



# Factors Influencing College Choice of Nepalese Undergraduate Students

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## Abstract

**Background:** College choice decision remains one of the major issues for the students and parents especially during the time of admission.

**Objective:** Understanding this problem, this research, taking colleges of Tribhuvan University and Kathmandu University as the samples, assesses which of the characteristics— institutional, marketing, and social are more dominant in this decision.

**Method:** The study, based on the primary survey; uses the questionnaire to collect data among the management students of bachelor's level in Kathmandu Valley, shows that academic program, quality of education, and social factors are the key factors that impact college choice decision. The study employs convenient sampling techniques. The tendency of students to make college choice decisions depends on the colleges' academic programs that they have concentrated.

**Result:** The results suggest that college should focus their eyes to apply different types of academic programs, adopt quality education in terms of appointing highly qualified faculties and even contribute certain margin to social support, employability of the students over the market and position of enrolment of the students in higher education. These characteristics enable the colleges to run and sustain in the long run.

**Conclusion:** To mitigate the moderating impact on college choice, the variable gender is used, however, its impact on the relationship of college fees and college choice is not supported by the study.

**Paper Types:** Research Paper

**Key Words:** Academic program, quality education, social factors, faculties, college choice

**JEL Classification:** A23, I2

## Introduction

Understanding how various influencing measures are chosen has long been a subject of interest to students in getting their college enrollment. In today's competitive academic environment, the transformation of quality educational services and satisfied students can be considered critical for the existence of any higher academic institutions (Munteanu, Ceobanu, Bobâlcă, & Anton, 2010). The competition among each other affects the enrollment of students to their respective institutions. The college enrollment decision, in many countries including Nepal, has become a very pressing and increasingly complex factor in the last 10 years, as higher education has transformed in many ways (Altbach, 2009; Baral, 2016; Broadfoot & Black, 2004; Cummings, 1984). Nepalese higher education has grown from a collection of small, local markets to regional and national markets. The higher education environment has become competitive and institutions increasingly have to compete for students in the recruitment market (James et al., 1999). Nichols, Smith, and Stellino (2020) reveal in their survey that employability and academic programs are the major issues for students before choosing their colleges for higher education. The nature of employability when it comes to college enrollment is to be strong for the students while making their decision (Piopiunik, Schwerdt, Simon, & Woessmann, 2020). Huggins (2010) argues that college decisions are made through a three-stage process that begins in seventh grade and ends when high school graduate enrollment in a post-secondary institution. High school students develop predispositions to attend college (Brown, 1997; Cheung, 2018; Greenacre, 2010), and they look for general information about colleges, the programs the colleges offers and make decisions that lead them to enroll at a specific institution of higher education as they progress through the college-choice process.

There are various affecting factors identified by scholars in the selection of colleges throughout the world; both in developed (Stewart, 2021; Wei, Zhou, & Yang, 2019) as well as in developing and underdeveloped countries (Dahnweih, 2021; Girmay & John, 2018). The studies have documented religion, caste, gender, parental and peer influence, parents' educational attainments, parents' occupations, cultural influence, social status, employment opportunities after graduation and the teaching styles of educators as some of the reasons. These themes that emerged from this literature review provided a conceptual framework for this study. The study on influencing measures of college choice occupies an important place in Nepalese educational units. Educational units, in the post-liberalization era, have become much competitive, and are facing tough challenges to get students' enrolment in undergraduate and graduate management degree colleges of the respective universities. Influencing measures of college choice in Nepalese universities have never received much attention as it is in recent years mainly due to the growth in many foreign educational units. While much study has been done on the factors that influence students' educational aspirations and their decisions to get admitted or not in a college program, but less attention has been paid to students' choice of college in the Nepalese context. Few studies have been undertaken among students in Nepalese education that investigate the factors that influence their course specialization (Shrestha & Shrestha, 2020). More of these studies are related to medical education (Chaurasia, Chaudhary, Paudel, & Singh, 2020; Tergesen et al., 2021).

The focus of this study is mainly on students' college selection criteria in management education that include, among others, institutional factors, marketing factors and social factors. A construct of these measures is developed based on the literature. Gender is proposed to be an important antecedent of college fees, which in turn influences the college choice.

The paper contributes to the academic literature on the students' decision to choose the college for their higher education. We find an academic program, faculty quality, employability and social status of academic institutions that are the major decision criteria for students' enrolment to their higher education. Many of the studies (Briggs & Wilson, 2007; Veloutsou, Lewis, & Paton, 2004; Yenisetty & Bahadure, 2020) focus on location, fee structure, quality of faculties that influence but surprisingly we

find social support from the college is a new phenomenon through which students may understand the contribution of college to society and its existence. Due to this existence, college is better known, and students make their decisions after considering this factor as one of the decision criteria.

Section I comprises the introduction of the study. It deals with the concepts of factors that affect college choice along with the objectives of the study. Section II briefly describes the overview of the previous study along with the theoretical framework. Section III is about methodological aspect, population and sample size, how the research procedures of this study are organized, presented and data are analyzed in Section IV and conclusion and recommendation for college authority are presented in Section V.

## Review of Literature

### *Theoretical Review*

Kallio (1995) examines the relative influence of factors determining the college admission of graduate students. The survey was based on 2834 admitted students in 1986 at a university-related management program, to which 38 percent of the sample was responded. Factor analysis was made of ratings of the importance of 31 college choice characteristics upon which the students' admission decisions are based. The five-point Likert scale was used to determine the importance and preference of firm characteristics and then regression was used to identify the variables that impact the decision to enroll or not to enroll at the surveyed colleges. The result shows that the quality and other academic characteristics, financial aid and the college social environment are the major influencers in their decision to enroll in the college program. Okeke (2000) concluded that parents have a significant effect on students' choice of career and subjects. If we want to encourage more young students into science, then students need rich opportunities to find out about the many ways sciences can be used in interesting careers, most of the students have not been helped by their parents when making their study choices. Academic quality, facilities, campus surroundings, and personal characteristics are the main factors that influence college admission decisions, according to a survey of 210 undergraduate students (Sidin, Hussin, & Tan, 2003). It also supports the argument that parents' income influences students' decision to attend a private college.

Simões and Soares (2010) surveyed 1641 students who were admitted to a Portuguese university. The majority of the respondents ranked the university website as one of the top three sources of knowledge, eminent faculties and academic programs. The findings also indicate that proximity to a higher education institution is the most significant deciding factor. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015) conducted a study to systematically document, scrutinize, and critically analyze the factors that influence university choice, focusing on two aspects: first, demographic and academic factors, and second, factors related to the school, such as efficiency, outcomes, and benefits, as well as facilities and characteristics of the institutions. The findings show that college fees, quality education, location are the important factors to consider while choosing a college.

Dao and Thorpe (2015) surveyed 1124 current or recently completed university students to examine the factors that influence Vietnamese students' choice of university. Marketing approaches are drawn upon to inform the exploration and understanding of student choice and decision making. The results revealed the key factors such as facilities and services, college programs, fees, offline/online information, ways of communication, program additions, and advertising are important considerations. The result further shows that college choice behavior is significantly different among male and female students.

In an empirical study, Hassan, Shamsudin and Mustapha, (2019) examined the factors that influence students' decision to enroll at a private Higher Business Education Institution in Sri Lanka. The survey was used to collect the data of 100 students in a business school at the University of Kuala Lumpur. The exploratory factor analysis was used to analyze the data. Institutional rankings, institutional facilities and employment opportunities are used as explanatory variables and students' decision to choose

college as the dependent variable. The analysis shows that the factor loadings all items above 0.50, institutional facilities and employment opportunities remark the highest KMO and Cronbach alpha of more than 0.90. Furthermore, the study outlined the specific components such as status, the image of the business school, campus safety and security, quality education, tuition fees, and location are the major factors that ranked higher in line with the students' decisions to select a particular business school to their college education.

Hieu, Xuyen, and Hung (2020) explore the impacting factors on the decision of college choice among high school students in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam. The study was based both on secondary and primary surveys. Secondary data were collected and used from previous studies and the primary data was done through seven experts, three in depths structured interviews with 10 students, and 273 survey questionnaires with the students pursuing their higher secondary course in management. The results show that the college fees, university reputation and social status, employment opportunity are the influencing measures of students' decision of university choice to study.

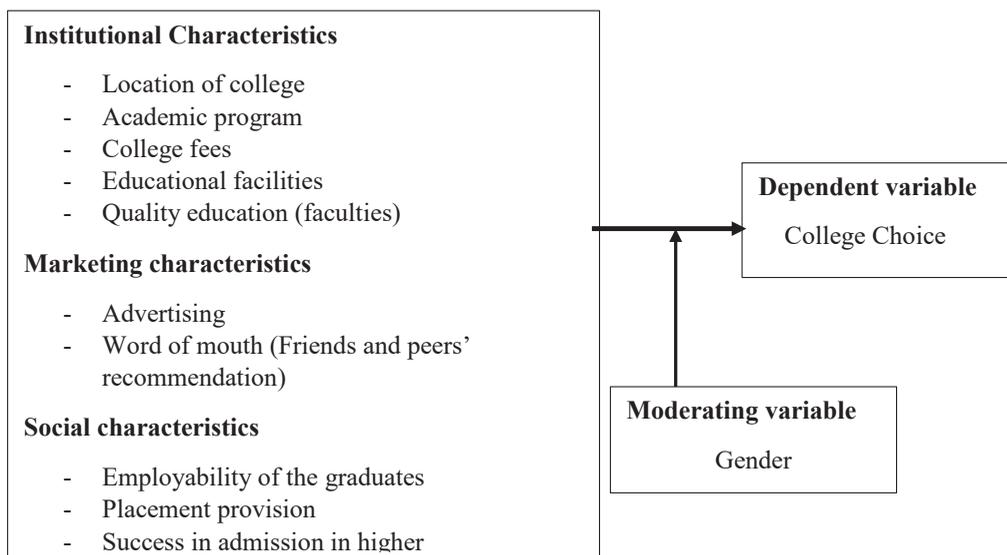
The major criticism of almost all these studies is the limited attempts made to develop any theory of influencing measures of college choice that would specify the variables to be included in the model. The specific components with few respondents predict the model in the western world but the finding is limited to providing generalizable results particularly to developing countries. The thinking behavior of the students of developed and developing countries are significantly different in various dimensions that affect their decision to choose their academic institutions. Considering this fact, a survey was conducted in July 2020 among Nepalese students.

**Research framework**

Students indicate some factors that influence the decision of choosing a college to study in an undergraduate program (Rudhumbu, Tirumalai, & Kumari, 2017). These factors are categorized into three groups— institutional, marketing, and social characteristics (Ming, 2010; Moogan, Baron, & Harris, 1999). Institutional, marketing, and social characteristics are considered as explanatory variables and college choice as a dependent variable. Institutional characteristics include location, academic program, college fees, educational facilities, and quality education available at the college.

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**

**Independent variables**



Concerning marketing characteristics, advertising, +2 visit, participating at an education fair, existing students' recommendations are the factors that influence the students' decision on which college they get admission (Kusumawati, 2010). The expertise of faculties, courses offered by an institution and convenience of travel are some of the components that students consider in choosing their college (Napompech, 2011). Social characteristics include employability of the graduates, placement status after graduation and success rate in admission in higher education especially to Master in Business Administration. In addition, gender is considered as moderating variable. It has been identified as a moderating variable in various studies (Kara, Kim, Lee, & Uysal, 2018; Karakuş, 2018) that has tempered the association between influencing factors and college choice (Sánchez-Mena, Martí-Parreño, & Aldás-Manzano, 2019).

## *Hypothesis formulation*

### **Institutional factors**

**Location-** This component refers to the physical location of the college, and proximity to road and home. Veloutsou et al. (2004) reveal that the location of the college is the key characteristic for students selecting a college. Proximity to home is one of the significant components of the college choice process (Bergerson, 2009; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

**H1: There is a positive association between location and college choice.**

**Academic Program:** Different types of academic programs may attract students to get their higher education. Mustafa, Sellami, Elmaghraby and Al-Qassass (2018) advocate that the academic programs, academic prestige of departments, the academic status of the university, and college facilities and job placement of graduates are the major choice factors. Ford, Joseph, and Joseph (1999) also indicate that program issues such as range of programs of study, suppleness of degree program, major change suppleness and variety of degree options are the most important factors for students to select their college choice. Based on this, it is hypothesized that:

**H2: Academic program has a positive effect on college choice.**

**College fees:** Students make their decisions in choosing a college based on its fees. Before choosing a college, students estimate how much they have to invest in education. It does not only comprise college fees but also includes the cost of transportation. Distance from the house also adds up to that cost and this can have an inverse effect on actual desires and influence students in choosing the college. Briggs and Wilson (2007), Heller (1997) reveal significant points associated with the cost of education: students from middle-class families are more complex to college fees than that the class of families from higher-income groups. Based on this, it is hypothesized that:

**H3: There is an inverse relationship between college fees and college choice**

**Educational facilities:** Educational facilities such as classrooms, computer labs, libraries, projectors are the important component that students consider while choosing their college for their higher education (Yenissety & Bahadure, 2020). Based on this, it is hypothesized that:

**H4: There is a positive relationship between educational facilities and college choice**

**Quality education:** Teaching reputation, quality of the faculty, research status, extracurricular activities, status of employment after graduation and enrollment in higher education in top-ranked universities are the quality of the college that affect students' decision to choose education institutions (Briggs & Wilson, 2007). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

**H5: There is a positive association between quality education and college fees**

Based on individual factors, it is summarized that institutional factors positively affect the decision of college choice.

## Marketing factors

College advertising through the media has tremendously increased in recent years. Television, social media, print media have become effective in building college image, status, and visibility in the specific region.

**Advertisement:** Another source of information for students in selecting a college is advertisement either on social media or in print media. Despite the internet's significance, advertisement in print media or social media remains a reliable source of information (Hoyt & Brown, 2003), (Moogan, 2011), (Veloutsou, Paton, & Lewis, 2005)). Thus, it is hypothesized that

**H6: There is a positive relationship between advertisement and college choice**

## Social factors

**Employability of the graduates:** Students are often concerned about post-undergraduate education because of the career opportunities it may offer (Sia, 2010). Han (2014) revealed that students often make college admission based on the job status of existing graduates. Students are curious about outcomes. They are influenced by what graduates are doing, which college they attend and what contribution they are making to society (Sevier, 1998). Thus, it is hypothesized that

**H7: There is a positive association between social factors and college choice**

**College choice:** The process through which students decide whether and where to join college for their undergraduate course (Iloh, 2018). Selecting college based on a different component is college choice. The process a student goes through as she or he transitions from high school to college has been described as a college choice.

## Moderating variable

People with different gender perceive their college choice differently. Sojkin, Bartkowiak, and Skuza (2012) state that male students considered college reputation, courses offered, and cost of studies, research activities and accessibility of financial aid as important factors whereas female students considered proximity, education quality, social condition or status of the college to be more important. Besides, Obermeit (2012) revealed that gender does not directly impact students' college choices. Based on this concept, it is hypothesized that

**H8: There is an inverse relationship between gender and college choice of the students in their higher education**

**H2i: There is a significant moderating role of gender between academic programs and college choice.**

## Research Methods

Based on a careful review of previous literature about the factors affecting college choice, a set of the draft survey was developed and circulated to a group of prominent students for feedback. The pilot survey was conducted among 20 students of Kathmandu valley and a few suggestions were incorporated into the original questionnaire surveyed in early July 2020. The changes were incorporated into the questionnaire.

This study is based on primary data. To examine the factors influencing students' college choices, the study uses a descriptive and causal-comparative research design. Undergraduate management students at Kathmandu University and Tribhuvan University are considered as the population of this study. Among these, three colleges from each university were selected as a sample of this study. For us, questionnaire surveys were useful in explaining the characteristics of a large number of students and their extensive capacity ensures a more precise sample to accumulate targeted results and to attain the objective of this study.

## ***Population and Sample***

The population for this study includes individuals from age 18 to 24 who have been involved in their education at the bachelor level in Kathmandu valley. Moreover, the sampling consists of two steps. In the first step, a list of colleges affiliated with Tribhuvan University and Kathmandu University was prepared. The list was further divided into the colleges where management education is focused. Nowadays, management faculty is considered a separate discipline and demanding constituent among the disciplines available in Nepal. There were 15 colleges associated with management faculty under Tribhuvan University and three colleges associated with management under Kathmandu University. Further, one constituent, one public and one private college affiliated to Tribhuvan University and three from Kathmandu University were selected to conduct the opinion survey of students in their college choice decision based on subjective judgment. The number of students pursuing a bachelor's degree was enquired through email/telephone with their respective admission departments. However, some of them did not disclose the exact number of students enrolled in their colleges. Then further inquiry was made to the examination department of their respective universities. It was revealed that 1112 students in TU affiliated colleges and 1078 students in KU colleges studying their bachelor's education in the year 2020 were considered as the population of this study.

In the second step, based on convenient sampling, 75 sets of questionnaires were distributed to the students of each of the selected six colleges. One month after the first distribution of questionnaires, the respondents, who did not respond to the first distribution of the questionnaire, contacted over the telephone. As a result, 248 usable questionnaires were retrieved, for a response rate of 55.11 percent. This response rate seems to be good as this response rate is greater than the response rate of 12 percent obtained in the study of (Hermes, Smid, & Yao, 2007; Trahan, 1995) and nine percent response rate of (Graham & Harvey, 2001; Kallio, 1995). It seems that data were sufficient to determine the influencing measures of college choice.

A structured questionnaire with a nominal scale was used to collect the data. The effect of each of the established factors on undergraduate students' college choice decision was measured using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from fully satisfied to dissatisfied. The questionnaire was first exposed to the reliability test before being administered. In reliability test for internal consistency, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was conducted. To do so, first, the initial sample made of 25 questionnaires was prepared and then by using the data from this survey and the smart PLS software to assess the reliability and validity tests. The computed value of Cronbach Alpha was 0.72 that indicates the instrument was reliable since it is greater than 0.7.

## **Data Analysis and Results**

### ***Respondents' Profile***

Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents were female students, that is, 151 (60.90%) and the remaining 96 (38.70%) were male students. Regarding age, the highest number of respondents was of between 20-22 years having a share of 43.10 percent whereas 94 respondents (37.90%) were between the 18-20 age group.

The students below the age of 18 were 33 (13.30%) and the lowest number was 14 (5.60%), the students over the age of 22. Among the respondents, 224 (90.30%) were the students, who have passed plus two under National Examinations Board (the then Higher Secondary Education Board), 10(4.0%) from CBSE Board and the remaining 9(3.60%) were from A-Level.

**Table 1: Respondents' Profile**

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	96	38.70
	Female	151	60.90
Age in years	<18 years	33	13.30
	18 to 20 years	94	37.90
	20 to 22 years	107	43.10
	> 22 years	14	5.60
Qualification	NEB or plus 2	224	90.30
	CBSE	10	4.00
	A Level	9	3.60
Study level	First-year	100	40.30
	Second-year	64	25.80
	Third year	45	18.10
	Fourth year	39	15.70

All of our respondents were of Bachelor's level representing different colleges of Kathmandu Valley. The highest number was from the first year, i.e., 100(40.30%), followed by the second year 64 (25.80%). The number of the third and the fourth-year students was 45 (18.10%) and 39 (15.70%) respectively.

### ***Satisfaction Level***

The mean value of each category representing the students' satisfaction vis-a-vis faculties and teaching pedagogy spans from 3.08 to 3.73. This value is above the cut-off value of 3 that indicates the respondents are moderately satisfied with their faculties and their teaching pedagogies.

However, we can notice a category-wise variation. For instance, in terms of gender, the satisfaction level is almost the same as the mean value of the satisfaction level of male respondents standing at 3.34 and 3.32 for female respondents. But the gap in the satisfaction level is higher in terms of age. The most satisfied were the respondents between the age group of 18-20 with a 3.52 mean value having the total number 107 whereas the least satisfied were the students above the age of 22 with a 3.08 mean value.

Similarly, regarding class, the most satisfied were the first-year students who have the average mean value of 3.72, whereas the third-year students were found least satisfied, i.e., 45 respondents with a mean value of 3.29.

**Table 2: Satisfaction Level**

Table 2 reports the survey responses of students' opinions that describe their satisfaction level with the faculties and their teaching pedagogies. Table 4.2 displays the satisfaction level along with their mean values. The mean score is computed as  $(6 \times 1 + 7 \times 2 + 42 \times 3 + 30 \times 4 + 11 \times 5) / 96$  and so on.

		1	2	3	4	5	Total	Weighted mean
Gender	Male	6	7	42	30	11	96	3.34
	Female	2	11	58	51	20	151	3.32
Age in years	18	2	1	14	14	2	33	3.39
	18 to 20	2	8	36	29	19	94	3.59
	20 to 22	2	8	45	36	16	107	3.52
	> 22	2	1	6	2	2	13	3.08

		1	2	3	4	5	Total	Weighted mean
Study year In Bachelor	First	1	4	37	36	21	99	3.73
	Second	3	7	30	15	9	64	3.31
	Third	2	4	21	15	3	45	3.29
	Fourth	2	3	13	15	6	39	3.51
Education	NEB	4	17	91	78	35	225	3.55
	CBSE	2	1	5	2	2	12	3.08
	A Level	2	0	4	1	2	9	3.11

The respondents are asked to rank on a scale of 1 (Extremely dissatisfied) to 5 (Extremely satisfied).

The students who completed their school level from the then Higher Education Board (now National Examinations Board) were much satisfied than those who were graduated from the CBSE board and A-Level. Our maximum respondents were NEB graduates, i.e., 226 out of 247 and the weightage mean of their satisfaction level is 3.55 followed by 3.11 and 3.08 mean values of A-Level and CBSE graduates respectively.

### Recommendation Level

Table 3 shows that female students (with the mean value of 3.62) recommend other prospective students for their bachelor’s degree in the college they were studying in more than the male students (with the mean value of 3.34) do. Among the respondents, the students with less or equal to 18 years were found in the frontline in recommendation with the mean value of 4 (33 in number). 94 students between the age group of 18-20 have a 3.90 mean value indicating high recommendation followed by the age group of 20-22 students with a mean value of 3.65.

**Table 3: Recommendation Level**

Survey responses to the question: Will you recommend this college? Table 4.3 reports the survey responses of students’ opinions that their recommendation level to the college in which they were studying.

		1	2	3	4	5	Total	Weighted mean
Gender	Male	6	7	42	30	11	96	3.34
	Female	3	10	58	51	29	151	3.62
Age in years	18	1	2	4	15	11	33	4.00
	18 to 20	5	5	18	32	34	94	3.90
	20 to 22	3	9	31	43	21	107	3.65
	> 22	3	2	3	4	2	14	3.00
Study year In Bachelor	First	5	6	16	38	35	100	3.92
	Second	1	5	18	23	17	64	3.78
	Third	3	6	11	17	8	45	3.47
	Fourth	3	1	11	16	8	39	3.64
Education	NEB	8	18	53	87	60	226	3.77
	CBSE	1	0	2	4	5	12	4.00
	A Level	3	0	1	3	2	9	3.11

The respondents are asked to rank on a scale of 1 (Least likely to recommend) to 5 (Most likely to recommend).

The least number of students who recommended were of above 22 years (3.00 mean value). It shows that the recommendation level decreases when the students upgrade. Year-wise (study year in bachelor program) mean of recommendation spans from 3.47 (the third-year students with 45 respondents) to 3.92 (the first-year students with 100 respondents). The mean value of the second-year and the fourth-year students are 3.78 and 3.64 respectively. Based on their school level, the highest recommenders were the CBSE graduate students with a mean value of 4.0, followed by NEB students with a mean value of 3.77 and A-Level students with a mean value of 3.11.

### ***Measurement and validity assessment***

We carried out reliability and validity analysis for all the measures that were used to test our hypotheses. Reliability can be assessed by using two values i.e. Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability where values of Cronbach's Alpha are greater than 0.60 and the mean value of composite reliability is greater than 0.70 and that is considered acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4.4 shows that the Cronbach's Alpha value of each construct ranged from 0.688 to 0.853 and composite reliability ranged from 0.739 to 0.931, signifying adequate reliability.

Moreover, all the items load on their matching construct with acceptable values of factor loadings (0.692 to 0.935) and the average variance extracted values (0.556-0.872) were all surpassed the cutoff point of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Similarly, another widely used measure that attempts to correct for the tendency of the goodness of fit statistics to reject models with a larger sample or a large number of observed variables is the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The value of RMSEA ranged from 0.03 to 0.08 indicating a better model fit (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014). The RMSEA value in this model is 0.067, indicating the sufficient goodness of fit.

**Table 4 : Measurement Items and Validity Assessment**

<b>Construct with underlying items</b>	<b>Factor loading</b>
<b>Academic Program (<math>\alpha = 0.768</math>, CR = 0.865, AVE = 0.682)</b>	
My college offers various undergraduate programs	0.774
My college is ahead in management education	0.847
My college degree is highly accepted in the market	0.854
<b>College Fees (<math>\alpha = 0.688</math>, CR = 0.833, AVE = 0.556)</b>	
My college fee is reasonable	0.932
My college fee is less expensive	0.935
<b>Educational Facilities (<math>\alpha = 0.739</math>, CR = 0.833, AVE = 0.556)</b>	
My college has a sophisticated computer lab	0.692
My college has conducive classrooms	0.82
My college has sufficient books in the library	0.742
My college provides extracurricular activities regularly	0.722
<b>Quality Education (<math>\alpha = 0.850</math>, CR = 0.899, AVE = 0.690)</b>	
My college believes in quality education	0.856
My college has highly qualified faculties	0.831
My college provides research-based education	0.835
My college degree would be on priority for admission in higher education	0.798

Construct with underlying items	Factor loading
<b>Social Factor (<math>\alpha = 0.846</math>, CR = 0.907, AVE = 0.764)</b>	
My college provides support to the needy students	0.892
My college offers a good amount of scholarship	0.877
My college recognizes the value of alumni	0.853
<b>College Choice (<math>\alpha = 0.853</math>, CR = 0.931, AVE = 0.872)</b>	
I chose this college due to additional educational facilities	0.880
I chose this college because the degree of this college provides higher value in university	0.866

The Cronbach Alpha of location and marketing constructs are 0.577 and 0.521, less than cut-off value, thus these variables were removed from this analysis.

### Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 5 shows that the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for the major variables. The mean value of all six latent variables ranged from 2.96 to 3.78 on a five-point Likert scale with the standard deviation ranging from 0.85 to 1.14. The mean values of the latent variables are all above the scale midpoint of 3 except educational facilities. It indicates that academic programs, college fees, quality education and social factors are key components for the students in making their college choice.

To test the discriminant validity, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion is used. The discriminant validity assesses the correlations between constructs and determines the potentially overlapping constructs. In Table 4.5, the square roots of AVEs (Average value extracted) portrayed in diagonal, are greater in all cases than the off-diagonal values in their respective rows and columns, indicating that the required discriminant validity has been observed.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients**

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Academic Program	3.59	0.87	<b>0.826</b>					
2	College choice	3.55	1.02	0.547	<b>0.873</b>				
3	College fees	3.25	1.14	0.342	0.327	<b>0.934</b>			
4	Educational facilities	2.96	0.903	0.518	0.425	0.254	<b>0.746</b>		
5	Quality education	3.78	0.85	0.725	0.631	0.381	0.638	<b>0.83</b>	
6	Social factors	3.35	0.89	0.529	0.624	0.468	0.459	0.712	<b>0.812</b>

In a nutshell, the results presented in Tables 4.4 and 4.5 justify the criterion of convergent and discriminant validity.

### Result of Path Analysis

The results presented in Table 4.6 show the result of the causal relations between constructs, including the estimation of path coefficients, t-values, p-values, lower-level confidence interval and upper-level confidence interval. There are five explanatory variables of college choice, moderating variable gender and the dependent variable of college choice. The three paths, academic program-college choice, quality education -college choice, and social factor -college choice are all positive and significant that indicate the acceptance of hypotheses. The coefficient

**Table 5: Path Model**

Table 6 displays the path model of firm characteristics and college choice. The firm characteristics such as academic program, college fees, educational facilities, quality education, social factors, and moderating variable gender are employed in this study. The table also shows the coefficients, t-values, p-values, upper and lower confidence interval of the variables employed in this study.

	Unst $\beta$	t-stat	P Values	LLCI	ULCI
Academic -> College choice	0.167	2.254***	0.025	0.054	0.293
College Fees*Gender -> College choice	-0.047	0.560	0.576	-0.203	0.075
College fees -> College choice	0.092	0.483	0.629	-0.202	0.414
Edu facility -> College choice	0.020	0.364	0.716	-0.065	0.118
Gender -> College choice	0.076	0.287	0.774	-0.266	0.560
Quality edu -> College choice	0.252	2.712***	0.007	0.093	0.402
Social -> College choice	0.347	5.002***	0.000	0.230	0.465

on the path from the academic program to college choice is 0.167 (t-2.25),  $p < 0.05$ ). Hypothesis 2 is accepted. Thus, this positive association suggests that hypothesis 2 is supported. It implies that students focus their eyes on the academic programs of the particular college before getting admission to the programs of their choice. The result is consistent with the study of Kallio (1995) and Veloutsou et al., (2004).

The path coefficient from quality education to college choice is 0.252 (t-2.71,  $p < 0.01$ ), which supports the fifth hypothesis. It indicates that students consider quality education as another factor before they took the final decision for college choice. The result is consistent with the study of Briggs (2006). Similarly, the path coefficient of social factor to college choice is 0.347 (t-5.002,  $p < 0.01$ ), which supports the seventh hypothesis. It implies that students also consider that whether the college is involved in social work and keep a good eye over the market.

LLCI-Lower limit confidence interval, ULCI -Upper limit confidence interval, significance level:  $P < 0.10^*$ ,  $P < 0.05^{**}$ ,  $P < 0.01^{***}$

Further, combining academic program, college fees, educational facility, quality education to institutional factor and statements of societal issues to social into one of each factor and run the model whether reliable constructs impact directly to college choice. In this case, two independent variables are created, i.e., institutional factors and social factors, which affect the decision for the choice of college. The path coefficients of institutional factors and social factors have been shown in Table 4.7. The result shows that both variables are significant at  $p < 0.05$  (t- 5.33 and 6.041).

**Table 6: Structural model**

Variables	Unst Beta	P-value	R-square	Hypothesis
Institutional factors->College choice	0.349*** (5.33)	0.00	34.90%	Accept
Social factors->College choice	0.387*** (6.041)	0.00	38.70%	Accept

Overall R2 = 46.4%, t-values are presented in parenthesis, \*\*\*, \*\*, \* indicate the level of significance at 1%, 5%, and 10% significance level respectively.

Source: Survey 2020

These results indicate that students consider the academic programs, quality education, college fees and societal status of a particular college before making their decision to choose the college. The result

shows that both of these variables are significant at  $p < 0.05$  ( $t = 5.33$  and  $6.041$ ). These results indicate that students consider the academic programs, quality education, college fees and societal status of a particular college before making their decision to choose the college.

The unreported moderating effect of gender seems to be insignificant, thus the result of this effect has not been presented. Table 7 also shows that the institutional factor explains the college choice by 35 percent and social factor by 39 percent. Overall, these two factors explain the variance of college choice by 46.4 percent which indicates that the model seems to be strong.

### ***The Moderating Effect of Gender***

The group comparison of structural equation modeling was used to examine the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between college fees and college choice. The gender is defined as 1 for male and 2 for female. This moderating effect was then performed to test whether any differences occurred in the path model between male and female respondents. The difference in this test is not significant,  $-0.047$  ( $t = -0.56$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), which does not support hypothesis H2i. It implies that gender does not make any influence on the selection of colleges for teenagers. Similarly, the path model is also conducted after using gender as an independent variable to assess the impact on college choice, the result of  $0.076$  ( $t = 0.287$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) shows that there is an insignificant association between gender and college choice. In sum, the variables, academic programs, quality education, and social factors seem to be the most significant in the selection of a college. The structural model explains 47 percent of the variance. We also attempted to determine the moderating impact of age, educational level, and study year, all of which are insignificant.

## **Conclusions**

This study assessed the factors that affect college choice in the context of colleges associated with Kathmandu University and Tribhuvan University. It examined whether the academic programs, college fees, educational facilities, quality education, and social factors are significantly associated with students' decisions in getting admitted to a college. The study is based on a primary survey among the Nepalese youths who are studying bachelor-level education and studied in management colleges in Kathmandu Valley regarding the factors affecting their choice of college admission. The result shows that academic programs and quality education which are consistent with Mustafa et al. (2018) implying that students consider various academic programs and their quality as the criteria for their enrolment. The result also shows that social factors are the key indicators that impact college choice decision which is inconsistent with Kolvereid (1996) implying that students explore the employability status of the college over the market before getting enrolled. The tendency of students to make college choice decisions depends on the colleges' academic programs of their concentration. The results suggest that college should focus their eyes to apply different types of academic programs adopting quality education policies in terms of appointing highly qualified faculties and even contributing to a certain margin into social supports. These characteristics enable the colleges to run and sustain the institution in the long run. This research covers only the Kathmandu Valley; had its coverage been South Asia or Asia itself, the result would have been more generalizable. Moreover, if the research incorporated other factors like physical (infrastructure), the result could have been different.

The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between college fees and college choice is not supported by the study. We also examined the relationship with other independent variables and college choice based on moderating variable, gender, the result does not seem to be significant. Further, the summed statements of constructs, institutional factors, and social factors, were also run by using moderation variable gender, the result again does not seem to be significant. A future longitudinal study could be conducted to further explore the causal and dynamic associations between the influencing measures and college choice, using mediating effect of parental education, income, and peer suggestion,

among others. This study is based on the opinion-based constructs to measure academic programs, college fees, educational facilities, quality education, social factors, and gender on college choice. There are other variables such as career counseling, extra-curricular activities that may also consider in conducting such types of studies in the future.

## Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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