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Exploring the Factors Affecting Students' Choice of Higher Education Institutes in India: *A Factor Analysis Approach*

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Abstract
The study seeks to identify and explore those factors the students consider while selecting a higher education institute or a university. The study is based on quantitative data as well as qualitative data. Individual interviews were conducted with subject experts and students. The data for analysis was collected from 212 students of the Indore region by using a structured questionnaire and judgemental sampling technique. With the help of exploratory study discovered eight factors were analysed namely– past placement record and programme design, college working hours and well-resourced library, co-curricular activities and alumni feedback, faculty expertise, benefits and expenditure, state-of-the-art, supportive staff, and additional facilities; that are considered while choosing a higher education institute. These eight factors were further examined through a confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the proposed model. An eight-factor model consisting of the factors affecting the students' choice of higher education institutes.

1. Introduction and Study Objectives

Development of any society is closely related to the education which is imparted in that society. In today's world economic growth is driven by knowledge and due to this knowledge creation has acquired a lot of significance. Knowledge creation and its development are highly dependent on the quality and quantity of the education system available, especially of higher education, in a country. Therefore, higher education providers have a lot of importance as both the inventor and supplier of knowledge. Easy access to higher education is very

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significant for the creation and spread of knowledge and further application of knowledge for the development of the economy.

Nowadays, there is much better access to higher education as compared to the past. There are many institutions offering quality higher education. Competition has grown stronger as many higher education institutions are joining. To survive in this environment, they must have competitive advantage. To provide greater value to the students' higher education institutions need to foresee and react to their needs and wants. Higher education institutions need to consider the factors which any student keeps into mind while selecting them. This is one of the key issues for the successful development of any higher education institute to determine which factors are considered by the students while selecting them. So, the aim of this study is to try to fill the gap by examining characteristics of higher education institutes that affect students' choice.

2. Literature Review

There is a wide literature available on the factors which are considered by the students while selecting a higher education institute or a university. Such types of studies are conducted both in India and abroad. Here an attempt has been made to present a review of the appropriate studies conducted.

There are several determinants for choosing any university in Turkey by school students; tuition fees, language of instruction, location where university is located, academic performance. However, Cokgezen, (2013) argued that tuition fee is an important determinant for government universities and private university students give more preference to its academic performance. While a student selects for an institute, he/she is most influenced by its placement related activities. Several other important factors considered for selecting an institute are good infrastructure, experience faculties, positive word of mouth and suggestion from friends and family (Patel, & Patel, 2012). However, host country and social influence do not have any significant impact on the choice of the students while selecting foreign university (Braimah, 2014). Female Students give more significance to exchange programme opportunities than male students (Aydin, & Bayir, 2016).

Studies have also been conducted on exploring the factors determining the overall satisfaction of the students in their first year of college. Encouraging the students for participation in academic and social activities and helping them in improving their presentation skills were the factors which lead to the satisfaction of students towards their college (Al-Sheeb, Hamouda, & Abdella, 2018). Students consider lot of factors while selecting an institute such as placement activities, computer lab, suggestion from friends and family members, course offered, specialization offered, brand name of the institute, positive word of mouth and its location (Subramaniya, Bharathy, & Rajapushpam, 2018). Selecting a college is not an easy task. Students investigate several factors which influence them in choosing an institute for higher studies (Prabakaran, Benat, Vadhani, & Nithya, 2018).

A researcher has also explored institutional factors which influence students while making decisions in choosing a higher education institute. Location of the institute, its reputation, educational facilities, cost, employment opportunities, advertising, campus visit and college representatives who visit schools for admissions were the independent variables which influenced the students' college choice decision making (Kee-Ming, 2010).

Satisfaction of undergraduate students is associated with their ability to access sufficient resources which helps them in attaining social and academic objectives (Sokoli, Koren, & Gutierrez, 2018)

The final choice made by the prospective international student depends upon; personal reasons, the effect of country image, city image, institution image and the evaluation of programme of the study (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006)

Study Objectives: The study has mainly sought to identify the determinants which influence the students choice while selecting a higher education institute or a university.

The institutes and universities providing higher education should consider the eight determinants explored in an eight-factor model of students' choice which will help them in improving the service quality and enhancing student satisfaction. In today's competitive scenario where the institute's imparting higher education is mushrooming it becomes very essential to look upon that the service quality should not be deteriorated, else it will lead to migration of students from that particular region due to lack of facilities and infrastructure. These eight factors will be beneficial for the students in their decision-making process while considering the selection of a higher education institute or university

3. Research Methods

The present investigation is based on exploratory research. The study is based on primary data that is collected using a questionnaire. The items were generated in two stage processes; where in the first stage a list of items or statements was prepared from previous research works, to identify those factors which are considered by a student while selecting any college/university. In the second stage the questionnaire was analysed by six academicians to obtain their views that a particular item represents the factors considered by students or not. We also had a discussion with counsellors, students, and their parents. Their views were collected before preparing a list of items which were used in the questionnaire.

Based on responses given by the respondents, items were selected for more study. Both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis is applied on the data collected. The criteria for selecting any statement or item were that it should have an optimistic view on five-point Likert scale, i.e., 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neutral', 'agree' or 'strongly agree' by at least 60 percent which means that 60 percent or more respondents have a view that it is agree or strongly agree representative of the students' choice. After completion of these two stages following items were identified: -

Table 1.
Source and Description of the Initial Items Collected

S.No.	Item Description	Source of Item
1	Good placement record	Nautiyal and Tanushree (2015)
2	Highest package offered	Nautiyal and Tanushree (2015)
3	Quality of companies visited in campus	Item generated for this study
4	Number of students placed	Nautiyal and Tanushree (2015)
5	Programme recognition	Item generated for this study
6	Well-equipped laboratories	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
7	Bus facility	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
8	Well-equipped class	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
9	Convenient working hours of library	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
10	Availability of journals and newspapers in library	Nautiyal and Tanushree (2015)
11	Adequate working hours by staff	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
12	Auditorium	Item generated for this study
13	Siblings / friends attended the institution	Item generated for this study
14	Sports facility	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
15	Annual fest	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
16	Academic qualification of faculties	Vnouckova et al. (2017) Tsinidou et al. (2010)
17	Communication skills	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
18	Teaching methodology of faculties	Vnouckova et al. (2017) Tsinidou et al. (2010)
19	Financial help by the institution	Item generated for this study
20	Overall cost of academic programme	Item generated for this study
21	Safety and security within campus	Item generated for this study
22	Industrial exposure	Item generated for this study
23	Timely communication by staff	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
24	Efficient and effective service of staff	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
25	Proper guidance by staff	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
26	Canteen facility	Nautiyal and Tanushree (2015) Tsinidou et al. (2010)
27	Medical facility	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
28	professional experience of faculties	Owalia&aspinwall(1996)
29	Approachability of faculties	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
30	Friendliness of staff	Owalia&aspinwall(1996)
31	Hostel facility	Owalia&aspinwall(1996)
32	Availability of textbook	Nautiyal and Tanushree (2015
33	E -Library	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
34	Types of specialization offered	Item generated for this study
35	Quality of course content	Tsinidou et al. (2010)
36	Area in which institute is located	Tsinidou et al. (2010)

Note. 27 items are selected from literature review and 9 items are generated for this study

Respondents of the Study

Data was collected from 212 students of Indore region, Madhya Pradesh (India). They were scouting for an engineering or a management institute.109 students were looking for an engineering institute whereas 103 students were searching for a management institute. The Study has been confined to Indore district only because it is recognized as one of the educational hubs of Madhya Pradesh, India.

Table 2.
Underlying Constructs in the Study

Factors	Items	Items	Items	Items	Items
Past Placement record and programme design	Good placement record 4.29	Highest package offered 4.15	Quality of companies visited in campus 4.20	Number of students placed 3.87	Programme recognition 3.99
State of the art	Well-equipped laboratories 3.99	Bus facility 3.85	Well-equipped class 4.00		
College working hours and well-resourced library	Convenient working hours of library 3.68	Availability of journals and newspapers in library 3.65	Adequate working hours by staff 3.72		
Co Curricular activities and Alumni feedback	Auditorium 3.58	Siblings / friends attended the institution 2.81	Sports facility 3.68	Annual fest 3.66	
Faculty Expertise	Academic qualification of faculties 3.93	Communication skills 4.11	Teaching methodology of faculties 4.02		
Benefits and Expenditure	Financial help by the institution 3.55	Overall cost of academic programme 3.81	Safety and security within campus 4.02	Industrial exposure 3.76	
Supportive Staff	Timely communication by staff 3.73	Efficient and effective service of staff 3.72	Proper guidance by staff 3.92		
Additional facility	Canteen 3.99	Medical facility 4.12			

Note. The values computed reflect the mean scores of the variables under each construct determining students' choice while selecting a higher education institute.
Note: Calculations based on the researchers' survey

Exploratory Factor Analysis has been used widely for several behavioural research works. Literature related to factor analysis provides a wide range of guidelines related to an adequate sample size. Most of the guidelines constantly support large samples (e.g., a sample size of at least 200) to obtain better factor analysis results. However, data sets with small samples are frequently encountered in social and behavioural research (MacCallum & Austin, 2000). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is generally regarded as a technique for large sample sizes (N), with N = 50 as a reasonable absolute minimum (de Winter, Dodou, & Wieringa,2009),

Analysis of the factors influencing students' choice in selecting higher education institutes

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): An approach towards scale purification is conducted in three phases; exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis and confirmatory factor analysis as suggested by Chahal, and Mehta (2013); Chahal, and Kumari, (2010; 2012).

EFA is a test which is applied using SPSS to reduce the observed variables into a smaller set of variables. It is an important tool which helps in determining the underlying constructs for a particular set of variables. As per Hair et al., (2012), factor loading more than 0.5 has practical significance due to which items with factor loadings less than 0.5 were deleted. 9 items were deleted as their factor loadings were below 0.5. To avoid the issues related to cross loadings we have applied varimax rotation in factor analysis using SPSS. As seen in the table below, eight constructs were retrieved after evaluating the values at several stages in 7 iterations. Table 3presents the computations in a summarised form:

The KMO value for the eight factors arrived at 0.848. (Hair et al., 2006) suggested, value > 0.5 is acceptable, and values between 0.5 and 0.7 are mediocre whereas values between 0.7 and 0.8 are good. In total, variance explained by the above-mentioned factors is 67.659%.

Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's alpha measures the reliability of different variables. It consists of estimates of how much variation in scores of different variables is attributable to random errors (Selltiz et al.,1976). The internal consistency test is acceptable when each construct has achieved a minimum alpha value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2012). In our study the overall Cronbach's alpha is 0. 896.Hence, it was found reliable for further analysis.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis: After reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis the eight factors were analysed in the confirmatory factor analysis to corroborate that whether the model proposed, perfectly fits or not. To make sure the one-dimensionality of the sub-constructs, measurement model is analysed using t-values above 2.57 (Netemeyer et al., 2006) and standardised factor loadings (SFL) above 0.50. While referring to the Hair et al.'s work, the items with squared multiple correlations below .25 should be removed.

Table 3.
Exploratory Factor Analysis for Students Choice

Variables	Communalities	Percentage of Variance Explained	KMO	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Factor Loadings	Corrected Item Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1 (Past placement record and programme design)								
V24	.813	32.768%	.854	4.15	.928	.843	.633	.875
V25	.791			4.20	.903	.830	.628	
V26	.717			3.87	1.01	.741	.640	
V23	.645			4.29	.855	.691	.609	
V27	.555			3.99	.787	.546	.573	
Factor 2 (College working hours and well-resourced library)								
V21	.668	7.137%	.653	3.68	.876	.730	.572	.720
V20	.697			3.65	.933	.680	.600	
V9	.591			3.72	.849	.691	.417	
Factor 3 (Co-Curricular activities and Alumni feedback)								
V17	.661	6.798%	.717	3.58	1.07	.705	.577	.736
V33	.670			2.81	1.33	.674	.335	
V18	.641			3.68	1.11	.671	.565	
V30	.574			3.66	1.13	.623	.434	
Factor 4 (Faculty Expertise)								
V1	.656	5.417%	.671	3.93	.879	.709	.527	.729
V4	.583			4.11	.833	.670	.436	
V3	.649			4.02	.865	.634	.577	
Factor 5 (Benefits and Expenditure)								
V35	.718	4.654%	.762	3.55	1.19	.764	.436	.754
V32	.559			3.81	.938	.549	.591	
V36	.605			4.02	1.01	.539	.605	
V34	.565			3.76	.970	.519	.483	
Factor 6 (State of the art)								
V14	.822	4.150%	.685	3.99	1.02	.896	.115	.827
V15	.826			4.00	.908	.894	.105	
V16	.689			3.85	1.01	.787	.310	
Factor 7 (Supportive Staff)								
V8	.752	3.549%	.682	3.73	.900	.738	.592	.763
V7	.663			3.72	.857	.689	.501	
V6	.672				.856	.686	.513	
Factor 8 (Additional facility)								
V12	.776	3.186%	.500	3.99	.958	.848	.338	.742
V13	.744			4.12	.932	.785	.487	

Overall Cronbach's Alpha = .896

Table 4.
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.848
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2648.227
	Df	351
	Sig.	.000

Overall KMO Value = .848

Note. Calculations based on the researchers' survey

Composite reliability (construct reliability) is a measure of internal consistency in scale items, much like Cronbach's alpha (Netemeyer, 2003). A rational threshold for composite reliability may vary from .60 and up, as per the view of different authors suggesting different thresholds. Netemeyer et al. state in "Scaling Procedures: Issues and Applications" that it is "reasonable" for a narrowly defined construct with five to eight items to meet a minimum threshold of 0.80. As shown below the table, the overall composite reliability score is 0.966.

The Average Variance extracted (AVE's) of all constructs are above the 0.40. Average Variance Extracted should be higher than 0.5 as recommended by Fornell & Larcker, (1981), but we can accept 0.40, if composite reliability is higher than 0.6, the convergent validity of the construct is still adequate (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). If composite reliability is higher than average variance extracted, then it strongly supports convergent validity.

Table 5.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Measurement Items

Construct & Item's Description	SFL	TV	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	SMC
Factor 1: PPR(Past placement record and programme design)						
PPR1	0.737	22.088	.875	0.871	.576	.543
PPR2	0.824	18.125				.679
PPR3	0.812	19.382				.659
PPR4	0.748	12.602				.559
PPR5	0.663	18.392				.440
Factor 2: (College working hours and well-resourced library)						
CWH1	0.745	11.280	.720	0.727	0.476	.555
CWH2	0.767	10.227				.588
CWH3	0.534	12.456				.285

Construct & Item's Description	SFL	TV	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	SMC
Factor 3: (Co-Curricular activities and Alumni feedback)						
CCA1	0.811	7.928	.736	0.750	0.438	.658
CCA2	0.519					
CCA3	0.735	8.906				.540
CCA4	0.533	12.456				.284
Factor 4 : (Faculty Expertise)						
FE1	0.632	15.468	.729	0.734	0.483	.399
FE2	0.621	19.369				.385
FE3	0.815	17.312				.665
Factor 5: (Benefits and Expenditure)						
BE1	0.656	6.793	.754	0.758	0.442	.431
BE2	0.67	12.661				.449
BE3	0.758	14.633				.575
BE4	0.562	11.394				.315
Factor 6 : (State of the art)						
SOA1	0.888	14.160	.827	0.838	0.638	.788
SOA2	0.637	12.273				.406
SOA3	0.849	16.186				.721
Factor 7: (Supportive Staff)						
SS1	0.788	11.894	.763	0.767	0.524	.621
SS2	0.709	12.277				.502
SS3	0.669	15.768				.447
Factor 8: (Additional facility)						
AF1	0.947	15.042	.742	0.775	0.642	.388
AF2	0.623	17.599				.896

SFL= Standardised Factor Loadings; TV= t-value; CR= composite reliability; AVE= average variance extracted; SMC= squared multiple correlation

Overall CR (Composite Reliability) is 0.966

Note. Calculations based on the researchers' survey

Discriminant Validity Analysis: Discriminant validity tests that the constructs that are not related are supposed to be unrelated. The average variance extracted (AVE) has frequently been used to evaluate the discriminant validity. Based on the correlations from the CFA model, the AVE of each of the latent constructs should be higher than the highest squared correlation with any other latent variable. In

this case, discriminant validity is established on the construct level and this rule is known as “Fornell–Larcker criterion.”

Table 6.

Discriminant Validity Analysis

	PPR	CWH	CCA	FE	BE	SOA	SS	AF
AVE	.576	.476	.438	.483	.442	.638	.524	.642
MSV	.404	.218	.218	.284	.404	.016	.284	.130
ASV	.196	.146	.137	.150	.175	.043	.126	.075
PPR	.759							
CWH	.453	.690						
CCA	.393	.467	.662					
FE	.489	.367	.371	.695				
BE	.636	.429	.422	.428	.665			
SOA	.124	.126	.044	.028	-0.014	.799		
SS	.495	.418	.458	.533	.377	.089	.723	
AF	.331	.303	.241	.268	.360	.029	.250	.801

The diagonally bold-faced values are average variance extracted. And the off diagonal values in italics are correlations between the constructs.

Note. Calculations based on the researchers’ survey

Table 7.
Eight Factor Model

Model	Cmin	Df	Cmin/df	P value	GFI	NFI	TLI	CFI	RMR	RMSEA
Eight factor model	551.504	295	1.870	.000	0.848	0.801	0.874	0.894	0.063	0.064

GFI= Goodness of Fit Index; NFI= Normed Fit Index; TLI= Tucker-Lewis Index; CFI= Comparative Fit; RMR= Root Mean Square of Residual; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation Index.The eight-factor model was discovered reflecting the choice of students while selecting a higher education institute.

Note. Calculations based on the researchers’ survey

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

In this study a student finds past placement record and programme design as the most impacting factor while deciding about a higher education institute. Good placement record, highest package offered; quality of companies visited on campus, number of students placed, and programme recognition attracts most of the students during their search for a higher education institute. According to Rao

et al. (2020), six variables are relevant while selecting an educational institution; these are placement, reference, quality teaching, brand image of institution, some other personal factors and reputation of university. Students also consider college working hours, a resourceful library and co-curricular activities at the institute/university level. Where library services are concerned, the availability of textbooks and journals is the main factor influencing the quality according to students (Tsinidou et al., 2010). Students like to go to the institute which has well equipped labs, classrooms, a good canteen and also provides medical facilities if needed. According to (He & Hutson, 2016), students lay emphasis on the content of each subject and possibility of using knowledge in practice.

Expertise of the faculties with reference to their academic qualification, communication skills and their teaching methodologies are also preferred by the students as they feel that their knowledge and skills excel if the faculties at the institute are proficient. Most of the students were satisfied with the faculties with respect to their knowledge and skills in their respective subjects (Nautiyal &Tanushree, 2015). Safety and security of the campus, the industrial exposure which they get in the institute and overall cost of their academic programme are also not overlooked by the students. They also ask their siblings or friends, those who have already studied there or those who are pursuing their studies, in relation to the institute before taking admission.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The results of the study demonstrate that the proposed eight factor model is fit which will help the students in making decisions while they look for a higher education institute and will also be helpful for the higher education institutes to focus on the key factors which are preferred by the students. The study is commensurate with the other studies like (Rao et al., 2020), (Tsinidou et al., 2010), (He &Hutson, 2016) and (Nautiyal & Tanushree, 2015). However, students focus more on quality education towards private universities in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2013). It is also seen that the suggestions from the family and friends, guidance from the counsellors, and positive word-of-mouth are also considered by the students (Patel & Patel, 2012). Tripathee (2017) identified that curriculum is seen as the least influential factor whereas institute's reputation is the most influential factor in forming students' perception. The study undertaken, revealed that the students take into consideration a variety of factors in making their final selection towards a higher education institute/University. Keeping the identified factors of the study in mind, it will be beneficial for the institutes to improvise their service quality and will be of great assistance for the students in the decision-making process while selecting a higher education institute.

Policy Implications: Factors considered by the students are very crucial for higher education institutes and universities to understand what they are expecting. The number of private universities and institutes providing higher education are increasing every year but ignoring students' expectations will

lead to their deterioration in the long run. To sustain in the tough business environment, they should be acquainted with not just the services offered by them traditionally but additionally the criteria that students draw on in selecting the institute/university. Institutions in the higher education sector should draw conclusions from the individual assessments by students (Thatcher et al., 2016),

Understanding what students think may help the management of an institute to ensure their services are delivered in the right direction as it will lead to higher satisfaction among students. As a better student today will make a better country tomorrow.

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Conflict of Interest

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