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# Exploring Student Choice Criteria for Selecting an Indonesian Public University: A Preliminary Finding

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## **Exploring Student Choice Criteria for Selecting an Indonesian Public University: A Preliminary Finding**

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### **Abstract**

Like any other business institution, a higher education institution needs to understand its customer needs and wants in order to remain competitive and survive among higher education providers. Studies on student choice criteria have been carried out, but none have addressed these in Indonesia, as these criteria may be unique to Indonesia. This paper aims to explore the factors that influence student choice in the selection of an Indonesian Public University. Semi-structured and focus-groups interviews were carried out with the same cohort of 48 first-year undergraduate students in five Indonesian public universities. Preliminary results revealed 25 choice criteria for selecting a university considered by Indonesian students. The factors considered by Indonesian students namely cost, reputation, proximity, job prospect, and parents as the five most important factors. Finally, implications and recommendations are presented.

Keywords: Student choice criteria, public university, Indonesia

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## **Abstract**

Like any other business institution, a higher education institution needs to understand its customer needs and wants in order to remain competitive and survive among higher education providers. Studies on student choice criteria have been carried out, but none have addressed these in Indonesia, as these criteria may be unique to Indonesia. This paper aims to explore the factors that influence student choice in the selection of an Indonesian Public University. Semi-structured and focus-groups interviews were carried out with the same cohort of 48 first-year undergraduate students in five Indonesian public universities. Preliminary results revealed 25 choice criteria for selecting a university considered by Indonesian students. The factors considered by Indonesian students namely cost, reputation, proximity, job prospect, and parents as the five most important factors. Finally, implications and recommendations are presented.

## **Introduction**

The governance of the higher education system throughout the world has changed considerably in the recent years. The main driver of this change because the decreased role by government. Higher education has been transformed from the dependency of funding by government to the competitive markets (Maringe, 2006). Some universities responded by engaging in structural reforms to become more efficient and effective in decision-making and operations, and to be more economic within the limits of available resources (Ball, 1998). As the result, the motivating factors for students in choosing a university have undergone change also and the role of marketing in student recruitment has become increasingly important.

The transformation in higher education has been also influenced by intensifying global competition, declining funding and changing demand patterns (Kallio, 1995; Jarvis, 2000; Gibbs, 2001; Veloutsou, Lewis and Paton, 2004). As competition increases in the higher education institution sectors, public and private universities increasingly view students as consumers and try to market their institution intensively. The transformation of higher education from the dependency on government funding to the competitive market also indicates that universities have to compete for students in the recruitment markets.

However, HEIs are not immune from having to respond to competitive pressures by improving service delivery and better governance (Mok, 2003; Mok, 2007). Numerous pressures and changes in the higher education environment including increased competition, a decrease in government funding, as well as restricted financial environment all impact on a

university's endeavours to attract quality students (Mouwen, 2000; Espinoza, Bradshaw and Hausman, 2002; Haigh, 2002; Moller, 2006). Consequently, there have been calls to respond to such challenges by understanding and influencing the HEI choice process among prospective students (Maringe, 2006; Briggs and Wilson, 2007). This research is one of the first consumer studies undertaken in the context of student choice criteria for selecting Indonesian public university, therefore, makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge in this important area of research.

### **Higher Education in Indonesia**

Indonesia is facing new challenges in the higher education sector. These challenges include government reforms in higher education, namely, a move towards establishing institutions as legal entities and changes in university autonomy and funding mechanisms. The main driving force behind changes is that universities in Indonesia were seen as being inefficient and ineffective (Tadjudin, 2005). Some overseas universities responded to the same criticism by engaging in structural reforms to become more efficient and effective in decision-making and operations, and to be more economic within the limits of available resources (Ball, 1998). In spite of these efforts, there are still calls for universities to improve the quality of education services and the efficiency of education expenditures (World Bank, 2007).

Higher education system in Indonesia has changed. Introduced after the enactment of Law 22 in 1999, the principle of educational decentralisation was subsequently extended by the Presidential Decree 61/1999 to facilitate the plan to transform public universities into autonomous universities or "state owned legal entities". The regulation significantly increased the academic and financial autonomy of universities, and formed the structure of the Basic Framework for Higher Education Development, KPPTJP IV (2003-2010). This decree was also supported by the Indonesian Government Regulation Nos. 152/2000, 153/2000, 154/2000, 155/2000 and the Act of Republic of Indonesia on National Education System No. 20 2003. Article 53 of the Act established a pilot scheme, which awarded four public higher educational institutions (HEIs) the new status of Badan Hukum Milik Negera (BHMN), or "State Owned Legal Entities".

The transformation has been led by four well-established public HEIs, namely Universitas Indonesia (Jakarta), Universitas Gadjah Mada (Yogyakarta), Institut Teknologi Bandung (Bandung), and Institut Pertanian Bogor (Bogor). The four state owned legal entity universities are among the top-ranked HEIs in Indonesia. Four other HEIs also have

autonomy status, Universitas Sumatera Utara (Medan), Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (Bandung), Universitas Airlangga (Surabaya) and Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember (Surabaya). These HEIs have become privatised with their management are no longer under the control of the Indonesian Government or the Ministry of National Education (MONE) (Fahmi, 2007). Currently, Indonesia has 48 public universities that are spread over different provinces and islands as shown on Table 1. As shown to Table 1, the largest number of public universities are located in the Java region (37.5 percent), followed by Sumatera (23 percent).

Table 1. Number of Public Universities in Indonesia

Region	Universities		
	Non-Autonomous	Autonomous	Total
Java	14	4	18
Sumatera	10	1	11
Sulawesi	8	-	8
Kalimantan	4	-	4
Bali	2	-	2
Nusa Tenggara	2	-	2
Papua	2	-	2
Maluku	1	-	1
Total	43	5	48

Source: DGHE (2008), Basaruddin (2009)

One of the most delicate issues in the transformation toward a legal entity is changes in university funding (Beerkens, 2007). The government acts more as a funding agency and implements a block funding mechanism based on output or the number of graduates produced instead of student enrolments (Brodjonegoro, 2002). In addition, universities are also free to generate income in other ways, such as through consultancy or cooperation with industry (Beerkens, 2007). The quality of HEIs is monitored through a quality assurance board (Ikhsan and Asih, 2008). Thus, university management has shifted towards a more corporate system (Wicaksono and Friawan, 2008).

Indonesian universities are aware that the government's financial support cannot keep up with the need to improve quality. While tuition fees act as one source of revenue (DGHE, 2008), the responsibility for setting the level of tuition fees is no longer in the hands of the central government. As part of this autonomy, universities may now collect tuition fees directly from the students and may set their own tuition fee levels which were previously set by the central government (Tadjudin, 2001). In this situation, universities are operating in more competitive

recruitment market. Therefore, it is important for the universities to understand about how to attract students and how to market themselves.

### **Research Gaps**

Previous studies have identified many factors contributing to a student's decision to study at tertiary level. However, the extant literature does not focus on student perceptions of choice criteria in the selection of an Indonesian public university, after the deregulation of Higher Education system in Indonesia in 1999. Much of the previous research in an Indonesian context focused on student choice for studying overseas. For example, Joseph and Joseph (2000), in a survey of Indonesian high school students, identified that physical facilities, and course and career information are the most important factors considered when choosing an educational institution at an overseas university such as those located in Australia or New Zealand. Similarly, Kemp *et al.* (1998) found that education service quality is an important determinant of study destination of Taiwanese and Indonesian students intending to study in US and Australia.

Although the literature review provides an understanding of the marketing framework and analytical methods, it raises concerns about the different factors of student choice found by previous researchers when surveying students in different countries. Therefore, this research will explore the most relevant factors that emerge in Indonesian higher education institutions context.

### **Research Question**

The research addresses three key questions:

1. What are the factors that influence Indonesian students' choices in the selection of an Indonesian Public University?
2. Which factors have the greatest influence on Indonesian students' choice in the selection of an Indonesian Public University?
3. Is there a difference in the student choice criteria of selecting an Indonesian Public University between an autonomous and non-autonomous university?

### **Literature Review**

Marketing in the higher education sector is not new. To effectively communicate with potential students, promotions, advertisements and other marketing tools are used as

marketing strategies to attract students. The increasingly important role that marketing plays in student recruitment has been recognized by many scholars (Goff, Patino and Jackson, 2004), include: marketing universities (Judson, James and Aurand, 2004), the image of universities (Ivy, 2001), relationship marketing (Ellis and Moon, 1998; Kittle and Ciba, 2001), international marketing (Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño, 2006), direct and data base marketing (Tapp, Hicks and Stone, 2004) and strategic marketing (Liu, 1998). Marketing in higher education is also needed to mitigate the effects of decreasing government funding and increases in competition (DesJardins, Ahlburg and McCall, 2006). In order to survive and to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, higher education institutions should use a marketing framework (Hoyt and Brown, 2003) and should satisfy the need of their customers by adding value (Kotler and Fox, 1995). This can be achieved by applying effective marketing mix tools to influence the demand for the services that the university offers (Ivy, 2008).

Higher education possesses all the characteristics of a service industry, for example that education is “people based”, and emphasises the importance of relationships with customers (Mazzarol, 1998). Shank, Walker and Hayes (1995, p. 74) also underlined that educational services are intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable from the person delivering it, perishable and the customer (student) participates in the process. As a service, higher education marketing is sufficiently different from the marketing of products (Nicholls, Harris, Morgan *et al.*, 1995). University management need to market their institution and establish a unique difference which highlights their strength and gives the students a reason to choose that university. Since higher education institutions operate in a service environment, they need to understand the unique aspects of service marketing in order to accomplish the above goal.

Several researchers have attempted to explain student choice model. Models of student enrolment behaviour theory started to emerge in the early 1980s. According to Hossler (1999), most studies that have tried to understand the university choice process could be included in one of the following categories: economic models, status-attainment models and combined models. The other combined models in the literature such as Jackson (1982), Chapman (1981), Hanson and Litten’s (1982), Kotler and Fox’s (1985), and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) models have become the most widely accepted in enrolment behaviour (Freeman, 1997; Hamrick and Stage, 1998; Moogan, Baron and Harris, 1999; Perna, 2000; Hamrick and Stage, 2004; Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio *et al.*, 2004; DesJardins, Ahlburg and

McCall, 2006; Smith and Fleming, 2006; Clarke, 2007), These models are related to the various general consumer behaviour and decision making models such as those of Engle, Blackwell and Miniard (1995; 2001), Perreault and McCarthy (2005), Schiffman and Kanuk (2007), and Kotler and Keller (2009). A comparison of these models is summarized on Table 1. These models have been helpful in allowing later researchers to understand that the decision to attend college is a complicated and lengthy process and influenced by a diverse set of factors.

Table 1. Models of the Stages in Consumer Decision Making and Student Choice

Authors	Consumer Decision Making and Student Choice Model					
Engle, Blackwell and Miniard (1995; 2001)	Need Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation Process	Outlet selection and purchase		Post purchase process
Schiffman and Kanuk (2007)	Need Recognition	Prepurchase Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase		Post purchase evaluation
Kotler and Keller (2009)	Problem recognition	Information Search	Evaluation Alternatives	Purchase Decision		Post purchase behaviour
Perreault and McCarthy (2005)	Need-want awareness	Search for information	Set Criteria and evaluate alternative solutions	Decide on solution	Purchase product	Post purchase evaluation
Chapman (1981)	Pre-search	Search	Application	Choice	Enrolment	
Hanson and Litten (1982)	Deciding to go to College	Investigating Colleges	Application, Admission and Enrolment			
Jackson (1982)	Preference		Exclusion	Evaluation		
Hossler and Gallagher (1987)	Predisposition		Search	Choice		
Kotler and Fox (1985)	Initial decision to investigate college	Information gathering	Evaluation and elimination of choices to generate set of options	Choice		

Source: Kusumawati (2010)

The choice to enrol in higher educational institutions has the potential to change a person's life; hence, it is an important issue for recruitment management. Several choice criteria for selecting a university occur from this current review. A range of research strongly discusses the dramatic effect parents have on a student's choice of college (Moogan and Baron, 2003; Domino, Libraire, Lutwiller *et al.*, 2006; Yamamoto, 2006; Raposo and Alves, 2007; Al-Yousef, 2009). Studies in Asian countries predominantly found that reference groups such as siblings, friends, peers, relatives, teachers and other influential people influence a student's choice of a university (Ceja, 2004; Ceja, 2006; Yamamoto, 2006; Pimpa and Suwannapirom, 2008; Wagner and Fard, 2009). Other research (Dawes and Brown, 2002; Kim, 2004; Nora, 2004; Yamamoto, 2006; Raposo and Alves, 2007) claimed that personal factors show the greatest positive influences on student choice of a university.

Previous research also considered geographic location as important factor (Veloutsou, Lewis and Paton, 2004; Wagner and Fard, 2009; Beneke and Human, 2010) as well as institutional characteristics include teaching quality, prestige, infrastructure, library, computer facilities, location, quality of the curricula, scientific research quality, administrative support, extra-

curricular factors (sports, leisure, canteens, etc.) and the availability of exchange programmes with foreign universities (Tavares, Tavares, Justino *et al.*, 2008). Price *et al.* (2003) noted that for many institutions, facilities, where provided to a high standard, were perceived as having an important influence on students' choice of institutions. In terms of closeness, Paulsen (1990), Raposo and Alves (2007), and Dawes and Brown (2005) pointed out that proximity to home is one of the strong influences in the choice process of selecting a university.

Academic reputation is one of the college choice factors that determines the success of university marketing strategies (Hoyt and Brown, 2003; Ho and Hung, 2008). Indeed, the reputation of the institution was found to be the most important factor in a student's decision of a place of further study (Moogan and Baron, 2003; Briggs, 2006; Ancheh, Krishnan and Nurtjahja, 2007; Wiese, van Heerden, Jordaan *et al.*, 2009; Afful-Broni and Noi-Okwei, 2010; Beneke and Human, 2010) in addition to the variable of courses and campus (Veloutsou, Lewis and Paton, 2004). Pupils also considered job prospects when selecting their faculty (Băcilă, Dorel and Alexandra-Maria, 2006; Băcilă, 2008; Wiese, van Heerden, Jordaan *et al.*, 2009) along with the enjoyment of the subject, need for a degree for a career, better job, new subject areas and the enjoyment of student life (Soutar and Turner, 2002; Tatar and Oktay, 2006; Whitehead, Raffan and Deaney, 2006). However, based on Tavares, Tavares, Justino *et al.* (2008), 'vocation' or specialization was a stronger reason for programme choice than employment prospects.

Many scholars have investigated the influence of price in the choice of a university (Domino, Libraire, Lutwiller *et al.*, 2006; Wagner and Fard, 2009; Beneke and Human, 2010), in which high discounts were viewed more favourably than low discounts (Quigley, Bingham, Notarantonio *et al.*, 2000). However, Domino, Libraire, Lutwiller's *et al.* (2006) found that price is the most important factor from parents' point of view rather than a student's perception. The impact of financial aid or packages that include scholarships and grants was examined thoroughly by Kim (2004), Govan *et al.* (2006) and Hoyt and Brown (2003), while Beneke and Human (2010) found that financial aid offered is only listed as the fifth important factor to study at university in South Africa. Although it was found that there are numerous important factors considered by students when selecting a university, these factors have different level of importance for each country and each student. Therefore, this research will determine the most influential factors that contributed to Indonesian students when selecting an Indonesian public university as these criteria may be unique to Indonesia.

## Research Methodology

The research aims to build on previous academic findings and extend the limited knowledge of the student decision-making process in the context of an Indonesian public university. Given the nature of research questions, the research design followed in this study is a sequential process. Creswell (2009) describes the design construct as beginning with qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by quantitative data collection and analysis, and concluding with an interpretation of the entire analysis. In this research, qualitative study would act as a precursor to the inclusion of other independent variables and the development of the instruments for quantitative research (Punch, 2006). Visual diagram of the current research design adapted from Creswell and Clark (2007, p. 53) is illustrated in Figure 1.

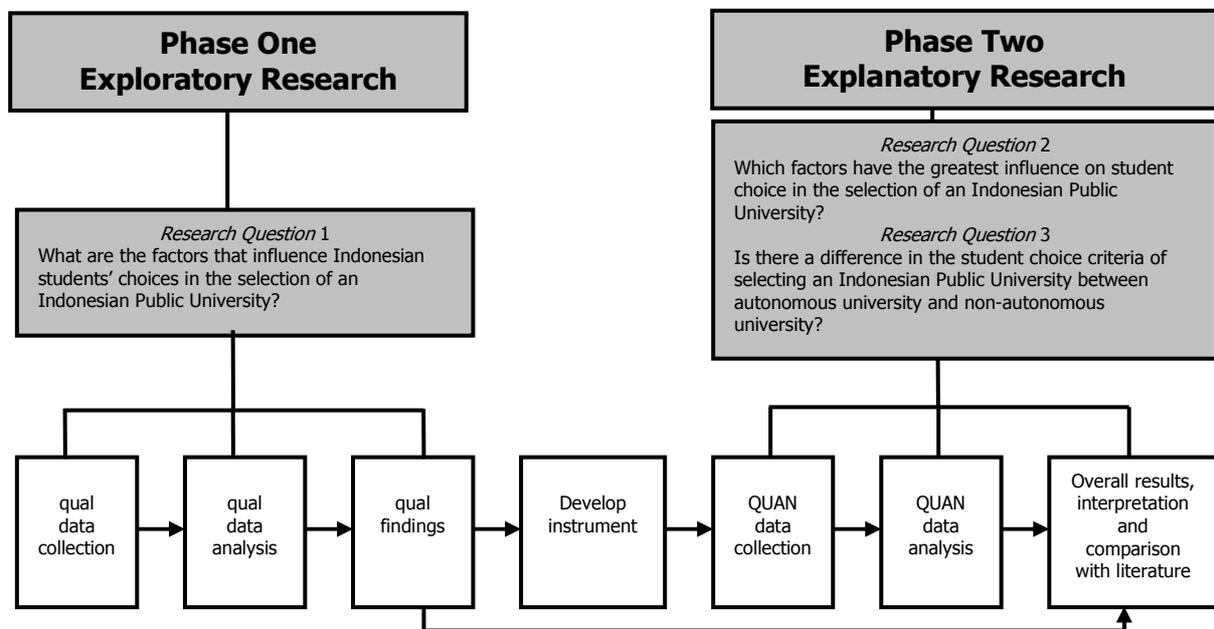


Figure 1. Research design of the current research adapted from Creswell and Clark (2007, p53)

### *Phase 1. Exploratory Research Methods*

As this research has not been studied in the Indonesian context, an exploratory approach to the research seems logical and justifiable (Aaker, Kumar and Day, 2007), as there was a need to collect preliminary information, validate the themes found and the theoretical constructs that will help identify problems and suggest hypotheses (Kotler, Adam, Brown *et al.*, 2006). The initial phase of this research involves a detailed review of literature to identify the theoretical background related to student choice factors in the selection of a university and the

analysis of various research themes and constructs to determine the research questions to be investigated. This phase will be followed by semi structured and focus group interviews to refine and validate these themes and the theoretical constructs before the research hypotheses is formulated. In this study, exploratory research is used to:

- a. explore and identify the variables related to the choice criteria of student in the selection of an Indonesian public university;
- b. verify the relationship between the identified variables and perceptions of students when selecting a particular university in order to establish a set of variables to included in the major study of this research;
- c. verify how variables could be operationalised in a questionnaire.

In order to assure evaluating the most current set of criteria used for selecting a public university, first-year undergraduate students in two autonomous and two non-autonomous universities selected Indonesian Public Universities in Java and Sumatera were chosen as potential participants. As the study requires to understand the criteria the students considered in the selection of a public university before the process they were involved in, the administration of individual questionnaires before the commencement of focus-group discussions were conducted with the same cohort of 48 first-year students with seven up to fifteen students for each focus group.

Content validity (face validity) was decided upon as the most appropriate method for pre-testing of both the qualitative instruments of this study by discussing and gaining approval from experts in the area of research as pointed out by Zikmund (2003). Reliability were checked during or after the first interview by modifying current questions and/or to generate new questions (Silverman, 2005). The focus group discussions were recorded using audiotape, with permission from the participants to ensure the accuracy of the information provided by the participants. All the results were transcribed verbatim by researcher and initially recorded as specific themes and indicators that are related. Data analysis used thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Silverman, 2005) and followed the guide provided by Creswell (2007). Initial open coding of the data gave way to axial coding, wherein codes were organized and sorted into categories based on their properties and similarities. Constant comparison was used throughout the coding process between participant responses and the coding, coding and categories, and categories and participant responses. Thematic categories were used to construct the survey for phase two of the research.

### *Phase 2. Explanatory Research Method*

Explanatory research will then be used for discovering and measuring the association and relationships of the marketing variables to provide a plausible explanation for observations (Hussey and Hussey, 1997; Kinnear and Taylor, 2006).

The second phase of this explanatory research will be conducted by developing a structured survey questionnaire to gather quantitative data from respondents. This phase will be followed by a factor analysis to discover which factors are involved when student choose a particular university and which factors can be categorised as marketing variables and which as non-marketing variables. Prior to performing a factor analysis, the suitability of the data for factor analysis will be assessed. In this research, factor analysis will used to:

- a. reduce the number of variables that is found from exploratory interviews in previous phase, by combining two or more variables into a single factor where appropriate. The analysis will isolate the underlying factors that explain the data.
- b. identify groups of inter-related variables, to see how they are related to each other in order to generate hypotheses.

The study will use a stratified random sampling of first year undergraduate students enrolled in autonomous university and non-autonomous university in Indonesia. Stratified random sampling is a probability sampling technique by using two-stage process that divides the population into strata, groups of individuals that are similar in some way (Malhotra, Hall, Mike *et al.*, 2006). The rationale for using this method of sampling is that it reduces random sampling error; ensures the representativeness of all groups in sample; ensures homogeneity of each group (Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran, 2000; Zikmund and Babin, 2007), and provides more information for a given sample size (Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran, 2000). The sample size is calculated using Taro Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1967). As the number of students in Indonesian public universities is more than 100,000, the sample size should be around 400 to obtain reliable data (at 95% confidence level and a 5% error level) (Yamane, 1967). Therefore, 400 responses are sought to study the factors influencing choice criteria of a university. Proportional allocation will then be used to allocate the total sample size among the strata in proportion to the strata sizes.

In order to answer the second research question, i.e. which factors have the greatest influence on student choice in the selection of an Indonesian Public University, multiple regressions analysis will be then employed. This research will also employ independent samples t-test to answer the third research question, i.e. is there a difference in the student choice criteria of selecting an Indonesian Public University between autonomous university and non-autonomous university.

### **Preliminary Findings and Discussion**

This section presents the preliminary results of the 48 semi-structured interviews with first-year undergraduate students in the five public universities in Java and Sumatera, Indonesia. The exploratory study consisted of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with first-year undergraduate students. This paper reports only the responses from semi-structured interviews. This study involved 48 participants from Economics and Business study program. Of 48 participants, 37 were female and the remaining were male students. Of the total participants, half represented Sumatera region and the other half represented Java region. Among the total participants, 22 students represented two autonomous universities, one each from Java and Sumatera, and the remaining 26 students represented two non-autonomous universities in Java and one non-autonomous university in Sumatera. Overall, participants age were 18 years and over.

The exploratory study revealed emergent themes as factors considered by students when selecting an Indonesian public university. To the semi-structured interviewed question that sought respondents' perceptions on criteria with regard to selecting a higher education institution as well as their reasons, the participants mention a range of factors, which some of which confirm the factors that already mentioned in the earlier literature. An initial sort of factor identified 37 reasons for choosing a public university. There were subsequently recoded into 25 themes to avoid overlap. It was notable that many categories could easily have been placed under other categories for example, 'university reputation', 'university achievement', 'university status' or 'university type' can be placed under 'reputation' categories. Similarly 'relatives' is related to 'family' and that 'tuition fee', 'cost of study', 'cost of living' is associated to 'cost'. This latter category played a definite and important role in influencing students on their choice for study at a university. Funding was also a central theme apparent in all forms of data collection to date.

Indonesian students revealed that they made decisions based on a combination of several factors. On average participants mentioned at least three factors affected their decision to choose a university rather than relying on only one factor. The result indicates that total expenses (cost) (40), reputation (36), proximity (33), job prospect (20), parents (18) are five most importance choice criteria for Indonesian students. The next five factors that respondents mentioned most frequently to be, in order of decreasing frequency are academic quality (17), friends (15), psychological (pre-selected motive) (13), facilities (11) and campus environment (11). Each of the top five factors is presented in the following part of this paper.

One of the important factors that influenced Indonesian students' perceptions of their university choice process was total expenses (cost). Students identified financial factors as tuition fee, cost of study, cost of living and other related expenses incurred while studying at the university. Students took into consideration cost and affordability. Those students noted that financial support which is from parents or family might limit the choice of the university, as their financial sponsors may influence them to study in certain destinations or study programs. Students made a rational decision by considering their social economic factor before making a choice. Consistent with economic models of choice by Becker (1975), that students are rational and make careful cost-benefit decisions by maximising their utility and minimise their risks in order to obtain the best choice for them (Raposo and Alves, 2007). In addition, this finding supports most of previous research which assumes that a student makes their actual application decisions by comparing the benefits and costs of all possible alternatives (Willis and Rosen, 1979; Fuller, Manski and Wise, 1982; Card and Krueger, 2004). As shown by Spaulding and Olswang (2005) that after students gains admission to a university, the cost of attendance moves from having an indirect influence on the process to the direct concern. The result also supports earlier findings in most of developing countries such as in Thailand (Pimpa and Suwannapirom, 2008), in Malaysia (Wagner and Fard, 2009), in South Africa (Beneke and Human, 2010), and in Turkey (Tatar and Oktay, 2006).

Indonesian students were also influenced by the academic reputation of the university. University reputation had influenced attitudes toward choosing an institution in many ways, such as university status (whether public or private), university ranking, and university achievement. When selecting a university, students were influenced not only by their own perceptions and attitudes, but also by what other people thought. Commonly, according to the participants, university reputation related to the general prominence of an institution in the public eye. The need to study at the prestigious university is related with interest in studying at

the public university rather than to the private ones. This finding is consistent with expectations in that if one's desire is to study at a reputable university, there is an opportunity to find a job easily after graduated or a guarantees for the students obtain a well-paid job in their area of study after graduation. This remains true as indicate by earlier studies (Conard and Conard, 2000; Conard and Conard, 2001; Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001; Coetzee and Liebenberg, 2004; Standifird, 2005; Braddock II and Hua, 2006; Bowman and Bastedo, 2009; Brewer and Zhao, 2010). This finding aligned with Conard and Conard' (2000) study who found that ability to get a good job after graduation was the most important factor as part of the academic reputation.

The location of the campus was significantly important for respondents. Living close to a selective university had attracted students to what this university have to offer and encourage students to try to attend a selective university. The location of the campus in near home was the most important for 70 percent of respondents. Not surprisingly, the factor was of highest importance to those students who are first-generation in their family or female students. They may prefer the emotional security of remaining close to family and friends while participating in the university. This line of thought parallels Archer's et al (2003), Pugsley's (2004), Reay's (2001) who underscored that students considered their emotional security while participating in the 'risky' and unfamiliar world of higher education by choosing a nearby university, especially for those who are first-generation educated and from working-class families. Going to a nearby college also allowed students to maintain more easily ties with family members, friends, and significant others, as supported by earlier studies (Pimpa, 2003; Pimpa, 2004; 2005; Turley, 2006; Turley, 2009). A survey in Iowa high school seniors from rural communities in 1994 by Johnson, Elder and Stern (2005) who found that almost 75 percent thought it was somewhat to very important to live near parents or relatives is also support this current research findings. In contrast, one respondent who choose to study in another region wanted to develop their self confident to be able to live independently while away from their parents. In parallel to the views of Christie (2007, p2245) "the geographical mobility marks a significant stage in the transition that young people make to adulthood and independence, bringing with it the opportunity to access a new city and a new lifestyle". In this sense, leaving home is an accepted and valued part of the university experience.

Career preparation was also an important factor. One of the important reasons for participating in higher education was the desire to acquire a higher qualification for a specific

job or career. Other motives, such as “to increase earnings” or “to get a prestige job” were also considered important by some of respondents. There was a strong belief among students that they expected to “better themselves” by going into higher education. They mentioned that it would not just lead to a better job, but a better paid occupation and better choice of job. Even though many students were still vague about their career or job plan after graduation and many appeared to be realistic about how “good” a job they might get in the short term, there was an overwhelming view that higher education was a necessary vehicle to a better paid and more secure job by obtaining more qualifications. This finding is in line with Moore, Shulock and Jensen’s (2009) thought who states that future job growth will require a college education. This result also confirms findings in several studies (Soutar and Turner, 2002; Hoyt and Brown, 2003; O’Brien, Webb, Page et al., 2007).

As would be expected the influence of parents was an important factor for undergraduate students in deciding a university. Parents’ suggestion as mentioned by some students also related to the funding supports. All of respondents were financially dependent on their parents. Therefore, financial support as the most frequently mentioned parental influence was directly related to the decision to study at university, choice of city, and, perhaps, choice of academic course. Some students expressed by saying that they follow their parents’ suggestion because parents become the only one financial sponsors of their study. The data showed that expectations from parents have a stronger impact on choice of university when students are financially dependent on their parents. This result corroborates previous finding from Hu and Hossler (2000) who found that students were most influenced by family input and finance-related factors. Interestingly, most of respondents mentioning parental influence claimed both their father and mother were equally influential in the family, in terms of the decisions to study at a university. This result is consistent with the findings from Ceja (2001; 2006) who revealed that that parents were key in encouraging their children to pursue higher education.

While the above results matched categories previously found in the literature, respondents mentioned other important factors that influence them to select their existing university. The factors, in descending order are: accreditation (10), course suitability (9), competition (7), family (7), high school teacher influence (6), alumni networking (5), interaction (4), scholarship (3), variety of course offered (3), safety (2), promotion (2), easy to postgraduate in overseas (1), community perceptions (1), God (1) and luck (1).

When respondents were asked on their perceptions of influential people in the decision to select a university, they mentioned six types of influential people with seven different roles. The six types of influential people that respondents mentioned are parents and family (47), friends (including peers, boyfriend and community) (35), teacher (26), themselves (10), promotion (4) and others (including senior in high school, current students at the university and alumni) (3). The roles that those influential people played are funding, motivator (encourager), advisor, role model, decision maker, siblings/friends studying in the same university, information source. The influence of the top two of influential people frequently mentioned by respondents is discussed below.

Students believed that parents' major roles related to the source of funding, besides encouragement in their choice of a university. The cost of undertaking study at a university is an important issue for undergraduate students. This is consistent with prior remark that for undergraduate study the burden of fees and living expenses falls on the parents. Results from the qualitative study by Pimpa (2004) support this, and he identified that beside finance, the influence from family could be categorised into four others different role include information, expectation, persuasion, and competition. This finding also inline with previous research (Hossler, Schmidt and Vesper, 1999; Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Kim and Schneider, 2005) that parental encouragement as the strongest factor predicting students' planning for university.

As would be predicted that the role of friends in the decision making process as the same entrant have affected college enrolment (Fletcher, 2006), but the mechanism is unclear. This findings parallel with prior research (Fletcher, 2006; Fletcher and Tienda, 2008) which revealed that students who attend high school with 10% more classmates who go on to attend college are five percentage points more likely to attend college. This research also found evidence that the preferences of classmates influence individual college choices in terms of encouragement, source of information, even as competitor in the enrolment market. Further, participants mentioned that even though the decision was influenced by others, the final decision to select a university was decided by their own decision.

Prior research shows that three variables are consistently rated as important to prospective students (Moogan, Baron and Harris, 1999; 2001; Price, Matzdorf, Smith et al., 2003; Veloutsou, Lewis and Paton, 2004; Domino, Libraire, Lutwiller et al., 2006; 2007). These are course, location and reputation. While these factor are considered by students of Indonesian

Public Universities in this current research, they cited other factors to be critical. These are cost, reputation and proximity. The course suitability in this research only placed in position 12 out of the 25 factors that influence the decision to choose a university. This result is contrast with earlier findings by Price et al. (2003), Maringe (2006) and Whitehead et al. (2006) who revealed that the course is often cited as the most important reason for choosing a university.

Several factors that influenced students' choice of university with different level of priority have been found from previous studies. For example, Briggs (2006) identified academic reputation, distance from home, location, own perception, graduate employment, social life nearby, entry requirements, teaching reputation, quality of faculty, information supplied by university, and research reputation as the top ten of the most crucial factors. Pimpa and Suwannapirom (2008) found the five key influencing factors were personal attitude, curriculum, potential employment, attractiveness of campus, and tuition fees. Raposo and Alves (2007) found that proximity to home, cost, parents and school teacher's recommendation are the four most essential factors. Yamamoto (2006) found that personal preference, parents, university entrance exam scores, university ranking, advisors, and friends as the six most influential factors. Veloutsou et al. (2004) found university reputation, course and campus as the three most critical factors. Soutar and Turner (2002) found that course suitability, academic reputation, job prospects and teaching quality as the four most important factors. Even though some of those above findings matched attributes found in the current research, respondents in this current research mentioned an extra factor that influenced them to choose a university. This extra factor is that by studying in the public universities it would make easier to students to do postgraduate in overseas.

Findings of this research signify that expectations held by undergraduate students that choice criteria are influential in the choice stage of selecting an institute of higher education. According to the result, present and future students expect good quality products and have specific views on what characteristics are important to them. Relevant literature supports these findings.

### **Implication of the Findings**

This aim of this research was to investigate the perceptions of Indonesian students when selection a public university in regard with their choice criteria. As expected from the

literature review, the respondents in this study exhibited many similar responses when choosing a university as other countries. These included cost, reputation, and proximity which were key drivers when selecting an institute of higher education. The other common antecedents are job prospect, parents and quality.

These results suggest that the antecedents to studying at a public university for potential undergraduates are vary and complex. The implication is that universities may addresses those important attributes more effectively so that can influence the choice process among potential students. The results, however, do not imply that all Indonesian university reveal the similar of their student choice criteria.

The results, which confirmed choice criteria found in the literature, also discovered other attributes not evident in the extant literature. Among those choice factors, the opportunity to continue at postgraduate level is one of the important criteria with least mentioned by Indonesian students although it is note that this requires further investigation. The findings imply that the factor mentioned by Indonesian students might be unique to Indonesia higher education context. The result suggests that universities should take into account of this factor for attracting prospective students.

Although, this study has revealed several important factors considered by Indonesian students when selecting a university that both support and contradict previous research, these factors have different level of importance as these criteria may be unique to Indonesia. In addition to determining what is important to Indonesian students when they choose universities, it will help universities to promote their institutions and to have a greater knowledge about the underlying motivations of students for furthering study in higher education. However, this result should be interpreted with caution given the smaller sample size and qualitative methodology.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This research has limitations that restrict the generalisation of its findings and open up directions for future research. Firstly, only public universities in two of the most populated regions in Indonesia were investigated. This means that the information gathered and the conclusions reached may require further testing in less populated regions. Secondly, the study only conducted at public universities and did not cover institutes and other higher education institutions because they are different type of higher education institution.

This study was exploratory in nature, therefore deeper analysis of qualitative interviews followed by quantitative study are planned in addition to addressing a number of related research questions such as to determine factors that have the greatest influence on Indonesian students' choice in the selection of an Indonesian Public University. The determinants discussed above also warrant further investigation in a quantitative manner. It is also important to determine if there is a difference in the student choice criteria of selecting an Indonesian Public University between an autonomous and non-autonomous university. This attribute is specific to the both type of universities. Future research in this area is recommended to determine if there is a distinctive factor occur.

Overall, the findings, although limited in scope and depth, may provide some light to service marketing arms of higher education institutions in developing their marketing agenda. Consideration should be given to the important attributes not only for those factors that most significant, but also other important factors which impacting on prospective students' decision making process.

### **Progress to date and Questions to the Panel**

I commenced my Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidature in June-July 2009. My review of the literature indicates that this topic in an Indonesian context is under-researched, and therefore would like to pursue my doctoral program on this topic. I have presented the research on the first-year research proposal review on November 2009. Data collection for the first phase or qualitative research method have conducted recently after finishing the ethics application on the mid of June. The result presented in this paper was a preliminary finding of the exploratory studies.

I would like to obtain some feedback on my preliminary findings which have not completed yet. I would also need some directions for the next phase of my data collection with a larger sample. This second phase depends on the results of the previous phase. Therefore, the feedback will be valuable for refining the next step of the research. As a final point, I would like to attend the doctoral colloquium also to learn how papers are presented in a prestigious learning forum like this and to network with colleagues and experts.

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