Institutional type preferences of South African higher education students

M. Kongolo
University of Swaziland
Swaziland

S.N. Imenda
University of Zululand
South Africa

ABSTRACT

This was a descriptive investigation of four higher education (HE) institutions in South Africa. The study sought to find out possible reasons for the choice of institutional type between traditional universities (TUs) and universities of technology (UTs). The findings showed that the majority of students attending UTs already had a clearer idea about the careers they wished to follow; the choice of the institution had been made by the students themselves; students attending UTs reported performance at high school to have been a decisive factor in determining their institutional type destination; there were little variations between the two groups on (a) access to financial aid arrangements for needy students; (b) fees charged by the given institution; and (c) the institution assisting to pay proportions of fees for students; institutional public image played a significant role in attracting students to the two respective institution types – as did quality of staff, catering as well as teaching / learning facilities. The stability of the institution and administrative efficiency were also regarded as important factors contributing to the students' choice of a HE institution. The respondents from the UTs were happier with the language(s) of use in their institutions, and were more inclined to recommend friends and family members to 'come and study' at their present institutions. These findings are discussed, and recommendations made.

Keywords: Higher education, traditional universities, universities of technology, institution type, preferences, career choice.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education (HE) remains both a tool and a means to social and economic development (Bowen, 1977; Etzkowitz, Webster, Gebhardt, & Terra, 2000; Abdi, 2003; Msila, 2007). Furthermore, HE is also seen as an answer to international competitiveness and poverty eradication (Department of Education [DoE], 2005), through providing students with relevant skills required in commerce and industry, as well as for the labor market, private and public enterprises and services (Bruwer & Fox, 1996). Thus, the valorization of HE has become topical, and has underscored most reforms in the sector (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995).

In South Africa, the government has characterized HE as falling under three institution types: (a) Universities (unqualified), (b) Universities of Technology, and (c) Comprehensive Universities (DoE, 2001). Typically, the primary purpose of the (unqualified) universities' is the 'pursuance of knowledge for knowledge's sake' – thereby producing skeptics and graduates who are thinkers. On the other hand, the purpose of the universities of technology is primarily to focus on the applied value of knowledge and imbue students with specific job-related skills needed by the labor market (du Pré, 2004).

Universities of technology started as technical and commercial colleges focusing on specific career programs, usually culminating in the award of certificates and diplomas, which provided for the training of a cadre of low to middle-level skilled labor force. As such, for a long time, universities of technology were not regarded as part of the HE sector. However, since the mid 1990s universities of technology have evolved into university-like HE institutions offering, not only granting certificates and diplomas, but also degrees at all levels - including doctorates. The important aspect of this, though, is that most study programs offered by universities of technology have remained career-focused and technology-based, with a significant mandatory portion of experiential learning. Furthermore, universities of technology have retained their strong links with commerce and industry in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their study programs. Overall, Universities of technology have become very popular with many students, parents and employers. However, the (unqualified) universities – in this study referred to as 'traditional universities' (TUs), also have their own pride of place in the minds of many other students, parents and employers.

The third institution type (the Comprehensive University) is so-named ostensibly because its mandate is to be a hybrid institution that offers programs of the types offered by both (unqualified) universities and universities of technology.

This situation is akin to what has been happening in Europe over the past several decades (Trow, 1984; Geuna, 1995). Trow (1984) characterizes HE institutional types in Europe as (a) pre second world war universities; (b) new post second world war universities; and (c) the non-university institutions of higher education, also referred to as post secondary institutions (PSIs) of higher education. In terms of this classification, pre-war universities were places where much of the top scientific research was carried out; the new post-war universities were involved mainly in technical research – usually applied and oriented to regional needs; and the PSIs were mainly teaching and market orientated. Thus, generally speaking, it appears that the current South African transformation of HE is modeled on the post second world war European model. Clearly,

there are very close parallels between the reported developments in Europe and what has happened in South Africa. Certainly, European PSIs bear a very close resemblance to colleges of nursing, education, agriculture, etc., as well as the universities of technology. Like in the case of the PSIs, these South African post secondary education institutions were, until recently, seen as non-university institutions, and were, like in Europe, "institutions founded by the national governments primarily to satisfy the educational demand and so, originally, they did not have any research orientation" (Geuna, 1995: 6).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The availability of many HE institutions, and institution types, offering different types of programs priced and packaged differently, means that prospective students can exercise a lot of choice in selecting universities to go to. Speaking from the United Kingdom point of view, Price, Matzdorf, Smith, and Agahi (2003: 213) express this point as follows:

> Aspiring students today can apply for up to six places on many different degree courses offered by over 200 educational establishments. The vast range of degree courses and institutions available to them makes the decision-making process rather complex.

In concurrence, Maringe (2006: 466) opines that for a number of reasons, students have adopted a "consumerist approach" with regard to their choice of HE institutions. Accordingly, Maringe posits that "students consider program and price related issues as more important than other elements of universities marketing mix" (p. 466). As such Maringe avers that for a student considering going to university, "the importance attached to labor market motives in terms of employment and career prospects significantly outweigh those related to pursuing HE on the basis of subject interest and a love for the subject" (p. 466). For this reason, "higher education environments have become increasingly competitive and institutions have to compete for students in the recruitment markets" – thereby requiring that universities position themselves appropriately in an increasingly diversifying recruitment environment (Maringe, 2006: 466).

Echoing the same sentiments earlier, Price, et al (2003: 213), contend that these developments point to the importance of "exploring the mechanisms through which decisions are made, the perceptions that potential students have of the university, and the contribution that these perceptions make to attracting or deterring application". Accordingly, Price, et al (2003: 213) make reference to theories pertaining to 'student-institution fit' as holding promise to explain how students get attracted to universities, and what makes them remain there for the duration of their studies. To that end, Price, et al, describe three sets of variables that comprise student-institution fit: (a) Characteristics of the students such as their personal goals, abilities, needs, interests and values; (b) Characteristics of the institutional environment, including the physical, academic, social and psychological variables, where facilities management has the most impact – including the physical design of the campus, such as its openness, privacy areas and wall decorations; and (c) The resultant effect of the interactions of the student with the environment – which impact on the student's academic achievement, satisfaction and

persistence within the institution.

However, from a career counseling point of view, Simpson Jr. (2009: 92) cautions against "matching individuals with occupations or educational options". According to Simpson Jr., the problem with this is that typically the matching is "done by the practitioner for the individual" rather than encouraging individuals "to learn how to make their own decisions if they are to remain employable because lifetime employment is no longer the norm." Advancing the argument further, Simpson Jr. (2009: 92), points out that "matching has also been criticized for stressing a simplistic, point-in-time approach that ignores intuition, the developmental nature of career choice, and the influence of social context on decision making". As such, it is argued that allowing individuals to make their own career decisions leads to "career maturity". Explaining this point further, and referring to the earlier works of Savickas (1990), Powell and Luzzo (1998: 146) have had the following to say:

People who possess relatively high levels of career maturity are likely to obtain successful satisfying careers, because they display more awareness of the career decisions-making process, often think about alternative careers, relate their present behavior to future goals, possess high levels of self-reliance in making career decisions, are committed to making career choices, and are willing to acknowledge and concede to the demands of reality.

Indeed, ultimately, what is important is to allow the individual student to make his/her own career choices, in an informed and relaxed manner, without undue pressure from career counselors, teachers, parents or peers. This can only be attained where such students display high levels of career maturity. Once the choice of career has been done, the identification of the appropriate HE institution type can then be easily made.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In South Africa, both students and employers are acutely aware of the philosophical orientations of the three institution types of HE described above. Nonetheless, employers expect that the graduates of both TUs and Universities of Technology (UoT) possess the requisite skills and know-how in order to add value to the productivity levels to the fields of study within which they have been trained, and subsequently employed. Indeed, the emphasis placed on effective institutions arises from their perceived role in producing a labor force with sufficiently high levels of knowledge and skills needed for the market economy (Leithwood, 1992; Hoggett, 1996; Shephard, 1996).

In the literature a number of factors have been investigated relating to the factors that may explain students' choices of HE institutions. These include the overall image of the university, social life at university and social life nearby, accommodation for first year students, safety and security, sports facilities (Tackey & Aston, 1999); location of the institution, housing facilities, social / cultural / entertainment activities, athletic facilities and dining facilities, courses offered (Discenza, Ferguson & Wisner, 1985); academic facilities, housing/accommodation, buildings/site, student union, space, social / sports facilities, security and lighting, canteen and split site – i.e. multi-campus (Roberts & Higgins, 1992).

In a longitudinal study, MORI (2001 & 2002) looked at the effects of the

following factors on students' choice of university: location, social facilities in town/city, social facilities at university, courses on offer, whether or not students were able to live at home or merely close enough to their families, and whether or not students would be able to travel home at weekends.

Maringe (2006) investigated the availability of computers, availability of library facilities, the quality of library facilities, teaching reputation, cleanliness of both the institution as a whole and of residences, reputation for research, proximity to home, opportunities for part-time employment, graduate employment rate, parental opinion, friends' opinion, cost of living, crime rates – i.e. security, attitude towards students, availability of university-owned accommodation, availability of self-catering accommodation, availability of IT in residences, availability of telephones in residences, cost and availability of quiet areas for study.

For the purpose of this study, it was hypothesized, that the following factors would possibly explain the current trends and patterns in student enrolments across the public HE institutions in South Africa (Imenda, Kongolo & Grewal, 2004): the kinds of incentives offered to prospective students; teaching and learning facilities available in the institution; student accommodation; the quality of administrative services students receive when they apply; the reputation or public image of the institution; state of governance and management associated with the institution; the career prospects associated with the study programs offered by the institution; the quality of teaching and learning (perceived or real); financial aid available to students; the accessibility and familiarity of the language of the institution and its administration.

With specific reference to incentives which could entice prospective students, the researchers postulated factors such as exemption from paying total fees, or partial remission of fees on satisfying certain requirements in favor of students from historically disadvantaged race groups (Brinkman, 1991).

The question that has remained unanswered is: what attracts some students to TUs while others prefer UoT? Thus, this paper investigates possible reasons underlying institution type preferences of South African HE students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

More specifically, this study sought to explore answers to the following two research questions:

1.0 What are the main reasons for students' preference of HE institution type between TUs and UoT?

2.0 Are there similarities / differences in the reasons underlying institutional-type choice by university students from the two institution types investigated?

METHODOLOGY

This was a descriptive survey involving four HE institutions in South Africa: two TUs and two UoT. Given the racially-based history of the country, each institution type comprised one historically 'black' institution and one historically 'white' institution. The research used volunteer samples. Consequently, it was not possible to get research samples which were representative of sub-groups within the target populations, as one

would get where randomization has been carried out. In each institution, the researchers made use of a research associate who gave out as many questionnaires as possible to students across the four levels of study, and made arrangements for the collection of the completed questionnaires. The participating historically white university constituting part of the TU group used English as the language of instruction, while the traditionally black university (meant for one of the ethnic groups in the country) also adopted English as the official language of instruction. For the universities of technology, both used English as the official language of instruction.

Data were collected using a questionnaire designed by the researchers and cross-validated by colleagues. The process of data collection entailed the distribution of the questionnaire to students to complete in their own spare time and return to the research collaborator based at the participating institution. Data were analyzed using the Excel program on Microsoft Office. The major characteristics of the research sample are given below.

Overall, the research sample comprised 362 students from two traditional universities (211) and two universities of technology (151). Almost all of them were single (97%); 3% were married.

The age profile of the research sample was as given in Table 1 (Appendix).

The age profiles of the participants are comparable between the two institution types. Table 2 (Appendix) presents the breakdown of the research sample in terms of their year of study.

The distribution of Year of Study between the two institutional types also appears to be reasonably matched. The highest differences were between the first and third years of study where there were 9% and 14% differences, respectively. Overall, however, the researchers felt that this would not unduly affect the findings of the study on the variables that constituted the data analysis. In particular, it was felt that there would not be any inherent bias arising out of the above distributions regarding the reasons for the participants choosing the respective institutions, as well as any other attendant factors relating to their career choices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In presenting the results of this study, first the results of the preliminary question on the availability of career guidance and counseling are presented. Thereafter, the presentation of results is organized according to themes corresponding to the three research questions.

Availability of Career Guidance and Counseling at School

Concerning the availability / offering of career guidance and counseling at the high schools the participants had attended before they came to their present tertiary institutions, Table 3 (Appendix) gives the profile of the responses to this question.

According to Table 3, there was a higher incidence of students who ended up at the universities of technology having been exposed to career guidance and counseling

than those who went to traditional universities. This result suggests that the majority of the students attending universities of technology already had a clearer idea about the careers they wished to follow, in comparison to those attending traditional universities. Needless to remind the reader that programs of study in universities of technology are more career-based than those in traditional universities (DoE, 1997). With more than 50% of the respondents in TUs, and 38% from UoT not having been exposed to career guidance and counseling prior to joining the HE sector, this means there is a lot that still needs to be done. In this regard, it may be advisable to take a leaf from the following remark by Watts and Sultana (2004: 105):

In all countries, career guidance is viewed as a public good, linked to policy goals related to learning, the labor market and social equity. These goals are being reframed in the light of lifelong learning policies, linked to active labor market policies and the concept of sustained employability. Career guidance accordingly needs to be accessible not just to school-leavers and the unemployed, but to everyone throughout their lives. With career guidance taking increasingly varied and disparate forms, there is a need within countries for stronger mechanisms to articulate a vision and develop a strategy for delivering such access.

Indeed, it would be helpful to avail career guidance and counseling to all students at the school level so that they are enabled to make well-informed decisions regarding their future after a successful school career.

Career Choice and Choice of Institution

There are a number of possible reasons for a student's choice of a(n) university. The possible reasons have been grouped into themes which have guided the presentation of the findings below.

The person making the choice and other related factors

The first question referred to who was responsible for the choice of the HE institution which the respondents ended up attending. Table 4 (Appendix) presents the answers to this question.

Table 4 shows that the choice of the institution had been made principally by the students themselves with regard to both institution types – with a slight bias in favor of the universities of technology. Parents and guardians appear to have played a slightly heavier hand in the choices made by those destined for traditional universities. Although the influence of guardians and parents is not very high at 12% and 17% for traditional universities and universities of technology, respectively, one may still be justified to say that there is a good reason to market HE programs to both the students and their parents / guardians.

Other Reasons for choice of present HE institution

Table 5 (Appendix) provides other reasons for selecting the present institution by respondents.

On the performance of students at high school, students at universities of

technology reported this to be a decisive factor at a higher rate than did respondents from the traditional universities. This is not surprising given that the entry requirements for universities of technology into certificate and diploma programs are generally lower than for degree programs. On the other hand, traditional universities predominantly offer degrees, which require a higher level pass at grade 12. The admission requirements are prescribed by government.

Regarding whether or not the respondents 'knew people' in the institutions to help them get admitted, this came quite low for both groups. However, when it came to not feeling "comfortable to go anywhere else" there was a slightly higher percentage for respondents from the universities of technology on the item. This was probably due to relatively lower passing levels at grade 12, among other reasons.

The institutions' proximity to the respondents' homes came up as a major factor for traditional universities. Both traditional universities that took part in this study were relatively rurally based, as opposed to the universities of technology. This probably explained why the respondents were inclined to apply to the nearest HE institutions. One also has to bear in mind the fact that being rural, in the South African context, is also associated with relatively lower economic prowess. However, concerning whether or not the respondents' current HE institution was the first to respond to the respondents' applications, this was evenly matched between the two institution types at 33% and 31% for the traditional universities and universities of technology, respectively. On whether or not the institution was the only one to respond to the respondents' applications, there was a slightly higher loading for the traditional universities (19%), compared to the universities of technology (13%). However, the relatively lower percentages for both suggest that they had a choice to study, or not to study, at their present institutions.

The physical appearance or attractiveness of the given institution was also an important factor for quite a sizeable number of the respondents – 34% for traditional universities and 44% for universities of technology.

Career-based choice

There were two items which sought to find out whether or not the respondents were guided by career choice in their choice of the institution, as reflected in Table 6 (Appendix).

On these two items it was evident that career choice was an important factor for selecting a particular HE institution – particularly for the universities of technology. The majority of respondents also chose the institutions for the many other career opportunities they offered. On both these reasons, the universities of technology gave appreciably higher ratings. Overall, these results strengthen the need to re-orientate program offerings to make them relevant to students' career aspirations and needs. It is quite clear that this could play a big role in attracting more students to HE institutions – especially those offering traditional, non-career based programs of study.

Another important factor in favor of career-based HE is the whole issue of social and economic mobility, which is one of the major reasons for the transformation of HE in South Africa (DoE, 2001). It is much safer, from the 'return on investment' point of view, for students to enter HE in specific career-directed study programs when socio-economic mobility is high on their personal and family agendas. In this regard, career-

directed HE holds more promise for socio-economic upward mobility than pursuing non-career-based HE study programs (Bowen, 1977).

Financial considerations

Five items sought to find out the extent to which financial considerations may have determined the respondents' choice of institution. Table 7 (Appendix) shows that there were only minor variations in the responses between the two institution types.

There were little variations on (a) access to financial aid arrangements for needy students (in favor of universities of technology); (b) charging lower fees compared to other institutions (in favor of universities of technology); and (c) the institution assisting to pay proportions of fees for students (in favor of traditional universities).

The issue of the Student Representative Council (SRC) sorting out everything for students, although coming up as a small percentage, represents an equally relatively small percentage of students who usually have no money to pay for their studies but hope, each year, that the SRC will agitate sufficiently to force management to accede to registering students without paying the requisite registration fees. For institutions with weak management committees the SRC registers successes regularly, resulting in such institutions carrying huge student debts – largely due to the poor socio-economic conditions of the parents who send their children to these institutions (Silber, 1993). Hence, these institutions find themselves in a vicious circle of financial incapacitation which, in turn prevents them from attracting more students (Berg & Hoenack, 1987; Brinkman, 1991).

Institutional public image

Another factor postulated by the researchers as a possible reason for the respondents' choice of a tertiary institution was the public image, reputation and/or prestige associated with the particular institution. Table 8 (Appendix) summarizes the responses in this regard.

It is evident from the above findings that the institutional public image played a significant role in attracting students to the two respective institution types. However, there were a couple of areas where there were more than 10 percentage point differences in the loadings on the table. The first one related to the institution being known internationally. This attribute favored the traditional universities. The second area related the institution offering qualifications of a very high standard: 95% for universities of technology, as opposed to 73% for traditional universities.

Quality of staff and facilities

There were four statements which sought to establish the extent to which the quality of staff and facilities (real or perceived) could have played a role in attracting students to the institutions. Table 9 (Appendix) gives a summary of responses to these statements.

The majority view of the respondents was that there was quality staff in the two institution types; the respondents were equally matched on the questions of (a) teaching / learning, and (b) catering facilities. However, there was a big loading when it came to hostel facilities – in favor of the traditional universities.

However, it should be noted that apart from the quality of staff, and marginally the teaching facilities / learning resources, the other two 'potential attractions' scored quite low. One may infer from this that hostel and catering facilities do not rank high in them minds of prospective (and incumbent) students in their choice of institution.

Stability of management and administrative efficiency

The stability of institutions and administrative efficiency were also regarded as important factors contributing to students choosing to study at a given institution. Table 10 (Appendix) gives a profile of responses obtained from the respondents from the two institution types.

On the question of the stability of its Management (i.e. very few strikes, if any), there was a huge loading in favor of the universities of technology. The reasons for this is not entirely clear, but one of the traditional universities participating in this study had just had some big management problems, which had resulted in the institution being placed under the charge of an 'Administrator' sent to the institution by the national Minister of Education.

Regarding how well student registration was conducted, the universities of technology faired better than the traditional universities, yet again – although both groups rated their institutions quite highly.

The third area where there was a percentage loading greater than 10% related to corruption in (perceived or otherwise) in allocating facilities (e.g. hostels) and learning resources at the respective institutions. Here, the traditional universities faired better than the universities of technology.

Although 'treating students fairly and equally' brought out a percentage loading difference less that 10%, the 9% percent difference warrants taking note of. In this respect, the universities of technology faired better than the traditional universities.

Language

Language is one important aspect of the political education discourse in South Africa presently - and may remain so for some time to come. Overall, the response profile on this issue, as shown in Table 11 (Appendix), indicates that the respondents from the universities of technology were much happier with the language(s) of use in their institutions. The loading of 68%, although high for traditional universities, suggests that there may be some issues to look into at these two institutions.

Overall Impression

One way to express one's overall impressions of an institution is to ask whether or not one would recommend one's friends and/or family members to "come and study" at

the same institution. The results relating to the overall impression are summarized in Table 12 (Appendix).

Students usually form very strong and intimate bonds with their institutions, and are often proud to recommend their friends and family members to study at their former institutions. However, in this case, the traditional universities did not fair well (51%), which meant that approximately half of the respondents were not inclined to recommend friends and family members to 'come and study' at their present institutions. A deeper analysis of the data showed that between the two traditional universities, only 36% of the respondents from the one which was, at the time of the study, under an Administrator, (which happened to be a historically black institution), responded in the affirmative. However, the second institution (i.e. the historically white institution) also scored lower (at 65%) than each of the two universities of technology. The two participating universities of technology scored 87%, for the historically white one, and 76% for the historically black one.

Not being inclined to recommend the institution you attended to friends and family members could, indeed, be a matter of negative publicity, which the concerned institutions need to address urgently.

Similarities and Differences in the Choice of Institution Type

The second research question concerned whether or not there were similarities and / or differences in the reasons underlying the choice of institutional-type. To answer this question, it is important to give a synopsis of the findings of this study.

There was a higher incidence of respondents from the universities of technology having been exposed to career guidance and counseling than attending traditional universities. This suggested that the majority of the students attending universities of technology already had a clearer idea about the careers they wished to follow, in comparison to those attending traditional universities. This means there is a lot that still needs to be done at the school level to enable students make well informed career decisions – which, in turn, will influence their choice of institution types for their tertiary-level education.

On the quality of the school certificate pass as a determinant in the choice of institution type, students at universities of technology reported this to be a decisive factor at a higher rate than did respondents from the traditional universities. Regarding whether or not the respondents 'knew people' in the institutions to help them get admitted, this came quite low for both groups. However, when it came to not feeling "comfortable to go anywhere else" there was a slightly higher percentage for respondents from the universities of technology.

The preferred institutions' proximity to the respondents' homes came up as a major factor for traditional universities. With regard to whether or not the respondents' current HE institution was the first to respond to the respondents' applications, this was evenly matched between the two institution types. On the other hand, regarding whether or not the institution was the only one to respond to the respondents' applications, there was a slightly higher loading for the traditional universities (19%), compared to the universities of technology (13%). However, the relatively lower percentages for both suggest that they had other choices.

The physical appearance or attractiveness of the given institution was also an important factor for quite a sizeable number of the respondents from both groups, and so was career choice – particularly for the universities of technology. The majority of respondents also chose the institutions for the many other career opportunities they offered. Overall, the results appeared to strengthen the need to re-orientate program offerings to make them relevant to students' career aspirations and needs – especially those offering traditional, non-career based programs of study.

There were little variations on (a) access to financial aid arrangements for needy students (in favor of universities of technology); (b) charging lower fees compared to other institutions (in favor of universities of technology); and (c) the institution assisting to pay proportions of fees for students (in favor of traditional universities).

The issue of the SRC sorting out everything for students, although coming up as a small percentage, was a reflection of the malaise of entitlement that some students exhibit – whereby they come without money to register, year in and year out, hoping that the SRC will agitate sufficiently, on their behalf, to force management to accede to students registering without paying the requisite registration fees. For institutions with weak management committees the SRC registers successes regularly, resulting in such institutions carrying huge student debts.

Institutional public image played a significant role in attracting students to the two respective institution types. However, on the question of the institution being known internationally, there was a higher percentage in favor of the traditional universities. However, on the point of the institution offering qualifications of a very high standard, the loading was by far in favor of the universities of technology.

The majority view of the respondents was that their respective institutions had quality staff; the respondents were equally matched on the questions of (a) teaching / learning, and (b) catering facilities as factors that attracted them to their present institutions. However, there was a big loading when it came to hostel facilities – in favor of the traditional universities. Nonetheless, it should be noted that apart from the quality of staff, and marginally the teaching facilities / learning resources, the other two 'potential attractions' scored quite low. One may infer from this that hostel and catering facilities do not rank high in the minds of prospective (and incumbent) students in their choice of institution.

On the question of the stability of its Management (i.e. very few strikes, if any), there was a huge loading in favor of the universities of technology. Regarding how well student registration was conducted, the universities of technology faired better than the traditional universities – although both groups rated their institutions quite highly.

On the question of corruption (perceived or otherwise) in allocating facilities and learning resources at the respective institutions, the traditional universities faired better than the universities of technology.

Although 'treating students fairly and equally' brought out a percentage loading difference less that 10%, the 9% percent difference warranted taking note of. In this respect, the universities of technology faired better than the traditional universities.

Overall, the universities of technology were much happier with the language(s) of use in their institutions. On whether or not the respondents would recommend their current institutions to friends and family members, the universities of technology, by far, outperformed the traditional universities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have provided a good picture regarding possible reasons for students choosing the various institutions as their HE destinations. More specifically it is important to note that the choice of the institution was made predominantly by the respondents themselves. This suggests that recruitment efforts should be directed principally at the high school students themselves. It is, therefore, recommended that HE strengthen their marketing strategies, with a view to reaching out to as many high school students as possible. However, this should be complemented by the availability of career guidance and counseling in the schools, particularly given that more than half of the respondents had no exposure to this service in high school. This recommendation is further strengthened by the finding that career choice, as well as the availability of many career opportunities, came up as important factors in the respondents' choice of institution.

The fact that 'proximity to home' came up as a major factor for traditional universities, which were both rurally-based may be speaking to the question of economic need, although the financial imperative did not come out as a major determinant in the ultimate destination of students the students in both groups.

The physical appearance of HE institutions, as well as the facilities they offered, came up as major factors in the students' decision-making process. The implications of this for HE institutions are obvious. However, catering facilities did not feature as a major attraction.

The public image of the institution, both in having an international reputation and in offering quality programs, also came up as major factors in the respondents' choice of a HE institution. The quality of staff and the stability associated with a given institution were also found to be positive determinants in enticing students in their choice of the institution.

In conclusion, the researchers consider this investigation to have achieved its objectives in attempting to discern the underlying reasons for students' choices of HE institutions and institution types. It is hoped that other researchers can build on these findings by investigating other issues related to this topic. On their part, university administrators and governance bodies can endeavor to implement some of the practical recommendations made in this paper.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Age profile of student respondents

AGE (Years)	TUs (n=211) (%)	UoT (n=151) (%)
16-18	22	16
19-21	48	45
22-25	22	29
>25	08	10

Table 2: Breakdown of respondents according to their year of study

YEAR OF STUDY	TUs (n=211) % Respondents	UoT (n=151) % Respondents
1	49	58
2	17	18
3	26	12
4	08	12

Table 3: Availability of Career Guidance at School Level

INSTITUTION	% YES	% NO
TUs (n=211)	46	54
UoT (n=151)	62	38

Table 4: Choice of institution

Person Making Choice	TUs (n=211) % Respondents	UoT (n=151) % Respondents
Parent or Guardian	17	12
Self	74	78
Other	09	10

Table 5: Other Reasons for Choice of present institution

Reason for Choice of Institution	TUs (n=211) % Respondents	UoT (n=151) % Respondents
1. My matriculation results were not good enough	07	17
2. I knew people who could help me get admitted	07	11
3. I did not feel comfortable to go anywhere else	28	34
4. The institution is nearest to my home	46	24
5. This was the first institution which responded to my application	33	31
6. This was the only institution which responded to my application	19	13
7. I was attracted by the institution's physical appearance	34	44

Table 6: Career as a possible reason for choice of institution

Reason for Choice of Present Institution	TUs (n=211) % Respondents	UoT (n=151) % Respondents
8. I came to this institution because it offered courses which I always wanted to take	62	77
9. This institution offers many other career opportunities.	60	76

Table 7: Financial considerations as determinants of choice of institution

Reason for Choice of Present Institution	TUs %Yes (n=211)	UoT %Yes (n=151)
My parents could not afford higher fees at other institutions	34	34
This institution offers easily accessible financial aid arrangements for needy students	54	59
You do not have to pay fees at this institution. The Student Representative Council sorts out everything for students	07	00
This institution charges lower fees compared to other institutions	34	42
We pay only a proportion of the fees, and the institution pays the rest	09	00

Table 8: Institutional public image as a reason for choice of tertiary institution

Aspect of Institutional Image	TUs %Yes (n=211)	UoT %Yes (n=151)
This institution is well known nationally	76	74
This institution is well known internationally	65	52
The reputation of this institution attracted me to come here	57	60
18 This institution offers qualifications of a very high standard	73	95
A qualification from this institution guarantees one employment	50	56
A qualification from this institution offers one better prospects for further studies anywhere else	73	76

Table 9: Institutional public image as a possible reason for choice of institution.

Statement	TUs %Yes (n=211)	UoT %Yes (n=151)
This institution has highly qualified staff	66	70
I was attracted by the teaching facilities and other learning resources available at this institution	48	49
I was attracted by the good hostel facilities found in this institution	39	20
24 The catering facilities found in this institution were an attraction	16	16

Table 10: Institutional stability and administrative efficiency as possible reasons for choice of institution.

Statement	TUs %Yes (n=211)	UoT %Yes (n=151)
I came to this institution because it has stable management (i.e. very few strikes, if any)	49	72
Administrative staff were/are very friendly	59	56
27 The admissions process was very clear, straight-forward and smooth	69	68
28 Course registration is always smooth and efficiently done	72	85
29 There is little/no corruption in admitting students to this institution	60	64
30 There is little/no corruption in allocating facilities (e.g. hostels) and learning resources in this institution	63	49
31 Students are treated fairly and equally in this institution	42	51

Table 11: Students' feeling about language used by the institution

Institution Type	Comfortable with Language (% Yes)
TUs (n=211)	80
UoT (n=151)	68

Table 12: Whether respondents would recommend the institutions to friends and/or family members

Institution Type	Willing to Recommend (% Yes)
TUs (n=211)	51
UoT (n=151)	80