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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **A literature review on students' university choice and satisfaction**

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Recently, many researchers have found that education systems in many nations are very comprehensive and competitive. They revealed that the primary goal of many universities is to increase the number of students' enrolment as much as possible. In students' perspective, they also consider different factors when they make their higher education decision. Therefore, this article aims to investigate the factors affecting for students' university choice and satisfaction. Relevant literature reviews explained in terms of four models which link to students' university choice process: economic model, sociological model, combined complex decision model and the marketing mixed model. Then, the study investigated the other main factors that are affecting to the university choice of students from empirical evidence. In terms of students' university satisfaction, this paper has described several models and other factors influencing on students' university satisfaction.

**Key words:** Higher education, university choice, university satisfaction.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The education system plays a major role as it contributes to making the future of every country. The education sector is absolutely critical for country's development (El-Hilali et al., 2015). Human capital is the most important element that represents nations' economic growth. Another aspect is the base pillar of the development of human capital. There may be a positive impact on the growth and wealth of any nation. Education can benefit a person financially, emotionally, socially, and intellectually. Comparing Sri Lanka to many other

developing nations especially in the sub-continent, it has made outstanding development in terms of basic education metrics (Liyanage, 2014). Thanks to the government's introduction of the universal free education program in 1945, Sri Lanka had universal basic education by 1964, providing free education for students from kindergarten through university. In the framework of free education system in Sri Lanka, the government offers free teaching, free textbooks, and free uniforms to students to make use the free education at the maximum

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level and serve to the nation respectively. In Sri Lanka, all children between the ages of 5 and 14 must attend school. The average length of the Sri Lankan school system is 13 years, divided into 3 cycles. According to Liyanage (2014), children attend primary school (Grade 1-5) from the ages of 5-10, junior secondary school (Grade 6-9) from the ages of 11-14, senior secondary school (Grade 10-11) from the ages of 15-16, and college (Grade 12-13) from the ages of 17-18. There are 15 universities, 7 postgraduate institutions, 10 additional higher education institutions, and 1138 technical and vocational training institutions that make up Sri Lanka's tertiary education system. These organizations are government-run (Liyanage, 2014). University education can be regarded as the next level in the learning process (Premarathne et al., 2016). It is indeed a critical component that education is absolutely necessary for the labor market requirement. The socio-economic aspects including parental education and household income and household transactions affect children's education (Edirisinghe et al., 2022). The academic journey basically ends once they find an employment since individuals who perform well on pre-tertiary examinations do not see schooling as a utility function (Edirisinghe et al., 2022). The development of the nation's economy depends on the application and accumulation of knowledge and innovation added to the economy. Due to the competitive business nature and market orientation of tertiary education, students' choice of academic areas has become crucial as the job market always head hunts skilled and diligent personnel.

Throughout secondary and tertiary education in Sri Lanka, individuals have a chance and platform to expand their basic skills and competencies. However, tertiary education always leads to the economic development of the country as it enhances productivity of the country. Considering admissions to the public universities, it is completely based on A/L results which mean it relies on the Z-score of each stream of the A/L examination. Therefore, admissions are extremely competitive, and the resource availability and capacity of the government university system is limited. The key issue is that only 20% of applicants are accepted by state universities and are eligible for a university education. University choice decision has become more complex perhaps the most crucial decision in a student life is related to their higher education, whilst selecting a degree program. The employers prefer to recruit undergraduates only from relevant disciplines (Edirisinghe, 2020). Students remain unemployed purely due to the wrong selection of the right academic stream (Edirisinghe et al., 2021). The institutional attributes such as benefits, facilities offered by respective academic institutes and the location where the services are being offered may influence the students' choice (Edirisinghe et al., 2016).

Decision making phase of university choice is very crucial in a student life since the whole career of the

student depends on it. Students do not make university or undergraduate choice randomly as it determines the whole career and future of the students. Poor choice can negatively impact on motivation and career path. While making the university choice, students consider some factors such as personal preferences, courses, job opportunities, workload, quality of teachers, university reputation, tuition fee, academic facilities, location, parents' influence, parents' knowledge, parents education status, family socialization, university ranking, learning environments, graduate success, financial aids etc.

The key objective of this study is to review literature on students' university satisfaction and motivation. The post-secondary education is an important phase for students since it typically determines whether they will become entrepreneurs or professionals in the industry (Edirisinghe et al., 2022). Right academic qualifications are the key to improve productivity and competitiveness of (Mudunkotuwa and Edirisinghe, 2017).

A psychological paradigm shift in students' enrolment for academic disciplines is much needed and need for the hour in order to cater to the requirements of modern business world (Edirisinghe et al., 2022). This article basically produces a summary of higher education and an empirical survey as well as theoretical approaches. Further, it provides overview on what are the factors influencing university satisfaction and choice. Then, it introduces conceptual frameworks including models and factors that influence university choice and satisfaction.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The models related to university choice

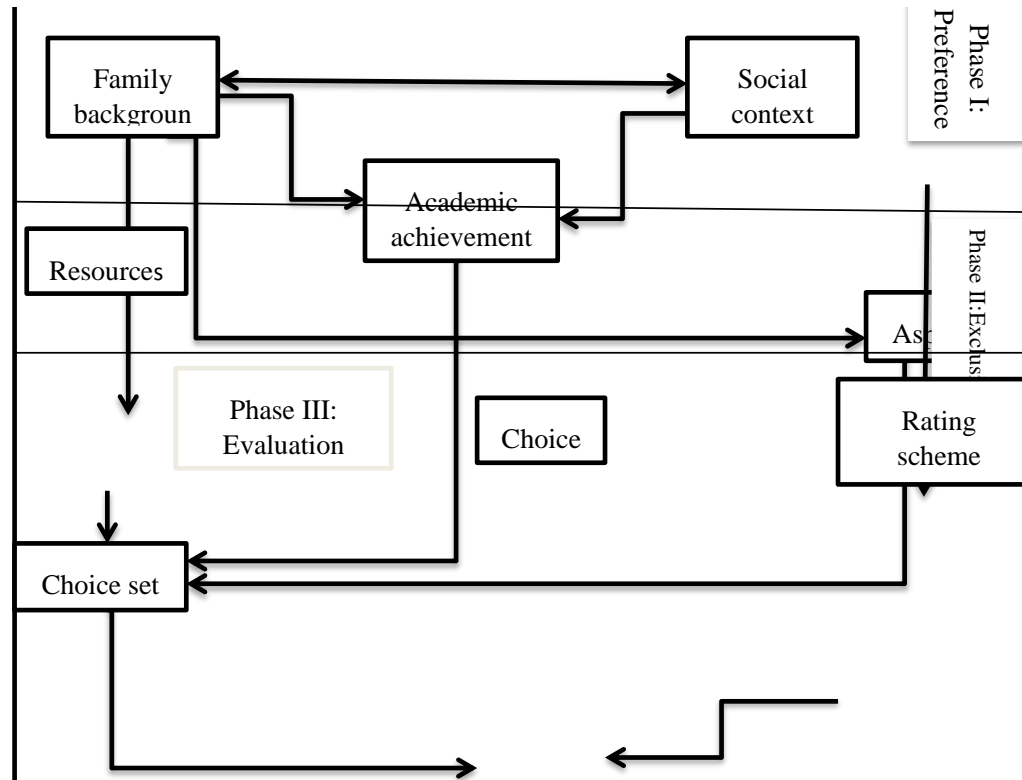
Most of the empirical studies used the following four models for the process of university choice of the students they are economic models, sociological models, the combined complex decision model, and the marketing mixed model.

#### *Economic model*

The decision between attending a college or university and pursuing a non-collegiate alternative is emphasized in economic models (Reddy, 2014).

These models often start with the premise that a student seeks to increase benefit while minimizing risk. The economic models' drawback is that they only consider students' reasoning as a deciding factor. Economic models of university choice are predicated on the idea that students make rational decisions based on their preferences at the time of the decision and evaluate all the information at their disposal (Aydin, 2015).

The most important economic model for students' college choices is the model introduced by Jackson in



**Figure 1.** Economic model of college choice.  
Source: Reddy (2014).

1982. It suggests that there are three stages involved in students' college decision-making: the preference stage, the exclusion stage, and the evaluation stage. In the preference stage, a student's academic standing, family history, and social milieu (such as the impact of peers, neighbourhood, and school) determine his or her educational goals and attitudes toward enrolling in college. The student goes through a process of removing some colleges from the potential list during the exclusion stage. Higher education institutions may be eliminated based on a variety of criteria, including tuition costs, location, and academic standards. Before making their final decision, students must first evaluate a variety of institutions (Reddy, 2014). The Jackson-introduced economic model is shown in Figure 1.

### **Sociological model**

Sociological models that emphasized the goals of people aspiring to attend higher education institutions were created from research on educational attainment and status.

In terms of students' choice, the most important model is Chapman's model of student choice which is introduced in 1981. It concentrated on the traits of the prospective student and the student's family as well as

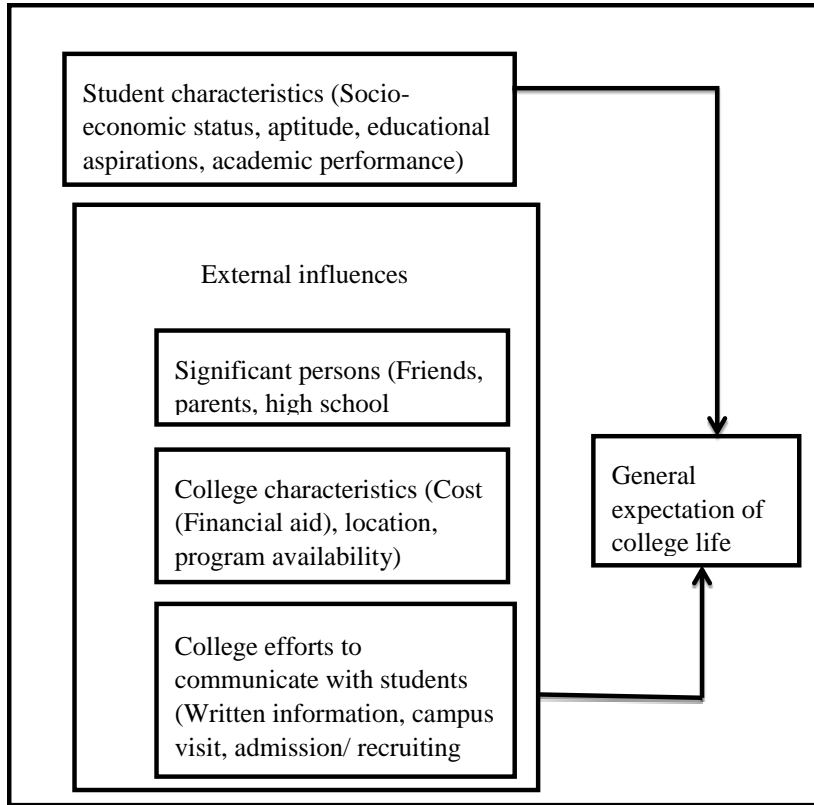
the traits of his or her college, which he labels as the price, location, and program availability. It also identifies decision-makers, such as the guidance counsellor at the school, instructors, friends, and parents (Reddy, 2014). The Chapman economic model is shown in Figure 2.

### **Combined complex decision model**

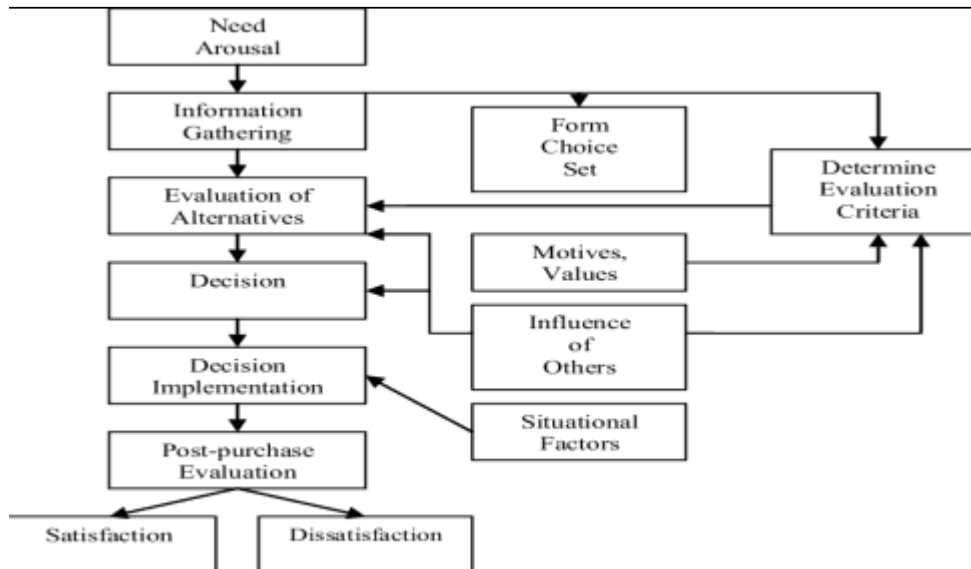
This model, developed by Holdsworth and Nind in 2006, identified a number of variables that affect a student's decision regarding a university, including cost, geographic proximity to home, the quality and flexibility of the degree and course options, the availability of housing, the likelihood that an employer will hire from that university, and the availability of accommodation (Figure 3).

### **Marketing mixed model**

The program, the site, the price, the promotion, the physical facilities, the people, and the process are the seven components that make up the marketing mix model for higher education developed by Kotler and Fox (1995). Similar to this, consumer behaviour refers to how individuals or groups choose, acquire, and use goods



**Figure 2.** Sociological model of college choice. Source: Reddy, 2014.



**Figure 3.** Combined complex decision model. Source: Holdsworth and Nind (2006).

and services. Students have five options when choosing a university: needs and motivations, information

gathering, weighing options, decision-making, and post-choice evaluation.

## Factors affecting for university choice

Many studies mention various criteria of students' university choice making process. They can be categorized as follows: family background, location, university fees, financial aids/ scholarships, information sources and institutional factors. In order to recruit students, universities need to know what the factors are determining students' university selection.

### *Family background*

Numerous studies suggest that there is a connection between a student's familial history and the university they choose to attend. The following areas are where families have a greater influence: finances, information, expectations, persuasion, educational status, and competition.

Additionally, Ogawaa and Imuraa (2010) examined the demand-side factors that affect access to postsecondary education in Indonesia. The multi-nominal logit model's findings revealed that while the education level of the household spouse is positively significant, the education level of the head of household and family income per household member have significant positive effects on the decision to pursue tertiary education in urban areas.

Cajucom (2019) looked into the individuals who persuaded the College of Management and Business Technology's (CMBT) freshmen to enrol in their course. To collect data, 211 survey forms were issued. The statistical methods utilized to analyse and interpret the acquired data included descriptive statistics like frequency, percentage, and weighted mean. Results revealed that the respondents' parents' recommendations greatly influenced their decision to enrol in a particular college course. Saitia and Prokopiadou (2008) looked at the factors influencing the demand for higher education enrolment in Greece. The findings indicated that Greek students chose to pursue higher education mostly because it provides advanced information that opens up professional opportunities. The desire for higher education in Greece was also influenced by factors such as monthly family income. Sojkin et al. (2011) claim that family opinion and expectations, as well as living like a student, are the driving forces behind decisions regarding pursuing higher education. Using survey data from the Italian National Institute of Statistics, Gaeta and Maio (2014) conducted an empirical analysis of individual-level predictors of Italian secondary school graduates' educational choices. The findings showed that enrolling in a university rather than ceasing education is connected with having a good family background, including highly educated parents who hold renowned professional jobs.

### *Location*

Another important consideration in choosing a university

is the institution's location. This element relates to a university's physical location and how near it is to a student's residence or the city's core. According to Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) research, student satisfaction levels are influenced by the university's physical surroundings. Kunwar (2017) say that location also influences for university choice. Further, Douglas et al. (2006) established a conceptual framework of student satisfaction with their educational experience in higher education.

Results revealed that access to university is the most important factor. Eidimtas and Juceviciene (2013) and Simões and Soares (2010) pointed out geographical proximity is most important choice factors for higher education institutions.

When choosing a university, undergraduate students at regional university campuses were investigated by Binney and Martin (1997). Students from the University of Melbourne's Glenormiston campus and the University of South Australia's Whyalla campus participated in this study as respondents. The information came from a self-administered survey that first-year, first-time undergraduates at the universities were asked to complete. According to the study, both groups' choice of university was most influenced by career preparedness. Students at the Whyalla campus gave consideration to things like accessibility to lodging and distance from home. Drewes and Michael (2006), Cruz (2018) identified location as one attribute in university choice.

### *University fees*

Students essentially take university expenditures into account. They calculate how much money they will need to spend on education before making a decision. It can refer to more than just tuition; it can also refer to living expenses and travel expenses. The expense is further increased by the distance from home, which may have an adverse effect on actual preferences and drive students to make fewer choices. A quite a lot of scholars have researched the influence of cost in the selection process of university selection process. For example, Eidimtas and Juceviciene (2013), Abeygunawardena (2018) and Maniu and Maniu (2014) and Kunwar (2017) its further validate the importance of expenditure on university selection process. Semsia et al. (2018) investigated various predictors of high school students' college and university choice decisions in Qatar by using 1,427 participants. Results found that the cost of education is highly affected to college and university choice decisions.

Using school-level data, Çokgezen (2014) investigated the factors that influence university decision in Turkey. According to regression analysis, factors that influence university choice include tuition costs, the size of the city where the school is located, its academic standing, and the language of teaching. The findings also show that tuition prices have a greater influence on public university

students, whereas private university students place a higher value on academic achievement than do their peers at public universities. Further, Dunnett et al. (2012) examined the impact of university fee changes on how students' grade and rank their university choices by employing conjoint analysis. Online questionnaires are distributed for 400 respondents. According to the study, students from homes where going to college has never been a tradition will be more negatively affected by the higher tuition. Cruz (2018) looked into why 152 first-year graduate students selected the Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST) as their graduate school of choice. According to the findings, students are very worried about reasonable fees. Additionally, Ming (2010) created a conceptual framework to investigate the institution-related variables influencing students' college choice decisions in Malaysia. The university cost is one of the independent factors that have been acknowledged as influencing students' college selection choices.

### ***Financial aids/ scholarships***

Financial aid and scholarships help students afford their education. As a result, another important element influencing students' institution choices is the impact of financial help. Some students base their college selection on their financial situation, financial aid, and scholarships.

Agrey and Lampadan (2014) and Azizan et al. (2018) emphasized that financial aid is one of the most significant factors influencing the students' decision making in choosing a pre-university program. Cajucom (2019) explored scholarships and grants are highly influenced for university choice. The availability of scholarships, according to Cruz (2018) and Burns (2006) is the institutional characteristic that influences students' decisions the most. Using a special set of micro data on college applications, Drewes and Michael (2006) investigated the impact played by institutional qualities in decisions made by high school graduates between the 17 universities in the Province of Ontario, Canada. According to a research, applicants like colleges that provide more scholarships.

### ***Institutional factors***

These factors are highly affected for every student's university selection process. Agrey and Lampadan (2014) have done a review on the various elements that goes into decision-making in university choice in Central Thailand by distributing 261 questionnaires to the respondents. The study found that factors like having good sporting facilities, a strong student life program (health care services, residential accommodations), activities (wide range of extracurricular activities), support systems (e.g., bookstore, guidance/counselling office),

learning environment (modern learning environment and facilities, reputation, beautiful campus, library, and computer lab), and finally a safe and friendly environment (safe campus as well as supporting faculty) were important. Researchers Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) examined the important variables influencing Sri Lankan students' satisfaction with higher education. The regression results showed that the quality of the academic staff and the quality of the administrative staff had a statistically insignificant impact on the levels of student satisfaction. Further, university infrastructure facilities, marketing strategy, university characteristics, and programme evaluation have been identified as the most influential factors which affect in selecting a bachelor's degree from the international degree programmes (Abeygunawardena, 2018). Azizan et al. (2018) found that factors such as academic quality, campus and socialization were significantly influenced the students' decision making in choosing a pre-university program. Lee (2014) stated that quality of education, learning environments, quality of teachers, the reputation and information about the institution are important factors for international higher education students. At the Trincomalee Campus of Eastern University in Sri Lanka, Perera and Pratheesh (2018) conducted a study to identify the variables that have the most impact on a group of management students' decisions on their areas of specialization. 75 undergraduate students participated in this study as respondents. According to the study's findings, academic standing and criteria connected to employment are the most crucial considerations when choosing a major.

### ***Information source***

Information sources are recognized as influencing factors in the decision-making process based on the pertinent literature. In a study based on undergraduates in foreign degree programs, Abeygunawardena (2018) investigated the deciding criteria for choosing a bachelor's degree from private higher educational institutions in Sri Lanka. Results found that the most important influential information sources are messenger and peers. Ahmad et al (2016) identified that recommendations from various groups are one of the push factors influencing for studying tourism and hospitality in abroad. Eidimtas and Juceviciene (2013) and Simões and Soares (2010) pointed out recommendations of teachers and career counsellors, mass media and university website cause for students' decision to enrol in higher education.

When choosing a university, undergraduate students at regional university campuses were investigated by Binney and Martin (1997). The guidelines provided by the individual state tertiary entrance centres, academic sources, and the students' peers served as their primary sources of knowledge. Furthermore, Reddy (2014)

looked into how social media affects choices of colleges and courses made by international students. The survey's questionnaire received responses from 167 international students. The study discovered that international students actively use social media, that social media plays a factor in international students' decisions about their choice of course and university, and that social media plays a part in providing their information demands.

### The models of university satisfaction

This section provides some empirical evidence with reference to the models and conceptual frameworks applied by researchers to escalate the students' satisfactions in higher education. According to Waugh (2002), SERVQUAL is the most well-liked and frequently applied service quality model. This is true when assessing student satisfaction all across the world. In order to assess a company's level of customer satisfaction and service quality, Parasuman created the SERVQUAL questionnaire in 1985. It takes into account five factors: tangibility, dependability, empathy, responsiveness, and assurance. Additionally, SERVQUAL is often criticized in higher education and is widely used in industry, according to Waugh (2002).

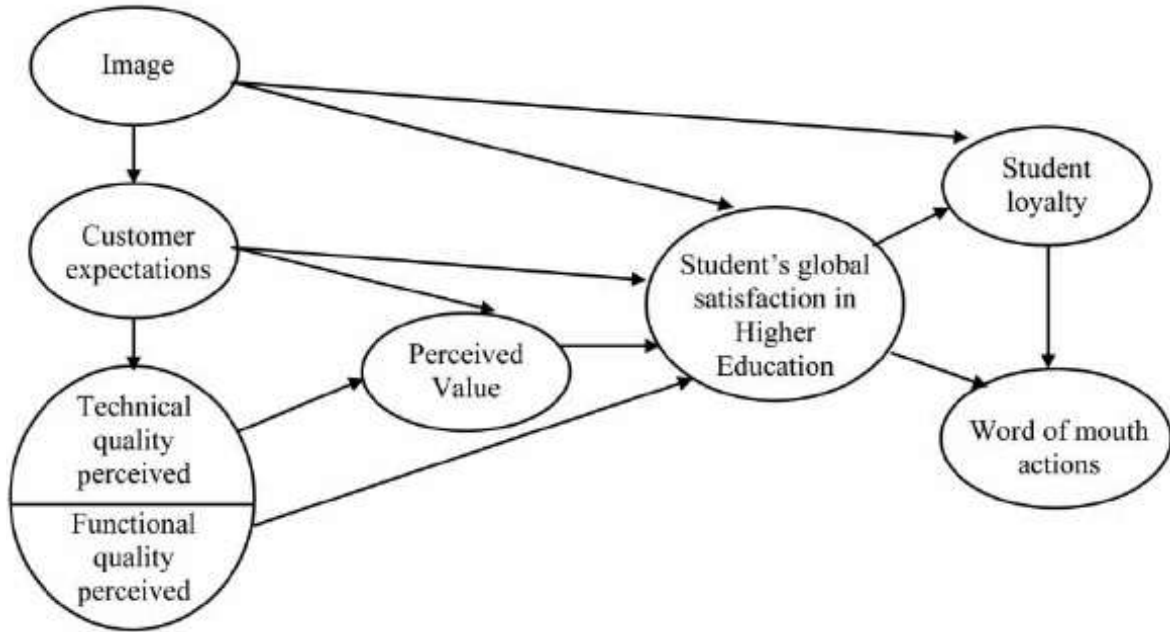
The interplay of the tangibles, dependability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy aspects of service quality (SERVQUAL) and student satisfaction (SS) was studied by Alsheyadi and Albalushi (2020). The direct and mediated impacts were investigated using the structural equation model. Information gathered from a survey of 352 students from 18 Oman-based higher education institutions Results showed that the direct effect model successfully established the centrality of the tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy aspects of service quality, while the mediated effect model failed to successfully demonstrate the significance of the tangibles and responsiveness. The "Happy-PProductive Theory" was subsequently introduced by Cotton et al. (2002) with a moderating component. The model suggests that students' suffering moderates their enjoyment. As a result, when student anxiety is low and when it is high, student satisfaction rises. The models' focus on a particular, insignificant aspect of happiness was too narrow (Weerasinghe and Fernando, 2018). In order to investigate factors influencing student satisfaction in higher education, Douglas et al. (2006) created the "Service Product Bundle" method in 2006. They took 12 dimensions into account, including the classroom's professional and comfortable environment, students' assessments and learning experiences, lecture and tutorial facilitation goods, textbooks and tuition fees, student support facilities, business procedures, relationships with teaching staff, and knowledgeable and responsible behaviour. Physical commodities, enabling goods, implicit services, and explicit services were the

four variables used to group the dimensions (Weerasinghe and Fernando, 2018). A conceptual model of the causes and effects of student happiness in higher education was tested by Alves and Raposo (2007). The model was put to the test using structural equations, and the results revealed that image, followed by value and then perceived quality, has the greatest impact on student happiness in higher education. The findings of this study also point out that the changing expectations may have a detrimental effect. It was also evident that student loyalty, which resulted from word-of-mouth from one student to another, was the primary effect of satisfaction. The conceptual model of student satisfaction in higher education is depicted in Figure 4.

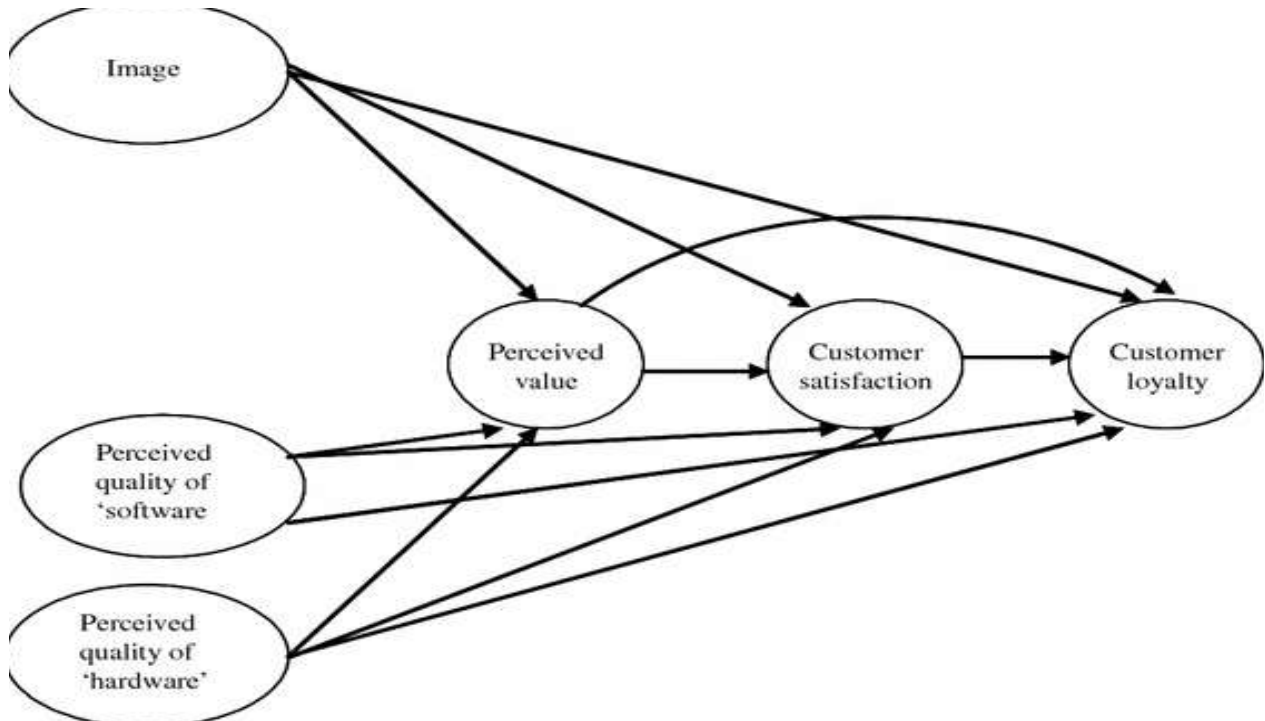
Partial least squares (PLS) structural equation approach was used by Brown and Mazzarol (2009) to test a customer satisfaction model of the factors influencing student happiness and loyalty in higher education settings. Students attending four different 'types' of Australian universities make up the sample. According to the findings, student contentment, which is itself predicted by the host university's perceived reputation, is a strong predictor of student loyalty. Although the perceived quality of "human ware" (such as people and processes) and "hardware" (such as actual service pieces and infrastructure) has an effect on perceived value, this was found to be weak and ambiguous. The influence of the institution's institutional image, which significantly predicted perceived value and, to a lesser extent, student satisfaction, was of utmost significance. The findings have ramifications for less prominent, more recent universities looking to compete in an environment where the market is more deregulated. The model for evaluating the factors that influence student happiness and loyalty in a higher education context in Australia is shown in Figure 5.

Hartman and Schmidt (1995) looked at the connections between the learning environment (service provider performance), perceived outcomes, and student/alumni overall satisfaction with their educational experience. The findings show that the process of forming satisfaction judgments is multifaceted and that it depends on how much a student has developed goals for a certain area of his or her educational experience. Students who have poorly defined educational goals are more prone to rely their satisfaction assessments on the performance of the institution. They are likely to base satisfaction assessments on the results of the institutional performance if their aims are well defined. However, in general, both the perceived quality of the service provider's performance and the perceived consequences of that performance affect student/alumni judgments of satisfaction with higher education. The research model is depicted in Figure 6.

Shuxin et al. (2014) introduced a hybrid model to measure students' satisfaction and loyalty. This conceptual model integrates two mainstream analyses:



**Figure 4.** Conceptual model of student satisfaction in higher education. Source: Alves and Raposo (2007).

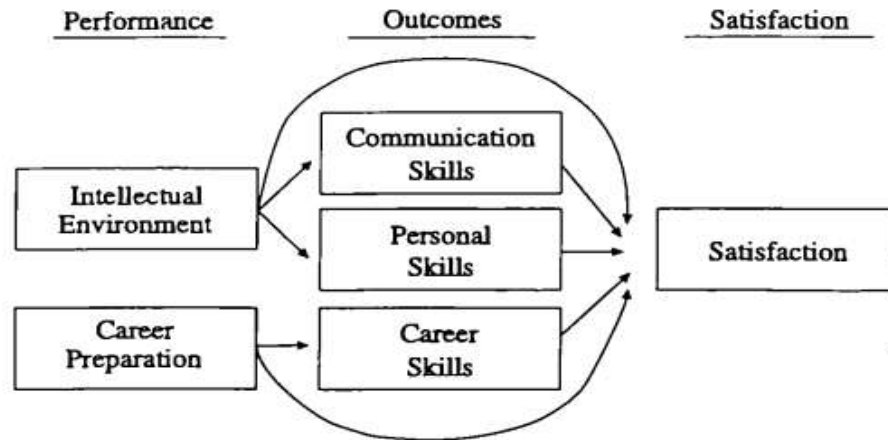


**Figure 5.** Model for testing drivers of student satisfaction and loyalty in an Australian higher education setting. Source: Brown and Mazzarol (2009).

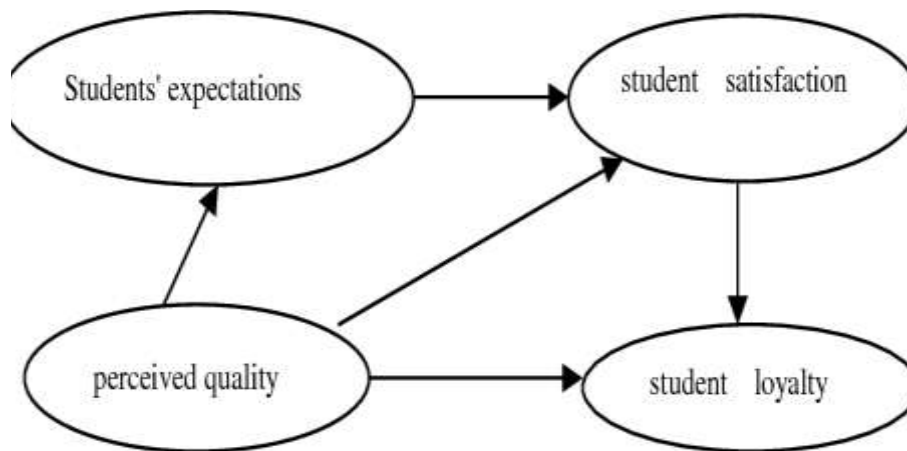
factor analysis and path analysis. Direct path of the model explains the impact of perceived quality on student loyalty and indirect path describes the impact of perceived

quality and student expectation on loyalty through student satisfaction. Figure 7 shows the hybrid conceptual model introduced by Shuxin et al. (2014).





**Figure 6.** Theoretical outcomes-satisfaction model. Source: Hartman and Schmidt (1995).



**Figure 7.** China satisfaction evaluation model. Source: Shuxin et al. (2014).

DeShields et al. (2005) looked at factors that are thought to affect students' college experiences, such as retention rates and student satisfaction, in colleges and universities. They have applied the Herzberg two-factor theory, which Keaveney and Young first proposed in 1997. Along with faculty services, the advising team, and class type, it assesses the effect of college experience on students' satisfaction while taking experience into account as a mediating variable.

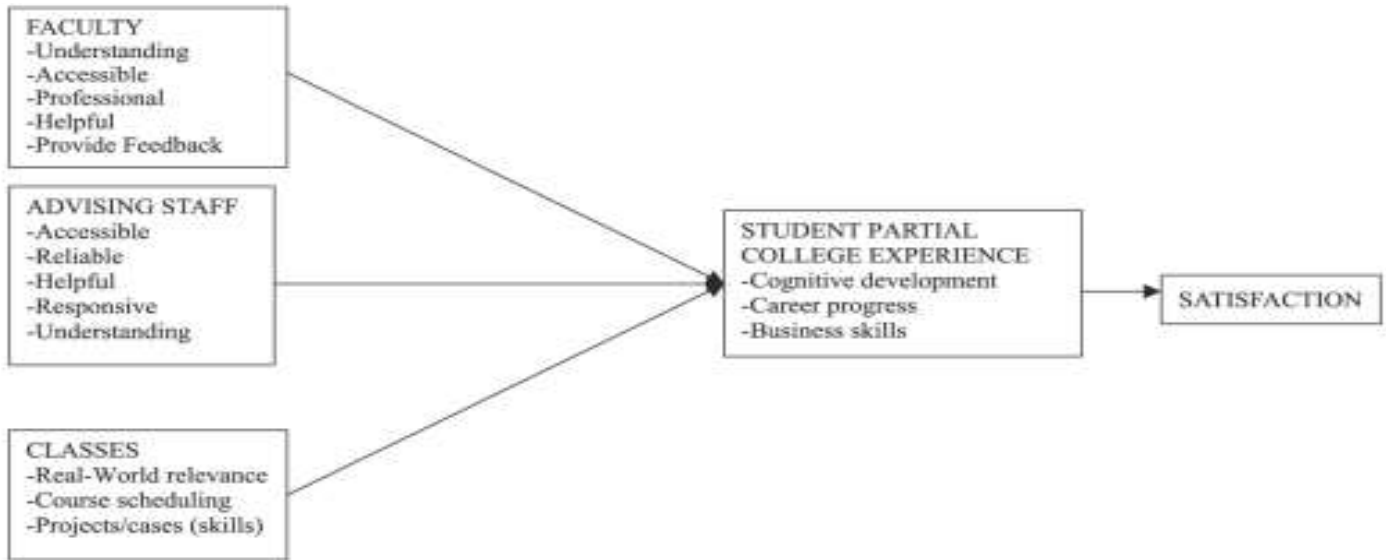
The findings support the hypothesis that faculty and classes are major determinants of students' incomplete college experiences based on the path coefficients connecting them to those experiences. Herzberg's two-factor hypothesis was supported by the path coefficient from partial college experience to satisfaction (Figure 8). Additionally, students who have a great college experience are more likely than students who do not to

be satisfied with the college or university.

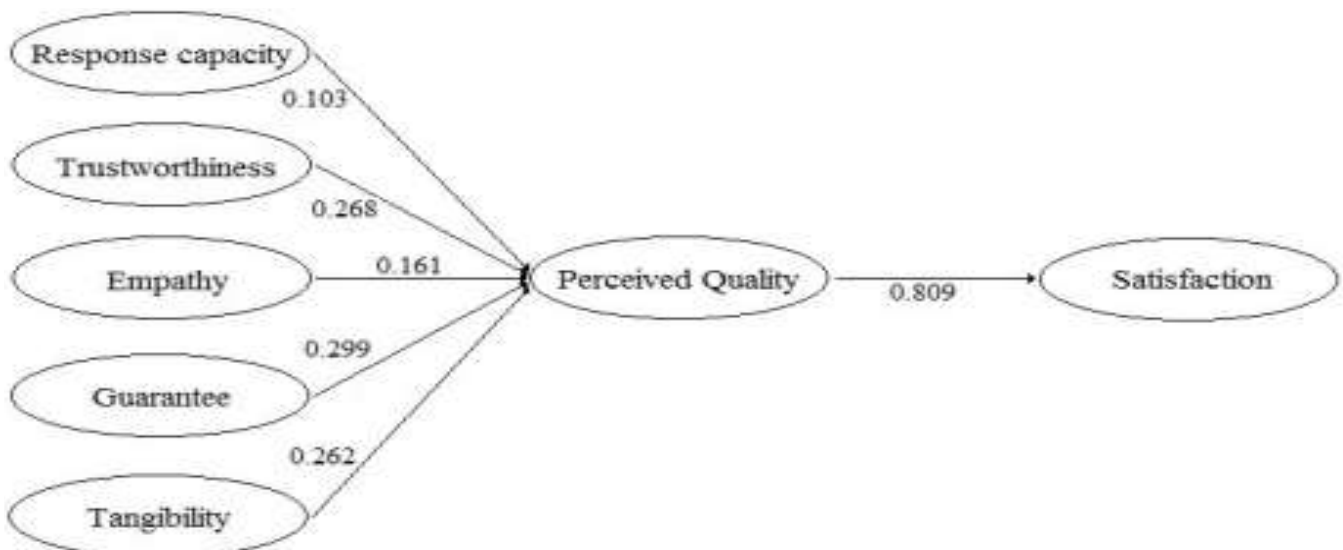
Pedro et al. (2018) examined what drives students' satisfaction and how it may contribute to retention in higher education institute context. A quantitative study was conducted at a Portuguese Faculty of Health Sciences using 359 students. Through the use of a structural equation model, the data were analysed (Figure 9). The findings showed that perceived quality (PQ) and satisfaction are considerably different when students are exposed to various teaching philosophies, and that PQ and satisfaction are positively correlated in the context of higher education institutions (HEI).

**Factors affecting for university satisfaction**

Many studies mention various criteria of students'



**Figure 8.** Herzberg's two-factor theory.  
 Source: DeShields et al. (2005).



**Figure 9.** Structural model.  
 Source: Pedro et al. (2018).

university satisfaction process. El-Hilal et al. (2015) looked at the variables that affect students' satisfaction, success, and capacity for learning. A Kuwaiti private college's 146 business diploma students are included in the study. The findings show that students' satisfaction is influenced by the college's reputation, academic program, and teaching strategies. Participation, satisfaction, instructional strategies, and programs all had an impact on students' ability to learn and absorb information. The only aspect of service quality that directly affects pupils is

tangible. In a sizable division of Pakistan's Punjab province, Danish et al. (2011) examined the effects of various quality services on student satisfaction in higher education institutions. This study includes both public and private sector institutions. Data was gathered from 240 business students in the Gujranwala region who were either enrolled in master's programs or graduate programs at provincially chartered universities. Equal numbers of male and female students made up the sample. According to the findings, students are generally

satisfied with services such as tangibility, assurance, dependability, and empathy, but not so much with parking facilities, computer labs, cafeteria services, or the complaint management system. Recommendations and policy consequences are presented, as well as guidelines for further research. Hill and Epps (2010) investigated the impact of classroom environment elements on individual student satisfaction measures and student assessments of university teaching. According to the findings, pupils notice considerable distinctions between ordinary and enhanced classrooms. Additionally, children exhibit a preference for updated classroom features such as tiered seating, lighting, and classroom noise management. Finally, students in updated classrooms score course enjoyment, classroom learning, and instructor organization higher than in ordinary classrooms. Dalton and Denson (2009) used a student evaluation of course instrument at an Australian research-intensive institution to investigate factors of overall satisfaction at the course level. During the 2007 academic year, all semester 1 and semester 2 course assessments were administered at the institution. The original sample included 63,891 student course evaluations from 2717 different courses. While student characteristics and reasons for enrolling in a course are predictors of overall satisfaction, the assessment questions explain the majority of the variation in course satisfaction.

The data also show that faculty-selected optional questions predict overall satisfaction better than required questions. Ginns et al. (2007) identified five elements influencing total student satisfaction with their degree: competent teaching (including feedback); clear goals and standards; adequate assessment; suitable workload; and generic skills. Spooen et al. (2007) found ten criteria that have an impact on total student satisfaction. They are clarity of objectives, subject matter value, subject matter build-up, presentation skills, and harmony in the organization of the course-learning process, (course materials to understanding the subject matter, course difficulty, and teacher assistance during the learning process, examination authenticity, and formative examinations. Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2014) suggested a structural model based on theoretical and empirical evidence about the linkages between students' perceived service quality (SPSQ), satisfaction (SSt), loyalty (SL), and motivation (SM). The findings show that students' perceived service quality has a direct positive effect on satisfaction, loyalty, and motivation. Masserini et al. (2018) studied whether the quality of educational services and the institutional image of the university influence students' overall satisfaction with their university experience, as well as the potential ramifications of these interactions on student loyalty.

A web questionnaire was used to collect data from 14,870 students at the University of Pisa. Among the more academic components of the educational service, the results suggest that teaching, lectures, and course

organization are the key drivers of students' satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, it is important to recognize the pivotal role that university reputation has in influencing student happiness, loyalty, and teaching and lectures through both direct and indirect consequences. Bini and Masserini (2015) investigated the elements influencing students' satisfaction with their university experience, concentrating on the aspects that characterize the educational offer's teaching efficiency. Using survey and administrative data from the University of Pisa, a structural equation model with latent variables is estimated. The findings indicate that instructional efficiency has a positive effect on satisfaction and that when it is inadequate, or is perceived to be inadequate, students are less satisfied with their university experience. Other elements influencing student satisfaction are also explored, such as study organization, social capital, and internship experience. In a large-scale Italian university, Bassi (2019) examined the changes in students' happiness over time as well as how these changes were influenced by the didactic practices, pedagogical ideas, and requirements of the professors. To analyse the gathered data, a mixture conditional latent growth model is estimated. The model's findings revealed a sizable group of university courses with high levels of satisfaction that remain constant over time and a small number of challenging courses with low levels of satisfaction that decline during the three academic years under consideration. Covariates associated with both the instructor and the didactic activity is anticipated to have interesting and statistically significant impacts. Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) evaluated significant elements influencing student satisfaction levels in selected Sri Lankan state universities. The study sample is made up of undergraduates from four different state colleges, and the data collected was evaluated utilizing factor analytics, correlational analysis, and regression analysis. The quality of the academic staff, university facilities, degree program, administrative staff, university location, and university image were all shown to be strongly connected with student satisfaction levels of 0.45, 0.47, 0.51, 0.31, 0.39, and 0.66, respectively. The quality of university facilities, the quality of the degree program, and the institution's image are statistically significant predictors, with the image being the best predictor. Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) identified two types of influences on student satisfaction levels in higher education: personal factors such as gender, employment, preferred learning style, and GPA, and institutional factors such as instruction quality, promptness of instructor feedback, clarity of expectations, and teaching style. Karna and Julin (2015) investigated the level of satisfaction with university facilities and services as assessed by students and faculty on two campuses in Finland. According to the findings, fundamental university activities such as research and teaching have a bigger impact on total student and staff

satisfaction levels than supportive facilities. Martirosyan (2015) explored factors influencing student satisfaction in Armenian higher educational institutions (AHEIs). This study investigated factors that affected student satisfaction in the college environment at AHEIs using an ex-post facto, non-experimental technique. A self-reported questionnaire was used to collect data from 372 students from nine public and three private institutions in Armenia's rural and urban districts. The ANOVA results revealed that various demographic variables and student satisfaction had substantial main effects. A link between various selected satisfaction assessment parameters and overall student satisfaction was discovered using multiple regression analysis. Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013) investigated student satisfaction factors at foreign branch campuses in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The findings revealed that student satisfaction ratings at UAE branch campuses were generally good. As important indicators of student happiness, the most influential elements were the caliber of lecturers, the quality of physical facilities, and the effective use of technology. Sojkin et al. (2011) discovered several elements that influence student university satisfaction. They are classroom quality, feedback quality, and the lecturer-student relationship, interaction with fellow students, course topic, available learning equipment, library facilities, and learning materials.

## METHODOLOGY

The study's approach is based on the dimensional aspects of student selection. Hossler (1999), Kotler and Fox (1995), the Marketing Mix Model for Higher Education, and the Combined Complex Decision Model (Holdsworth and Nind, 2006), are examples of decision-making models. And students' satisfaction is based on several models such as SERVQUAL model, Happy - Productive Theory, Service Product Bundle, Herzberg's two-factor theory, Conceptual model for satisfaction, Satisfaction Evaluation Model etc. The study used literature reviews, archived literature reviews, case studies, assumptions, different conceptual frameworks, models and theories to explain theoretical and empirical literature of students' choice and satisfaction.

## RESULTS

The proposed conceptual frameworks identify the factors affecting students' university choice and students' satisfaction in Sri Lanka (Table 1 and Figure 10). Reference to the admissions to the public universities completely based on A/L results and similarly it relies on the Z-score of each streams of the A/L examination. Therefore, the admissions are extremely competitive, and the capacity, available resources of the state university system is absolutely limited. Further, university satisfaction is also very important component in higher education. Many scholars have tried to touch different aspects of students' satisfaction using different models and frameworks. Models and frameworks have been

made using different criteria and they applied in different geographical areas in different times. Table 2 and Figure 11 show the factors affecting for university satisfaction.

## Conclusion

The university selection process can be varied from one person to another. Every student doesn't have the same choices when selecting their higher education institution and programme. They consider various factors such as university fee, location, quality of education, institutional factors, scholarships, etc. to make the most suitable choice for themselves. Due to the ever-evolving job market, the university selection process has become more critical and complex. As a result, there is a huge competition among universities when recruiting students to their institutions. As a result, each higher education institution needs to recognize that the university selection process has become a tool for creating a recruitment plan in order to gain a competitive advantage over other institutions. Furthermore, the research suggested that students are more likely to choose universities that offer good academic reputation, excellent student services, and potential job opportunities after graduation. Moreover, it was found that the reputation of the university and its alumni network, the quality of teaching and research, and the quality of the facilities are important considerations for the selection of a university. Additionally, the analysis showed that university rankings, social networks and personal visits are also significant influencing factors in the university selection process. Finally, a conceptual framework is introduced in terms of the decision-making process, which will benefit university recruitment managers in making decisions. This study also invites other scholars to discuss and investigate this problem in order to establish university selection models and criteria that may be used to create an effective recruitment plan.

The university satisfaction may be differed from one person to another since every student does not have similar satisfaction when they are studying. There are several factors affecting for students' university satisfaction. They are tangibility, competence, empathy, curriculum, delivery, reliability, departments and faculty, consulting staff, classes, student's higher education experience, empathy, responsiveness, assurance etc. using these factors affecting university selection, a conceptual framework is prepared.

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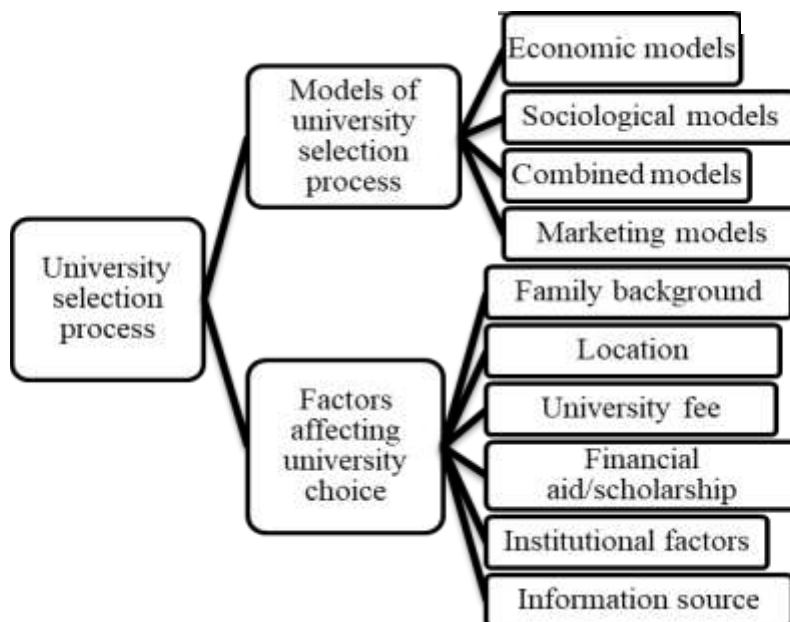
**Table 1.** Factors affecting for university choice.

<b>Name of the university choice factor</b>	<b>Literature evidence</b>
Family background	<p>Ogawaa and Imuraa (2010) – Determinants of Access and Equity in Tertiary Education: The Case of Indonesia.</p> <p>Cajucom (2019) – Appraisal of the Choice of College among Management and Business Technology Freshman Students.</p> <p>Saitia and Prokopiadou (2008) – The demand for higher education in Greece.</p> <p>Gaeta and Maio (2014) – Post high school education choices in Italy: an empirical analysis.</p>
Location	<p>Kunwar (2017) - Factors influencing selection of higher education institutions in Finland by foreign students.</p> <p>Maniu and Maniu (2014) – Educational marketing: Factors influencing the selection of a university.</p> <p>Eidimtas and Juceviciene (2013) – Factors influencing school-leavers decision to enrol in higher education.</p> <p>Simões and Soares (2010) - Recruiting Higher Education Students: Information Sources and Choice Factors.</p> <p>Binney and Martin (1997) – How Do Rural Students Choose Their Higher Education Institutions? Two Regional Australian Cases.</p> <p>Drewes and Michael (2006) - How do students choose a university? An Analysis of Applications to Universities in Ontario, Canada.</p>
University fees	<p>Eidimtas and Juceviciene (2013) – Factors influencing school-leavers decision to enrol in higher education.</p> <p>Abeygunawardena. (2018) – Influential Factors in Selecting a bachelor's degree from Private Higher Educational Institutes in Sri Lanka: A Study Based on Undergraduates of International Degree Programmes.</p> <p>Maniu and Maniu (2014) – Educational marketing: Factors influencing the selection of a university.</p> <p>Semsia et al. (2018) – Determinants of College and University Choice for High-School Students in Qatar.</p> <p>Çokgezen (2012) – Determinants of University Choice: A Study on Economics Departments in Turkey.</p> <p>Cruz (2018) – Choosing an Ideal Graduate Education: The Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology Experience.</p>
Financial aids/ scholarships	<p>Agrey and Lampadan (2014) – Determinant Factors Contributing to Student Choice in Selecting a university.</p> <p>Azizan et al. (2018) – Factors that influence program selection and its relationship with students' achievement in pre- university study.</p> <p>Cajucom (2019) – Appraisal of the Choice of College among Management and Business Technology Freshman Students.</p> <p>Cruz (2018) – Choosing an Ideal Graduate Education: The Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology Experience.</p> <p>Drewes and Michael (2006) - How do students choose a university? An Analysis of Applications to Universities in Ontario, Canada.</p>
Institutional factors	<p>Agrey and Lampadan (2014) – Determinant Factors Contributing to Student Choice in Selecting a university.</p> <p>Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) – Critical factors affecting students' satisfaction with higher education in Sri Lanka.</p> <p>Semsia et al. (2018) – Determinants of College and University Choice for High-School Students in Qatar.</p> <p>Abeygunawardena (2018) – Influential Factors in Selecting a bachelor's degree from Private Higher Educational Institutes in Sri Lanka: A Study Based on Undergraduates of International Degree Programmes.</p> <p>Azizan et al. (2017) – Factors that influence program selection and its relationship with students' achievement in pre- university study.</p> <p>Perera and Pratheesh (2018) – Factors Influence on Student Course Selection: A Case of Trincomalee Campus.</p> <p>Abeygunawardena (2018) – Influential Factors in Selecting a bachelor's degree from Private Higher Educational Institutes in Sri Lanka: A Study Based on Undergraduates of International Degree Programmes.</p>

Table 1. Contd

Information source	Binney and Martin (1997) – How Do Rural Students Choose Their Higher Education Institutions? Two Regional Australian Cases. Reddy (2014) - The influence of social media on international students' choice of university and course.
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Source: Author Developed (2023)



**Figure 10.** Conceptual framework for university selection.  
Source: Author developed (2023).

Table 2. Factors affecting for university satisfaction.

Author and Year	Variable
El-Hilali et al. (2015) - Students' Satisfaction and Achievement and Absorption Capacity in Higher Education	The image and prestige of the college, the academic curriculum, and instructional techniques
Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013) - Assessing student satisfaction in transnational higher education	Lecturer quality, physical facility quality, and effective use of technology
Hill and Epps (2010) - The Impact of Physical Classroom Environment on Student Satisfaction and Student Evaluation of Teaching In the University Environment	Classroom learning environment, course enjoyment, and instructor organization
Ginns et al. (2007) - Student evaluation: what predicts satisfaction? in The Student Experience	Good instruction (including feedback); defined goals and standards; proper evaluation; adequate workload; and general skills
Spooreen et al. (2007) - Student evaluation of teaching quality in higher education: development of an instrument based on 10 Likert-scales	Clarity of objectives, subject matter value, subject matter development, presentation skills, harmony in the organization of the course-learning process, contribution of course materials to subject matter understanding, course difficulty, teacher assistance during the learning process, authenticity of examinations, and formative examinations
Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) - Critical factors affecting students' satisfaction with higher education in Sri Lanka	Academic faculty quality, university amenities, degree programs, administrative personnel, university location, and university image

Table 2. Contd.

Sojkin et al. (2011) - Determinants of higher education choices and student satisfaction: the case of Poland	Classroom quality, feedback quality, lecturer-student relationship, interaction with other students, course content, available learning equipment, library facilities, and learning materials
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Source: Author Developed (2023).

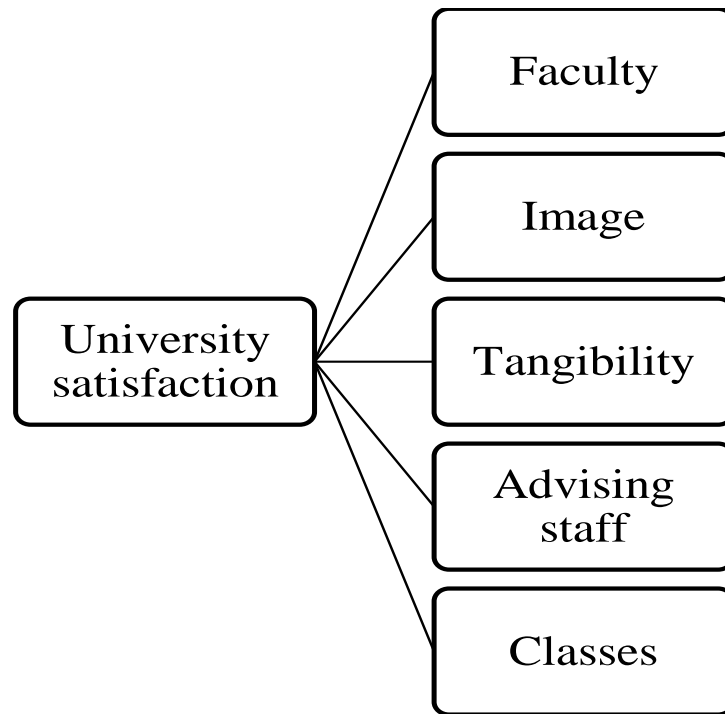


Figure 11. Conceptual framework for university satisfaction.  
Source: Author Developed (2023).

**CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors have not declared any conflicts of interests.

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **School dropout and early marriage affects youth agribusiness employment**

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**This article focused on uncovering the background of the youth lamenting unemployment in the presence of agribusiness employment opportunities. A phenomenological qualitative design was employed to generate in-depth information. The sample frame was formed of youth agribusiness clubs from the district agribusiness office. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants doing different agribusinesses. Photovoice, focus group discussions, and oral interviews were used to generate data, which was analyzed using content, discourse, and thematic approaches. The data revealed that background factors such as age, educational attainment, and marital status were key factors in explaining youth unemployment in agribusiness employment opportunities. The study found that most youths in rural areas marry soon after dropping out of school, followed by taking up agriculture as a livelihood. Those youth dropping out of school before they turn 18 are considered children and enter agribusiness without the necessary skills. Systematically, they are forced to engage in agribusiness at a very young age, such as 14, in order to survive and to take on family responsibilities. The study recommended the introduction of practical agriculture in primary and secondary schools so that school dropouts at least gain agribusiness skills for self-employment, as well as deploying new ways of reducing early marriages.**

**Key words:** School dropout, youth unemployment, phenomenological qualitative approach, agribusiness, child abuse.

## **INTRODUCTION**

School dropout is one of the challenges locking the education sector in Malawi, with most of the school dropouts falling below the age of eighteen and into the childhood group. In order to earn a living, the youth who have dropped out of school often enter into early marriages and engage in a variety of self-employment

agribusiness enterprises, such as poultry, vegetables (onions, tomatoes, and potatoes), sheep and goat fattening, cereal production, and dairy production (Tarekegn et al., 2022). These enterprises are selected due to their perceived profitability. Malawi has a youthful population and an unemployment rate of 18.5% (National

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Statistical Office, 2018). Agriculture is a major contribution to Malawi's economy, accounting for 39% of its GDP, employing 85% of its workforce in the food and cash crop industries, and generating more than 90% of its foreign exchange earnings. In a study conducted in Karonga, Salima, Kasungu, Lilongwe, Mangochi, Zomba, Chikwawa, Mzuzu and Mwanza, 83.2% of the youths were of the view that agriculture remains the main employer directly in production and agribusiness (Zidana et al., 2020).

Rigg et al. (2018) state that motivation is one of the key factors that explain youth engagement in agribusiness, but that young farmers are hesitant to work on farms due to seeing little opportunity for increasing income. Kafle (2019) and Zidana et al. (2020) both argue that agriculture is a laborious yet low-paying and high-risk enterprise, creating disincentives for youths to engage in it due to low profit margins and limited agricultural insurance.

Low public perception about the sector and parental influence to move out of farming, as well as low profitability, have been highlighted as demotivating factors for the youth by Susilowati (2014).

On-farm and non-farm activities have been closely related to youth engaged in agribusiness, with more rural people engaging in different non-farm activities, such as small scale business, on-farm labour and off-farm wage labour, in order to diversify their livelihoods (Mangulama and Shengkun, 2016). Due to the decline in incomes through agribusiness, on average 44% of rural African households are engaging in non-farm wage employment or self-employment (Ackah, 2013).

Youth can be motivated to participate in agribusiness in Malawi if the following challenges are addressed: provision of agribusiness management training; availability of agriculture extension services; improved access to land; increased access to capital; provision of agricultural infrastructure; value addition; and a shift in the positive perception towards agriculture and agribusiness (Zidana et al. 2020). These challenges, when resolved, can help to reduce unemployment.

Since youth unemployment was recognized to be an issue of concern worldwide attention began to grow in form of stimulating debate and actions. The, United Nations General Assembly (2015) highlight issues of youth unemployment under Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals. At continental level, African Union (2011) highlights youth unemployment in the '*African Youth Decade 2009-2018 plan for action: Accelerating Youth Empowerment for sustainable development*'. At national level, Malawi discusses youth unemployment in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy, Malawi Government (2017) but also in the National Youth Policy, Malawi Government (2016) among other documents. Youth unemployment discourses and policy formulation at different levels suggest the importance of the subject matter. There has also been a growing attention on

projects addressing youth unemployment. One of such projects is the 'Jobs for Youth.'

Agribusiness is believed to be one of the viable solutions to the youth unemployment paradox in Africa, and particularly in Malawi, as it is highly featured in rural development, economic empowerment, and job creation. Okali and Sumberg (2012) predicted that most African youth in Sub Sahara region would pursue agricultural livelihoods.

The United Nations (2012) and the Economic Commission for Africa (2009) recognize youths as people aged between 15 to 24. The African Union (2011) adopts an African Union definition which recognizes youths as those aged from 15 to 35 years. Brempong and Kimenji (2013) also reveal that Ghana, Tanzania, and the Republic of South Africa recognize the age 15 to 35 brackets as youth. The definition of youth in Malawi's National Youth Policy (2013) defines youth as "all persons from age 10 to 35 years regardless of their age, sex, race, education, culture religion, economic, marital and physical status" (7). However, this poses potential conflict with the country's Labour Laws, which recognise children as those under the age of sixteen in accordance with Section 23 Subsection 5 of the Malawi Constitution (2006). The definition of youth in Malawi has implications on the overall percentage of youth in the country, as well as the legal age to participate in agribusiness and employment, since the labour laws prohibit engagement in agricultural activities by those under sixteen. This means that, although the national definition of youth encompasses those aged between 10 and 35, the age range appropriate for agribusiness and employment is 17 to 35. As a result, the majority of the population in Malawi is considered to be of youth age. According to the 2018 census conducted by the National Statistical Office, the population of Malawi stood at 17,563,749, with approximately 50% of the population being youths aged 10-35 and 36% being legally eligible to engage in agribusiness between the ages of 17-35. This technical variation in defining youth can have important implications for dealing with youth-related issues in agriculture and youth employment, as well as discussions involving the youth in other sectors.

In terms of marital status of the youth, Malawi Government (2010), under the Childcare, protection and justice Act No.22 of 2010 recognized children as those under the age of sixteen. Odhiambo (2016) noted that in 2015, Malawi amended its marriage law to have a minimum marriage age of 18, but the constitution allows children between the ages of 15 and 18 to marry with parental consent, and is unclear on those under 15.

In terms of education background, Sabola (2023) highlights that World Bank human capital review report indicate that less than 40 percent of primary school pupils transition to secondary schools. This suggests that some of the school dropouts could be those in agribusiness.

Any form of employment requires certain skills,

knowledge, values and attitude for one to perform. The background of the youth in specific communities and how it affects their employability in agribusiness is a subject of interest in this article.

### Problem statement

The government, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders are continuously putting effort into promoting school completion and discouraging early marriages as a way of combating the deeply rooted tradition of school dropout followed by early marriage and engagement in agribusiness. Despite the agribusiness employment opportunities, the National Statistical Office (2018) reported that youth unemployment was still high. This situation presented a pragmatic gap in understanding why the youth continued to suffer unemployment even though agribusiness employment opportunities were available. Literature is scant on the backgrounds of the unemployed youth and how such backgrounds relate to unemployment.

### Purpose

The main purpose of this study was to generate data that would help understand the determinants of youth unemployment in agribusiness employment opportunity situation. Such an understanding would be crucial in crafting solutions such as policies and interventions towards creating agribusiness youth employment and thereby reducing youth unemployment.

### Theoretical framework

The study adopted Victor Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation to help understand youth unemployment in agribusiness employment opportunity nation. Youth unemployment was being studied under the lenses of the theory which includes expectancy, instrumentality and valence. These lenses further helped in digging out information related what might have contributed to motivation and demotivation the youth to engage in agribusiness. This theory was supported by the concept of value chain. This concept helped in analyzing the entire agribusiness value chain to understand the issue of youth unemployment.

### Research question

The main study was guided by the question: "what were the determinants of youth unemployment in agribusiness employment opportunities in northern Malawi? Specifically, for this article, the guiding question was

"what was the background of the youth determining unemployment in agribusiness employment opportunities in northern Malawi?"

### METHODOLOGY

The study used a phenomenological qualitative design. According to Ndengu (2012), the design helps to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience it. Interpretivist and critical theories as paradigms further guided the study.

The study was carried out in northern districts on Malawi which included; Mzimba, Nkhatabay, Likoma, Chitipa, Rumpi and Karonga. Agribusiness youth groups were sampled from district agricultural offices database registered as active groups. Furthermore, groups were purposively sampled from the database based on the different types of agribusiness and location in the geographical district. This was to ensure rich data were generated from different parts of the district. Secondly, snowball sampling was used in one to one oral interviews. Ndengu (2012) and Mertens (2005) agree on purposive sampling for qualitative studies.

This study used participatory methods of; photovoice, interviews, and focus group discussions. This approach has also been supported by Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009) who indicate that 'we call employment of a multiple tools triangulation'. Table 1 shows the discussion of findings and the number of participants by sex and data generation method.

Verbal data gathered through oral interviews and focus group discussions was analysed using narrative and discourse techniques. Textual data gathered through photovoices and transcriptions of interviews was analysed using content analysis. This analysis led to further abstraction and grouping of related data and themes developed. This article has zeroed in on theme one, background of the youth having an influence on their engagement in agriculture and agribusiness. The next table presents themes related to this article developed in the study.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Sex of participants in agribusiness employment

On sex, the majority of youth farmers were males. An in-depth enquiry revealed several factors responsible for the trend. The first one was connected to land ownership issues. The study was carried out in patrilineal setup where men traditionally own land. As such, men become decision makers in agribusiness (Table 2).

Focus group discussions revealed that an unmarried male youth person may be allocated a piece of land for farming while a female one may not. The female youth is expected to join unknown man in marriage where she would get settled. One participant in AYF OI 15 said that "*mwanakaziwalijecharo;*

*palawandatengwecharontchawapapi* wake, *palawatengwacharontchamfumu wake*" translated as "A woman does not have land; when unmarried, the land belongs to parents and when married, the land belongs to the husband." This depicts women as proxy to land ownership as they are culturally not deemed to own land, but simply users. As a user without ownership rights,

**Table 1.** Thematic analysis showing codes, categories and themes.

Code	Category	Theme
Age	Characteristics of participants	Background of participants
Sex		
Family size		
Marital status		
Educational level		
Maize, rice	Forms of agribusiness	Common agribusiness enterprises by geographical location
Soya beans, Unyunya, ground nuts, beans		
Tomato, onions, Irish potato, cabbage		
Cotton		
Goats, pigs		
Beekeeping		

Source Author.

**Table 2.** Sex of participants in agribusiness employment.

Sex	Photovoice	FGD	Oral interviews	Number of participants	Percentage
Male	17	76	14	107	50.2
Female	7	89	10	106	49.8
Total	24	165	24	213	100.0

Source: Author.

most women face challenges in accessing land for own agribusiness enterprises.

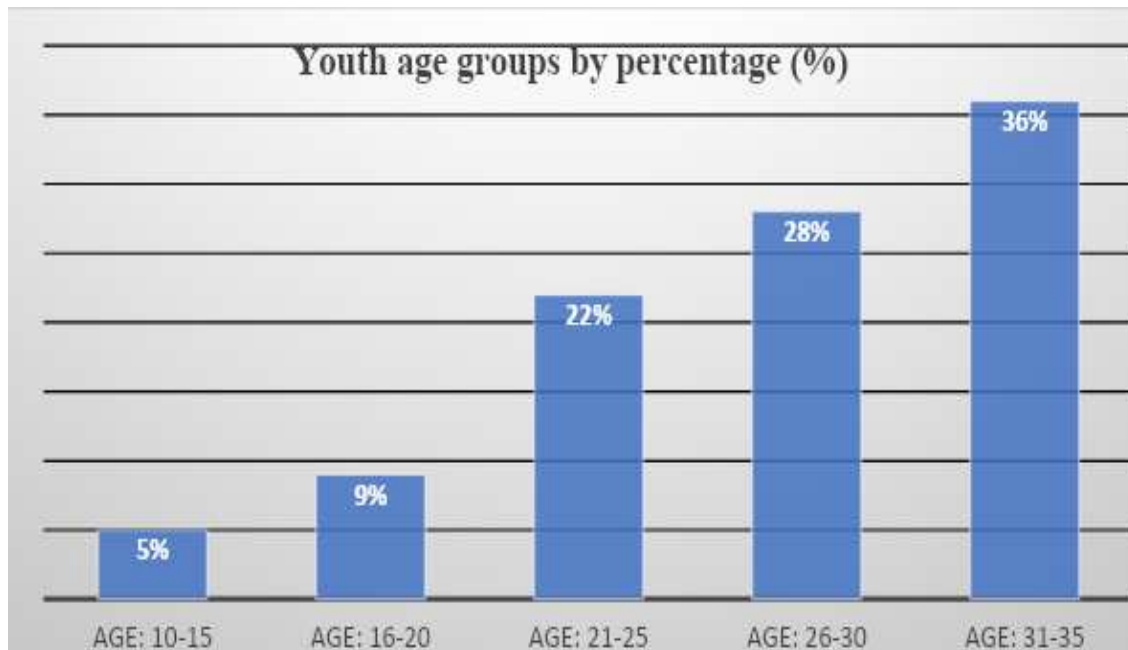
The second issue discussed was the stability of female members who, upon getting married, may find themselves in a different village, where the man has authority over the land, due to the patrilineal system of marriage practised in all the districts. The issue of land ownership between males and females has sparked debate in recent years, and the Malawi Government (2016) acknowledges this challenge and has promised that its national policy will promote access to ownership and control of productive resources, such as land, water, and farm inputs, as well as access to finance for females working under male leadership. It is not clear to what extent the policy has promoted land ownership, particularly for female victims of cultural discrimination when it comes to ownership rights. This study noted that land issues remain a challenge, particularly for rural women in agribusiness. By providing land certificates to both males and females, this challenge contributes to low female participation in agribusiness, particularly ownership of the enterprises, and helps to promote gender sensitive land management in rural areas.

In contrast, women did not have the same access to capital, as men had better control over existing capital resources. Therefore, women were unable to use these resources to start businesses and put themselves

forward economically. Participant AYF OI 16 expressed her desire to grow more tomatoes, but lacked the necessary fertilizer, and was unable to engage in typical male activities such as bicycle taxi, as this was seen as socially unacceptable for a woman to do. This suggests that gender issues still persist in rural areas, holding back some women from engaging in certain economic activities. This finding is consistent with Zidana et al. (2020) study, which assessed the engagement of youth in agribusiness in Malawi, and their perceptions and impediments.

**Age of youth in agribusiness employment in the study**

The succeeding bar graph presents age of youth in agribusiness employment engaged in the study. As shown in chapter in the preceding Figure 1, the majority of youth participants fell in the age group of 31 to 35. This suggests that older members were more engaged in agribusiness than lower ages within the youth category. Initially this study considered the age of 18 to 35 as research participants with the view that even though the national youth policy recognizes the youth as those between 10 to 35, the constitution which is the supreme law categorises all people under the age 16 as children.



**Figure 1.** Age of the youth in agribusiness employment.  
Source: Author.

In-depth studies revealed that some members who were aged 16 and engaged in agribusiness were also married. These findings were in agreement with Gausi (2020) who reported that by the age 18, 42% of the girls were already in marriage and 29% of the girls aged between 15 and 19 had begun child bearing. Even though ages 16 and below were not supposed to be part of participants, the study took a special interest to learn more on why the youth below age 16 were engaged in agribusiness clubs.

Some agribusiness youth clubs with members below 16 years include AYF FGD 5 and AYF FGD 9. The following were the reasons for including children under 16 in the farmer clubs;

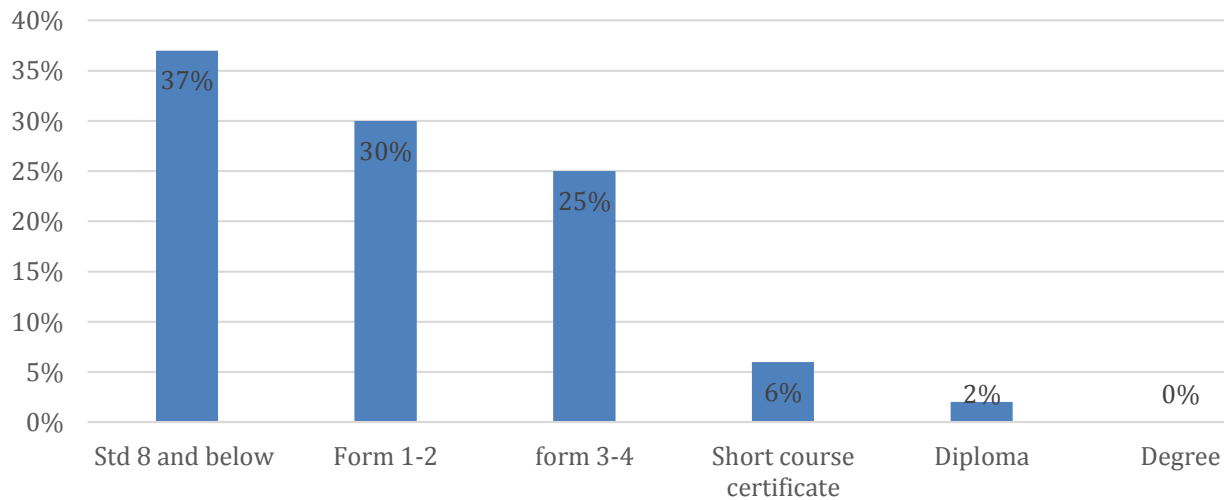
1. Children are trained to take up adult roles in farming.
2. Some children have no hope in making a living through white collar jobs as they do not perform well in class.
3. Those who were married had to start to be economically independent. Agribusiness was the most available option.

One member in AYF FGD 9 argued that one of the reasons most youths do not like farming was because it was introduced at a later stage in their lives. One member said that in their club, children below age 16 were taken as 'farmers on nurse.' On whether this disturbs education, it was discussed that all children were being encouraged to attend schools. Children were joining other group members to learn different types of farming after classes. The idea of 'farmer nursery' was also agreed by an agriculture officer (AO 1) who noted

that most youth shun away farming because primary and secondary curriculum does not include practical agriculture and technical and vocational skills as it was the case with curriculum during the first Malawi president, Kamuzu Banda era. AO 1 added that democracy and human rights have been misunderstood to the point that teaching a child future role like agriculture which is the backbone of the economy has recently been coined as child labours. According to this officer, there were more and more youths who grew up with negative attitude about agribusiness because their parents fear to use them. Parents' fear of being in conflict with child labour issues and at the same time the school does not teach it practically, hence creating a pool of youth with no interest in agriculture. Due to limited formal employment opportunities, many youths become unemployed. While engaging children in agriculture is mostly considered as child labour in light of legislation, Chihana (2020) report of some other authorities calling for children to be taught at an early stage in planting trees to protect the environment and retain soil fertility for agriculture. This report agrees with the philosophy of AYF FGD 5 and AYF FGD 9.

In an AYF FGD 5 observation, it was noted that some children who do not expect to earn a living through academics were lagging behind in their educational pursuits, falling short of the expected academic level for their respective ages of 13, 14 and 15. Contrary to this, the members of this group, aged 14 and 15, were in standard 4 and 5 as shown in appendix. This was a sign that they were likely to become dropouts soon. To ensure

### Education levels of youth participants



**Figure 2.** Summary of education levels for youth participants. Source: Author.

that they had a future, senior members of the group felt it was important to orient them toward a more likely way of life. Findings from other groups agree with these sentiments indirectly. For instance, AYF-PV 13 indicated that he started keeping local chickens when he was in Form One and continued to do so after he completed secondary education, scaling up his efforts.

#### Education level of youth in agribusiness in the study

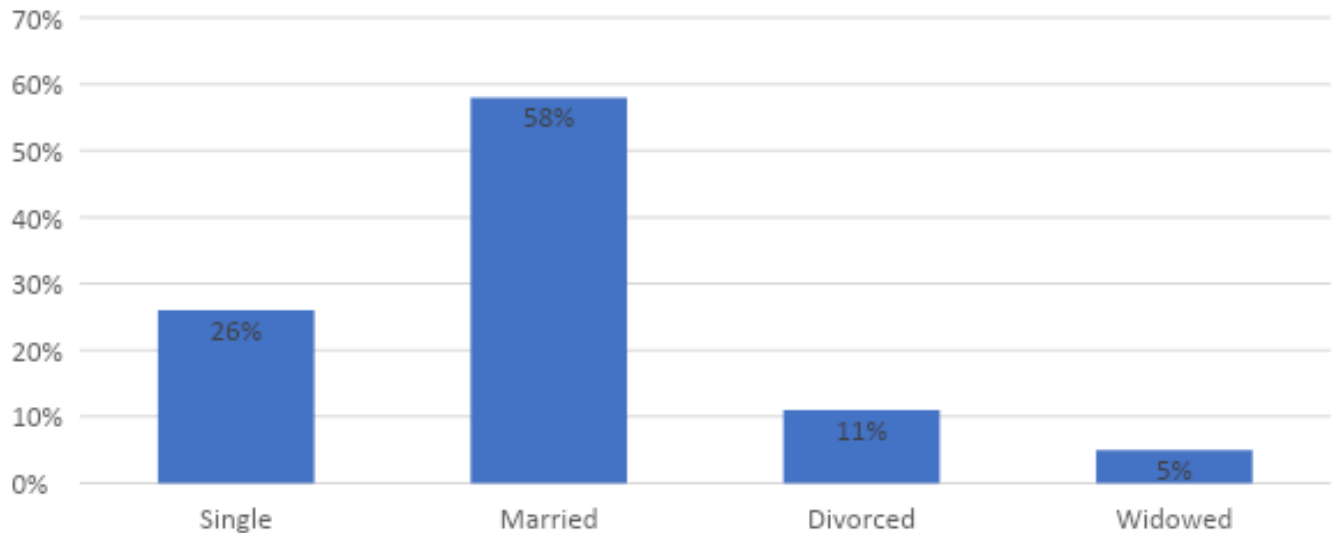
The next bar graph presents education levels of youths engaged in this study. As shown in Figure 2, the majority of participants were in the group of education levels of up to primary standard 8 and below. The next majority was the category of those who went to as far as junior secondary education (Forms 1 and 2).

Third group was that whose education levels were in senior secondary education (Form 3 and 4). Out of those who attained secondary education, few had actual qualifications such as JCE and MSCE. Six percent of the participants had post-secondary education of certificate level while two percent had diplomas. Some post-secondary qualifications for participants engaged in agribusiness self-employment included agribusiness, general agriculture, TEVET and community development.

The researcher agreed with the participants' proposal that it would be unfair to categorise someone holding a PSLCE certificate when they had completed the four years of secondary training but failed one subject to fulfil the requirements of an MSCE certificate. Since the JCE has been phased out, such people would otherwise be

categorised in the group of PSLCE holders, even though their level of knowledge and understanding of educational matters may be far higher.

While other participants displayed good knowledge of operations in agribusiness especially those who had certificates in agriculture and some who attained senior secondary education, others were expressing lack of correct knowledge. For instance, in AYF FGD 3, one participant said *“masuzgohanayaketukoloratuchoko, wafwitiwanandichomenewoyawirampungu, inenalimilekisupalanatolamathinighadono”* translated as *“some other challenges, we harvest little because there is a lot of witchcraft that transfers rice from our field. For example, I cultivated a large piece of land but harvested few tins of rice.”* The other member agreed with him and could not appreciate that recycled seeds could be contributing to low yield. This suggested that they believe witchcraft affects their yield to be low unlike the recycling of seeds and other factors which are scientifically proven as noted by Tscherig (2002) that farmers growing improved and modern varieties had higher yields and earned higher profits than farmers growing traditional varieties. Such beliefs possibly explain the importance of education levels. The two participants had attained school up to primary education. A study by Xhaba and Masuku (2013) in Swaziland used a linear regression to identify determinants of profitability of vegetables and concluded that education levels had a positive relationship with profitability and was significant at 1% level. Another study by Nankhumwa and Peiris (2009) also noted that formal education attained by the farmers affects yield and profitability. In agreeing with these studies, this study submits that some of the challenges



**Figure 3.** Summary of marital status for the youth in the study.  
Source: Author

that agribusiness youth farmers face could be attributed to low education levels.

In general, the study found out that most youths engaged in agribusiness were those without formal education qualifications and those with low education levels. Such youth were basically school dropouts. Education levels are said to have an effect on agribusiness as noted by different studies cited in this research but also as found in this study.

### **Marital status of the youth in agribusiness in the study**

The next bar graph presents marital status of the youth in agribusiness engaged in this study. As presented in Figure 3, most participants were married, seconded by single, the widowed and then the divorced. The study revealed that those who get married engage in agribusiness as an extension to subsistence farming. It was discussed that once married, one had to find means of finding food and money for daily subsistence needs such as soap and salt. According to the participants, farming becomes the first option to many in finding food but also agribusiness for income generation. It was reported that those who were single but at the same age as those married were not much worried as they could depend on their parents for survival. It was for this reason that those who get married top the list of youth engaged in agribusiness.

It was interesting in Mzimba when some female participants had indicated single as their marital status when they were actually married and leaving at the patrimonial home. According to such participants, they

opted to be single because they do not receive any support from their husbands who went to the Republic of South Africa over a decade ago. One participant indicated that;

*'Afumu wane wakanitolaaponkhawanavilimika 16. Pakatipajumphachakachimoza, iwowakalutaku South Africa. Mu vilimikavakwambiliravitatu, wakizangakamoza pa chakakwizakationandipowakatumangakosondalamayafet eleza, mchere, sopo, Malaya navakukhumbikwavyake. Kufuma pa vyakavitatuapombwewakalekakutumakalikose. Pa sonovilimika 10 vakwana no wowwiri no kwizako. Pakwambawakatiwizamunitolakutitikakhalengetoseku Joni uko. kenakokwitiwakaziiiiii. Mahumihumiwakutiwatikwaliwalikutolakuko. Nkhujiyimira pa nekhakulimanatuma business. Nkhukhalakunokunthengwapakutipalimwana. Kanaumomwapulikiraapamungatinili pa nthengwa?'*  
translated as;

'My husband married me when I was 16. One year later when I was expectant, my husband went to South Africa. During the first three years, he used to visit home once every year and used to send money for fertilizer, salt, soap, clothes and other needs. Soon after the three years he stopped visiting and supporting me. It is now almost a decade. At first, he promised to come and pick me to South Africa to stay with him there. After sometime, he became quite on this issue.

Romours have it that he married there. I am independent in farming and some small businesses. I stay here (patrimonial home) because I have his child. In



this circumstance, would you consider me as married?’

This question raised debate and the group agreed that she was really single as marriage description needed to be applied where the man supports the woman financially. This discussion was interesting in this study, reflecting at the support husbands render to their wives and the status of being single or married. The remarks concerning migrating to South Africa were in agreement with Niboye (2018:9) who reveal that ‘Mzimba district in the Republic of Malawi is one of the persistent senders of labour migrants to the Republic of South Africa.’

## Conclusion

In summary, the main study on which this article was based sought to uncover the determinants of youth unemployment in the presence of agribusiness employment opportunities. Specifically, the study aimed to uncover the backgrounds of the youth who lament being unemployed when presented with agribusiness employment opportunities. The study adopted a phenomenological approach in order to gain in-depth insights from those affected, the youth. Thematic, content, and discourse analyses were employed in the data analysis. The findings and discussions imply that the backgrounds of many youths, such as having low education levels, low skill levels, and being married, contributed to unemployment. The study recommends a review of the approaches used in curbing school dropouts and early marriages, which are crucial for agribusiness employment.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study drew the following recommendations;

1. The government need to revise approaches being used in curbing school dropouts and retaining those who dropout.
2. The government and other stakeholders need to review the practice of marriages below the age of 18. Even though the marriage, divorce and family relations Act (Malawi Government, 2017) is in place, there is need to find mechanisms of enforcing it.
3. The engagement of children into agribusiness needs supervision so that it does not turn into child labor.
4. The government needs to review to curriculum by incorporating practical agriculture which is the economic back bone of the rural youth.
5. Maintain Junior Certificate Examinations as it serves a security valve when one is unsuccessful on Malawi School Certificate of Education. This is because the qualification is still important in terms of securing some formal employment but also act as an entry qualification for some skills training.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Factors affecting on students' university choice in the tertiary education in Sri Lanka**

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**Education boosts any nation's economy. Sri Lankan higher education is competitive. Because only 15% of students who take the General Certificate Examination in Advanced Level (G.C.E A/L) are qualified to enter public universities, every student struggles to get into university. Some ineligible public college students attend private universities, vocational schools, or are migrant students. 15% of students qualify for public colleges, but their abilities and skills may limit their possibilities. These characteristics show that Sri Lanka doesn't assess students' talents, qualifications, and program interests when picking a university. Thus, this study seeks to understand how Sri Lankan students choose universities. The study uses student selection dimensional variables. Hossler (1999), Kotler and Fox (1995), Marketing Mix model for higher education, and Combined Complex Decision model (Holdsworth and Nind, 2005) to quantify student university choice. Convenient sampling selected 139 students from 150. Methods were quantitative and qualitative. Descriptive and inferential statistics examined data to attain study aims. HEM majors lost students due to employability. HEM programs' flexible financing options are the biggest factor in students' undergraduate choices. Female HEM majors are unemployed. According to the findings, Sri Lanka's tertiary education system needs a paradigm shift to properly select university students.**

**Key words:** University choice, Students' demand, Tertiary education in Sri Lanka, Academic disciplines, Paradigm shift.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The education system plays a major role in contributing to the future of every country. For any nation, the that represents nations' economic growth. By developing human capital through education, there may be a positive

education sector is critical for its development (El-Hilali et al., 2015). Human capital is the most important element impact on the growth and wealth of any nation. Education can benefit a person financially, emotionally, socially and

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intellectually. In terms of Sri Lanka, the country is currently ranked 91st out of 118 countries based on Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in tertiary education and the higher education participation rate in the world. Comparatively, the East Asian countries show a significant improvement from the late nineties onwards, while Sri Lanka has shown a slow progress in higher education, despite making attempts to emulate other South Asian states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and India. The GER (gross enrolment ratio) is a metric used to determine the number of students enrolled in schools at several different grade levels. In Indonesia, it was recorded as 31%, Malaysia and Vietnam as 30%; Thailand at 51%, and Sri Lanka was recorded as just a little bit above 20% (World Bank Annual Report, 2019).

In comparison to many other poor countries, Sri Lanka has made an outstanding improvement in terms of basic education metrics (Liyanage, 2014). This is due in part to the government's universal free education policy, which was implemented in 1945; all students from kindergarten through university education being eligible for free education. This includes free textbooks, uniforms and tuition fees. Every child in Sri Lanka between the ages of 5 and 14 is required to attend school. In general, the Sri Lankan education system is divided into three cycles of 13 years. Children from 5–10 attend primary school (Grade 1–5), from age 11–14 junior secondary school (Grade 6–9), from age 15–16 senior secondary school (Grade 10–11), and from age 17–18 collegiate (Grade 12–13) (Liyanage, 2014). There are 15 universities in Sri Lanka, 7 postgraduate institutes, 10 additional higher education institutes, and 1138 technical, vocational, and training institutes. These are government institutions (Liyanage, 2014). University education can be regarded as the next level in the learning process (Premarathne et al., 2016). It is a critical component that is necessary for the labor market. To develop the economy in the country, knowledge accumulation and application are essential. Therefore, students' choice for the academic disciplines in the tertiary education has become important because tertiary education is competitive and market oriented. Throughout tertiary education, individuals can expand their knowledge and skills. However, tertiary education always leads to the economic development of the country as it enhances productivity of the country.

Admission to public universities is entirely based on A/L results, which implies that the Z-score of each stream of the A/L examination is used. As a result, admissions are exceedingly competitive, and the public university system's capacity is limited. The crucial thing to remember is that only about 20% of students who qualify for university study are admitted stating universities. Aside from that, it further demonstrates that, even after this competitive university selection process, the unemployment rate of graduates in the country still exists at a perceptible proportion such as the average overall employability ratio of Universities in Sri Lanka is 54%

(Nawaratne, 2012). According to the study conducted by University Grants Commission (UGC) in 2012, under the theme of Re-creating and Re-positioning of Sri Lankan Universities further highlights that the Faculties of Arts and Management have higher rates of unemployment in the country and account for 76 and 36% of unemployed graduates respectively. In the current situation, tertiary education has become even more complex as a result of changing nature and the doors are repeatedly opened for a lot of practical issues in the tertiary education system on the island. Out of many issues, one of the critical issues is the entry system and the university selection process in the country. University choice decision has become more complex perhaps the most crucial decision in a student life is related to their higher education, whilst selecting a degree program. Decision making phase of university choice is very crucial in a student life since the whole career of the student depends on it. Students do not make university or undergraduate choice randomly as it determines the whole career and future of the students. Poor choice can negatively impact on motivation and career path. In considering the above facts, it implies that Sri Lanka do not have a proper mechanism to select a suitable higher education program for its students aiming for carrier buildup or to find a suitable job opportunity for their stated qualification. This is one of the burning issues as the unemployment in the degree holders are climbing up to 15% and youth unemployment was increased from 18% to 28% during the last decade of Sri Lanka. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to identify the factors affecting for students' university choice in Sri Lanka.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

"Higher" education is simply the highest segment of the education system of a nation. Higher education is said to impart the deepest understanding in the minds of students, rather than the relatively superficial grasp that might be acceptable elsewhere in the system. In higher education, nothing can be taken on trust and the students have to think for themselves so as to be able to stand on their own feet, intellectually speaking (Barnett, 1997). Friedmann (2018) investigated women's participation in STEM fields. According to the findings, "salary and the ability to balance work and family responsibilities were the most important determinants of women's career choices." Raza (2016) investigated the significance of several employment characteristics for men and women. In this study, choice-based conjoint and choice model analyses were used. For the first time, this study focused the basic traits associated to women's profession choices, the initial principles of a social marketing intervention. Furthermore, the study found that current trends, personal preferences, parental pressure, and career counselors can all have an impact on kids' job

decisions.

Raza also investigated the educational and career-change behaviors of male and female students. Purposive sampling was used to select 145 female and 123 male students for the study, which was done at various public and private universities in Islamabad. According to the findings of the study, students' choices and adoption of educational careers are influenced by current and prevalent trends as well as their personal decisions. However, family pressure has no effect on educational or professional selections. Furthermore, male students are more satisfied than female students with a profession change in education. All of the other findings were nearly same for male and female students. According to Perera and Pratheesh (2018), decision-making in higher education while picking a program is critical because course selection determines students' prospects. According to the research, the "most important factors in major selection are the job factor and academic quality." Abeygunawardena (2018) studied influential factors in selecting a bachelor's degree from international degree programmes which have appeared recently. The methodology employed in the study was review of literature to identify the influential factors found in previous studies. In this study, in order to reflect the industry demand, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Engineering, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Business Administration degrees have been selected for the study to cover STEM and Management related disciplines. A simple random sampling is used in the study with a sample size of 420 first year undergraduates in STEM and management related bachelor's Degrees in randomly selected Private Higher Education institutes. Numerous studies have found a link between students' university choices and their family background. Families wield power in the following areas: finance, information, expectation, persuasion, educational prestige, and competition. Furthermore, Ogawaa and Iimuraa (2010) examined the demand-side determinants of access to tertiary education in Indonesia. According to the findings of the multi-nominal logit model, the education level of the head of household and family income per household member have significant positive effects on the choice of pursuing tertiary education in urban areas, whereas the education level of the household spouse is not. Cajucom (2019) researched who persuaded freshmen from the College of Management and Business Technology (CMBT) to enroll in their course. To collect data, 211 survey questionnaires were issued. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and weighted mean were utilized to analyze and interpret the collected data. The findings revealed that the respondents' parents' advice played a significant effect in their choice of a college course.

The location of an institution is another major factor in the university selection process. This factor refers to where a university is located geographically, and close

proximity to home or city center. Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) found that the quality of the university location is influenced on the student satisfaction levels. Kunwar (2017) says that location also influences for university choice. Furthermore, Douglas et al. (2008) introduced a conceptual model of student satisfaction with their experience in higher education. Results revealed that access to university is the most important factor. Eidimtas and Juceviciene (2014) and Simões and Soares (2010) pointed out geographical proximity is most important choice factors for higher education institutions. Furthermore, Drewes and Michael (2006), identified location as one attribute in university choice. Students, in general, consider university expenditures. They calculate how much money they will need to spend on education before making their decision. It does not simply refer to university tuition; it can also cover housing and transportation expenses. Distance from home increases the expense, which might have a detrimental impact on actual preferences and force students to limit their options.

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the role of cost in the university choosing process. Eidimtas and Juceviciene (2013), Abeygunawardena (2018), and Kunwar (2017), for example, demonstrate the significance of expenses in the university selection process. Using school-level data, ÇOkgezen (2014) investigated the factors of university choice in Turkey. Tuition fees, the population of the city in which the institution is located, the academic success of the university, and the language of instruction are all key factors of university choice, according to the regression results. The findings also show that tuition prices have a greater impact on public university students, but private university students are more concerned with academic success than their public university counterparts. Furthermore, Dunnett et al. (2012) used conjoint analysis to investigate the influence of fee adjustments on how students weigh their university options. 400 responders are given online surveys. According to the data, students from households with no history of attending university will face more disutility because of the higher costs. Financial aid and scholarships help students fund their education. As a result, financial aid is another important element influencing students' institution choices. Some students base their decision on financial considerations including financial help or scholarships. Cajucom (2019) explored scholarships and grants are highly influenced for university choice. According to Cruz (2018) availability of scholarships is the most influential institutional characteristic for students in decision making process. Drewes and Michael (2006) used a unique set of microdata on university applications to investigate the effect of institutional qualities in the choices made by graduating high school students between the 17 universities in the Province of Ontario, Canada. According to one survey, applicants favor universities that spend

more money on scholarships.

Institutional factors are highly affected in every student's university selection process. Agrey and Lampadan (2014) have done a review on the various elements that goes into decision-making in university choice in Central Thailand by distributing 261 questionnaires to the respondents. The study found factors such as support systems (for example bookstore, guidance/counselling office), learning environment (modern learning environment and facilities, reputation, beautiful campus, library and computer lab), having good sporting facilities, a strong student life program (health care services, residential accommodation), activities (wide range of extracurricular activities) and finally a safe and friendly environment (safe campus as well as supporting faculty) are significantly influenced decision-making on which institution of higher learning to attend. Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) studied the critical factors affecting students' satisfaction with higher education in Sri Lanka. The regression results indicated a statistically insignificant influence of the quality of the academic staff and the quality of the administrative staff on the student satisfaction levels. Quality of education and cultural values affected to college and university choice decisions. Furthermore, university infrastructure facilities, marketing strategy, university characteristics, programme evaluation have been identified as the most influential factors which affect in selecting a bachelor's degree from the international degree programmes (Abeygunawardena, 2018). Information sources are identified as influential factors in the choice process based on the relevant literature. Abeygunawardena (2018) studied on the influential factors in selecting a bachelor's degree from private higher educational institutes in Sri Lanka: a study based on undergraduates of international degree programmes. Results found that the most important influential information sources are messenger and peers. Ahmad et al. (2016) identified that recommendations from various groups are one of the push factors influencing for studying tourism and hospitality in abroad. Another research found that advisors and friends are the most important factors when selecting universities. Eidimtas and Juceviciene (2013) and Simões and Soares (2010) pointed out recommendations of teachers and career counsellors, mass media and university website cause for students' decision to enroll in higher education. Furthermore, Reddy (2014) investigated how social media influences international students' decision of course and university. There were 167 international students were used to response to the survey questionnaire. The study found that active social media participation amongst international students; the role of social media in influencing international students' decisions on course and university selection and the role of social media in meeting their information needs. The majority of studies use following four models for university choice process such as economic models, sociological

models, combined complex decision model and the marketing mixed model.

### **Economic model**

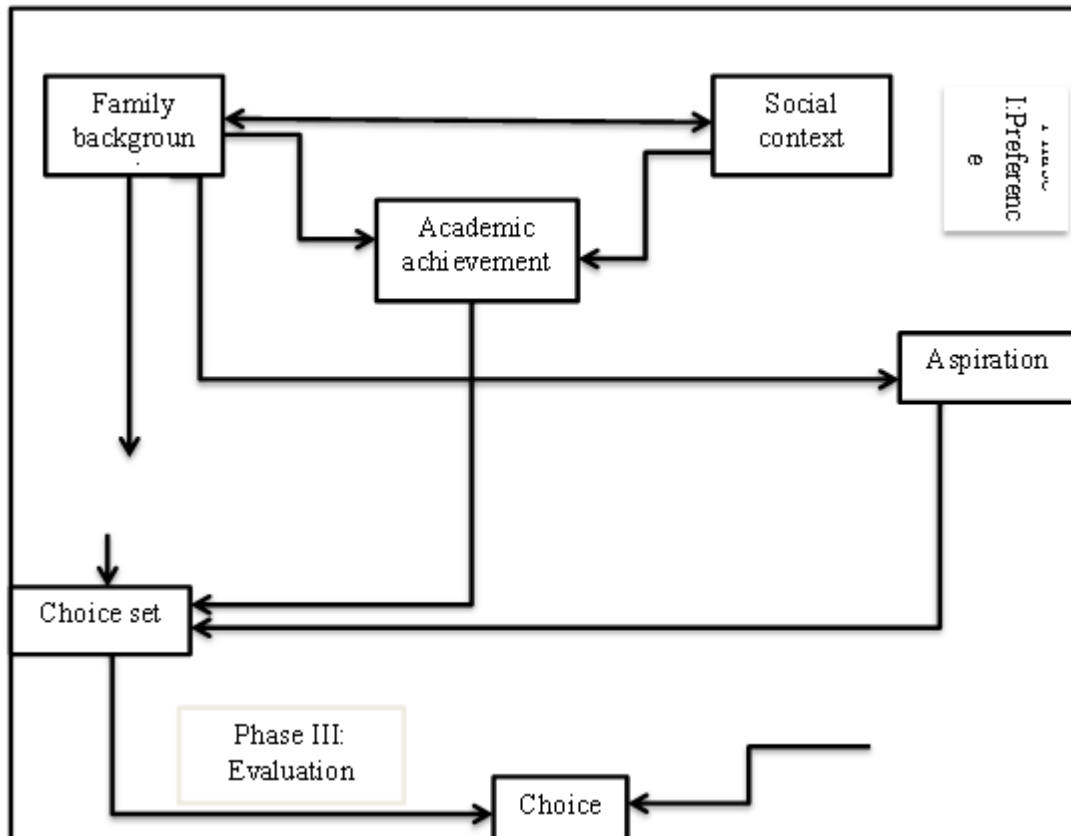
Economic models emphasize the decision between attending college or university and pursuing a non-collegiate option (Reddy, 2014). These models are typically based on the idea that a student wishes to maximize benefit while minimizing risks. The economic models' weakness is that they only include students' rationality as a factor in their decisions. Economic models of university selection are based on the assumption that students act rationally, analyzing all available information in light of their preferences at the moment of choosing (Aydin, 2015). The most important economic model for students' college choices is the model introduced by Jackson in 1982. It proposes that students' college choices involve three stages: the preference stage, the exclusion stage and the evaluation stage. In the preference stage, a student's educational aspirations and attitudes about college enrolment is shaped by his or her level of academic achievement, family background and social context (for example, the influence of peers, neighborhood, and school). In the exclusion stage, the student goes through a process of eliminating some institutions from the prospective list. Tuition fees, location and academic quality are among the factors that may be considered in eliminating higher education institutions. In the evaluation stage, students are faced with a choice set of institutions before they make their final choice (Reddy, 2014). Figure 1 shows the economic model introduced by Jackson.

### **Sociological model**

Sociological models were established as a result of educational and status achievement studies, with an emphasis on the ambitions of persons seeking higher education. The most prominent model for student choice is Chapman's model of student choice, which was introduced in 1981. It focused on the prospective student's (and the student's family's) traits as well as the features of his or her college, which he labels as cost, location, and program availability. More importantly, it identifies decision-making influences such as the school counselor, instructors, friends, and parents (Reddy, 2014). Chapman's economic model is seen in Figure 2.

### **Combined complex decision model**

This model is introduced by Holdsworth and Nind in 2005, identified some factors that influence the choice process of a university: quality and flexibility of the degree/ course



**Figure 1.** Economic model of college choice.  
Source: Reddy (2014)

combinations, availability of accommodation, whether or not employers are likely to recruit from that university, cost and spatial proximity to home (Figure 3).

### Marketing mixed model

Kotler and Fox (1995) introduced a marketing mixed model for higher education which consists of seven elements such as the program, the place, the price, the promotion, the physical facilities, the people and the process. Similarly, the student choice is a part of consumer behavior that is how individuals or groups select, buy and use goods or services. To select a university, students have five steps of choice: there are needs and motives, information gathering, evaluating alternatives, decision making and post choice evaluation.

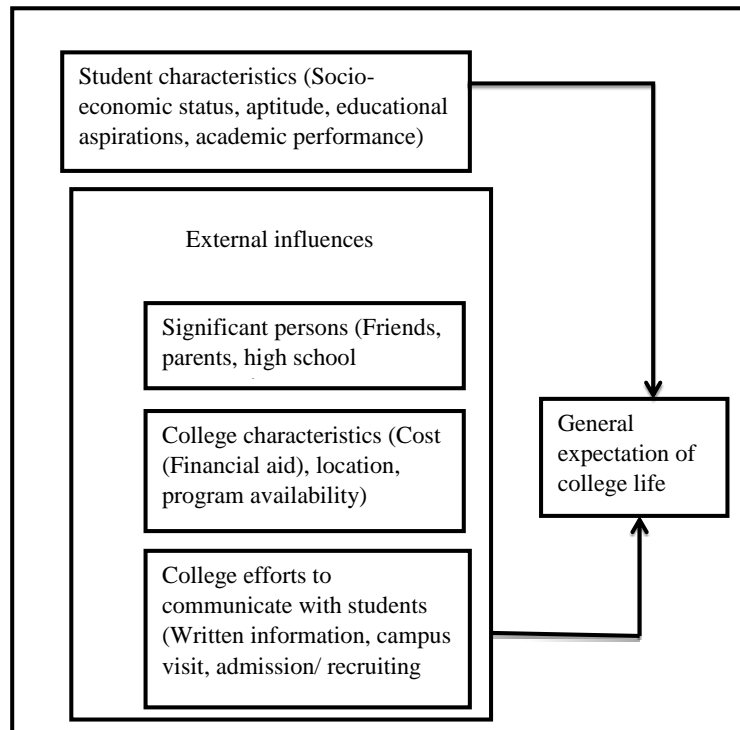
### METHODOLOGY

Methodology is basically a detailed procedure, strategy or strategies utilized to distinguish, select process, and analyze information about the core content of the topic. The conceptual framework is presented, and it is based on the theoretical framework of the literature review and the conceptual framework of this study is

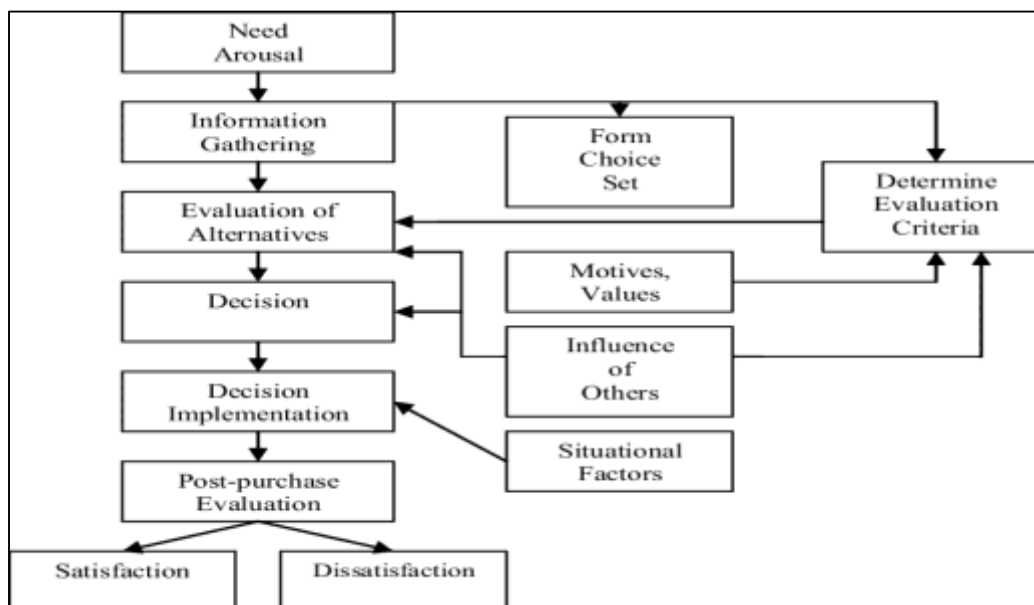
mainly based on three theoretical models have been used to identify and measure the university choice of the students. In this chapter, Conceptual framework and Operationalization of the study are briefly explained.

1. Dimensional factors of student selection by Hossler (1999)
2. Marketing mix model for Higher Education Kotler and Fox (1995)
3. Combined Complex Decision model Holdsworth and Nind (2005)

Dimensional factor model is considered under three categories, namely: economic model, sociological model and combined model. In the economic category model, Cost of attending a specific higher education institute, parental income, student academic ability, college characteristics, location, available majors, academic reputation of the university, future career and job prospects factors are taken into consideration. In sociological models, influence of significant others such as peers, parents, teachers and influence of siblings or spouse considered. In addition to the influence of significant others, academic ability, student motivation and high school characteristics are also taken into consideration under sociological model. In the Marketing Mix model for Higher Education by Kotler and Fox, student choice is considered as a part of consumer behavior. Main elements in Marketing Mix model developed by Kotler and Fox are the program, location, price of the course, promotion, Facilities of the Higher Education Institute, the people and the process. In the Combined Complex Decision model by Holdsworth and Nind, factors affected to the university choice is identified as, quality and flexibility of the degree program, Accommodation availability, employers' likelihood to recruit from the



**Figure 2.** Sociological model of college choice. Source: Reddy (2014).

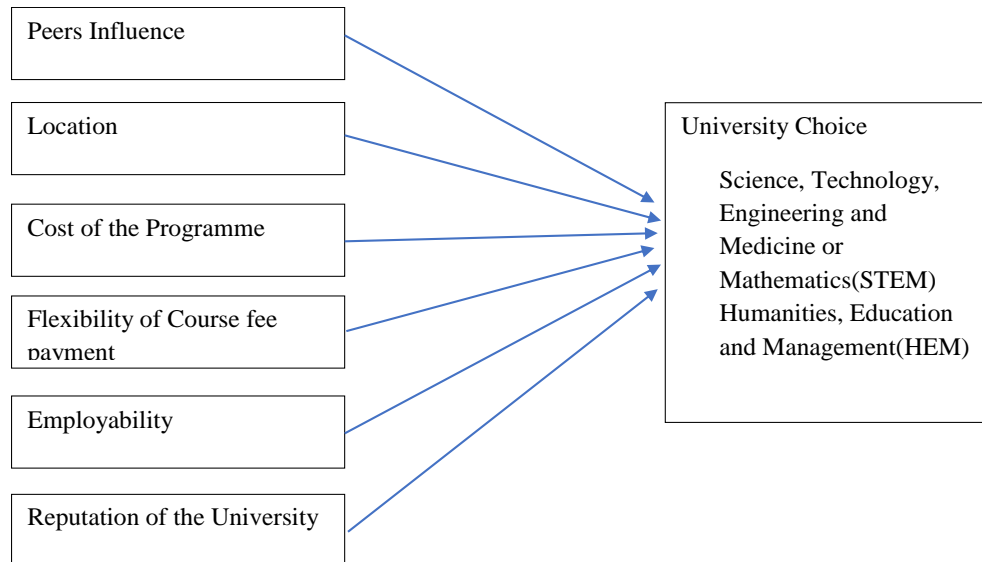


**Figure 3.** Combined complex decision model. Source: Holdsworth and Nind 2005.

selected university, cost of the program, spatial proximity to home. By studying the theoretical frameworks listed above, conceptual framework of the study is shown in Figure 4.

Six independent variables are selected in the conceptual framework. In operationalizing the Conceptual framework, all independent variables are measured using the Interval Scale. 20





**Figure 4.** Conceptual framework of the study.  
Source: Author

equi-distance Likert scale questions are used to measure the independent variables. Dependent variable of the study is a Binary variable, where the University choice of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine or Mathematics) and HEM (Humanities, Education and Management) programs taken. Target population of this study is Undergraduate first year students. In Sri Lanka, Undergraduate First year students can be mainly categorized into two clusters as State University and Non- State University students. In this study, only Non-state Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) taken into consideration as State University student choice is board area and final decision is made by the University Grants Commission (UGC) Sri Lanka. Sample of 150 students are selected for the study using convenient sampling method, for the final analysis 139 responses are selected. Upon carrying out descriptive analysis, correlations between independent variables and dependent variables were checked using Chi-square test. Confirmatory Factor analysis was carried out using Principal component analysis to fit the sub variables into main variables in the Conceptual Framework. Independent sample t-test used to compare the means of the independent variable in STEM and HEM choice. As the dependent variable of the study is a Binary variable. Binary Logistics regression model will be fitted to test the Conceptual Framework and to check the impact of the six independent variables in making STEM and HEM choice. Pseudo R square, Classification tables and Omnibus test are used as model diagnostic tools.

## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

### Descriptive analysis

In the selected sample of 139 students, 61% are male students. 82% of the students in the sample are aged 21-23. 93% of students decided to enter into undergraduate studies having three passes or above in their Advanced Level examination. 52% of the sample received National University Entrance but was selected in the non-state sector. 27% of them enrolled into non-state sector

institutes considering that it will take longer time to complete the degree if joined a state university. 19% of the students enrolled into Non-state HEI as they were not selected for their preferred program in state university. When considering the financial background of the students, 53% of the students are using Government Interest Free Loan Scheme as their financial support to continue their degree in Non-state HEIs. 43% of the students, course fees will be paid by their parents. When considering their awareness of the available degree programs, 52% of students visited the university websites, 30% of students visited social media fan pages of the selected university, 19% visited stall of the Non-State HEI in an educational fair, 41% participated Open Day programs conducted by the HEIs and another 28% visited the HEI before enrolling into the degree programs. It is worthwhile to note that only 14% of students enrolled by referring to the information in newspaper advertisements (Table 1). When considering the descriptive statistics, mean of the identified variables, influential level of friends, peers following the similar program, peers in the same university, award of scholarships and availability of university resources are at medium level. Influential level of other factors is at a low level when considering mean.

### Correlation analysis

In testing the correlation between identified variables and university choice, Chi-square test has been used. Below hypotheses tested in correlation analysis:

H0: ith Variable has no correlation with university choice.  
H1: ith variable has a correlation with university choice.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of the variables.

Descriptive statistics	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. error	Statistic	Std. error
Parents influence	139	1.84	0.887	0.760	0.206	-0.016	0.408
Peers similar course	139	2.49	1.099	0.526	0.206	-0.419	0.408
Peers' similar unity	139	2.76	1.179	0.407	0.206	-0.652	0.408
Friends influence	139	2.44	1.149	0.326	0.206	-0.744	0.408
Location	139	2.24	1.087	0.783	0.206	0.298	0.408
Transport availability	139	2.29	1.131	0.632	0.206	-0.270	0.408
Cost	139	2.19	0.924	0.386	0.206	-0.655	0.408
Flex payments	139	2.08	0.843	0.658	0.206	0.441	0.408
Scholarships	139	2.70	1.322	0.288	0.206	-0.982	0.408
Loan facility	139	2.15	1.388	0.880	0.206	-0.637	0.408
Uni Resources	139	2.37	1.180	0.753	0.206	-0.081	0.408
Academic reputation	139	1.86	0.913	1.043	0.206	0.956	0.408
Entry requirement	139	2.12	1.050	0.757	0.206	0.015	0.408
Discipline	139	1.74	0.879	1.312	0.206	1.875	0.408
Internships	139	1.70	0.857	1.118	0.206	0.542	0.408
Programme availability	139	1.71	0.756	0.959	0.206	1.269	0.408
Teaching methodology	139	2.01	0.830	0.604	0.206	0.346	0.408
Industry demand	139	1.61	0.856	1.548	0.206	2.248	0.408
Duration	139	1.80	0.972	1.233	0.206	1.209	0.408
Employment	139	1.90	0.973	1.211	0.206	1.439	0.408
Valid N (listwise)	139						

Source: Author

Employability, Industry demand, award of scholarships and offering internship factors show a significant correlation with the university choice, which is significant at 1% level. The cost of the program shows a significant relationship with university choice which is significant at 5% level. Friends influence, Teaching Methodology and entry requirement factors are correlated at 10% level with the university choice (Table 2).

### Factor analysis

According to the results of KMO and Bartlett's Test, factor analysis can be performed. As KMO test statistics is above 0.6, sample is adequate to perform Factor analysis. Bartlett's test check whether the covariance matrix is identical or not. As the test is significant, covariance matrix is not identical which further supports the factor analysis (Table 3). Approximately 66% of the variance in the university choice is explained by the factor model (Table 4). According to the rotated component matrix of the factor model 06 factors extracted as listed:

1. Peers Influence
2. Location of the University
3. Cost effectiveness
4. Flexibility of course fee payment

5. Employability
6. Reputation of the University

### Hypothesis testing

Ho: Mean of  $i^{\text{th}}$  factor in STEM group = Mean of  $i^{\text{th}}$  Factor in HEM Group  
H1: Mean of  $i^{\text{th}}$  factor in STEM group  $\neq$  Mean of  $i^{\text{th}}$  Factor in HEM Group  
 $i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, 6$

Flexibility of Course fee payment factor is significant at 5% level and Employability factor is significant at 10% level. For all other factors mean for STEM and HEM groups are equal. It can be concluded that Mean influence of the flexible course fee payment availability is different for STEM and HEM groups. When considering the employability factor, Mean influence of employability factor is different for STEM and HEM groups (Table 5).

### Regression modeling

Binary Logistics regression model fitted as the response variable is a binary variable. Model summary is shown in Table 6. According to the omnibus test the fitted model is

**Table 2.** Correlation analysis results.

Variable name	Test statistic	p- Value	Status
Employability	26.143	0.000	Accepted at 1%
Industry Demand	16.491	0.002	Accepted at 1%
Scholarships	12.77	0.012	Accepted 1%
Internships	11.569	0.009	Accepted at 1%
Cost	8.825	0.041	Accepted at 5%
Friends Influence	8.791	0.067	Accepted at 10%
Entry Requirement	8.233	0.083	Accepted 10%
Teaching Methodology	7.966	0.093	Accepted at 10%
Transport Availability	6.587	0.159	Rejected
Peers similar university	5.8	0.215	Rejected
University Resources	4.651	0.325	Rejected
Academic Reputation	4.276	0.37	Rejected
Discipline	3.673	0.452	Rejected
Location	3.556	0.467	Rejected
Duration	3.107	0.54	Rejected
Loan Facility	2.625	0.622	Rejected
Programme Availability	1.761	0.623	Rejected
Peers Similar course	1.658	0.798	Rejected
Parents' Influence	1.518	0.823	Rejected
Flex Payments	1.108	0.893	Rejected

Source: Author

**Table 3.** KMO and Bartlett's Test.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.794
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	987.516
	df	190
	Sig.	0.000

Source: Author

significant (Table 7). Fitted model is shown below:

$$\text{Log}\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right) = 1.337 + (-0.367)* \text{Cost} + (-0.092)*\text{Employability} + 0.352* \text{Flex Pay} + 1.045*\text{Gender}_1$$

### Model interpretation

Odds ratio will be used in interpreting the Binary Logistica Regression Model:

1. When Cost of the degree program is higher than alternative programs, students are less likely to select HEM program as their undergraduate choice.
2. When employability of the undergraduate program is more influential, students are less likely to select HEM

programs as their undergraduate choice.

3. When flexible payment methods are more influential students are more likely to select HEM programs as their undergraduate choice.

4. Female students are more likely to select HEM programs as their undergraduate choice. Table 8 contains the Pseudo R square values of the model. Cox and Snell R square and Nagelkerke R square both used to calculate the explained variation. According to Pseudo R square values, variability explained by our model is varies from 27.2 to 31.2%. According to the classification table, percentage accuracy in classification is 79.9%. Sensitivity, which is the percentage of cases that selected HEM courses, which were correctly predicted by the model is 98.2%; where the percentage of cases that not selected HEM courses which were correctly predicted by the model is 10.3% (Table 9).

**Table 4.** Variability explained by the Factor Model.

<b>Total variance explained</b>						
<b>Component</b>	<b>Extraction sums of squared loadings</b>			<b>Rotation sums of squared loadings</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of Variance</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of Variance</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
1	5.345	26.723	26.723	3.860	19.301	19.301
2	2.549	12.743	39.466	2.067	10.337	29.639
3	1.659	8.296	47.763	2.015	10.077	39.716
4	1.423	7.114	54.876	1.950	9.750	49.466
5	1.124	5.620	60.496	1.665	8.327	57.793
6	1.029	5.145	65.641	1.570	7.848	65.641

Extraction method: principal component analysis

Source: Author

## DISCUSSION

Empirical studies have proven that considering factors that affect students' university choice in tertiary education in Sri Lanka can influence students' decision-making process in Sri Lanka. Current study results are slight deviation with some of the empirical results of the various studies conducted by scholars. Some of the highlighted factors are Reputation and Ranking, Academic Programs and Majors, Faculty Quality and Expertise, Location and Accessibility, Financial Considerations, Facilities and Resources, Campus Culture and Student Life and Recommendations, Alumni Network and Career Opportunities and Word-of-Mouth.

This study is aimed to identify determinants of university choice for the academic disciplines in the tertiary education in Sri Lanka. The identified determinants of university choice of the students can be categorized in to six factors namely, peers influence, location of the university, cost of the program, flexibility of course fee payment, employability, reputation of the university. It is found that the entry requirements and teaching methodology has a significant association over the selection of the STEM and HEM programs. Similarly, while making a comparison with student choices, it is identified that that mean influence of availability of flexible course fee payment and the consideration of employability is somewhat dissimilar for the selection of STEM and HEM programs. It is found that, students prefer to select HEM programs more, when more flexible payment methods are available, such as different payment plans, Installment Plans, Financial Rebates on qualifications and skills of the students, penalty waved schemes, payment adjustments plans and banking aid and assistance facilities etc. The results of the regression model further illustrate that the availability of such flexible payments methods makes the student more likely to select the HEM programs. The reason behind this finding is perhaps, the selected sample represent 53% of the students from Government Interest Free Loan Scheme (IFLS). This

finding was questionable as students are generally more likely to select STEM courses when the flexible payments methods are available for the program selection. Another fact is that the courses offered under Government Interest Free Loan Scheme are limited in the STEM stream. Correspondingly, the no of degree opportunities offered under STEM stream are also be limited. The reason behind this is STEM course fees are much higher than the HEM course fees since the STEM programs are essentially required to conduct laboratory practical sessions and need of special equipment and utensils for the various scientific investigations. Therefore, it is suggested that the competent authorities need to mull over in developing a flexible payment scheme policy for the undergrads and it is required to do a structural revision of STEM course fees by establishing more programs for the selection of the students. Aside from that, students are more likely to select STEM programs when they consider the prospect of getting employed just after graduation. Hence, the undergraduates have high tendency to select STEM programs by assuming that the students could secure a permanent job in the future. When cost of the opted program is higher than the alternative programs, students are more likely to select STEM programs. This may be the prospect of safeguarding an employee opportunity in the future. The results further depict that the female students are more preferred to select the HEM courses. This is somewhat a debatable finding; National Youth Unemployment Rate was shown an upward movement in the last decade in Sri Lanka. Youth unemployment rate increased from 18 to 28% (Department of Census Statistics, 2019). Female labor force participation rate was recorded as 32% in the year of 2019. It is a quite low rate comparing to the Asian countries.

## Conclusion

The study found that female students are more likely to

**Table 5.** independent sample T- rest for comparing Means.

		Independent samples test								
		Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means					95% confidence interval of the difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	Lower	Upper
Peers	Equal variances assumed	9.106	0.003	-0.374	137	0.709	-0.21003	0.56144	-1.32024	0.90017
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.476	67.037	0.635	-0.21003	0.44080	-1.08986	0.66980
Location	Equal variances assumed	0.926	0.338	0.301	137	0.764	0.12069	0.40051	-0.67128	0.91266
	Equal variances not assumed			0.263	37.732	0.794	0.12069	0.45895	-0.80863	1.05001
Cost	Equal variances assumed	0.001	0.981	1.332	137	0.185	0.43887	0.32942	-0.21254	1.09028
	Equal variances not assumed			1.384	46.254	0.173	0.43887	0.31716	-0.19944	1.07719
Employability	Equal variances assumed	14.227	0.000	2.121	137	0.036	1.74890	0.82460	0.11832	3.37949
	Equal variances not assumed			1.644	34.186	0.109	1.74890	1.06397	-0.41292	3.91072
flex_pay	Equal variances assumed	6.436	0.012	-1.887	137	0.061	-0.99843	0.52917	-2.04482	0.04796
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.427	68.564	0.018	-0.99843	0.41138	-1.81921	-0.17765
Uni_Reputation	Equal variances assumed	0.444	0.506	1.435	137	0.153	0.66865	0.46582	-0.25247	1.58978
	Equal variances not assumed			1.501	46.698	0.140	0.66865	0.44551	-0.22774	1.56505

Source: Author

**Table 6.** Omnibus test results.

Omnibus tests of model coefficients				
		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	4.475	1	0.034
	Block	4.475	1	0.034
	Model	18.513	4	0.001

Source: Author

select HEM programs and that there is high tendency to be unemployed by considering the labor force participation rate in Sri Lanka. Hence,

it is suggested to design a diverse entrepreneurial program including financial assistance aiming for the female grandaunts to actively participate in the

labor force and intensify the country's' economic growth. It is also found that the employability opportunity of STEM is higher than the

**Table 7.** Fitted binary logistics regression model.

Variables in the equation	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Cost	-0.367	0.182	4.075	1	0.044	0.693
Employability	-0.092	0.054	2.888	1	0.089	0.912
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> flex_pay	0.352	0.128	7.572	1	0.006	1.422
Gender_1	1.045	0.521	4.013	1	0.045	2.842
Constant	1.337	0.870	2.361	1	0.124	3.808

<sup>a</sup>Variable(s) entered on step 1: Gender\_1.  
Source: Author

**Table 8.** Model diagnostics table.

Model summary			
Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	132.029 <sup>a</sup>	0.272	0.312

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Source: Author

**Table 9.** Classification table.

Classification table <sup>a</sup>					
	Observed		Predicted		
			Final_Choice		Percentage correct
			STEM	HEMS	
Step 1	Final_Choice	STEM	3	26	10.3
		HEMS	2	108	98.2
	Overall Percentage				79.9

<sup>a</sup>The cut value is 0.500  
Source Author

employability opportunity of HEM. Hence, it is suggested to make a structural revision of the HEM program curriculum to make undergraduates more skillful and to make a job-oriented approach. Similarly, it is much required to develop a "Vox Populi" among the public to draft an evaluation policy of undergraduates of Sri Lanka.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Higher education for refugees, returnees and host communities: Reflections on the Djibouti declaration of IGAD and its ramifications for sustainable development**

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This paper argues that access to quality education and skills development programs for refugees, returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) is not only one of the fundamental human rights that states and non-state actors have obligations to fulfill; it is also an integral part of sustainable development efforts which will have significant contributions to socio-economic transformation in host countries, countries of origin and countries of destinations in the event that refugees become migrant, which is sometimes the case. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region, consisting of eight member states, namely, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda, host more than 13 million forcibly displaced people. This results from protracted and devastating conflicts; drought and famine and other natural or man-made calamities. Within the IGAD region, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan produce 80 to 90% of displacement due to protracted civil wars. However, almost all the member states have refugees, IDPs or migrants sheltered in their territories. Access to higher education among refugees, returnees and IDPs is very low at only 3% compared to 36% globally. The figure for Africa is still dismal, at less than 1%; and the same holds true for the IGAD region. In an effort to address this major challenge facing these population categories, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) convened a high level regional (Ministerial Conference) on refugee education held in Djibouti, 12-14 December 2017. That Conference adopted what is now called the Djibouti declaration and Plan of Action for refugee education in the IGAD region. The major purpose of this paper was is to outline the refugee situations in general and the state of higher education in the region in particular.

**Key words:** Higher education, refugees, returnees, host communities, Djibouti declaration, sustainable development.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The IGAD region, consisting of eight member states, namely, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda, hosts more than 7.5 million

Forcibly displaced people (4.5 million refugees and 8.5 million IDPs). This results from protracted and devastating conflicts; drought and famine and other natural or man-

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made calamities. Within the IGAD region, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan produce 80 to 90% of the refugees and IDPs due to the protracted/on-going civil wars in the two countries. However, almost all the member states have refugees, IDPs or migrants sheltered in their territories. The region has a population of more than 250 million people accounting for a quarter of the population of the continent. With a population of over a 100 million, Ethiopia alone contributes to 40% of the regional total. On average, 60 to 65% of the population consists of the youth and school age children. The region is also characterized by high level of poverty, frequent drought and famine owing to climate change and global warming. All these contribute to frequent competition for scarce resources and protracted conflicts. Almost all the member states of IGAD have been/are involved in several internal or external conflicts. Some of these have lasted for decades. The terrible civil wars that quickly come to mind were between Ethiopia and Eritrea; South Sudan and Sudan; and Somalia, Sudan (notably Darfur) and Uganda (Lord's Resistance Army). These and many other skirmishes have produced millions of refugees, IDPs, and forced migration in and outside of the region. The key commitments on which the Djibouti Declaration was based included: Agenda 2063 of the African Union as a collective aspiration of "the African We Want" as well as the decadal policies, strategies and plans of action derived from it; the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG4, which contains targets on inclusive and quality education; and another UN initiative: the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (UNHCR, 2017).

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The thrust of this paper is not much on the root causes of conflicts or civil wars that lead to displacement and refugee. Nor will it focus on the long list of social problems emanating from conflicts, which could be a legitimate subject of another paper. As clearly suggested by the title, the three interrelated concerns of this paper were: access to quality higher education by refugees, returnees, IDPs and host communities; regional approaches to ensure access to education as illustrated in the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education (IGAD, 2017b); and the role of higher education institutions in general and private higher education institutions in particular in providing access and ensuring quality education for refugees, returnees and host communities. These issues were discussed in the context of major regional and global commitments to provide education to all for inclusive and sustainable development.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology used here is largely descriptive and content or

context analysis. The material is derived from desk review and a detailed review of the literature, regional and international commitments, mainly decisions, declarations, etc. One of these sources is the Djibouti declaration on education for refugees, returnees and host communities adopted in December 2017. The other sources of information include the African Union Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goal, particularly Goal4 which deals with inclusive and equitable access to education. More importantly, since the paper deals with refugees, the UNHCR education strategy 2016 was consulted. The analysis focused on the status of refugee education in the IGAD region and the implication of higher education of refugees for sustainable development. This exercise is expected to serve as a basis for future research. As pointed out above, the study focuses on refugees, returnees and host communities as special population groups. Of the 26.6 million refugees globally, only 3% has access to higher education (UNHCR, 2021). The method employed was descriptive context analysis. In Africa, the overall university enrollment is less than 5% (Harvard University, 2006), whereas those of refugees' access to tertiary education accounts for 1%, far below the global average of 36% (UNHCR, 2020). The major refugee hosting countries in Africa in general and the IGAD region in particular did not have a clear policy and strategy on access to higher education by refugees, returnees and IDPs. This is often a neglected area since much focus, even for nationals, has been placed on universal primary and secondary education. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) scarcely mention higher education as a target to be met by member states of the UN. This neglect has been somehow rectified in the SDGs which, under Goal 4, Considers quality tertiary education and inclusive development as major requirements for the attainment of the SDGs. Therefore, though refugees do not receive explicit coverage in the SDGs, the emphasis on inclusiveness and leaving no one behind capture the specific needs of refugees, returnees and IDPs.

## DISCUSSION

### Key elements of the Djibouti declaration

The Djibouti Declaration emanated from a three-day Conference of IGAD ministers in charge of education held in Djibouti from 12 to 14 December 2017. The Conference was organized by IGAD in partnership with the UNHCR, EU, and GIZ and attended by representatives from the seven IGAD member states, international institutions and civil society organizations in the region, Africa, Europe and North America. The theme of this Conference was "Regional Quality Education Standards and Inclusion into National Systems for Refugee Children in Line with the UN Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), SDG4 and Agenda 2063 on Education". This shows very clearly that education for refugees, returnees and host communities is a development issue for two major reasons. First, societies cannot claim to have achieved development without ensuring the right to access to education and skills building opportunities to their citizens. The right to education at all levels by all is a gateway to a meaningful enjoyment of other rights. Second, access to quality education, as shown in the relevant sections above, is a critical instrument for sustainable development. In conflict and post-conflict situations,

educating refugees is believed to have considerable implications in resolving conflicts, rebuilding shattered socio-economic infrastructures and lives, enhancing reconciliation processes, building peace and preventing relapse to conflicts given the fact that educated citizens together with other segments of the society, notably elders and religious leaders, can help create better understanding and enabling conditions for peace and development. In this context, the IGAD Summit of Heads of State and Government held in March 2017, commits member states to “Enhance education, training and skills development for refugees to reduce their dependence on humanitarian assistance, and prepare them for gainful employment in host communities and upon return” (IGAD, 2017a). Regional Economic Communities like IGAD understood their catalytic role in terms of fulfilling the rights of individuals or groups on the one hand and contributing to the successful realization of regional and global initiatives for sustainable development, on the other. It is in this context that IGAD took-up the responsibility to promote education for refugees, returnees and host communities as outlined in the Djibouti Declaration. Refugee affairs, including education, being cross-border or transnational require: (a) a shared vision, (b) collective responsibilities, (c) collaborative efforts and (d) pooled resources. These are the major assumptions underlying the Djibouti Declaration whose key elements are outlined thus:

### ***Regional education quality standards***

Refugees stay in the host country for an extended period of time, on average up to 11 years. Though a limited percentage of the refugee youths receive education, they face several challenges in terms of quality and relevance of their education. Host countries follow curricula and educational systems which is different from the countries of origin. When refugees either return home or migrate to other countries, they face difficulties in getting their educational certificates accredited or accepted. This problem discourages others from pursuing education. Those who undergo certain levels of training would consider their years in school as wasted. This problem cannot be addressed by individual countries and, hence the need for a regional approach. The Djibouti Declaration commits member states to “Establish regional minimum education standards and targets with access and delivery of quality education for ... higher education including Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and education for people with special needs to benefit refugees, returnees, and host communities in order to maximize learning outcomes” (IGAD, 2017b). Doing so is believed to contribute to refugees’ access not only to quality education but also to learning outcomes that will be recognized by countries of origin, hosting countries or other countries in the region.

In the final analysis, educational achievements recognized by these countries could also meet global standards facilitating their acceptance outside the region as well building confidence among students and/or graduates.

### ***Regional skills development for refugees***

Higher education provides opportunities to specialize in different disciplines. Some of them help to develop skills and competencies whereas others offer generalized orientation in the sense of learning to learn. Skills can be acquired from either experience or specialized training programs from a given institution with purposely designed modules. Skills are essential to perform certain tasks or provide services. Regional skills development programs for refugees involve coordination of efforts of member states, identifying skills gaps (needs assessment), inventory of skills and competencies existing in different countries to see if there would be possibilities for cross-fertilization and exchanges. It also enables best practices in delivery methods, regulatory frameworks to recognize qualifications and in putting quality assurance systems in place. These require considerable investment and follow-up. In this regard, the Djibouti declaration urges: local and international partners to provide sustained and increased support for infrastructure and capacity building for skills development, particularly in refugee-hosting countries; and match skills training to job opportunities in the IGAD region in order to enable access to secure livelihoods, self-reliance and dignified work for refugees as provided for in the 1951 Refugee Convention (IGAD, 2017a). Given the fact that refugees stay in concentrated locations for a long period of time, it is possible to achieve this objective of developing employability skills among refugees, returnees, and host communities through regional cooperation.

### ***Inclusion of refugees education in national education systems***

The experience of many countries in the past shows that refugees receive education as outsiders in a manner perceived appropriate for the refugees. Recent studies emphasize the need for integrating refugees into national education systems to ensure consistency and sustainability. The Djibouti declaration echoes this when it urges member states to “integrate education for refugees and returnees into National Education Sector Plans by 2020; enhance the capacity of IGAD Member States to integrate education for refugees and returnees into national education system; and ensure the protection of refugees in national education systems particularly refugee and returnee children and their psycho-social well-being through a multi-sectoral approach”.

### **Financing, partnership and monitoring**

Financing education in general and refugees' education in particular is one of the challenges facing developing countries. Budgetary allocations for the latter mostly come from humanitarian assistance, often inadequate and time-bound. The debate on keeping the balance between humanitarian supports and investing in long-term development sectors including education in crisis and post-crisis situations still rages. Donors usually respond to emergencies. States struggle with competing priorities to spend their meager resources. This poses a formidable impediment for specific group of populations such as refugees who are often sheltered in communities with weak and poorly developed infrastructures and facilities. Addressing this challenge calls for coordinated and collaborative efforts by different actors and stakeholders. The Djibouti Declaration articulated this need and urged governments to "Commit to developing cost, long-term refugee education response strategies, as part of national education sector plans based on a comprehensive mapping of current and emerging resources and call upon humanitarian and development partners to support this process." The Declaration also "Urge[d] International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and bilateral, regional and international partners, in the spirit of responsibility sharing, to increase multi-year, predictable and sustainable support to IGAD and its Member States to ensure refugee and host community children and youth have greater access to and quality education ..." (IGAD, 2017b).

### **Linkage between higher education and sustainable development**

Higher education institutions in both the private and public sector are expected to play significant roles in ensuring equitable access to education for all. They have the mandate to develop the requisite skills, competencies and the knowledge-base for the successful implementation of the SDGs. However, refugees and IDPs have very limited access to higher education. Therefore, special attention should be given to populations in difficult circumstances such as refugees and hard-to-reach peripheral communities, where often refugees are accommodated. The role of education in socio-economic development has long been recognized quite early in the history of emerging Africa from the yoke of colonialism. The 1961 Addis Ababa Conference on the Development of Education in Africa underlined the "... vital importance of education as an investment in any programme of economic and social development, and the need for a close link between educational planning and overall development planning" (UNESCO and UNECA, 1961). This theme of education for development continued to be the major pre-occupation for post-independence and contemporary Africa as well. The

Founding Conference of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963 called for strong educational and cultural cooperation amongst the newly independent African States both to broker socio-economic development and also enhance regional integration by breaking "... down linguistic barriers and promote understanding amongst the people of the continent" (OAU, 1963). The Second Decade of Education of the African Union ((AU) 2006-2015) and its operational Plan of Action considers higher education as one of the seven areas of focus as both a field of development and a critical tool for sustainable development. This emphasis on higher education was further capitalized in the Continental Strategy for Education in Africa (CESA) for 2016-2025 of the African Union which states that "Virtually all development players now concur that for any meaningful and sustainable economic growth to be realized and sustained, tertiary education must be centrally placed in the development agenda of nations" (AU, 2016). Of course, this assertion is firmly based on the priorities identified by Agenda 2063 of the Union which embodies the vision for collective aspiration of the 'Africa We Want' (AU, 2013). Other international institutions have confirmed the place of higher education in delivering rapid and sustainable development. The World Bank Group Education Strategy 2020 underlined the need for inclusive education which is firmly grounded on the Bank's conviction that "Educated individuals are more employable, able to earn higher wages, cope better with economic shocks and raise healthier children" (World Bank, 2021). When this notion of education for a better life is extended to forcibly displaced population it means a lot. For this category of population education in general and higher education in particular creates the capacity to understand the root causes of displacement, builds power of resilience and problem-solving, contributes to conflict-resolution, reconciliation and provides skills needed for post-conflict reconstruction and recovery. Indeed, during their stay in the host countries, educated refugees could participate actively in economic and social development provided that they are given the opportunity to do so.

### **Higher education for refugees in IAGD Region**

Access to education including higher education is both a fundamental human right enshrined in global, regional and national legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Peoples and Human Rights, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and several other legal frameworks (Lee, 2013). The World Declaration on Higher Education of UNESCO (1998) stressed, among others, that: *Access to higher education for members of some special target groups, such as indigenous peoples, cultural and linguistic minorities, disadvantaged groups, peoples living*

*under occupation and those who suffer from disabilities, must be actively facilitated, since these groups as collectivities and as individuals may have both experience and talent that can be of great value for the development of societies and nations. Special material help and educational solutions can help overcome the obstacles that these groups face, both in accessing and in continuing higher education.*

Though refugees are not mentioned here, perhaps, for lack of awareness on special higher education needs of this category of the population which could be explained in terms of universities not having focused their attention on displaced population as important targets for higher education, the general reference to 'disadvantaged groups', could also be extended to cover refugees, returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

According to the World Bank (2017) "Higher education can make an important contribution to building a stronger society, ending extreme poverty, and boosting shared prosperity. It can serve the community by contributing knowledge and advanced skills as well as basic competencies and research. Knowledge plays a growing role in the global economy, driving economic growth and productivity. Economic studies have shown a positive relationship between education and economic growth, particularly those that take into account the quality of education. Higher Education fulfills multiple roles that go beyond educating students." The Bank further pointed out that to respond to the challenges faced by society, "higher education needs to address: (i) the growing demand for higher education; (ii) the role of access, including equity; (iii) the quality and relevance of teaching and its implications for employability; (iv) the role of research and development in higher education; and (v) the role of systems reform within higher education" (World Bank, 2017). There is also a strong correlation between higher education and economic development. The rapid growth in Asian and Latin American over the last three to four decades and in recent years in Africa is associated with the expansion of higher education.

Realizing this transformative role of higher education in Africa, Agenda 2063 of the African Union envisions that "at least 70% of all high-school graduates will go on to have tertiary education, with 70% of those graduating in subjects related to science and technology" (Chipperfield, 2016). Refugees' access to higher education is very low in the IGAD region. Ethiopia is one of the few countries to establish a specific target for increasing refugees' enrolment in higher education. In March, 2017, it announced its intention to increase refugees' enrolment in higher education from 1,600 to 2,500. Kenya is committed to continued access to the education system, schools and training institutions for refugees (IGAD, 2017).

The IGAD member states are at different stages of incorporating refugee education into their national education programs. Before the adoption of the Djibouti

Declaration in December 2017, some of them do not even make reference to 'refugee' in their education plans. As a result, it was very difficult to find solid empirical evidence on the state of refugee education in these countries. Even those that have made reference to refugee education in their education sector plans have it either as a passing remark or as a separate chapter with no solid statistical data. This calls for the development of a strong Education Management Information System (EMIS) which should capture all categories of students including refugees, returnees, IDPs and children of host communities. The Djibouti Declaration has emphasized on the need for this and other intervention areas which are outlined thus.

### **Ramifications of the Djibouti declaration on sustainable development**

Sustainable development is possible only through inclusive, equitable and participatory undertaking through comprehensive planning and visionary leadership. It also requires bringing on board a wide-range of actors, stakeholders and partners from near and far. The Djibouti Declaration is not merely about refugee education though this is the cardinal issue to be tackled in a coordinated manner. It is also about education, science, technology and innovation that have to be promoted at both national and regional levels. These are amply captured in the Continental Agenda 2063 of the AU and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN and IGAD's five-year strategic plan for 2016-2020 as well as the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) of the UN adopted in 2016. These are all political commitments at macro levels and will need to be translated into concrete action; and this is not an easy task. The successful implementation of the Djibouti Declaration will result in developing and operationalization of various instruments and guidelines which will ensure children's and young peoples' access to quality education, skills and competencies through TVET and higher education programs. It will also result in regional frameworks that will encourage as well as oblige member states to recognize certificates and credentials obtained in other countries within the region. Obviously, this in turn will require establishment or strengthening of quality assurance and equivalency rating mechanisms and agencies which will have to work in line with regional and continental guidelines. Of course, it will be an ambitious goal given the fact that countries will take time to domesticate and implement the declaration and all the required instruments. Some of the activities, especially inclusion of refugees into national education systems will require huge resources. It will also take time to convince partners and mobilize support that responds to the educational needs of refugees. As economic entities manned mostly by pragmatic economists, international financial institutions will have to look into the short,

medium and long-term returns to investment in this sector. In other words, there is a need, on the part of both IGAD and its member states, to develop sound projects, engage in persuasive advocacy and build strong partnership with a wide range of actors and stakeholders.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The IGAD region is one of the regions affected by frequent and protracted conflicts, climate change and the resulting drought and famine as well as other natural and man-made disasters. These socio-political and natural calamities produce millions of forcibly displaced people. Accordingly, the region hosts more than 4.5 million refugees and 8.5 million internally displaced people. Providing access to basic social services, including education for this population category, has been one of the formidable challenges for both refugees and host communities. The refugees cross borders and remain in their host communities for a considerable period of time. Lack of access to quality education and relevant skills means years wasted and opportunities lost. Realizing this fact, international and regional organizations have begun to find comprehensive response strategies to refugees' problems. IGAD, as one of the Regional Economic Communities in the eastern and horn of Africa region, has taken special interest in the multiple challenges facing refugees. The Djibouti declaration and its accompanying plan of action, aims at responding to the educational needs of refugees, returnees and IDPs and host communities. Among others, the declaration urges member states, partners and IFIs to coordinate their efforts in providing access to quality education; develop regional educational quality frameworks; integrate refugee education into national education systems; and adopt mechanism for mutual recognition of education certificates, degrees, diplomas and other credentials obtained in a host countries. The declaration also calls upon IGAD and member states to establish regional platforms and coordination mechanisms in order to follow up progress in the declaration and to implement regional programs in education, science, technology and innovation that are critical for the attainment of globally agreed development instruments such as Agenda 2063 and SDGs. IGAD has taken up these assignments seriously; and is working towards meeting the target in the next three to five years. Regional institutions play important roles in creating political space for their member states to develop commonly agreed commitments. The various normative instruments adopted by member states through the convening power of regional bodies like IGAD will have immense contributions in setting common agenda, creating consensus, developing plans and monitoring progresses. They also bring various stakeholders together to learn from each other and chart the next best way forward based on the lessons learnt. With regard to the subject of

this paper, the Djibouti Declaration on refugees' education, it is essential to consider the following key recommendations:

1. Make refugees a concern for higher education institutions: Higher education institutions, in both the public and private sectors within the region have to give serious attention to the education of refugees, returnees and host communities in the context of their triple responsibilities: teaching, research and community services. If institutions of higher learning are not concerned with the education and social development of forcibly displaced populations, who else will? Despite some sporadic research efforts in cross-border education, which rarely refers to refugees and IDPs, universities do not seem to have a coherent program on tertiary education needs of the refugees. It is imperative that this deficit is addressed through the active involvement of higher education institutions in the provision of quality education for refugees, returnees, IDPs and host communities. As privileged social institutions, some of them running projects funded from taxpayers' money or grants, they should not ignore this important segment of the populations.

2. Strengthen Partnership and Cooperation: Regional institutions, IFIs, and UN Agencies and civil society organizations should join hands in addressing the challenges faced by refugees and refugee-hosting communities in promoting refugees' access to quality education. In the context of the Djibouti declaration, its effective implementation can only be achieved if IGAD and its development partners work in concerted and coordinated manner. To this effect, IGAD needs to undertake vigorous advocacy and partnership building campaigns. It should also support member states in their endeavours to mobilize adequate resources for integration of refugees into their respective national education sector development plan.

3. Establish strong regional coordination and implementation mechanisms: Regional normative instruments require regular follow-up on the status of their implementation. Countries have myriads of competing and often conflicting priorities. Because of this, they may likely fail to meet agreed regional targets unless constantly reminded and assisted technically, financially or otherwise. Therefore, it is essential to put regional coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place. This will facilitate the flow of information and lessons on subsequent actions in a two-way traffic: from regional secretariats to member states and vice versa.

4. Encourage refugees to pursue education: The reasons for extremely low percentage of refugees' enrolment in tertiary education are linked to a number of internal and external factors. The first refers to the difficult situations

in which refugees find themselves. Having been forcibly displaced from their homes and countries, they experience a series of social, political, economic, psychological and ecological challenges. Their primary concern will, therefore, be survival, adaptation and looking for possibilities of either returning home or migrating to other destinations often to the West or to the Middle East. Higher education or skills training could add value to refugees and their families wherever they live. Therefore, they should be encouraged and supported to seek higher education and skills development opportunities. Further studies should be conducted. In addition to the practical actions towards the implementation of the Djibouti declaration within a broader framework to enhance quality, affordable and accessible education in the region, higher education institutions are encouraged to conduct studies on the linkage between access to education by refugees, returnees and host communities and sustainable development. This can be done through collaborative projects and multi-stakeholder partnerships between public and private higher education institutions.

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Processes, products and lessons in translating policies into practice: The case of IGAD teacher training initiative in refugee and host community secondary schools**

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**This paper describes the role of regional institutions in translating regional policy instruments into practical action using the experience of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in training teachers for refugee and host community secondary schools in three pilot member states: Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. The paper raises questions about the regional organizations could be engaged in developing commonly shared commitments and at the same time implement these policies. Using a participant observation method combined with textual and contextual analysis, the study outlined the results in terms of process, products and lessons achieved in the course of the teacher training process. Regarding the process, the paper highlights consensus building, needs assessment, selection of sites, teachers and trainers as well as development of training modules as important outcomes. The product involves the skill-sets acquired or capacities developed cultural materials and media products. The training initiative brought home useful lessons including the importance of the participatory approach and joint decision-making, the role of partnership, enabling leadership, effective coordination and flexibility in managing joint, multi-stakeholder programs. The paper concludes by articulating the need for further studies and scaling-up the teacher training covering member states that are not involved in the pilot phase.**

**Key words:** IGAD, the Djibouti Declaration, regional organizations, teacher training, policies and commitments, partnership, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Taking the value addition of a regional approach into account, this study attempts to document the nexus between policy and praxis with a focus on the

implementation of the Djibouti Declaration on education for refugees, returnees and host communities adopted by the IGAD ministers in charge of education, in December

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2017. The Conference that endorsed the Djibouti Declaration was organized by the IGAD Secretariat, in partnership with the Government of Djibouti, UNHCR, EU, the Government of Germany through GIZ, and others. The paper looks into the concrete activities carried out and the preliminary tangible results achieved on one of the sub-components of education for refugees, “*teacher development*”. In the process, it asks some critical questions such as, how can regional commitments expressed in normative documents be domesticated and implemented into practical action. To what extent is partnership with member states and development agencies relevant to realizing the objectives of regional, intergovernmental organizations? Most importantly, it raises questions on the role of planning, coordination, follow-up and timely decisions at both individual and organizational levels in moving the agenda forward. By so doing, the paper highlights new frontiers of thinking and acting which challenge established academic norms which tend to consider regional commitments as mere ‘talk-shop’ platforms. Finally, the paper provides insights on how efforts can be effective when accompanied by individual and collective commitments guided by instruments adopted by relevant political and policy organs. It also challenges the views that African states are famous for adopting tools but not making sure of their practical implementations.

The argument goes like this: policies provide opportunities and rights; opportunities to link-up with relevant state and non-state actors as well as rights to deal with these actors: launching processes, carrying out visits, identifying entry points, establishing linkages or contacts and convening consultative platforms. The convening power comes from treaties establishing organizations as well as from conventions, protocols, declarations, decisions or recommendations adopted by such organs in the course of their operations. Declarations are often non-binding expressions of intentions which embody collective values and articulate common goals. At the same time, they do create opportunities that can equally serve the purpose of a binding agreement if effectively utilized since the practice, not so much the theory, is important and at the heart of smooth inter-state cooperation. That’s normally the case with the Djibouti Declaration which softly but clearly gives mandates to IGAD to execute the decision they collectively made in relation to education, in general, and teacher training, in particular. In this connection, it is worth noting the provisions of paragraph 36 of the Declaration which calls upon all member states, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and other stakeholders to “Strengthen the capacity of the IGAD secretariat to coordinate and monitor the commitments of Member States towards quality education and learning for refugees, returnees and host communities. This includes the establishment of the regular platform of the Ministerial Committee on Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI)”.

The Declaration also urges IGAD and partners to enhance the capacity of member states since the actual implementation takes place within their boundaries. Using these opportunities and rights requires internal commitment, determination, leadership and uninterrupted action. In this regard, the last five years have witnessed exactly these; and looking back to the five years since the adoption of the Djibouti Declaration, a lot of achievements can be recorded in the different thematic areas. The present paper focuses only on teacher training and all the steps that have been carried out during the past two years, 2020 to 2022. The processes, products and lessons described in the paper are expected to provide benchmarks and milestones for success in other areas of the Djibouti Declaration as well as in other sectors which require concerted efforts of international organizations.

### **Why do teachers matters for the implementation of the Djibouti declaration?**

To state the obvious, teachers are the most important elements of quality education in any system. As the world is registering more than 100 million forcibly displaced people (UNHCR, 2022 <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics> accessed on 21 August 2022), talking about augmenting the capacity of refugee teachers is an all-time important topic more than ever. IGAD recognizes this need in 2017 when adopted the Djibouti Declaration (DD) at the first high-level conference of ministers in charge of education. Among others, the ministers urged member states, IGAD and partners to “Strengthen regional frameworks to promote the inclusion of refugee teachers, and their professional development and certification, in national education systems and support of equivalency” (IGAD, 2017). The key recommendations under this component include:

- 1) Facilitation of teacher accreditation and certification<sup>1</sup> across borders;
- 2) Identification and implementation of methods to fast-track training and certification;
- 3) Progressively align pay and conditions of service across host community and refugee teachers as it relates to experience and qualifications;
- 4) Support continuous pre-service and in-service professional development of refugee and host community teachers;
- 5) Increase gender parity and equalize career progression

<sup>1</sup> Regional qualifications and certification constitutes one of the five thematic focus areas of the Djibouti Declaration. IGAD has developed a regional qualifications framework (IGADQF) which is reviewed and validated by experts from member states and partner institutions in October 2022. It is ready for final endorsement by the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of IGAD ministers in charge of education during the first quarter of 2023.



opportunities among teachers.

The plan of action also urges member states, IGAD and partners to “Identify emerging community college-type programmes as a platform for expansion, with development of modular training programmes targeted to country-specific training priorities. Similarly, the IGAD Regional Education Policy Framework adopted by the second conference of IGAD ministers in December 2018, considered teacher development as one of the key priority areas. This policy instrument emphasized on member states’ collective desire to:

- 1) Develop shared regional criteria, while keeping in mind national peculiarities for admission, training, recruitment and deployment of teachers;
- 2) Integrate teacher development into national human resource development plans;
- 3) Facilitate and strengthen programs aimed at upgrading skills and qualifications of teachers through continuing education, in-service training, and distance learning arrangements;
- 4) Develop appropriate incentives and remuneration policies/schemes for teachers at all levels;
- 5) Undertake awareness creation, sensitization and behavioral change communication to revive the values and social status of the teaching profession;
- 6) Provide enabling environment for female teachers who will serve as role models for female students;
- 7) Encourage dialogue between teacher associations, employers (both public and private) and policy-decision makers (IGAD, 2018).

The first Strategic Objective (SO) of the African Union Continental Strategy for Education in Africa (CESA), 2016-2025, urges to “Revitalize the teaching profession to ensure quality and relevance at all levels”. This includes, though not explicitly stated as the issue comes to the attention of Africa relatively late, teacher development in the displacement affected communities. However, CESA underlines the need to “Recruit, train, and deploy well qualified teachers as well as promote their continuous professional development with emphasis on instilling core values, results and accountability to learners” (CESA 2016). To this effect, the African Union has established thematic cluster coordination committees. The author, representing IGAD, is serving as a member of the AU Teacher Development Cluster. This Cluster has done a number of activities, though it did not launch actual teacher training programs with the exception of IGAD which initiated and reported same to the Clusters as part of its commitment to promote teacher training in the region. Furthermore, the education-focused Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4), has set a target to “... substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for the teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing

states” (UNDP, 2016). This target guides IGAD’s emphasis on training and enhancing the teaching-learning quality of teachers particularly in refugee settings and most marginal, underserved and least prepared host communities.

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), adopted by the United Nations in September 2016, does not make direct reference to teacher development. Nevertheless “... the General Assembly set out the key elements of a [CRRF] that is designed to ease pressures on countries hosting large numbers of refugees, to enhance refugee self-reliance, to expand access to third-country solutions, and to support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. The key elements of a comprehensive response include: (a) rapid and well-supported reception and admissions; (b) support for immediate and on-going needs (such as protection, health and education); c) assistance for local and national institutions and communities receiving refugees; and (d) expanded opportunities for solutions” (UNHCR, 2018a). These opportunities, elaborated further in the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), imply teacher training which is usually at the center of inclusive access to quality education. In this regard, paragraph 69 of GCR clearly emphasizes that “Depending on the context, additional support could be contributed to expand educational facilities ...and teaching capacities (including support for, as appropriate, refugees and members of host communities who are or could be engaged as teachers, in line with national laws and policies)” (UNHCR, 2018b).

At the regional level, the IGAD Migration Policy Framework, adopted a decade ago (in 2012) made the following:

- 1) The IGAD Secretariat to streamline education and human resources development among member states, ensuring proper accreditation and ultimately unification of the education system; tertiary education in IGAD to admit students from different Member States, thereby cultivating comradeship among students and thereby [sic] preparing them for post-education careers as citizens of IGAD rather than of different States;
- 2) Periodic meeting of teachers and trainers at different levels of education system to undertake meaningful discourses on education and human resources issues of interest to IGAD;
- 3) The private sector in human resources development of migrants to supplement the efforts of the public sector;
- 4) Gender sensitivity in supervision of education development at all levels and in the development as well as deployment of human resources, developing the capacity of underserved gender.

From the preceding paragraph, it is possible to understand that IGAD has been mindful of the special place of education in bringing the region together and in

meeting the needs of both mainstream and mobile populations, especially migrants who cross borders often forcibly either due to conflicts, economic distress, in search of employment or for investment in neighboring countries and beyond. However, while the role of teachers in planning and executing human resources development was well recognized, their own professional development was not adequately emphasized until recently. That came into being with the Djibouti Declaration and the IGAD Regional Policy Framework on Education as outlined elsewhere both of which emphasize on promoting quality education in the region by building the capacity of teachers particularly in refugee and underserved areas.

### Goals and objectives of the study

The overall objective of the study is to shed light on the process, product and lessons of implementing regional policies in national development interventions. The discussion is intended to demonstrate how a high-level political commitment at regional level is cascaded into country-specific programs designed to ensure quality, relevance, and attractiveness of education through the development of the capacity of teachers who are the most important ingredients, but often severely forgotten, elements of success in education. Most importantly, the study will outline the various steps taken to ensure that lofty regional ideals are embedded in practical action at grassroots level.

The specific objectives of this study include:

- 1) Identifying the processes involved in organizing and implementing the IGAD teacher training initiative;
- 2) Describing the key outcomes or products that are generated through the selected intervention of the program;
- 3) Highlighting the lessons learnt, experiences acquired and challenges encountered in bringing IGAD to the People (TIP); and
- 4) Building the case for future research with the active participation of policy makers, practitioners and stakeholders engaged in the field of education, in general, and in teacher education for displacement affected communities, in particular.

Given the fact that education for refugees, returnees and host communities is a recent phenomenon in the IGAD region, as suggested elsewhere, the study is expected to pave the way for further research and enhanced understanding of issues, events, and requisite actions required for successful translation of such commitments into meaningful action.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research employs primary data to a greater extent. Most of it

comes from the analyses and desk review of policies, declarations, decisions, reports and correspondences. Essentially, these are sources produced and acquired in the course of implementation of the Djibouti Declaration which recommended, among others, the professional or career development teachers through need-based or tailor-made periodic interventions. Since the author has been involved in all the processes starting with the development of background documents, preparation of conferences, drafting of outcomes, facilitation of adoptions, and implementation of decisions as well as elaboration of project proposals and contracting of service providers, the study methodology involves participant observation. In this case, it can be considered as largely anthropological and qualitative.

Similarly, the analysis is mostly descriptive with lots of text/context specific interpretation. In other words, though it contains quantitative data about the number of teachers trained, the writing follows a simple step-by-step explication or exposition of the implementation activities with a focus on documenting the processes, products, and lessons, most of which are subjective, time-sensitive and perishable; hence the need to quickly document and share them for researchers who may be interested in the broader regional-cum-local dynamics of 'teaching the teacher to teach well'.

Obviously, the issue of teaching is shrouded with philosophy, pedagogy, ideology and technology. In other words, whom to teach, what and when to teach is governed by a number of internal and external factors. These are very themes important to understand in all contexts but very importantly so in refugee or displacement circumstances which involve students and teachers from complex social, political, cultural, economic and environmental settings. This explains the need to start somewhere with the view to developing methods, based on lived-experiences of teachers, administrators, schools, colleges, policy-makers, development partners. If done in a timely and concerted manner, researching teacher training initiatives in the region will contribute to the process of making informed policies. Therefore, author's intention here is to reiterate the need for continued investigation with the aim of generating evidence for sound decisions. Informed decision, in turn, will have a potential to revolutionize the teaching profession as it is here where we need transformative revolutions.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Djibouti Declaration and its byproducts underscore the merits of regional interventions not only in emergencies but also in ushering sustainable development through education. That's why the IGAD Regional Education Policy Framework, the IGAD Migration Policy Framework and other instruments stress the imperatives of collective goal-setting and investment on education, including teacher development. Accordingly, member states, IGAD and its partners pledge to design and implement programs for the training of teachers in the region. The IGAD Teacher Training Initiative (ITTI) was launched in February 2021. In fact, the preparation for this undertaking went back to 2020 during which time IGAD and GIZ developed the Terms of Reference (ToR), announced the vacancy to procure the services of international consultants, identify the right consultant (s), conduct the selection and hired Particip GmbH- a Firm based in Germany, to coordinate/facilitate the ITTI. This is an appropriate step in terms of policy and political commitment. At the same time, it is also

important to reflect on the nature and extent of implementation of such policy measures. With particular reference to the teaching profession, it is essential to understand the concrete actions that have been carried out to improve the capacity of teachers in selected refugee schools in the IGAD region. It is also pertinent to know about which players moved in with practical solutions towards addressing the skill gaps among teachers. Then this leads to the follow-up question about what has been achieved during the intervention period. In this regard, the sections that follow outline these and a number of other issues relevant to our understanding of what happen with what effects and how these gains can be further strengthened.

### **The process**

The training of teachers as a process involves different activities that are worth highlighting. The following constitute just a snap shot of such activities in the member states which participated in the initiative.

#### ***Building consensus***

The Training was preceded by a series of consultations at regional, national and site (teacher training colleges or other training centers) in three countries: Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. Together, these countries host more than half of the refugees, the majority of them coming from Somalia, South Sudan and other countries in the region. The selection was made on the basis of two simple criteria (a) countries that have developed a costed national education response plan for the implementation of the Djibouti Declaration; and (b) countries that host the largest refugee population. One more criterion, which was not explicitly stated but was somehow employed, was willingness to host the teacher training initiative.

The first national consultation kicked off in Khartoum, Sudan, on 10-12 February 2021 with the participation of the Ministry of Education, especially the section responsible for education in emergencies, state education authorities in the areas which host the largest refugees; and other relevant stakeholders attended the meeting. During this meeting the role of IGAD was to create the platform, introduce the subject, linking it to the commitments of member states in the Djibouti Declaration; and the outlining the required coordination mechanisms. The discussion was held largely in Arabic and facilitated by the expert recruited by Particip to coordinate the Sudan national teacher training initiative. The two-day meeting ended with the agreement to (a) conduct the teacher training; (b) establish a national coordination committee; and (c) develop a plan for the way forward. With these arrangements, IGAD was sure that the outcome would be positive and plans to proceed

with organizing the same consultative platforms with the other two countries.

Ethiopia was the second country to hold a national consultation on the importance of teacher training as a practical contribution of IGAD to member states on the implementation of the DD through building the requisite capacities. The consultation was held in Addis Ababa on 18-19 February 2021. The Federal Ministry of Education, the Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and their national partners attended the meeting. The discussion revolved around the same issues: relevance, timing, locations, number and duration of the training as well as administrative matters. Here, too, IGAD introduced the subject, explained how IGAD and partners, in this case GIZ, are ready help with emphasis on national leadership and ownership of the initiative. These were agreed; timelines were set; and further discussion was thought important in determining the numbers, identifying the study institutions; and the scope of the coverage of the training.

Then IGAD moved, during the 01-02 March 2021, to Uganda, to do a similar national conversation and launching of the ITTI. The Ugandan Ministry of Education, especially those dealing with teacher development, and the national secretariat for the multiyear costed Education Response Plan (ERP) as well as a number of stakeholders attended the meeting. They contributed substantively to the discussion on the need for teacher training in that country which hosted the largest refugee population in the region. The presence of the multiyear costed plan helped a lot in strengthening the rationale for the training and the meeting ended, like in the other countries by creating a coordination mechanism, an evolving work plan and a designated focal point to work with the national coordinator of the training.

In summary, the agenda-setting and consensus building process was done successfully in all the three member states. Accordingly, the teacher training was accepted well and the move towards creating the conducive environment for the job to be done within the agreed time-frame. This is then followed by a series of activities and events that helped achieve the objective.

#### ***Selection of provider, locations and teachers***

The original tender for a consulting firm was circulated issued in April 2021. However, due to limited number of applicants, it was re-advertised. Three firms qualified for short-listing and were interviewed. Particip stood first; signed the contract and commenced the work. At national level, Particip recruited three lead experts, one each in Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. An overall coordinator was working virtually from London. The latter was supposed to be in the IGAD region but was unable to relocate due to the Covid 19 restriction. Nevertheless, all the three

**Table 1.** Summary of the process during the three rounds of the teacher training.

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Events/activities</b>
January 2020-January 2021	Preparation of relevant documents, including the Terms of Reference (ToR), announcement of the calls, receiving and screening applications, shortlisting, selection, signing contracts and deployment of the consulting firm
February-march 2021	National consultation and consensus-building in Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda, establishment of the national coordination committee/secretariat and preparation of internal documents
February-March 2021	Briefing, planning and preparation of the national teacher training institutes (NTTIs)
April 2021	Teachers' Needs Assessment, Analysis and dissemination of findings
May 2021	Designing the training strategy and approach
June-July 2021	Developing the modules with NTTIs: Writing, review, finalization of four modules (Pedagogy, Psychosocial Support, Life-skills and ICT) Selection of schools and teachers
July-August 2021	Test-run (facilitators preparation and sample implementation of the training)
August 2021-October 2022	Teacher Training (Rounds I-III), certificate awards for different rounds, regional learning workshop (in June 2022) and preparation on of two additional modules. The latter are not used for this pilot phase of the training but may be used on the next rounds.
November-December 2022	Concluding the first (pilot) phase, reporting and closing the project; reflections on what goes right and what could have been done better; and planning for the future.

visited the IGAD region for meetings related to the training. The other three, one respectively, from Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda, coordinated the national training. They were assisted by a modest number of nationals either as administration assistants, accountants or support trainers.

In general, the preparatory process included selection of providers, coordinators (facilitators) training sites or centers. The latter were decided to be at least in two different geographic locations in each country. The major selection criterion was the number refugees hosted in the vicinity of the training center. That center caters for several schools from where the participants of the program were to come. Teachers were selected from secondary schools in predominantly refugee settlements who were teaching both refugee and host community children. As much as circumstances allow, priority was given to refugee teachers but their number being relatively small in each school, teachers from the host communities teaching refugee learners constituted the minority of the trainees. In the same way, emphasis was given to female (refugee) teachers though the actual percentage varies from country to country.

### **Needs assessment**

Once the locations were selected, the selection of teacher was carried out, often in parallel. However, the greater part of the preparatory process was identifying the themes before developing the modules. These required (a) thorough reading of the existing teacher training modules (textbooks) in each member state; (b) conducting needs assessment in the field to determine the nature and scope of the courses to be provided. This

was done in a more systematic and scientific way to avoid selection bias or not to make the training repetitive or duplicative of materials already in use. The national coordinators were accompanied or supported by experts from ministries of education, teacher training colleagues or institutions. This participatory approach contributed to the success of the needs assessment, analysis of the results and preparation of the training modules. It also made the modules comprehensive, acceptable, and consistent with national training standards. Team of experts from each country meets regularly, often once a week, to exchange findings and practices. Consequently, each national team developed four modules including: (i) pedagogy, (ii) psycho-social support, (iii) life-skills, and (iv) ICT or basic computer skills. These are the major processes in the run-up to the start of the teacher training in the three IGAD member states.

The actual training was launched officially in Gambella with the presence of representatives of IGAD, GIZ, the Federal Ministry of Education of Ethiopia, the Gambella regional state president, and other dignitaries. The event was accompanied by a documentary filming program by a renowned media producer from Germany. A number of teachers and program managers participated in the interviews on their expectations, significance of the training and results they anticipate. Table 1 shows summary of the process during the three rounds of the teacher training.

### **The product**

#### **The modules**

Most importantly, the four modules constitute the direct

**Table 2.** Summary of the components of each training modules.

Module	Contents outline
Module 1: Pedagogy skills	Introduction to pedagogy and the module; approach to professional development (planning); code of conduct; classroom management; seating arrangement/setting up the classroom; student attendance and registration; effective communication and diversity; differentiation and diversity; managing behaviour in classroom; managing a large class; teaching and learning resources; methods of questioning; lesson planning, schemes and work and curriculum; learner-centred methodology; developing a lesson plan; bridging it all together; developing and action plan; reflection, growth, mind-set; interactive methods of training ...
Module 2: Psychosocial support	Understanding wellbeing; what is psychological wellbeing? Providing psychosocial support; positive discipline; responding to misbehaviour; putting it altogether; stress management for teachers; teacher stress: how teachers deal with stress; effects of teachers' stress on students; coping with stress and distress: practicing stress management; mindfulness; student stress and distress; responding to student distress; building student coping skills; psychosocial activities and practice; mindfulness for students; action plan; final wrap-up; follow-up
Module 3: Life-skills	Time management; self-awareness; self-esteem; coping with emotion: stress management; assertiveness; effective communication; empathy; critical thinking; problem-solving; collaboration skills; interpersonal relations; creativity and innovation; conflict management; financial literacy and entrepreneurship
Module 4: ICT- skills	Introduction and expectations; why ICT in the classroom; ICT-skills check-in; ICT-project: internet searching and lesson plans project; ICT for differentiation; check-in on MS word processing and search check-in; open education resources: social media for teaching and learning; check-in on email; managing classroom resources with ICT; chair debate: review lesson plans; review and reflect

and visible products of the training. They resulted from the needs assessment and are outlined (Table 2).

Each of these modules and their respective contents are offered to the trainees with varying durations. The training was often interactive and participatory. The trainers would introduce the modules and themes, while trainees would elaborate, expand, improvise or explicate concepts, ideas and processes. By so doing, they could contribute their own share to making the training considerably engaging; and the program memorable. This has been observed in the training centers visited and during informal conversations with the trained teachers, trainers, school administrators and ministry of education officials as well as during the certificate award events or during the learning missions and the regional workshop in Addis Ababa.

### **Skilled teachers**

Skilled and motivated teachers are the major outcomes of this specific initiative. Initially the training was designed for one hundred teachers in each member states. Consequently, the total number of teachers expected to receive the training was three hundred in the three countries. Since there were six locations, two in each country, the number of trainees in each location was about fifty. However, as the program moves through the first round of the training, the provider and the client (IGAD and GIZ) realized that the resources at hand were enough to do another round of training. Accordingly, the

two sides agreed to continue with the training of the next round. Again, a further assessment of the resources and the facilities revealed that a third round of training was possible, this time with fifty teachers in each country and twenty-five or so in each training site of a country. This was a pleasant surprise and shows the merits of a bit of over-budgeting and a bit of under-planning, during the first round, but a clear indication of effective management. This resulted in an extension of the duration, till November 2022, still within the planned completion period, which, again, shows a reasonable expectation of the timing among the parties.

Consequently, for the IGAD region as a whole, the TTI trained 755 teachers, more than 250% of the originally planned. Though the number may be small compared to the needs of the population in the region, this constitutes close to 50% of the teachers of secondary schools in the refugee settlement. The training responds to the long-awaited questions of teachers to receive some kind of in-service, on-the job, training services.

In this regard, the teachers who participated in the training program can be considered as one of the most important products of the process. This calls for a systematic impact assessment to be conducted among trained teachers to determine the qualitative change the training has brought. The current reporting is made largely on the informal testimony received from the majority of teachers contacted during visits and regional meetings conducted by IGAD and partners. The majority of teachers confirmed that the training has improved their skills and has motivated them to teach well in their

**Table 3.** Number of teachers trained, (Rounds I, II and III, aggregate).

<b>Total of Trained teachers (Rounds I, II, III)</b>		<b>% of M/F</b>
Male	496	65.7
Female	259	34.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>755</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4.** Gender disaggregation of trained teachers, per country total, (Rounds I, II, III).

<b>Member State</b>	<b>Teachers trained</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>% of M/F</b>
Ethiopia	Male	216	85.4
	Female	37	14.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>100</b>
Sudan	Male	133	53.2
	Female	119	46.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100</b>
Uganda	Male	147	58.8
	Female	103	41.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

respective schools. The disaggregated national figure of the teachers who received the training is as follows:

From Table 3, it is clear that the majority (65.7%) of the direct beneficiaries were male; whereas females constitute only 34.3 % of the total. This low involvement of female teachers in the program suggests to either the overall limited number of female teachers or bias in the selection of male over female teachers. At this stage it is only speculation since it is imperative to have concrete gender disaggregated data on the number of men and female teachers or on the way the selection was made (Table 4).

Gender imbalance in the trained teachers was very high in Ethiopia during all the three rounds (85.4% male against 14.6% of female teachers. This is demonstrated by the third round training whereby out of a total of fifty teachers on 8 or 14% were female teachers.

The other two countries have relatively narrow variation in the number of male and female teachers. For example, Sudan has trained 53.2% of male and 46.8 % of female teachers during the three training rounds; whereas Uganda could train 58.8% of male against 41.2% female teachers during the same period. The last round is also close to the overall difference. However, Uganda has achieved 50%-50% parity between male and female teachers respectively. That of Sudan stands at 60% and 40%, respectively. Table 5 shows the gender disaggregation of trained teachers, per country total, Round III (Training June to Oct-2022).

#### **Percentage of teachers trained out of total number of secondary school teachers in the selected schools**

During the first two rounds, the number of teachers trained out of the total accounted for 46% while this figure moved down by 11%, and stood at 35% when the three rounds are computed together. The regional coordinator of the ITTI explained this when she reported "Please note that while more teachers have now been trained, the percentage is now lower than the previous report given the additional 11 schools selected in Round III. This means there are now more teachers and students within the selected group of schools". This is well understood and the fact that IGAD has responded to the training needs of 46% at the higher end and 35% at the lower point, is a remarkable achievement. The home taking message, again, is that with the right intervention, it is possible to improve the teaching capacity of teachers within a short period of time. Moreover, it is possible to cover the retooling process of teachers in refugee, returnee and host communities in a matter two to three years but with a plan to repeat this at least every five years to upgrade the skills of teachers. Table 6 shows the number of teachers teaching within the host community and refugee settlements.

The percentage of refugee and host community teachers in the three rounds of training stands at 51.8, 58, and 51.7%, respectively. In this regard, there is no major gap in the number of teachers incorporated into the

**Table 5.** Gender disaggregation of trained teachers, per country total, Round III (Training June to Oct -2022).

		<b>Teachers Trained Round III only (June to Oct 2022)</b>	<b>% of male/female</b>
Ethiopia	Male	42	84
	Female	8	16
	Total	50	100
Sudan	Male	30	58.8
	Female	21	41.2
Uganda	Male	25	50
	Female	25	50
	Total	50	100

**Table 6.** Number of teachers teaching within the host community and refugee settlements.

<b>Teachers in refugee settlement and host communities</b>				<b>% of Refugee/host community teachers</b>
	<b>Refugee settlement</b>	<b>Host community</b>	<b>Total</b>	
Round I	156	145	301	51.8
Round II	176	127	303	58.0
Round III	78	73	151	51.7
Total	410	345	755	54.3

program from refugee and host community teachers. The question that follows this picture will be “Does the closeness of the percentage refers to equity between refugee and host community teachers? This question should lead to a further research. Very quickly; however, there is a big discrepancy between the coverage of teachers in refugee schools and teachers who are refugees themselves. The reported figures revealed that only 113 teachers or (close to 15%) are refugees whereas the largest majority of teachers (85%) are from the host country, but may not necessarily be from the host community as the latter are often less educated, marginal and under-represented.

The product also includes students and communities who are expected to be direct or indirect beneficiaries. Here again, an impact assessment is needed but it is estimated that aggregate (for all three countries, all three Rounds included, October 2022) 15,424 students may have been reached or impacted. This is a very conservative estimate and maybe recalculated 37,700 students, based the simple assumption one teacher could teach at least a minimum of 50 students in most crowded secondary schools in Africa in general and in the case countries in particular. This is only about students. It does not represent the academic motivation and social impact of the study on the community. A focused study on a number of target groups: students, teachers not involved in the training, school administrators, staff of education ministries, community members and partner institutions

would be important to determine the intended or unintended consequences, if any, of the teacher training.

Improvement in school infrastructures and facilities has been reported by school authorities and training facilitators. This too needs to be carefully documented and substantiated. Moreover, the quality and extent or suitability of the technical as well as material improvement should be understood through empirical studies.

### **Cultural products**

Cultural products are often forgotten but critical elements of effective and attractive teaching. These are qualities naturally acquired but can be cultivated through exposure to enabling circumstances. In this connection, the most interesting products of the teacher training include poetry, songs and related artistic expressions. They also include bulletins and immense photographs from all the three member states where the training took place. A notable example can be cited from White Nile, Sudan, whereby one of the teacher-trainees (Mr. Martin Loro Sule) proved to be a distinguished poet and orator. He composed a poem which he recited eloquently, on the occasion of the Certificate Award Ceremony at the end of one the training rounds, which certificates were specifically designed for the coordinators and administrators of the training program. This captivating though slightly incomplete poem recital was posted on the IGAD YouTube page. It is

now accessible to interested audience. Another very spectacular product includes lyric composed, choreographed and produced by a female teacher trainee (Ms. Lydia Nakiriya) from the Mubende teacher training center of south-western Uganda. The lady's song was a eulogy (tribute) to IGAD and the training which remembered, apparently, long forgotten teachers and provided them with rare skill-sets that enabled them to change their lives and the future of their students.

Furthermore, the author wishes to record one very memorable culinary art, a cake that made history. This cake was made in the town of Arua, North Western Nile, Uganda, through the Muni Teachers Training College (MNTC) in April 2022, in connection with the second round of certificate award ceremony. There are three things unique about this cake.

First, it was made in the district town from the finest materials in a Tukul-shape. The color of the cone and base as well as the middle column of the cake is in green, one of the colors of IGAD. The overall shape reflects the housing structure very common in the area, and one that is found among the refugee settlements. When this is given to IGAD, it sends a heart-felt gift message of gratitude with genuine representation of the culture of the communities which comes to the region. Here we note a strong symbolism about the linkage between the local and the regional or the global.

Second, made to last for longer time than ordinary cakes, under various temperatures, the cake reflects the desire for a lasting relationship between IGAD as a regional body and its local communities, including refugees hosted in these communities. Third, the cake travelled more than 2000 km to reach its final destination (700 km by road at the back seat of a double cabin pick-up, often travelling over rough surfaces, from Arua to Kampala; 45 km by road from Kampala to Entebbe, 1250 km, 12 km from Addis Ababa Airport to the author's home and 50km from the latter to Bishoftu, where it was finally cut and enjoyed by participants of a meeting from two universities of Sudan and IGAD staff from Djibouti, Addis Ababa and other places. The meeting was held to review and select students for the IGAD scholarship program. The idea was to transport it to Djibouti and cut it there by the Executive Secretary. Unfortunately, time and circumstances could not allow for this to happen though slices of cake were sent to Djibouti for taste by some prominent staff in the Organization. This is how the cake made history: it travelled thousands of miles; it did not spoil due to lapse of time even without being put in refrigerators; in fact, it maintained its original freshness; it did not collapse or shrink either; rather its structure was as in the original; it was cut in an important gathering; and consumed by people from different member states of IGAD. In summary, the cake was a truly regional product and served as a means of holding the region together amidst fragility, volatility and fluidity.

Such is the wonder of building requisite skills which

results in remarkable products and memorable events. The conclusion to be drawn from these instances is that investment in training, skill-building and capacity augmentation pays both in the short and long-run. The corollary message, too, is partners and stakeholders should put money on education and skills development, notably on teacher training.

### ***Media and publicity products***

Right from the outset, the teacher training has given opportunities to interact with IGAD in all countries. News coverage's have appeared in all major media outlets from Facebook to TV channels and have popularized IGAD as well as the teacher training program. Consequently many people are able to hear about the Organization, for the first time, especially in relation to its work on social development in general and education/teacher training in particular.

### **Lessons**

The present research has generated a number of lessons to be used for future teaching-learning processes, especially in displacement affected communities. These are very important lessons if programs are to be effectively carried out.

#### ***Lesson Number 1: Intergovernmental Organizations (IOs) can make a difference***

Traditionally Intergovernmental Organizations (IOs) are considered as aloof, merely political and unable to go down to local or grassroots levels due to limitation of mandates. However, the teacher training initiative under consideration in this study reveals that IOs can wed political commitments and practical action to bring about real changes in the lives of people. In other words, IOs, like IGAD, can use their political leverage to develop policies and mobilize the participation of both partners and member states to design programs and interventions that can be implemented on the ground. In recent times, IGAD call this approach as Taking IGAD to the People (TIP). TIP is a novel approach that can be emulated by other agencies in Africa and elsewhere.

#### ***Lesson 2: Effective planning works***

Once a political commitment, as in adopting the Djibouti declaration, is secured, it is imperative to plan, organize, and popularize plans effectively. This means performing implementation activities through well-conceived, properly designed and vigorously pursued approach.



### ***Lesson 3: Solid and committed partnership brings durable solutions***

This IGAD teacher training is a joint initiative with the Government of Germany through GIZ. GIZ is one of the strong partners that have been supporting the Djibouti Declaration even before its adoption. GIZ has put considerable amount of resources and technical expertise in the preparation and convening of the Djibouti high-level regional/ministerial Conference, 12-14 December 2017, which adopted the Djibouti Declaration. GIZ also injected significant budget for the implementation of the Djibouti Declaration over the last five years. The teacher training is financed directly through GIZ with the leadership of IGAD as well as regular and joint coordination/follow-up with GIZ. More specifically, the consulting firm (service provider) Particip GmbH was directly contracted by GIZ. Together with IGAD, Particip did a wonderful job in planning, coordinating, executing and evaluating the implementation of the teacher training initiative. All the experts they put in place were very productive, flexible and capable of accommodating changes as and when required. IGAD uses its political leverage and coordination capacity to listen to, communicate with all relevant stakeholders, provide guidance and resolve matters that call upon its timely intervention.

In this regard, the program reaped the benefits of effective partnership and collaboration ably conducted with all players from individual consultants to the top management of IGAD/GIZ secretariat and relevant offices of the government of Germany, such as the German embassies in Addis Ababa and Kampala who made visits to selected training sites during certificate award ceremonies.

### ***Lesson 4: The participation of member states is very critical***

At the end of the day, meaningful implementation of any initiative resides in the powers and prerogatives of member states. It takes quite a good amount of time to convince member states to put a regional program into their respective national action plans. IGAD has the luxury of getting its social development programs and this same can be said for the teacher training initiative under consideration. The ease of acceptance is witnessed as a result of strong trust built between IGAD and its member states given the fact that decisions are made and plans adopted with their active participation. This shows that action can be taken when there is adequate room for participation; when member states are fully convinced about the desirability of any intervention from regional level; when the program fits well into national priorities and contributes to their attainment; and when there is no discrepancy in words and deeds by agencies that have come to implement regional initiatives. In this regard,

every bit of the Djibouti Declaration is so lucky in a sense that it has obtained full approval and acceptance right from the outset as it responds to and addresses concerns of member states, refugees, host communities and all relevant stakeholders involved in ensuring access to education in such contexts.

It is therefore believed that any undertaking that aspires to be accepted and implemented should be participatory and engages all concerned using both the bottom-up and top-down approaches. The latter refers to the need for a comprehensive understanding of the local or national circumstances and bringing these to the attention of decision/policy-makers and making planning reflective of felt and spelt needs of member states or the communities they serve. The latter alludes to the top-down approach: time, context and audience-specific decisions which are relented to solving real problems in a durable or sustainable manner.

The current training teacher initiative has exactly done that. It understands the needs or limitations of teachers, particularly those in refugee settings. It designs programs through the active involvement of member states; and it takes this back to those who needed it most thereby contributing to the process of building local capacities that are essential for solving problems for a longer period of time. This could only be possible through the development and adoption of multi-year costed plans of action in these three countries where the teacher trainings were conducted.

### ***Lesson 5: It takes more than one partner to ensure sustainability of initiatives***

The pilot phase of the teacher training initiative is ending by November 2022. There is an ongoing discussion on phase II of the project. However, it has become clear that there is need to work with more partners to cover more teachers both in the countries that have already undergone the pilot phase and in other member states of IGAD that have not been covered by the initiative yet. The involvement of more and more partners is expected to happen the years to come. When it materializes, it will enhance the capacity of more teachers and contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning at all levels of education not only for refugees but also for the host community at large. Moreover, the continued leadership of IGAD in this process will significantly contribute to regional integration and cultivation of common citizenry in the eastern and horn of African environment. Region-building is one of the stated objectives of IGAD and education in general and education of displaced and migrant populations in particular will enable it to achieve this noble objective.

Therefore, this paper calls upon all relevant partners and stakeholders in the region to (a) invest in education and implement the policies/commitments of member

states through IGAD; (b) use education as a means of fulfilling the bigger goal of promoting human rights of displaced populations and marginal hosting communities; and (c) by so doing, ensure the realization of burden and responsibility sharing as enshrined in a number of regional and international instruments such as Agenda 2063, SDG4, CRRF, GCR, GCM and others.

### ***Lesson 6: Decentralized leadership pays a lot***

While all the lessons are important for the success of regional commitments, one very important lesson stands out.

**Leadership:** As in the preceding lesson, leadership is successful and will allow the timely delivery of services when it is participatory, flexible and not excessively bureaucratic. This is what we at IGAD experienced and this is also what exists with the GIZ leadership. In both organizations there is more room for understanding and cooperation rather than complication and obstruction. This does not mean, however, that rules were not followed. There are rules, in both institutions and their affiliated organizations. They are followed to the letters. At the same time, leaders at all levels give their time plentifully and work towards removing barriers at all circumstances. These contributed to the smooth inception, concretization, establishment and operationalization of interventions throughout the teacher training program. It can be concluded, therefore, that without enabling, participatory and flexible or communicative leadership, the program could not have achieved its goals.

### **Conclusion**

The paper examines the pilot phase of the teacher training initiative within IGAD, focusing on the process, outcomes, and lessons learned over the past two years. As elaborated throughout the manuscript, the process was observed to be participatory and engaging. It commenced with the groundwork for the Djibouti Declaration, formulated and endorsed through active involvement of member states, partners, the IGAD secretariat, and all pertinent stakeholders. The Declaration pinpointed critical priority areas, and their execution commenced immediately after its adoption in December 2017.

Likewise, the teacher training was done in a participatory and collaborative manner whereby IGAD and GIZ joined hands to plan and executive the initiative. In the process, other actors were involved including Particip, the consulting firm, as well as different institutions at national and regional levels. Selection of countries, sites and teachers was done through

consultative processes. Similarly, subject areas and modules were developed in participatory manners. And a number of other activities brought together different state and non-state actors at all levels.

The products included teachers whose skills were upgraded, the teaching materials which can be used for subsequent training programs, and other material and non-material products, notably poetry and music. More products are envisaged in future but this requires serious follow-up and research.

Regarding the lessons in the teacher training initiatives, a lot has been acquired which can be summarized as immense role of intergovernmental institutions in making things happen that could other be difficult for individual countries; the importance adequate but flexible planning; the imperatives strong partnership; the participatory approach; the need for continuous planning to ensure sustainability and the role of decentralized, visionary and accommodative leadership.

### **Recommendations**

As a recommendation, it is important to highlight the necessity for ongoing research, coupled with consistent training programs, to continually enhance the capacity of teachers as the foundation of high-quality outcomes in the teaching-learning process. Additionally, it is imperative to diversify the pool of partners to broaden outreach and ensure sustained continuity.

The work of IGAD is profoundly critical in establishing a robust partnership on one hand, and in utilizing research to enhance the quality of policy-making on the other.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Investigating the challenges facing effective implementation of free primary education in Bo District, Southern Sierra Leone**

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**This paper aims to examine the obstacles hindering the successful implementation of Free Primary teaching in Kakua chiefdom, Bo district, Southern Sierra Leone, focusing on the adequacy of funding and provision of educational resources to schools. The research employed a survey design with a cross-sectional approach, involving the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from various respondents simultaneously. The target population consisted of 600 participants, including 20 school leaders, 575 teachers, and 5 education officers from the Bo district. The sample, comprising 120 responses, included one deputy director (DD), two zonal executives of the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (ZESLTU), nine school leaders, and 108 teachers. The DD and ZESLTU executives were selected through purposive sampling, while school leaders and teachers were chosen through proportionate sampling. Interviews were scheduled with the Sierra Leone Teachers Union's zonal executives and DD. The results revealed that a majority of teachers reported overcrowded classrooms attributed to free primary education, aligning with findings from other research. The necessary number of classrooms exhibited variation, with an average deficit of 2 per school. Teachers reported inadequacies in classrooms, urinals, toilets, desks, and textbooks. However, other teaching and learning aids were generally rated as sufficient. This highlights a lack of resources in schools, potentially impeding the efforts of teachers and school administrators. Therefore, the study recommends that the government should allocate adequate funding, time, and resources to ensure the effective implementation of free primary school education without compromising quality.**

**Key words:** Challenges, free primary education, Sierra Leone.

## **INTRODUCTION**

At independence, Sierra Leone, with its seemingly unparalleled track record in education and a vibrant, productive bureaucracy, was rated as one of the success stories among new African states (Entwistle, 2015).

Fourah Bay College, established in 1829, made commendable strides in providing enviable quality education not only for Sierra Leoneans but also for other West Africans. Sierra Leone earned the moniker 'Athens

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of West Africa' due to its reputation for offering quality education on the African continent (Paracka, 2004). Sadly, forty-two years later, in 2003, Sierra Leone was rated as having one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world. According to Cost (2006), a major policy shift occurred with the introduction of the 6334 in the education system. The government at that time, in an effort to further enhance education, implemented a Free Education Policy. The present government undertook an ambitious and commendable venture to provide education to an increased number of children. In alignment with the September 2000 United Nations Millennium Summit, which 'challenged' 189 countries worldwide to provide basic education for all by 2015, the Sierra Leone government designed several policies to enhance access to and quality of education in the country. One significant policy was the Education for All Action Plan (EFA).

Under the EFA Action Plan, the government initiated the provision of Universal Primary Education in September 2001. A key component of the EFA Action Plan was the elimination of primary school tuition fees, replaced by a fee subsidy of 2,000 Leones per pupil per term for the three terms. The EFA Action Plan also included the provision of teaching and learning materials. The primary objective of the policy was to ensure that all children from Class 1 to JSS 3 have 'unfettered' access to education regardless of their gender, social, cultural, or economic backgrounds.

Against the backdrop of ongoing challenges in the effective implementation of free primary education in the Bo district, this study was conceived with the aim of investigating the challenges facing the effective implementation of free primary education in Bo district, southern Sierra Leone.

### **Aims and objectives of the study**

The research was carried out with the following aims and objectives in mind:

- (1) To determine the obstacles to the successful implementation of free primary education in Bo district
- (2) To determine the challenges facing effective implementation of free primary education in Bo district
- (3) To determine the adequacy of primary education funds allotted to the government-aided schools in the Bo district

### **METHODS**

The study employed a survey design with a cross-sectional approach, involving the simultaneous collection of qualitative and quantitative data from various respondents. This research adopted a descriptive research design, which serves as a comprehensive plan, roadmap, and blueprint strategy of investigation conceived to obtain answers to research objectives; it is considered the core of any study (Kothari, 2004). This design was chosen because it

examines phenomena, events, and issues as they naturally occur (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). Its suitability lies in its ability to thoroughly explore the problem at hand, define it, clarify it, and gather pertinent information that can be beneficial to individuals in the education sector. Moreover, this design facilitates the generalization of results and is both easy to administer and record.

### **Study area**

The study was conducted in Government Assisted Primary Schools located in Kakua chiefdom, Bo district, Southern region of Sierra Leone. Bo district stands as the second most populous district in Sierra Leone, following the Western Area Urban district. The city of Bo in the Kakua chiefdom, the second-largest city in Sierra Leone, serves as the capital and largest city of the district. Other major towns in the district include Baoma, Bumpeh, Serabu, Sumbuya, Baiima, and Yele. As of the 2015 census, the district's population is 547,201. Bo district shares borders with Kenema district to the east, Tonkolili district to the north, Moyamba district to the west, Bonthe district to the southwest, and Pujehun district to the south. Encompassing a total area of 5,473.6 km, Bo district comprises fifteen chiefdoms.

Singleton (1993) advises that the ideal setting for any study should be easily accessible to the researcher and should permit instant rapport with the informants. Bo district in the Southern region was chosen because it was within reach for the researcher. Additionally, reports from the Sierra Teachers Union Office in Bo indicated that primary schools were encountering challenges in the effective implementation of Free Primary Education in Bo district, Southern Sierra Leone. Obtaining empirical data regarding the difficulties facing the effective implementation of free primary education in the district would be crucial.

### **Target population**

The population for this study comprises male and female primary school teachers, as well as school leaders in all 20 government assisted primary schools in Kakua chiefdom, Bo district. The Deputy Director and the four zonal executives of the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) in the Kakua chiefdom were also included in the study. Therefore, the total population for the study consists of 600 subjects.

### **Sample size and sampling procedures**

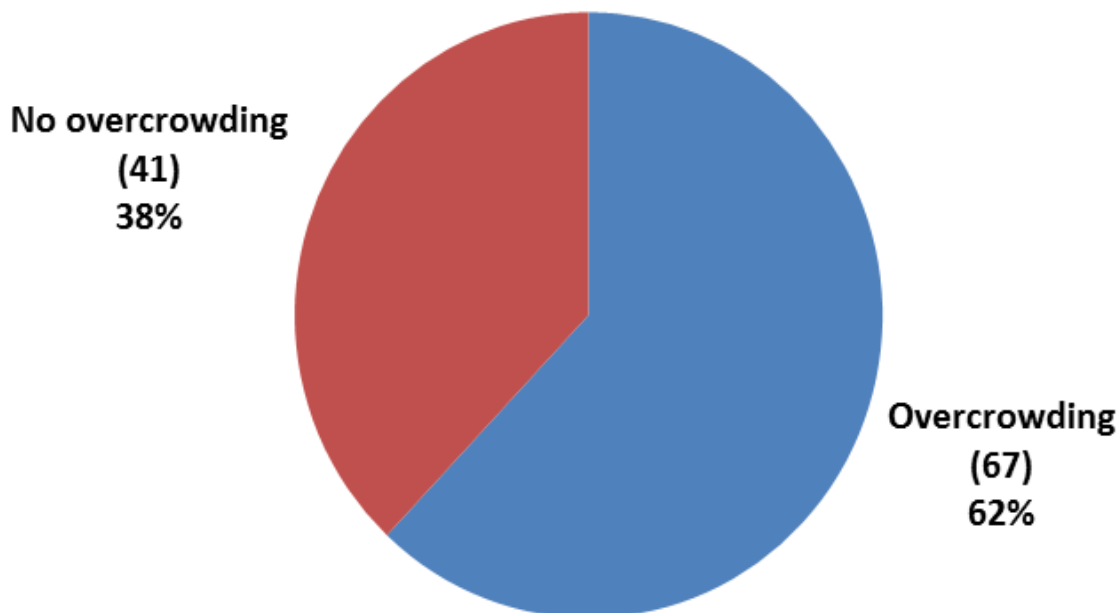
The sample size for this study was determined based on the recommendation of Amedeho (2002), who suggested that for descriptive studies, the sample size should fall within the range of 10 to 20% of the population. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) and Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) concur with Amedeho (2002) and further emphasize that a sample size ranging from 5 to 20% is ideal for representing the entire population. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) specifically recommend a minimum sample size of 20% for educational research when the target population is small (less than 1000 members).

In line with proportionate sampling, the researcher selected 120 participants from the 600 members of the target population, constituting 20% as per Amedeho's (2000) recommendation. The sample included 108 teachers and 9 school leaders, selected proportionately. Additionally, one Deputy Director of Education and two Zonal Executives of SLTU were purposively chosen. This sample size was deemed adequate for the investigation. Table 1 provides a summary of these details.

Objective 1: To determine the obstacles to the successful

**Table 1.** Matrix of sampling.

Item	Number	Size of sample
School leaders	20	9
Instructors	575	108
SLTU	4	2
DD	1	1
Total	600	120



**Figure 1.** Overcrowding in classes as a result of FPE.

implementation of free primary education in Bo district.

Objective 2: To determine the challenges facing effective implementation of free primary education in Bo district

Objective 3: To determine the adequacy of primary education funds allotted to the government-aided schools in the Bo district.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic characteristics of respondents

The study collected demographic information from the respondents, including details on gender, work experience, and education levels. The research conducted in Kakua chiefdom, Bo district, Southern Region, Sierra Leone, focused on government-assisted primary schools, involving the participation of 108 teachers and 9 school leaders. The gender distribution among teachers was equal, with 50% being female and 50% male. Among school leaders, 44.4% were men, and 55.6% were women.

The investigation aimed to uncover the educational backgrounds of the teachers and school leaders. Figure 1

illustrates the percentage of teachers who reported overcrowded classrooms due to free primary education. Of the teachers surveyed, 62.0% indicated that their classes were overcrowded because of free primary education, while 38.0% reported that their classes were not overcrowded. This finding suggests that most schools experienced overcrowded classrooms, aligning with research from other sources. For instance, Moranga (2013) found that teachers in the majority of sub-Saharan African nations typically work in crowded, multi-grade classrooms (with 40 to 80 students per class). This overcrowding is primarily attributed to a significant increase in student enrollment in primary and secondary education. According to Moranga (2013), congestion, along with other issues, remains a prevalent challenge.

Table 2 illustrates that the required number of classrooms in each school varied from 10 to 22. However, the available number of classrooms ranged from 8 to 20. Across the nine schools, a total of 135 classrooms were needed, averaging 15 classrooms per school. Nevertheless, the schools had a total of 120 classrooms, averaging 13 classrooms per school,

**Table 2.** The number of classrooms that schools must have.

Institution	No. required	No. available	Unavailable
PS-1	16	14	2
PS-2	16	16	0
PS-3	19	16	0
PS-4	22	20	2
PS-5	12	12	0
PS-6	10	8	2
PS-7	12	12	0
PS-8	11	10	1
PS-9	17	12	5
Total sum	135	120	15
Average	15	13	2

**Table 3.** Instructor evaluations of sufficient resources.

Resources	Adequate no.	Percent	Inadequate no.	Percent
Tutorial room	53	49.1	55	50.9
Restrooms/Latrines	41	38.0	67	62.0
School desks	53	50.0	54	50.0
Course books	67	62.0	41	38.0
Resources for teaching and learning (charts, chalk, writing materials)	80	74.0	28	25.9

resulting in an average deficit of 2 classrooms per school. While three schools did not require additional classrooms, others needed up to five more. Proper utilization of facilities is crucial for schools to enhance learning opportunities for students, including spaces such as staff rooms and administrative offices.

In addition, Table 3 indicates that 50.9% of the teachers believed the classrooms were insufficient, while 49.1% considered them adequate. Regarding urinals and toilets, 38% of teachers rated them as adequate, while 62% deemed them inadequate. Desks received equal ratings of 50% adequate and 50% inadequate. For textbooks, 38% of teachers considered them inadequate, while 62% rated them as adequate. Other teaching and learning aids, such as writing paper, charts, and chalk, were considered adequate by the majority of teachers (74%), while 25.9% rated them as inadequate. This analysis reveals that classrooms and sanitary resources were reported as the most lacking resources in the schools, according to the teachers.

These resources may be insufficient, posing challenges for teachers and school administrators in effectively carrying out their duties. Gongera and Okoth (2013), highlight the increasing administrative difficulties faced by school leaders, including inadequately constructed buildings, a shortage of classrooms and equipment, a lack of proper school furniture, especially desks, poor or non-existent maintenance and repairs, overcrowded

classrooms, and inadequate communication infrastructure and supporting services, especially health services. A shortage of these resources could compromise the quality of primary education in the country. For example, inadequate classrooms may lead to overcrowding, creating an unfavorable learning environment.

Another potential challenge in the implementation of free primary education is related to the adequacy of textbooks. Consequently, data were collected from school leaders on the number of classrooms available and the number required for each school. According to Table 4, the average number of students attending the schools increased gradually from 465 in 2018 to 530 in 2019 and 546 in 2020. This indicates that the implementation of free basic education led to an improvement in school enrollment. While commendable, an issue could arise if there are no corresponding increases in crucial resources such as teachers and instructional materials.

As per the Deputy Director of Education for Kakua chiefdom, Bo district, the implementation of Free Primary Education (FPE) resulted in a notable 30% increase in student enrollment within the district. He pointed out that while an increase in enrollment meant greater access, it also had a detrimental effect on curriculum delivery and educational quality.

According to the Zonal Executives of the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (ZESLTU), FPE equated to more

**Table 4.** Enrollment figures for the nine schools (2018 to 2020).

Institution	2020	2019	2018
PS-1	385	522	548
PS-2	705	812	837
PS-3	606	671	702
PS-4	540	540	540
PS-5	334	381	412
PS-6	286	334	372
PS-7	586	607	584
PS-8	313	365	340
PS-9	427	534	579
Average	465	530	546

**Table 5.** Obstacles related to finances of free primary education.

Obstacles encountered	No. of school leaders	Percent
Insufficient funding	9	100.0
Government funds for school fee subsidies were released later than expected	8	88.8
Before implementing FPE, the government did not take into account funding ongoing projects	7	77.7
Delays in recruitment/promotion of teachers	9	100.0

students, particularly.

The third research question examined the amount of money the government allocated for the successful implementation of free primary school education in Kakua chiefdom, Bo district. Globally, including Sierra Leone, government support is essential for the development of government-run schools. When queried about whether the funding provided to their schools met their needs, all school leaders provided negative responses, indicating that the funding fell short of their requirements. This information was gathered during the research.

Table 5 outlines the challenges school leaders face in securing government funding for free primary education. According to the table, all school leaders (100%) stated that the money allocated to their schools was insufficient.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that free primary education facilitated increased student attendance, contributing to equity in primary education. The primary objective of the study was to explore the challenges hindering the successful implementation of free primary education, particularly regarding the adequacy of physical infrastructure. The results revealed a deficit in school supplies and utilities due to the strain imposed by free primary education on the available classroom resources. Research on the required number of classrooms, for instance, exposed a general insufficiency of classrooms

per school.

The second objective was to investigate the difficulties in implementing free primary education concerning student enrollment and teacher workload. According to the study, the average number of students in schools steadily increased. However, there was an inadequate provision to meet this growing demand.

## Recommendations

In light of the study's analysis, the researcher hopes to make the following recommendations:

- 1) The government should provide schools with adequate funding, time, and resources to ensure that free primary school education operates smoothly without compromising educational quality. The study found that the biggest obstacle to the successful implementation of free primary education in government-aided primary schools was a lack of sufficient funding and resources.
- 2) The study suggests that, in order to accommodate everyone entering the system, the government should construct more schools and hire more teachers for free primary education. Due to the lack of enough teachers on the government payroll, most teachers were teaching many lessons per week, compromising their effectiveness.
- 3) School leaders should enroll pupils according to the available resources and teachers to avoid overcrowding



schools and overworking teachers. The study revealed that most schools faced a shortage of classrooms, leading to overcrowded classes and placing a significant workload on teachers, potentially affecting their effectiveness.

4) School leaders should actively involve the surrounding community in school development programs and projects. Additionally, schools should initiate income-generating projects to supplement government funding.

5) The government should organize more capacity-building programs for both school leaders and teachers to equip them with the necessary skills and abilities to address emerging issues in the implementation of free primary education.

6) Ways of motivating school managers and teachers should be devised to compensate them for the extra workloads they are undertaking to manage their schools.

7) The directorate within the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) should have greater authority and access to resources to perform their duties as supervisors and monitors in schools more successfully. It is anticipated that their frequent visits to schools will be advantageous because, with their assistance, schools would be able to uphold the standards necessary for effective learning to occur.

8) The Teaching Service Commission (TSC) must be operationalized to handle the management of the teacher payroll, recruitment, and other associated issues.

9) The Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) must be seen advocating not only for the material benefits of the teachers but also for professional ethics.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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