finance and customer preference were computed and subjected to multiple regression analysis. The results are shown in Tables 2. In Table 2, the result of the analysis was found to be significant with R square = 0.678 showing that location, academic programme, reputation and finance strongly influence customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria. Adjusted R-square showed that location, academic programme, reputation and finance caused 0.676, variance in customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria. In other words, an estimated 68% of customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria is accounted for by location, academic programme, reputation and finance when all other variables are held constant. The statistical significance of the multiple regression ($F = 416.842$, $p = 0.000$) showed that the model was significant as $p < 0.05$. The result means that we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis.

For H_1: Results from the multiple regression analysis of variables shown in table 2, the standardized beta co-efficient of location showed the level of contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable customer preference. From the table, location ($\beta = 0.722$, $t = 11.672$, $p = 0.000$). The positive beta indicated that location positively affect customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria. However, the result showed that location has significant effect on customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria.

For H_2: Results from the multiple regression analysis of variables shown in table 2, the standardized beta co-efficient of academic programme showed the level of contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable customer preference. From the table, location ($\beta = 0.585$, $t = 8.325$, $p = 0.000$). The positive beta indicated that academic programme positively affect customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria. However, the result showed that academic programme has significant effect on customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria.

For H_3: Results from the multiple regression analysis of variables shown in table 2, the standardized beta co-efficient of reputation showed the level of contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable customer preference. From the table, location ($\beta = 0.533$, $t = 7.175$, $p = 0.000$). The positive beta indicated that reputation positively affect customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria. However, the result showed that

reputation has significant effect on customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria.

For H$_4$: Results from the multiple regression analysis of variables shown in table 2, the standardized beta co-efficient of finance showed the level of contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable customer preference. From the table, finance (β = 0.900, t= 20.417, p = 0.000). The positive beta indicated that finance positively affect customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria. However, the result showed that finance has significant effect on customer preference of public universities among undergraduate students in Southwest, Nigeria. The multiple regression of the model is shown below as:

PF = 2.667 + 0.722Lct + 0.585Adp+ 0.533Rpt + 0.900Fin

(Where PF = Performance, Lct = Location; Adp = Academic Programme; Rpt = Reputation; Fin = Finance)

Discussion of Findings

According to the first hypothesis, an undergraduate student in Southwest Nigeria's preference for public universities is positively and significantly influenced by geography. It follows that when making a decision, candidates should take the distance and environment of the school into account. However, students prefer to study in calm, welcoming environment that allows them to complete their work within the allotted time.

Second, undergraduate students in Southwest Nigeria were shown to favor public universities as a result of their academic programs. As a result, this meant that every student making a decision about public universities must first determine whether their selected course is offered there. However, the academic year is equally relevant because every student intends to complete their programs during the specified year.

Additionally, it was discovered that undergraduate students in Southwest Nigeria's preference for public universities is favorably and considerably influenced by reputation. This suggested that while selecting public universities, an institution's reputation cannot be compromised. The majority of students desire to attend a school with a modern lab, library, and other amenities as well as one where they may receive high-quality services. Therefore, student selections are greatly influenced by how an institution is seen.

Finally, among undergraduate students in Southwest Nigeria, it was discovered that financing had a favorable and significant influence on their selection for public colleges. It was discovered that this element influenced student preferences the most. This is so that every decision can be supported by financial resources. In Southwest Nigeria, the primary and first determinants of public institutions are the affordability of the preferred institution.

With the value of the regression coefficient shown in the table 2, it can be shown that these characteristics have a significant impact on people's choice for public universities. This alternative hypothesis was supported; however, the study rejected the other one. The outcome is consistent with the research conducted by Rudhumbu, Tirumalai, and Kumari in 2017 to assess the variables influencing undergraduate students' selection of a university in Botswana. The study discovered that factors such as academic programs provided, institution's reputation and image, advertising, career fairs, staff caliber, and graduates' employment prospects all had a significant impact on students' decisions to attend Botho University.

Conclusion

This study analysed and evaluated modern factors determining the preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria considering undergraduate students across the Southwest region. The determinant factors employed are location, academic programme, reputation and finance on preference. The study found that location positively and significantly affect preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria; Moreso, academic programme was found positive and significant on preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria; Furthermore, reputation was found positive and significant on preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria; finally, finance was found positive and significant on preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria. Finance was found to affect preference for public university most. This is because the choice of any university has to be solely backed up by finance. Therefore, location, academic programme, reputation and finance were positively related to preference for public universities in Southwest, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Since the entire factors were found positive and significant on preference for public universities, the study recommends that management of universities in southwest, Nigeria should ensure that finances that has to do with universities on the part of the students such as school fees and levy should be relatively affordable. Moreso, academic programme should strictly follow that time frame given in the school calendar to avoid unnecessary delay. The programme floated must also be accredited. The world is changing over time, it is very important that institutions are equipped with modern facilities like laboratory, libraries, technologies, physical structures, competent workforce and others to build a good image or reputation in the mind of prospective applicants in Southwest, Nigeria.

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