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Students' Choice and Higher Education: The Case of Ghana Communication Technology University (GCTU)

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Abstract:

Education is crucial for the growth of a nation's workforce and is a fundamental human right; therefore, its significance for a country's success cannot be overstated (Global Monitoring Report, 2014). Choosing to further one's education is always a big responsibility and is unique to everyone, regardless of how vital education, particularly higher education (HE), is. There are many factors to take into account before enrolling in a higher education institution (HEI); therefore, every graduate or prospective student must choose which HEI to attend. This decision has always been challenging, especially considering a large number of HEIs available. This study's main objective is to evaluate the factors influencing GCTU students' decisions on higher education. By electronically distributing closed-ended questionnaires to the participants, the study was conducted on 310 GCTU freshmen to get their opinions on the most crucial variables influencing their decision to join. The variables were categorized as social, academic, and professional. The Wilcoxon Signed-rank test and the Kendell's W test were used to evaluate the final data in SPSS. The findings revealed that the top three social, academic, and work determinants were the school atmosphere, education expense, and study leave with pay. The study recommended that GCTU adopt a more technological approach in managing its student recruitments and target senior high school students who have not yet graduated, as their next step of HE education is with a tertiary institution. This is because the world is changing, and technology is the norm.

Keywords: Students, higher, institution, admission, Ghana communication Technology University

1. Introduction

The importance of education for a country's success cannot be understated because, in addition to being a fundamental human right, it is also essential for the development of a nation's workforce (Global Monitoring Report, 2014).

No matter how important education, specifically higher education (HE), is, choosing to further one's education is always a significant responsibility to undertake and is distinct to each person. Every graduate or prospective student must decide on which higher education institution (HEI) to attend because there are various considerations to make before enrolling in an HEI. This choice has always been difficult, especially when there are so many HEIs to consider.

The Ghana Education Service (GES) (2008) reminds students that primary and secondary education should prepare them for college-level jobs by assisting them in identifying the talents, skills, interests, and aptitudes needed. However, even though program selection and HEI enrolment are vital and required for prospective students, Edward and Quinter (2017) claim that second-cycle college graduates have difficulties selecting HEIs and programs to study.

Kula (2008) claims that while choosing which HEI to enrol in is a challenging undertaking in most less developed countries, such as Ghana, it is less difficult in more developed countries, such as the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK). The fact that there are so many HEIs and that they are well-equipped to meet every student's needs may have contributed to the generalizations made by the study.

There is little research on HEI enrolments in Ghana. However, studies in other countries have suggested that factors such as academic reputation, teaching, the suitability of programs or courses, the location of the HEI, the type of HEI—such as whether it is modern or old—the distance of the HEI from one's residence, and parental and teacher recommendations regarding whether or not to enrol in the HEI are essential factors (Crossman, 2010). The advantages or disadvantages of selecting a specific HEI affect both the individual and the country. As a result, all national stakeholders should be very interested in a citizen of Ghana's decision to enrol in a specific HEI.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In 1996, Ghana's first class of Senior High School graduates enrolled in HEIs and universities alike. Since then, enrolment trends in higher education (HE) or university education (UE) have changed, creating competition among HEIs

for students. A few years ago, Ghana's prospective HEI students only had three public HEIs or universities from which to choose, severely limiting their options. The Ghana Communication Technology University (GCTU), formerly known as Ghana Technology University College, is one of the several universities that have popped up over time, both public and private.

Prospective HEI students in Ghana now have a wide choice of options, thanks to the advent of these new HEIs. However, since GCTU is a new university, the old traditional universities in Ghana may not be concerned or even respond to this recent trend in enrolment due to the reputation they have built for themselves. As a result, new and emerging HEIs like GCTU must take specific steps to claim a fair share of the second cycle graduates.

Over the years, GCTU's admissions policy has changed from allowing students to enrol only once per academic year to three times every academic year, thus in January, May, and September. In addition, even more mature students are now being admitted to GCTU who only need to reach the age of 25 to be eligible for enrolment, as opposed to needing a certificate of qualification.

GCTU has even set up distance learning centres in four additional regions (i.e., Western region, Takoradi, Ashanti region, Kumasi, Eastern region, Koforidua, and Volta region, Ho). Despite all of these efforts, GCTU has not yet experienced an increase in enrolment. Hence, more needs to be done to help the policies become a reality. It is important to note that other interventions or actions aimed at boosting student enrolment would not be successful without knowledge or comprehension of the causes that caused the present students to select GCTU and enrol there in the first place.

According to Fapohunda (2015), HEIs face a variety of difficulties, including maintaining their competitiveness, continuing to operate, managing rising operating costs, and meeting client expectations. These present issues for GCTU require attention. Therefore this study, which aims to identify the variables influencing the decision to attend a higher education institution, in this case, GCTU, makes some recommendations to fill up any gaps that are found.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The study's overall goal is to evaluate the variables affecting GCTU students' decisions on higher education. The study's particular goals are the following:

- To evaluate the elements influencing the decision to pursue higher education
- To determine the elements influencing the selection of the study program
- To investigate the difficulties students have while choosing a curriculum.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The study's conclusions might act as a springboard for further investigation into HEIs by other scholars. The study's findings would shed light on the variables influencing prospective students' decisions to enrol with GCTU as an HEI. The study's findings are anticipated to contribute to the body of information already known about the factors influencing the selection of HEIs. The study's conclusions should show the GCTU leadership how to direct their efforts and take the appropriate steps to boost enrolment. The study findings will assist relevant parties in making the necessary modifications in accordance with prospective students' choice of HEIs to be enrolled in.

2. Literature Review

A review of linked and related studies revealed that there is relatively little research on the variables influencing the selection of HEIs in Ghana. As a result, literature on subjects other than Ghana was used to inform this study. A research on students' preferences for academic institutions was done in the Netherlands by Lau (2011). The results of a self-completion questionnaire given to students at random revealed that faculty qualifications, university reputation, academic standards, the quality of education offered, the availability of modern facilities, opportunities for traineeships, curriculum flexibility, and student campus life were among the factors that students looked at most while choosing an HEI.

In their study using data from the American Testing Program, Krampf and Heinlein (1981) found that prospective students with a positive attitude toward higher education gave high ratings to informative campus visits, family recommendations, informative HE catalogues, friendliness of the campus atmosphere, how close the HE is to home, and attractiveness of the campus as deciding factors.

In their study, Afful and Noi (2010) opined that Ming (2010) agreed with McDonnell (1995), who proposed that academic reputation, size of the school, geographic location, selectivity of school, financial aid availability, availability of academic programs, student body population, and social atmosphere are among the factors to take into account while assessing the choice of HEIs.

According to their study conducted in Australia, Mazarol, Soutar, and Tien (1996), prospective students should take into account the reputation of the HE for quality as well as the willingness to value staff knowledge and quality based on prior credentials while choosing HEIs.

In his study on African-Americans, Savier (1993) confirmed Martin and Dixon (1991), who found that the availability of financial aid, job placement rates, the reputation of the institution, costs of attendance, geographic location, faculty creativity, and student body demographics- all had an impact on the choice of higher education.

Another study that looked into first-year enrolment at Washington State University using the admissions office's 'prospective student system,' an online recruitment tool, discovered that the main factors influencing their choice were employment opportunities after graduation, variety of courses, cost of attendance, faculty reputation, specific academic programs, career counselling, college reputation, and housing opportunities (Sanders, 1986).

According to Johnston's (2010) research, students do consult their parents while selecting higher education institutions and their decision to major in a specific subject is more likely to be affected by family tradition than by a desire to attend a particular university.

In their study of how prospective students choose HEIs in the UK, Hooley and Lynch (1981) cited university location, course compatibility, academic reputation, advice from parents and teachers, and academic reputation as influencing factors in their preference for a particular HEI. Their findings showed that prospective students of HEIs were eager to tolerate nearly any level of the other features as long as they got enrolled in the course of their choice. Their study further suggested that course appropriateness was the most crucial attribute in determining HE choice.

3. Methodology

The study used both primary and secondary data and was quantitative in character. Emails of freshmen were collected from the admissions office of GCTU due to the emergence of COVID-19 and the requirement to follow the pandemic's mitigation methods. All University freshmen were emailed a link to online surveys created with Google Docs, which they were asked to complete for analysis without jeopardizing the participants' privacy.

Before accessing data on freshmen and distributing surveys, the authorization and approval of the University's registrar were requested in order to uphold ethical standards.

The questions were organized into themes (e.g., social component, job security factor, and academic element) to determine the most influential factor. Responses were then sought using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from not at all important to extremely important.

By using the Krejcie and Morgan formula from 1970, a sample size of 310 was determined in order to guarantee a generalized measure for the study's population, and responses were collected from them because the intended population was too large for the study to continue:

$$s = \chi^2(N)(P) \frac{1 - P}{d^2(N - 1)} + \chi^2(1 - P)$$

Where;

s = Size of the sample (xxx)

χ^2 = Value of Chisquare from table; at 1^0 of freedom

N = Size of the population (300)

P = Proportion of the population; at 0.50 presumed to yield maximum size of sample

d = level of accuracy; defined as a percentage (5%)

Since every questionnaire was correctly completed, none of them was deleted. According to Babbie (1989), for any study, a response rate of 50% is sufficient, 60% is good, 70% is very good, and 90% raises no objections for analysis and/or reporting.

The study sought to examine each theme separately to determine which factors influence the selection decision of GCTU students the most. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS by adopting the non-parametric style, using Kendall's W test, and comparing it with Wixcoxon's test for double assurance.

4. Findings and Discussion

The study's goal was to evaluate the variables that affect students' decisions to attend GCTU; therefore, each variable was carefully examined to identify the most crucial ones.

4.1. Social Factor

The relative relevance of the social component factors was assessed using Kendall's W test.

	Mean Rank	N	Kendell's W	X	Df	Sig
1. School environment	2.8	310	0.196	17.688	3	0.01
2. Students' population	2.3	310				
3. Friends/relatives' recommendation	2.14	310				
4. Extra curriculum programmes	2.62	310				

Table 1: Social Factor Summary of Mean Ranks and Kendall's Test Statistics

Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 1 shows substantial differences in the mean rankings of the reasons under the social component are revealed by Kendall's W test ($W=.196$, $df=3$, $p0.001$). With a mean score of 2.8, GCTU's environment came in first, indicating that most students consider the university's environment while deciding whether to enrol or not.

To determine the relative importance of the factors under the social component that might be responsible for the significant effect, the Wilcoxon Signed-rank test was used with a Bonferroni's adjustment of critical exact significant value of .005.

	1	1	1	2	2
	v	v	v	v	v
	2	3	4	3	4
Z	-10.955b	-11.822b	-12.112b	-.688b	-1.062a
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Exact Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Exact Sig (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Point Probability	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 2: Wolcoxons's Test of Social Factors
Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 2's inference that all comparisons were significant at the crucial Exact Sig Value of .005 shows this. These comparisons were made between School environment (1) and Students' Population (2), School environment (1) and Friends'/Relatives' Recommendation (3), School environment (1) and Extracurricular Programs (4), and School environment (1) and Friends'/Relatives' Recommendation (3), all of which were statistically significant (Z=-11.822b, p.005). All indicated that the school setting is the preferred one. Students' population (2) and recommendations from friends or family (3) were compared (Z=-.688b; p.005), as were students' population (2) and extracurricular activities (4) (Z=-1.062a; p.005). Although the student population favours recommendations from family and friends, extracurricular activities sponsored by the University are less popular.

4.2. Academic Factor

	Mean Rank	N	Kendell's W	X	Df	Sig
1. Cost of education	3.8	310	3.61	436.888	4	0.000
2. Availability of desired programme	3.5	310				
3. Quality of teaching	3.2	310				
4. Academic reputation	2.62	310				
5. Mode of application	3.7	310				

Table 3: Academic Factor Summary of Mean Ranks and Kendall's Test Statistics
Source: Field Data (2022)

The relative relevance of the factors supporting the academic component was assessed using Kendall's W test. According to table 3, the cost of education is ranked highest (mean = 3.8), showing that it is the most relevant reason students consider while choosing GCTU, which shows significant changes in the mean rankings of the justifications under the academic component (W=3.61, df=4, p0.005). The most crucial factor that affected students' decisions regarding their choice of HE was the mode of application.

To analyze the relative significance of the factors under the academic component that may have contributed to the significant effect, the Wilcoxon Signed-rank test was used in this instance as well, with a Bonferroni's adjustment of critical Exact significant value of .005.

	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4
	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
	2	3	4	5	3	4	5	4	5	5
Z	10.955b	-11.822b	-12.112b	-1.421b	-.688b	-7.821a	-8216a	-1.062a	-10.076b	-11.325b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Exact Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Exact Sig (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Point Probability	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 4: Wolcoxons's Test of Academic Factors
Source: Field Data (2022)

While using the critical Exact Sig Value of .005, table 4 reveals that eleven pairwise comparisons of the reasons are highly significant. These are the average rankings of the costs of education (1) and the availability of preferred programs (2), showing that the former is more important than the latter ($z=10.955b$; $p<.005$). Cost of education (1) was once more compared to teaching quality, academic repute, and mode of application ($z=-11.822b$, $p<.005$, $z=-12.112b$, $p<.005$, and $z=-1.421b$, $p<.005$), respectively. All of these pointed to the cost of education as the most essential and desirable consideration, followed by the application method or how potential students of GCTU get their applications processed.

The availability of the desired program (2) was contrasted with the teaching quality (3) ($z=-.688b$; $p<.005$), the reputation of the academic institution (4) ($z=-7.821a$; $p<.005$), and the application method (5) ($z=-8.216a$; $p<.005$). It was discovered that, in addition to academic reputation and application method, which were given greater weight than the availability of desired program in the selection of GCTU by its students, quality of education was the least valued factor.

The effectiveness of instruction (3) was examined next to academic standing (4) ($z=-1.062a$; $p<.005$) and application method (5) ($z=-10.076b$; $p<.005$). Here, academic standing and application method were more significant factors than educational quality.

Finally, when academic reputation (4) and manner of application (5) were examined, the form of application was found to be the most crucial element in prospective students' decision to attend GCTU ($z=-11.325b$; $p<.005$).

4.3. Work Factor

	Mean Rank	N	Kendell's W	X	Df	Sig
1. Study leave with pay	3.8	310	3.61	436.888	4	0.000
2. Ability to study and work	3.5	310				
3. Quality of teaching	3.2	310				
4. Closeness of home /work	2.62	310				
5. Possibility of being employed upon graduation	1.9	310				

Table 5: Work Factor Summary of Mean Ranks and Kendall's Test Statistics
Source: Field data (2022)

From table 5, Kendall's W test revealed significant variations ($W=.361$, $df=4$, $p<0.000$) in the mean rankings of the justifications under the work factor ($W=.196$, $df=4$, $p<0.000$). Here, study leave with pay was ranked the highest with a mean of 3.8, implying that most students do look out for flexibility in working while pursuing academic work.

Once again, the Wilcoxon Signed-rank test was employed with a Bonferroni's adjustment of crucial exact significant value of .005 to investigate the relative relevance of the causes under the work component that may be accountable for the significant effect.

	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	4
	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
	2	3	4	5	3	4	5	5
Z	10.955b	-11.822b	-12.112b	-1.421b	-.688b	-1.062a	-10.076b	-11.325b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Exact Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Exact Sig (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Point Probability	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 6: Wolcoxons's Test of Work Factor
Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 6 reports 8 pairwise comparisons of the highly significant reasons when the crucial Exact sig value of .005 was applied. According to the table reports, all eight comparisons were highly significant. These were the contrasts between study leave with pay(1) and ability to study and work (2), ($z=10.955b$; $p<.005$); study leave with pay(1) and quality of teaching(3), ($z=-11.822b$; $p<.005$); study leave with pay(1) and closeness of home/work(4), ($z=-12.112b$; $p<.005$); and study leave with pay(1) and the possibility of being employed upon graduation(5), ($z=-1.421b$; $p<.005$). It was established that study leave with pay was ranked the most important factor among the ability to study and work, quality of teaching, the closeness of home/work, and the possibility of being employed upon graduation.

Also, the ability to study and work (2) was compared with the quality of teaching(3), ($z=-.688b$; $p<.005$). The ability to study and work was ranked important to the quality of teaching. On the other hand, quality of teaching was considered the most essential factor to the closeness of work (4), ($z=-1.062a$; $p<.005$) and the possibility of being employed upon graduation (5) ($z=-10.076b$; $p<.005$).

Finally, the closeness of home/work (4) ranked important compared to the possibility of being employed upon graduation (5), ($z=-11.325b$; $p<.005$).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the current study revealed that 'school atmosphere' and 'extracurricular programs' had a greater impact on students' enrolment decisions than the other social elements. This outcome seems to be consistent with the current sample's demographics, which showed that 60% of the participants, who were recent graduates from the second cycle, were young. As many graduates from the second cycle may be recruited, this shows that the University's goal of boosting student enrolment has not yet been achieved. Therefore, it is advised that GCTU launch public awareness efforts, as should other higher education institutions like GCTU.

Contrary to other studies' findings (Krampf & Heinlein, 1981; Hooley & Lynch, 1981; Sanders, 1986; Dixon & Martin, 1991; Sevier, 1993; McDonnell, 1995; Mazzarol, Soutar & Tien, 1996; Mazzarol, Soutar & Tien, 1996; Mazzarol, Soutar & Tien, 1996, 1997), it is not surprising that these variables were placed closely by the students in this poll as the most important ones that affected their decision to enrol at GCTU.

It is not surprising that factors like the opportunity to work and study, paid study leave, and the calibre of instruction are significant and are listed under the work component. This is due to the fact that a sizable portion of study participants funded and participated in a variety of entrepreneurial activities. These participants were committed to improving their knowledge and skills and, as a result, expected to add value to whatever economic activity they were involved in or wherever they found themselves. Therefore, it is not surprising that when compared to the other reasons stated under the work aspect, the students in this study find the ability to work and pay for school to be the most alluring reason for enrolling at GCTU.

The findings above are consistent with empirical studies that highlighted 'work commitments' as the main factor preventing students from finishing their education within the required time (Perry, Borman, Care, Edwards and Park, 2008; Tinto, 1993). Although most HEIs provide work-study programs like a modular sandwich and part-time courses to address this issue, these programs are never flexible enough in terms of both the content and how it is delivered and how quickly students are expected to finish their studies.

The implications of the findings are particularly relevant to students and administrators at similar institutions because this study's findings are based on a sample of undergraduate students admitted to pursue a bachelor's degree at GCTU. The results of this study suggest that general recruitment strategies should consider the GCTU application process. To attract potential students, such as SHS graduates and even the working class, it is essential to adopt a more practical and technologically friendly approach, improve teaching standards, make competitive programs available, and, if at all possible, create original programs.

Last but not least, future studies should focus on Senior High School students who have not yet enrolled at GCTU or other institutions of higher education in the nation.

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