

From Interest to Enrolment: Investigating the Factors that Influence Program Choices Among Students in Politeknik Mukah

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Abstract: *This study investigates the factors influencing students' program choices at Politeknik Mukah, offering valuable insights for educators and policymakers. The decision to choose a higher education program is shaped by a combination of personal motivations, such as interest in a particular field, career aspirations, and financial considerations, alongside external influences, including family expectations, societal pressures, and institutional factors. This research explores key factors, including the role of quality assurance, the availability of university facilities, the cost of education, and the impact of peer recommendations and social media. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed among new students, analyzing responses to understand their preferences and decision-making processes. The findings reveal that students are influenced by the perceived quality of programs, institutional reputation, financial affordability, and the input of peers and family. The study highlights the importance of aligning academic programs with both student aspirations and labor market demands to attract and retain students in higher education.*

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Learning Centre Facilities, Cost of education and Recommendations from peers, acquaintances, parents and social media

1. Introduction

Choosing a higher education program is a critical decision for students as it profoundly influences their academic path, career prospects, and personal growth. This decision is shaped by a complex interplay of internal motivations and external pressures that steer students toward a particular discipline. Understanding these factors is vital for educators, policymakers, and higher education in order to attract students and design programs that align with their aspirations and objectives.

Several factors shape students' choice of academic programs, including personal interests, skills, career goals, and anticipated job prospects. While many students are driven by a genuine passion for a particular subject or field, others may prioritize programs aligned with market demands, seeking enhanced employability and financial stability upon graduation. Beyond personal motivations, external factors such as family expectations, societal pressure, and cultural trends significantly impact students' program choices. For instance, parents and relatives often steer students toward fields they believe will lead to stable and prestigious

careers. Likewise, peer influence can encourage students to pursue subjects that are trending or widely regarded as popular.

Additionally, institutional factors like university reputation, faculty expertise, availability of scholarships, and campus facilities play a crucial role in shaping program selection. Universities known for excellence in particular fields often attract more students to those disciplines, though students may also be influenced by marketing strategies or the institution's overall brand image.

In summary, the process of choosing a higher education program is multifaceted, shaped by a range of personal interests, career ambitions, social influences, and institutional factors. This study aims to explore these dimensions in depth, offering insights into how students navigate their choices and what measures can be taken to guide them toward more informed decisions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Quality Assurance

Recent studies emphasize the significant impact of quality assurance (QA) on students' program selection at universities. QA practices, including accreditation, benchmarking, and continuous improvement, ensure that academic programs meet established standards, making them more attractive to prospective students. Accreditation, for instance, serves as a strong indicator of a university's commitment to maintaining rigorous academic standards.

Additionally, universities that emphasize continuous improvement through regular internal and external assessments often offer more adaptable and forward-looking academic programs. This flexibility, combined with a focus on meeting societal needs, makes these institutions particularly attractive to students seeking high-quality education tailored to evolving industry demands.

Moreover, rankings such as those from Times Higher Education indicate that leading universities dedicated to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including quality education, are more likely to attract students. This is due to their proven commitment to offering equitable and accessible educational programs, which are crucial factors in the decision-making process for program selection.

In conclusion, robust quality assurance systems in universities significantly influence program selection by ensuring credibility, aligning with industry demands, and fostering trust among students, employers, and policymakers. These factors are a crucial element in students' decision-making processes when choosing educational programs (Olcay & Bulu, 2017).

2.2. Learning Centre Facilities

According to Rahman, Haris, and Mahmud (2020), University facilities significantly influence students' program selection, shaping their educational experiences and overall satisfaction. Below is an overview of how various elements of university facilities impact students' decisions. The quality and design of physical infrastructure such as classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and study areas play a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of a program. Contemporary, well-equipped facilities are often linked to higher academic standards and improved learning outcomes. Research indicates that students tend to favor programs offered by institutions with modern facilities that cater to their preferred learning styles.

The accessibility of modern technology and resources such as computer labs, specialized equipment, and online learning platforms plays a crucial role in influencing students' program selections. Programs that utilize the latest technical tools are more effective in preparing students for their future careers, thus increasing their desirability. Such programs not only equip students for the job market but also attract individuals who are technologically proficient and career-oriented. For instance, disciplines like engineering, computer science, and healthcare often depend on advanced technology, making these fields particularly attractive to students when selecting their study paths (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

The article was authored by Thong, Ali and Rahim, (2021) explain that campus amenities, such as dining services, housing, and social spaces, are influential in student decision-making. A vibrant campus life is recognized for attracting students to programs by providing a more holistic educational experience beyond academics.

In addition, Universities that invest in their facilities are often perceived as committed to academic excellence. This perception can influence students' decisions to pursue advanced studies at institutions that demonstrate such dedication. Students may feel that a university's facilities are indicative of the resources and support available for further studies. Access to top-notch facilities can give students confidence in their decision to continue their education at that institution.

Overall, the quality and availability of university facilities exert a significant influence on students' program choices. Investments made in modern facilities, technological resources, and comprehensive support services enhance the likelihood of attracting and retaining students in their programs. Institutions that prioritize their infrastructure are often regarded as dedicated to academic excellence. High-quality facilities not only elevate the educational experience but also cultivate an environment in which students feel supported and inspired to achieve their academic objectives. As facilities are expanded and improved by universities, they will increasingly play a crucial role in shaping students' futures and encouraging them to pursue higher education.

2.3. Cost of Education

The expense of education is increasingly seen as one of the primary factors influencing program selection among university students. Growing concerns regarding the financial implications of higher education, driven by rising tuition fees and living costs, are being felt by both students and their families. Due to the high cost of higher education, many students are led to opt for less expensive programs or are discouraged from enrolling altogether. A recent study shows that 56% of individuals who have not pursued any postsecondary education cite cost as a significant barrier, highlighting how financial concerns often overshadow the perceived value of continuing education (Mowreader, 2024).

Enrollment is increasingly influenced by growing concerns over the affordability of education. As expenses continue to rise, many prospective students question whether they can afford a high-quality education. Consequently, more affordable alternatives, such as online courses or vocational training, are being considered as viable options. According to a survey by Inside Higher Ed, more than half of high school students ruled out certain institutions due to their high cost. Financial limitations play a significant role, as an increasing number of students rely on student loans to finance their education, leading to concerns about accumulating long-term debt. In fact, 46% of students plan to use federal loans, while 20% turn to private loans.

Additionally, around 31% of current college students are considering dropping out due to financial pressures.

For students seeking alternatives, several additional options can be considered where many Training Service Provider offer certification programs that can be completed quickly and are often more affordable than Tertiary education programme. Earning these certifications allows students to qualify for specialized roles in fields such as project management, IT, and healthcare in a relatively short amount of time. Studies, such as a quasi-experiment in Germany, have shown that the implementation or elevation of tuition fees is linked to a considerable decrease in enrollment rates, especially for lower-income students. It has been established that these results are consistent across different nations and educational systems, indicating a global phenomenon where the high cost of education acts as a deterrent to university enrollment (Espinoza et al., 2023).

2.4. Recommendations from Peers, Acquaintances, Parents and Social Media.

Choosing a university is one of the most complex decisions that students face, especially at such a critical point in their lives. Traditionally, factors like academic reputation, location, finances, and personal goals have been the main drivers behind this choice. But with social media and digital tools now in the mix, the whole decision-making process has gained a new twist.

Peer recommendations are recognized as playing a pivotal role in the decision-making processes of students, significantly influencing the selection of university programs. The perceptions of various institutions and their offerings can be shaped by the experiences and opinions of friends, family, and social media connections. Research indicates that endorsements from friends and family serve as social proof, reinforcing the value associated with specific universities and their programs (Shinde, 2022).

Furthermore, the influence of peer pressure is significantly shaped by the perceived reliability of the source. Recommendations from individuals regarded as trustworthy or knowledgeable about a particular subject or institution are more likely to leave an impression on students.

Moreover, research has indicated that peer groups can influence not only the selection of academic programs but also a student's overall academic trajectory. For instance, a study conducted at Ambo University found that peer recommendations were significant factors in determining students' career choices (Getachew & Defar, 2023). This illustrates how social dynamics can play a crucial role in shaping educational pathways, highlighting the complex interplay between social influence and academic decision-making.

3. Methodology

Primary data may be collected through various methods, including the distribution of questionnaires, telephone surveys, and interviews. The size of the sample will be significantly influenced by the considerable number of students involved in this research. Therefore, a quantitative research strategy utilizing the questionnaire method has been selected for its effectiveness in data collection. Respondents will be provided with the questionnaire via a designated URL and will complete it using the Google Forms platform.

The survey instrument employs a Likert scale to assess levels of agreement, with values ranging from 1 to 5. It is structured into two sections: Part A focuses on gathering demographic

information from the respondents, while Part B is dedicated to investigating the specific factors under this studies. This methodological framework is designed to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the research topic by collecting robust quantitative data.

The respondents will be selected randomly from the student population of Politeknik Mukah. According to information obtained from the Department of Student Affairs and Development (JHEPP) at Politeknik Mukah, the table below displays the latest enrollment statistics for new students for Session I: 2024/2025:

Table 1: Population for New Students at Politeknik Mukah by Programme

Academic Department	Total
Department of Civil Engineering:	
Diploma In Civil Engineering - DKA	100
Department of Electrical Engineering	
Diploma in Electrical and Electronic Engineering - DEE	77
Diploma in Electronic Engineering (Communication) - DEE	12
Department of Mechanical Engineering	
Diploma in Mechanical Engineering - DKM	106
The Information & Communication Technology Department	
Diploma in Information Technology - DIT	82
Commerce Department	
Diploma in Accountancy - DAT	74
Diploma in Business Studies - DPM	98
Diploma in Secretarial Science - DSK	100
	649

The sampling method employed in this study will be probability sampling. This approach is necessary due to the impracticality of collecting data from the entire student population. The sample size for the study will be determined using the procedure proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). As illustrated in the distribution below, this methodology will lead to the allocation of 242 questionnaires across various programme in Politeknik Mukah.

Table 2: Sample Size in each Academic Department of Politeknik Mukah

Academic Department	Total
Department of Civil Engineering:	
Diploma In Civil Engineering - DKA	37
Department of Electrical Engineering	
Diploma in Electrical and Electronic Engineering - DEE	29
Diploma in Electronic Engineering (Communication) - DEE	4
Department of Mechanical Engineering	
Diploma in Mechanical Engineering - DKM	39
The Information & Communication Technology Department	
Diploma in Information Technology - DIT	31
Commerce Department	
Diploma in Accountancy - DAT	28
Diploma in Business Studies - DPM	37
Diploma in Secretarial Science - DSK	37
	242

The above table describe the sample size from the population of new enrollment in Politeknik Mukah for session I:2024/2025. The results will be examined and the means for each question will be determined using SPSS statistical software. The mean scores were interpreted by the researcher using Moidunny's (2009) methodology, which is as follows:

Table 3: Interpretation Method of Mean score

Mean Score	Level
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.20	Medium
3.21 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very High

4. Finding and Analysis

Table 4: Demographic Analysis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	Less than 18 Years old	8	3.3	3.3	3.3
	18 – 20 Years Old	227	93.8	93.8	97.1
	20 – 25 Years Old	7	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	242	100.0	100.0	
Religion	Islam	96	39.7	39.7	39.7
	Christian	134	55.4	55.4	95.0
	Hindu	1	.4	.4	95.5
	Buddha	3	1.2	1.2	96.7
	Others	8	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	242	100.0	100.0	
Gender	Male	111	45.9	45.9	45.9
	Female	131	54.1	54.1	100.0
	Total	242	100.0	100.0	

A full set of data was obtained from 242 respondents, encompassing the entire population of new students at Politeknik Mukah. From the chosen respondents, 93.8%, or 227 respondents, are aged between 18 and 20 years. In terms of religion, Christians are the largest group, comprising 55.4% of respondents, followed by Islam at 39.7%. The remaining respondents identify as Hindu, Buddhist, or others. The gender distribution shows a higher number of female respondents with 131 respondents compared to their male only 111 respondents.

Does the Programme that you currently enrolled in is your first choice?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	177	73.1	73.1	73.1
	No	65	26.9	26.9	100.0
	Total	242	100.0	100.0	

A total of 177 respondents confirmed that the registered program was their first choice, while the remaining 65 indicated that it was not their preferred option. This may be because the

selected program failed to meet the specified requirements or faced competition from other students.

Does the Programme that you currently enrolled in is among your choice?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	231	95.5	95.5	95.5
	No	11	4.5	4.5	100.0
Total		242	100.0	100.0	

An impressive 95.5% of respondents indicated that the program they enrolled in was one of their preferred choices when seeking to advance their studies. This suggests that most respondents are continuing their education in accordance with their preferences.

Table 5: Quality Assurance Statistics

		The Learning Centre has clear goals and objectives for its program to be my choice.	Curriculum is constantly reviewed and updated to meet industry standards is my priority.	Qualified and knowledgeable faculty members in their respective fields provide more benefits to students.	I prefer Learning Centre that maintains accreditation from recognized bodies.	Overall, I am satisfied with the top quality assurance measures by the Learning Centre.
N	Valid	242	242	242	242	242
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		4.32	4.28	4.41	4.17	4.28
Median		4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
Mode		5	5	5	5	5
Std. Deviation		.790	.791	.753	.864	.866

According to Table 5, the mean scores for the Quality Assurance factors influencing students' program selection at the Learning Center are notably very high. All items scored above 4.21, except for the fourth item, which recorded a score of 4.17. Nonetheless, this minor difference still places the rating within the high range, consistent with Moidunny's (2009) approach.

These figures demonstrate that students view the Quality Assurance of a program and study center as paramount. This is because quality significantly contributes to a student's development and adds substantial value to their overall experience. This has also been demonstrated in prior research, where Quality assurance not only enhances internal operations but also elevates the institution's global profile. Accreditation by recognized agencies and adherence to international quality assurance standards increase the attractiveness to students and faculty (Al-Ramahi & Odeh, 2020).

Table 6: Learning Centre Facilities Statistics

		Easy access to resources and facilities for learning is my priority.	Adequate resources provided to support student-centered learning is my priority (eg, library, laboratory, technology).	Insufficient facilities and resources hinder the effectiveness of the implemented programs.	Insufficient facilities and resources lead to frustration and boredom.	Due to insufficient facilities, I was unable to concentrate well during classes.	The provision of excellent facilities in educational institutions can impact my academic performance.
N	Valid	242	242	242	242	242	242
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	4.37	4.41	4.32	4.41	4.14	4.29
	Median	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
	Mode	5	5	5	5	5	5
	Std. Deviation	.826	.775	.790	.753	.935	.834

As shown in Table 6, the Learning Center Facilities factor achieved a notably high average mean. The facilities at the study center are a critical factor influencing students' decisions to pursue a particular program, as they contribute to student satisfaction when they are sufficient and comfortable. Furthermore, this factor significantly influences student performance, as access to well-equipped and comfortable facilities directly enhances their ability to focus, engage, and excel in their academic endeavors.

Research has shown that modern, well-equipped facilities have a significant impact on student academic achievement. The availability of advanced laboratories, huge libraries, and collaborative learning spaces provides students with critical resources for complete learning, which helps to increase both grades and information retention. Notably, a study found a strong relationship between educational facility quality and student results, particularly in areas that need practical application, such as STEM subjects (Gao & Sun, 2024).

Table 7: Cost of Education Statistics

		Financial burden will affect my educational performance.	I prefer programs that don't require significant financial commitments.	The substantial financial demands of education would place a considerable burden on me.	I have no objection to make significant financial investments in my education.	The substantial cost of pursuing further studies in a particular program presents a significant barrier to my continuation.	I am willing to take on a significant loan to continue the program I am passionate about.
N	Valid	242	242	242	242	242	242
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	4.32	4.06	4.17	3.36	4.28	3.17
	Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00
	Mode	5	5	5	3	5	3

Std. Deviation	.790	.958	.864	1.043	.866	1.217
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The cost of education has an impact not just on students' ability to enrol and complete their studies, but also on their overall academic experience and future employment opportunities. The mean analysis for this factor indicated a high level, ranging from 3.21 to 4.20. This indicates that students view financial difficulties as a substantial concern, which can significantly impact their choice of academic programs.

Rising education costs not only impact students' decisions to continue their studies but also influence where and what they choose to study. High tuition fees at prestigious institutions or in certain fields, such as medicine or law, often push students to choose less expensive colleges or majors with lower future income potential, which may limit their career prospects (Wolla et al., 2023).

Table 8: Recommendations from peers, acquaintances, parents and social media.
 Statistics

		The decision to continue studying in the program is based on the advice and recommendations of my family members.	Peer influence plays a significant role in the selection of programs at the Learning Centre.	The programs chosen at the Learning Centre are largely guided by the input of peers.	The selection of programs is substantially affected by social media trends.	I remain unaffected by the opinions of those around me and I am willing to continue my studies in any program I desire.
N	Valid	242	242	242	242	242
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	4.43	4.29	4.39	4.34	4.14
	Median	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
	Mode	5	5	5	5	5
	Std. Deviation	.739	.830	.756	.768	.935

According to Table 8, this component also yielded a mean score exceeding 4.21 for each item, indicating a very high value. Students agree that their program selection at the study center is influenced by recommendations from peers, acquaintances, parents and social media.

This is supported by previous studies by Wu et al., 2023, Students are heavily influenced by their peers when choosing to continue education. Peer groups create social norms that encourage educational aspirations and the pursuit of specific academic paths. Parental expectations, particularly in financially dependent families, play a critical role. Parents often influence not just the decision to continue education but also the choice of institution or field of study.

Table 9: Multiple Regression Analysis
 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.929 ^a	.864	.861	.256	1.959

a. Predictors: (Constant), ALL_IV4, ALL_IV3, ALL_IV2, ALL_IV1

b. Dependent Variable: ALLDV

Based on the table above, Multiple Regression Analysis is employed to assess whether the independent variable under consideration can predict or exert a significant influence on the dependent variable. The results of the regression analysis revealed a noteworthy finding: the independent variable accounted for a substantial 86.4% of the variance observed in the dependent variable ($r = .929$). This highlights the significant contribution of the independent variable, equating to 86.4%, to the factors that influence program selection at the Learning center. Furthermore, the strong positive correlation indicates a unidirectional relationship between all independent variables and the dependent variable.

4. Conclusion

In summary, numerous main elements strongly influence students' judgements when choosing academic programs at institutions. Quality of Education emerges as a significant consideration, with students preferring institutions with good curricula, experienced staff, and high graduation rates. Through accreditation, quality is demonstrated to prospective students and stakeholders, enhancing reputation and attracting higher-caliber students and faculty members (Javed & Alenezi, 2023).

Financial Considerations are likewise deemed essential, as students evaluate tuition costs, the availability of scholarships, and the potential return on investment regarding future earning potential. This reluctance frequently leads to lower enrolment rates, especially among low-income students and those from underprivileged areas. As a result, students may prefer shorter, less expensive programs or practical training over costly university degrees (Castleman and Meyer, 2019).

Besides that, the facilities and resources provided by the institution, such as libraries, laboratories, and technology, have a substantial impact on students' judgements of program quality. Modern campus facilities that promote social connections—such as student lounges, study hubs, and common areas—actively foster a sense of community. This feeling of belonging is crucial for students' emotional and social engagement, leading to positive learning experiences and enhanced academic performance (Hanaysha et al., 2023; other sources). Finally, peer influence and family expectations might influence students' decisions, as advice and support from family and friends frequently play an important role in decision-making. Research indicates that strong parental support can enhance students' self-efficacy, leading them to pursue higher education. In cultures where family approval is paramount, parents' recommendations can be decisive in students' educational trajectories (Oguguo et al., 2020).

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