RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Assessment of Students' Needs in Tertiary Education in Malaysian Universities

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In the context of globalisation, declining interest in higher education and persistent dropout rates have raised concerns about the adequacy of student support and programme relevance in Malaysian universities. **Methods:** An ethical approval was obtained from the Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. This study employed a quantitative survey design involving 30 tertiary students from Malaysian universities. A survey comprising Likert-scale items across four constructs: University, Society Influence, Family Influence, and Student was administered to the students. The survey items were reliable because the Cronbach's alpha value was 0.936. **Results:** The majority of participants agreed with items across all four constructs, indicating that institutional reputation, societal expectations, family support, and individual factors jointly influence students' decisions to pursue and persist in tertiary education. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that multifaceted influences shape students' higher education choices in Malaysia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many higher education institutions (HEIs) face the problems of unprepared students. The education system has changed after the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) struck the world (Agbonlahor, Lamidi, Gibbs, & Nash, 2024; Lim & Ho, 2022). This causes the students to lose interest in studies, and some would likely drop out of their university.

The goal of education undoubtedly shifts as societal demands do, but improving students' learning domains has always been the main priority for all age groups (Mantai, Swain, Bearman, & Brew, 2023). It is important to find out the tertiary students' needs to strategise programme approach and marketing their needs. The higher education authorities will need to investigate the factors influencing students' choices and decisions. This will attract students to pursue their higher education at colleges and universities after secondary education, as well as review and develop appropriate strategies. By doing so, it will promote particular institutions through

better knowledge by focusing on the key factors that could significantly affect university choices (Khairani & Razak, 2013).

Understanding the key factors that influence tertiary students to remain in the university can enhance decision-making for students, ensuring they choose educational routes that match their abilities and goals (Khairani & Razak, 2013). By obtaining accessibility to HEIs, tertiary students could create a more promising future since tertiary education provides both theoretical knowledge and practical skills vital for their personal and professional development (Mantai, Swain, Bearman, & Brew, 2023). This aids individual students and supports them while also contributing to the nation's future since they are leaders, innovators and workforce essential for the country's advancement. Their advancement is closely connected to the broader progress of society, resulting in a more knowledgeable, skilled and thriving populace.

However, the studies about students' needs are not analysed in detail, especially the cases of low intakes and continuous drop-outs in the HEIs. Most of the studies examined the tertiary students' needs in pursuing their studies (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Khairani & Razak, 2013; Sarkodie, Asare, & Asare, 2020). Understanding the factors that influence the low intakes and continuous drop-outs can help improve decision-making processes for students, ensuring they pursue educational paths that align with their skills and aspirations.

This study seeks to analyse how these factors can impact the students' decisions, as well as investigate the programmes offered, the HEIs' recognition and reputation, as well as the choice made by students to enroll in Malaysian private HEIs. This study intends to fill in the gap by addressing these factors through targeted policies and student-centered interventions may enhance enrolment and reduce attrition rates in higher education institutions. This is because it is alarming to notice that 17,613 tertiary students left university, while 5,165 more were suspended according to data from the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) (Atat & Abd. Majid, 2024). In addition, this study aims to explore and identify the factors that influence HEI students in their decision to choose their higher education courses. To ensure that the research objective is fulfilled, a research question, which is framed in this current study is as follows: "What are the factors influencing the students' decision to continue their studies at higher education institutions?"

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia practises dualistic tertiary education system by permitting participation from both public and private HEIs. The statistics from the Ministry of Higher

Education of Malaysia forecasted that the potential growth of revenue that is expected to be generated from these HEIs will be around RM65 billion (USD14.8 billion) by 2026, and with many alternative institutions for students, there is a high level of competition among the tertiary education institutions to attract students (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Sarkodie, Asare, & Asare, 2020).

Students' Needs in Tertiary Education

In the age of globalisation, only universities that are aiming for quality education will endure (Salfi, Khurshid, Saleem, Saeed, Ahmad, Jabeen, Mehmood, & Ahmad, 2015). Nowadays, the function of universities is similar to that of industries in terms of their instruction, with students representing the products, customers being the students, and teachers acting as sellers or salespersons. The students will enroll only in those universities that offer quality education through valuable courses at the lowest price. Furthermore, the guidance given to them is suitable in the open market. This kind of quality instruction relies on two factors, namely, need-based courses or skills and efficient teaching or instruction.

Higher education institutions are expected to prepare students for a career in a fast-changing society (Bullock & Wilder, 2016; Lucas, 2016). It no longer suffices that students learn a fixed body of knowledge. Rather, students are expected to be proficient in competences or skills that allow them to keep up with these changes and make a positive contribution to society (Baartman, Bastiaens, Kirschner, & van der Vleuten, 2006). It is fundamental to know the younger generations' wants and needs in their tertiary education. This will guide in strategising programme approach and marketing to cater to the students' needs (Vaessen, 2021).

Assessment on students' needs in tertiary education aims to foster learning, guarantee rigour in HEI choices, as well as equip students with resources and experience for showcasing their employability (Baartman & Quinlan, 2023). Consequently, it provides a resolution to three primary issues encountered by the sector and, more broadly, the improvement of learning and teaching quality (Baartman, Bastiaens, Kirschner, & van der Vleuten, 2006). In summary, this assessment has the potential to revolutionise HEIs which can be tailored to three essential objectives, which are learning, maintaining standards and enhancing employability.

Factors Influencing the Students' Decision to Continue Their Studies at Higher Education Institutions

Some institutions are known for producing graduates who excel in certain industries, which may

enhance job prospects. For example, The One Academy is dubbed as "Oscars" of Malaysian advertising industry and is Malaysia's leading art and design colleges. For some, a university's mission, values and alignment with personal beliefs, such as sustainability or religious affiliation can influence choices too (Aydin, 2015).

Cost Factors

There are other factors, such as cost factors that include primary expenses of tuition fees, living expenses of accommodation, meals, transportation, and personal expenses, books and supplies, as well as other hidden costs, such as books, software, labs and materials (Aydin, 2015; Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Cynthia & Chong, 2023; Harahap, Amanah, Gunarto, & Purwanto, 2021; Zhao & Kanjanapathy, 2024). Financial aids or scholarships leading to less student loan debt are crucial as students would need to consider the affordability of the institution alongside the potential for financial aid (Aydin, 2015; Patnaik, Dicko, Subudhi, & Parhi, 2024).

Reference Groups Factors

There are reference groups which include teachers, friends, siblings, peers, and relatives (Aydin, 2015; Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Stephenson, Heckert, & Yerger, 2016). Julaihi and Mohamadin (2024) highlighted personal decisions and family influence play significant roles in shaping students' programme choices, which are consistent with previous research emphasising the crucial role of family and peers in educational decision. This is because a family's budget or financial support affects the choice of the university, which relates to cost, as well.

Location Factors

There are also some of the factors that influence students' preference. Strategic location, whether the institution is in a big city, suburban area, or rural location, is important for the students to enrol in HEIs. The accessibility to nearby convenience stores and in terms of transportation, being closer to home for familial or personal reasons, studying abroad versus domestically, taking into account the lifestyle, culture, and future job opportunities in each location are the key factors for students to decide their HEIs (Aydin, 2015; Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022).

Accessibility to Facilities Factors

Accessibility to research facilities, laboratories, study resources, counselling and mental health services, academic support along with high end technology and infrastructure - well-equipped campuses with modern technology and learning spaces can greatly influence the student experience. On top of that, additional care and security for students influence college choice decisions, especially among parents (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Zhao & Kanjanapathy, 2024).

External Factors

The social environment, student organisations, extracurricular activities, recreational programmes can influence the students' decisions to continue their studies at the HEIs. The presence of clubs, societies, sports, which are relevant to the students' interests can influence how well students feel they would fit in elevate their lifestyle expectations (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Zhao & Kanjanapathy, 2024).

Studies on Students' Needs in Tertiary Education

Some studies show the growing competition in higher education which emphasised that the aim of the growing competition between universities was to increase the number of students, get research support, find faculty members, and receive financial contributions (Aydin, 2015; Sarkodie, Asare, & Asare, 2020). With the variety of courses offered, it is difficult to understand how students select colleges or universities of their choice (Julaihi & Mohamadin, 2024). Julaihi and Mohamadin (2024), as well as Khairani and Razak (2013) mentioned that better understanding on the influential factors is needed to restrategise their marketing strategies to attract and retain students. Hence, more studies in this field need to be conducted before a clearer picture of the education industry in Malaysia emerges (Sidin, Hussin, & Tan, 2003).

The reputation and ranking, both national and global, of specific academic programmes can influence and sway students' decisions, especially if they are interested in a particular field or students seeking prestige or recognition as it is a brand reputation, as well (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022). This is also prevalent in Khairani and Razak's (2013) study that evidenced that university's image is the most influential factor followed by the university's environment, facility provided and courses offered by the university. Studies by Connie et al. (2022) and Sidin et al. (2003) showed there is a significant relationship between programme, university reputation, academic quality, employment opportunity, pricing, security, education and campus facilities, surrounding campus, events, location, peers, mentoring, as well as personal characteristics, like income. This was echoed by Sedahmed et al. (2019) as educational Institution related factors, such as diversity

of study, quality of education, education facilities and feasibility strongly were the highest influencing students' enrollment factor at 50 per cent. Results from survey done by Sarkodie et al. (2020) also rated reputation of institution as a major factor followed by parental factors, while the least factors were peer and media influences. This shows that the legitimacy and reputation of the institution provide the students' confidence that they will be able to obtain job opportunities (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022).

It is important to take note that the perception of the university where branding, advertising and marketing is done through advertisements, social media and outreach programmes can affect the appeal. However, media influence was the least factor in Sarkodie et al.'s (2020) study. The perceived ability of the institution to help graduates secure good jobs in their field of study can strongly influence decisions (Aydin, 2015; Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022). This is indeed proven in Mukanziza and Singirankabo's (2022) research as employment or job prospect is the most important factor.

On top of that, Quecano, Rincon and Moreno (2024) conducted a study to examine the drop-outs in postgraduate programmes. The research aimed to determine which personal, educational, socio-economic, and organisational factors affect student drop-outs at the postgraduate level (Master's and Doctoral) via a scoping evaluation. Forty research papers were analysed for bibliometric insights, focusing particularly on explanatory factors related to postgraduate dropout. Within the personal determinant, factors that explain include nationality, gender, age, relationship status, familial assistance, family and job responsibilities, and levels of motivation. Socio-economic factors include the student's earnings, job situation, and the overarching national economic atmosphere. In the educational setting, essential factors include previous knowledge, educational achievement, learner satisfaction, independence, self-efficacy and interest in research. Finally, factors like inadequate financial resources, institutional regulations, teacher-student engagement, student assistance, academic facilities, and curriculum development are crucial in the institutional domain. In conclusion, the research deepens the comprehension of postgraduate attrition, providing essential understandings for the scholarly community and governments to create approaches that enhance retention rates and decrease drop-outs rates in graduate education. Quecano, Rincon and Moreno's (2024) study is different compared with this current study because it is a study to investigate the drop-outs in postgraduate programmes via a scoping review. Nonetheless, this current study examines the factors that

influence the tertiary students in their decision to choose their HEIs.

3. METHODOLOGY
Research Design

A needs analysis was applied in this research. This research utilised a self-administered survey via Google Form. A needs analysis is a test carried out within a small scale of sample size which aims to evaluate the quality of the instrument employed in the actual study (Altman, Burton, Festing, Hutton, & Playle, 2006). To address the research gap, a survey for needs analysis was created to investigate about the students' needs in tertiary education in Malaysian universities to reduce students' drop-outs from the university. Factor analysis and reliability testing were conducted to identify relevant factors and variables and to ensure the instrument's validity and reliability. Hence, the survey was created using the current literature and consisted of four constructs: University, Societal Influence, Family Influence, and Student (Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019). It was found that the items were reliable because the Cronbach's alpha value was 0.936 (George & Mallery, 2003). To examine the validity of the instruments, the survey was reviewed by two inter-raters based on the items listed in Table 1 (Sutha & Nurhanani, 2023). These two inter-raters had the expertise about assessment on students' needs and they have been teaching at HEIs for 10 years. These inter-raters were contacted via email to give their comments or feedback pertaining to the survey items. The survey items were then modified by incorporating the inter-raters' comments or feedback.

Samples

Bujang et al. (2024) and Hair et al. (2003) elucidated that the sample size of 5 to 30 participants is sufficient to test the reliability of the survey. The target participants for this study were 30 current existing tertiary students enrolled at universities offering tertiary student programmes in Malaysia. A sample size of 30 is considered a standard guideline that is adequate in quantitative research (Bujang, Omar, Diana, & Yoon, 2024; Hair, Babin, Money, & Samouel, 2003). The inclusion criterion of the samples was that the students would be at the age of 18 years and above. However, the exclusion criterion of the samples was that the students could not be 30 years of age and above. The inclusion and the exclusion criteria were added because the target group of students encompassed undergraduate students. There were 17 female and 13 male students who were in the age range of 18 and 30 years old who participated in this study. These students are from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman which is a private university in Malaysia.

Table 1. *Criteria for Items Construction*

No.	Item
1	Instructions for questions
2	Use of simple language
3	Clearly constructed questions
4	No spelling errors
5	Constructed questions to measure the content and objectives of the study
6	Appropriate instrument format with each item consists of clear information

Source: Sutha and Nurhanani, 2023

Convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods were employed to recruit 30 tertiary students from these universities. Convenience sampling offers various built-in advantages, like being economical, time-efficient, and easy to implement it, but it also has limitations, such as susceptibility to sample biases, systematic inaccuracies, lack of representativeness and limited generalisation of the research results (Golzar, Noor, & Tajik, 2022). Snowball sampling was also employed to recruit the tertiary students. A limited set of initial contacts who met the research criteria were asked to participate in the study (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019). The 15 willing participants were requested to suggest 15 other contacts who met the research criteria. Researchers, consequently, utilised their social networks to create initial connections, with sampling momentum arising from these, capturing an expanding chain of participants.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The researchers set forth a clear research objective and question. An ethical approval was obtained from the Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. The survey was developed based on the existing literature and comprised four constructs: University, Society Influence, Family Influence, and Student (Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019). There were 15 items under the construct of university, 3 items under the construct of Society Influence, 2 items under the construct of Family Influence, and 26 items under the construct of Student. The survey items were adapted from Davis's (2021) and Katz's (2019) studies following the four constructs and the number of items. The scale used for all the four constructs was a 5-point Likert-type scale, with participants indicating their level of agreement on a Strongly Disagree - Disagree - Neutral - Agree - Strongly Agree continuum. Under the construct of Student, there were also two open-ended items on the credit hours that the participants took in a semester and the time spent to study. There were also five items, in which the participants would have to rank them from the most serious problem at the university to the least serious problem at the

university under the construct of Student. The survey was distributed to university students in Malaysia via Google Form after getting the approval for the research ethical clearance from Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. The survey was sent out via the Google Form due to its quick access, as well as easy process and analysis. In total, 30 self-administered surveys were disseminated, and the data collected were analysed descriptively by obtaining the frequency and percentage for the items of the four constructs using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 25.

4. RESULTS

Based on the four constructs of the survey, the majority of the participants responded with "Agree" to the items. The results would focus on the majority of responses to the survey items instead of the frequency of each of the five responses.

a. University

Table 2 shows the description of the items under the construct of university.

From Table 2, for university needs, most of the participants responded with "Agree" that they would go to the university because they would want to explore a variety of career opportunities (70.0%) and learn more about career interests (60.0%). They also elucidated that they would want to go to the university learn more about job applications (60.0%), resumes (50.0%), and job interviews (56.7%). They would also want to learn more about the university admission processes (60.0%), different universities (40.0%), and different programmes of study (63.3%), as well as university costs (66.7%). From the majority of the responses which responded with "Agree", the highest percentage was displayed by Item 1 (70.0%), while the lowest percentage was displayed by Item 7 (40.0%). Items 2, 3 and 6 revealed the similar percentage of 60.0 per cent.

However, the majority of them responded with "Neutral" when they stated that they would go to the university to visit more universities (36.7%) and learn

Table 2. *Items from the Survey under the Construct of University*

No.	Description	Majority of the Responses (%)		
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral
UNIVERSITY NEEDS				
1	I would go to the university because I would want to explore a variety of career opportunities.		70.0	
2	I would go to the university because I learn more about career interests.		60.0	
3	I would go to the university because I learn more about job applications.		60.0	
4	I would go to the university because I learn more about resumes.		50.0	
5	I would go to the university because I learn more about job interviews.		56.7	
6	I would go to the university because I want to learn more about the university admission processes.		60.0	
7	I would go to the university because I want to learn more about the different universities.		40.0	
8	I would go to the university because I want to learn more about the different programmes of study.		63.3	
9	I would go to the university because I want to learn more about the university costs.		66.7	
10	I would go to the university to visit more universities.			36.7
11	I would go to the university to learn more about how to pay for the university.			40.0
SELF-MANAGEMENT FACTORS				
1	My living environment makes studying difficult.			43.3
2	I have very little time to study because of university			43.3
3	My family responsibilities take up most of their time.			50.0
4	I have little time to sleep because of university.	46.7		

Source: Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019

more about how to pay for university (40.0%). Based on the majority of the responses which responded with "Neutral", the highest percentage was shown by Item 11 (40.0%), while the lowest percentage was shown by Item 10 (36.7%).

For self-management factors, the most of participants responded with "Neutral" that their living environment made studying difficult (43.3%). They also responded with "Neutral" that they had very little time to study because of university (43.3%), and their family responsibilities took up most of their time (50.0%). This shows that the highest percentage was demonstrated by Item 3 (50.0%), while the lowest percentage was demonstrated by Items 1 and 2 (43.3%). Nevertheless, they agreed strongly that they had little time to sleep because of university (46.7%).

In short, the majority of the responses for the items under the construct of university fell under the "Agree" response which exhibited the highest frequency for most items, followed by the "Neutral" response and lastly, the "Strongly Agree" response.

b. Society Influence

Table 3 displays the item descriptions under the construct of Society Influence.

From Table 3, for support system factors, the majority of the participants responded with "Agree" that their friends encouraged them to complete their university degree (36.7%), at least one person at university has shown real interest in their success (50.0%), and they would probably see a counsellor if they could afford one (43.3%). Based on the findings, it illustrated that Item 2

Table 3. *Items from the Survey under the Construct of Society Influence*

No.	Description	Majority of the Responses (%)
		Agree
SUPPORT SYSTEM FACTORS		
1	My friends encourage me to complete my university degree.	36.7
2	At least one person at university has shown real interest in my success.	50.0
3	I would probably see a counsellor if I could afford one.	43.3

Source: Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019

exhibited the highest percentage (50.0%), while Item 1 exhibited the lowest percentage (36.7%).

In sum, the majority of the responses for the items under the construct of Society Influence fell under the "Agree" response.

c. Family Influence

Table 4 illustrates the survey items for the construct of Family Influence.

Table 4 shows that for support system factors, most of the participants stated that they strongly agreed that their family encouraged them to complete their university degree (53.3%). Nonetheless, most of the participants responded with "Neutral" that their parents helped them to understand their studies better (43.3%).

The table portrays that the majority of the responses for the items under the construct of Family Influence fell under the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses.

d. Student

Table 5 presents the item descriptions from the survey for the student construct.

Based on Table 5, for personal needs factors, most of the participants agreed that they went to the university because they learned to deal with conflict in a positive manner (63.3%) and how their self-esteem affected their behaviour (76.7%). Additionally, they went to the university because they accepted greater responsibility for their actions (53.3%), learned to make good choices (56.7%) and developed stronger leadership skills (43.3%). Item 2 demonstrated the highest frequency (76.7%), while Item 5 demonstrated the lowest frequency (43.3%).

With regards to academic needs factors, most of the participants concurred that they went to the university because they learned how to complete and turn in their assignments on time (50.0%) and to obtain better grades in university (60.0%). The findings presented the highest frequency by Item 2 (60.0%). On a contrary, most of the participants had a split response between "Neutral" (40.0%) and "Agree" (40.0%) that they went to the university because they took tests better with less anxiety.

Table 4. *Items from the Survey under the Construct of Family Influence*

No.	Description	Majority of Responses (%)	
		Strongly Agree	Neutral
SUPPORT SYSTEM FACTORS			
1	My family encourages me to complete my university degree.	53.3	
2	My parents help me to understand my studies better.		43.3

Source: Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019

Pertaining to study needs factors, most of the participants agreed that they went to the university because when they missed class, they would get a copy of the notes from that day (40.0%), and they could turn in all their assignments (63.3%). They also remarked that when they read the course materials, they took notes (70.0%), and the notes that they took effectively prepared them for the examinations (60.0%). Item 3 had the highest frequency (70.0%), while Item 1 had the lowest frequency (40.0%).

For time management factors, the majority of the participants agreed that they went to the university because they used their syllabus as a guide to each course (66.7%), they studied more than two days before an examination (63.3%), and they set aside specific times each week to study (40.0%). On top of that, they successfully balanced their social life and study time (46.7%), as well as used a day planner or calendar to organise their weekly routine (43.3%). The highest frequency was noted by Item 1 (66.7%), while the lowest frequency was noted by Item 3 (40.0%).

In respect of expectation factors, the majority of the participants responded with "Neutral" (30.0%) and "Agree" (30.0%) that they were satisfied with merely passing all their courses. Besides that, they responded that they agreed that they were frustrated that they could not seem to make "A's" in university (43.3%), and while taking examinations, they felt a high level of anxiety (36.7%). Items 6 and 9 showed that they had the highest percentage (56.7%), while Item 1 had the lowest frequency (30.0%). However, they disagreed that their university grades were lower than their high school grades (36.7%).

Apart from that, under Factors, the majority of the participants responded with "Agree" that they went to the university because they could deal with peer pressure (40.0%), and they could get along with students who were different than them (56.7%). They also went to the university because they could manage personal stress (43.3%). Other than that, they went to the university because they could handle conflict at university (40.0%), and they could fit in at their new university (56.7%). The findings showed that Items 2 and 5 exhibited the highest frequency (56.7%), while Items 1 and 4 exhibited the lowest frequency (40.0%).

For the open-ended item on credit hours that the students took in a semester, the majority of them remarked that they had between 15 and 20 credit hours in a typical semester. Pertaining to the time spent to study, they mentioned that they would study for about four to six hours per day. With regards to the five items, in which the participants would have to rank them from the most serious problem at the university to the least serious

Table 5. *Items from the Survey under the Construct of Student*

No.	Description	Majority of the Responses (%)		
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
PERSONAL NEEDS FACTORS				
1	I would go to the university because I learn to deal with conflict in a positive manner.	63.3		
2	I would go to the university because I learn how my self-esteem affects my behaviour.	76.7		
3	I would go to the university because I accept greater responsibility for my actions.	53.3		
4	I would go to the university because I learn to make good choices.	56.7		
5	I would go to the university because I develop stronger leadership skills.	43.3		
ACADEMIC NEEDS FACTORS				
1	I would go to the university because I learn how to complete and turn in my assignments on time.	50.0		
2	I would go to the university because I learn to obtain better grades in university.	60.0		
3	I would go to the university because I take tests better with less anxiety.	40.0	40.0	
STUDY NEEDS FACTORS				
1	When I miss class, I would get a copy of the notes from that day.	40.0		
2	I would go to the university because I could turn in all my assignments.	63.3		
3	I would go to the university because when I read the course materials, I take notes.	70.0		
4	I would go to the university because the notes that I take effectively prepare me for the examinations.	60.0		
TIME MANAGEMENT FACTORS				
1	I would go to the university because I use my syllabus as a guide to each course.	66.7		
2	I would go to the university because I study more than two days before an examination.	63.3		
3	I would go to the university because I set aside specific times each week to study.	40.0		
4	I would go to the university because I successfully balance my social life and study time.	46.7		
5	I would go to the university because I use a day planner or calendar to organise my weekly routine.	43.3		
EXPECTATION FACTORS				
1	I am satisfied with merely passing all my courses.	30.0	30.0	
2	I am frustrated that I could not seem to make "A's" in universities.	43.3		
3	While taking examinations, I feel a high level of anxiety.	36.7		
4	My university grades are lower than my high school grades.			36.7
BELIEF FACTORS				
1	I would go to the university because I could deal with peer pressure.	40.0		
2	I would go to the university because I could get along with students who are different than me.	56.7		
3	I would go to the university because I could manage personal stress.	43.3		
4	I would go to the university because I could handle conflict at university.	40.0		
5	I would go to the university because I could fit in at my new university.	56.7		

Source: Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019

problem at the university, most of the students illustrated that the least serious problem at the university would be problems with students who were different than them in terms of race, money or religion. However, they stated that the most serious problem at the university would be violence, especially bullying, controlling anger and fights in or out of the classroom. All the aforementioned responses from the students would determine whether the students would continue to be motivated to study at the university or lose interest in their study, thus causing drop-outs at the university.

It was noted that the majority of the responses for the items under the construct of Student fell under the "Agree" response which exhibited the highest frequency for most items, followed by the "Neutral" response and lastly, the "Disagree" response.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study pinpoint the elements that affect students' decisions to attend HEI. By providing information on the factors influencing the decision to pursue university education, the study's findings also help

to close the knowledge gap, as well as enable education institutions and even the Education Ministry inputs for better planning.

Results from this study showed that most of the participants agreed (70.0%) that they would go to the university because they would want to explore a variety of career opportunities as supported by Connie et al. (2022), Cynthia and Chong (2023), Mukanziza and Singirankabo (2022), Sarkodie et al. (2020), as well as Sedahmed and Noureldien (2019). This study adds to employment opportunities and career desire influence have influence on student choice of programme which are consistent with studies by Aydin (2015), Connie et al. (2022), Cynthia and Chong (2023), Rababah (2016), as well as Sedahmed and Noureldien (2019). This is also an important factor for government as they would need to provide job opportunities to graduates.

The results displayed that 60.0 per cent of participants also would want university admission processes, which included the admission requirement as stated by Sedahmed and Noureldien (2019). Choice of programmes was a high factor at 63.3 per cent, which supported the statement from Cynthia and Chong (2023) that programme and course structure offered could be one factor influencing the students' choices to study at private HEIs. Some programmes are appealing because they offer qualifications recognised internationally, allowing students to work abroad. They could also be because it is related to the students' career aspirations and long-term goals. Students are influenced by the potential and stable high-paying jobs and the likelihood of finding employment post-graduation.

Besides that, costs were seen as a major factor as survey results yielded a 66.7 per cent (Cynthia & Chong, 2023; Haron, Hamid, Jamaludin, & Azan, 2017; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Migin, Falahat, Yajid, & Khatibi, 2015; Sedahmed & Noureldien, 2019; Yaacob, Sobri, Nasir, Norshahidi, & Husin, 2020; Patnaik, Dicko, Subudhi, & Parhi, 2024). This study adds that costs are a pertinent factor taking into account their family income and affordability. Rudhumbu (2017) stated that as parents are the financiers of their children's education, they have a significant influence on where their children go for higher education.

Majority of the participants responded with "Agree" that their friends (36.7%) and family (53.3%) which could be also named as peer influence that impacts perceptions, preferences and choices in several ways that encouraged them to complete their university degree. Several studies, such as Aydin (2015), Mukanziza and Singirankabo (2022), as well as Sedahmed and Noureldien (2019) supports the importance of peer influence. In some cultures, career desires are heavily influenced by societal norms or parental expectations, which in turn affect programme selection. For example, medicine and engineering are two of the most sought-after professions in India (Gaurav & Sheikh, 2020).

Quecano, Rincon and Moreno (2024) conducted a study to examine the factors that cause drop-outs in the postgraduate programmes. These factors are personal, educational, socio-economic, and organisational factors that are not consistent with this current study that analyses four factors, which are university, society influence, family influence, and student. In other words, factors like society influence and family influence were not investigated in Quecano, Rincon and Moreno's (2024) research. Furthermore, their study did not focus on the students' needs in the tertiary student level which are fundamental for the tertiary students to be aware of the importance of completing their studies at HEIs.

6. CONCLUSION

The decision to pursue higher education is increasingly influenced by a complex interplay of university offerings and students' psychological factors. Questions, such as "Should I study?" and "Where should I study?" have become more challenging due to stiff competition in the higher education sector. This study explores how various factors impact students' choices, including university attributes, society and family influences, and personal considerations. Students prioritise institutions that offer strong career prospects and a healthy study-life balance. Encouragement from friends and family plays a crucial role in motivating them to continue their education. They seek universities that foster the development of interpersonal skills, enhancing their overall personal and professional growth. Additionally, self-esteem is a key factor as it drives students to embark on their higher learning journey. Understanding these factors can enhance students' decision-making processes, ensuring they choose educational paths aligned with their skills and aspirations. Accessibility to higher education enables students to build a brighter future as it provides theoretical knowledge and practical skills that are essential for personal and professional growth. The findings of this study will also help authorities, management and administrators of the universities to understand better the key issues underlying the selection and decision-making process by clarifying what matters most to students. Consequently, authorities, management and administrators of the universities can refine their marketing strategies for student recruitment, as well as deliver a more holistic teaching and learning experience. Besides that, the findings of this study will determine the students' needs and expectations in order to strategise programme marketing approach and university

offerings to cater to their needs. To ensure students are motivated to continue their education at HEI, it is crucial to comprehend the factors affecting their decisions, such as university, society and family influences, as well as student. This is due to students favouring schools that provide excellent career opportunities and a good study-life balance. Support from friends and family is vital in inspiring them to pursue their education further. They also look for universities that promote the enhancement of interpersonal skills, contributing to their overall personal and professional development. The university offerings can be further enhanced by improving the infrastructure and facilities to fulfil the students' needs and wants. Moreover, self-esteem plays a crucial role as it motivates students to pursue their higher education paths. For future research, the constructs which are factors analysed in this study can be analysed further based on different students' community groups, like public and private university students, as well as school leavers. The results obtained can provide a base for comparative analysis.

Limitations and future directions of the study

The findings could still be interpreted considering their limitations. This study included only 30 tertiary students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, with a small sample size skewed towards students from the Klang Valley region. As a result, the findings are not representative of the broader tertiary student population (Ramachandiran, Dhanapal, & Salman, 2023). Conducting a replication of this study with a larger and more diverse sample from various regions across Malaysia or other universities would be beneficial. Future research could also incorporate additional factors, such as family upbringing and cultural influences. A follow-up study with a larger sample size is recommended to enhance accuracy, and future investigations could expand to areas not covered in the present research.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/ or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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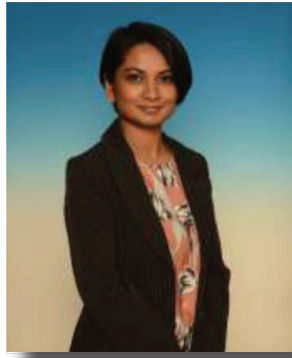**Ms. Khor Gee Khing**
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