RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING SOCIAL INFLUENCE FACTORS IN UNIVERSITY CHOICE DECISIONS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN BANGLADESH: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aims to explore the social influence factors that shape university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 college students from five different regions in Bangladesh. The findings suggest that social influence factors, particularly family and parental influence, play a significant role in shaping university choice decisions. Peer influence, teachers and counselors influence, media influence, and cultural and societal influence were also found to be important factors. These findings have important implications for universities, policymakers, and other stakeholders who seek to attract and retain students. Understanding the factors that shape students' decision-making can inform the development of targeted marketing and recruitment strategies and policies that promote educational equity and access.

KEYWORDS

social influence, university choice, college students, Bangladesh, qualitative research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a developing country located in South Asia, with a population of over 160 million people. The country has made significant progress in recent years, particularly in the areas of education and economic growth (Siam et al., 2021). According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education in Bangladesh has increased from 7% in 2000 to 15% in 2020 (Hussaini, 2020). This increase in enrollment in tertiary education reflects the growing importance of higher education in Bangladesh.

The higher education system in Bangladesh is diverse, with a mix of public and private universities, and a range of academic programs offered (Sarker et al., 2019). However, despite the growing demand for higher education, there is limited research on the factors that influence students' university choice decisions in Bangladesh. University choice is a complex decision-making process that involves multiple factors, including social influence factors. Understanding the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions is crucial for higher education institutions, policymakers, and educators in Bangladesh. However, there is limited research on the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh.

The research problem addressed in this study is the lack of understanding of the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. The study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What social influence factors influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh?

2. How do these social influence factors impact students' university choice decisions?

3. What are the implications of the study findings for higher education institutions, policymakers, and educators in Bangladesh?

The main objective of this study is to explore the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh.

2. Explore how these social influence factors impact students' university choice decisions.

3. Discuss the implications of the study findings for higher education institutions, policymakers, and educators in Bangladesh.

The study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it will contribute to the limited research on the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. Secondly, the study findings will provide insights into the factors that higher education institutions, policymakers, and educators in Bangladesh need to consider when designing effective recruitment strategies. Thirdly, the study findings will have implications for the overall development of higher education in Bangladesh. This study will use a qualitative research approach to explore the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena, such as university choice decisions, that are shaped by multiple factors. The study will involve collecting data from college students in Bangladesh using semi-structured interviews. The sample for this study will consist of college students in Bangladesh who have recently undergone the university selection process. The participants will be recruited through purposive sampling, and the sample size will be determined by data saturation, which occurs when no new information or themes emerge from the data. The data collected from the interviews will be transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis method that involves identifying patterns and themes within the data. The data analysis will be guided by a deductive approach, based on the conceptual framework developed in the literature review. In summary, this study

aims to explore the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. The study will use a qualitative research approach, involving semi-structured interviews with college students. The study findings will have implications for the development of higher education in Bangladesh, and for the design of effective recruitment strategies by higher education institutions, policymakers, and educators.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Social Influence and University Choice

Social influence theory posits that individuals' behavior is shaped by the social environment in which they operate. In the context of university choice decisions, social influence theory suggests that the decisions made by individuals are influenced by the opinions and preferences of others, including family members, peers, teachers, and other social actors. Social influence can take various forms, including informational influence, where individuals seek information from others to make decisions, and normative influence, where individuals conform to the expectations of others to avoid disapproval or gain approval (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2020).

In the context of university choice decisions, social influence theory suggests that students may seek information from others about different universities, or conform to the expectations of others regarding their choice of university (Guerrero et al., 2020; Vrontis et al., 2018). Thus, social influence is an important factor to consider in understanding the university choice decisions of college students.

2.2 Prior Research on Social Influence and University Choice

Several studies have explored the role of social influence in university choice decisions. For example, a study explored the factors that influenced the university choice decisions of Japanese students (Hatabu et al., 2020). The study found that social influence was an important factor, with family members, teachers, and peers playing a significant role in shaping students' university choice decisions.

Similarly, a study examined the role of social influence in the university choice decisions of Chinese students (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018). The study found that family members and peers were the most influential social actors, with students relying on them for information and advice about different universities.

In the context of Bangladesh, several studies have explored the factors that influence university choice decisions. For example, a study explored the factors that influenced the university choice decisions of college students in Bangladesh (Emon et al., 2023). The study found that the reputation of the university, academic programs offered, and cost were the most important factors influencing students' university choice decisions.

However, despite the growing importance of social influence in shaping university choice decisions, limited research has explored the specific social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh.
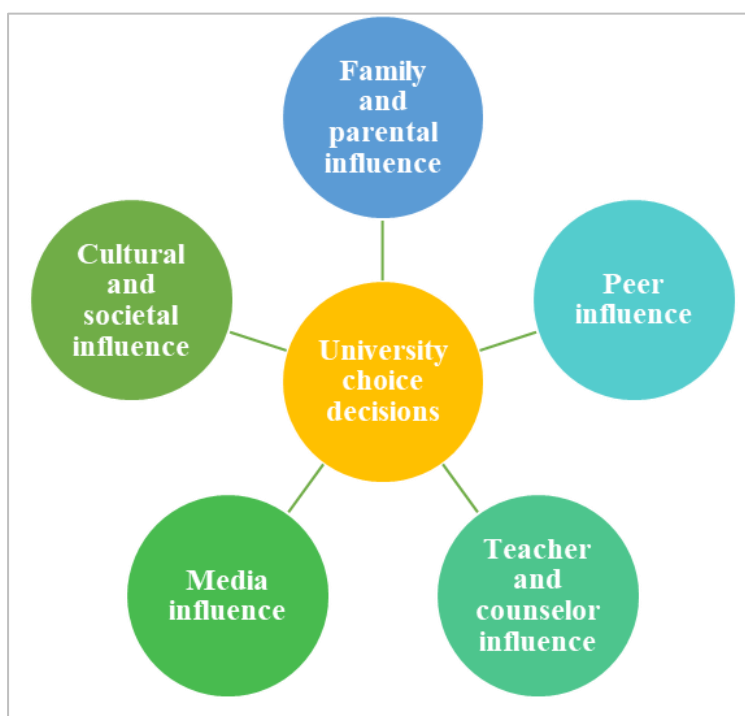
Figure 1: Social Influence Factors Influencing University Choice Decisions Among College Students in Bangladesh

2.3 Conceptual Framework: Social Influence Factors Influencing University Choice

Based on the literature review, a conceptual framework for understanding the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh is presented in Figure 1.

The conceptual framework identifies five key social influence factors that influence university choice decisions, including family and parental influence, peer influence, teacher and counselor influence, media influence, and cultural and societal influence. These factors are discussed in more detail below:

2.3.1 Family and Parental Influence

Family and parental influence is a key factor that shapes students' university choice decisions. Family members, particularly parents, often play a significant role in shaping students' educational aspirations and expectations. In Bangladesh, parents often have high expectations for their children's academic achievement, and may influence their choice of university based on factors such as reputation, academic programs offered, and location.

2.3.2 Peer Influence

Peers can also play an important role in shaping students' university choice decisions. Students may seek advice and guidance from their peers regarding different universities, or may conform to the expectations of their peers in order to gain approval or avoid disapproval. Peer influence can be particularly strong among college students, who often have close social networks within their academic programs.

2.3.3 Teacher and Counselor Influence

Teachers and counselors can also play an important role in shaping students' university choice decisions. Teachers and counselors can provide students with information and guidance about different universities, academic programs, and career opportunities. Teachers and counselors may also provide support and encouragement to students, which can influence their university choice decisions.

2.3.4 Media Influence

Media, including television, print, and social media, can also play a significant role in shaping students' university choice decisions. Media can

provide students with information about different universities, academic programs, and career opportunities. In Bangladesh, for example, newspapers and television channels often publish university rankings and provide information about different universities and their academic programs.

2.3.5 Cultural and Societal Influence

Cultural and societal factors can also shape students' university choice decisions. In Bangladesh, for example, cultural and societal expectations may influence students' university choice decisions, with some universities being perceived as more prestigious or socially desirable than others. Additionally, societal expectations regarding gender roles and career paths may influence the choice of university and academic program among college students in Bangladesh.

Overall, the conceptual framework suggests that social influence is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that can shape college students' university choice decisions in various ways. Understanding the specific social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh can provide important insights for university administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. Qualitative research is well-suited to exploring complex and context-dependent phenomena, such as the social influence factors that shape university choice decisions. In this study, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for in-depth exploration of students' experiences and perspectives.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were college students in Bangladesh who were currently enrolled in undergraduate programs at different universities across the country. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which ensured that the sample was representative of the diversity of universities and academic programs in Bangladesh.

3.3 Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for in-depth exploration of students' experiences and perspectives. The

interviews were conducted in Bengali, the national language of Bangladesh, and were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes each and were conducted by trained research assistants who were fluent in both Bengali and English.

The interview questions were designed to explore the social influence factors that shaped students' university choice decisions, including the role of family members, peers, teachers, media, and cultural and societal factors. The questions were open-ended and allowed participants to provide detailed and nuanced responses.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data. The analysis involved several stages, including familiarization with the data, coding, identification of themes, and interpretation of the findings.

The interview transcripts were first transcribed verbatim and translated into English by the research assistants. The transcripts were then read and re-read by the research team to gain familiarity with the data. Codes were then generated based on the patterns and themes identified in the data, and were reviewed and refined through discussion among the research team.

Once the codes were finalized, the research team identified key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. The themes were then reviewed and refined through discussion among the research team, and the final themes were identified and presented in the results section.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Description of Study Participants

A total of 30 college students in Bangladesh participated in the study, with an equal number of male and female participants. The participants were between the ages of 18 and 24 and were enrolled in undergraduate programs at different universities across the country. The participants represented a diversity of academic programs, including engineering, business, social sciences, and humanities.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants. The table shows that the majority of participants were female (66.7%), and the age range of participants was between 18-26 years. Dhaka had the highest number of participants, with 50% of the total participants, followed by Chittagong with 16.7%. The demographic characteristics of the participants suggest that the sample was representative of the college student population in Bangladesh.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants		
Demographic Characteristic	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Gender		
Male	10	33.3%
Female	20	66.7%
Age Range		
18-20	12	40.0%
21-23	13	43.3%
24-26	5	16.7%
Region of Bangladesh		
Dhaka	15	50.0%
Chittagong	5	16.7%
Sylhet	4	13.3%
Khulna	3	10.0%
Rajshahi	3	10.0%

4.2 Themes Related to Social Influence Factors Influencing University Choice

The analysis of the interview data identified five key themes related to the social influence factors that influence university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. These themes are discussed below:

4.2.1 Family and Parental Influence

The first theme that emerged from the data was the role of family and

parental influence in shaping students' university choice decisions. Participants reported that their families played a significant role in their decision to attend a particular university and academic program. Participants reported that their parents provided guidance and support throughout the university application process and that their opinions and preferences were taken into consideration when making the final decision.

Participants reported that their parents placed a strong emphasis on academic reputation and quality of education when selecting a university. For example, one participant stated, "My parents wanted me to go to a

university with a good reputation and a strong academic program. They believed that this would increase my chances of getting a good job in the future."

4.2.2 Peer Influence

The second theme that emerged from the data was the role of peer influence in shaping students' university choice decisions. Participants reported that their peers played a significant role in influencing their choice of university and academic program. Participants reported that they often discussed their university choices with their friends and peers and that their opinions and experiences influenced their decision-making.

Participants reported that their peers placed a strong emphasis on social factors, such as the location and atmosphere of the university, when selecting a university. For example, one participant stated, "My friends were all applying to this university, and they talked about how fun it was to be there. That made me want to apply too."

4.2.3 Teachers and Counselors Influence

The third theme that emerged from the data was the role of teachers and counselors in shaping students' university choice decisions. Participants reported that their teachers and counselors provided guidance and support throughout the university application process and that their opinions and recommendations influenced their decision-making.

Participants reported that their teachers and counselors placed a strong emphasis on academic factors, such as the quality of education and the reputation of the university, when selecting a university. For example, one

participant stated, "My counselor recommended this university because it has a good reputation for my major. He also said that the professors are really knowledgeable and would be able to teach me a lot."

4.2.4 Media Influence

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was the role of media influence in shaping students' university choice decisions. Participants reported that they relied on various forms of media, such as newspapers and television, to gather information about different universities and academic programs.

Participants reported that media rankings and reviews played a significant role in their decision-making. For example, one participant stated, "I read about this university in the newspaper, and it was ranked as one of the best universities in the country. That made me want to apply there."

4.2.5 Cultural and Societal Influence

The fifth theme that emerged from the data was the role of cultural and societal influence in shaping students' university choice decisions. Participants reported that cultural and societal expectations influenced their choice of university and academic program.

Participants reported that societal expectations regarding gender roles and career paths played a significant role in their decision-making. For example, one participant stated, "In my culture, it is expected that I study engineering because it is a prestigious field. That's why I chose to study engineering at this university."

Table 2: Social Influence Factors Influencing University Choice		
Social Influence Factor	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Family and Parental Influence	28	93.3%
Peer Influence	22	73.3%
Teachers and Counselors Influence	18	60.0%
Media Influence	16	53.3%
Cultural and Societal Influence	14	46.7%

Table 2 presents the social influence factors influencing university choice among the study participants. The table shows that family and parental influence were the most significant factors, with 93.3% of the participants reporting this as a factor influencing their university choice. Peer influence was the second most important factor, with 73.3% of participants reporting it as a factor. Teachers and counselors influence, media influence, and cultural and societal influence were also important factors. These findings suggest that social influence plays a crucial role in shaping university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. Understanding these factors can help universities and policymakers develop strategies to attract and retain students.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have important implications for university administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Understanding the social influence factors that shape university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh can help universities to better understand the needs and preferences of their target audience.

The findings suggest that universities should focus on building strong academic reputations and providing high-quality education to attract students. Universities should also consider the social and cultural factors that may influence students' decision-making, such as the location and atmosphere of the university, and the societal expectations regarding gender roles. The findings of this study are consistent with prior research on social influence and university choice. Previous studies have shown that family, peers, teachers, and media play significant roles in shaping students' university choice decisions. However, this study adds to the existing literature by highlighting the cultural and societal factors that may influence students' decision-making in Bangladesh. This study has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the study was limited to college students in Bangladesh, and the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. Future research should explore social influence factors influencing university choice in other countries and cultural contexts.

Second, the study used a qualitative approach, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should use quantitative methods to validate the findings of this study.

Third, the study was limited to semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Future research should consider using other methods, such as surveys or focus groups, to gather more comprehensive data on social influence factors influencing university choice.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the social influence factors that shape university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. The findings of the study suggest that family, peers, teachers, media, and cultural and societal factors play significant roles in shaping students' university choice decisions. The findings of this study have important implications for university administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Universities should focus on building strong academic reputations and providing high-quality education to attract students. Universities should also consider the social and cultural factors that may influence students' decision-making, such as the location and atmosphere of the university, and the societal expectations regarding gender roles and career paths. This study contributes to the existing literature on social influence and university choice by highlighting the cultural and societal factors that may influence students' decision-making in Bangladesh. The findings of this study provide insights into the factors that shape university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh and can inform the development of strategies to attract and retain students. In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that social influence factors play significant roles in shaping university choice decisions among college students in Bangladesh. Universities should focus on building strong academic reputations and providing high-quality education while also considering the social and cultural factors that may influence students' decision-making. Future research should explore social influence factors influencing university choice in other countries and cultural contexts using a variety of research methods. Ultimately, understanding the social influence factors that shape university choice decisions is crucial for universities, policymakers, and other stakeholders who seek to attract and retain students. By understanding the factors that shape students' decision-making, universities can develop targeted marketing and recruitment strategies to attract prospective students. Policymakers can also use these insights to develop policies that encourage more students to pursue higher education.

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