Factors Influencing the Selection of a University by High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Today, student attraction is one of the most important problems for universities. Universities have to try to attracting more volunteers to meet their financial needs. This study has been done in order to investigate factors influencing the university choice among pre-university students in the provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran in the north of Iran. Survey was used for collecting data, and data were quantitative. Data has been collected via a questionnaire with reliability 0.79, which calculated with rerun and Spearman correlation. Cluster method sampling was used. Findings showed that economic factors, university related factors, personal factors, and social factors influence student's choice of university respectively. All effects sizes were at the high and very high level. For determining effect sizes, non-parametric method were used.

KEYWORDS: University choice, Islamic Azad University, university selection model, student attraction, higher education marketing, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

The atmosphere of higher education has increasingly become competitive, and institutions have to compete with each other to attract students in the recruitment markets (Maring et al, 2006). It is expected that Iranian institutions of higher education pay attention to the competitive policy. This is more important for private universities than for public institutions of higher education in Iran because some private institutions have encountered problems in attracting students since 2005. There are many research studies about factors influencing student's university choice in the world. These studies can be categorize in three levels containing national level (Bikett and Newman, 2001; etc), international level (e.g. Choy Chung, 2009, etc) and both (Kee Ming, 2010; etc). because of local and national factors, is necessary the research to run. This study was conducted to find answers to the following questions:

1) Which factors influence choice of university among Iranian students?
2) How significant each factor is?
3) What model of attracting students can be developed for Iranian higher education system?

The aims of the present research include:

1) Determining the factors influencing students’ choice of university,
2) Determining priorities and the relative importance of factors influencing their choice,
3) Developing a model of attracting students for Iranian universities.

The data was collected using a questionnaire. Factors influencing choice of university were divided into four categories including personal factors, university-related criteria, economic, and social factors. Then some sub-categories were determined for each group of factors. The questionnaire included two groups of items, multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The validity of the questionnaire was calculated to be 0.79 through using Spearman re-test, and its reliability was assessed via a pilot study and approved by experts' view. This research was done in two provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran in the north of Iran. Fifty-three experts answered a Delphi pretest, and 381 subjects completed the questionnaire. KMO was calculated to be 0.81.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Kotler and Armstrong (1994) describe the stages through which buyers supposedly pass to reach a buying decision. Need recognition is triggered when the buyer recognizes a need or a problem. It is followed by information search, an evaluation of alternatives and a purchase decision. According to Kotler and Armstrong (1994), the purchase decision derives from the consumer ranking the alternatives to formulate a purchase intention. Two factors may however intervene. The first is the attitude of others, whose influence will depend upon both the strength of the other person’s attitude towards the buying intention and the consumer’s motivation to comply with that person’s wishes. For the potential student this could include parental attitudes and opinions.
to their child’s university and course choice. The second is unexpected situational factors. Such unexpected situational factors for the potential student could be: The failure to achieve the grades needed to warrant the course and university they had decided upon; achieving higher grades than expected, opening up opportunities for universities or courses not previously considered; or alternatively, being offered a good job subsequently leading to further alternatives.

Kee Ming (2010) tested ten purposes in his research in Malaysia. He stated that there are significant positive relationship between college choice decision and:

- location,
- academic programs,
- college reputation,
- educational facilities,
- cost,
- availability of financial aid,
- employment opportunities,
- advertising,
- higher education institution representatives,
- campus visit.

Bradford (2008) conducted a research in six Finn universities and found that welfare, home vicinity, presence of some friends in the same university, entrance examination, special characteristics of the department’s research and teaching, costs and advertisement, influence student’s university choice. Hsuan and Chi Hung developed a research under the title “Marketing mix formulation for higher education” and stated that the purpose of their paper was to examine how a graduate institute at National Chia-yi University (NCYU), by using a model that integrates analytic hierarchy process, cluster analysis and correspondence analysis, can develop effective marketing strategies. The results of AHP revealed that the five most important factors for students’ school selection were employability, curriculum, academic reputation, faculty, and research environment. The results of clustering analysis identified five student groups for market segmentation, which include the Prominence group, the less aware group, the Pragmatic group, the Austerity group, and the fastidious group. Finally, the results of correspondence analysis suggested that students of the pragmatic group are more likely to be attracted by NCYU, and also, students perceived NCYU to be strongly associated with lower tuition, fewer entrance-exam subjects, lower entrance-exam pass rates, and easier graduation requirements (Hsuan and Chi Hung 2008).

There is an article under the title of “satisfaction among current doctoral students in special education” Wasburn-Davis (2008). This article reports the results of a nationwide satisfaction survey of 619 students from 78 doctoral programs. Findings indicate that students appear generally satisfied with their programs. However, areas of concern include program structure, overall workload, and quality of preparation in research.

Meng ei Wong has conducted two research studies since 2004 to 2005, in which he has compared choice of university between students in Japan and Britain. He stated in results of the research in Britain (2004) two groups of visually impaired (VI) students in Britain confronting post-school transition are considered. One group aspires to enter university, the other group has decided on vocational training. Positive image, employment pragmatics and the notion of ‘something extra’ are contributing factors shaping VI students in their post-school choices. Underlying these influences is a determination to ensure employability is achieved at the completion of their chosen post-school path.

Chung and Shyan Fam (2009) have conducted a research about effects of cultural values on university consumers’ choice of international higher education. This paper investigates cultural value influences on student’s decision about study destinations and the sources preferred to gathering information about, in Singapore and Malaysia.

Tackey and Aston (1999, p. 2) argue that the feasible range of options are limited by a variety of factors but mainly educational qualifications, geographical mobility and financial considerations Marketing literature concentrates on the decision-making process which consumers go through before purchasing a product. Since 1999 to 2001, Price et al have conducted a serial research under the title of “The impact of facilities on student choice of university”. There is a report of some important points of this article in the following section: A total of 12 questioning modules were included, among them “type of university”, “reputation of town/city”, “accommodation”, “learning facilities”, “university security”, “transport”, “social facilities”, “sporting facilities”, “childcare facilities” and “university environment”. In the 2000 survey, 12 factors had average importance scores of four or above (high importance). In 2001, this number fell to 11, though the differences are small. The top eight factors, on average, are identical. Of the top six, two might be considered entirely pedagogical: “course” and “teaching reputation”. Four relate to impressions of the study facilities. Of the next six, in both surveys, four might be considered “pure” facilities factors, and two might be influenced by facilities. The evidence provided by the 2000 survey, namely of the importance of factors other than academic reputation in decision making, was confirmed in 2001. Accommodation factors tend to follow provision. The importance
of “availability of university-owned accommodation” was, hardly surprisingly, significantly lowest for three institutions where “proximity to home” was significantly more important.

In Australia, James et al. (1999) have found that: field of study preferences, course and institutional reputations, course entry scores, easy access to home and institutional characteristics in that order exert significant influence on applicants' choice of institution. Overall, costs incurred have usually not been a strong influence in applicants' decisions and choice of university.

While confirming the above research, further dimensions has been added in England. For example, applicants to undergraduate programs in England consider the teaching reputation of universities as more important than their research profiles (Price et al., 2003). In addition, as a result of the newly introduced HE fees in England, there seems to be greater propensity for students to consider more carefully economic factors such as job opportunities to supplement their incomes, accommodation costs and family home proximity as a fall back in times of distress and financial difficulty (Foskett et al. 2006).

Following by Ivy (2002), sixth form students were asked to rank on a 1-10 scale the importance of 30 factors to their decision making in choosing a university. The thirty factors were classified into seven categories: Program, price, place and prominence factors seemed to be the most important in determining students' choice of university for their HE study.

Bennet (2006) has indicated that, as a result of his initiative, the university has increased its applicant retention capacity four fold in the last two years. Equally, university promotional messages need to lay emphasis on issues students find most important to them and not issues universities think are most important to students. This research has found that students do not place equal emphasis to the 7Ps and due consideration must be given to this in developing institutional information and marketing strategies. In conclusion, the HE environment has become increasingly competitive and this research has demonstrated that applicants to HE are no longer passive consumers in this environment. Applicants are becoming discerning choosers in the HE marketplace. The purpose of the paper by (Keskinen, Juhani, Liimola 2008) was to find out which factors contribute to the decisions of the students when they choose their place of study among the six psychology departments of the Universities in Finland. Findings has implicated that the major determinants for university choice for applicants in Finland were the special characteristics of the teaching and research in the psychology departments. An aptitude test seems to the applicants like a natural part of the selection process since the lack of one put off some applicants.

3.METHODOLOGY

Regarding the purpose of the study, this is a practical research because it determines the factors influencing student's university selection, and regarding methodology, it is a descriptive survey. University officials can plan programs based on findings of the present research. The statistical population and samples include all pre-university students in Gilan and Mazandaran provinces. Cluster Sampling was conducted. As a result, after determining two provinces, 13 cities were randomly selected among all cities, and then by referring to educational departments, a list of all schools in the district was taken, and the questionnaires were distributed in those schools. There were 40761 students in research population, among whom 381 samples were selected based on Morgan schedule. Data gathering tool- Data gathering tool was a questionnaire containing 24 multiple-choice and four open-ended questions. Also three blank spaces were anticipated in the questionnaire so that the subjects could add additional views. The validity of the questionnaire was calculated to be 0.79 through using Spearman re-test, and its reliability was assessed via a pilot study and approved by experts' view. Data analysis- The data collected have been summarized in frequency tables and then described appropriately in inferential statistics. Because we used rank scale data, non-parametric methods were used. In order to determine whether the factors were different among students or not, Friedman test was used. Then in order to determine which factors were more effective and which ones less effective W Kendall test was used. In order to compare the observed results and the expected results from the open-ended questions, chi-square test was applied. First of all, each factor's importance was evaluated separately, and in the second step to determine which factors were more important, the factors were compared one by one. The open-ended questions were analyzed by chi square method, and for each of them effect size was calculated via correlation coefficient method.

4.DATA ANALYSIS

In order to recognize factors influencing university choice among pre-university students, four sets of factors were determined including:
1. economic factors
2. university-related factors
3. personal factors
4. social factors
The following table shows the results of statistical analysis on the above-mentioned factors.

Table 1: statistical index with chi square and effect size results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>$x^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Ef</th>
<th>Rr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic factors</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>103.823</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>P&lt;01</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University-related factors</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>245.082</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>P&lt;01</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal factors</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>102.504</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>P&lt;01</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social factors</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>20.887</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>P&lt;01</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the results shown in table 1 the economic factors are on the top ($Ef .091$). University-related factors are in the second place ($Ef .071$). Personal factors are in the third place ($EF.067$) and at the end, social factors are in the fourth place ($EF.018$). All factors were evaluated as effective.

Each of the above factors was divided into some sub-categories which are as follows:

- Economic factors included relationship between university and labor markets, tuition, opportunities for finding job out of the university, and opportunities for getting a job inside the university
- University-related factors included facilities for students, university's academic reputation, teachers’ academic reputation, Customer centeredness, new and rare courses, availability of post-graduate education, workshop and laboratory, relationship with universities in foreign countries, extra-curricular programs and the quality of students' life
- Personal factors included teacher and advisor counseling, personal interest to the university and parental influence, vicinity of the university, and the university's leniency towards religious matters and students' behavior.
- Social factors included university's moral reputation, security of the city in which university was established, welfare facilities around the university, welfare facilities within the university.

Table 2: four sets of factors and their sub-categories ranking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Economic factors</th>
<th>Ranking mean</th>
<th>Re-ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with labor market</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for job outside university</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for job inside university</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer centeredness</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher's academic reputation</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University's academic reputation</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet and library</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular programs and life quality</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to post-graduate education</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with universities in other countries</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop and laboratory</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rare courses</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal interest and parental influence</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicinity of the university</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher counseling</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leniency towards religious matters</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security of city in which university was established</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities around the university</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities inside the university</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University's moral reputation</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows the results of statistical calculation on the four sets of factors. As it can be seen in table 2, the economic factors received the highest rank among the factors influencing choice of university. Among sub-categories of the economic factors, the relationship between university and labor markets has taken the highest rank (Rm. 2.93), tuition (Rm. 2.57) in the second rank, opportunities for jobs outside the university (2.31) in the third place, and opportunities for part-time jobs inside the university (Rm. 2.19) in the fourth place. University-related factors included ten components. Under this factor, there are facilities for students (Rm. 6.38), Customer centeredness (Rm. 6.4), part-time academic reputation (Rm. 6.02), university's academic reputation (Rm.5.96), library and internet (Rm. 5.88), extracurricular programs and quality of life (Rm. 5.39), availability of post-graduate education (Rm. 5.31), the university's relationship with other universities (Rm. 5.20), lab and workshop (Rm. 4.95), and rare or unique courses (Rm. 3.87), which have gained the ranking of 1 to 10, respectively. Personal factors were placed in the third position, which included individual interest to the university and parental influence (Rm. 3.43), viceyness of the curriculum (Rm. 3.32), teacher counseling (Rm. 2.83), and leniency towards religious matters (Rm. 2.57). Finally, social factors included security of the city in which the university is established (Rm. 2.66), facilities around the university (Rm. 2.53), facility inside the university (Rm. 2.46) and university's moral reputation (Rm. 2.35).

One factor that influences students' choice of university is advertising from the side of the university. The students were asked questions about the ways they have received information about the college that they were going to select. Analyzing data was done through chi-square test. The results are summarized in table 3. In order to be concise, only the first three high frequent answers to each open-ended question are reported in this table.

Table 3: findings from open-ended questions about students' sources of information about university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Three more frequent answers</th>
<th>FO</th>
<th>FE</th>
<th>Ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what ways did you get your information?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x^2 = 340.250, \sigma = 0.00$</td>
<td>School 67, Friends 67, Internet 38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is your information enough about the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>university that you want to choose?</td>
<td>$x^2 = 204.873, \sigma = 0.00$</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To some extent 31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your favorite sources for getting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information?</td>
<td></td>
<td>School 132, TV 42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x^2 = 457.401, \sigma = 0.00$</td>
<td></td>
<td>Specific journals and magazines 30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What reasons make you select a university?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University's academic reputation 88</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x^2 = 528.379, \sigma = 0.00$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vicinity to university 78</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good teachers and professors 60</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on information summarized in table 3, 68.7 per cent of the students reported that their information is not enough for selecting a university. 9.3 per cent reported that they do not have any information about the university they want to select. Only 22 per cent claimed they have adequate information. 64 per cent of students gained their information from school counselors, 20 per cent from TV and 14 per cent from related publications. In answer to the question "what reasons make you select a university?", 35 per cent mentioned "University's academic reputation", 31 per cent referred to "vicinity of the university", and the 24 per cent mentioned "good teachers and professors". The Chi-square with 99 per cent confidence has shown there is a significant difference among answers.

5. RESEARCH CONCLUSION

5.1. Economic factors

Economic factors were the most effective factors in selecting a university compared with the other factors. Economic factors depend on the student's economical conditions during and after education in the university. In this domain, the researcher has inquired about some components including university's relationship with labor markets, possibility of finding a prospective job, and the opportunity for getting a part time job and earning money during study. In many developed countries, universities have a close relationship with labor markets and entrepreneurs. The results show that relationship with labor markets gained the top rank (ranking mean 2.93). Regarding this factor, universities can form a department to improve their relationship with industries, and post bulletins about their students' capabilities and introduce them to the labor markets. The fact that economical factors were placed at the top is in line with findings of Maring (2006) who believes that university's relationship with the labor market and the perspective of future jobs is a more effective factor influencing choice of university than personal interest in a field of study. Among the economic factors, tuition (ranking mean 2.57) has gained the second place. Changing the method of paying the tuition, for example, through giving loan to students, or deferred payment until after students graduate and find a job can be a factor to attract students. Concerning opportunities for working outside or inside the university campus (2.31 and 2.19 ranking mean), results of this research are consistent with findings of the Maring (2006), Borjas (1999), Jaims et al (1999),

5.2. University related factors (effect size .071)

This set of components stood in the second place. As shown in table 2, among the sub-categories, well-fare facilities for students is at the top, Customer centeredness of authorities in the second place, teachers' and university's academic reputation in the third and fourth place, library and internet, extracurricular programs and quality of students' life, availability of post-graduate studies, and relationship with foreign universities are in the fifth to eighth place, respectively. Also, laboratory and workshop, and access to rare courses are in the last place. Facilities; the facilities for students (ranking mean 6.38) gained the first place in this research. Among previous research studies, the most significant investigation was conducted by green (1994) who separated facilities from factors related to facilities and suggested both of them influence choice of university. Moreover, Bening and Bening (1986) and Bening and McKinly (1980) came to similar results. All in all, results of the present study are line with the results of the previous studies.

- Customer centeredness: Customer centeredness has gained the second rank in this research (ranking mean 6.4). This factor can be observed in a broad range of university functions. Also, it can play an important role in publicity for the university. Customer centeredness is one of the two factors that Maring (2006) indicated in his research. In this research, some questions were asked about concepts like students' rights, but unfortunately some students did not have any idea about what was meant by customer centeredness.
- Teaching quality or teacher's academic reputation: this component came in the third rank with the mean of 6.02. Also, in the open-ended questions, it was one of the three top components among reasons for selecting a university. In this regard, findings of this research are consistent with studies by Price et al (2003), James et al (1999) and Hesoo-An and Chihang (2008).
- University's academic reputation: University's academic reputation was placed in the fourth rank (rank mean 5.96). Totally, teacher's and university's academic reputation attained a high rank with a strong correlation. Moreover, they gained the highest rank among factors influencing university selection in open-ended questions. This factor can be important in signing academic contracts with universities in other countries. Also, Bradford (2008), Hesooan and Chihang (2008), Foskett et al (2006), Maring (2006), Pimpa (2005), Price (2000 and 2001), James et al (2000) have come to the same results. Yet Maring (2006) only referred to the official reputation of the university and not to the academic reputation.
- Library and internet: Importance of library and internet in students' viewpoint gained the fifth rank (rank mean 5.88). This component was rarely investigated in the related literature. Only Price (2001 and 2002) considered it as a separate factor, which is in line with the results of the present study. That educational facilities were not included in the previous studies might be due to the fact that workshop, library, laboratory and internet are taken for granted for a university.
- Extracurricular programs and quality of student life: Findings show that this component has attained the sixth rank (rank mean 5.39), which compared with many other components has not been favored by the subjects. Regarding this factor, the results can be compared with Taky and Aston's research (1999), which came to similar results.

5.3. Personal factors

Personal factors in this research attained the third position (effect size .067). This factor included four components including parental influence and personal interest (rank mean 3.43), vicinity of the university (rank mean 3.32), teacher counseling (rank mean 2.83), and leniency towards religious matters (rank mean 2.12), which came in the first to the fourth place respectively.
- Parental influence and personal interest: Price et al (2003) consider parental influence among factors related to attractiveness of a field of study. Unlike Price et al's study (2003), this research shows that parental influence gained the top rank among factors influencing choice of university. Price, quoting Foskett and Hemsley-Broun (2001) indicates that "parental influence on schooling decisions seems to wane as the children become older". The findings in this research are in contrast with findings of the previous research by Foskett and Hemsley-Broun (2001). This can be accounted for by referring to the fact that in Iran there is a stronger relationship between parents and children compared with that in western families. However, the results concerning the influence of parents on students' choice of university are consistent with findings of Kattlre and Armestrang (1994), who considered parental influence as an external factor that influences students' selection.
- Vicinity of the university: Vicinity of the university has been considered as an important factor influencing choice of university both in studies about national and in studies about international higher education. Vicinity to university gained the second rank among personal factors (ranking mean 3.32). This is considered an important factor by subject since it is related to students' emotions and feelings, costs of
commuting to the university, boarding, and their optimum use of weekend, etc. The findings again are in line with previous research findings specially those by Price et al (2003).

- Influence of school teachers' counseling: this component gained the third rank in answers to the multiple-questions (ranking mean 2.83), but it proved the highest frequency in open-ended questions. It is consistent with reports by price et al (2003); Ivy (2002); and Jame et al (1999), who suggested that 'secondary school teachers could be universities' greatest allies in helping students decision making about higher education.
- Leniency towards religious matters: This component is at the lowest level of importance in ranking (ranking mean 2.12). This factor has not been studied in the related literature before. This is because issues related to limitations about wearing makeup, Islamic hijab ( a cover for hair and body for women), or wearing jewelry are given more emphasis in Iranian university than in other universities.

5.4. Social factors

This is the least significant factor among the four factors that were studied in this research (effect size .018). It includes four components, i.e., security of the city in which the university is established (ranking mean 2.66), urban facilities around the university (ranking mean 2.53), the facilities in the university campus (ranking mean 2.46), and university's moral reputation (ranking mean 2.35), which ranked first to fourth, respectively. Under this category, there are two separate sets of components—the components that are important in Iran but less important in other countries, and the components that are least important in Iran but significant in other countries. This could be due to the fact that the first set of factors are taken for granted in many other countries but not in Iran, and instead the second group of factors are beyond students' expectations in Iran, but they fulfilled in other countries.

- Social security in the city in which the university is located: This component was placed at the top among sub-categories of social factors (ranking mean 2.66). In Taky and Aston (1999), as quoted by Price (2003), this factor came fifth among the ten factors studied. Social security was given more weight by subjects in this study than those in other studies.
- Urban facilities around the university: It should be noted that many universities in Iran are located away from cities and villages. Since vicinity of the university is considered very important to students, more attention should be given to this factor. Urban facilities such as costs of accommodation and commuting were placed in the third rank (ranking mean 2.46). Taky and Aston (1999) indicated that city's reputation was placed in the second rank, environmental factors in the fourth, and costs of commuting in the fifth place among ten factors studied, which is in line with the results of the present study.
- Facilities in the university campus: The range of facilities (e.g., bank, bookshop, transportation agency, restaurant, etc) (ranking mean 2.53) which came in the second rank this research, was placed in the fifteenth and tenth place in Price's surveys in 2000 and 2001, respectively.
- University's moral reputation: This was the least important component in students' viewpoint, which was placed in the fourth rank (ranking mean 2.35).

Methods of getting information about university: In the open-ended questions, there were two questions about this factor. First, the subjects were asked "do you have adequate information about the university you want to go to?" The answer "NO" (82.2 per cent) was significantly more than the answer "YES" (26.2 per cent). It shows lack of adequate information for school students about universities, so they have to get information from irresponsible references such as friends and non-professionals. Secondly, the subjects were asked to list the references through which they prefer to get information about universities. The answers showed that the most favorite resources are school's counselors, TV, and specific publications, which came in the first to third places, respectively. It is, therefore, suggested that universities do establish broader relationship with schools and students and give them the information they need for decision-making.

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