

Key Factors of Prospective Students's Interest in Choosing a Study Program

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ABSTRACT

Study programs as products offered by universities are currently facing a very dynamic competitive situation. Managers are required to be able to understand the various things considered by prospective students and be able to meet their expectations. This article aims to develop a research model that is able to predict the antecedents of interest in prospective students enrolling in a particular study program. A literature review was conducted to build a research model that describes the antecedents of interest in enrolling in study programs. The results of the study show that job opportunities, quality and the environment of higher education are antecedents that have consequences on the interest in enrolling prospective students in a study program at a particular tertiary institution.

Keywords: theory of planned behavior, student attitude, job opportunity, quality of higher education, environment of higher education.

Faktor Kunci Minat Calon Mahasiswa Memilih Program Studi

Abstract

Program studi sebagai produk yang ditawarkan oleh perguruan tinggi saat ini menghadapi situasi persaingan yang sangat dinamis. Pengelola dituntut mampu memahami berbagai hal yang dipertimbangkan calon mahasiswa dan mampu memenuhi harapannya. Artikel ini bertujuan Menyusun model penelitian yang mampu menduga antecedent minat calon mahasiswa mendaftar pada suatu program studi tertentu. Kajian pustaka dilakukan untuk membangun model penelitian yang menggambarkan antecedent minat mendaftar ke program studi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa peluang kerja, mutu dan lingkungan perguruan tinggi merupakan antecedent yang memberikan konsekuensi pada minat mendaftar calon mahasiswa pada suatu program studi di perguruan tinggi tertentu. Studi empiris diperlukan untuk memberikan bukti kehandalan model penelitian dalam menjelaskan hubungan antar variable pembentuknya.

Kata kunci: teori perilaku berencana, minat calon mahasiswa, peluang kerja, kualitas perguruan tinggi, lingkungan perguruan tinggi.

INTRODUCTION

Fierce competition also occurs in higher education providers. Organizational comparative advantage is required to continue to be built to adapt and innovate, so that it remains relevant and competitive in line with environmental changes (Baláž et al., 2023).

Higher education as an organization providing higher education, offers educational products in various fields of knowledge and skills needed by the community. The operational implementation of education in specific fields of knowledge and skills that are packaged in a curriculum is carried out by study programs (UU No: 12 of 2021). The name of the study program reflects the educational product brand in the form of specific knowledge and skills that students will receive.

One way for universities to build competitive advantage is by forming new study programs. The key to the success of a new study program opened by a tertiary institution is highly dependent on the level of conformity, alignment with the wishes of current and future stake holders. Prospective students are one of the important elements of higher education stakeholders, which are the main market for new study programs offered by universities. The accuracy of the new study program in adopting the wishes of prospective students is the key to success for the study program. The prediction of the success of a study program can be shown by the amount of intention to enroll prospective students in the new study program.

However, building the excellence of higher education is not enough by opening study programs that are desired by the community because the decision to enter higher education is a complex and multi-dimensional problem because it relates to the behavior of prospective students. The theory of planned behavior provides a reference in predicting human behavior. Theory of planned behavior defines behavioral intention as

behavior only when the behavior is under the individual's perceived control, meaning that the person considers himself to have full control over the decision to perform the behavior or not to do it (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen & Madden, (1986) was the first to test the theory of planned behavior. Research findings consistently show that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control influence behavioral intentions (Yakasai & Jusoh, 2015); (Lizin et al., 2017); (Sun, 2020); (Norisnita & Indriati, 2022), which then affects the performance of the behavior (Bamberg et al., 2007); (Hasyim & Purnasari, 2021); (Liu et al., 2021).

Research has shown that the intention-behavior relationship is consistent, but only moderate in strength (Armitage & Conner, 2001); (Hagger et al., 2002). This finding means that individuals can have strong intentions but fail to transfer them into actual behavior (Harris & Hagger, 2007). Researchers have tried to find moderating variables that can help strengthen the conversion of intentions into behaviors such as: implementation intentions (Orbell et al., 1997); regret anticipation and descriptive norms (Sheeran & Orbell, 1999); intention stability (Sheeran et al., 1999); temporal stability (Conner et al., 2000); need satisfaction (Harris & Hagger, 2007); lack of habit, perceived policy effectiveness (Lizin et al., 2017); consumer social responsibility, marketing mix (Chou et al., 2020); confidence level (Sun, 2020); perceived price (Dorce et al., 2021).

From the research journey with the theory of planned behavior, it can be seen that there has been an extraordinary development, namely the variables used to predict intention and behavior. At the beginning of the planned behavior theory, there were only two variables used to predict intention and behavior, namely subjective norm and attitude. Then it developed with the inclusion of one variable, namely perceived behavior control. In

subsequent developments, in addition to the three main variables, the variables included became very diverse, such as: awareness consequences, anticipating feelings of guilt, general problem awareness, personal norms (Bamberg et al., 2007); environmental concerns (Paul et al., 2016); moral norms, descriptive norms (Shi et al., 2017); past behavior, moral norms, consequences (Lizin et al., 2017); perceived credibility, trust, perceived expertise, and perceived congruence (Chetioui et al., 2020); perceived quality (Chou et al., 2020); perceived moral obligation, sustainability self-identity (Chen, 2020); innovativeness in new technologies (Ho et al., 2020); self-efficacy (Norisnita & Indriati, 2022). Of the many variables that develop in research related to interest in subsequent behavior, they often no longer touch the initial ideas of this theory but apply variables outside the initial ideas of the theory to adapt to the research context to fulfill the rules of model simplicity.

Theory of planned behavior is widely used in behavioral research in various fields such as: environmental (Blok et al., 2014); waste recycling behavior (Botezagias et al., 2015); public transportation (Bamberg et al., 2007); green hotels (Han et al., 2010); ethical product (Sun, 2020); sustainability labeled coffee (Chen, 2020); environmental attitude (Asih et al., 2020); halal food (Hasyim & Purnasari, 2021); outbound travel based on the perception of Covid 19 (Liu et al., 2021); cryptocurrencies (Norisnita & Indriati, 2022).

(Che Azemi & Romle, 2020) implementing the theory of planned behavior in universities. Several studies show that product, location influence the decision to choose a college (Risdiyanto & Kurniyati, 2015); staff support, sports & recreation, advice, reputation, place of residence, campus, financial feasibility, social support, academic resources are factors considered in choosing a study program (Fuller & Delorey, 2016); study program image and reputation of higher

education, job opportunities have a strong influence on the decision to choose a tertiary institution (Rudhumbu et al., 2017); type of study program, university reputation, market opportunities, costs, security, campus facilities, location, mentoring have an effect on satisfaction and college selection (Connie et al., 2018); individual personality, job prospects, college image, and family support have a positive effect on the decision to choose a tourism study program (Sabalius Uhai et al., 2020); Transportation accessibility, study program accreditation, job opportunities, competency programs, supporting services and facilities, lecturer education levels, tuition fees influence the choice of study program (Hamta et al., 2021); getting a decent job, increasing knowledge and skills, inviting friends are factors that influence students to choose to continue their studies in certain study programs (Karno, 2022); product, price, location, and advertising have a significant impact on the selection of *Tuah Negeri College of Economics* (Yanti et al., 2023).

However, other studies say that the campus and its facilities have no effect on the choice of study program (Azizan et al., 2017) while university features also do not affect the selection of study programs (Le et al., 2022). Internal factors (self-motivation, dreams, desires) were found to have more influence on interest in choosing a study program compared to external factors (family support, school support and college image) (Singgih Purnomo & Rayhan Gunaningrat, 2022). Other studies also show that the ability to meet expectations, university features, individual factors that influence the choice of majors, suitability with personal characteristics, university reputation are not able to influence students' interest in choosing a study program (Le et al., 2022). The controversy over the results of this study is interesting for further research in an effort to find the right model according to the existing context.

This article aims to build a key theoretical model that predicts the interest of prospective students to choose a study program. The theoretical model of this research is useful as a guideline for conducting empirical research to support decision making for the management of study programs and higher education in order to be able to get prospective students and manage the operations properly.

RESEARCH METHODS

The preparation of the proposed empirical model was carried out by means of a literature review with the following stages: identification of relevant theories, identification of theory developments, identification of studies that have been carried out, identification of appropriate variables to develop theoretical models and preparation of the proposed hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Research Model

1.1 Registering Interests

The term interest can describe two distinct experiences (although they often occur together): the individual's momentary experience of being captivated by an object and the more enduring feeling that the object is pleasurable and worthy of further exploration. Therefore, interest is a psychological state characterized by increased attention, effort, and influence, which is experienced at a given moment (situational interest), as well as a long-lasting tendency to re-engage with a particular object or topic from time to time (Hidi & Ann Renninger, 2006). Ferdinand (2006) formulate indicators of buying interest are: the intensity of searching for information about a product, the desire to buy immediately and preferential desire. Referring to the definition of interest, indicators of interest are formulated: pleasure, intensity of seeking information, desire to register immediately and choice preferences. The researcher formulates the variables that

are predicted to influence the interest of prospective students in choosing a study program, namely: job opportunities, quality image of the organizing tertiary institution, price, quality of communication, supporting environment (Risdiyanto & Kurniyati, 2015; Rudhumbu et al., 2017; Connie et al., 2018; Sabalius Uhai et al., 2020). Based on previous research and considering simple principles in developing the model, predictors of interest in registering are: employment opportunities; higher education quality and higher education environment.

1.2 Job Opportunities

Prospective students will logically choose study programs that have good job opportunities after they graduate. Job opportunities are the willingness of certain jobs to develop a career, get a decent job status, and receive decent compensation for a living. Study Rosalina et al., (2020) shows that job market opportunities are factors that influence students to choose the accounting profession. Siddiky & Akter, (2021) also said that student career choices are influenced by the study program they choose. This research shows that the study program is a factor to be considered in future career selection.

Research result Rudhumbu et al., (2017); Connie et al., (2018); Sabalius Uhai et al., (2020); Hamta et al., (2021); Karno, (2022) obtained evidence that job opportunities affect the decision to choose a college study program. Referring to the results of previous studies, hypothesis 1 is proposed as follows.

H1: work opportunities have a positive effect on choosing a study program.

1.3 Higher Education Quality

The quality of higher education in this study means both the image and the reputations believed by prospective students. The image of the university is the result of an aggregate process using students' mental perceptions of their own reality, based on evaluating various attributes of the university

through the expression of their feelings, ideas, beliefs, impressions, and real life experiences at the university with its four forming dimensions, namely external communication and values, national and international accreditation, economic value, and university facilities (Manzoor et al., 2021).

Education personnel support, sports & recreation, advice, reputation, campus facilities, financial feasibility, student recreation, academic resources are factors considered in choosing a study program (Fuller & Delorey, 2016). Research conducted Connie et al., (2018), Sabalius Uhai et al., (2020), conveyed the results that the quality of tertiary institutions had a positive effect on the decision to choose a study program in tertiary institutions. Another study states that tuition fees and facilities affect the choice of study program (Connie et al., 2018), (Herman & Suryadi, 2019); study program accreditation, competencies formed by a study program, facilities and support services, lecturer education level, tuition fees are factors that influence the choice of study program (Hamta et al., 2021); college image (Singgih Purnomo & Rayhan Gunaningrat, 2022); cost (Yanti et al., 2023). For this reason, hypothesis 2 is proposed as follows:

H2: the quality of tertiary institutions has a positive effect on the decision to choose a study program.

1.4 Higher Education Environment

The environment in which the university is located are elements that are outside the campus, which affect the calm, comfort, and sense of security of students in life on campus. The indicators developed to measure the university environment consist of: the strategic geographical location of the campus, the facilities needed by students, security conditions around the campus, social relations with the community around the campus.

Housing and social support outside of campus activities are factors to be considered in choosing a study program (Fuller & Delorey, 2016). Research conducted Connie et al., (2018); Ilgan et. Al., (2018) shows evidence that the higher education environment influences the decision of prospective students to choose a tertiary institution that organizes the desired study program. Another study states that the ease of access to transportation also influences the choice of study program (Hamta et al., 2021); location consisting of access to public transportation, location on the main road, parking security and government regulatory support (Yanti et al., 2023). Referring to the research findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: the higher education environment influences interest in enrolling in study programs.

Table 1 presents the state of the art of interest in enrolling in a study program.

Table 1. State of the Art Interest in Applying to the Study Program

No	Research Title	Researcher	Research result
1	Marketing Strategy for Private Higher Education in Sleman Regency, Yogyakarta Based on Marketing Stimuli	(Risdiyanto & Kurniyati, 2015)	The product variable, location influences the decision to choose a college.
2	Making the choice: University and program selection factors for undergraduate management education in Maritime Canada	(Fuller & Delorey, 2016)	Staff support, sports & recreation, advice, reputation, place of residence, campus, financial feasibility, social support, academic resources are factors considered in choosing a study program.
3	A Study on Student' Choice in the University	(Ajibola et al., 2017)	The decision to choose a study program is mostly made by prospective students.
4	Factors that Influence Undergraduate Students' Choice of a University: A Case of Botho University in Botswana	(Rudhumbu et al., 2017)	Image and university reputation study program variables, job opportunities have a strong influence on the decision to choose a college.
5	Exploring Key Factors Influencing University Choice: An Emprical Study on Malaysia Students	(Connie et al., 2018)	Variable types of study programs, university reputation, market opportunities, costs, security, campus facilities, location, mentoring have an effect on satisfaction and college selection.
6	Factors Affecting University Choice: A Study on University Freshman Students	Ilgan et al., (2018)	Variables of job opportunities, the quality of tertiary institutions, and the campus social environment affect the interest of prospective students.
7	Factors Influencing Students Choosing the Tourism Study Program, Department of Tourism at Samarinda State Polytechnic.	(Sabalius Uhai et al., 2020)	Individual personality variables, job prospects, college image, and family support have a positive effect on the decision to choose a tourism study program.
8	The decision of choosing study programs is based on students' perceptions of accounting study programs in Batam.	(Hamta et al., 2021)	Transportation accessibility, study program accreditation, job opportunities, competency programs, supporting services and facilities, lecturer education levels, tuition fees influence the choice of study program.
9	The Interest of High School Students in Study Programs in College	(Karno, 2022)	Getting a decent job, increasing knowledge and skills, inviting friends are factors that influence students to choose to continue their studies in certain study programs.
10	Student Decision Choosing Management Program At Tuah Negeri College Of Economics	(Yanti et al., 2023)	Product, price, location, and advertising have a significant impact on the selection of Tuah Negeri College of Economics.

Based on previous research, it was indicated that the variables of job opportunities, quality of higher education institutions, and the environment of higher

education institutions had an effect on interest in enrolling in study programs, so a research model was developed which is presented in Figure 1.

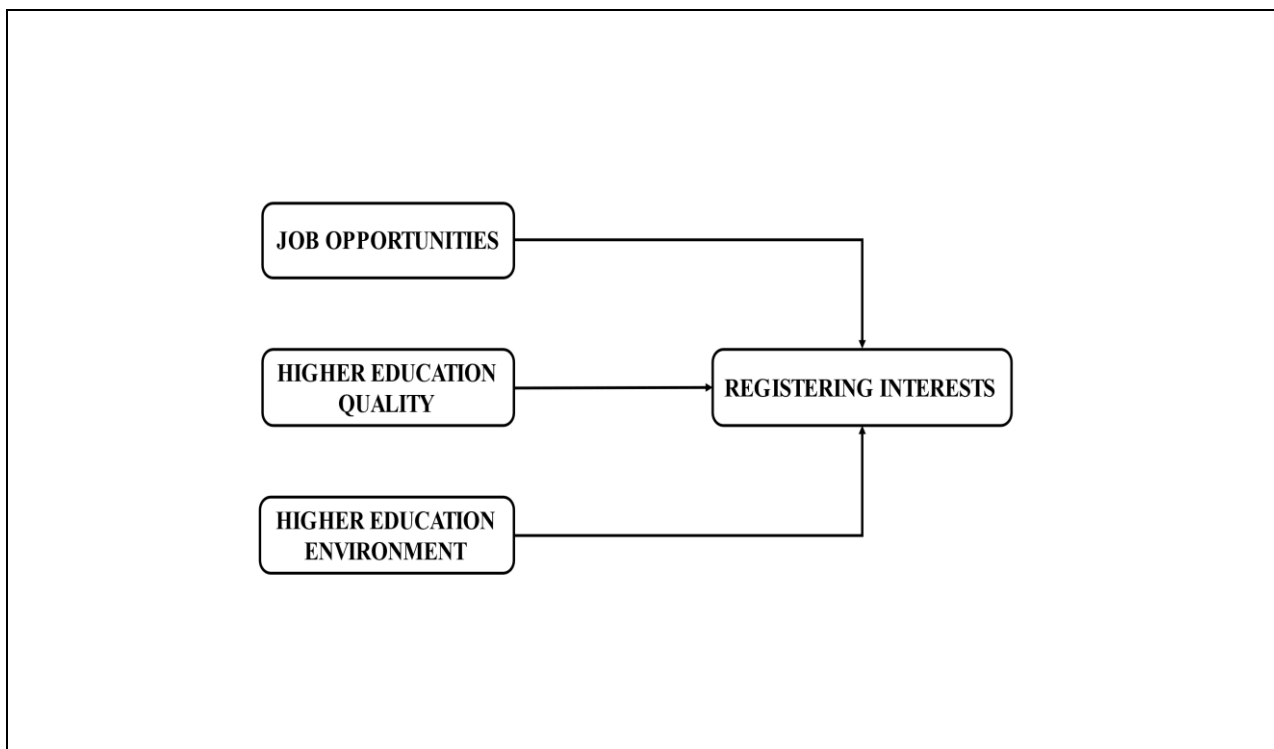


Figure 1: Research Model

2. Operational Definition and Variable Indicators

Operational definitions and indicators are needed to provide boundaries and

directions in conducting empirical research. In this article, operational definitions and indicators of the proposed model are formulated as presented in table 2 below.

Table 2 Operational Definitions and Variable Indicators

No	Variables	Operational Definition	Indicators
1	Interested in Registering	A tendency to pay attention and act towards other people, activities or situations of objects with pleasure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information seeking intensity. • Desire to buy immediately. • Preferential wishes.
2	Job Opportunities	The perception of the availability of certain jobs according to the study program after graduation.	(Hamta et al., 2021); (Sabalius Uhai et al., 2020); (Connie et al., 2018): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of getting a job according to competence. • Occupational social status. • Career development opportunities • Decent fees.
3	Study Program Quality	Perceived image and reputations of higher education institutions and study programs that are believed by prospective students.	(Hamta et al., 2021); (Manzoor et al., 2021); (Sabalius Uhai et al., 2020); (Connie et al., 2018): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation. • Tuition fee. • Facility. • Lecturer quality • Share value • Alumni.
4	Campus environment	Elements that are outside the campus, which affect the calm, comfort, and sense of security of students in life on campus.	(Hamta et al., 2021), (Yanti et al., 2023): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation access (Risdiyanto & Kurniyati, 2015), (Yanti et al., 2023): • The strategic geographic location of the campus. • Security conditions around campus. (Risdiyanto & Kurniyati, 2015); (Fuller & Delorey, 2016): • Facilities needed by students (a place to live, eat, laundry, shopping center, entertainment, sports, open space). • Social relations with the community around the campus.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research model contributes to the development of a theory of planned behavior in its application in tertiary institutions as a predictor of interest in choosing a study program, thereby adding to the existing body of literature. The proposed research model also has advantages because it is expected to be comprehensive to examine the factors that influence the interest of prospective students in choosing a study program. This advantage

lies in the employment opportunity variable which is a proxy for the reasons for prospective students to continue their education to tertiary institutions. Same opinion (Siddiky & Akter, 2021) who said that student career choices are influenced by the study program they choose. Higher education quality variable is also an interesting factor to be proposed in this research model, because the community is very intelligent and exposed and able to access transparent information from various

sources, so it is very easy to obtain various information related to the tertiary institution and study program they will choose. Thus testing this variable is very important to understand the indicators that are most considered by prospective students in their decisions as signaling devices that can be considered by managers to formulate appropriate policies. Environmental variables are also an important matter to be tested in the proposed research model because with the growing lifestyle needs of prospective millennial students who are diverse, they have more complex requirements in the educational process that are not just a matter of educational programs provided by campuses but are growing in the need for access to various support services and campus environment support. This is corroborated by the findings Fuller & Delorey, (2016) which states that staff support, sports & recreation, advice, reputation, place of residence, campus,

financial feasibility, social support, academic resources are factors considered in choosing a study program.

Some suggestions for further research are empirical testing of the proposed research model with various quantitative and qualitative approaches. Instrument testing needs to be done to find strong indicators in predicting each variable used. It is recommended to test the model using simple analytical tools but can present clear and detailed empirical evidence. Model testing can also be done by including moderating variables such as demographic factors such as gender, origin of prospective students, social and economic background. The type of study program and level of education can also be considered as moderating variables to provide complete empirical evidence so as to have strong predictive power in policy formulation.

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