The factors that students consider in university and department selection: A qualitative and quantitative study of Kocaeli University, Faculty of Education students

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Abstract

People spend the majority of their lifetime having a good career with the aim of a high quality life. Universities have an enormous influence in determining individuals’ quality of life and careers. Although universities are not institutions which have the obligation to be vocationally oriented, students view universities as vocational institutions which lead to employment. Therefore, students choose among a variety of universities in order to reach the jobs in their vision. The aim of this study is to determine the factors students consider when choosing a university. The study was conducted by means of survey method aided by qualitative and quantitative research models. The sample comprised 290 students selected by stratified random sampling out of 535 freshman year students enrolled in 7 different programs at Kocaeli University, Faculty of Education in fall 2011. Questionnaires and interview forms were employed as data collection instruments. The collected qualitative data will be analyzed via content analysis; as for the quantitative data, they were evaluated by means of arithmetic mean. The results point out that students make a serious amount of research on their own as well as with their family and teachers’ help when choosing university and department. The foremost reason why teacher candidates choose their profession is that they love teaching, their ÖSYS (university entrance exam) score is sufficient for teaching and that teaching graduates have little difficulty finding employment. Another finding is that students consider factors apart from the ÖSYS score when selecting department and universities. In general, the factor that influences students most in department and university selection is the physical conditions of the university. This is followed by the city where the university is located, the university’s socio-cultural facilities and the informal information, rumors, and stories about the university.

Keywords: University, department selection, reasons for selection

1. Introduction

Higher education is a significant domain for raising qualified manpower needed for the country and generating knowledge (Gürüz, 2001). Higher education usually takes place in universities. University is derived from...
"universitas" in Latin. "Universitas" means "an area where people come together and converse, where information is organized systematically and ideas are freely expressed (Akgül Barış, 2007). In Turkey, university is defined in the Higher Education Law numbered 2547 as "a higher education institution with scientific autonomy and public entity, offering higher education, scientific research, publication and consultancy and is comprised of units such as faculty, institute, vocational school, etc. (YÖK, 2007).

Universities are environments where individuals center on the rational process rather than the emotional process, recognize the current events by observation and discussion and thanks to this awareness, try to develop a scientific outlook towards events (Akgül Barış, 2007).

Universities are not only vocational organizations but also centers where scientific research is carried out and published. Universities teach individuals how to think analytically over events and issues and be free in life (Gökçe, 1990; Velidedeoğlu, 1990). University education aims to help the individual to recognize the characteristics of one's society and the world in order to prepare and develop the individual to life as a whole. In addition, university helps the individual to analyze events and concepts as well as to develop oneself and mature in accordance with one's age (Ortaş, 2005). University which is described in the above definitions has certain functions. The leading functions are to create and disseminate knowledge.

Goldstein, Maier and Luger (1995) have expanded the traditional university functions to include forming the necessary human capital, generating knowledge, creating innovation, explaining how and why technology emerges, regional leadership, capital investment, forming information background, developing regional atmosphere (cited in Drucker and Goldstein, 2007).

University's functions can be classified under three headings: education, basic scientific research, and social services (Doğramacı, 2000). University aims to form qualified human power by means of using students' interest, talent and capacities in a rational way (Sayan and Aksu, 2005). Students try to attend universities in order to gain the qualities stated in universities' aims and functions and to develop themselves in the best way. However, there is also a perception that universities are only vocational institutions. In Turkey, there are certain requirements for being a university student. These are completion of primary and secondary education with success, and getting sufficient scores in the two-stage ÖSYS (Student Selection and Placement Exam). The description of exam by Student Selection and Placement Center in 2011 is as follows: In the first place, students enter the Entrance into Higher Education exam (YGS) which contains 40-item tests on Turkish, Basic Mathematics, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences. Students who receive 180 and higher in this exam have the right to enter the second exam. For sections like fine arts, conservatory which accept students on the basis of special talent, it is sufficient for students to score 140 and higher. As for the second exam, it is called the Undergraduate Placement Exam (LYS) which comprises six sections. In this exam, the content and weight of each section is different (ÖSYM, p. 28). In the university entrance process, candidates choose among the universities and departments in the university selection list guide published by ÖSYM. This process ends with the placement of candidates to the university departments in line with their preferences in the central placement system. University candidates go through a series of decision making processes until they are placed in a program.

The more the individual's options, the more complex the decision making process becomes. Within this process, individuals are under the influence of various internal (personal or mental) and external (environmental) factors. These influences lead to a number of pressures and conflicts in the individual. Especially the idea that the university and department to be selected is crucial for one's future complicates the selection process. University selection has a highly significant position in a person's life. For, university constitutes a significant step in an individual's personal development in terms of enculturation, gaining information, utilizing and generating information, beginning a career, etc. One of the most significant stages of the university education process which starts with exam preparation is university and department selection. In the previous literature, there are limited studies on students' university preferences (Becerener, 2010; Özgüven, 2011; Gavcar, Bulut and Karabulut, 2005; Kazoleas, Kim and Moffitt, 2001; Saroğlu and Özkan, 2009). The present research is highly critical in terms of demonstrating the criteria that students consider when making department and university selection. The study will not only enlighten the university candidates in university selection but also give clues to the universities as to why they are selected. In this context, the answers to the following questions were traced:
What are the criteria considered by Faculty of Education students when making university and department selection? To what extent do these criteria influence university and department selection?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The present study brings together qualitative and quantitative methods.

2.2. Sample

The sample comprised 290 students selected by stratified random sampling out of 535 freshman year students enrolled in 7 different programs at Kocaeli University, Faculty of Education in fall 2011. Of the questionnaires distributed to 290 students, 200 were returned and processed. A total of 200 students, 34 male (17%) and 166 female (83%) students, participated in the study. Of these 200 students, 149 (74.5%) were daytime students while 51 (25.5%) were in the evening program. Among the participants, 83 (42.6%) had graduated from Anatolian high school, 74 (37.9%) graduated from general high school, 30 (15.4%) had graduated from Anatolian teacher training high school and 8 (4.1%) had graduated from vocational technical high school. The participants' families' monthly income varied between 100-6000 TL and the mean income level was 765 TL. The distribution of the participants on the basis of program type was as follows: Of the participants, 41 (20.8%) studied primary school education, 38 (19.3%) studied English education, 37 (18.8%) studied science education, 33 (16.8%) studied primary mathematics education, 18 (9.1%) studied preschool education, 17 (8.6%) studied psychological counseling and guidance and 13 (6.6%) studied Turkish education.

2.3. Data Collection Instrument

Research data were collected by means of a 61-item "University Students' Selection Criteria" questionnaire prepared on the basis of interview with students and the previous literature (Polat, 2011; Özgüven, 2011; Beceren, 2010; Sarıoğlu and Özkan, 2009; Gavcar, Bulut and Karabulut, 2005; Kazoleas, Kim and Moffitt, 2001).

In the questionnaire, the criteria for university and department selection were classified under five headings: a) information, rumors and stories about the university, b) the city where the university is located, c) the university's physical conditions, d) the university's socio-cultural facilities, e) the university's quality.

3. Findings and Interpretation

To the question, "Have you made research about the department you selected", 77% (f=454) of the participants replied as "Yes" while 23% (f=46) replied as "No". This illustrates that the majority of students made conscientious decisions.

To the question "Who helped you when making university and department selection?" students mostly replied as follows: my own efforts (f=39), my family (f=38), my private course teachers (f=31), my school teachers (f=26), the Internet, university guides, seminar and presentations, etc. (f=26), and my friends (f=21).

To the question "Why did you select the department?" the majority replied as "I love teaching" (f=90). Other replies to this question were as follows: since my ÖSS score was sufficient for it (f=39), in order to get a job as soon as possible since I am aware of the teacher gap (f=23), in order not to be unemployed (f=20), in order to experience the university life (f=17), upon the recommendation of friends studying in faculties of education (f=17), family/environmental support (f=16) and upon the recommendation of high school teachers. (f=15).

To the question "Did any other factors apart from the ÖSYM score influence you?" 57.3% (f=110) of the participants replied as "Yes" and 42.7% (f=82) replied as "No". As is seen, the ÖSYM score is not the only reason
underlying university and department selection in Turkey. Although these scores maintain the minimum requirements, there are other factors influencing students' university and department selection.

On the whole, the variable that influences students the most in making university and department selection is the university's physical condition (\( \bar{X} = 3.34; S = .92 \)), followed by the university's quality (\( \bar{X} = 3.15; S = 1.00 \)), the city factor (\( \bar{X} = 3.00; S = .815 \)), the university's socio-cultural facilities (\( \bar{X} = 2.71; S = .93 \)), the information, rumors and stories about the university (\( \bar{X} = 2.08; S = .66 \)).

An analysis of the items related to the university's physical conditions reveals that students take into account the appearance of campus and buildings the most (\( \bar{X} = 3.91; S = 1.19 \)), which is followed by the university's infrastructure (library, computer, the Internet, dining hall, library, sports hall, dormitory, etc.) (\( \bar{X} = 3.69; S = 1.27 \)), campus organization and the buildings (\( \bar{X} = 3.55; S = 1.37 \)), whether the university has a campus or not (\( \bar{X} = 3.51; S = 1.44 \)), the accommodation and food facilities (\( \bar{X} = 3.42; S = 1.39 \)), the physical appearance of faculty and classrooms (\( \bar{X} = 3.33; S = 1.32 \)), and the infrastructure of classrooms (board, desk, overhead projector, educational technologies, etc.) (\( \bar{X} = 3.25; S = 1.42 \)), transportation to the campus and city center (\( \bar{X} = 3.05; S = 1.52 \)), and laboratory facilities (\( \bar{X} = 2.55; S = 1.35 \)) respectively.

Among the items related to the university's quality, the item that is considered the most was found to be "high quality education" (\( \bar{X} = 3.63; S = 1.22 \)). This item was followed by the university's postgraduate and doctorate opportunities (\( \bar{X} = 3.48; S = 1.39 \)), being a university with specialization (\( \bar{X} = 3.47; S = 1.33 \)), the prestige of the diploma (\( \bar{X} = 3.44; S = 1.35 \)), the quality of the services given to students (student affairs, medical service, etc.) (\( \bar{X} = 3.38; S = 1.32 \)), the academic personnel (\( \bar{X} = 3.09; S = 1.39 \)), the reputation of the academic programs (\( \bar{X} = 3.04; S = 1.43 \)), international student exchange programs (\( \bar{X} = 3.03; S = 1.51 \)), raising highly qualified graduates (\( \bar{X} = 2.98; S = 1.38 \)), the academic past of the school (years in service) (\( \bar{X} = 2.85; S = 1.38 \)), presenting the students with a wide range of courses (\( \bar{X} = 2.78; S = 1.36 \)), and reputation for scientific studies (\( \bar{X} = 2.66; S = 1.35 \)).

Within the items related to the city that the university is located in, the most important variable influencing students' preferences is the location of the university (\( \bar{X} = 3.73; S = 1.36 \)). Other city-related factors considered in university preferences were as follows: The transportation from the hometown to the city where the university is located (\( \bar{X} = 3.48; S = 1.69 \)), the quality of life in the city where the university is located (\( \bar{X} = 3.41; S = 1.31 \)), the distance between the school's city and the hometown (\( \bar{X} = 3.34; S = 1.75 \)), the opportunities that the university's city offers (\( \bar{X} = 3.26; S = 1.37 \)), the city's socio-cultural structure (\( \bar{X} = 3.21; S = 1.41 \)), the student's familiarity with the city (\( \bar{X} = 3.20; S = 1.67 \)), the city's image in the country (\( \bar{X} = 3.07; S = 1.45 \)), the attractiveness of the city and its surroundings (\( \bar{X} = 2.97; S = 1.51 \)), the accommodation facilities in the city (\( \bar{X} = 2.88; S = 1.53 \)), the economic attractiveness of the city (\( \bar{X} = 2.55; S = 1.40 \)), the employment opportunities in the city (\( \bar{X} = 2.42; S = 1.42 \)), whether the campus is in the city center or not (\( \bar{X} = 2.27; S = 1.43 \)), the climate conditions (\( \bar{X} = 2.27; S = 1.39 \)).

Amongst the factors related to the university's socio-cultural facilities, the campus facilities (such as cafeteria, cinema) (\( \bar{X} = 3.28; S = 1.38 \)) is the most important item that students consider in making preferences. This item is followed by spring festivals, special fun activities (\( \bar{X} = 3.13; S = 1.41 \)), leisurely activities (sports, music, theater, painting, etc.) (\( \bar{X} = 3.08; S = 1.40 \)), artistic activities (exhibitions, concerts, etc.) (\( \bar{X} = 2.94; S = 1.38 \)), the dominance of democratic behaviors (\( \bar{X} = 2.90; S = 1.43 \)), the dormitory and scholarship opportunities provided by the university (\( \bar{X} = 2.81; S = 1.44 \)), equal distance to different political and ideological views (\( \bar{X} = 2.77; S = 1.46 \)), the university's student clubs and activities (\( \bar{X} = 2.74; S = 1.43 \)), sports activities (\( \bar{X} = 2.70; S = 1.44 \)), cheaper living expenses in comparison with other universities (\( \bar{X} = 2.12; S = 1.19 \)), the university's criteria for passing exams, summer school (\( \bar{X} = 2.03; S = 1.28 \)), and the opportunity of part-time work (\( \bar{X} = 2.01; S = 1.25 \)).

"Relatives, families and friends' rumors who have information about the university" (\( \bar{X} = 2.89; S = 1.44 \)) is the most important source of information when students make university preferences. Other sources of information that students frequently use when selecting university are listed as follows: The university's website (\( \bar{X} = 2.77; S = 1.48 \)), rumors of university personnel or students (\( \bar{X} = 2.56; S = 1.48 \)), promotion and advertisements in the virtual environment (\( \bar{X} = 2.55; S = 1.38 \)), university selection guide (\( \bar{X} = 2.48; S = 1.59 \)), rumors of graduates (\( \bar{X} = 2.24; S = 1.36 \)), promotions in private courses or schools (\( \bar{X} = 1.99; S = 1.32 \)), advertisements and news on the media (radio, newspaper, television) (\( \bar{X} = 1.78; S = 1.13 \)), university students' or personnel's personal blogs (\( \bar{X} = 1.76; S = 1.20 \)), participation in university activities or campus visits (\( \bar{X} = 1.63; S = 1.15 \)), university promotion brochures (\( \bar{X} = 1.60; S = 1.15 \)).
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S=1.08), university promotion days (X̄=1.46; S=1.00) and the mail sent directly from the university (X̄=1.37; S=0.87).

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The results point out that students make a serious amount of research on their own as well as with their family and teachers’ help when choosing university and department. In the previous studies, it was understood that students make their university preferences on the basis of such motivating factors as the environment and family or without awareness (Becer en, 2010). The present study points out that students are more conscientious when selecting university and department.

The foremost reason why teacher candidates choose their profession is that they love teaching, their OSYS (university entrance exam) score is sufficient for teaching and that teaching graduates have little difficulty finding employment. Another finding is that students consider factors apart from the OSYS score when selecting department and universities. In general, the factor that influences students most in department and university selection is the physical conditions of the university. This is followed by the city where the university is located, the university’s socio-cultural conditions and the informal information, rumors and stories about the university.

As for the factors that are most important when selecting university and department, the most significant criteria are "university's campus and buildings, the location of the city, the university's infrastructure (library, computer and the Internet, dining hall, library, sports hall, dormitory, etc.), the quality of the university's education, the city where the university is located, the transportation between the student's hometown and the university, postgraduate opportunities, whether it is a specialized university or not, the prestige of the diploma". In a previous study carried out in Muğla University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, an analysis of the reasons for preference revealed that the most significant factor was the university exam score which is followed by the distance to the hometown, the attractiveness of the city and its surroundings (Gavcar, Bulut and Karabulut, 2005). In a study on the reasons for selecting foundation universities, the most influential criterion was found to be the tuition, the quota and the academics, followed by the number of course credits, the university’s year of service, entrance score, the physical structure of the buildings, the campus site and the cultural activities (Özgüven, 2011). This shows that students from different universities and departments may have different university and department preferences.

The current study was carried out only with students of faculty of education, which is a limitation. A study considering students from different academic units may yield more generalizable results.

References


