

A Quantitative Study of Higher Institutional Marketability Factors

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of this research was to investigate reasons why students chose university of Uyo and the extent to which each reason determines the students' choice. The research design was causal comparative (ex-post facto). The target population was all the Post University Matriculation Examination (PUME) candidates that applied for the 2012/2013 academic year admission into the University of Uyo. A cross section of 243 candidates was used. Validity of Marketability Factors for Institutional Attractiveness Questionnaire (MFIAQ) was documented and the internal consistency of the instrument was obtained with the Cronbach's alpha as .72. The research questions formulated to guide the study were analysed using measures of central tendency (the mean) frequency, percentage and ranks. Data collected were analyzed and results tabulated with the relevant headings using percentages and frequencies. The results were that some factors actually instigate the institutional marketability than others; many candidates did not take into consideration whether the school is a Federal State institution or not; its broad or narrow education to prepare one for the future; and their gut feelings. Recommendations were given based on the results as stated.

Keywords: Quantitative Study, Higher Institution, Marketability Factors

INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, many students would rather choose other universities, both within and outside Nigeria for their studies than study in the University of Uyo. Parents would not mind paying so much for their wards to attain such institutions of higher learning; instead of allowing them to choose the University of Uyo. In recent time, the trend has changed to the opposite direction. From 2002 to 2009, the total students' enrolment in the institution increased notably from a little too much thousands. The University now witnesses application from so many students seeking admission to study one course or the other. A typical example is the 2012/2013 academic session where 35,000 candidates who registered for both Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) and the Post University Matriculation Examination (PUME) candidates chose the University of Uyo as their first and second choices respectively. This number exceeded the 5000 benchmark capacity given by the Nigerian University Commission (NUC), notwithstanding the growth in the number of public and private higher education institutions in Nigeria.

Reasons for the level of institutional marketability (promotion or awareness) seem to vary among individual candidates; and institutional characteristics. This study is particularly important though little empirical evidence exists that explores this issue. Among the studies reported is an examination of the institutional characteristics which affect the attractiveness of colleges and universities to bright, prospective students. The result showed that of 28 selected variables: low tuition, well-credentialed faculty, research orientation, and fiscal

strength appeared as the important factors in raising institutional attractiveness (Anderson, 1976).

In a similar study, Brown (2007) examined the factors that make a medical school attractive (or otherwise) to potential students and found that three categories of medical school attributes stood out as positive determinants of choice: academic factors (with reputation considered the most important), location factors (specifically preferences for particular cities) and intangibles (gut feelings and personal contacts and recommendations). According to Brown, most of the students' decision-making activity was undertaken during the admissions stage of the application process.

Fernandez (2010) found, among factors influencing the decision of students to study at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) that, students pursue higher education to improve their job prospects and to gain knowledge and experience. This study shows that students choose tertiary institutions based on information gathered from various sources, of which, the Internet is the most popular. A student's preference for a public institution is influenced primarily by considerations of quality of education and pecuniary factors. Finally, the decision to study at USM was attributed to USM's strong business links, good reputation, adequate, facilities, and availability of programmes and courses that suit the students' needs.

According to the recently published results of the 2011 National Student Survey, Leicester was the top University in England for student satisfaction after Oxford and Cambridge. The reasons why students chose to study at the University of Leicester were recounted to include student satisfaction; a top-ranking institution; a compact and friendly campus where an experience that is different and special is offered, with all teaching buildings within a few minutes' walk of each other; teaching that inspires; and an exceptional learning environment where excellent teaching reputation is matched by the quality of the learning environment; high quality resources, facilities and support services that are provided for students' learning and studies.

Executive Director, Office of Admissions in Melbourne (2011) gave 10 reasons why students should choose the University of Melbourne. According to the author, the university has an international reputation, globally recognised degrees and is ranked Number 1 in Australia; offers research-led teaching and in-depth disciplinary knowledge; provides excellent career and personal development opportunities; is located on a beautiful campus with historic sandstone architecture; has technologically advanced learning spaces; has internationally renowned teaching staff; is easily accessible via public transport and has fantastic cafes, arts and sports venues at their doorstep; gives outstanding career prospects (as ranked number ninth in the world for graduate employability); has educational and professional opportunities for one to pursue either within Australia or internationally; and lifelong connections as one becomes a member of their alumni community. Another set of reasons were given on why students chose to go to University of Canada and USA to include a prestigious education, success, broad education to prepare one for the future, and flexibility (Institute of International Education, 2012).

Cokgezen (2012) examined determinants of university choice in Turkey using school level data. Regression results showed that tuition, the population of the city in which the university is located, academic performance of the university and language of instruction are important determinants of university choice. The results also revealed that the impact of tuition is higher for public university students, while private university students care more about academic performance than do their counterparts in public universities.

The factors so presented by various researchers do not vary so much from another. Nevertheless, this study will investigated whether some of these factors could determine the marketability of the University of Uyo, to students and if so, to what extent would each factor determine her marketability

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Most evaluative studies on university choice of students have always employed the qualitative approach. Among the few that are done quantitatively, no comprehensive study has been conducted on the students’ choice of an institutional marketability in Nigeria. Therefore, reasons why students chose university of Uyo and the extent to which each reason determines the students’ choice are the main focus of this research. In other words, why do students choose university of Uyo and to what extent does each reason determine the students’ choice?

METHOD

The research design was causal comparative (ex-post facto). The target population was all the Post University Matriculation Examination (PUME) candidates that applied for the 2012/2013 academic year admission into the University of Uyo. A cross section of 243 candidates who accepted to participate in the study was used. Validity of Marketability Factors for Institutional Attractiveness Questionnaire (MFIAQ) was documented and the internal consistency of the instrument was obtained with the Cronbach’s alpha as .72. The research questions formulated to guide the study were analysed using measures of central tendency (the mean) frequency, percentage and ranks. Data collected were analyzed and results tabulated with the relevant headings using percentages and frequencies.

RESULT

Table 1. Frequency and percentage results for higher institutional marketability factors (HIMF)

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Marketability Factors for Institutional Attractiveness</i>	<i>SA Freq (%)</i>	<i>A Freq (%)</i>	<i>D Freq (%)</i>	<i>SD Freq (%)</i>
1.	Low tuition	77 (31.7)	142 (58.4)	2 (.8)	22 (9.1)
2.	Well-credentialed faculty	97 (6.6)	130 (53.5)	-	16 (6.6)
3.	Research orientation	51 (21.0)	147 (60.5)	29 (11.9)	16 (6.6)
4.	Fiscal strength	145 (50.7)	66 (27.2)	25 (10.3)	7 (2.9)
5.	Federal institution	55 (22.6)	62 (25.5)	78 (32.1)	48 (19.8)
6.	Gut feelings	6 (2.5)	72 (29.6)	87 (35.8)	78 (32.1)
7.	Personal contacts with the school	63 (25.9)	93 (38.3)	66 (27.2)	21 (8.6)
8.	People’s recommendations about the school	114 (46.9)	114 (46.9)	6 (2.5)	9 (3.7)
9.	Personal satisfaction	80 (32.9)	138 (56.8)	16 (6.6)	9 (3.7)
10.	Top-ranking institution	77 (31.7)	81 (33.3)	40 (16.5)	45 (18.5)

11.	Compact/ friendly campus	65 (26.7)	115 (47.3)	40 (16.5)	23 (9.5)
12.	Experience that is different/ special is offered	57 (23.5)	90 (37.0)	31 (12.6)	65 (26.7)
13.	All lecture halls located within a few minutes' walk of each other;	67 (27.6)	144 (59.3)	23 (9.5)	9 (3.7)
14.	Teaching that inspires	122 (50.2)	109 (44.9)	3 (1.2)	9 (3.7)
15.	Exceptional learning environment where excellent teaching reputation is matched by the quality of learning environments	106 (43.6)	99 (40.7)	16 (6.6)	22 (9.1)
16.	High quality resources are provided for students' learning and studies.	92 (37.9)	129 (53.1)	9 (3.7)	13 (5.3)
17.	High quality facilities are provided for students' learning and studies.	60 (24.7)	118 (48.6)	41 (16.9)	24 (9.9)
18.	High quality support services are provided for students' learning and studies.	81 (33.3)	118 (48.6)	30 (12.3)	14 (5.8)
19.	Good language of instruction	71 (29.2)	118 (48.6)	45 (18.5)	9 (3.7)
20.	International reputation	83 (34.2)	118 (48.6)	24 (9.9)	18 (7.4)
21.	Globally recognized degrees	87 (35.8)	120 (49.4)	18 (7.4)	18 (7.4)
22.	Research-led teaching	85 (35.0)	134 (55.1)	6 (2.5)	18 (7.4)
23.	In-depth disciplinary practice	99 (40.7)	142 (58.4)	2 (.8)	-
24.	Provides excellent career development opportunities	84 (34.6)	114 (46.9)	27 (11.1)	18 (7.4)
25.	Provides excellent personal development opportunities	49 (20.2)	99 (40.7)	47 (19.3)	48 (19.8)
26.	Located on a beautiful campus	80 (32.9)	73 (30.0)	50 (20.6)	40 (16.5)
27.	Historic sandstone architecture	83 (34.2)	86 (35.4)	41 (16.9)	33 (13.6)
28.	Technologically advanced learning spaces	53 (21.8)	108 (44.4)	52 (21.4)	30 (12.3)
29.	Internationally renowned teaching staff	104 (42.8)	81 (33.3)	18 (7.4)	40 (16.5)
30.	Easily accessible via public transport	43 (17.7)	99 (40.7)	41 (16.9)	60 (24.7)
31.	Fantastic internet cafes	61 (25.1)	86 (35.4)	50 (20.6)	46 (18.9)
32.	Arts/ sports venues at our doorstep	87 (35.8)	125 (51.4)	22 (9.1)	9 (3.7)
33.	Outstanding career prospects (as ranked high for graduate employability)	80 (32.9)	131 (53.9)	32 (13.2)	-
34.	Educational/ professional opportunities	82 (33.7)	128 (52.7)	15 (6.2)	18 (7.4)
35.	Lifelong connections as one become a member of their alumni community	78 (32.1)	145 (59.7)	11 (4.5)	9 (3.7)
36.	Prestigious education success	97 (39.9)	87 (35.8)	5 (2.1)	54 (22.2)

37.	Broad education to prepare one for the future	52 (21.4)	64 (26.3)	55 (22.6)	72 (29.6)
38.	Takes me away from home/my parents	86 (35.4)	114 (46.9)	34 (14.0)	9 (3.7)
39.	High quality of education	37 (15.2)	143 (58.8)	50 (20.6)	13 (5.3)
40.	Strong business links	78 (32.1)	149 (61.3)	7 (2.9)	9 (3.7)
41.	Good reputation	62 (25.5)	120 (49.4)	34 (14.0)	27 (11.1)
42.	Adequate facilities	73 (30.0)	141 (58.0)	29 (11.9)	-
43.	Availability of programmes/courses that suit the students' needs	106 (43.6)	111 (45.7)	26 (10.7)	-

Source: Author's calculations using data from the respondents in the study.

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; Freq = Frequency. Entries in Table 1 reveal that all but three factors of higher institution marketability contribute to the choice of many candidates for the University of Uyo. The three factors that do not appeal to many candidates are: being a Federal institution; candidates' gut feelings; and providing broad education to prepare one for the future.

Table 2. Mean and rank results for HIMF

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Higher Institution Marketability Factors</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Ranks</i>
1.	Fiscal strength of the institution	243	3.4362	1
2.	Teaching that inspires	243	3.4156	2
3.	In-depth disciplinary knowledge	243	3.3992	3
4.	People's recommendations about the school	243	3.3704	4
5.	Availability of programmes/courses that suit the students' needs	243	3.3292	5
6.	Well-credentialed faculty	243	3.2675	6
7.	High quality resources are provided for students' learning and studies.	243	3.2346	7
8.	Strong business links	243	3.2181	8
9.	Lifelong connections as one become a member Of their alumni community	243	3.2016	9
10.	Outstanding career prospects (as ranked high for graduate employability)	243	3.1975	10
11.	Arts/ sports venues at students' doorstep	243	3.1934	11
12.	Personal satisfaction	243	3.1893	12.5
13.	Exceptional learning environment where excellent teaching reputation is matched by the quality of learning environments	243	3.1893	12.5
14.	Adequate facilities	243	3.1811	14
15.	Research-led teaching	243	3.1770	15

16.	Away from home/my parents	243	3.1399	16
17.	Globally recognized degrees	243	3.1358	17
18.	Low tuition	243	3.1276	18.5
19.	Educational/ professional opportunities	243	3.1276	18.5
20.	All teaching buildings within a few minutes' walk of each other;	243	3.1070	20
21.	High quality support services are provided for students' learning and studies.	243	3.0947	21.5
22.	An international reputation	243	3.0947	21.5
23.	Provides excellent career development opportunities	243	3.0864	23
24.	Good language of the instruction	243	3.0329	24
25.	Internationally renowned teaching staff	243	3.0247	25
26.	Its research orientation	243	2.9588	26
27.	A prestigious education success	243	2.9342	27
28.	A compact/ friendly campus	243	2.9136	28
29.	Historic sandstone architecture	243	2.9012	29
30.	Good reputation	243	2.8930	30
31.	High quality facilities are provided for students' learning and studies.	243	2.8807	31
32.	Quality of education	243	2.8395	32
33.	Personal contacts with the school	243	2.8148	33
34.	Located on a beautiful campus	243	2.7942	34
35.	A top-ranking institution	243	2.7819	35
36.	Technologically advanced learning spaces	243	2.7572	36
37.	Fantastic cafes	243	2.6667	37
38.	Excellent personal development opportunities	243	2.6132	38
39.	Experience that is different/ special is offered	243	2.5720	39
40.	Easily accessible via public transport	243	2.5144	40
41.	A federal institution	243	2.5103	41
42.	Broad education to prepare one for the future	243	2.3951	42
43.	Gut feelings	243	2.0247	43

Source: Author's calculations using data from the respondents in the study.

Note: HIMF =Higher Institution Marketability Factors; N =Number

In Table 2, mean and rank results for HIMF are presented. The items are ranked according to the mean results which range between 2.0247 to 3.4362. The mean shows the extent to which each factor contributes to the marketability of the University of Uyo to the candidates. Therefore, those factors with the mean above 2.5 are said to contribute highly, while those below 2.5 contribute lowly to higher institutional marketability.

DISCUSSION

The meta analysis of the factors that contribute to higher institutional marketability revealed that some factors actually instigate the institutional marketability than others. This was shown by the level of determination when compared with other factors. The study revealed that many candidates did not take into consideration whether the school is a Federal institution or not; its broad or narrow education to prepare one for the future; and their gut feelings. This might have resulted from the fact that some states and private Universities perform better in facilities, academic activities, among others, than some Federal institutions in the Country. Moreover, the candidates may not have known the type of the institution as the item did not specify; and did not want to be carried away with mere feeling about a particular university.

The low rating of a factor like whether an institution has a broad education shows the level of ignorance of candidates who seek university admission in Nigeria. There is much rush to get university education to the detriment of entering into vocational areas or taking other educational options like studying in the polytechnique and the college of education. These other higher educational options do not usually have enough candidates for admission. The finding rather contradicts that of Institute of Education (2012) that students chose to attend the University of Canada and USA because they have broad education to prepare one for the future.

The result on students' gut feelings agrees with Brown's (2007) findings that higher educational institutions do not appeal to candidates on the basis of their gut feelings. High rating of factors like students' satisfaction, and top ranking university agree with the 2011 National students Survey in Leicester, England. Other factors like low tuition, well credential faculty are in consonance with Andersons (1976) findings; while school location, academic performance, international reputation, globally recognised degree are supported by the findings by Fernandez (2010), Office of Admission, University of Melbourne (2011), and Cokgezen (2012).

The results are important in explaining that the students in the sample rated staying away from home highly than other factors that other candidates would have rated high. The results also suggest that few of the important attributes rated high could have been rated by error by the participants. This calls for marketing higher educational institutions with clear tips to guide the candidates in their choice of educational institutions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

These findings could not have been otherwise because everybody wants to be a success in life, especially at this age of the ICT. People want to be associated with good things. Therefore, candidates' choice of the University of Uyo based on the marketability factors surveyed is not surprising, rather, those finding should be maintained and improved upon by the management and other members of the school community. However, health factors were not included among the ones studied. Therefore, they should be considered in future study of factors of higher institutional marketability. Besides, groupings of items on higher institutional marketability into categories like institutional facilities, academic content/coverage, and reputation, among others, is highly recommended.

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