**FACTORS INFLUENCING 12TH GRADE STUDENT’S DECISIONS TO CHOOSE THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS, HUE UNIVERSITY IN THUA THIEN HUE PROVINCE**

**Abstract**

This study examines factors influencing decisions to choose the University of Economics, Hue University among 12th grade students in Thua Thien Hue Province. The quota sampling technique is applied to collect 200 students being enrolled in the University of Economics, Hue University. Research results of multiple linear regression models show that university characteristics, employability potential offered by the major, reference groups, communication activities and personal characteristics of students are five factors affecting 12th grade students' choice of the University of Economic, Hue University.

**Keyword:** 12th grade students, factors influencing decisions, University of Economics.

**1. Introduction**

A good education system is one of the key foundations for national development. Within the context of Vietnam, higher education is the highest level in the national education system and plays a key role in training and developing high-quality human resources. Students at this level are equipped with basic and advanced professional knowledge, as well as skills needed for career development in the future. In reality, most high school students have problems in choosing majors and universities after graduating from national high school examinations. According to Nu Vuong (2021), experts in the field of admissions argued that students often choose majors based on emotions, tendencies or family orientations without considering carefully whether their chosen field is suitable for them. Choosing inappropriate universities and majors can create amiss choices that lead to the inability to fully utilize capabilities, reduced productivity and efficiency in studying and working and difficulty in getting jobs after graduation. Therefore, it wastes resources of students and society.

On the supply side of the education market, a social enterprise in the higher education sector leads to an increase in competition among universities, creating both opportunities and threats for high school students’ choices. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), Vietnam has 236 universities, of which 171 are public and 65 are non-public [4]. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Training has reformed national high school exams and university entrance examinations in recent years. These two factors are increasing the intensity of competition among universities in attracting potential students. As higher education competition rises, the need for a better understanding of how high school students choose which universities to attend (and majors thereof) is becoming more pressing for each university.

**2. Literature review and Hypotheses**

**2.1. Customers**

Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, defined customers as those who are willing to pay for goods and services, who make economic resources into wealth; and materials into goods [11]. He emphasized the importance of customers to the success of companies, and that one of companies’ goals is to create customers.

Bean (quoted in Kotler, 2003) said that “the customer is the most important person to our company. They don't depend on us, we depend on them. They are not outsiders but a part of our business. When we serve our customers, we are not only helping them but also they are helping us by giving us the opportunity to serve” [13].

As may be clear, the customer is an important part of the business operation, who plays a pivotal role in the existence and development of the enterprise. Kotler divided customers into two groups: individual customers, who are also final consumers (including individuals and households) and organizational customers (including manufacturing firms, commercial enterprises, government organizations and non-profit organizations) [14].

**2.2. Customers Buying Behavior**

The concept of consumer buying behaviour has been accorded several definitions by several authors. Kotler et al. (2018) defined consumer behaviour as a reflection of the buying behaviour of the final consumer - the individuals and households that buy goods and services for personal consumption [14]. According to Solomon (2017), consumer behaviour is a process that involves an individual or a group of people choosing, buying, using or discarding a product or service, ideas or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants [18]. Schiffman and Wisenblit defined consumer behaviour as consumers’ actions in the process of finding, buying, using, evaluating and rejecting products or services that they expect to satisfy their needs [17]. Vu Huy Thong (2010) argued that consumer behaviour is the behaviour that consumers conduct in searching, evaluating, buying and freely using products and services that they expect they will satisfy their needs and wants [6].

Neal et al. (2004) contended that consumer behaviour explains how and why consumers choose to buy a good or service [15]. The American Marketing Association (cited in Peter & Olson, 2002) defined consumer behaviour as interactions among cognition, affect, behaviours, and the environmental events, by which people conduct exchange activities in their lives [16]. According to this view, consumer behaviour is dynamic, interactive and related to exchange activities.

As per the definitions mentioned above, the concept of customer behaviour refers to a human process in which an individual forms a response to one’s own needs. This process includes the awareness and action on a consumer’s part.

**2.3 Factors affecting customer decisions**

Prior research has attempted to establish factors affecting customer decisions and behaviours. Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015) recognise the customer as an individual and being affected by socio-cultural characteristics. These two sets of factors, Schiffman and Wisenblit argue, influence customer behaviour. Personal factors include motivation, personality, awareness, attitude, and reception whereas socio-cultural factors include family and social norms, cultural impacts, cultural branches and cultural variation [17].

Neal et al. (2004) divided the impact factors into two groups: internal and external factors. The group of internal factors includes awareness, reception and remembering, motivations, personality and emotions, and attitudes of consumers. The group of external factors includes social characteristics, household structure, reference or influence group, social class, and culture [15]. Solomon (2017) also has the same division as Neal et al. However, in addition to the above factors, Solomon added factors related to the consumer's personal characteristics such as self-opinion, gender characteristics, self-image [18].

Kotler (2018) has a fairly comprehensive view of the factors affecting customer behaviour. He proposes factors affecting customer behaviour as including (1) cultural factors which comprise culture, cultural branch and social class; (2) social factors which include reference group and social networks, family, role and personal status; (3) personal factors comprising age and life cycle, occupation, economic status, lifestyle, personality and self-image and (4) psychological factors which comprise motivation, awareness, reception, beliefs and attitudes [14].

**2.4 Hypotheses and Research model**

There are three main groups of models researching factors that influence university choice among high school students, which includes economic models, sociological models and information processing models. In this paper, the information processing model, especially that proposed by Chapman (1981) is used. According to Chapman, in the process of choosing a university, students are strongly influenced by the advice of their friends and family. These individuals, Chapman argues, influence students’ choices in three ways: (1) their opinions on a particular university shape the students’ expectations of a particular university; (2) they can give direct advice on where students should apply and (3) in the case of close friends, the place where best friends apply can influence the student’s university choice [10].

The reference group factor is also experimentally proven by domestic researchers Tran Van Qui and Cao Hao Thi (2009) [5]; Nguyen Minh Ha et al (2011) [1]; Nguyen Ngoc Thi Kim Loan (2017) [3]; Vu Thi Hue et al (2017) [7].

Furthermore, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) affirmed that besides the strong impact of parents, friends are also one of the strong influences on students' decisions to choose universities.

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) also said that individuals at the students’ high school also have a significant effect on the student’s university choice [12]. Considering the educational conditions of Vietnam, one group of individuals which has a great influence on the students’ university choice is their high school teachers. Therefore, in this paper, family, parents, siblings, close friends and high school teachers are considered as the factors influencing students’ university choice.

Accordingly, hypotheses are proposed:

**H1: The larger the reference groups influence on students’ choice of university is, the more likely the students are to choose that university.**

Chapman (1981) proposed that fixed factors of the university such as tuition fees, geographic location, cost support policy or dormitory environment will influence the student’s decision to choose a university. Burns (2006) added a number of factors about university characteristics in his research. Specifically, scholarship factors, dormitory safety conditions, the quality of the students at the university, the degree of popularity and the reputation of the school, the competitive rate of application, the school’s benchmarks, and the level of the attractiveness of the major field are among the factors that influence students’ university choice [8]. Vietnamese authors such as Luu Chi Danh and Lam Ngoc Le (2018) [2], Tran Van Qui and Cao Hao Thi (2009) [5], Nguyen Ngoc Thi Kim Loan (2017) [3]; Vu Thi Hue et al (2017) [7] also demonstrated that this is a variable influencing the student's choice of school.

As a result of above literature, hypothesis H2 is proposed as follows:

**H2: The better the characteristics of the university are, the more likely the students are to choose that university.**

Chapman also specifically emphasised the influence of the school’s communication efforts with students on students’ university choice. Universities’ images are improved through activities to introduce and advertise the universities to potential students such as introducing scholarships or exchange programmes, advertising on magazines and television and cultural and sports activities to attract the interest of students and their families. Chapman also argued that the availability of documents and materials affect the student’s school choice process. Choosing a school is, for students, a decision that requires a lot of information. Therefore, the quality of information and the availability of information in available documents such as websites or other printed materials will be a significant support in a student’s choice.

According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), direct school visits or school introductions also influence students’ school choice.

Based on factors to do with the school’s communication efforts with students such as school visits, participation in school presentations, scholarship recommendations, newspaper, magazine or television advertisements and completeness and quality of the information provided in the available documents, hypothesis 3 is proposed as follows:

**H3: The more effort the university puts into communication with students, the more likely the students are to choose that university.**

According to Cabera and La Nasa (2000), in addition to expectations about learning, expectations about future jobs are also one of the factors affecting students’ decisions to choose schools [9]. Washburn et al. (2000) argued that students’ readiness for work and the possibility to find a job after graduation are factors affecting the students’ college choice [19]. …

Thus, we hypothesize:

**H4: The higher the employability potential after graduating from a university is, the more likely the students are to choose that university.**

Chapman argued that the individual factors of the students are one of the groups of influences on their university choice. Among those, the factors of the students’ own abilities and interests are the most obvious influences on the university choice.

Thus, we hypothesise:

**H6: The more relevant to the students’ competencies interests the majors in the university are, the more likely the students are to choose that university.**

Base on the hypotheses mentioned above, we present our complete model of factors influencing university choice of grade 12th students in Thua Thien Hue Province in the diagram below.

Reference group

University characteristics

Communication activities of the university

Employability potential

Personal characteristics of students

University Choice

**Diagram 1: Research model**

**3. Methods**

The research model includes one dependent variable and five groups of independent variables. With an independent impact relationship, the measurement and estimation of the influence of each group of independent variables on the dependent variable were performed through multiple linear regression models.

Regarding the surveyed sample, based on the data reported internally by the Admission Advisory Board of University of Economics, Hue University, the authors identified a number of high schools in Thua Thien Hue province whose students have been enrolled to the University of Economics, Hue University in large numbers over the years.

Thereafter, this research applied the quota sampling method with the quota allocation criteria being the proportion of high school students enrolled to the University of Economics, Hue University. Then, we applied direct investigative approaches to collect all 200 samples.

To measure and estimate the impact of factors on students’ university choice, the authors inherited the related studies of Chapman (1981) [10], Tran Van Quy and Cao Hao Thi (2009). ) [5], Vu Thi Hue, Le Dinh Hai, and Nguyen Van Phu (2017) [7] and Nguyen Minh Ha, Huynh Gia Xuyen and Huynh Thi Kim Tuyet (2011) [1] and combined qualitative surveys to build the scale.

**Table 1. Research scale**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Factors | Scale | sources |
| Personal characteristics of students | The family's economic condition is guaranteed | Chapman (1981) and authors’ qualitative research results |
| Self-gifted in accordance with the field of study |
| Expect the chosen studying field to have good prospects in the future |
| Good high school study results |
| Individual hobbies are relevant to the field of study |
| University characteristics | The school’s location is convenient | Chapman (1981), Burns (2006), Danh & Le (2018), Qui & Thi (2009), Loan (2017), Hue, Hai & Phu (2017) and authors’ qualitative research results |
| The cost of studying is suitable |
| Good learning environment |
| Attractive and appropriate curriculum |
| Benchmark level matching capacity |
| Popularity of the school |
| The facilities are good |
| Teachers are of high quality |
| There are abundant extracurricular activities |
| Reference group | I choose a major that is influenced by teachers | Chapman (1981), Hossler & Gallagher (1987), Qui & Thi (2009), Ha, Xuyen & Tuyet (2011), Loan (2017), Hue, Hai & Phu (2017) and authors’ qualitative research results |
| I choose a major that is influenced by my parents |
| I choose a major that is influenced by my siblings |
| I choose a major that is influenced by my friends |
| I choose a field of study that is influenced by an admissions advisory staff |
| Communication activities of the university | Enrollment orientation sessions have good information content | Chapman (1981), Hossler & Gallagher (1987) |
| The school's website is full of information |
| Experience programs of Youth Union, Student Union is attractive |
| Advertising channels are full information |
| Employability potential | Chances of finding a job are high | Cabrera & Nasa (2000), Washburn, Garton & Vaughn (2000) |
| Opportunity to find a job with high income |
| Chances of finding a job with a good social position |

**4. Research results**

Statistics on sample characteristics based on 200 survey elements including students who want to choose University of Economics, Hue University, are as follows:

**Table 2. Characteristics of the research sample**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristics | | Number | Proportion |
| Gender | Male | 42 | 21.00 |
| Female | 158 | 79.00 |
| Academic capacity | Excellent | 4 | 2.00 |
| Good | 30 | 15.00 |
| Average | 147 | 73.50 |
| Poor | 19 | 9.50 |
| The order to choose University of Economics, Hue University | First choice | 116 | 58.00 |
| Second choice | 45 | 22.50 |
| Third choice | 15 | 7.50 |
| Fourth choice and after | 24 | 12.00 |
| Summary | | 200 | 100.00 |

*(Source: Survey results 2021)*

The results of evaluating the reliability of the scales of variables through Cronbach's Alpha coefficients show that reliable values of the scale are guaranteed to have good value, above 0.7.

**Table 3. Results of testing the reliability of the scale with Cronbach Alpha Coefficients**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Factors | Number of variables | Cronbach Alpha |
| Personal characteristics of students | 5 | 0.836 |
| University characteristics | 9 | 0.867 |
| Reference group | 5 | 0.776 |
| Communication activities of the university | 4 | 0.891 |
| Employability potential | 3 | 0.725 |
| University Choice | 3 | 0.731 |

*(Source: Survey results 2021)*

Based on the results of factor analysis to narrow the data and evaluate the effects of factors on the student's university choice, the authors group obtained the model with the index R = 0.535, that means the model explaining 53.5% of the variation of the data; Durbin Watson value of 2.014 is in the range of DU and 4- dU (1.82-2.18), so we conclude that there is no correlation; VIF coefficients are all less than 10, so there is no multicollinearity phenomenon.

The regression results of factors affecting students' university choice are as follows:

**Table 4. Results of multiple linear regression using the Enter method**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model | Standardized coefficients | t | Sig |
| Constant |  | 0.000 | 1.000 |
| University characteristics | 0.627 | 12.970 | 0.000 |
| Communication activities of the university | 0.191 | 3.944 | 0.000 |
| Reference group | 0.233 | 4.817 | 0.000 |
| Employability potential | 0.229 | 4.734 | 0.000 |
| Personal characteristics of students | 0.104 | 2.157 | 0.032 |

*(Source: Survey results 2021)*

The test results for the Sig values are all less than 0.05, so the variables are significant in the model. Variables in the model affect the student's university choice through the coefficient B. Variables with partial regression coefficients have positive values, representing a positive interaction (proportional) between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

The estimation model could be rewritten as follows:

University choice = 0.627 \* University Characteristics + 0.191 \* Communication activities of the university + 0.233 \* Reference Group + 0.229 \* Employability potential + 0.104 \* Personal characteristics of students.

As the estimation results, three factors have relatively strong influences on university choice compared to the rest, which are University Characteristics (0.627), Reference Group (0.233) and Employability potential (0.229).

**5. Conclusion**

The study discovered and estimated the impact of factors on the decision to choose the University of Economics, Hue University among high school students in Thua Thien Hue Province.

The results show that universities need to make efforts in building school characteristics, especially the traits that students have a high interest in such as competency-matching benchmarks, attractive curriculum and convenient geographic location. In addition, universities also need to change their market orientations, considering themselves as a service provider in the market and focusing on communication activities and promotions to students. Moreover, building a beautiful image of the school to the public also has the effect of creating a good impression on reference groups such as parents, siblings, friends, and high school teachers of the students. Employability potential is also a factor that needs to be focused on – schools need to pay attention to aligning their curriculum to societal needs in order to increase the employability of students after they graduate. Finally, to help students make good choices, universities should consider investing in online advisory tools for potential students such as real-time one-to-one advisories; and respect students’ individual characteristics to guide them to choose the right major. This would help avoid wastage of societal resources which would come about due to poor student performance owed to improper choices of majors. Besides, schools can also gain the lifetime value of customers from students choosing a major which is in line with their passion and hence pursuing their studies until the end.

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