

DOES GENDER INFLUENCE STUDENTS HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SELECTION PROCESS?

Higher education institutions (HEIs) do not exist in isolation and are not immune to change. The environment in which higher education institutions operate currently shows signs of being unstable and turbulent. HEIs will only develop and grow if they have knowledge of their environment and have the ability to adjust to the economic and social changes.

The process of transformation of higher education in South Africa expects institutions to deliver the much needed graduates for social and economic development, while simultaneously addressing equity and diversity. One way to achieve this is to better understand the student market in terms of choice factors they consider when deciding on enrolling with a higher education institution.

This leaves the question: what choice factors do students consider when selecting a higher education institution and are there any noticeable differences between gender and language groups? Previous research revealed that students select international higher education institutions based on, amongst others, affordability, prestige and quality.

Males and females differ in terms of consumer traits, information processing, decision-making styles and buying patterns. Findings from prior studies revealed that males and females differed with regard to importance of financial aid, security, academics and atmosphere. HEIs need to be aware that differences exist which affect how HEIs reach and influence each gender group with appropriate communication messages.

A study was undertaken by a team of researchers including [Dr Melanie Wiese](#) and [Prof Yolanda Jordaan](#) (staff members in the [Department of Marketing Management](#)) to investigate the choice factors students consider when selecting a higher education institution. Particular focus was placed on the differences between language and gender groups.

The results indicate that irrespective of gender or language, the most important choice factor for respondents was the quality of teaching at HEIs. The findings showed that males and females differ according to the selection of certain choice factors which suggest that HEIs can consider recruitment strategies for each gender group. Significant differences between the language groups show that decisions are based on different choice factors.

The findings provide HEIs with an idea of the importance of choice factors that students consider when selecting an HEI. This will allow HEIs to use their limited funds more efficiently to attract the right calibre student, to create a unique position, to segment the student market appropriately and to gain a competitive advantage.

The full reference for this study is:

[Wiese, M.](#), Van Heerden, N. and [Jordaan, Y.](#) 2010. The role of demographics in students' selection of higher education institutions. *Acta Commercii*, 10: 150-163 – also available via [UP Space](#).