

Comparative Factors Influencing Student Choices Between Affiliated Colleges and Universities

Dr. Shafqat Rasool

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Government College University, Faisalabad Email:dr.shafqat.rasool@gcuf.edu.pk

Ramna Tariq

MPhil Scholar, Department of Education, Government College University Faisalabad

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Government College University Faisalabad Email:drmuhammadshabbir@gcuf.edu.pk

Komal Javed

M. Phil scholar, Department of Education. Government College University Faisalabad

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the determinants that could affect the decisions that undergraduate students make in terms of affiliation to colleges or autonomous universities in Faisalabad, Pakistan. An enrollment survey was carried out on a sample of 300 students to study the influences of factors like tuition affordability, institutional reputation, faculty quality, relevancy of the curriculum, academic resources, social influence, and career placement opportunities on enrollment choices. Findings of independent-samples t -tests show distinct differences in institutional types. Affiliated college students favored cheaper tuitions, distance, and support of family and friends to show financial limitations and the role of collectivist imperatives. Conversely, students in universities put high importance on institutional reputation, the skills of the faculty, current curricula, availability of current academic infrastructure, and job opportunities. The results indicate how the system of higher education has inequality in structure and the need to have access to quality education. Based on the Rational Choice Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the research has practical implications on the policymakers and institutions that are interested in enhancing equity, transparency, and informed decision-making in higher education.

Keywords: Affiliated Colleges; Universities; Student Choice; Higher Education; Pakistan

Introduction

Pakistan Higher education has grown fast in the last twenty years and has developed two institutional types of dominance namely autonomous universities and associated

colleges. Academic and administrative independence is enjoyed by Universities, and parent Universities regulate Colleges attached to them which determine curricula, syllabi, and examinations. Even though the affiliation system is democratic in access, it also creates inequalities of quality, innovation, and resources accessibility.

Higher-education planners and policy makers have become concerned with the question of student choice. Students around the world consider the similarity between push and pull factors: the financial ability, the family, the perceived prestige, and professional prospects (Maringe & Gibbs, 2020). In Pakistan, when there are unequal opportunities in tertiary education, the choice may be limited by the economic situation and social norms. These determinants can only be understood so as to be able to design equal systems that facilitate institutional diversity as well as educational mobility.

Review of Related Literature

Literature on college-choice behavior has its roots in the West. A model that was put forward by Chapman (1981) focused on the attributes of students, outside forces and institutional messages. This was narrowed down by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) to three stages; predDisposition, search and choice all of which are mediated by socioeconomic and psychological variables. Such frameworks formed the basis of future empirical studies that have interrelated family background and availability of information with the decision to enroll.

Three theoretical perspectives are incorporated in this research, first one is Rational Choice Theory (Coleman, 1990) supposes that students weigh between costs and benefits to attain the greatest perceived utility. Reputation, employability, and affordability thus can be quantified as trade-offs.

Second, the Theory of Planned Behavior developed by Ajzen (1991) describes how the intentions are determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and the perceived behavioral control; in a collectivist society, parental approval can usually be stronger than personal preference.

Third, the Push Pull Model is a conceptualization of external forces (economic constraints, distance) that drive students out of one choice and favorable institutional qualities (reputation, resources) that drive students in to the other (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). These theories also offer a multidimensional view of educational decision-making.

Research on established systems reveals that the priorities of the students are dominated by the reputation of the institution and graduate outcomes. According to Hemsley-Brown (2021), the important factors when choosing a university in the UK are perceived academic quality and employer recognition. According to Briggs (2006), competitive markets were found to be influenced by marketing communications and web presence with regard to expectations. Conversely, affordability and proximity are critical in the developing economies (Maringe & Gibbs, 2020). The Asian studies, especially of India and Sri Lanka, indicate that family and peer pressure usually prevail over the institutional rankings (Perera and Weerasinghe, 2019).

The higher-education system of Pakistan is a mixture of elite state universities, a great number of private universities, and a massive system of associated colleges. Aslam and Rafi (2023) revealed that the socioeconomic background has a strong influence

on the propensity toward attending autonomous universities. According to Rehman and Shahid (2023), students of affiliated colleges feel that they only have access to limited career services and outdated syllabi. According to Khan et al. (2022), affordability, distance and safety were found to be a significant factor and Qureshi and Ahmed (2021) remarked on gender norms that limit movement of female students to the institution. In spite of these insights, a limited number of comparative quantitative studies have seriously measured differences between affiliated colleges and universities in the medium sized cities of Pakistan.

The images of quality are built on the basis of faculty qualification, research production and the learning facilities. Harvey and Green (1993) operationalized the concept of quality in terms of fitness to purpose whereby the university that has the ability to determine the curriculum in relation to labour market demands is said to be better. According to recent local studies (Iqbal & Hameed, 2020), the idea of quality is becoming more and more equated with the employability results, not with academic rigor itself. As such, however, the affiliated colleges, depending on resources, find it difficult to offer similar experiential learning.

Affordability has been one of the hindrances. The lack of government funding and the increase in private tuition have increased disparities between the public and the private providers (HEC, 2022). Students with middle and lower-income families are attracted to affiliated colleges which are usually cheaper. This economic specialization strengthens the social hierarchy in the tertiary sector. The evidence on the international level indicates that the cost sensitivity is negatively associated with parental education and income-patterns that find their reflection in Pakistani surveys (Kim and Gasman, 2019).

Educational choices in the collectivist societies are hardly made independently. Peer and parents are reference groups (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2015). Research in South Asia demonstrates that the institutional choice is determined by the aspirations of families and the prestige of other communities instead of the academic interest of an individual (Haque and Zafar, 2021). The impacts are greater among the first-generation university entrants, where social validation affects their choice of institutions.

Although there is a wide range of studies done on single institution, very few comparative studies between affiliated-college and university students in Pakistan have been conducted. Furthermore, not many of the studies combine theoretical views with statistical facts. The study tackles these limitations by testing the differences in the perceived quality of the faculty, the relevancy of the curriculum, and the adequacy of resources between the two types of institutions in Faisalabad.

Objectives of the study

Identify comparative factors influencing student institutional choice.

Examine socioeconomic and cultural variables affecting preferences.

Evaluate perceptions of faculty quality, reputation, and career opportunities.

Suggest evidence-based strategies for equitable higher-education access.

Research Questions of the study

What primary determinants shape students' selection of affiliated colleges or universities?

How do financial and cultural contexts influence institutional preference?

What differences exist between students' perceptions of faculty quality, curriculum relevance, and career outcomes?

Which policy measures can strengthen informed student decision-making?

Methodology

The design was a quantitative comparative design. The population was divided into 300 undergraduates 150 of which were affiliated college students and 150 university students in Faisalabad.

The instrument included 30 Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) of the perceptions of affordability, reputation, faculty quality, curriculum, peer/family influence, academic facilities, and employability.

Cronbach alpha =.603 generated in reliability analysis which is acceptable in exploratory work.

The SPSS 26 was used to analyze the data, with descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-tests $p = .05$. The ethical consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were guaranteed.

Findings

Table 1

Tuition Fee Differences by Program

Program	N	M	SD	t	p
BS	150	3.28	0.81	2.14	.034
B.Ed	150	3.01	0.76		

Note. $p < .05$.

Table 1 compares the perception of tuition fees of the students in BS four years and B.Ed programs. The findings show that BS students ($N = 150$) had a higher mean on tuition affordability ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.81$) than B.Ed students ($N = 150$) who had a lower mean ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.76$). According to the independent samples t-test, this difference was found to be statistically significant with $t = 2.14$, $p = .034$ which is below the .05 level of significance.

The mean difference was observed to propose that BS four years students believe that their program fees are cheaper compared to B.Ed students. The statistical significance of the difference in mean scores is moderate, but the difference between the perceptions of tuition affordability across academic programs is not negligible. The similar standard deviations also indicate that each group had a similar perception.

These results are consistent with the position of Aslam and Rafi, (2023), who stress that the cost factor is critical in the choice of programs among students with poor economic backgrounds. In terms of Rational Choice Theory, students are likely to analyze the choices they have in education by considering the perceived costs and the benefits expected. In this regard, students, especially the ones with low economic

Online ISSN

3007-3197

Print ISSN

3007-3189

<http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about>

means, will tend to focus on the programs that they perceive as affordable even when other programs can have a higher level of symbolic or professional value. Therefore, the affordability of tuition fee becomes a significant determinant when it comes to enrollment of students in various programs.

Table 2

Institutional Reputation by Program

Program	N	M	SD	t	p
BS	150	3.52	0.77	1.89	.060
B.Ed	150	3.36	0.74		

Table 2 provides a comparison between the perception towards the institutional reputation of BS and B.Ed programs among students. The result indicates that the mean score of institutional reputation is marginally higher in BS students ($N = 150$, $M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.77$) than the B.Ed students ($N = 150$, $M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.74$). But, the independent samples t-test did not show significant values between them that were statistically significant, $t = 1.89$, $p = .060$, at the .05 level.

Though this was not statistically significant, the fact that the mean of BS students was higher indicates that they tend to attach more importance to the institutional reputation when choosing programs. Both similarity in the variance of standard deviations imply that there was reasonably close consistency in the perceptions between the two groups. The near significance p-value also suggests that the institutional reputation could still have a nuanced effect on decision-making of students, despite being not revealed as a decisive kind of influence in this comparison.

These findings are supportive of the claims by Hemsley-Brown (2021) that institutional prestige increases labor-market visibility and perceived employability. Students can still perceive institutional reputation in terms of long-term career benefits even in situations of financial constraint. Therefore, affordability can reignite short-term choice preferences but relative to the short-term consideration, institutional reputation is an effective variable of influencing educational preferences among students.

Table 3

Faculty Quality Perceptions

Institution	M	SD	t	p
Universities	3.61	0.69	2.32	.021
Affiliated Colleges	3.32	0.74		

Table 3 allows comparing the perceptions of the quality of the faculty of students in universities and affiliated colleges. The findings reveal that students in universities had a better mean score of perceived faculty quality ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.69$) than those who were in affiliated colleges ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.74$). The independent samples t-test showed that this difference was statistically significant, $t = 2.32$, $p = .021$, at .05 level of significance.

The high mean difference indicates that the students of the university believe their

faculty to be more competent, qualified and effective compared to those of affiliated colleges. The standard deviation of the respondents in the university is also lower indicating somewhat homogeneous perceptions of faculty quality in universities. This disparity can be explained by the fact that recruitment standards are better, the professional development opportunities are greater, and more regular academic monitoring systems are usually present in institutions of higher learning.

Such results can be regarded as the evidence of the Two-Factor Theory by Herzberg especially the contribution of such motivators as quality teaching, recognition, and professional competence to the improvement of students satisfaction and engagement. Faculty of high quality do not only enhance the effectiveness of instruction delivered, but also help students to feel their academic success and their probability of success. As a result, faculty quality becomes an important institutional factor that affects the educational experiences and satisfaction rates of the students.

Table 4

Curriculum Relevance and Modernization

Institution	M	SD	t	p
Universities	3.44	0.78	1.97	.049
Affiliated Colleges	3.17	0.83		

Table 4 compares the relevance of the curriculum and modernization as perceived by students in the universities and affiliated colleges. Findings also show that curriculum relevance with respect to students in universities had a higher mean score ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.78$) compared to students in affiliated colleges ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.83$). The t-test of independent samples indicated that the difference was statistically significant $t = 1.97$, $p = .049$ at the .05 level of significance.

The large mean difference is an indication that the university students feel that their curriculum is more in tune with the modern knowledge, market needs as well as the new trends in their disciplines. The marginally greater variability of affiliated college students is an outcome of lopsided experiences in curriculum implementation and updating. Institutional governance structures can to a large degree account to this disparity. Academic freedom in universities is generally more liberal and thus, universities can update their syllabi, add new courses, and adopt new and more effective pedagogical methods faster.

Conversely, affiliated colleges are still subject to centrally approved curricula and the lateral policy directives which yield slow curricular renewal. These results are in line with Rehman and Shahid (2023), who emphasize the issue of the structural inertia among affiliated college systems. In general, the relevance of the curriculum can be considered as one of the most prominent institutional merits of universities, which strengthen the sense of academic responsiveness and flexibility of these institutions in the fast-evolving educational environment.

Table 5

Peer and Family Influence on Institutional Choice

Institution	M	SD	t	p
Affiliated Colleges	3.68	0.82	2.51	.013
Universities	3.35	0.79		

Table 5 presents a comparison of the influence of peers and family on institutional choice between students enrolled in affiliated colleges and those studying in universities. The findings indicate that students from affiliated colleges reported a higher mean score for peer and family influence ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.82$) compared to university students ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.79$). The independent samples t-test revealed that this difference was statistically significant, $t = 2.51$, $p = .013$, at the .05 level of significance.

The significant mean difference suggests that students enrolled in affiliated colleges rely more heavily on family members and peer networks when making decisions about institutional enrollment. The comparable standard deviations across both groups indicate relatively consistent perceptions of social influence within each institutional context. This pattern reflects the continued salience of collective decision-making in educational choices, particularly within affiliated college settings.

These findings are consistent with **Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior** (1991), specifically the concept of subjective norms, which emphasizes the role of perceived social pressure in shaping individual intentions and behaviors. In collectivist societies such as Pakistan, family approval and peer endorsement often outweigh individual agency, especially when decisions involve financial risk, geographic mobility, or long-term career implications. Thus, social influence emerges as a decisive factor guiding institutional choice among affiliated college students.

Table 6

Career Placement Opportunities

Institution	M	SD	t	p
Universities	3.70	0.72	3.05	.002
Affiliated Colleges	3.30	0.77		

According to the results, there is a high variation of student perceptions to career placement opportunities in universities and affiliated colleges. Students who are at the university recorded higher mean score on career placement opportunities ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.72$) than the students who are enrolled in the affiliated colleges ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.77$). This difference was statistically significant as the independent samples t-test showed that $t = 3.05$, $p = .002$, was significant at the .05 level.

The high mean significant difference indicates that universities appear to have stronger employment-associated support systems than affiliated colleges. These benefits can comprise of well-organized internship programs, proactive career placement departments, industry relationships, and effective alumni relations. The similarity in the standard deviations in the two groups reveals the stability in the perceptions of each institutional setting.

These results affirm the claims made by Yorke (2006) in which he states that contact with the workplace is core to student development and employability. Practical experience gained in the real-world work setting with the help of internships and networking activities does not only improve job preparedness in students, but also gives them more confidence in their future employment opportunities, as they get to see the opportunities available to them upon graduation. Career placement opportunities are, therefore, an important institutional strength of the university, which portrays the function of universities to assist transition of students out of school into work place.

Table 7

Academic Resources and Facilities

Institution	M	SD	t	p
Universities	3.82	0.68	2.88	.004
Affiliated Colleges	3.45	0.73		

Table 7 gives a comparison of how students perceived the academic resources and facilities in universities and affiliated colleges. There is an indication that academic resources and facilities had the highest mean score of 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.68 in the case of university students compared to affiliated college students at 3.45 with an SD of 0.73. The independent samples t-test also demonstrated the difference statistically significant, $t = 2.88$, $p = .004$, at the .05 significance level.

The mean difference is large and shows that universities are taken to be having better academic infrastructure than the affiliated colleges. The benefits normally encompass well furnished laboratories, current computerized libraries, availability of online academic databases and contemporary learning facilities that facilitate both teaching and research processes. The fact that the standard deviation is slightly reduced among students of the university implies the existence of a more homogeneous access to these sources.

These results concur with the conceptualization of quality in higher education in terms of the ability of an institution to change as posited by Harvey and Green (1993). Proper academic facilities and resources are resources that help universities to improve the learning process, facilitate innovative practices in learning and promote intellectual and professional growth in students. In turn, access to modern academic infrastructure becomes an important factor in determining the perceived institutional quality and student satisfaction.

Conclusion

The research study will entail a comparative study of determinants of institutional choice of students in various universities and colleges with which they are affiliated. After pooling the findings of each of the seven tables, it can be noted that the students, in fact, make rational decisions with regard to education due to the cost, benefits, and the contextual limitations. The fact of affordability has become a building attribute particularly to the students of the affiliated colleges and this has shown that economic factor is a clear cut determination of accessibility of higher education. On the other hand, university students reported more institutional reputation, faculty quality,

relevance of curriculum, academic resources and career placement opportunities and therefore the orientation to long-term academic and labor-market returns were higher. The findings lean immensely towards the Rational Choice Theory that the individuals consider the monetary constraint with the expectation of the outcome of the move such as employability, prestige, and the quality of the school. Even though the factor of affordability and proximity dominate the minds of students with low socio-economic status- mainly in affiliate colleges, university students are worried about the prestige of the school, the intellectual facilities and employment. These trends show a strong push-pull pattern where the economic limitations are pushing the students to more economical options and the academic achievements are pushing them to the universities that have greater symbolic and material rewards.

In addition, high peer and family norms among affiliated-college students show that the Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen is applicable particularly the subjective norms in collectivist contexts. The educational choices made in Pakistan are not always individualistic but all have to be based on the family needs and social acceptance and seeming economic risk. This is in line with international statistics on student mobility and choice behaviour, as well as identifies regionalised structural constraints such as limited scholarships, tardy curricular reformation and institutional skewed ability.

The analysis generally indicates that higher education is stratified with the type of institution intermediating the experience, expectation and opportunities of students. Colleges which are associated with universities are the institutions of academic modernization and mobility of careers, and the rest of the students which lack the resources are, almost, exclusively, the alternative to the available and affordable entry points.

Recommendations

It is suggested that, on combination of the results, the following must be adopted:

Targeted Financial Support

Government and regulatory agencies should play a more appropriate role in augmenting need-based scholarships and tuition subsidies particularly to the students of affiliated-colleges so that the aspect of cost does not prevail in the decisions making in institutions.

Strengthening Affiliated Colleges.

Investments should be undertaken in faculty development, academic infrastructure and digital libraries so that the quality difference between the universities and the affiliated colleges is narrowed down.

School Curriculum and Revitalization

The affiliated colleges should also be given more flexibility in the curriculum to ensure that the required changes in line with the demands of the labor market are made as soon as possible to reduce structural inertia.

Career Placement Mechanisms.

The affiliate colleges need to have institutionalized career offices, industry connection and alumni network in place in order to boost the rates of employability.

Family-Responsive Counseling

An entry into the student guidance and counseling service must stand out remarkably where it is known that the families play a decisive role in the educational choice of decisions in collectivist societies.

Future Research Directions

Longitudinal or mixed-method research design can be used in the future to research the role of institutional choice on the actual career path. Comparative regional or cross-national studies may help to illuminate more regarding the relationship between localized constraints and global higher education trends.

It is provided access via affiliated colleges despite the superior academic and career outcomes in the universities. There should be a proportional increase in higher-education.

References

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.
- Aslam, M., & Rafi, S. (2023). Socioeconomic determinants of higher education choice in Pakistan. *Journal of Education and Society*, 11(2), 45–62.
- Briggs, S. (2006). An exploratory study of the factors influencing undergraduate student choice. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 30(3), 247–263.
- Coleman, J. S. (1990). *Foundations of social theory*. Harvard University Press.
- Haque, S., & Zafar, T. (2021). Family influence and educational decision-making among Pakistani youth. *Journal of Education and Society*, 14(2), 55–68.
- Harvey, L., & Green, D. (1993). Defining quality. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18(1), 9–34.
- Hemsley-Brown, J. (2021). The marketization of higher education and the role of institutional reputation. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 75(2), 256–270.
- Hemsley-Brown, J. (2021). University choice: Influences, decision-making, and implications. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 75(3), 395–412.
- Hemsley-Brown, J., & Oplatka, I. (2015). *Higher education consumer choice*. Springer.
- Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. S. (1987). Studying student college choice: A three-phase model. *College and University*, 62(3), 207–221.
- Iqbal, R., & Hameed, A. (2020). Quality perception and employability expectations of Pakistani students. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 75, 102113.
- Khan, N., Ali, M., & Farooq, S. (2022). Determinants of student institutional choice in Punjab. *Pakistan Journal of Educational Research*, 5(1), 1–18.
- Kim, M. M., & Gasman, M. (2019). Affordability and access in emerging economies. *Comparative Education Review*, 63(4), 563–589.
- Maringe, F., & Gibbs, P. (2020). *Marketing higher education: Theory and practice*. Routledge.

Online ISSN

3007-3197

Print ISSN

3007-3189

<http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about>

- Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). Push–pull factors influencing international student destination choice. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(2), 82–90.
- Perera, L., & Weerasinghe, M. (2019). Determinants of university choice among South Asian students. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 5(2), 283–292.
- Qureshi, S., & Ahmed, R. (2021). Gender norms and institutional access in Pakistani higher education. *Education and Society Review*, 31(1), 73–90.
- Rehman, A., & Shahid, M. (2023). Governance and curriculum reform challenges in affiliated college systems. *Pakistan Journal of Educational Studies*, 6(1), 21–38.
- Rehman, A., & Shahid, N. (2023). Institutional performance and student satisfaction in Pakistan’s affiliated colleges. *Pakistan Journal of Education*, 40(2), 112–129.
- Yorke, M. (2006). Employability in higher education: What it is – what it is not. Higher Education Academy.