

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE-MAKING PROCESS OF SELECTING GRADUATE SCHOOL PROVIDER: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the students' perception on the factors influencing their choice-making process in selecting graduate school provider. The study used thematic qualitative approach. Participant was invited following a purposive sampling approach. The respondents were enrolled at the university graduate school program as it was part of the selection criteria. 51.46% of the respondents came from the MAEd programs, 14.62% were from PhD, 12.28% were from MBA, 7.01% were from MAN, 5.81% were from MABS, 4.09% were from DIT, 2.92% were from MPA, and 1.75% belongs to the DPA program. Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. Analyzing the graduate school student perception, the findings indicated that the following factors greatly influenced the choice-making process of the students: (1) quality of education and school integrity; (2) scholarship programs and value for money; (3) value for time/flexible time; (4) competent teaching force and support personnel; and (5) accreditation status.

Keywords: Graduate School Study, Quality Education, Competent Teaching Force, Graduate School Programs.

Introduction

Earning a master's or doctorate degree helps an individual gain specialized knowledge to advance in their specialized field. As the workforce evolves, a graduate degree shows dedicated to enhancing individuals' industry expertise and credibility. A certain individual can focus on a particular field of study, which helps them become more competitive in their chosen field (P. P., & Talking, 2007).

Universities operate in an increasingly competitive market place facing new and complex socio-technical and economic challenges. For many universities graduate school students is desirable and necessary for survival. Universities knowledge in this area is often an imperfect tool as the changing environment and diversity of cultures with which it must interact challenge previous assumptions and common wisdom (O'Brien, et.al, 2007).

The marketing of higher education especially graduate school students has become an issue of interest for researchers who have identified relationship marketing as a key area for future focus (Shank & Hayes, as cited on O'Brien, et.al, 2007).

On a study conducted by Spaulding and Olswang (2005), Shows that graduate school student weighs the benefits, advantages and disadvantages they most likely gain/encounter before they decided to enroll in one university.

The study focused on the choice-making process of the graduate school students in choosing graduate school provider. Moreover, the study also perceived the students' perception on the best marketing practices of one higher education provider in Malolos City, Region III. The findings of the study can help institutions identify the good practices in the graduate school department that could be used to further improve graduate school enrollment.

Methodology of The Study

The study focused on the students' perception of the choice-making process and why they choose to enrolled in the university where the study was employed. The study make use of thematic qualitative approach.

Qualitative methods are widely used in learning and teaching research and scholarship. There are many, often excellent, texts and resources on qualitative approaches; however these tend to focus on assumptions, design and data collection rather than the analysis process per se. (Divan, Ludwig, Matthews, Motley & Tomlienovic-Berube, as cited on Maguire, 2017).

Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis within qualitative research. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest that it is the first qualitative method that should be learned as it provides core

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skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis' (p.78).

Furthermore, thematic analysis particularly from the perspective of learning and teaching is a method rather than a methodology (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). This means that, unlike many qualitative methodologies, it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective. This makes it a very flexible method, a

considerable advantage given the diversity of work in learning and teaching.

Participant were invited following a purposive sampling approach, the respondent must be willing to share their choice-making process and their perceived best practices employed by the university. The respondents must be presently enrolled in the university graduate school program as it is part of the selection criteria.

Table 1: List of Interviewees' Programs and Degree Status

Interviewees' Program		Number of respondents	Degree status	Percentage
A	MABS	10	On-going	5.81%
B	MAEd	88	On-going	51.46%
C	MBA	21	On-going	12.28%
D	MPA	5	On-going	2.92%
E	MAN	12	On-going	7.01%
F	DPA	3	On-going	1.75%
G	DIT	7	On-going	4.09%
H	PhD	25	On-going	14.62%
Total respondents		171		100%

Table 1 depicts the respondents of the study. 51.46% were from the MAEd programs, 14.62% were from Phd., 12.28% were from MBA, 7.01% were from MAN, 5.81% were from MABS, 4.09%

were from DIT, 2.92% were from MPA, and 1.75% belongs to the DPA program. Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Table 2: Themes Emerging Across The Interviews

Themes		Participants
1	Quality of education & School Integrity	60%
2	Scholarship programs & Value for money	10%
3	Value for time/ Flexible time	10%
4	Competent teaching force and support personnel	15%
5	Accreditation status	5%

Table 2 show the themes emerging across the interview, 60% of the respondents mention quality education & School Integrity as one of their choice-making process why they are enrolled in that university, 15% considered the competent teaching force, 10% considered the value for time/flexible time scheme, 10% considered the scholarship programs & Value for money, and 5% considered the kind of support services and programs the institutions are giving to the students.

Results and Discussions

This section depicts the choice-making process themes made by the respondents on why they choose to enroll in the graduate school program of the university located in Region 3 - Malolos city.

1 Quality of education & school integrity

Education must be available and accessible but also acceptable and adaptable. Past research has indicated that the effects of having a graduate school degree increases ones' capability and skills in the field they are working (Goldhaber, 2015).

What students perceive as quality in graduate school programs is unclear (Hill et al, 2003), and is likely to depend on student expectations and values (Telford & Masson, 2005). Surveys suggest that they value academic competence (Munasinghe & Rathnasiri, 2011); teaching quality and their relationships with academic staff (Neves & Hillman, 2016).

I decided to enroll in this institution because this university is autonomous university which serves as evidence of the quality of education they provide

to their students. I am looking forward to be an international/globally competitive student.

I want to finish my studies here because I interviewed many of your successful graduates. I am inspired by their achievements. This university is one of the finest MAE Universities in Bulacan, so I am proud.

I chose to enroll this school for my graduate Masters' program because of the quality education it provides to graduate Students.

I still chose this university for my Doctorate Studies because I know of the School's capability & capacity to help graduate students like me. The methodology & Strategy in delivering are comprehensively expressed & effectively delivered. They help Students all the way since their objective is to help us become successful. Thank You!

I was told by my sister who is also studying here that this school really offers a topnotch quality education and the professors are very competent in their field. You will be guided on your research.

I enrolled in this university because I believed that Good Admin & staffs, faculty provides me a quality education. This university is well knowledgeable in terms of research work.

This university is ISO Certified meaning that they are systematic in all areas.

Because it provides exceptional educational outcomes by developing the minds of each individual graduate school students, and also, it is only graduate school that give a scholar specialty in cultural education, because I'm an Indigenous Peoples teacher in our place.

On a study conducted by Horn, et.al. (2017), it was revealed that teachers with a master's degree relative to only a bachelor's degree significantly improved their performance in teaching. This proves that they have received a great amount of quality education in their master's education program.

2. Scholarship programs & value for money

Scholarship programs might be used not only to attract bright, talented students, but also to attract a diverse student body or a student body with significant leadership skills or with a significant commitment to public service. This may also helped improved the perceived choice-making of student to enroll in a certain educational institution (Organ, 2011).

I was one of the scholars of the National Commission on Culture and the Arts. We were given two summer semesters to finish the 24 units. After graduation, I decided to continue my graduate studies because of the following: 1. Personal and professional growth; 2. not to waste the money spent by NCCA; and 3. Meet people with diverse backgrounds.

I continue my study here in this university for the reason that it is the partner school of a scholarship of National Commission for Culture and the Arts that I received.

The institutions are flexible in many areas such as payment schemes flexible schedules, accommodating office personnel, understandable system.

Students with financial difficulties tend to choose educational institutions that offer scholarship program and institutions with lower tuition fee but delivers quality education and the degree they sought to partake.

3. Value for time/ flexible time

Graduate school students opted to enroll with schools who offer flexible time, since most of them are working and handles different life responsibilities (Hill, 2003). In additional, they also look for educational institutions that can cater them and finished their chosen degree on time.

I choose this institution to take my Master's degree because I believe that this is the university that will help me to finish fast my degree. In others university, it takes year to approve the title proposal, the title proposal are just left behind on top of the table. But here, and what other says Time is important, the approval at title will not take years.

Personally I really wanted to take my Master's Degree and I believed that it's wise to enroll in a university which is competitive and at the same time concerned with the students thru helping us finish the degree with assistance and guidance.

First, my personal reason is to just finish my MAED in a 2year time frame for me to be a regular in my school. But as trimestral goes by I am more overwhelmed by the research method of the school.

They offer trimestral so it would be easier to finish the Master's program in terms of the spare of time.

Manageable time or flexible time

Time is an element to most of the graduate school students, which is the main reason why they chose

school provider who can give them the value of time they desired.

4. Competent teaching force and support personnel

Teacher competence is the extent to which a teacher has the knowledge and skills in the subject that they are teaching. This also includes, the ability to organize and teach in interesting and flexible ways, using good teaching methods (Cubukcu, 2010).

Knowledgeable professors

Professors are very accommodating and approachable, same with the GS Staff.

I also love the student-friendly approach of most of the professors and staff of graduate school department. This institution since day one of my stay here has proven that quality education does not need to be STRESSFUL. I adore the way they approach students in a very friendly & approachable. The methodology & Strategy in delivering are comprehensively expressed & effectively delivered. They help Students all the way since their objective is to help us become successful. Thank You!

Because I do believe that the professors are effective and efficient. More so, when it comes to research, the professor motivates me to appreciate unity researches with accessible facility.

The Institution and its faculty helps the students achieved its goals finished its degree.

Learning-friendly environment

Teachers help their students without so much pressure.

The staffs are all approachable

Teacher competence includes three main components: interpersonal skills, classroom procedures and subject knowledge. This includes the teacher's ability to communicate with the student, a positive student approach, understanding students' learning difficulties, acknowledging the individual student, being someone the students can trust. Truly this factors yields significant effects on the enrollment and retention of students (Cubukcu, 2010).

5. Accreditation status

Another significant factors that most of the students mention during the interview was the accreditation status of the institutions, which significantly proves the world class quality of programs they provide.

One of the well-known autonomous in the country.

This institution is autonomous.

Level III Accredited status in MABS.

Catholic and Autonomous University.

ISO Certified which means high standard education.

According to Segismundo (2017) it is evident that the best accreditation experience determinant of quality of education was found to be its Short/Long-term benefits. This was followed by professional development and Teaching-learning environment. Accreditation is still an effective scheme in distinguishing quality levels among higher educational institutions. The participatory involvement of the academic community in defining its own strengths, weaknesses as well as available opportunities and threats gives it direction in shaping what is imperative for the institution's growth and development. Thus, accreditation also pays big role in the choice-making process among graduate school student in choosing the right graduate school provider.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper was to investigate students' perception on the factors influencing their choice-making process in selecting graduate school provider. Given the living testimonies of the graduates, it can be concluded that the following factors greatly influenced the choice-making process of the students; (1) Quality of education & School Integrity, (2) Scholarship programs & Value for money, (3) Value for time/ Flexible time, (4) Competent teaching force and support personnel, (5) Accreditation status. The research elucidated that the aforementioned factors affects the choice-making process of graduate school students in choosing a graduate school provider.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors in this manuscript.

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