

Factors influencing postgraduate students' university choice decisions at the Vietnam National University



Minh-Quang Duong^{1,*}, Van-Tuong Nguyen¹, Thi-Ngoc-Dung Bach¹, Hong-Phan Nguyen¹, Thi-Yen-Di Le²

¹Faculty of Education, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

²College of Management, Dayeh University, Dacun, Taiwan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 November 2022

Received in revised form

12 March 2023

Accepted 15 March 2023

Keywords:

University choice decision

Postgraduate student

Demographic characteristics

Social support factor

Vietnamese higher education

ABSTRACT

Understanding postgraduate students' university choice criteria is essential for developing marketing strategies in higher education settings. The purpose of this study was to investigate postgraduate students' perceptions in terms of their university choice decisions and evaluates the correlation between their personal and social support factors and university choice decisions. A questionnaire survey was disseminated to 401 postgraduate students from five member universities of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The findings revealed that rated a fairly high degree of agreement on university choice decisions and demographic characteristics differences exist regarding their choice (such as living place, registration level, university studies, and Admission methods). In addition, the findings also found that personal and social support factors had a statistically significant impact on their university choice decisions. The findings of this study carry both theoretical and practical implications for Vietnamese higher education. The suggestions inferred from university managers and other stakeholders are also discussed.

© 2023 The Authors. Published by IASE. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Previous research works indicated that choosing a higher education is a high-risk decision and deciding which university to study at can have enduring effects on career students (Walsh et al., 2015). The competition between universities no longer takes place within a country or region, but also countries in attracting good students, academic members, researchers, and financial aid, in which, "an increase in the number of postgraduate students" is an important part of the competition among universities (especially public universities in Vietnam). Higher education institutions must develop more competitive marketing strategies by understanding the university selection process of postgraduate students (Maniu and Maniu, 2014). A better understanding of postgraduate students' university choice decisions, hence, can help inform marketing practices and customize marketing strategies in higher education institutes in order to

help universities attract more students to enroll in postgraduate programs (Adefulu et al., 2020). However, the research on university choice decision-making by postgraduate students has mainly been conducted in Western countries and focused on inequality in social class (Shaw, 2013).

Research on postgraduate program selection decision-making in higher education is widespread and has revealed many factors that postgraduate students must consider when making postgraduate program choices (Chen, 2007; Simões and Soares, 2010). In order to have a good career and high position, many people often think pursuing a master's and doctorate degree to get an advantage over others. However, choosing a postgraduate study program (such as master's and doctoral programs) at higher education institutions as expected is perhaps one of the most important decisions for postgraduate students and their families. This decision involves identifying the most important academic and non-academic factors (Lei and Chuang, 2010). The studies showed that the university choice decisions of postgraduate students are a multi-stage decision process that is influenced by many factors (Kallio, 1995) such as learner characteristics, how to collect information, and characteristics of the university and major as well as personal factors (including marriage, family and work). The research provided reasons for students' choice of

* Corresponding Author.

Email Address: duongminhquang@hcmussh.edu.vn (M. Q. Duong)

<https://doi.org/10.21833/ijaas.2023.05.010>

Corresponding author's ORCID profile:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9229-8526>

2313-626X/© 2023 The Authors. Published by IASE.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

postgraduate study such as continuing their research path, changing previous research topics, attending an elite university, increasing competition for jobs, personal interests, avoiding work pressure, following the general trend, and others (Liu and Morgan, 2020).

There were various factors to analyze for the university choice decisions of postgraduate students such as institutional, program, faculty and personal factors (Lei and Chuang, 2010); factors of admission process, faculty interaction, and living condition (Van Hoof et al., 2014), academic pulling, administrative pulling, ease of Visa/Immigration, and environment factors (Chen, 2007; Shah et al., 2013), content of specific courses, reputation university and department (Padlee et al., 2010; Veloutsou et al., 2004), special study available, obtaining career-specific information, personal career and flexibility of class schedules (Sheppard, 2013), quality factors such as programs, faculty, employment, development opportunities etc. (Moore et al., 2009; Padlee et al., 2010; Shah et al., 2013), service factors like support team, partnerships, relationships with organizations, etc. (Manoku, 2015), location factors including central location, campus, environment etc. (Mubaira and Fatoki, 2012; Shah et al., 2013). Moreover, the research demonstrated that factors of practical issues (e.g. costs beyond financial aid, financial incentives, program location, research opportunities, and program feasibility) and structural considerations (such as degree type, core philosophy, and campus life) were conducted to assess the university choice decisions (Mertz et al., 2012).

Postgraduate students must take into account a number of factors that may affect the process of postgraduate study when considering which higher education institutions or postgraduate programs to attend (Lei and Chuang, 2010). Studies show that there are many factors to impact graduate students' decision to choose a university such as demographic factors including gender, age, SES, race and ethnic composition, etc. (Aydin, 2015; Liu and Morgan, 2020), economic and financial factors as tuition fees, scholarships, financial aid, career opportunities, marketing, etc. (Çokgezen, 2014; Padlee et al., 2010), university environment factors like programs, learning space, campus, facilities, support services, etc. (Manoku, 2015), and socio-environmental factors as friends, family, relatives, and social life, etc. (Manoku, 2015; Soutar and Turner, 2002).

In view of the previously mentioned points, the purpose of this study investigates postgraduate students' perceptions of their university choice decisions and evaluates the correlation of the reasons for postgraduate study with their university choice decisions. This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the general level of postgraduate students' perceptions in the VNU-HCM of the university choice decisions?

2. Are there any significant demographic characteristics differences in the university choice decisions among the respondents in the VNU-HCM?
3. How are the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM affected by personal and social support factors?

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Sample

A questionnaire survey gave out to 450 postgraduate students who are currently studying full-time from the five-member universities of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM), which were 172 public universities in Vietnam. Out of the 450 postgraduate students who were investigated random sample, this study was conducted with 401 students with an 89.11% return rate by their email.

A multipart questionnaire was used to collect postgraduate students' personal information and obtain data regarding their university choice decisions as well as reasons for postgraduate study. Broken down by gender, the sample of this study was as follows: female students (50.6%) and male students (49.4%); 55.1% of postgraduate students come from urban and the rest are from rural areas. For registration level, 365 postgraduate students (86.3%) apply for a master's degree, and for doctoral students (13.7%). Of those who responded to the survey 17.5%, 17.7%, 24.7%, 29.2%, and 11% were postgraduate students of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Science, University of Technology, University of Economics and Law, and University of Information Technology, respectively. For admission methods, there were 79.6% of postgraduate students choose the entrance exam, 17.5% participated in checking documents and the rest are combine both methods.

2.2. Variables

The university choice decisions of postgraduate students were identified as the dependent variable in this study. As shown in Table 1, the university choice decisions of postgraduate students were composed of six items such as (1) postgraduate curriculum has achieved quality accreditation, (2) the discipline has a scientific training process, (3) the academic member has a high-quality teaching and research area, (4) faculty with high internationalization in teaching and research area, (5) the quality of postgraduate curriculum of the prestigious faculty and (6) academic freedom environment. For each item, the respondents were asked to rate postgraduate students' level of university choice decisions on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1="strongly disagree" to 5="strongly agree." Factor loading, total variance explained, and internal consistency analysis

(Cronbach's α) were conducted to assess the validity and reliability of this constructed measurement for the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM. Table 1 presents that factor loading values for items designed to measure each factor were consistently large from 0.667 to 0.752 which were greater than the threshold level of 0.6 (Hair et al., 2006), showing that the six factors were all suitable for constructing university choice decisions. The total variance explained was 50.17 percent, which was higher than the threshold level of

50 percent and meeting the requirement of a constructed variable for social science research (Hair et al., 1998). The internal consistency analysis yielded Cronbach's α coefficient from 0.801 in this study higher than the threshold level of 0.6 (Hair et al., 2006), indicating satisfactory reliability. Based on the validation of construct reliability, it is concluded that the research construct of the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in this study is reliable (Table 1).

Table 1: The results of M(SD), factor analysis, and reliability of the dependent variable in this study

Factors	M(SD)	Range of score	Factor loading
1. Postgraduate curriculum has achieved quality accreditation	4.00 (.71)		.752
2. The discipline has a scientific training process	4.01 (.68)		.734
3. Academic member has a high-quality teaching and research area	4.16 (.69)	1 - 5	.710
4. Faculty with high internationalization in teaching and research area	3.98 (.73)		.704
5. The quality of postgraduate curriculum of the prestigious faculty	4.06 (.72)		.680
6. Academic freedom environment	3.99 (.69)		.667
Total variance explained (%)		50.17	
Cronbach's α		.801	
Total M(SD)		4.03 (.5)	

Data were analyzed with principal component analysis

Table 2 shows the correlation among five dimensions of the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM. The value of the correlation coefficient ranges from 0.320 to 0.495 was a relatively high positive correlation between factors of the university choice decisions of postgraduate students. The relationship was highest associated between the academic member having a

high-quality teaching and research area and the postgraduate curriculum having achieved quality accreditation ($r=.495$). Other significant associations were lowest found between the quality of the postgraduate curriculum of the prestigious faculty and the academic member having a high-quality teaching and research area ($r=.320$).

Table 2: The results of the correlation between six dimensions of the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Postgraduate curriculum has achieved quality accreditation	1					
2. The discipline has a scientific training process	.425**	1				
3. Academic member has a high-quality teaching and research area	.495**	.391**	1			
4. Faculty with high internationalization in teaching and research area	.436**	.406**	.429**	1		
5. The quality of postgraduate curriculum of the prestigious Faculty	.438**	.445**	.320**	.363**	1	
6. Academic freedom environment	.365**	.434**	.372**	.356**	.343**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The independent variables of this research encompassed three categories: Postgraduate student demographic characteristics, and personal and social support factors (Table 3). Firstly, postgraduate student demographic characteristics consisted of (1) gender, (2) living place, (3) registration level, (4) university studies, and (5) admission method. Secondly, personal factors contained six items, including (1) I have faith in the university of my choice, (2) I am satisfied with the university of my choice, (3) the university I choose is right for me, (4) I have faith in my own abilities, (5) I have the ability to complete the study program, and (6) I am responsible for my choices. Finally, the social support factor included (1) advice from parents or guardians, (2) advice from a spouse, (3) advice from brothers/sisters in the family, (4) advice from friends and colleagues, and (5) advice from a program advisor. Table 3 shows the details of

operational definitions, means (M), and standard deviations (SD) of the independent variables.

2.3. Data analyses

This study employed statistical methods of descriptive analyses, independent t-test, the analysis of variance (ANOVA), and multiple regression analyses to analyze the data. Descriptive analyses of the mean and standard deviations were computed to understand the general level of the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM. The independent t-test and ANOVA were performed to see whether significant differences existed between demographic characteristics and the university choice decisions of postgraduate students. A series of separate stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted to analyze the effects of personal and social support factors on the university choice decisions of postgraduate students.

Table 3: Coding schemes and proportions of the independent variables in this study

Demographic characteristics
1. Gender: Female=0, Male=1
2. Living place: Measured on a 2-point scale, where 1=urban areas, and 2=rural areas (M=1.45, SD=0.50)
3. Registration level: Measured on a 2-point scale, where 1=master's degree, and 2=doctoral degree (M=1.14, SD = 0.34)
4. University studying: Measured on a 5-point scale, where 1=University of Social Sciences and Humanities, 2=University of Science, 3=University of Technology, 4=University of Economics and Law, and 5=University of Information Technology (M=2.99, SD=1.27)
5. Admission methods: Measured on a 3-point scale, where 1=entrance exam, 2=checking documents, and 3=combine both (M=1.23, SD=0.49)
Personal factor
1. I have faith in the university of my choice: Measured on a 5-point scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree (M=4.37, SD=.71)
2. I am satisfied with the university of my choice: Measured on the same scale as that for first factor (M=4.13, SD=.67)
3. The university I choose is right for me: Measured on the same scale as that for first factor (M=4.07, SD=.77)
4. I have faith in my own abilities: Measured on the same scale as that for first factor (M=4.06, SD=.75)
5. I have the ability to complete program: Measured on the same scale as that for first factor (M=4.06, SD=.73)
6. I am responsible for my choices: Measured on the same scale as that for first factor (M=4.13, SD=.72)
Social support factor
1. Advice from parents or guardians: Measured on a 5-point scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree (M=3.83, SD=.81)
2. Advice from a spouse: Measured on the same scale as that for advice from parents or guardians (M=3.67, SD=.68)
3. Advice from brothers/sisters in the family: Measured on the same scale as that for advice from parents or guardians (M=3.56, SD=.66)
4. Advice from friends and colleagues: Measured on the same scale as that for advice from parents or guardians (M=3.59, SD=.66)
5. Advice from a program advisor: Measured on the same scale as that for advice from parents or guardians (M=3.71, SD=.72)

Every variable is measured with one question item

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The general level of the university choice decisions

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the dependent variable-the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM-based on the results from the six questionnaire items. With the overall *M* and *SD* for each value, the findings reveal that postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM hold fairly high opinions of university choice decisions ($M=4.03$, $SD=0.50$).

For the six dimensions of the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM, the findings of Table 1 also show that they were highest agreed with the academic member has a high-quality teaching and research area ($M=4.16$, $SD=0.69$), followed by the quality of postgraduate curriculum of the prestigious faculty ($M=4.06$, $SD=0.72$), the discipline has a scientific training process ($M=4.01$, $SD=0.68$), and the postgraduate curriculum has achieved quality accreditation ($M=4.00$, $SD=0.71$). Postgraduate students least agreed with the faculty with high internationalization in the teaching and research area ($M=3.98$, $SD=0.73$) and the academic freedom environment ($M=3.99$, $SD=0.69$), respectively.

The findings of this study correspond to the findings of Lei and Chuang (2010) and Van Hoof et al. (2014). Their research showed that there was a wide range of factors that influence the decision of which university to apply to for postgraduate programs. For example, factors of the ranking of the university, campus facilities, library collections, class size and overall program size, faculty factors faculty research interests, faculty reputation, the availability of child-care, housing, geographic location, family accommodations, the quality of the admission process were conducted to assess the university choice decisions of postgraduate students. However, this study was two factors that are similar to their research including program factors (e.g. department ranking, overall program size) and faculty factors (e.g. faculty research interests, faculty publications,

faculty reputation). The research indicates that personal and family factors (including family accommodations or job opportunities for a spouse) will be the most influential factors in the university choice decisions of postgraduate students (Kallio, 1995; Van Hoof et al., 2014). Moreover, the research also shows that most of the research on university choice decisions of postgraduate students is conducted in developed countries (such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States) and a few developing countries (e.g. Malaysia and Indonesia). Therefore, further research should be more research on this topic, especially increasing the number of studies in developing countries (like Vietnam) to have a basis for comparison with other countries as well as to enrich the theoretical and practical for this theme (Adefulu et al., 2020).

3.2. Demographic characteristics

Table 4 shows that postgraduate students' demographic characteristics in the VNU-HCM difference exist regarding their university choice decisions. Regarding the relationship in the university choice decisions between male ($M=3.99$, $SD=0.49$) and female postgraduate students ($M=4.06$, $SD=0.50$), the t-test findings reveal that there were no significant differences in the university choice decisions among different gender groups ($t=-1.384$, $p>0.05$). This study's findings demonstrate that there were significant differences among the university choice decisions of postgraduate students and their living place ($t=2.295$, $p<0.05$) as well as their registration level ($t=3.275$, $p<0.01$). Specifically, postgraduate students who are living in urban areas ($M=4.10$, $SD=0.54$) were more satisfied with their university choice decisions than their counterparts who are living in the countryside ($M=3.97$, $SD=0.44$). Moreover, master's students ($M=4.06$, $SD=0.51$) decided to choose postgraduate study higher than doctoral students ($M=3.87$, $SD=0.36$).

As shown in Table 4, the ANOVA findings indicate that there were significant differences among the university choice decisions and universities where

the postgraduate student is studying ($F=12.183$, $p<0.001$), and admission methods ($F=5.677$, $p<0.01$). Specifically, the findings of post-hoc explained that the University of Social Sciences and Humanities ($M=4.23$, $SD=0.61$), the University of Science ($M=4.21$, $SD=0.55$), and the University of Information Technology ($M=4.18$, $SD=0.53$) postgraduate students had a higher score in the

university choice decisions than their colleagues in the University of Technology ($M=3.86$, $SD=0.40$) and the University of Economics and Law ($M=3.89$, $SD=0.35$). Finally, participants of admission methods by the entrance exam ($M=4.01$, $SD=0.48$) and checking documents ($M=4.07$, $SD=0.54$) had lower satisfaction in the university choice decisions than those combine both methods ($M=4.49$, $SD=0.63$).

Table 4: Statistical analysis of postgraduate students' demographic characteristics in the VNU-HCM and the university choice decisions

Factor	N	M(SD)	t-test/F	Post hoc	
Gender	Male	198	3.99 (.49)	-1.384	-
	Female	203	4.06 (.50)		
Living place	Urban	221	4.10 (.54)	2.295*	-
	Rural	180	3.97 (.44)		
Registration level	Master's degree	346	4.06 (.51)	3.275**	-
	Doctoral degree	55	3.87 (.36)		
University studying	USSH (A)	70	4.23 (.61)	12.183***	A,B,E > C, D
	US (B)	71	4.21 (.55)		
	UT (C)	99	3.86 (.40)		
	UEL (D)	117	3.89 (.35)		
	UIT (E)	44	4.18 (.53)		
Admission methods	entrance exam (A)	319	4.01 (.48)	5.677**	A,B < C
	checking documents (B)	70	4.07 (.54)		
	combine both above (C)	12	4.49 (.63)		

Note. USSH: University of Social Sciences and Humanities, US: University of Science, UT: University of Technology, UEL: University of Economics and Law, UIT: University of Information Technology; *: $p<0.05$; **: $p<0.01$; ***: $p<0.001$

The findings of this study were supported by the research of Van Hoof et al. (2014) for registration level (master or doctoral degree), but as opposed to their research for gender factor. The finding demonstrated that male international postgraduate students rated the quality of the admission process item of university choice decision-making as more important than female international students; by contrast, domestic female students rated it as more important as compared to domestic male students (Van Hoof et al., 2014). In addition, their study also showed that Ph.D. students analyzed faculty interaction items as significantly more important in their university choice decision as master students. Moreover, previous studies also showed that postgraduate students in different disciplines will have different decisions to choose a major. For example, hospitality and tourism postgraduate students mainly observe factors of self-actualization, study load, scholastic achievement, job opportunity, and field attractiveness (Lee et al., 2008) or friendships, interest in practical aspects, and ease of study (Kim et al., 2007). The study used different approaches, disciplines/majors, and instruments to measure the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in higher education, thus, they have different findings.

3.3. Effects of personal and social support factors

In Table 5, Models 1 to 2 were stepwise regression analyses to clearly present the effects of independent variables on the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNUHCM, and Models 3 presents the combined effects. The different regression models had different explanations for university choice decisions across different factors. These models explained 26.6% of

the variance of the university choice decisions of personal and social support factors (Adj. $R^2=.266$). Multicollinearity diagnosis yielded no value of variance inflation factor (VIF) in the regression model higher than 10 (in this study $VIF=1.152$ to 1.846), indicating no risk of serious multicollinearity of the model (Hair et al., 2006). The results exhibit coefficients of β values, with $\beta>0$ indicating a positive impact on the university choice decisions of postgraduate students and by contrary.

The findings of Model 1 indicate that two out of six items of personal factors (such as I am satisfied with the university of my choice and I have faith in my own abilities) exerted a substantial influence on the university choice decisions of postgraduate students, and this model explained 25.1% of the variance of university choice decisions of personal factor (Adj. $R^2=.251$). Both items of personal factors yielded positive effects on their university choice decisions ($\beta=.312$, $p<0.001$, and $\beta=.138$, $p<0.05$, respectively). There is only one item in Model 2, advice from a program advisor, which was positively associated with the university choice decisions ($\beta=.278$, $p<0.001$) and this model explained 6.3% of the variance of university choice decisions of social support factor (Adj. $R^2=.063$).

In the combined Model 3, two items of personal factors, namely, I am satisfied with the university of my choice ($\beta=.301$, $p<0.001$) and I have faith in my own abilities ($\beta=.122$, $p<0.05$) and advice from a program advisor item of social support factor ($\beta=.152$, $p<0.001$) steadily maintained their significant beneficial effects on the university choice decisions of postgraduate students cross models.

The findings of this study demonstrated that personal and social support factors persisted to have significant relationships with the university choice decisions of the VNU-HCM postgraduate students. As

for personal factors, the results of previous studies showed that satisfaction of personal needs, and personal expectations influence postgraduate

students' choice of university (Liu and Morgan, 2020; Malaney, 1987; Vrontis et al., 2007).

Table 5: The results of regression analyses of personal and social support factors' effects on the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM

Factors	University choice decisions			VIF
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
	Beta (β)			
Personal factor				
I have faith in the university of my choice	.019		.018	1.454
I am satisfied with the university of my choice	.312***		.301***	1.595
The university I choose is right for me	.075		.081	1.554
I have faith in my own abilities	.138*		.122*	1.846
I have the ability to complete program	.090		.073	1.788
I am responsible for my choices	.012		.009	1.605
Social support factor				
Advice from parents or guardians		-.021	-.055	1.294
Advice from a spouse		-.012	.019	1.218
Advice from brothers/sisters in the family		.025	.034	1.152
Advice from friends and colleagues		-.012	-.033	1.262
Advice from a program advisor		.278***	.152**	1.241
F	23.377	6.405	14.193	
	***	***	***	
Adj.R ²	.251	.063	.266	

*: $p < .05$; *: $p < .01$; ***: $p < .001$

The research indicated that personal perception is the most important factor influencing students' choice of university (Shah et al., 2013). Besides, the perception of individual ability in accordance with chosen major and university requirements has been shown to be very important in students' decisions (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000).

For the social support factor, unfortunately, there is not enough empirical research to have significant relationships between advice from a program advisor item and the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM. However, McDonough (1997) showed that parental advice is a strong influence on postgraduate students' choices, especially in terms of financial support from their parents. In addition, peers and colleagues are often cited as an important factor to continue their studies and they are also a source of essential information about universities so that students can make an application decision to participate in postgraduate programs of higher education institutions (Kim and Gasman, 2011).

The research results show that postgraduate students' intrinsic factors have an influence on their university choice decisions; therefore, admissions officers must have a strategy to meet postgraduate students' needs, aspirations, and expectations in order to attract more participation in graduate programs at the university.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the postgraduate students' perceptions in the VNU-HCM of the university choice decisions, and the relationship between postgraduate student demographic characteristics, and personal and social support factors to ones was examined. The findings revealed that postgraduate students hold a fairly high opinion of the university choice decisions. In addition, the findings also found that postgraduate students' demographic

characteristics (such as living place, registration level, university studies, and admission methods) difference exist regarding university choice decisions. Finally, in three out of eleven items both personal and social support factors (such as I am satisfied with the university of my choice, I have faith in my own abilities and advice from a program advisor) persisted to have significant relationships with the university choice decisions in the VNU-HCM postgraduate students.

Though there are many previous research studies on the university choice decision, however, little is known about the relationship between the university choice decision and personal and social support factors as well as this topic in developing countries like Vietnam. The findings of this study contribute to filling critical gaps in both theories and practices regarding this theme. Although the study was carefully designed and conducted, it has some limitations. The primary limitation is that five member universities of the VNU-HCM were sampled in this study and especially the postgraduate level. Further research, thus, should collect student samples from various higher education levels, disciplines, and other factors to accumulate abundant empirical information on the assessment of the university choice decisions in Vietnamese university postgraduate students. It is hoped that the barrier to the university choice decisions of postgraduate students in the VNU-HCM found in this research might be useful for university managers and other stakeholders to develop and implement a strategic marketing campaign in the competitive higher education institutions market.

Acknowledgment

This research is funded by Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City under grand number B2021-18b-02.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Adefulu A, Farinloye T, and Mogaji E (2020). Factors influencing postgraduate students' university choice in Nigeria. In: Mogaji E, Maringe F, and Ebo Hinson R (Eds.), Higher education marketing in Africa: Explorations into student choice: 187-225. Springer International Publishing, Cham, Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39379-3_8
- Aydın OT (2015). University choice process: A literature review on models and factors affecting the process. *Yükseköğretim Dergisi*, 5(2): 103-111. <https://doi.org/10.2399/yod.15.008>
- Cabrera AF and La Nasa SM (2000). Understanding the college-choice process. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2000(107): 5-22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.10701>
- Chen LH (2007). Choosing Canadian graduate schools from afar: East-Asian students' perspectives. *Higher Education*, 54(5): 759-781. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-006-9022-8>
- Çokgezen M (2014). Determinants of university choice: A study on economics departments in Turkey. *Yükseköğretim Dergisi*, 4(1): 23-31. <https://doi.org/10.2399/yod.14.002>
- Hair JF, Anderson RE, Tatham RL, and Black WC (1998). *Multivariate data analysis*. 5th Edition, Prentice Hall International, Upper Saddle River, USA.
- Hair JF, Black WC, Babin BJ, Anderson RE and Tatham RL (2006). *Multivariate data analysis*. 6th Edition, Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, USA.
- Kallio RE (1995). Factors influencing the college choice decisions of graduate students. *Research in Higher Education*, 36: 109-124. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02207769>
- Kim JK and Gasman M (2011). In search of a "good college": Decisions and determinations behind Asian American students' college choice. *Journal of College Student Development*, 52(6): 706-728. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2011.0073>
- Kim SS, Guo Y, Wang KC, and Agrusa J (2007). The study motivations and study preferences of student groups from Asian nations majoring in hospitality and tourism management programs. *Tourism Management*, 28(1): 140-151. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2005.11.003>
- Lee MJ, Kim SS, and Lo A (2008). Perceptions of hospitality and tourism students towards study motivations and preferences: A study of Hong Kong students. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education*, 7(2): 45-58. <https://doi.org/10.3794/johlst.72.178>
- Lei SA and Chuang NK (2010). Demographic factors influencing selection of an ideal graduate institution: A literature review with recommendations for implementation. *College Student Journal*, 44(1): 84-97.
- Liu D and Morgan WJ (2020). Why do students enrol for postgraduate education in China? The influence of gender and of family habitus. *Gender and Education*, 32(2): 177-193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1447092>
- Malaney GD (1987). Efforts to recruit graduate students: An analysis of departmental recruiting practices. *College and University*, 62(2): 126-136.
- Maniu I and Maniu GC (2014). Educational marketing: Factors influencing the selection of a university. *SEA: Practical Application of Science*, 2(3): 37-41.
- Manoku E (2015). Factors that influence university choice of Albanian students. *European Scientific Journal*, 11(16): 253-270.
- McDonough PM (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity*. State University of New York Press (SUNY Press), Albany, USA.
- Mertz N, Eckman E, and Strayhorn T (2012). Entering student affairs: A comparative study of graduate school choice. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 30(2): 1-14.
- Moore C, Shulock N, and Jensen C (2009). *Crafting a student-centered transfer process in California: Lessons from other states*. Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, California State University, Sacramento, USA.
- Mubaira T and Fatoki O (2012). The determinants of the choice of universities by foreign business students in South Africa. *Asian Journal of Business and Management Sciences*, 1(8): 9-21.
- Padlee SF, Kamaruddin AR, and Baharun R (2010). International students' choice behavior for higher education at Malaysian private universities. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 2(2): 202-211. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijms.v2n2p202>
- Shah M, Nair CS, and Bennett L (2013). Factors influencing student choice to study at private higher education institutions. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 21(4): 402-416. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-04-2012-0019>
- Shaw A (2013). Family fortunes: Female students' perceptions and expectations of higher education and an examination of how they, and their parents, see the benefits of university. *Educational Studies*, 39(2): 195-207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2012.713549>
- Sheppard JS (2013). *Factors that influence college choice: Decisions of graduate students*. Texas A&M University, Commerce, USA.
- Simões C and Soares AM (2010). Applying to higher education: Information sources and choice factors. *Studies in Higher Education*, 35(4): 371-389. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903096490>
- Soutar GN and Turner JP (2002). Students' preferences for university: A conjoint analysis. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(1): 40-45. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540210415523>
- Van Hoof HB, Wu L, and Zhang L (2014). Hospitality graduate students' program choice decisions: Implications for faculty and administrators. *Hospitality Review*, 31(3): 69-93.
- Veloutsou C, Lewis JW, and Paton RA (2004). University selection: Information requirements and importance. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 18(3): 160-171. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540410527158>
- Vrontis D, Thrassou A, and Melanthiou Y (2007). A contemporary higher education student-choice model for developed countries. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(9): 979-989. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.01.023>
- Walsh C, Moorhouse J, Dunnett A, and Barry C (2015). University choice: Which attributes matter when you are paying the full price? *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 39(6): 670-681. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12178>