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# Competition and Strategy in Private Higher Education in Ghana: Managing Complexity and Uncertainty

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# Competition and Strategy in Private Higher Education in Ghana: Managing Complexity and Uncertainty

**By**

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**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, the University of Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Management**

**Supervisor:**

**Prof. Thomas Anning-Dorson**

**Johannesburg, South Africa**

**2024**

# ABSTRACT

This study examines the fundamental challenges threatening the viability, growth, development and long-term sustainability of Ghana's private higher education sector, with particular emphasis on the critical issue of diminishing student enrolment patterns and their implications for institutional survival. The study employed a multi-perspective mixed-methods research design that incorporated multiple stakeholder perspectives. Quantitative data were collected through surveys administered to both final year senior high school students and current enrollees at private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Ghana. To complement the quantitative data, qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including parents, employers, PHEI administrators and the regulator (Ghana Tertiary Education Commission). This methodological triangulation facilitated a deeper understanding of the complex factors that shape stakeholders' selection of PHEIs and their subsequent impact on institutional sustainability. The empirical findings reveal a multifaceted decision-making framework employed by key stakeholders in selecting PHEIs. Specifically, student respondents identified a complex interplay of determinants, including institutional reputation, fee/cost, location/proximity, admission process, programme offerings, personal aspiration, recommendation, and physical facilities. Parental choices, in turn, also reveal related concerns yet with differing emphases: institutional prestige, cost of tuition, proximity, admission protocol, curriculum diversity recommendations, and infrastructural adequacy. It also showed that religious denomination moderated the process for students and parental choice of a decision to join or place their wards in a PHEI. Also, the choice criteria of employers, in turn are based on three fundamental parameters: institutional reputation, faculty expertise, and the professional competency exhibited by graduates/alumni at the workplace. The study brought several critical challenges in PHEI management to light that, if unresolved, may result in compromised operational viability and the long-term sustainability of such institutions. The research also

delineates the regulatory framework implemented by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, whose oversight encompasses multiple dimensions of institutional governance: quality assurance mechanisms, mandatory annual reporting requirements, transparency in administrative processes, and the systematic evaluation of both institutional and programmatic accreditation and reaccreditation procedures. This research enhances scholarly understanding by making several substantial contributions across various domains, including theoretical frameworks, empirical literature, management practices, and policy development. The theoretical contribution of the study is rooted in its innovative amalgamation of three distinct theoretical lenses, which serve to clarify competitive dynamics and strategic management within the realm of PHEI. For example, the application of stakeholder theory illustrates that the decision-making processes within higher education institutions require a thorough evaluation of the varied interests of multiple stakeholders, including students, academic faculty, managers of PHEIs, alumni, governmental entities, and members of the community. This theoretical framework posits that the formulation of competitive strategies within higher education institutions must intrinsically integrate the diverse expectations and needs of these complex stakeholder groups. Impliedly, the strategic alignment of HEIs with stakeholder interests facilitates value creation across constituent groups, thereby enhancing institutional competitive positioning. The institutional theory also brought to the fore the adaptive responses of tertiary institutions to environmental pressures and competitive dynamics within the higher education sector. This theoretical lens explained how the HEIs simultaneously pursued conformity with regulatory frameworks, accreditation requirements and sectoral benchmarks, while endeavouring to establish distinctive competitive advantages. Navigating the duality of conformity and strategic positioning of the HEIs bring in its wake complexities in the institutions' operations, governance, and strategic direction. Regarding the decision theory, study ultimately expands the theory by providing evidence that the selection of PHEIs by parents and students is moderated by their religious affiliation. Based on the study's conclusion, it is recommended that private higher education

institutions implement distinctive pedagogical frameworks characterised by industry-integrated program delivery mechanisms. Specifically, institutions should forge strategic partnerships with industry stakeholders to facilitate experiential learning opportunities through structured internships and industrial attachments. Such collaborative initiatives would augment the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical competencies, thereby fostering the cultivation of skills pertinent to the industry. Moreover, this collaboration between industry and academia has the potential to facilitate a seamless transition for students from academic settings to professional environments, thereby improving graduate employability outcomes. The execution of these recommendations has the potential to substantially enhance the competitive positioning of institutions, while concurrently addressing the disparity between theory and practice in higher education.

**Keywords:** Competition, Managing complexity and uncertainty, Private Higher Education, Institutional theory, Stakeholder theory, Decision theory, Sustainability, Ghana

# DEDICATION

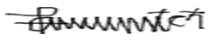
I owe this work to my family and friends for their love and support in my academic journey.

# DECLARATION

I, Andrew Kwesi De Roy, do hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research effort and to the best of my knowledge has not been submitted by anyone for any academic award in this University or any other institution. All references used in this work have been duly acknowledged

**Andrew Kwesi De Roy Signed:**

**Date: 26th February, 2024**



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... i
DEDICATION ..... iv
DECLARATION ..... v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ..... vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... vii
LIST OF TABLES ..... xvii
LIST OF FIGURES ..... xx
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ..... xxi
DEFINITION OF TERMS ..... xxiii
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION ..... 1
1.1 Background to the study ..... 3
1.2 Problem Statement ..... 6
1.3 The Objectives of the Study ..... 8
1.4 Research Questions ..... 9
1.5 Significance of the study ..... 9
1.6 Assumptions of the study ..... 11
1.7 Limitations of the study ..... 12
1.8 Theoretical framework informing the study ..... 14
1.9 Brief methodological and data analytical frameworks ..... 16
1.10 Ethical Considerations highlights ..... 17
1.11 Organisation of the study ..... 17
CHAPTER TWO CONTEXT OF STUDY ..... 19
2.0 Introduction ..... 19
2.1 Overview of Ghana's educational system ..... 19
2.1.1 Pre-high school education in Ghana ..... 21
2.1.2 High school education and exit options ..... 22
2.2 An overview of the higher education sector in Ghana ..... 25
2.2.1 The governance structure of Ghana's higher education sector ..... 29
2.2.2 Private higher education institutions in Ghana ..... 30
2.3 Gaps to be addressed in the study ..... 32
2.4 Chapter Summary ..... 34

CHAPTER THREE THEORETICAL REVIEW ..... 35
3.0 Introduction ..... 35
3.1 Rationale for the Choice of the Theories ..... 35
3.2 Stakeholder Theory ..... 36
3.3 Institutional Theory ..... 41
3.4 Decision Theory ..... 45
3.5 Theoretical Framework ..... 47
3.6 Chapter Summary ..... 50
CHAPTER FOUR LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 51
4.0 Introduction ..... 51
4.1 Higher education literature at the broader level ..... 51
4.1.1 Public HEIs ..... 53
4.1.2 Privatisation of higher education ..... 53
4.2 Empirical Classifications of HEIs ..... 56
4.2.1 The Levi Classification ..... 56
4.2.2 The Geiger Classification ..... 58
4.3 Regulatory Constraints ..... 61
4.4 Competition and the adoption of business strategies for performance in the HE sectors. 62
4.4.1 Competition ..... 62
4.4.2 Strategy ..... 66
4.4.3 Uncertainty ..... 68
4.4.4 Complexity ..... 69
4.4.5 Students' choice criteria and decision behaviour ..... 69
4.4.5.1 Student’s choice criteria of higher education ..... 69
4.4.5.1 Relevance of Students’ Choice to Sustainability of HE ..... 71
4.4.6 Parents' choice criteria and choice and decision behaviour ..... 73
4.4.7 Employers’ choice criteria and employability decision behaviour ..... 74
4.5 Choice, enrolment, and performance of private HEIs in Ghana ..... 75
4.5.1 Choice and Enrolment ..... 75
4.5.1.1 Institutional factors of higher education choice ..... 77
4.5.1.2 Institutional characteristics ..... 77
4.5.1.3 Interaction between the student and the institution ..... 78
4.5.1.4 Geographical ..... 79

4.5.1.5 Price sensitivity ..... 79
4.6 Sustainability of Private HEI ..... 80
4.7 Chapter Summary ..... 81
CHAPTER FIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ..... 82
5.0 Introduction ..... 82
5.1 Conceptual Framework ..... 82
5.1.1 Hypotheses Development ..... 85
5.1.2 Students' Choice factors (Both Prospective and Current) ..... 85
5.1.2.1 Cost factor ..... 86
5.1.2.2 Institutional Reputation Factor ..... 87
5.1.2.3 Physical Facilities ..... 88
5.1.2.4 Location Factor ..... 89
5.1.2.5 Recommendations/Referrals Factor ..... 90
5.1.2.6 Personal Aspiration Fixed Institutional Characteristics ..... 91
5.1.2.7 Programme Availability Factor ..... 92
5.1.2.8 Admission Process Factor ..... 93
5.1.2.9 Quality of Tuition Factor ..... 94
5.1.2.10 Marketing Communication Factor ..... 95
5.1.3 Parents' choice factors ..... 96
5.1.3.1 Institutional Reputation ..... 97
5.1.3.2 Cost ..... 98
5.1.3.3 Location/Proximity ..... 99
5.2.2.8 5.1.3.4 Physical Facilities ..... 100
5.1.3.5 Recommendations/Referrals Factor ..... 101
5.1.3.6 Loyalty and Alumnus factors ..... 102
5.1.3.7 Programme Availability Factor ..... 103
5.1.3.8 Admission Process Factor ..... 103
5.1.4 Employers' choice factors ..... 104
5.1.4.1 Institutional Reputation ..... 105
5.1.4.2 Quality of faculty ..... 106
5.1.4.3 Evidence of Alumni Job performance ..... 106
5.1.5 General Perception of Candidates from Private HEIs ..... 107
5.1.6 The moderating role of regulatory concerns ..... 108
5.1.7 The moderating role of religion ..... 110

5.2 Chapter Summary ..... 112
CHAPTER SIX METHODOLOGY ..... 113
6.0 Introduction ..... 113
6.1 Methodological Framework ..... 113
6.2 Research philosophy ..... 115
6.3 Research paradigms ..... 115
6.3.1 Positivism ..... 116
6.3.2 Interpretivism ..... 119
6.3.2.1 Credibility ..... 121
6.3.2.2 Transferability ..... 121
6.3.2.3 Dependability ..... 121
6.3.2.4 Confirmability ..... 122
6.3.2.5 Member Checking ..... 122
6.3.2.6 Data Bracketing ..... 123
6.3.3 The Critical /Transformative Paradigm ..... 123
6.3.4 The Pragmatic Paradigm ..... 125
6.4 Elements of the Paradigms ..... 126
6.4.1 Ontology ..... 126
6.4.2 Epistemology ..... 127
6.4.3 Axiology ..... 129
6.5 Research Design ..... 130
6.5.1 Deductive and Inductive Reasoning ..... 130
6.5.1.1 Deductive Reasoning ..... 130
6.5.1.2 Inductive Reasoning ..... 133
6.6 Research Approach Adopted ..... 133
6.6.1 Application of the Multi Perspective Mixed Design ..... 134
6.6.2 Justification for Using Multi-Perspective Design ..... 135
6.6.3 Part one: Qualitative ..... 136
6.6.3.1 Population ..... 136
6.6.3.2 Sample and Sampling Technique of the Study ..... 136
6.6.3.4 Data Collection ..... 137
6.6.3.5 Data Management and Analysis ..... 137
6.6.4 Part Two: Quantitative ..... 140
6.6.4.1 Population ..... 140

6.6.4.1.1 Geographical Context of selected SHS ..... 141
6.6.4.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size ..... 143
6.6.4.3 Operationalisation of Construct ..... 146
6.7 Pilot Testing ..... 146
6.7.1 Reliability Validity and Sensitivity ..... 147
6.7.1.1. Reliability ..... 147
6.7.1.2 Validity ..... 148
6.7.1.3 Sensitivity ..... 148
6.8 Ethical Considerations ..... 149
6.9 Chapter Summary ..... 149
CHAPTER SEVEN RESULTS/FINDINGS – QUALITATIVE ..... 150
7.0 Introduction ..... 150
7.1 Qualitative Findings Presentation ..... 150
7.1.1 Demographic profile of participants ..... 150
7.1.1.1 Employer Group ..... 150
7.1.1.2 Managers of private HEIs Group ..... 151
7.1.1.3 Regulators of private HEIs Group ..... 151
7.1.2 Themes and sub-themes ..... 152
7.1.2.1 Employer Perception ..... 152
7.1.2.1.1 Institutional Reputation ..... 153
7.1.2.1.2 Quality of Faculty ..... 153
7.1.2.1.3 Lack of resources ..... 154
7.1.2.2 The challenges faced by Managers of PHEIs ..... 155
7.1.2.2.1 Declining enrolment ..... 155
7.1.2.2.2 Rising drop-out rates ..... 156
7.1.2.2.3 Increased competition ..... 157
7.1.2.2.4 Inadequate resources ..... 158
7.1.2.2.5 Inadequate capacity development ..... 159
7.1.2.2.6 High cost of accreditation ..... 160
7.1.2.2.7 Institutional autonomy and identity crises ..... 161
7.1.2.3 Regulator's Role ..... 162
7.1.2.3.1 Quality Assurance ..... 162
7.1.2.3.2.Annual Reporting ..... 163
7.1.2.3.3 Transparent governance and best practices ..... 164

7.1.2.3.4 Accreditation and Reaccreditation ..... 165
CHAPTER EIGHT RESULTS/FINDINGS – QUANTITATIVE ..... 167
8.0 Introduction ..... 167
8.1 Quantitative Results Presentation ..... 167
8.1.1 Prospective Students Analysis and Presentation ..... 167
8.1.1.1 Data Preparation ..... 167
8.1.1.2 Response rate analysis ..... 171
8.1.2 Demographic Profile of the Respondents – Prospective Students ..... 172
8.1.2.1 Gender ..... 172
8.1.2.2 Programme of Study ..... 173
8.1.2.3 Parent/guardian level of education ..... 173
8.1.3 Descriptive Statistics – Prospective Students ..... 174
8.1.4 Reliability Measures – Prospective Students ..... 175
8.1.5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) – Prospective Students ..... 176
8.1.5.1 Convergent Validity ..... 177
8.1.5.2 Discriminant Validity ..... 178
8.1.5.3 Fornell-Larcker criterion ..... 179
8.1.5.4 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio ..... 181
8.1.5.5 Common method bias assessment ..... 183
8.1.6 Hypothesis – Prospective Student ..... 184
8.1.6.1 Regression Estimation ..... 184
8.1.6.2 Hypotheses Evaluation and Results ..... 185
8.1.6.2.1 Cost factor and Prospective Student Choice ..... 185
8.1.6.2.2 Institutional Reputation and Prospective Student Choice ..... 186
8.1.6.2.3 Physical Facilities and Prospective Student Choice ..... 186
8.1.6.2.4 Recommendation and Prospective Student Choice ..... 187
8.1.6.2.5 Personal Aspiration and Prospective Student Choice ..... 187
8.1.6.2.6 Programme Availability and Prospective Student Choice ..... 187
8.1.6..2.7 Admission Process and Prospective Student Choice ..... 188
8.1.6.2.8 Quality Tuition and Prospective Student Choice ..... 188
8.1.6.2.9 Marketing Communication and Prospective Student Choice ..... 188
8.2 Current Students Analysis and Presentation ..... 190
8.2.1 Data Preparation ..... 190
8.2.1.1 Response rate analysis ..... 194

8.2.2 Demographic Profile of the Respondents – Current Students ..... 195
8.2.2.1 Age ..... 195
8.2.2.2 Gender ..... 195
8.2.2.3 Level of Study ..... 196
8.2.2.4 Programme of Study ..... 196
8.2.2.5 Parent/guardian level of education ..... 196
8.2.2.6 Profession of parent/guardian ..... 197
8.2.3 Descriptive Statistics – Current Students ..... 197
8.2.4 Reliability Measures – Current Student ..... 198
8.2.5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) – Current Student ..... 199
8.2.5.1 Convergent Validity ..... 200
8.2.5.2 Discriminant Validity ..... 201
8.2.5.3 Fornell-Larcker criterion ..... 201
8.2.5.4 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio ..... 203
8.2.5.5 Common method bias assessment ..... 205
8.2.6 Hypothesis – Current Student ..... 206
8.2.6.1 Regression Estimation ..... 206
8.2.6.2 Hypotheses Evaluation and Results ..... 207
8.2.6.2.1 Cost factor and Current Student Choice ..... 207
8.2.6.2.2 Institutional Reputation and current Student Choice ..... 207
8.2.6.2.3 Physical Facilities and Current Student Choice ..... 208
8.2.6.2.4 Location and Current Student Choice ..... 208
8.2.6.2.5 Recommendation and Current Student Choice ..... 208
8.2.6.2.6 Personal Aspiration and Current Student Choice ..... 209
8.2.6.2.7 Programme Availability and Current Student Choice ..... 209
8.2.6.2.8 Admission Process and Current Student Choice ..... 209
8.2.6.2.9 Quality Tuition and Current Student Choice ..... 210
8.2.6.2.10 Marketing Communication and Current Student Choice ..... 210
8.3 Parents and Guardian Analysis and Presentation ..... 211
8.3.1 Data Preparation ..... 211
Source: Author's Compilation, 2023 ..... 213
Source: Author's Compilation, 2023 ..... 215
Source: Author's Compilation, 2023 ..... 216
8.3.2 Demographic Profile of the Respondents – Parent ..... 217

8.3.2.1 Age ..... 217
8.3.2.2 Gender ..... 217
8.3.2.3 Level of Education ..... 218
8.3.3 Descriptive Statistics – Parents ..... 218
8.3.4 Reliability Measures – Parent ..... 219
8.3.5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) – Parent ..... 220
8.3.5.1 Convergent Validity ..... 221
8.3.5.2 Discriminant Validity ..... 222
8.3.5.3 Fornell-Larcker criterion ..... 222
8.3.5.4 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio ..... 224
8.3.5.5 Common method bias assessment ..... 226
8.3.6 Hypothesis – Parent ..... 227
8.3.6.1 Regression Estimation ..... 227
8.3.6.2 Hypotheses Evaluation and Results ..... 228
8.3.6.2.1 Institutional Reputation factor and Parent Choice ..... 228
8.3.6.2.2 Cost factor and Parent Choice ..... 228
8.3.6.2.3 Location factor and Parent Choice ..... 229
8.3.6.2.4 Physical Facilities factor and Parent Choice ..... 229
8.3.6.2.5 Recommendation factor and Parent Choice ..... 229
8.3.6.2.6 Personal Aspiration factor and Parent Choice ..... 230
8.3.6.2.7 Programme Availability factor and Parent Choice ..... 230
8.3.6.2.8 Admission Process factor and Parent Choice ..... 230
8.3.7 Employers' Choice Analysis and Presentation ..... 231
8.3.7.1 Data Preparation ..... 231
8.3.7.2 Response rate analysis ..... 235
8.3.8 Demographic Profile of the Respondents – Employers ..... 235
8.3.8.1 Age ..... 235
8.3.8.2 Gender ..... 236
8.3.8.3 Level of Education ..... 236
8.3.9 Descriptive Statistics – Employers ..... 237
8.3.10 Reliability Measures – Employers ..... 237
8.3.11 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) - Employers ..... 238
8.3.11.1 Convergent Validity ..... 239
8.3.11.2 Discriminant Validity ..... 239

8.3.11.3 Fornell-Larcker criterion ..... 240
8.3.11.4 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio ..... 241
8.3.11.5 Common method bias assessment ..... 241
8.3.12 Hypothesis – Employers ..... 242
8.3.12.1 Regression Estimation ..... 243
8.3.11.2 Hypotheses Evaluation and Result ..... 243
8.3.11.2.1 Institutional Reputation and Employers Choice Criteria ..... 243
8.3.11.2.2 Quality of Faculty and Employers Choice Criteria ..... 244
8.3.11.2.3 Evidence of Alumni Job Performance and Employers Choice Criteria ..... 244
8.3.11.2.4 Brand Management marketing communication and Employers Choice Criteria ..... 244
8.4 Moderation Analysis ..... 246
8.4.1 Prospective Students' Choice Criteria and Regulatory Concerns ..... 247
8.4.2 Current Students' Choice Criteria and Regulatory Concerns ..... 247
8.4.3 Parent Choice Criteria and Regulatory Concerns ..... 248
8.4.4 Employers Choice Criteria and Regulatory Concerns ..... 249
8.4.5 Prospective Students' Choice Criteria and Religion ..... 250
8.4.6 Current Students Choice Criteria and Religion ..... 251
8.4.7 Parent Choice Criteria and Religion ..... 252
8.4.8 Employers Choice Criteria and Religion ..... 253
8.5 Chapter summary ..... 254
CHAPTER NINE DISCUSSION OF RESULTS ..... 255
9.0 Introduction ..... 255
9.1 Students' choice criteria for considering and selecting private HEIs ..... 255
9.2 Parents' choice criteria for selecting particular private HEIs for their wards ..... 258
9.3 Employers' perceptions of private HEI brands and their products ..... 259
9.4 The challenges faced by managers of private HEIs in Ghana ..... 262
9.5 The role that regulators play in PHEIs' sustainability ..... 265
9.6 The Moderating role of regulatory concerns and religion ..... 269
CHAPTER TEN SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ..... 271
10.0 Introduction ..... 271
10.1 Summary ..... 271
10.2 Conclusion ..... 274
10.2.1 Students' choice criteria for considering and selecting private HEIs ..... 274

10.2.2 Parents' choice criteria for selecting particular a private HEI for their wards ..... 276
10.2.3 Employers' perception of private HE brands and their products ..... 277
10.2.4 The challenges of enrolment faced by managers of private higher education institutions in Ghana..... 278
10.2.5 Assessing the role of regulatory agencies and religion in the survival of PHEIs .. 279
10.3 Theoretical, empirical and practical implications of the study ..... 281
10.4 Recommendations ..... 289
10.5 Limitations of the Study ..... 290
10.6 Suggestion for future study..... 291
REFERENCES ..... 292
APPENDICES..... 317
APPENDIX A..... 317
APPENDIX C..... 327
APPENDIX D..... 330
APPENDIX E ..... 332
APPENDIX F ..... 334
APPENDIX G..... 335
APPENDIX H..... 336
APPENDIX I ..... 337
APPENDIX J ..... 338

# LIST OF TABLES

Table 4. 12: Summary of Levi Classification of Higher Education ..... 56

Table 6. 1: Estimated and Actual Sample Size ..... 144

Table 8. 1: Normality test using Skewness and Kurtosis ..... 169

Table 8. 2: Linearity results – ANOVA Table ..... 170

Table 8. 3: Multicollinearity Test (VIF Value) ..... 171

Table 8. 4: Participating Senior High Schools ..... 172

Table 8. 5: Frequency table of gender distribution in the sample ..... 173

Table 8. 6: Frequency table of Programme of Study distribution in the sample ..... 173

Table 8. 7: Frequency table of parent/guardian level of education distribution in the sample 174

Table 8. 8: Descriptive Statistics ..... 174

Table 8. 99: Reliability Measures ..... 176

Table 8. 10: Convergent Validity ..... 178

Table 8. 11: Fornell-Larcker Criterion ..... 180

Table 8. 12: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio ..... 182

Table 8. 13: CMB Test with VIF ..... 184

Table 8. 14: Regression Results Summary ..... 189

Table 8. 15: Normality test using Skewness and Kurtosis ..... 191

Table 8. 16: Linearity results – ANOVA Table ..... 193

Table 8. 17: Multicollinearity Test (VIF Value) ..... 194

Table 8. 18: Frequency table of age distribution in the sample ..... 195

Table 8. 19: Frequency table of gender distribution in the sample ..... 195

Table 8. 20: Frequency table of level of study distribution in the sample ..... 196

Table 8. 21: Frequency table of programme of study distribution in the sample ..... 196

Table 8. 22: Frequency table of parent/guardian level of education distribution in the sample

..... 197
Table 8. 23: Frequency table of profession of parent/guardian distribution in the sample ..... 197
Table 8. 24 ..... 198
Table 8. 25: Reliability Measures ..... 199
Table 8. 26: Convergent Validity ..... 200
Table 8. 27: Fornell-Larcker Criterion ..... 202
Table 8. 28: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio ..... 204
Table 8. 29: CMB Test with VIF ..... 206
Table 8. 30: Regression Results Summary ..... 210
Table 8. 31: Normality test using Skewness and Kurtosis ..... 213
Table 8. 32: Linearity results – ANOVA Table ..... 215
Table 8. 33: Multicollinearity Test (VIF Value) ..... 216
Table 8. 34: Frequency table of age distribution in the sample ..... 217
Table 8. 35: Frequency table of gender distribution in the sample ..... 217
Table 8. 36: Frequency table of level of education distribution in the sample ..... 218
Table 8. 37: Descriptive Statistics ..... 219
Table 8. 38: Reliability Measures ..... 220
Table 8. 39: Convergent Validity ..... 221
Table 8. 40: Fornell-Larcker Criterion ..... 223
Table 8. 41: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio ..... 225
Table 8. 42: CMB Test with VIF ..... 227
Table 8. 43: Regression Results Summary ..... 230
Table 8. 44: Normality test using Skewness and Kurtosis ..... 233
Table 8. 45: Linearity results – ANOVA Table ..... 234
Table 8. 46: Multicollinearity Test (VIF Value) ..... 235
Table 8. 47: Frequency table of age distribution in the sample ..... 236

Table 8. 48 Frequency table of gender distribution in the sample ..... 236

Table 8. 49: Frequency table of level of education distribution in the sample..... 236

Table 8. 50: Descriptive Statistics ..... 237

Table 8. 51: Reliability Measures..... 238

Table 8. 52: Convergent Validity ..... 239

Table 8. 53: Fornell-Larcker Criterion ..... 240

Table 8. 54: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio..... 241

Table 8. 55: CMB Test with VIF..... 242

Table 8. 56: Regression Results Summary..... 245

Table 8. 577: Regulatory Concerns on CPSCF and PSC ..... 247

Table 8. 58: Regulatory Concerns on CCSCF and CSC ..... 248

Table 8. 59: Regulatory Concerns on CPCF and PC..... 249

Table 8. 60: Regulatory Concerns on CECF and EC ..... 250

Table 8. 61: Religion on CPSCF and PSC ..... 251

Table 8. 62: Religion on CCSCF and CSC ..... 252

Table 8. 63: Religion on CPCF and PC..... 253

Table 8. 64: Religion on CECF and EC ..... 254

# LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3. 1: Theoretical Framework ..... 49

Figure 5. 1: A Stakeholder Model for Private Higher Education Institution Sustainability ..... 82

Figure 5. 2: Operationalised Concept Framework ..... 84

Figure 6. 1: Methodological Framework ..... 115

Figure 6. 2: Schematic Diagram of the Six-Stage Thematic Analysis Process ..... 140

Figure 6. 3: The Map of Ghana ..... 142

Figure 6. 4: The Map of Central Region ..... 142

Figure 8. 1: Regression Results ..... 189

Figure 8. 2: Regression Results ..... 211

Figure 8. 3: Regression Results ..... 231

Figure 8. 4: Regression Results ..... 246

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| | 77689yuiAfrican Capacity Building Foundation |
| ADP | Admission Process |
| ADP | Admission Process |
| ANOVA | Analysis of variance |
| AP | Admission Process |
| AVE | Average Variance Extracted |
| CA | Cronbach's Alpha |
| CFA | Confirmatory Factor Analysis |
| CFA | Confirmatory Factor Analysis |
| CIU | Conference of Independent Universities |
| CMB | Common Method Bias |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease |
| CS | Current Students |
| CSC | Current Student Choice |
| EAJP | Evidence of Alumni Job Performance; |
| EC | Employers' Choice |
| ECC | Employers Choice Criteria |
| EFA | Exploratory Factor Analysis |
| FCUBE | Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme |
| GES | Ghana Education Service |
| GTEC | Ghana Tertiary Education Commission |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEIs | Higher Education Institutions |
| HTMT | Heterotrait-Monotrait |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IR | Institutional Reputation. |
| KNUST | Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology |
| LC | Location |
| MC | Marketing Communication |
| MKC | Marketing Communication |
| MOE | Ministry of Education |
| MTMM | Multitrait-Multimethod |
| NAB | National Accreditation Board |
| NABPTEX | National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations |
| NTCs | National Technical Colleges |
| PA | Personal Aspiration |
| PCA | Principal Component Analysis |
| PF | Physical Facilities |
| PHEI | Private Higher Education Institution |
| PHEIs | Private Higher Education Institutions |
| PNDC | Provisional National Defence Council |
| PRA | Programme Availability |
| PSC | Prospective Student Choice |
| QOF | Quality of Faculty |
| QT | Quality Tuition. |

| | |
|---|---|
| RC | Recommendation. |
| SD | Standard Deviation |
| SHS | Senior High School |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for the Social Sciences |
| SSSCE | Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations |
| TPB | Theory of Planned Behaviour |
| TTCE | Teacher Training Colleges of Education |
| UAE | United Arab Emirate |
| UCC | University of Cape Coast |
| UG | University of Ghana |
| UNESCO | United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| UR | University Reputation |
| URC | University Rationalisation Committee |
| VIF | Variance Inflation Factor |
| WASSCE | West African Senior School Certificate examinations |

# DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Competition:** Competition can be defined as the rivalry between individuals or groups for resources, opportunities, or recognition, often driving innovation, efficiency, and performance within various contexts, such as business, sports, and ecology (Hitt et al, 2023)

**Complexity:** Complexity refers to the intricate interplay of various factors that influence the institution's operations, governance, and strategic direction (Tsoukas & Dooley, 2022; Schneider et al., 2021 Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2023)

**Strategy:** Strategy refers to a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term goal or objective and it involves careful consideration of resources, environment, and potential challenges (Hanson et al., 2021; Jacobides & Reeves, 2020; Porter, 1996).

**Uncertainty:** Uncertainty refers to the unpredictability and lack of clarity regarding various factors that can impact the institution's operations, strategy, and overall success (Bennett, & Lemoine, 2021; Jalonen, 2022; Packard & Clark, 2020).

**Higher education institution:** Higher education institution (HEI) is an organisation that provides education beyond the secondary level, typically leading to academic degrees or certifications (Marginson, 2023; UNESCO, 1998).

**Public higher education:** Public higher education refers to post-secondary institutions that are primarily funded and operated by government entities—typically state or local governments (Marginson, 2023; Johnstone & Marcucci, 2022; Tight, 2021).

**Private higher education institution:** Private higher education institution is a college or university that is not operated by the government and relies on private funding sources, such as tuition fees, donations, and endowments (Levy,2018).

# CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The landscape of higher education in Ghana has witnessed a significant transformation in recent years, with the emergence and rapid growth of private higher education institutions (PHEIs) challenging the long-standing dominance of public universities. This shift has been driven by a confluence of factors, including an increased demand for higher education opportunities, limited public resources to accommodate this growing demand, and the need for more diversified and responsive educational offerings that can cater to the evolving needs and expectations of students and other key stakeholders (Tsyhaniuk & Akenten, 2021).

It is established in the extant literature that the private higher education sector in Ghana is characterised by a varied range of institutions, including tiny faith-based entities, specialised colleges, and multi-disciplinary universities (Ntiamoah & Antwi, 2022). The private higher education sector is further divided into charter and non-charter institutions. The sector is affected by legislative changes, demographic transitions, worldwide educational trends, and elevated stakeholder expectations (Stander & Herman, 2017). Moreover, competition among these schools is intense, fuelled by the pursuit of student enrolment, academic distinction, and financial viability (Ansah, Swanzy & Nudzor, 2017). Furthermore, the strategic responses of private institutions to competitive pressures—such as curriculum innovation, programme offerings, infrastructure expansion, and strategic partnerships—are essential for their survival and sustainability.

Nevertheless, the PHEIs in Ghana are confronted with existential threats as a result of low student enrolment. In the meantime, the revenue mobilisation of these institutions is substantially influenced by the payment of tuition fees via student enrolment (Puig & Sanz-Casado, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). The financial stability of private institutions is jeopardised by their fluctuating enrolment figures (Nazneen et al., 2023).

In addition to the financial challenges, private higher education institutions in Ghana must also navigate the complex regulatory environment and stakeholder expectations. The intricacy is exacerbated by the reality that state-funded public universities in Ghana expand their satellite campuses into regions served by private higher education institutions, thereby attracting the restricted pool of students due to their lower tuition costs (Moses & Osei, 2023). Furthermore, The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this challenge, as the disruption to educational activities has led to a significant decline in tuition payments, further straining the financial resources of these institutions. The need for private institutions to develop effective branding and marketing strategies, while also ensuring alignment with the regulatory and quality assurance frameworks, is crucial for their success and growth in the Ghanaian higher education landscape.

Notwithstanding these insights, numerous gaps remain in our comprehension of the intricacies involved in the provision of private higher education in Ghana. The precise elements impacting student and parent choices in selecting PHEIs are now thoroughly documented in the literature from the perspective of developing countries. Employers are essential stakeholders in the formulation of curriculum and pedagogy within higher education institutions, as well as being significant beneficiaries of these institutions' outputs, including internships, industrial training, employment, and scholarship opportunities, among others. Nonetheless, there is limited evidence regarding the impact of employers' perceptions on the brands and products of PHEIs. This gap necessitates exploration, as graduates from these PHEIs seek employment prospects from these employers.

Moreover, PHEIs do not function in isolation. Regulatory agencies ensure compliance and accountability in the activities of PHEIs to maintain public faith in their mandate execution. Consequently, PHEIs frequently encounter difficulties in balancing regulatory obligations with the necessity for creativity, adaptation, and innovation, especially within the swiftly evolving

higher education environment. Consequently, current research has mostly overlooked this nuanced intricacy.

This chapter lays down the context and perspectives to the study. Specifically, the chapter covers the background of the study, the problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitation of the study and the organisation of the entire study.

### 1.1 Background to the study

Globally, higher education (HE) has witnessed tremendous transformation in the twenty-first century, under the aegis of greater rivalry, privatisation and the demand for strategic management (Altbach et al., 2019).

The phenomenal growth of PHEIs over the years has triggered academic and policy discussions (Kinser et al., 2010; Levy, 2010). Levy (2018) indicated that as at 2013, private HE institutions held 31.3% of global enrolment, with a slight increase to 32.9% in 2018. Gellatly et al. (2020) predicted that the worldwide higher education industry expanded from $1.33 trillion to $2.33 trillion between 2014 and 2017. According to Teferra and Altbach (2020) the emergence and growth of economies centered on knowledge, information and communication technology have intensified the need for higher education. This increased demand has resulted in a widespread expansion of private higher educational institutions across the globe (Marginson, 2016).Despite these staggering indicators of growth in the HE sector, these statistics are aggregated global figures. Hidden in there are context- specific quirks that can undermine the perception of global growth, indicating a disproportionate distribution across geographical contexts, as Levy (2018) strongly implied. Between 2014 and 2017, Gellatly et al. (2020) projected that the global higher education sector would grow from $1.33 trillion to $2.33 trillion.

The evolving global trends in the growth in higher education in general and private higher education in particular has also impacted Africa. Over the last several decades, Africa has seen a swift and varied growth in its higher education landscape. The surge in demand for post-secondary education has outpaced the capacity of public institutions, creating a significant gap in provision (Teferra & Altbach, 2020). To bridge this divide, private higher education institutions (PHEIs) have risen to prominence, especially within Sub-Saharan Africa, where they now play a crucial role in meeting educational needs (Tamrat & Teferra, 2018).

In west Africa, following the implementation of economic liberalisation policies and structural adjustment programmes during the 1980s and 1990s, West African countries experienced a significant surge in the number of PHEIs (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021). The private higher education sector in West Africa has grown to be an essential component of the educational ecosystem, playing a crucial role in human capital development and contributing to economic growth. This evolution reflects broader trends in educational policy and economic development strategies across the region, playing a crucial role in expanding access to tertiary education and broadening the spectrum of academic programmes available to students (Atuahene, 2021).

Again, the landscape of private tertiary education in West Africa is characterised by its heterogeneity. It encompasses a wide spectrum of institutions, from niche, focused academies to expansive university campuses. This diverse ecosystem comprises commercial enterprises, non-profit organisations, and religiously affiliated schools, each employing unique pedagogical approaches and educational models in their delivery (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2022).

In spite of their importance and continuous growth, Private higher education institutions (PHEIs) encounter various obstacles including maintaining educational standards, ensuring financial viability, and addressing concerns about equitable access. Furthermore, the sector's rapid growth

has intensified competition, compelling institutions to devise effective strategies for longevity and expansion.

In the context of Ghana, the expansion of private higher education institutions reflects a broader regional and global phenomenon of democratizing HE to allow for private participation, where private players seek to capture a portion of the educational market by offering specialised and flexible programmes (Agyei & Akrofi, 2022). However, the proliferation of private higher education institutions in Ghana is not without challenges. The sector faces a highly competitive environment, where institutions vie for limited number of students for enrollment, qualified faculty and scarce financial resources. This competition is intensified by the presence of well-established public universities which have satellite campuses across the length and breadth of Ghana including sharing campuses on the same campuses of the private universities that come under their supervision by way of affiliation. In light of this Anabila et al., (2020) assert that the subsequent unprecedented growth of public HEIs through facility expansion and the setting up of new public universities in Ghana has had a negative impact on the enrolment rate in private HEIs. Again, globally, PHEIs depend mainly on their financial strength and shareholder(s)' or owners' financial capabilities for their development and sustainability. These developments include investing in attracting and maintaining quality students and faculty, expanding infrastructure, branding and communication management, and developing programmes, among other things. These investments aim to make private higher education institutions competitive and preferred choices for various stakeholders, particularly students and parents (Boakye & Oppong, 2021). Meanwhile, these PHEIs are self-funded privately. The sustainability and profitability of private higher education institutions hinge on several key factors. These crucial factors include student recruitment, efficient management of resources (including finances, materials, and personnel), research influence, community engagement, strategic campus location, faculty excellence, institutional reputation, tuition pricing, modern facilities, global

outreach, and a diverse academic portfolio, among other considerations. How must PHEIs operate such that in the arena of choice, they are not bypassed by students, parents and other stakeholder? What accounts for the steady decline in enrolment numbers among PHEIs in Ghana accounting to Ghana Tertiary Education Commission statistics (GTEC,2024)?

Consequent to the above, private institutions must navigate a complex array of factors, including market saturation, regulatory pressures, and varying student, parents and employers' preferences, all of which add layers of uncertainty to their operational strategies (Ntiamoah & Antwi, 2022; Owusu & Tetteh, 2023; Agyemang & Kofi, 2023). The uncertainty in this regard refers to the unpredictability and lack of clarity regarding various factors that can impact the institution's operations, strategy, and overall success (Milliken, 1987).

Managing these complexities requires a strategic approach that balances competitive positioning with adaptability. This study examines the competition and strategy within the private higher education sector in Ghana, focusing on how PHEIs manage the inherent complexities and uncertainties.

### 1.2 Problem Statement

Ghana's PHEIs are confronted with existential challenges due to the tumultuous and intense competition in the educational sector. The existential perils mostly arise from the continuous decline in enrolment in the private higher education institution. According to GTEC (2024) statistics, private universities and colleges in Ghana have experienced a steady fall in student enrolment over the last five years when compared to public higher education institutions. The enrolment level fell from 71327 students in the 2019 academic year to 59709 students in 2023. This represents a 17% reduction. During the same time span, enrolment in public higher education institutions increased by 37% (GTEC, 2024). The situation poses a serious existential

threat to their survival and sustainability if left unaddressed. The comparison yields a gloomy outlook offering little hope for the private HEIs and, on the other hand, rather good increases in enrolment for the public HEIs. Enrolment has a critical role in HEIs' funding and survival, particularly private HEIs. As a result, according to Olaleye et al. (2020), student enrolment is a primary source of university revenue, both directly through tuition fees and indirectly through government subventions in the case of public HEIs. Thus, the disparities in the enrolment statistics serve as a motivation to examine the phenomenon of decline, mainly from an extensive stakeholder perspective that submits inclusive insights towards practical solutions. The first step toward understanding why enrolment in private HEIs is dropping while enrolment in public HEIs is expanding is to determine the criteria that different stakeholder groups consider when making HEI selections. Enrolment to educational service providers is akin to revenue generation and endorsement of their brand. Understanding why stakeholders choose a particular HEI enables PHEIs to design strategies for attracting prospective students. Thus, without addressing these dire challenges that confront private HEIs in Ghana and as it is the case in many developing countries, the future survival and sustainability of these institutions will be at stake.

In addition to the enrolment issue, as outlined above, there are also theoretical gaps, methodological gaps, and contextual gaps in the literature relative to the subject matter of PHEIs and their existential threats (Callender and Jackson, 2008; Eder et al., 2010; Ahmad & Hussain, 2017; Engin & McKeown, 2017; Arar, Abramovitz, Bar-Yishay, & Notzer, 2017; Singh, 2016; Yang & Mutum, 2015; Al-Fattal and Ayoubi, 2013). From the perspective of theoretical gap, it has been established that the common theories often used in examining factors that influence choice include theory of planned behaviour, theory of reasoned action, and prospect theory. Thus, the use of other equally compelling theories such as stakeholder theory, institutional theory and decision theory have not received much attention (Ahmad & Hussain, 2017; Engin & McKeown, 2017; Arar, Abramovitz, Bar-Yishay, & Notzer, 2017; Singh, 2016;

Yang & Mutum, 2015). The current study therefore integrated three main theories – stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and prospect theory – to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the subject matter of competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana. Additionally, the methodological approaches to examining the phenomenon in extant studies thus far have mainly been quantitative with very little attention to other methodological approaches like insight-driven qualitative methods that unearth respondents' reasoning behind choice of HEIs and its subsequent generalisations offered by the strengths in method triangulation approaches (Ivankova & Wingo 2018). Consequently, the current study through a pragmatic mixed method approach seeks to offer insights and contribute to the current body of literature on the relevant stakeholders' choice criteria of HEIs in Ghana.

### 1.3 The Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the competition and strategy within the private higher education sector in Ghana, focusing on how PHEIs manage the inherent complexities and uncertainties. More precisely, the study addresses the following specific objective

1. To examine what constitutes students' choice criteria for considering and selecting PHEIs
2. To examine what constitutes parents' choice criteria for considering and selecting PHEIs for their wards.
3. To explore and assess employers' perceptions of PHEI brands and their products.
4. To explore the challenges faced by managers of PHEIs in Ghana and how these challenges manifest themselves.
5. To explore the role regulators play in PHEIs' sustainability.
6. To investigate the moderating role of regulatory concerns and religion in the positive relationship between students' and parents' choice factors and attitude and behaviour toward choice of PHEIs.
7. To examine the moderating role of regulatory concerns and religion in the positive relationship between employers' perception and PHEI brand and their products.

### 1.4 Research Questions

Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What constitutes students' choice criteria for considering and selecting PHEIs?
2. What constitutes parents' choice criteria for selecting particular PHEIs for their wards?
3. What are employers' perceptions of PHEI brands and their products?
4. What are the challenges faced by managers of PHEIs in Ghana and how do these challenges manifest themselves?
5. What role do regulators play in PHEIs' sustainability?
6. What is the moderating role of regulatory concerns and religion in the positive relationship between students' and parents' choice factors and attitude and behaviour toward choice of PHEIs?
7. What is the moderating role of regulatory concerns and religion in the positive relationship between employers' perception and PHEI brand and their products?

### 1.5 Significance of the study

Human capital development is important, and PHEIs play a key role. They support the local economy through employment, knowledge production and transfer, research, teaching and community service. In light of this, anything that appears to threaten their existence and sustainability must be a source of worry. PHEIs in Ghana are experiencing an existential threat in the form of low and declining student enrolment. Over that past five years, enrolment figures have been steadily receding and it seems no empirical study has been conducted to find out the reasons for and consequences of the decline in enrolment for the sustainability of private universities and colleges in Ghana. This study is among few, if any, to have investigated the subject matter of stakeholder choice criteria for PHEIs.

The study's findings have implications for research, practice, and policy. Students' choice, competition, and the sustainability of private higher education was explored and examined from stakeholder perspectives in this study; thus, this study has addressed the paucity of literature both conceptually and practically. Moreover, the study makes a theoretical contribution by incorporating institutional and stakeholder theories which previous studies did not consider in dealing with the subject matter. Consequent to the above, the application of stakeholder and institutional theories to complement both the theory of planned behaviour, prospect and decision theory offers new insight into the complex arena of students' choice of HEI in general and PHEI in particular.

Empirically, most literature on the subject matter has focused primarily on the choice phase and influences of choice. However, this study provides insight into how private institutions can also effectively influence students' choice by designing and adopting strategies that will entice prospective students into their enrolment milieu. Individuals' freedom of choice can be influenced by both external and internal factors. Families, friends, and personal considerations are among the most important internal motivators, whereas distance, the country's reputation, and the educational system are all important external motivators. There appears to be a glaring omission in this analysis of students' decision motivators: competition and regulatory framework. Thus, the study explores these dynamics from regulatory and legal perspectives.

Again, the PHE industry faces numerous challenges, including a lack of capital and a poor enrolment rate. There are numerous negative consequences of PHEI closures, including disappointment for current and future students as well as the loss of student records and difficulties in transferring to other institutions. There are also labour tensions and other complex issues that come with any bankruptcy of a private company. The results of this research will help private higher education institutions better understand the elements that influence stakeholder choices and the methods they should employ to succeed.

### 1.6 Assumptions of the study

Acknowledging the considerable constraints inherent in academic research can be both humbling and motivating (Wolgemuth, Hicks & Agosto, 2017). These deficiencies include the availability of resources and the cognitive processes of the researcher, together with intrinsic human limitations (Nkwake & Nkwake, 2020). Verma and Abdel-Salam (2019) contend that empowerment emerges from recognising the researcher's limitations and the shortcomings in their decisions, thereafter implementing the requisite modifications.

First, the private higher education industry functions within a competitive market where institutions compete for students, resources, and funds. Various stakeholders, including students, parents, faculty, administrator/managers, employers, regulators, and faith-based groups, are thought to possess diverse and occasionally conflicting interests that impact the institutional methods of PHEIs.

The researcher also posits that PHEIs provide distinctive value propositions that set them apart from public HEIs, including tailored education, reduced class numbers, and specialised program offers, which should facilitate student enrolment attraction. Moreover, economic variables like as household income, tuition fees, and job market conditions profoundly influence enrolment choices and institutional viability as put forwards by many scholars (Stander & Herman, 2017; Ansah, Swanzy & Nudzor, 2017; Moses & Osei, 2023).

Moreover, it is presumed that the higher education sector is influenced by governmental policies, regulations, and religious factors that can impact competition, funding, and institutional practices. The research ultimately posits that the calibre of education offered by PHEIs directly influences pupil satisfaction, retention rates, and institutional reputation.

These assumptions establish a fundamental framework for executing this research on the strategies and competition in the management of PHEIs within a complex and uncertain environment. Consequently, PHEIs must be adaptable and sensitive to evolving market demands, preferences of students, parents, and employers, as well as developing educational trends to maintain competitiveness and sustainability.

### 1.7 Limitations of the study

In conducting this study, it was understood that there has been limited research relative to that numerous gaps remain in our understanding of the complexities involved in the provision of private higher education in Ghana. The study also made claims that the precise factors impacting student and parent choices in selecting PHEIs are not thoroughly documented in the literature from the perspective of developing countries. Further, the study claims that employers are essential stakeholders in the formulation of curriculum and pedagogy within higher education institutions, as well as being significant beneficiaries of these institutions' outputs, including internships, industrial training, employment, and scholarship opportunities, among others. Nonetheless, there is limited evidence regarding the impact of employers' perceptions on the brands and products of PHEIs.

Finally, the study claims that PHEIs do not function in isolation. Regulatory agencies ensure compliance and accountability in the activities of the PHEIs to maintain public faith in their mandate execution. Consequently, PHEIs frequently encounter difficulties in balancing regulatory obligations with the necessity for creativity, adaptation, and innovation, especially within the swiftly evolving higher education environment.

The aforementioned gaps motivated the researcher. Consequently, the researcher resolved to focus the study inside the Ghanaian setting, recognising the inherent challenges, which would

significantly enhance the existing literature on PHEI management for both emerging and developing nations.

The first limitation can be ascribed to one of the data collection instruments. The interview guide employed in this study had pertinent follow-up questions that do not consistently align with the specific themes outlined in the literature review. This was a deliberate decision due to the abductive methodology and exploratory character of this study, which aims to enhance understanding of decision choice factors (decision theory), institutional factors (institutional theory), and stakeholder pressures (stakeholder theory) impacting the selection of PHEIs and the management of these institutions in order to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of stakeholder expectations to attain sustainability.

Secondly, there are sixteen regions in Ghana, but the study focuses on only one region for the selection of participants. Nonetheless, the characteristics of these regions are not different and because of the homogeneous nature of the regions, using only one region will not alter the findings. Furthermore, while a mixed research methodology was employed, incorporating longitudinal data collection instead of a cross-sectional approach would have afforded the researcher the opportunity to administer questionnaires to prospective students who, after completing senior high, became current students of the surveyed schools. This method would provide the comparison of their pre- and post-choice factors to ascertain any changes in their preferences following enrolment in the PHEIs. This could have improved the policy contribution relative to the only the cross-sectional survey of various student groups.

Thirdly, all audio recordings taken during the interview were transcribed manually. Consequently, the researcher reviewed the recording multiple times during and after

transcription; there exists a likelihood that crucial information, which could have enhanced this study, was not captured, and this is regarded as an additional drawback of the research.

Lastly, in the process of sample selection for interviews, the researcher made a deliberate choice to focus exclusively on employers, managers, and regulators of Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Ghana. This decision notably excluded faith-based organizations and civil society groups, despite their emerging role in regulatory matters of public interest within the country (Tetteh, Agyenim-Boateng & Simpson, 2024). The rationale behind this exclusion stems from the fact that the official regulator remains the sole public entity legally empowered to oversee PHEI operations in Ghana, regardless of any affiliations with faith-based organisations. This approach aligns with one of the study's primary objectives: to examine how PHEI managers navigate complexities and uncertainties to achieve sustainability. Such insights could only be effectively gathered from the key stakeholders directly involved in the management and regulation of these institutions.

### 1.8 Theoretical framework informing the study

This study integrates three main theories: stakeholder theory, institutional theory and decision theory to provide guidance, help explain and examine the issue of competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana. Several factors influenced the integration of the three theories to establish the theoretical framework of this study.

The application of institutional theory in this study serves to elucidate the responses of universities and colleges to external pressures and competitive forces within the higher education landscape. Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Ghana may adopt particular strategies and behaviours to conform with the expectations set by their institutional environment. These expectations encompass accreditation criteria, governmental regulations,

and industry standards, while simultaneously striving to differentiate themselves from competitors to gain a competitive edge.

This research posits that the actions of numerous actors in the higher education sector inevitably influence the selection of PHEIs. The decision-making process and the choice of PHEIs are shaped by the interests of a diverse group of stakeholders, including students, parents, faculty members, administrative staff, alumni, governmental bodies, employers, religious affiliations, and local communities (Freeman et al., 2020; Barney & Harrison, 2020; McGahan, 2021). To account for this complexity, the study expands its theoretical framework to incorporate decision theory.

The integration of decision theory into the framework is predicated on the understanding that the higher education environment is characterised by uncertainty and intricate decision-making processes. This complexity arises from the multitude of stakeholders involved and the institutional context in which PHEIs operate. Decision theory provides a structure for understanding how prospective students and their families navigate the selection process among competing PHEIs, weighing potential benefits and drawbacks associated with each option. Furthermore, decision theory inherently addresses the concept of opportunity cost, which underpins the trade-offs between anticipated advantages and disadvantages in choosing a particular PHEI.

In the Ghanaian context, a multitude of PHEIs vie for student enrollment in their academic programs. The decision to select a specific PHEI is primarily influenced by a range of social and economic factors. These include the institution's reputation, graduate employability rates, quality of physical infrastructure, tuition fees and overall costs, and the variety of available academic programs, among other considerations.

Collectively, these theories - institutional, stakeholder, and decision theories - provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing and understanding the complex dynamics of competition and strategy within Ghana's private higher education sector.

### 1.9 Brief methodological and data analytical frameworks

The term 'methodology' encompasses a broad spectrum of elements in research, including the research design, methods, approaches and procedures employed in a meticulously planned investigation to uncover new knowledge (Keeves & Adams, 1997; Cresswell, 2017). This umbrella term covers various components such as data collection techniques, participant selection, instruments utilised, and data analysis methods. In essence, methodology articulates the rationale and progression of the systematic processes employed to conduct a research project, with the aim of exploring a specific research problem. It elucidates the assumptions made, challenges encountered, and the strategies implemented to mitigate or minimise these limitations. The focus of methodology lies in explicating how researchers acquire knowledge about the world or a particular aspect of it (Creswell, 2009).

This study adopts a mixed research design, employing a sequential process of inquiry, which is deemed appropriate given the nature of the research purpose, aims and questions. As Creswell (2009) posits, a mixed method approach with a sequential strategy of inquiry commences with qualitative data collection and analysis, progresses to quantitative data collection and analysis, and culminates in a comprehensive interpretation of the entire analysis. In this investigation, the initial phase involves qualitative data collection, conducted prior to the inclusion of any additional independent variables or the development of instruments for the study (Saunders et al., 2023). The detailed schematic of the revised Creswell and Clark research plan is employed and elucidated in the methodology chapter of this thesis, specifically in chapter six.

### 1.10 Ethical Considerations highlights

Prior to commencing the study, ethical clearance was secured from the Ethics Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The researcher sought permission from the relevant gatekeepers within the participating organisations. All study participants provided informed consent before engaging in surveys or interviews.

The researcher briefed respondents on the study's objectives, emphasising how their contributions would aid in conceptualising the management of complexity and uncertainty within the context of Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) administration. Participants were explicitly informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary, and they retained the right to withdraw from the study at any juncture.

The researcher placed great emphasis on ensuring anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. To safeguard participants' identities, all identifying information about them was expunged. In lieu of names, participants were assigned unique identification codes, which were subsequently used in the presentation of findings.

### 1.11 Organisation of the study

This section outlines the organisation of the study. The research is structured into nine chapters, each addressing distinct aspect of the study.

Chapter One serves as an introduction to the study. It articulates the problem statement, enumerates the research objectives and questions, acknowledges the limitations of the investigation, and elucidates the significance of the study and its structural organisation. Chapter Two contextualises the study, examining the unique circumstances under which private higher education institutions operate in Ghana. The third chapter presents a theoretical review, scrutinising several pertinent theories including the stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and decision theory.

Chapter Four comprises a comprehensive literature review. It offers definitions and clarifications of crucial terms such as higher education, for-profit and non-profit institutions of higher learning, and privatisation. This chapter also critically examines theoretical hypotheses and empirical findings relevant to the study.

The fifth chapter expounds upon the conceptual framework guiding the research and explores various hypotheses. Chapter Six is dedicated to the research methodology, detailing the research design, sample selection processes, sampling methods employed, and data collection techniques. The seventh chapter presents both quantitative and qualitative findings and results gleaned from the study. Chapter Eight provides a thorough discussion and analysis of the results. Finally, Chapter Nine synthesises the research, offering a summary and conclusion to the study.

# CHAPTER TWO CONTEXT OF STUDY

## 2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the distinctive context of the study and the operational environment of private higher education institutions in Ghana. It provides a comprehensive overview of Ghana's education system, alongside an exploration of the various types of higher education institutions.

The discussion extends to illuminate the myriad challenges confronting private higher education institutions in Ghana. It underscores the imperative for concerted efforts from all stakeholders to effectively manage the complexities and uncertainties that imperil the growth, survival, and long-term sustainability of these institutions.

Through this contextual analysis, the chapter aims to furnish readers with a nuanced understanding of the unique landscape within which Ghanaian private higher education institutions operate. This foundational knowledge is crucial for comprehending the subsequent analyses and findings presented in this study.

## 2.1 Overview of Ghana's educational system

The contemporary education system in Ghana can be traced back to the country's complex political history. During the colonial era, the primary purpose of education was to facilitate the activities of Christian missionaries, provide instruction to the offspring of European traders, and sustain the machinery of the colonial government (Adu-Gyamfi & Anderson, 2021). In the period leading up to independence and in the immediate post-independence phase, Ghana undertook considerable investment in formal education. The 1951 Accelerated Development Plan by the Ghanaian government, which recognised the importance of enlightened thought and modernism, underscored education as an essential tool for expediting policies and initiatives aimed at economic stability (Takyi et al., 2021).

The pursuit of economic stability required equitable access to education. In 1960, Ghana implemented free primary and secondary education (Charway & Houlihan, 2020), striving for spatial justice through the establishment of schools across various communities. To dismantle the economic obstacles to formal education, scholarships were allocated to students in Northern Ghana, the nation's most impoverished region. These efforts eradicated economic and spatial barriers but also impacted school quality due to managerial challenges arising from extensive infrastructure development (Nkansah, 2021; Kpessa-Whyte & Tsekpo, 2021).

In response to the tension between educational expansion and quality maintenance, a new Education Act was promulgated in 1961. This legislation delegated the responsibility for primary education expansion to local education authorities, aiming to mitigate quality issues arising from the rapid growth of educational infrastructure (Buabeng et al., 2020; Donkoh et al., 2023). Subsequently, the Kwapong Review Committee was established in 1966. This committee was tasked with evaluating the declining educational standards and formulating recommendations. The outcome of this assessment led to the development of a structured ten-year plan for basic education, designed to address the identified challenges and enhance the overall quality of education provision.

In the mid-1970s, the Dzobo Committee was convened to enhance equity within Ghana's educational system (Nkansah, 2021; Kpessa-Whyte & Tsekpo, 2021). The Committee's recommendations led to a more vocationally oriented education system. Further, the FCUBE was founded in 1996 to foster enrolment and retention, aiming to enrol all school-aged children by 2005 (Wilson & Samuel 2013).

The alarmingly high failure rates in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination in 2002 catalysed the formation of the Anamuah-Mensah Committee. This committee's recommendations led to a significant restructuring of secondary education, culminating in the establishment of the Senior High School system. In the wake of this reform, substantial investment was directed towards infrastructure development to accommodate an increased student population.

Since 2009, the duration of senior high school education has been fixed at three years. This reform resulted in a reconfigured educational structure comprising six years of primary education, followed by three years of middle school, and concluding with three years of senior high school. This 6-3-3 system aims to provide a more comprehensive and balanced educational experience for Ghanaian students.

Continued efforts towards equity were evident when the Comprehensive Free Public Senior High School policy was introduced in 2017, providing free education for all senior high school students. This policy, anticipated to cost approximately GH$1.2 billion, ensures that financially disadvantaged students continue their education (Ministry of Finance, 2017).

The Ghanaian government has implemented a series of strategic plans and policies to ensure universal access to quality education. These initiatives include the Education Strategic Plan 2010-2020, the Information and Communication Technology in Education Policy 2015, the Ghana Education Standard and Guidelines 2015, and the Inclusive Education Policy 2015. These comprehensive measures align with the constitutional mandate set forth in Article 38(1) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, which stipulates that the state shall make educational facilities accessible to all citizens.

The government's unwavering commitment to fostering a literate and productive citizenry is exemplified by its sustained efforts to broaden access to higher education. These endeavours aim to benefit all citizens, regardless of gender or socioeconomic background, reflecting a dedication to educational equity and inclusivity (Nkansah, 2021; Kpessa-Whyte & Tsekpo, 2021).

### 2.1.1 Pre-high school education in Ghana

In Ghana, education is provided free of charge from kindergarten through to the conclusion of the first year of junior secondary school. This provision is underpinned by the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme (FCUBE), introduced in 1996. The initiative's original

goal was to ensure that by 2005, all school-age children would have access to a high-quality, universally available, and comprehensive education system spanning from kindergarten to year 12.

Recent educational reforms have further expanded the scope of compulsory education in Ghana. Children are now required to attend either a crèche (for those aged 3-4 years) or a nursery school (for those aged 4-6 years) as part of the country's newly mandated pre-school education programme. This extension of early years education reflects Ghana's commitment to providing a strong educational foundation for all its young citizens (Buabeng et al., 2020; Donkoh et al., 2023; Nkansah, 2021; Kpessa-Whyte & Tsekpo, 2021). According to the Ghana Education Service, more than 1,200,000 children attended Ghana's more than 15,000 schools. Preschool programmes are designed to better

children's minds and bodies. Instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, the visual and performing arts, and dance are all part of the programme. Children in Ghana must start school at the age of six. They also begin elementary school at this time. The six-year primary school period is divided into two phases of three years each. Reading, writing, mathematics, and the development of problem-solving skills are all given significant time and attention in the early grades of schooling. Math, science, biology, arithmetic, music, dance, handicrafts, and citizenship education are all on the curriculum. There is no post-course recognition in the form of a certificate. At the age of 12, most children are old enough to graduate from elementary school. Primary schools have a 40-week school year (Buabeng et al., 2020; Donkoh et al., 2023; Nkansah, 2021; Kpessa-Whyte & Tsekpo, 2021).

### 2.1.2 High school education and exit options

In Ghana, secondary education comprises two phases -junior high schoo and senior high school, each spanning three years. The junior secondary stage marks the conclusion of compulsory schooling. By the age of 15, most pupils are deemed sufficiently mature to make their own

choices. The junior secondary curriculum encompasses English, mathematics, social studies and integrated science. Additional subjects include basic design and technology, religious and moral education, French, and information and communication technology (ICT). At the end of their junior year, students sit the Basic Education Certificate examinations (Buabeng et al., 2020; Donkoh et al., 2023; Nkansah, 2021; Kpessa-Whyte & Tsekpo, 2021).

The upper secondary level of Ghanaian education mandates instruction in core subjects, namely English, mathematics, social studies and integrated science. In addition to these compulsory courses, pupils have the opportunity to select from a wide range of electives. These optional subjects cater to various specialisations, including agriculture, business, technology and trade, as well as general education pathways in the arts or sciences (Nkansah, 2021; Kpessa-Whyte & Tsekpo, 2021).The culmination of secondary education in West Africa is marked by the West African Senior School Certificate examinations (WASSCE). Administered since 2007 in lieu of the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (SSSCE), these examinations are overseen by the West African Examinations Council's Ghana National Office. To obtain their West African Senior School Certificate, students must successfully pass examinations in the core subjects of English, mathematics, social studies, and integrated science, along with three or four elective subjects in their chosen specialisations (Buabeng et al., 2020; Donkoh et al., 2023).

Upon completing these requirements, students typically graduate from high school at the age of18. The standard academic year spans 40 weeks. It is noteworthy to mention that an education reform in 2007 extended the final year of high school from three to four years. However, this alteration was subsequently reversed by the new administration in 2009, reducing the period of official validity from five to three years. This short-term change did not impact the grading criteria for the Senior Secondary School Certificate (Nkansah, 2021; Kpessa-Whyte & Tsekpo, 2021).

Junior high school students can choose between continuing their education in secondary vocational education or advancing to senior secondary school. Ghana's technical and vocational training institutions provide secondary vocational education. These schools offer courses for people who want to pursue careers as carpenters, electricians, or tailors, among many other technical and vocational specialisations. Usually lasting between two and three years, these courses culminate in the customary culminating examinations leading to a variety of diplomas and certificates (Buabeng et al., 2020; Donkoh et al., 2023).

In West Africa, the attainment of the West African Senior School Certificate (WASSCE) through successful completion of the relevant exams is a prerequisite for high school graduation. The admission criteria for undergraduate programmes at Ghanaian universities necessitate that applicants must have achieved a pass in at least six subjects (comprising three compulsory subjects and three electives) on the WASSCE. The passing grades are A to E for the WASSCE or A to D for the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE), and the maximum aggregate score must not exceed 24. Alternatively, candidates must have passed (with grades ranging from A1 to C6) at least three core and three elective subjects, with a maximum aggregate score of 36 (Buabeng et al., 2020; Donkoh et al., 2023). These general requirements may be supplemented with specific stipulations concerning the electives for which the candidate must have successfully completed the examinations, contingent upon the selected field of study. Prospective students of polytechnic programmes are obligated to meet the same formal criteria.

It is a common trend within the Ghanaian educational system that students who achieve lower scores on the WASSCE are typically admitted into polytechnic institutions, whereas those with higher scores generally secure acceptance into university programmes. This differentiation

illustrates the diverse pathways available to students within the tertiary education landscape in Ghana, thereby accommodating various academic abilities and aspirations (Nkansah, 2021; Kpessa-Whyte & Tsekpo, 2021).

### 2.2 An overview of the higher education sector in Ghana

The inception of tertiary education in Ghana can be traced back to 1943, when Justice Asquith was commissioned by the British government to delineate the guiding principles for the establishment of universities in the colonies (Daniel, 1997). Historically, the British educational model imparted to Ghana and several other Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries was conceived with the intent of ultivating an elite corps who would assume the civil service roles formerly occupied by expatriates (MOE, 2008).

The establishment of the University of Ghana (UG) in 1948 as the University College of Gold Coast marked a significant milestone in the country's higher education landscape. By the close of the 1980s, Ghana's academic infrastructure encompassed three publicly funded universities, namely UG, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), and the University of Cape Coast (UCC), in addition to various tertiary-level professional educational institutions.

The journey of UG, from its inception with a mere 100 students at the opening ceremony in 1948 to a peak enrolment of 9,000 in 1976, reflects the growth and development of higher education in Ghana. This enrolment plateau persisted until the release of a government white paper in 1991 on reforms to the Tertiary Education System, a precursor to the report of the University Rationalisation Committee (URC).

The URC's examination of the condition of higher education in Ghana yielded specific proposals for systematic reform (MOE, 2008). These suggestions served as the foundation for innovative paradigms within academia. Among the URC's key recommendations were the establishment of a new university in the northern region of the country, the elevation of existing polytechnics to tertiary education status in alignment with Ghana's Polytechnic Law, and the formulation of strategies to enhance access, with particular attention to low-income and female students (PNDC; Provisional National Defence Council Law 321 in 1992).

Furthermore, the URC report advocated a unified, coordinated system of higher education that would bolster institutional accountability to the public (ibid). These recommendations, articulated with foresight and awareness of the nation's educational needs, were instrumental in shaping the trajectory of tertiary education in Ghana, reflecting both its heritage and aspirations for the future. While maintaining constitutionally mandated zero-cost tuition, the URC recognised that the government could not provide all funding for higher education and suggested that institutions diversify their revenue streams through creative means such as the introduction of cost-sharing and cost-recovery mechanisms. In the years between the 1990s and the 2000s, these transformational changes allowed for a dramatic increase in accessibility and engagement. Total enrolment at the three public universities was 14,500 in 1993; by 2002, it had risen to 86,570; by 2005, it had risen to 121,390 (Adu & Orivel, 2006, cited in World Bank, 2011).

Over the past two decades, Ghana has witnessed encouraging expansion in its higher education sector, particularly in the number of private institutions. By late 2012, the National Accreditation Board (NAB) of Ghana had granted accreditation to more than 126 higher learning establishments. At present, there are 38 Teacher Training Colleges of Education (TTCE) that have been elevated to university status, 18 National Technical Colleges (NTCs) in

the process of attaining university standing, 10 polytechnics, and 6 public universities. Amongst the 49 private universities, 2 have been chartered and possess presidential authority to confer degrees (NAB, 2013). Additionally, numerous private institutions offer post-secondary courses, albeit without official recognition. However, the surge in student enrolment has not been met with a commensurate increase in classrooms and other academic resources at public universities. Across all post-secondary institutions, the average annual growth rate reached 18% between 1990 and 2004, whilst for universities alone, this figure stood at 16% (World Bank, 2011).

During the 2006-2007 academic year, over 130,000 students were enrolled in various post-secondary institutions. The number of students attending polytechnic institutions saw a marked increase from approximately 1,900 in 1990-91 to around 45,000 in 2008-09 (Effah, 2011). These developments are a direct result of governmental initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of higher education in Ghana. Despite this expansion, universities and technical universities continue to face a shortage of facilities necessary to accommodate the substantial number of qualified applicants seeking enrolment. The lack of adequate resources at public higher education institutions (PHEIs) leads to the rejection of numerous qualified candidates annually, notwithstanding the fact that the vast majority of these rejected students ultimately gain admission to PHEIs regardless.

The tertiary education sector in Ghana encompasses a diverse range of institutions, including ten public universities, eight technical universities, and seven universities offering specialised professional training programmes. Whilst technical universities and professional institutions tend to concentrate on specific disciplines, universities, as defined by the National Accreditation Board (NAB), are multifaceted entities engaged in 'advanced instruction and research across various branches of learning, conferring degrees in diverse faculties, and often incorporating colleges, schools, and similar establishments'. Notable examples of public universities with

specialised programmes include the University of Energy and Natural Resources and the University of Education, Winneba.

Complementing these universities are other institutions offering undergraduate programmes in affiliation with public universities, typically concentrating on employment-oriented fields such as teacher training colleges and nursing colleges. According to the OECD's 2011 report, approximately 23% of public sector students in Ghana were enrolled in polytechnics, compared to 14% in teacher training colleges and 62% in universities. The country's polytechnics, with one situated in each of Ghana's ten regions, have broadened their curricula in recent years to include courses traditionally exclusive to universities. The Ghanaian government's recent elevation of eight polytechnics to technical university status, granting them the authority to confer bachelor's and master's degrees, exemplifies the ongoing endeavour to bolster the nation's tertiary vocational education.

In the sphere of private higher education institutions, the majority are classified as colleges. A key factor in this categorisation is the stipulation that private colleges must initially 'apprentice' themselves to public universities as affiliated colleges. Of the 81 accredited private institutions in Ghana, only seven have been granted official charters as fully autonomous degree-conferring entities. These are Ashesi University, Central University, Trinity Theological Seminary, Valley View University, Methodist University College, the Catholic University College and the Presbyterian University College (GTEC, 2023).The multifaceted and evolving nature of Ghana's higher education system reflects the country's commitment to educational advancement and inclusivity, with an increasing emphasis on technical and vocational training and a nuanced interplay between public and private institutions. The balance between expansion, specialisation, quality, and accessibility continues to shape the trajectory of higher education in Ghana, making it an essential pillar of the nation's development.

### 2.2.1 The governance structure of Ghana's higher education sector

Edwards (2003) posits that university governance centres on how universities establish their values, make decisions and allocate resources, define their objectives, structure their hierarchies, and interact with other sectors of society and the academic community. Gayle et al. (2003) further defined university governance as the institutional framework and decision-making process through which a university addresses matters of significance to its external and internal stakeholders.In Ghana's public universities, both internal and external mechanisms of control are in place, each playing a crucial role in the governance and operation of these institutions (Effah & Mensa-Bonsu, 2001).

On the external front, key components include the Ministry of Education, National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), National Accreditation Board (NAB), and Joint Admissions & Matriculation Board. These bodies collectively shape the policies and quality standards governing higher education in the country. In response to the recommendations put forth by the Report of the University Rationalisation Committee and the Government White Paper (1991), three regulatory agencies were established to ensure the quality of post-secondary education and testing: NCTE, NAB, and the National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABPTEX).The NCTE, now replaced by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), is mandated to provide guidance to the Minister of Education concerning the development of postsecondary education and relevant policies.

The NAB bears the responsibility of determining educational standards for both public and private institutions, delineating programme requirements to ensure smooth operation and acceptable levels of academic or professional standards. This task is undertaken in consultation with the relevant institutions. Moreover, the NAB plays a role in equating credentials earned within Ghana and in other jurisdictions. NABPTEX is charged with overseeing examinations,

evaluation, assessment, and certification schemes for professional organisations, non-university tertiary institutions, and private institutions (Effah & Hofman, 2010). This ensures a standardised approach to evaluation and recognition across diverse types of educational providers.

On the internal side, each university is governed by key roles and committees, including the Chancellor as the ceremonial head, the Vice Chancellor (or Principal) as the administrative head, the Council as the ultimate decision-making body, and the Academic Board (or Senate) providing guidance on scholarly matters. These elements work together to create a cohesive administrative framework within the university, ensuring proper management and alignment with academic goals.

In addition to these formal internal structures, universities may also operate informal bodies, such as the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals. Such committees provide a platform for consultation on matters of shared interest, enhancing the collaborative nature of university governance and policymaking. Overall, the governance of Ghana's public universities is characterised by a complex interplay of both internal and external mechanisms, providing a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to quality assurance, policy formulation, and academic integrity.

### 2.2.2 Private higher education institutions in Ghana

It is common knowledge that private institutions of higher learning have expanded rapidly throughout the world in recent years (Utuka, 2008). One of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding sectors of Ghana's postsecondary education over the past decade has been private higher education. These schools first appeared in Ghana in the 1990s and immediately made an impact on the country's educational system. Privately accredited universities have proliferated

across the country since that time. The favourable environment for the development of Ghana's private higher education sector can be traced back to the deregulation policies, market-friendly reforms implemented under structural adjustment programmes, and the state's financial crisis of the 1980s.

University colleges, diploma-granting colleges, theological colleges, professional and specialised colleges, and tutorial colleges are just some of the many types of private higher education institutions available in Ghana. These establishments can maintain themselves or receive funding from religious groups. Christian and Muslim groups in Ghana are both involved in the private higher education sector. Many schools of higher learning receive funding or sponsorship from Christian organisations. The country's private institutions are overwhelmingly driven by profit

maximisation. They offer courses in subjects that are in demand by employers, and rely heavily on tuition revenue to do so.PHEIs are established by an act of parliament after undergoing a rigorous accreditation process (Yalley & Dodoo, 2022). Similarly, public HEIs are not obligated to affiliate with or mentor private HEIs, but private HEIs are required to do so. The National Accreditation Board (NAB) awards two types of accreditation: programme and institutional. Accreditation for programmes takes into account a variety of factors, including the planned number of programmes, the programmes' potential impact on national development, the programme's faculty, the expected number of students enrolled, the number of jobs open to graduates of the programme, the availability of an affiliated institution willing to serve as a mentor to the private HEIs, and so on. Accreditation of educational institutions, on the other hand, is granted for a period of five years based on site inspections by the NAB and the presence of necessary instructional resources (physical infrastructure). For the first three years, new private HEIs must apply for an interim permit to offer programmes under the supervision of an

affiliating university (mentor) and undergo annual performance reviews by the mentoring university. After at least ten years of operation as university colleges, private HEIs may apply for chartered degree-granting status provided they meet certain criteria, including the delivery of high-quality programmes and the availability of adequate facilities and teaching staff (NAB, 2022). The National Accreditation Board of Ghana prohibits the provision of academic programmes by institutions that lack such accreditation.

### 2.3 Gaps to be addressed in the study

Until recently, public universities had a near-monopoly on providing higher education in African countries, according to Varghese (2004b). Like other African countries, Ghana had a state monopoly on tertiary education immediately after independence. The state funded all public

universities in order to train the manpower required for the nation's rapid development. This situation has created enrolment challenges for the PHEI. The enrolment rate in higher education has increased by a factor of about ten between 1990 and 2021, according to a report by the education ministry. While thousands apply to public universities each year, only a fraction are accepted, while private higher education institutions (PHEIs) struggle to bring in new students. Because of this, PHEIs are facing difficulties securing adequate funding.

It is recognised that higher education institutions' funding depends heavily on student enrolment (Eaton et al., 2020; Bound et al., 2021; Hentschke et al., 2023). Poor enrolment has a detrimental influence on the financial health and long-term viability of private higher education institutions. Tiny private schools and universities confront a variety of challenges as a result of their size, including financial strains, enrolment issues, and more (Choi et al., 2023). To give just one recent example, Chan and Muthuvelo (2019) claim that private HEIs, which enrol 73% of

Malaysia's total higher education students, are essential to the country's global competitiveness and economic success. However, private HEIs have more difficulties than public HEIs in today's environment because they must generate new cash to maintain their commercial expansion. The general operational funds are largely tuition fees that are received from students through enrolment.

However, for five consecutive years (2016-2021), enrolment numbers across the 81 private higher education institutions plummeted. What accounts for such a worrying decline? In the Ghanaian context, the mentor-mentee requirements stipulate that private HEIs in Ghana must undergo mentorship and training under public ones, while issuing certificates in the mentor's name may, for example, undermine the brand image and reputation and inhibit stakeholder trust and confidence. This begs the question as to whether a prospective student chooses a HEI which is under mentorship and tutelage over the mentor or an established autonomous public HEI.

Moderated by the delineated issues of perceived high fees, faculty quality, infrastructural deficit, among other things, a prospective student is likely to form a choice being aware of and hence influenced by these issues and others yet to be uncovered. There is a sense of despondency among owners and management of private higher education institutions in Ghana, as there is in many other developing environments. What follows is a description provided by the president of Ghana's Conference of Independent Universities (CIU) (Daily Graphic, 2021).

About some 100,000 people are said to have obtained higher education from private universities in the last 20 years probably, clearing all access backlogs. That the expansion of public universities to the doorstep of the private ones has been a major threat to their survival. For instance, the situation where mentor universities set up satellite campuses within the vicinity of their mentee private HEIs' campuses.

- Misconstrued perception of higher fees charged by private HEIs.

- The proliferation of private HEIs. Presently, 81 accredited private tertiary institutions are operating in Ghana while the government intensifies its efforts to expand and upgrade existing public ones and establish new public universities (GTEC, 2020). The financial situation of most private HEIs in Ghana is horrible, and some faith-based ones derive respite and support from their respective missions.
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This portrayal suggests that public and private HEIs in Ghana are in fierce competition, with the private HEIs appearing to be losing out to the public ones. Managers of Ghana's higher education institutions face numerous realities that are brought to light by this study. There is a considerable impact on Ghana's higher education sector from the growing number of private higher education institutions (HEIs). 210 public and private tertiary education institutions are listed by the Ghana

Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), which oversees quality assurance and certification in Ghana (GTEC, 2021). In summary, the architecture and institutional designs that impede the growth of private HEIs (Anthony, 2021), the unbridled new entrants into the market, and varied stakeholder need, and choice peculiarities characterise the Ghanaian private HE sector in particular.

### 2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has given a comprehensive overview of the status of Ghana's HEI, with a focus on PHEI. Consequently, several gaps in Ghana's PHEI are identified with the sole aim of contributing to the body of knowledge.

# CHAPTER THREE THEORETICAL REVIEW

## 3.0 Introduction

This chapter examines a few pertinent theories related to human decision-making, which is frequently impacted by both internal and external forces. Theoretical frameworks often employed in the majority of the examined empirical studies to investigate factors influencing decision- making include the theory of planned behaviour, the theory of reasoned action, decision theory, stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and decision theory. The current study integrates three main theories: stakeholder theory, institutional theory and decision theory to provide guidance, help explain and examine the issue of competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana.

## 3.1 Rationale for the Choice of the Theories

Institutional theory elucidates the reasons HEIs may follow similar practices to sustain legitimacy, but stakeholder theory clarifies how institutions distinguish themselves and cater to the requirements and expectations of a varied array of stakeholders. Collectively, these theories elucidate the competitive dynamics within higher education and the strategic positioning of institutions (Marginson, 2011). Institutional theory explains how universities and colleges react to external influences and competitive dynamics within the realm of higher education. PHEIs may implement specific strategies and behaviours to align with the expectations of their institutional environment, including accreditation standards, government regulations, and industry best practices, while simultaneously striving to distinguish themselves from competitors to achieve a competitive advantage.

The study asserts that the actions of many players in the higher education sector invariably affect the selection of PHEIs. Consequently, the interests of all stakeholders—students, faculty,

staff, alumni, government, employers, religious affiliation and the local community—impact decision-making and the selection of PHEIs (Freeman et al., 2020; Barney & Harrison, 2020; McGahan, 2021). As a result, the study broadens the framework to incorporate decision theory in decision making. Decision theory is being incorporated into the theoretical framework, based on the premise that higher education environment is marked by uncertainty and a complicated decision-making environment due to various stakeholders and the institutional context in which the PHEIs operates. Decision theory offers a framework for comprehending how student applicants and their guardians select among competing options of PHEIs by considering the potential gains and losses associated with their choice. Decision theory inherently addresses the issue of opportunity cost, which underlies the trade-off between anticipated gains and losses in the selection of a particular PHEI.

In the context of Ghana, numerous PHEIs are competing for student to enrol into their programmes. The decision to select a particular PHEI is predominantly influenced by various social and economic factors, including reputation, employability, physical infrastructure, fee/cost and programme options, among others. Collectively, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the intricate dynamics of competition and strategy within the private higher education sector.

The next three sections delve into detail the three underpinning theories.

### 3.2 Stakeholder Theory

Freeman's groundbreaking study, Stakeholder Management: A Stakeholder Approach (Freeman, 1984), transformed the field of stakeholder theory. Freeman came to the conclusion that the prevalent management philosophy, which placed a premium on maximising shareholder wealth, was inadequate in light of the scope and diversity of recent changes in the

economic environment. Environmental changes were happening everywhere, according to Freeman, and they affected external and internal stakeholders equally (governments, rivals, consumer advocates, environmentalists, special interest groups, and the media) as well as internal stakeholders (owners, customers, employees, and suppliers). His warning to managers was to "take into account all of those groups and individuals that can affect or are affected by actions of the business" (Freeman, 2023). Following Freeman's scholarly work, many questions have surfaced regarding the involvement and extent of the stakeholders he identified.

There is a perspective in academic circles that contends that the phrase "can affect" essentially renders the term "stakeholder" devoid of meaning. Phillips and Reichart questioned this notion, stating, "Why should we espouse a theory of stakeholder management if all living entities, in so far as they can affect the firm, must fall under the obligatory umbrella of managerial consideration?" (Freeman et al., 2020). As a result, it is more challenging than ever for managers to determine which stakeholders merit their attention. Therefore, there have been some empirical studies looking into the type of stakeholders that managers should pay attention to. Freeman (1984) classified them as either internal or external, as well as cooperative or competitive. Managers should give priority to primary stakeholders over secondary stakeholders, according to Barney and Harrison (2020). Phillips, Freeman, and Wicks (2003) categorise them as normative and derived stakeholders. McGahan (2021) defines stakeholders as everyone who has a "significant interest" in the business.

Stakeholder theory has been supported by many scholars (e.g., Dmytriyev et al., 2021; Hörisch et al., 2020), but it has also been criticised for coming from socialist worldviews, serving as a justification for management opportunism, calling for legal changes, or being a comprehensive moral doctrine that discourages taking risks and complicates corporate governance.

Thus, the integration of stakeholder theory with institutional theory considers the regulatory pressures, normative beliefs, and cognitive beliefs (norms and moral doctrines) that influence organisational decision-making processes in relation to addressing stakeholders' interests. Higher education exemplifies an organisation that employs stakeholder theory, which emerged in the 1980s in response to the increased dynamism and complexity of the environment in which enterprises operate. As Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) develop and become more intricate, it has become increasingly challenging to identify and analyse who their stakeholders are, what stakes they claim, and what risks or opportunities stakeholders present (Khanyile, 2018). Stakeholders are defined as individuals who have an impact on, or potentially have an impact on, an organisation's progress. (Dmytriyev et al., 2021; Hörisch et al., 2020).

As previously noted, the central tenet of stakeholder theory is that the support of stakeholders is crucial for an organisation's long-term survival. Managing the needs, expectations, and competing interests of these stakeholders is a key responsibility of strategic management in Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs).

According to Clarkson (1995) and Tetteh et al. (2024), a PHEI requires the support of its primary stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, clients, and suppliers, to achieve success. These stakeholders provide the infrastructure and legislative frameworks necessary for the operation of the institutions. This study posits that PHEIs do not regard secondary stakeholders, such as the media and special interest groups, as critical to their survival. Instead, they prioritise those stakeholders with power, urgency and legitimate claims.

Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) developed a widely adopted framework to define the salience relationships of stakeholders, which has since been extensively utilised by both practitioners and researchers. They argue that stakeholder identification and salience are influenced by the

stakeholder's possession of one or more of the following relationship attributes: (1) the stakeholder's power to influence the firm, (2) the legitimacy of the stakeholder's relationship with the firm, and (3) the urgency of the stakeholder's claim on the organisation. In real life, the power attribute can take on various forms. It may manifest as coercion, sometimes known as "coercive power," which is the use of force, violence, or restraint. in contrast to normative power, which is grounded in symbolic resources (Tetteh et al., 2024; Alves, Gomes & Corsini, 2014).

Legitimacy, the second characteristic, identifies the stakeholder requiring managerial attention; however, if this characteristic is emphasised in isolation from the power characteristic, the theory fails to convey its intended significance. Dong, Burritt and Qian (2014) highlight that even though certain stakeholders' interactions may be accepted as legitimate, this does not necessarily confer control or authority over the group as a whole. Legitimacy can also signify that an organisation's actions are acceptable and appropriate in relation to a set of rules, norms, principles, and beliefs (Alves et al., 2014). This stakeholder pressure is applied at various levels of analysis, from individual to societal (Adongo & Kim, 2018). However, this study adopts solely an organisational approach of Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) to the legitimacy attribute.

However, the dynamics of stakeholder interactions do not solely result from the recognition of power and legitimacy traits. The third characteristic, urgency, suggests that the relationships between these groups will transition from a static to a dynamic form, implying greater influence in these audiences' claims (Alves et al., 2014; Tetteh et al., 2024). The urgency attribute underscores the ability of stakeholders to define their level of sensibility, criticality, and pressure in order to compel managers of organisations to heed their claims (Mitchell et al., 1997; Şener, Varoğlu & Karapolatgil, 2016).

In addition to being socially constructed, the characteristics of power, legitimacy, and urgency that emerge in interactions between organisations and their interested parties are likely to vary and may be consciously and intentionally present in relationships between stakeholders and strategic management of complexity and uncertainties in Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs). Consequently, the measures implemented by the PHEIs to address complications and uncertainties within the higher education landscape become increasingly intricate and complex.

The stakeholder theory considers universities to be multiplex businesses with a wide range of stakeholders and interest groups. Falqueto et al. (2020) point out that universities today are home to a wide range of constituents and partners that have an impact on and are influenced by the institution's operations.

There is evidence that stakeholder theory has permeated numerous fields, including strategic management, finance, accounting, human resources management, production, information technology, and marketing. Consequently, academic literature on stakeholder theory has emerged in these fields and beyond. Despite the theory's growing reputation and applicability, broader scopes and less researched contexts, such as higher education institutions, still require more thorough investigation, as previously noted. This study will employ stakeholder theory to examine student and parent preferences, as well as perspectives from private university administrators, regulators, and employers on enrolment and sustainability.

Student choice affects enrolment and the sustainability of private universities and colleges in many ways, including financing (Adefulu et al., 2020). However, among the key people that influence student’s choice greatly are parents. Parents also consider many factors before making choice decisions for their wards’ higher education (Dmytriyev et al., 2021). Key among the choice criteria of parents are the reputation and image of the HEI, tuition fees, quality and

employment after graduation. These factors have a direct or indirect relationship with regulation and management (Mkong et al., 2021). In view of this, exploring and examining is a complex thing must be studied from a broad and holistic stakeholder perspective.

Regardless of the motivation or stakeholder influence for Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) to consider stakeholders' demands and interests in managing higher education institutions, the overarching rationale is to build or protect their reputation in order to generate more revenue from student enrolment. These various mechanisms to identify and categorise stakeholders can be viewed as a preliminary step towards establishing a theoretical basis for investigating why the management of PHEIs chooses different approaches to managing complexities and uncertainty in the higher education industry. This theory also helps to uncover which stakeholders are perceived by the management of PHEIs to be exerting the most pressure on the higher education institutions to commit to providing quality education and employable graduates in the Ghanaian context.

### 3.3 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory posits that organisational practices, norms and values are largely influenced by institutional pressures such as regulation, government policies, industry leaders' practices, courts ruling, political pressures and cultural practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In other words, corporate entities do not always adopt strategies, structures, and practices to enhance their financial performance; instead, they react and look for ways to accommodate external and regulative pressures that help them obtain legitimacy from their powerful stakeholders. This theory explains the reasons firms in the same industry often have similar organisational arrangement and practices that makes it difficult to differentiate them (Peters, 2022). Thus, corporate entities in the same industry adopt similar practices and strategies because they face the same external pressures, which make them isomorphic. Isomorphism is key to understanding

the concept of institutional theory because the conduct of one firm in the industry can bring external pressures from authorised sources that can threaten the survival of the whole industry (Nite & Edwards, 2021). This may explain why companies in various industries form a union to regulate the conduct of the firms. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explain isomorphism as the process by which firms in the same industry adopt similar structures and systems, making their practices identical.

Under institutional theory, corporate entities are also seen as social and cultural systems and not simply production systems (Cardona Mejía et al., 2020; Nite & Edwards, 2021). They tend to adopt the same business practices over time as a response to common external pressures from authorised sources such as regulatory institutions. Institutional theory provides three different types of isomorphism that make organisations adapt to their institutional environment. These include normative, coercive, and mimetic. Coercive isomorphism occurs when powerful external stakeholders such as regulators exert influence on companies to adopt a particular practice. Coercive pressures are crucial in driving management of PHEIs because of the legal obligation to comply with accreditation, while normative isomorphism ensures that corporate entities conform to an institutionalised behaviour that is seen as legitimate (Cardona Mejía et al., 2020; Nite & Edwards, 2021). Finally, when businesses try to duplicate the success of their rivals in an industry, this phenomenon is known as mimetic isomorphism (Choi & Woo, 2022).

Institutional theory elucidates that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) adapt to the requirements of their institutional environment, primarily due to their formal structure being "loosely coupled" from their technical activities, characterised by insufficient coordination and control over the technical processes associated with classroom instruction (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2005).

Institutional theory, therefore, challenges rational perceptions of private higher education institutions as internally motivated and technically proficient. Institutional theorists contend that legitimacy arises from adherence to the normatively established rules and scripts of the institutional context, rather than from instructional efficacy; consequently, for schools, organisational success relies on factors beyond mere technical efficiency (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009; Cai & Mehari, 2015).

The decentralised and autonomous characteristics of charter Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) enable them to function independently of bureaucratic constraints, thereby challenging and redefining institutional categories. Ironically, the challenge for these charter schools to establish new educational paradigms may be practically impossible to overcome, given that the institutionalised frameworks arising from bureaucratic regulations are those that, within the broader institutional context, determine both effective and legitimate education (Calderón-Hernández, Jiménez-Zapata & Serna-Gomez, 2020).

Essentially, the creation of PHEIs is opposed by the prevailing institutional environment that defines valid education, as well as by the existing standards, norms, and frameworks of their institutional context. Thus, in the Ghanaian context, the PHEIs are required to comply with the regulatory standards of GTEC and the Affiliate institutions, two influential external entities. Not only is it difficult but also unpredictable that these PHEIs would be able to get over these institutional obstacles and apply creative tactics to boost enrolment and income. Studies that look into the challenges and complexities PHEIs face navigating larger institutional and regulatory contexts as well as the steps taken by charter organisations to address these issues are lacking in the body of research (Arar et al., 2017; Appe & Barragán, 2017; Calderón-Hernández et al., 2020). Although public HEIs are exempt from many rules that apply to conventional public HEIs, they are not operating in a decentralised policy vacuum that keeps

them impervious to the impacts of the larger institutional context. PHEIs with charters, for example, are nevertheless constrained by the institutionally defined normative notions of what constitutes an effective education.

This study presents a conceptual framework designed to address the gap in research by facilitating the identification (qualitative) and prediction (quantitative) of the factors influencing choices, as well as the complexities, uncertainties, and challenges faced by PHEIs within the broader institutional context. The framework is predicated on the following empirical question: Will PHEIs enhance their organisational survival decisions through student enrolment by focusing on technical production duties rather than adhering to the institutionalised rituals that characterise legitimate education within the institutional environment? The framework presents two competing conceptual contexts in which PHEIs operate: competition on one hand, and a complex and uncertain environment on the other.

Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) enjoy considerable autonomy from multiple supervisory bodies and bureaucratic oversight, enabling them to focus on internal technical goals and local accountability measures to gain a competitive edge for survival and sustainability. In contrast, Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) are evolving within a stringent institutional framework that demands conformity to normative educational standards. Although PHEIs are theoretically allowed to pursue innovative educational approaches that challenge established pedagogical practices, they remain constrained by existing institutional regulations that define acceptable educational methods in Ghana.

Thus far, achieving success has presented numerous challenges for PHEI administrators, an issue this thesis will explore in the following sub-section. The upcoming sub-section outlines a theoretical framework that illuminates the difficulties PHEIs face in balancing rule-based

requirements for institutional legitimacy whilst endeavouring to foster innovative educational models that correspond to the practical needs of employers and the local community.

### 3.4 Decision Theory

The fields of psychology, organisational behaviour, and marketing all contributed to the development of decision theory, but they did so for distinct reasons and through unique lenses (Främling, 2020; Fisher & Hamilton, 2021). In the social science literature, consumer decision theory can be broken down into three distinct camps: first, normative decision theory aims to delineate the optimal course of action for a decision-maker to attain the maximum achievable utility (Främling, 2020; Fisher & Hamilton, 2021). This includes examples such as expected utility theory and subjective expected utility theory. As articulated by its advocates, normative decision- making "permits uncertainty regarding the occurrence of external events but presumes decision- makers to be certain about their preferences" (Pal, 2020).

Second, decision-makers operate with bounded rationality (Regenwetter et al., 2022), aiming to "satisfice" instead of maximising. This notion challenges the portrayal of the rational decision- maker within normative decision theory. According to scholars of behavioural decision theory (e.g., Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Regenwetter et al., 2022; Pal, 2020), consumers are flexible decision-makers whose preferences are heavily influenced by their unique characteristics, the situation, and the task. In contrast to normative decision theory, this constructive view emphasises the necessity of considering all pertinent factors (Regenwetter et al., 2022; Pal, 2020). The reality is that not all decision-makers possess explicitly defined preferences. Studies have revealed that uncertain consumers are more prone to employ ad hoc decision strategies and assign varying weights to different attributes (Regenwetter et al., 2022; Pal, 2020). Behavioural decision research has disclosed a multitude of decision-making methods, with 'satisficing' being perhaps the most renowned. Other theories encompass

lexicographic elimination by aspects, and strategies such as equal weight; majority of confirming dimensions and decision theory (Regenwetter et al., 2022; Pal, 2020).

Third, in contrast to behavioural and normative decision theories, naturalistic decision theory (e.g., Hunt et al., 2021) originated from the notion that authentic decision behaviour ought to be examined within its natural context, and models should be constructed from such observations (Ksander et al., 2021). Consequently, naturalistic decision theory, unlike behavioural theory, discards normative constructs like probability and utility theory (Hunt et al., 2021; Ksander et al., 2021). As a framework for decision-making, it adopts a process-oriented and outcome-driven approach, commencing with a "situation assessment," followed by the presentation of several options for proceeding with a purchase. Thus, it entails decision-making amid uncertainty, incomplete information, and evolving priorities. Models such as image theory, the dominance search model, the situation assessment model, and recognition-primed decisions are illustrative examples (Li et al., 2020; Hunt et al., 2021; Ksander et al., 2021). Various decision strategies offer insights into the enigmatic "black box" of consumer decision-making processes, and each class of decision theory emerged in response to the necessity for such understanding.

Ladrón de Guevara Cortés, Tolosa, and Rojo (2023) provided empirical evidence for this theory by examining how individuals focus on gains and losses, with a stronger emphasis on risk appetite. According to these authors, the decisions made by individuals exhibit a range of effects—such as certainty, reflection, and isolation—that are inconsistent with traditional economic theories. These effects, therefore, serve as the foundational basis for investigations into choice dilemmas and the dynamics of risky decision-making processes.

Mongin and Baccelli (2021) postulate that individuals are influenced by financial, environmental, psychological, and sociological factors when making choices. The theory assumes that stakeholders are motivated by a combination of these factors, which drive an individual's willingness to select a particular Public Higher Education Institution (PHEI). This study also investigates whether there is a statistically significant positive association between the decision criteria of students, parents, and employers and their behaviour and attitude towards selecting a specific PHEI.

### 3.5 Theoretical Framework

A total of three theories – namely, stakeholder, institutional and decision theory – were employed in this study. The theories from the literature share one important common theme, i.e., decision-making behaviour and the influence of the external environment. Stakeholder theory suggests that an organisation should consider the interests of all its stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, government, and the local community, when making decisions (Freeman et al., 2020); Barney & Harrison, 2020; McGahan, 2021).

In higher education, this means that universities and colleges need to consider the needs and expectations of various stakeholders when developing their competitive strategies. By understanding the diverse interests and concerns of stakeholders, higher education institutions can shape their strategies to create value for all stakeholders and gain a competitive advantage (Freeman et al., 2020; Barney & Harrison, 2020; McGahan, 2021). Institutional theory focuses on the impact of institutional environments on organisations, including how organisations conform to institutional norms, values, and expectations (Cardona Mejía et al., 2020; Nite & Edwards, 2021; Choi & Woo, 2022).

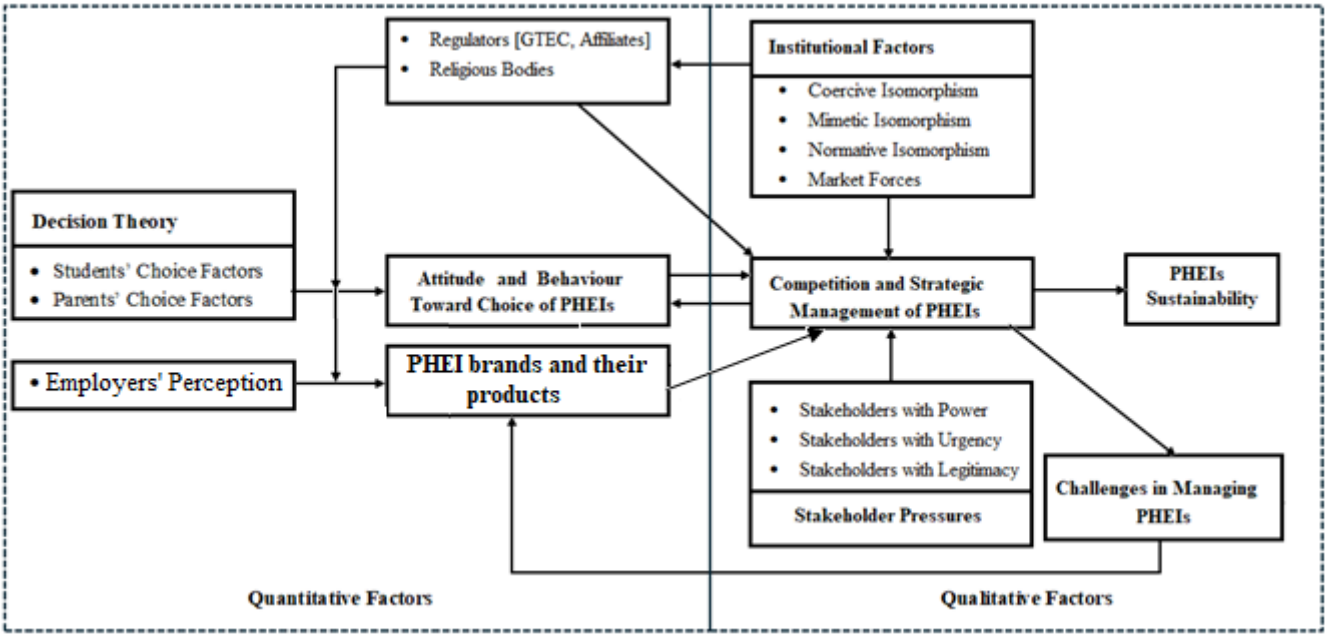
In the context of higher education, institutional theory can help explain how universities and colleges respond to external pressures and competitive forces. Institutions may adopt certain strategies and behaviours to conform to the expectations of their institutional environment, such as accreditation standards, government regulations, and industry best practices, while also seeking to differentiate themselves from competitors. Decision theory, a concept from behavioural economics, explores how individuals make decisions under uncertainty and risk (Ruggeri et al., 2020; Harrison & Swarthout, 2023). In the context of higher education competition, this theory can help explain how students, faculty, and administrators make choices and evaluate alternatives. For example, prospective students may weigh the potential gains and losses associated with choosing a particular university based on factors such as reputation, cost, and future career decisions. In the context of higher education, this theory can help to understand how students, faculty, and administrators plan and act based on their expected gains and losses with regard to the selection of a particular PHEI. Institutions can use this theory to predict and influence behaviours related to enrolment, retention, faculty recruitment, and administrative decision-making.

In essence, these theories are interlinked within the context of competition and strategy in higher education, offering insights into the intricate interactions among stakeholders, institutional environments, decision-making processes, and behavioural factors that shape the competitive dynamics of the higher education sector. By considering these theories, higher education institutions can formulate more informed and effective strategies to navigate competition and achieve their objectives. Through the consideration of these interplays among stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and decision theory, private higher educational institutions can develop comprehensive approaches that not only attract prospective students but also address the needs and expectations of a diverse array of stakeholders. This holistic approach ultimately contributes to their long-term success within the competitive higher education landscape.

The study finally, uses the decision theory to help explain how students, parents and employers evaluate multiple factors such cost, quality of faculty, location, facilities, programme offerings and so on simultaneously to make informed choice of PHEIs. By applying decision theory, stakeholders can make more rational and informed choices, while PHEIs can develop effective strategies to enhance their appeal and competitiveness in the market space.

In summary, effectively managing the complexities and uncertainties arising from the institutional environment and stakeholder pressures will lead to the sustainability of PHEIs. Conversely, the failure of PHEI managers to sufficiently navigate these complexities and uncertainties will lead to challenges that they must address in order to attract optimum number students that will generate the desired revenue for sustenance. The intricate linkages of these theories are illustrated in the theoretical framework in Figure 3.1 below.

**Figure 3. 1: Theoretical Framework**




**Source: Author's Own Constructs**

### 3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses the various theories that have been identified in the literature to underpin the factors that influence the behaviour of prospective students, parents and employers in making choice of a PHEI. The chapter also discusses theories that underpin management of complexities and uncertainties in PHEIs to achieve desired sustainability and sustenance. In all, a total of three theories – namely, stakeholder, decision, institutional theory – are identified and reviewed. The study integrates these theories as the basis for explaining the various factors that influence competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana. These three theories are complementary and together provide a strong theoretical foundation for the study.

# CHAPTER FOUR LITERATURE REVIEW

## 4.0 Introduction

The section is dedicated to reviewing previous works on higher education and the varied contributions. Specifically, the chapter looks at the literature on higher education at the broader level, public HEIs, privatisation of HE, private HE, types and functions, empirical classifications of HEIs, the Levi classification, the Geiger classification, regulatory constraints, competition and the adoption of business strategies for performance in the HE sectors, the HE choice criteria literature and the hypotheses for this study.

## 4.1 Higher education literature at the broader level

Higher education (HE) is defined by the UNESCO as all types of studies, training, or training for research provided by universities or other educational establishments that have been approved as institutions of higher education by the competent State authorities. Higher education institution (HEI) is an organisation that provides education beyond the secondary level, typically leading to academic degrees or certifications (UNESCO, 1998). Only a government agency can identify a facility as a higher education facility in the eyes of UNESCO (Guàrdia et al., 2021). This shows that the legal system of a country governs HE (Guàrdia et al., 2021). Higher education (HE) is confronted with a significant problem that is often ignored. The problem originates from the way the idea is conceptualised, from the core principles that have long underpinned the idea of HE, and from the deterioration of those principles (Sinuany-Stern, 2021). According to Guàrdia et al. (2021) and Sinuany-Stern (2021), there are many who view higher education as a business venture that requires financial investment from investors in order to turn a profit, while others view it as a public benefit that the state must offer, support, and oversee. Lueg and Graf (2022) investigated the prevailing legitimating notion and purpose of higher education because of this seemingly dichotomous view on higher education's concept and purpose. The authors see a shift in higher education's principal justification from that of a

social institution to that of a commercial enterprise. Higher education is seen as a social institution that sustains, reproduces, or adapts itself to implement generally held and firmly organised societal values as quasi-corporate enterprises that create a wide range of commodities and services in a competitive marketplace (Wong & Wong, 2021). Higher education is perceived as a business by the public, since it provides a diverse variety of goods and services in a competitive market. Higher education institutions in the region are now shifting towards a business-oriented approach, moving away from the traditional focus on professionalism (Guàrdia et al., 2021; Sinuany-Stern, 2021).

Increasingly, higher education is becoming recognised as the most important procedure for converting people into human resources and improving a country's growth and income as a result (Wong & Wong, 2021). However, the terms university and higher education are sometimes used interchangeably. The current investigation takes place in a college or university setting. Higher education institutions are defined as institutions of higher learning, including universities as well as for-profit and nonprofit organisations. Greater access to quality higher education has benefited economic growth, scientific progress, inventions, knowledge expansion, and political stability around the world over the last few decades (Qasim, Al-Askari., Massoud, & Ayoubi, 2021). Colleges and universities have been plagued by several problems that make it difficult for them to fulfil their missions, despite the enormous contributions they've made. Funding is one of these factors, along with globalisation, accessibility, quality assurance, governance, and accountability. When it comes to higher education commodification and massification, access appears to have had a particularly large impact, especially in developing nations (Barakat & Shields, 2019). It's possible to classify higher education into two types: publicly funded and privately funded.

### 4.1.1 Public HEIs

Scholars disagree on the meaning of public vs. private higher education, but they all agree that it is a controversial topic. Despite this, a few distinguishing characteristics have been discovered and applied as a means of sorting public from private universities. Public higher education refers to post-secondary institutions that are primarily funded and operated by government entities—typically state or local governments ( Johnstone, 2020). Unlike private universities, public higher education institutions (HEIs) are either wholly owned by the state or receive substantial public funding from a national or subnational government (Brzezicki, 2020). Whether or not a national university meets the criteria for "public" status varies widely from one country (or region) to the next (Estetikha et al., 2021). Anderson et al. (2020), for example, combine legal ownership, funding, and societal impact as a distinguishing factor. Public and private higher education are distinguished by funding and the nature of the goods provided (Anderson et al., 2020). Public good is characterised as having advantages accrued to society as well as individuals, whereas the distinction between private and public higher education can be stated in terms of outcomes (Qasim et al, 2021). Private higher education institutions, including those that are for-profit, can contribute to the public good as well as the other way around.

### 4.1.2 Privatisation of higher education

Privatisation of higher education involves leaning more on private funding instead of continuously escalating government subsidies. This makes cost recovery a crucial factor in educational privatisation (Brzezicki, 2020). Across all levels of education (primary, secondary, tertiary), there are frequent calls for privatisation, largely due to education being a major expenditure in government budgets (Estetikha et al., 2021). There are dual paths to privatising higher education: students attending private schools or the private funding of higher education. In the former, the government ceases to offer higher education services, constituting true privatisation. In the latter, public higher education institutions are financed by tuition fees

instead of government funds (Qureshi & Khawaja,2021). Six central forces propel the emergence of for-profit universities: the rise of the knowledge-based economy, demographic shifts, altered public attitudes towards education, new technological developments, the pursuit of knowledge-driven organisation, and diminished public trust in the public sector (Qureshi & Khawaja, 2021).

The relentless advance of globalisation has birthed the knowledge-based economy, where knowledge and communication are the wealth engines, not merely natural resources or manual labour. This elevates the importance of intellectual capital, leading to high demand for higher education. Contemporary education emphasises lifelong learning, and globalisation has made education a global phenomenon, thereby attracting private sector interest (Mirza & Nisa, 2020).

The public sector, including higher education, faces scrutiny for low productivity, high costs, and poor leadership and technology. This criticism invites the private sector, which perceives itself as more efficient. The need for technology investment often exceeds the funding capabilities of states and localities, necessitating private sector involvement (Mirza & Nisa, 2020). The private sector may find the education system attractive due to its slow pace of change, large and stable cash flow from tuition, and the growing global education market. Higher education is somewhat insulated from economic downturns, as enrolments often increase during recessions, as people prefer studying to unemployment. This countercyclicality and the state subsidies for higher education further lure the private sector (Mirza & Nisa, 2020; Qureshi & Khawaja, 2021). Finally, a decline in public confidence in government or the public sector has been noted, shifting trust towards the profit sector (Mirza & Nisa, 2020; Qureshi & Khawaja, 2021). Private Higher Education, Types and Functions It is well known that in recent years, private universities and colleges across the globe have experienced rapid growth and expansion. There has been a lot of progress in the worldwide movement to increase access to higher education (Mirza & Nisa, 2020; Qureshi & Khawaja, 2021). A conspicuous manifestation

of growth in various regions, encompassing Sub-Saharan Africa, is the proliferation of private institutions dedicated to higher learning. As articulated by UNESCO (2006), the private sector exercises particular influence in regions such as Latin America, East Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The amplification of the private sector within the sphere of higher education is integral to the broader sector reform in Sub-Saharan Africa, conceived with the aspiration to augment accessibility (Mirza & Nisa, 2020; Qureshi & Khawaja,2021).

Several scholars, including Jones (1992), Geiger (1986, 1991), Levy (1986b), Altbach (1998), and Zumeta (1992), have provided comprehensive insights into the preliminary studies on private higher education. These studies have primarily explored the ramifications of state policies for private higher education and examined the underlying rationales and functions of private higher education within the context of specific state policies. Geiger (1986) employed a taxonomic and analytic approach to delineate the triad of primary functions attributed to private higher education. The concept of the private sector on a grand scale serves as the foundational premise.

It is not uncommon for public institutions to have size restrictions and entrance policies that are more stringent than their private counterparts. As a result of this disparity and the open admissions policy in private institutions, concerns regarding the quality of private education may arise (Barsoum, 2020). These institutions are known as demand-compensating private institutions, and their primary function is to provide higher education. In developing countries, the non-elite alternative is more prevalent, as these nations lack the financial resources to fund the expansion of public higher education in the face of rising demand. This demand is driven by educational development philosophies, the rise of the middle class, and population growth.Government subsidies account for less than 10% of private providers' overall income in underdeveloped nations, and are frequently zero (Eaton et al., 2020). Students in private sector universities typically receive little in the way of governmental aid, whether in the form of merit- or need-based scholarships or student loans. While the state generally allows private companies

to enter the market, private institutions are left entirely to their own devices (Chankseliani et al., 2021). Secondly, private higher education serves the purpose of offering a different type of education than what is offered by public institutions. Particularly in areas where there is a broad and diverse public sector, as well as in places where cultural or religious groups insist on their own control of educational institutions, private efforts are encouraged (Chankseliani et al., 2021).

### 4.2 Empirical Classifications of HEIs

#### 4.2.1 The Levi Classification

Levy has delineated a framework for the examination of public-private collaborations in the realm of higher education (1986b). Integral to his typology are the ensuing queries.

**Table 4. 12: Summary of Levi Classification of Higher Education**

| SN | Levi Classification | Characteristics |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | Composition | 1. Monolithic<br>2. Dual |
| **2** | Financial contribution | 1. Wholly public finance<br>2. Wholly private finance<br>3. Combination of above |
| **3** | Dual system | 1. Proportionate size public<br>2. Proportionate size private |
| **4** | Distinctiveness | 1. Percentage of private enrolment<br>2. Percentage of public enrolment |

**Source: Levi, 1986b**

1. Concerning the composition of a given system, is it monolithic or does it embody both private and public sectors? This structural inquiry is oriented towards discerning whether the system is 'Single' or 'Dual' in nature.
2. In the instance of a single system, what is the extent of private financial contribution to the public sector? If the institutions are financed wholly by public means, the pattern is identified as 'Statist'. Conversely, if there is a confluence of public and private funding, the system may be characterised as 'Public-Autonomous'.

3. If the system is dual, what is the proportionate size of each sector, and how are private and public funds apportioned to each? The underlying question pertains to the financial alignment of the sectors: if identical, the system is termed 'Homogenised'; if disparate, it is labelled a 'Distinctive' system.
4. In the case of distinctiveness, what percentage of enrolments is accounted for by private higher education? Systems where private institutions enrol less than half of the total aretermed 'Minority Private', whereas a greater share results in the classification 'Majority Private'. Levy notes a degree of ambiguity at the borders between these patterns, such as between 'Statist' and 'Public-Autonomous', and recognises that the delineations may appear somewhat arbitrary, particularly as systems evolve.

A prevalent model followed by many states is the "90% - 90% operational guideline," necessitating at least 90% public enrolments and corresponding state funding (Eaton et al., 2020). Typically, governments directly finance institutions, which then judiciously allocate funds among themselves (Jacob et al., 2021). In the majority of such systems, institutions are barred from imposing tuition fees, instead offering an array of state-backed financial aid to students. However, in response to fiscal constraints and debates surrounding the private and public merits of education, some governments are adopting moderate tuition fees, a trend observable in many Western European countries (Chankseliani et al., 2021). Within these systems, the influence of private institutions on state-run universities remains marginal, though deviations do occur, most prominently in the Public-Autonomous pattern of state-funded higher education.

Public policy has fostered a context wherein organisations retain a measure of financial self-determination while concurrently introducing competitive elements into the process of distributing public funds (Eaton et al., 2020; Chankseliani et al., 2021; Jacob et al., 2021). This mechanism involves government funding without explicit directives concerning its allocation

or means of disbursement. Without delving into technicalities, it is observed that students enrolled in specific institutions can avail themselves of public funding for higher education through governmental grants and scholarships. Countries such as Great Britain and Australia exemplify public- autonomous systems where private institutions receive significantly less governmental support than public entities. Lastly, the "homogenised" type of dual-sector system is characterised by equitable state funding across both sectors, resulting in a financial landscape in which private and public sectors are strikingly analogous (Eaton et al., 2020; Chankseliani et al., 2021; Jacob et al., 2021).

Traditionally, private businesses have relied on non-government revenue, such as tuition, to operate. But the private sector has been unable to carry out its duties using only private funds, and it has successfully claimed public funding. It was decided "not to see them perish due to insufficient funds" in countries like Belgium and the Netherlands because their governments saw private higher education as socially valuable and distinct from the public higher education system (Levy, 1986). Despite the fact that public funding typically entails heavy government oversight, public and private sectors are still treated differently in systems like Belgium's. Over 10% but fewer than 50% of students follow this trend of enrolling privately.

### 4.2.2 The Geiger Classification

Geiger (1986) introduced an analogous categorisation of structural types within higher education systems, integrating patterns of public-private differentiation alongside the previously described classification of the rationales and functions of private higher education (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021). In relation to the state's delivery of public higher education, Geiger distinguishes three discrete types of mixed public-private systems: parallel public and private sectors, comprehensive public sectors, and mass private sectors accompanied by limited public sectors (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021).

The diversity within private college configurations is considerable, with each embodying distinct characteristics. In nations where only a select few elite public universities are present, the private sector has experienced substantial growth (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021). This proliferation of private institutions has been instrumental in addressing the escalating demand for higher education. Within most private mass-market industries, the majority of students pursue their education at private establishments (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021).

However, the evaluation of private education extends beyond its sheer magnitude to the inherent quality of instruction. Mass private sectors are characterised by a propensity to enrol a significant portion of students in institutions that are typically low-cost, unselective, and often of inferior quality. Geiger contends that hierarchies are an inescapable component of expansive private sectors. While the top tier of institutions generally consists of the country's most prestigious universities, the lower ranks exhibit greater variability beyond the mere distinction of public versus private ownership (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021).

Public institutions, often benefiting from a longstanding heritage, commonly hold a superior reputation for excellence and maintain a higher standard of quality compared to their private counterparts. The higher education institutions that cater to the broader populace within the private sector are often described as tuition-based, supply-absorbing, and market-driven. They usually offer a narrow array of programmes with a vocational focus, tailored to fields where graduate demand is pronounced (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021).

The existence of such vast private sectors is contingent upon state endorsement and assistance. The public sector's limited capacity to meet the demand for higher education has prompted

some states to temporarily adopt such a policy (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021). Contrarily, the majority of private sectors, education included, operate without government financial support. Geiger's scrutiny reveals that extensive private sectors are entrapped in a precarious policy dilemma. If private schools depend solely on tuition fees, particularly from less affluent students, they may be compelled to diminish the scope, complexity, and rigour of their programmes (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021).

Japan emerges as an exception, where private institutions receive government subsidies, thereby enhancing the stature of private universities. This complex landscape underscores the intricate interplay between public and private sectors, reflecting not only structural variations but also the nuanced dynamics of quality, demand, and state intervention within higher education systems (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021).

Whether or not low-quality higher education is preferable to no higher education for large numbers of students, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, is a policy problem for mass private sectors (Borsi et al., 2022). To combat the spread of subpar private higher education, many states have instituted stringent regulations on course material and teaching methods known as accreditation. Also, governments try to limit the mushrooming of private universities by making it harder to launch new ones. There needs to be (1) recognised cultural groups whose interests are represented in government, (2) a uniformly high national standard for higher education, and (3) substantial public subsidies for private institutions to bring them up to par with the public sector before there can be a parallel private and public sector (Sin et al., 2022).

In most cases, the state decides to heavily subsidise institutions originally funded by cultural or religious subgroups in order to ensure that members of those groups have access to higher

education and to keep academic standards high (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021). Private providers are often less respectful of the cultural or religious groups that founded institutions when they must rely on government funding. Furthermore, as Geiger notes, this has often led to a reduction in private institutions' autonomy, a loss of freedom to innovate, and, ultimately, the system's lack of distinctiveness (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021). However, private universities and colleges typically have more leeway and options in terms of market positioning and successfully competing with public institutions. The systems of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Chile are all viable candidates for inclusion here. Geiger also identifies a third sector, which he terms a peripheral private sector (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021). When public systems aren't adequate to meet the full demand for higher education, tangential private sectors rise to fill the void. The government allows for the existence of private institutions, but it invests almost exclusively in the public sector of higher education. This holds true for the higher education systems in the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, and Germany. Due to a lack of state funding, private providers can't compete academically with public institutions and are instead forced to cater to the needs of a narrower subset of students or sponsoring groups (Zapp et al., 2021; Hall & Lulich, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021).

### 4.3 Regulatory Constraints

Higher education has been unable to escape heavy state regulation and the domination of public ownership, having been viewed initially as a tool to enhance society's modernity and then as a vehicle for social mobility and economic development (Holzer et al., 2021). In Ghana, the emergence, existence and operations of private universities and colleges are regulated by the state through Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC, 2022). Private universities and colleges must all be accredited, but they are able to operate legally. As part of the accreditation requirements, private universities and colleges must affiliate with a public university for mentorship that lasts up to at least a decade before they can charter to become independent

institution that can award their own degrees (Agormedah et al., 2020). This regulatory arrangement not only subordinates private colleges and universities to the public ones but also makes them appear subservient, minions and low standard higher education institutions. Potentially and in reality, this regulatory regime fuels negative perceptions about the reputation and brand image of private universities and colleges. In other words, regulations can influence people's perception and choice of higher education brand, products and sustainability (Asiedu et al. 2020).

## 4.4 Competition and the adoption of business strategies for performance in the HE sectors

### 4.4.1 Competition

Competition can be defined as the rivalry between individuals or groups for resources, opportunities, or recognition, often driving innovation, efficiency, and performance within various contexts, such as business, sports, and ecology (Hitt et al, 2023). It occurs between and among business enterprises and forms part of many struggles that businesses and organisations go through on a daily basis. Within the business context, competition is characterised as a dynamic process whereby many organisations or entities within an industry or market attempt to outperform one another by providing clients with superior value propositions. With the ultimate goal of attaining superior performance and market position, this process comprises businesses trying to outperform competitors using a variety of strategies like innovation, cost reduction, quality improvement, or differentiation (Hitt et al., 2023).

Organisations compete for both material and human resources for growth, survival and sustainability. Businesses craft their strategies around prevailing and anticipated competition. In the context of higher education, the concept of competition casts higher education institutions as organisations that compete with one another in social fields. Fields, as defined by Fligstein and Dauter (2007), are social spaces populated by agents who share commonalities in their

activities, their constraints, and their opportunities for interaction with one another. In contrast to for-profit businesses, where bottom lines are the only thing that matters, universities are judged on a number of criteria, not just their financial stability. Higher education institutions (HEIs) compete fiercely for a number of vital resources, including as student enrolment, faculty talent, and funding (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2021). Because of the intense competition, the profession is frequently hierarchical, with successful institutions occupying privileged positions. It has been noted that there is a persistent and even increasing level of stratification in higher education, with elite universities preserving their standing by a variety of means (Marginson, 2023; Marginson, 2022). The arena of higher learning has experienced an acceleration and intensification of competition, largely driven by globalisation. Higher education has not remained insulated from the pervasive influence of globalisation, a force that Knight (de Wit & Altbach, 2021) contends has been neither impartial nor uniform across various sectors. Rust and Kim (2012) argue that the emergence of global university rankings, declarations by various nations to establish world-class universities, the formulation of regional governance structures and reforms, the inception of cross-border quality assessment mechanisms, and the widespread internationalisation of universities are emblematic of the global competitive landscape in higher education. This landscape reflects how globalisation and competition have become fundamental, shaping forces within contemporary institutions of higher learning.

Beyond the mere augmentation of competition, the influence of the free-market economy, fostered by globalisation, has elicited additional ramifications (Ahmad et al., 2023). Neoliberalism, an economic philosophy that champions a free-market economy and advocates for diminished government interference, has proliferated globally with the facilitation of international financial organisations and development agencies in recent decades (Boersma-de Jong, & de Jong, 2023). This ideology has not only played a crucial role in escalating

competition but has also contributed to reshaping the global contours of higher education, emphasising efficiency, market-driven practices, and cross-border collaboration. Such trends underline the multifaceted and transformative impact of globalisation on higher education, weaving together elements of competition, market principles, policy shifts, and international cooperation. Every part of the higher education industry feels the effects of the competition that comes with the global free market economy (Ahmad et al., 2023). The actualisation of academic capitalism, which views institutions of higher education not as public goods but as markets for private profit (Kwiek, 2021; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). In recent years, there has been a growing challenge to the traditional understanding of public higher education as a pure public good. The distinction between public and private goods is becoming more hazy, since public higher education continues to yield enormous society advantages while simultaneously yielding substantial private benefits to individuals (Marginson, 2023). Discussions over financing schemes, admissions, and the role of the government in higher education delivery have arisen as a result of the dual nature of higher education.

There is also a rise in institutional mergers, which can involve the combining of "strong" and "weak" institutions in a variety of configurations to increase universities' or nations' competitive advantages (Harman and Harman 2008). Third, there is a rise in private and international provision of education and student mobility in the world's higher education environment (Marginson, 2022).

Several countries in Asia and the Middle East have amplified their investment in higher education in recent times, even though neoliberal economic practices have often led to a reduction in government expenditure on higher education (Rovito, 2021). This investment pattern gives rise to concerns regarding access and equity, as a considerable portion of these funds is channelled towards the development of private institutions or elite "world-class"

research universities, which serve only a narrow segment of the population. Conversely, in Africa, private sector enrolment growth appears sluggish when juxtaposed with the public sector. This can be attributed to the fact that governments continue to invest in and broaden access to higher education within the public domain, a trend that is particularly observable in Ghana (Asiedu et al., 2020).

The landscape of competition within the higher education institutions (HEI) sector is multifaceted and plays out across various tiers: institutional, local, regional, national, and international. Competition manifests in several forms, including rivalry between domestic providers (both public and private) and foreign institutions operating both at home and abroad; competition among public and private HEIs; and intra-competition among public HEIs. Despite the intricate web of competitive dynamics, Laura et al. (2013) posit that there are no singular or central change agents steering the global competition phenomenon. Rather, the shaping and instigation of competition can be affected or initiated by an array of entities, including international aid agencies, financial institutions, national governments, individual educational institutions, or administrative bodies. This nuanced perspective on competition underscores its complex and multifactorial nature in the realm of higher education, reflecting the confluence of various global trends, policy decisions, and localised dynamics.

In this competitive milieu, there may successes and failures, losers, and beneficiaries. However, in higher education, according to Zebal and Goodwin (2012), given the growing number of private higher education institutions, the possibility of some of them going bankrupt or collapsing because of increased competition cannot be understated. Private higher education institutions compete not only in a defined physical jurisdiction and stiff regulatory environment, but also in the larger global community; as a result, they face many of the same risks that corporations and other business do to succeed (Küster & Avilés-Valenzuela, 2010; Ross, Grace, & Shao, 2013).

### 4.4.2 Strategy

The word "strategy" has become overused, particularly in management and business publications. The term "strategy" is defined and interpreted differently by different academics depending on their agendas. Strategy refers to a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term goal or objective and it involves careful consideration of resources, environment, and potential challenges (Hanson et al., 2021; Jacobides & Reeves, 2020; Porter, 1996). Due to the rise of multiple schools of strategic thought and the term's frequently casual and indiscriminate use in a variety of circumstances, the definition of strategy has grown more and more elusive. In both academic and practical spheres, there is a lack of unanimity and clarity as a result of the multiplicity of viewpoints and the loose use of "strategy" (Mintzberg et al., 2021).

Despite having its roots in the military, the concept of strategy now spans many different fields and industries. Similar to how military leaders use strategic thinking to direct their forces, business executives use strategic planning to set priorities, maximise the use of resources, and coordinate decision-making across their companies (Whittington et al., 2020).

Strategy in higher education has been a growing area of research over the last 20 years. Scholars, as well as policymakers and practitioners, have significantly contributed to the body of knowledge related to higher education management and have investigated different aspects of strategy of higher education. This has been analysed at the national (Waring 2013; Gazizova, 2012; Barbato et al, 2019), organisational (Vuori 2016; Fumasoli & Lepori, 2011; Van Vught & Huisman, 2013; Shah, Nair & Bennett, 2013; Luoma, Risikko, & Erkkilä, 2016, Fumasoli et al., 2020) and individual (Degn, 2015; Ainscough, Stewart, Colthorpe, & Zimbardi, 2018; Torrance, Thomas, & Robinson, 2000) levels of analysis.

At the organisational level, different dimensions of strategic management have gained

prominence: mission statements of higher education institutions (Arias-Coello, Simon-Martin, & Gonzalo Sanchez-Molero, 2020; Seeber et al., 2019), development and implementation of strategic plans (James & Derrick 2020; Morphew, Fumasoli, & Stensaker, 2018), use of strategic management tools like SWOT analysis and balanced scorecard (Chimtengo, Mkandawire, & Hanif, 2017). University strategy in relation to various activities such as teaching (Newton, 2010), internationalisation (James and Derrick 2020; Soliman, Anchor & Taylor, 2019; Kristensen & Karlsen, 2018; Middlehurst, & Woodfield, 2007), the articulation of the research-teaching nexus (Couper & Stoakes 2010), application and competition for research funding (Taleeb & Steele, 2000; Litwin, 2009; Boezerooij, van der Wende, & Huisman, 2007), and the marketing promotion of higher education institution (Milian, 2016) has been explored.

University strategy has also been investigated as a response to changing environmental conditions, e.g., funding arrangements (Rolfe 2003), as well as, more recently, to the Covid-19 pandemic (Bebbington, 2021). An important strand of research has developed around institutional positioning and profile building (Vuori 2016; Fumasoli & Lepori, 2011; Van Vught & Huisman, 2013; Fumasoli & Huisman, 2013; Wilkins & Huisman, 2019; Morphew, Fumasoli, & Stensaker, 2018; Fumasoli et al., 2020).

At the individual level scholars have explored the strategy development and implementation by different higher education actors – e.g., academics (Degn 2018), deans and department heads (De Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Degn, 2015; Hladchenko & Benninghoff, 2020; Davis, Jansen van Rensburg, & Venter, 2016, Stensaker and Fumasoli, 2017), doctoral candidates (Odena & Burgess, 2017) and students (Ainscough et al., 2018; Torrance, Thomas, & Robinson, 2000; Lee et al., 2017). Strategy as practice has been highlighted as an important approach to understand the complexity of strategy in higher education (Frolich et al., 2013).

Strategy has been investigated in different types of higher education institutions – e.g., university college (Couper and Stoaker 2010), university of applied sciences (2016), undergraduate and research-intensive universities (Milian 2016). However, there is a paucity of strategy literature on private HEIs. The literature provides views on the strategy of higher education in multiple countries: Finland (Vuori 2016), Denmark (Degn), Canada (Milian, 2016), Ukraine (Hladchenko & Benninghoff, 2020), South Africa (Davis, Jansen van Rensburg, & Venter, 2016), Portugal (Mourato et al., 2019), the United Kingdom (2019), and Australia (Shah, Nair & Bennett, 2013). However, strategy in private higher education remains underexplored in many national contexts, particularly in Ghana.

### 4.4.3 Uncertainty

Uncertainty refers to the unpredictability and lack of clarity regarding various factors that can impact the institution's operations, strategy, and overall success (Jalonen, 2022). The higher education industry, like other businesses, is in a state of flux, making it difficult for managers and other stakeholder to make any meaning predictions about its operation and direction. Technological advancement, changing industry and societal expectations have combined to undermine prediction about its future, making its future operations and delivery extremely uncertain. Uncertainty is the condition of having insufficient knowledge or understanding regarding a circumstance, result, or upcoming event. The inability to completely comprehend or forecast the state of the environment, the results of actions, or the likelihood of possible events is what defines uncertainty in organisational and strategic situations (Packard & Clark, 2020). Managers must navigate unclear situations and make decisions without all the information at their disposal, which poses a fundamental challenge to decision-making processes.

The multifaceted aspect of uncertainty is emphasised by contemporary viewpoints, which acknowledge that it can originate from a variety of sources, including changes in technology, market dynamics, regulations, or world events. In the field of PHEIs, the uncertainty may emerge from governmental regulations, internationalisation, quality assurance concerns and economic

down turn. In recent times, uncertainty is becoming recognised as a possible source of opportunity for businesses that can effectively adapt to and take advantage of unexpected circumstances, rather than just a challenge that needs to be handled (Bennett, & Lemoine, 2021).

### 4.4.4 Complexity

In the context of business, complexity pertains to the dynamic and intricately interrelated organisational systems, surroundings, and processes. It is difficult to anticipate and regulate because of its many interacting components, non-linear interactions, and emergent features (Tsoukas & Dooley, 2022). Cause-and-effect linkages are sometimes ambiguous in complicated corporate environments, and modest changes can have disproportionate and unanticipated effects.

Contemporary viewpoints on business complexity highlight the complexity's multidimensionality, which includes aspects related to technology, organisations, and the environment. Uhl-Bien & Arena, (2023) assert that organisations that can successfully traverse and exploit complexity are expected to gain a competitive edge and see it as a source of innovation, rather than just a task to be managed. Within the PHEI setting, the complexity manifest itself in the sheer number of stakeholders with their varied demands, expectations and interests.

### 4.4.5 Students' choice criteria and decision behaviour

#### *4.4.5.1 Student's choice criteria of higher education*

Human decision-making is dynamic and ever-changing in both space and time. Choosing to go to college is a critical decision. Consequently, scholars and researchers have been working hard to understand the numerous factors that affect and determine a student's decision to enter a higher education institution for some time. In the words of Obermeit (2012), "choice factors" are the parameters prospective students use to assess the numerous options available to them.

According to a recent study by Nuseir and El Refae (2021), academic reputation, grants and funding, location and proximity, facilities and services, and promotional and marketing channels all influence students' decision to attend a university in the United Arab Emirate (UAE). Many other theories contend that the choice of which HEI to apply to is affected by a wide range of characteristics, including the personality of the student, the institution's attributes, and reliable information sources (Hemsley, Brown & Oplatka, 2015). The selection factors used by students are influenced by personal characteristics such as academic ability, personal preferences, and socioeconomic status, according to Li and Bray (2007a). For the same reason, Chen (2007) emphasises the role of influential persons such as family members, friends, and former classmates in helping students decide whether or not to pursue a college degree. Given that education is considered an investment, its quality and assurance may also play a role in the decision-making process. If we consider Ellis and Steyn's findings from 2014, students are increasingly looking for relevance, value, and choice in higher education institutions. In terms of higher education, this alternative is more concerned with quality and value for money. In a study by Simes and Soares (2010), it was found that course fit, academic reputation, employment opportunities and teaching quality are all key factors for students to consider. Another study found that the availability of programmes and a university's proximity to a student's home were major determinants of whether or not a student chose to attend (Velout-sou, Lewis & Paton 2004). Students' decisions to pursue further education may be swayed by rankings, according to research. Due to the rise of global citizens and digital natives, it is essential to consider a university's ranking on a national and international scale. This demonstrates that student choice in higher education is a complex phenomenon.

Categorising student choice has traditionally drawn on aspects from economics, sociology, and psychology, three key disciplines or fields. Students' rational cost-benefit analysis assumes that attending a certain HEI or programme will maximise the utility of their time and money. There are a few theories in the literature about why students make the choices they do. Sá, Florax and Rietveld (2004) propose the human capital theory as a way of explaining why students choose

higher education after comparing the potential advantages against the potential costs (Sa et al., 2004). In economics, pricing has been used in conjunction with consumption theory to imply that students base their purchasing decisions on cost (Hausman, 1992). According to the human capital theory (Sá, Florax, & Rietveld, 2004), students choose to attend higher education (HE) after balancing the benefits and drawbacks of the many options. In economics, pricing has been used in conjunction with consumption theory to imply that students base their purchasing decisions on cost (Hausman, 1992). A variety of factors have been linked to student choice, including gender, financial status, or even the location of the school. These factors have been tested empirically under various hypotheses.

#### *4.4.5.1 Relevance of Students' Choice to Sustainability of HE*

Attendance at college or acquisition of a degree may be the means to that end, but the end is the social mobility, enhanced economic status and the higher salary which are believed to accompany education beyond high school. In this sense, students as customers of the higher education industry are purchasing an investment good (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). They must invest resources, both directly in the form of tuition and effort, and indirectly in the form of lost wages, in order to reap the benefits of a higher salary over the course of their lives (Herlitz et al., 2020). Of course, not all students receive a degree or get a labour market payoff even though they experience the process of acquiring higher education for some period of time and derive some utility from doing so (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021).

Higher education institutions rely on student enrolment for their own existence, survival, expansion, and sustainability. There are several options for students when it comes to enrolling in a HEI, and they often have many to select from. Choice connotes options and competition. As a result, nowadays, students have numerous HEIs from which to choose, and they must make informed decisions by selecting, comparing, and analysing the costs and benefits of various universities (Joseph et al., 2012). Students' choices may lead to an increase or reduction in the number of students enrolled in a given HEI. The higher education environment has

become very competitive as a result of the decline in enrolment and the explosion of information about institutions and programmes offered, and students' choices must be frequently analysed (Miotto et al., 2020).

In a similar vein, Daily et al. (2010) found that during the course of their lives, people make six major decisions: friends, family relationships, dating and sex, drug and alcohol abuse, and the significance of going to college. Choosing a university or other higher education institution is the first step in any of these alternatives because it has to do with the vocation a person wishes to follow. Because of this, choosing a university is a critical decision in a person's professional career. In the pursuit of a career and the completion of a higher education certification, academics have studied the concept of choice and its justification. Due to intense rivalry and globalisation, researchers have been motivated to study university choice (Chen, 2008; Chung et al., 2009). When studying students' HE choices, increased competition for international students and faculty has been given as an explanation (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Czarniawska & Genell, 2002), but, given how complex the decision-making process and its associated factors are, a better understanding of why students choose one university over another is required.

Additionally, tuition fees at higher education institutions have risen because of the incapacity of most governments to adequately fund them (Awotwe et al., 2020). Increasing enrolment and attracting fee-paying students are now prerequisites for the long-term viability of higher education. These concerns influence student choice and give sufficient grounds for student choice research. In addition to post-graduation career opportunities (Awotwe et al., 2020), research has also focused on future earnings and student achievements (Strayer, 2002), as well as studies related to decision support (Awotwe et al., 2020) As Bratti (2002) puts it, concerns about enrolment and the financial viability of HEIs in general, and private HE in particular, are not the only driving forces behind research on student choice. Enrolling in a university's also involves students signing up for programmes for which reason they have decided to attend that university. Such enrolment decisions are not made in a vacuum; rather, they occur within the

realm of competition and therefore require planning. This means that further research and understanding of student choice within the regulatory framework it is situated in should be encouraged and advanced (Shaturaev, 2021).

Student choice has a significant impact on enrolments and the competitiveness of private higher education, as well as on the long-term viability of the institution. HEIs need to know their target market and meet their customers' needs before they can establish an effective competitive strategy (Shaturaev, 2021). The issue of student selection criteria emerges from the standpoint of higher education in general and private higher education. As well as the choice of a specific HEI, public or private, the question of selecting higher education over other possibilities (working or no university options) comes up (Qasim et al., 2021). This investigation revolves around where you should go to school. What are the factors that influence a student's decision, and how does that decision affect enrolment, competition, strategy, and the long-term survival of private higher education? What approaches to the challenge have researchers in the field of higher education choice taken?

### 4.4.6 Parents' choice criteria and choice and decision behaviour

The idea that HE choice is heavily influenced by students has garnered a lot of attention in the literature (Ashmarina et al., 2020). Choosing a college is usually presented as a personal decision. Hence, the student is king when it comes to making a decision about where to pursue their further education (Abdulkadiroğlu et al., 2020). However, in a typical family setting, both students and parents have some say in the institution of higher learning they choose. Parents have long been recognised as important decision-makers when it comes to their children's higher education choices, but they have received little attention in the literature (Ashmarina et al., 2020; Abdulkadiroğlu et al., 2020). Existing research on student choice frequently focuses on the viewpoints of the students themselves, at the expense of other important people like parents (Tan et al., 2020). Parental educational expectations and encouragements were the best predictors of whether or not students attend college and where they attend (Tan et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, parents' impact on their children may not only be confined to their academic well-being; they may also be concerned about their children's future job goals and their choice of further education institution after high school (Tan et al., 2020). Thus, it's vital to know how parents think and what influences their judgments on which university to send their children. It is possible, however, to gain a better understanding and insight into the decisions made by parents if they are included in these models. Clearly, the choice dilemma demands the input of various stakeholders and is complicated (Tan et al., 2020).

### 4.4.7 Employers' choice criteria and employability decision behaviour

For many higher education institutions (HEIs), students, and other stakeholders, employability has taken precedence over political and democratic principles (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020). Getting a decent career after college is a common goal for many young people. Numerous factors influence the likelihood of landing a well-paying job or employment (Calma & Dickson-Deane, 2020). It matters to employers what university you attended, what curriculum you pursued, and what skills you've acquired. Employers care about these things. Employers, like students, take the institution's reputation, image, and brand into account when evaluating candidates (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020). Others take into account the institution's local as well as global standing. Some colleges use partnerships and internship opportunities with partner companies to promote their image and reputation to industry. To assist train the human capital they require, companies offer scholarships and research money to higher education institutions (HEIs). As a result, students are swayed by the availability of scholarships, grants, and job possibilities at a certain university (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020; Calma & Dickson-Deane, 2020).

### 4.5 Choice, enrolment, and performance of private HEIs in Ghana

#### 4.5.1 Choice and Enrolment

There have been a large number of studies seeking to determine the reasons for students' choice of institution, in a number of local settings (Amoako et al., 2020; Kodi & Kumar, 2020). Important empirical research on higher education choice and factors influencing students' choices are critically reviewed in this section. The literature on student choice in higher education (HE) suggests that the scope and extent of variables influencing and affecting student HE choice continue to rise in higher education environments (Amoako et al., 2020; Kodi & Kumar, 2020). Because of this, research into what makes students choose to go to college or university is not new either. Researchers in developed and developing countries across the world have carried out extensive study in this area. Despite some shared characteristics, empirical research shows that the factors that influence students' decisions to enrol in a particular college or university vary from one individual to the next (Adamba, 2020). Many studies break down the factors that influence students' decisions about where to enrol in higher education into two broad categories: institutional characteristics and communication/marketing strategies (Amoako et al., 2020; Kodi & Kumar, 2020), but other studies add contextual and individual factors. Institutional factors include things like a school's name and prestige, where it is located, the courses it offers, the quality of its facilities, the cost of its tuition among others. (Anane-Donkor & Dei, 2021). Students' choices of colleges and universities are affected by various marketing and communication strategies such as advertisements, campus visits, institutional representatives visiting high schools, and career fairs (Amoako et al., 2020; Kodi & Kumar, 2020). Some of the factors that influence a student's decision to enrol in a particular university are the quality of the faculty, the breadth of the curriculum, and the accessibility of the campus (Amoako et al., 2020; Kodi & Kumar, 2020).

Course suitability, university location, academic reputation, distance from home, university type (modern/old), and advice from parents and teachers were all found to be important

determinants of the selection of HEI (Qureshi & Khawaja, 2021). Student decision-making is influenced by several institutional factors. Location, academic options, reputation, fit, and extracurricular activities are just a few of the many considerations (Heiskala et al., 2021). Among other things, course appropriateness, academic reputation, employment prospects, and teaching quality have also been identified as important factors that have a substantial impact on students' higher education decisions (Amoako et al., 2020; Kodi & Kumar, 2020). The reputation of the institution as well as future graduates' job prospects, nature of the institutes, lower costs and affiliation with the institutes are all important considerations from both students' and parents' perspectives. However, for parents, the most critical problem is the financial assistance provided by HEIs. Researchers Mitić and Mojić (2020) looked into the reasons why students in Serbia chose HEIs and discovered that job prospects and a university's global reputation were the most relevant criteria. The reputation of the institution, the reputation of the course, the course content, the location, the study modes, the teaching staff, the course information and facilities (such as libraries, online resources, rooms and equipment, extracurricular facilities, catering, sports facilities, student union, etc.), and the fees all play a role in students' decisions about which HEIs to enrol in (Mitić & Mojić, 2020)

To find out what influences students' decisions about going to college, empirical study has been done in Ghana (Amoako et al., 2020; Kodi & Kumar, 2020). While many studies have looked at this issue from a student's perspective, they have neglected to include other important stakeholders who have an impact on students' decision-making about higher education institutions. Additional factors that empirically look at the issue of student and other stakeholder choice are as follows:

#### *4.5.1.1 Institutional factors of higher education choice*

University enrolment and choice may be influenced by a variety of factors, some of which have been investigated by marketing researchers as opposed to those whose focus is on students (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020). Institutional features, outcomes and benefits, and quality are the three overarching categories into which the authors have placed the factors listed above. It is worth noting that studies rarely include a representative sample of students from a large number of institutions, so the results may be skewed toward the characteristics and benefits of the particular institutions that were studied (Boldureanu et al., 2020).

#### *4.5.1.2 Institutional characteristics*

More important than a university's actual infrastructure are the qualities that contribute to its reputation for excellence. Prospective students care most about a school's name, curriculum, and location (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020; Boldureanu et al., 2020). For instance, Qureshi and Khawaja (2021) discovered that students perceive the four institutions sampled to be similar in terms of friendliness, clarity of admissions and registration processes, and overall quality of staff, teaching and learning facilities, and administration. There is a wide range of quality among educational institutions, but what sets some apart from others is their public image, especially in terms of international recognition and the high standard of qualifications that makes some institutions stand out as particularly prestigious (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020; Boldureanu et al., 2020). The information needs of different subgroups of students can vary significantly. Students with a strong sense of direction and those entrenched in university life primarily seek course-related information. On the other hand, students with less direction look for information on sports, and newcomers to university life are more interested in aspects of student life (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020; Boldureanu et al., 2020). Further support for the varying needs among different student segments is provided by other authors (e.g., Qureshi & Khawaja, 2021; Amoako et al., 2020). They highlight that the importance of specific details about an institution is not uniform across all types of students. Instead, this fluctuates based on diverse lifestyle characteristics and demographic factors.

Academic reputation stands out as a crucial factor in the choice of institution (Khoshtaria et al., 2020). Indeed, it is top-ranking, and this emphasis on reputation is supported by various other studies, including those by Garvanova (2020) and Nogales et al. (2020). Moreover, the decision factors are not limited to the reputation of the university or its faculty. The choice of programme and discipline and the specific needs of applicant subgroups all play significant roles. These elements have been the focus of numerous studies, highlighting the complexity of student choice in higher education (Garvanova, 2020; Nogales et al., 2020).

#### *4.5.1.3 Interaction between the student and the institution*

The relationship between educational institutions and their students is influenced by a multitude of factors, creating a complex and dynamic interplay (Alam & Mohanty, 2023). Location considerations are often vital. Some students might be concerned with the university's proximity to home, while the convenience of being near airports or train stations might be an important factor for others (Lisnyj et al., 2021). Marketing and promotion are other significant aspects of this relationship. Researchers have carried out studies to understand the impact of various information sources and advertising initiatives on student choice behaviour. These insights help institutions determine the most efficient methods to promote themselves and appeal to prospective students (Lisnyj et al., 2021). Financial concerns are equally crucial in shaping this dynamic. The setting of price tariffs by institutions and the students' attitudes toward debt, as well as their ability or willingness to pay, play significant roles in decision-making (Lisnyj et al., 2021). The fear of debt and pricing considerations can significantly impact both the institution's approach and the student's choices. All these factors, in conjunction with others like race and socioeconomic status, create a multifaceted landscape. The market gets divided into distinct subsets, each with its unique needs and preferences. This complexity requires a nuanced understanding and tailored approach to effectively meet the diverse expectations and requirements of different student groups (Garvanova, 2020; Nogales et al., 2020).

#### *4.5.1.4 Geographical*

The convenience of a college's location in relation to the student's home life is an important consideration for many (Garvanova, 2020; Nogales et al., 2020). For instance, applicants will pick a local university over one further away if the two are otherwise equivalent. Since proximity to home is less important for entrants to research-led institutions and some students select universities based on a city location, segmentation variables are again important in terms of student choice factors (Garvanova, 2020; Nogales et al., 2020). Furthermore, research shows that mature students tend to attend university closer to their family home than school leaver applicants do (Garvanova, 2020; Nogales et al., 2020).

#### *4.5.1.5 Price sensitivity*

Since the funding of higher education has recently undergone sweeping reform, particularly in the United Kingdom (Callender & Melis, 2022), it is not surprising that a number of recent papers have examined the impact of variable tuition fees and debt anxiety on students' decisions about where to enrol in college (Callender & Melis, 2022; Jabbari et al., 2023). Previous studies have investigated how much tuition prices factor into students' final decisions (Long, 2022; Furuta, 2021). It was discovered that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to worry about student loan debt, opt for schools that are closer to home (though not necessarily living with parents), and choose study abroad destinations with lower living costs (Long, 2022; Furuta, 2021). Similar conclusions were drawn in another study, in which black respondents, who opted to attend a historically black institution located in a region which "suffered major socio-economic neglect" (Norvilitis & Linn, 2021), reported that their parents could not afford higher fees and that their chosen institution charged lower fees than elsewhere.

### 4.6 Sustainability of Private HEI

In the current body of knowledge, 'sustainability' has had different operationalisations. To the environmentalists, sustainability has largely been operationalised as human and organisational activities and concerns that pose a threat to the environment. These include climate change issues, green environmental concerns and advocacy, among other factors (Zahid et al., 2021). Sustainability has also been operationalised to mean the longevity, endurance or survival of brands in the market (Habib et al., 2021). Sustainability is operationalised in the current study dwelling on the latter operationalisations. Thus, sustainability is defined and operationalised in the current study as the longevity, survival, growth or resilience of private HEIs in Ghana in the face of stiff competition, declining enrolment rates and the institutional complexities surrounding their efficient, independent and profitable operations (Zahid et al., 2021; Habib et al., 2021).

In light of the high dependence on tuition fees for the financial strength of private higher education institutions, there may be increased pressure on these institutions for greater flexibility in meeting the diverse educational as well as professional needs of students and employers (Teixeira et al, 2013). Tuition fees are based on the number of students enrolled – hence low enrolment has an impact on the institution's profitability, according to this argument. Recent studies (see Bautista- Puig & Sanz-Casado, 2021; Wang et al., 2020) indicate that the institution's legal standing (public versus private) matters greatly, because public and private HEIs employ different strategies due to regulatory worries over funding. As previously stated, private HEIs rely significantly more on tuition fees than public HEIs, which explains their capacity for profit maximisation in a corporate-

style way. If enrolment decreases, income and profit margins dwindle – hence the lack of financial power in the day-to-day administration of private HEIs (Nazneen et al., 2023). Unlike

public HEIs, which receive subventions and many forms of assistance from central governments, quasi government institutions and development partners, private HEIs receive little to no external support apart from the fees as income derived from enrolments (Nazneen et al., 2023). Thus, enrolment stagnation or decline poses an existential threat to private HEIs, unlike their public counterparts (AlDhaen & Mahmood, 2020).

### 4.7 Chapter Summary

The literature on the factors that affect higher education was discussed in this chapter. It focused on issues such as the sustainability of PHEIs, price sensitivity, performance of PHEIs, geographical factors and many others. In essence, this chapter sought to bring to the fore the various factors in the literature that have been identified to influence student choice of PHEI.

# CHAPTER FIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

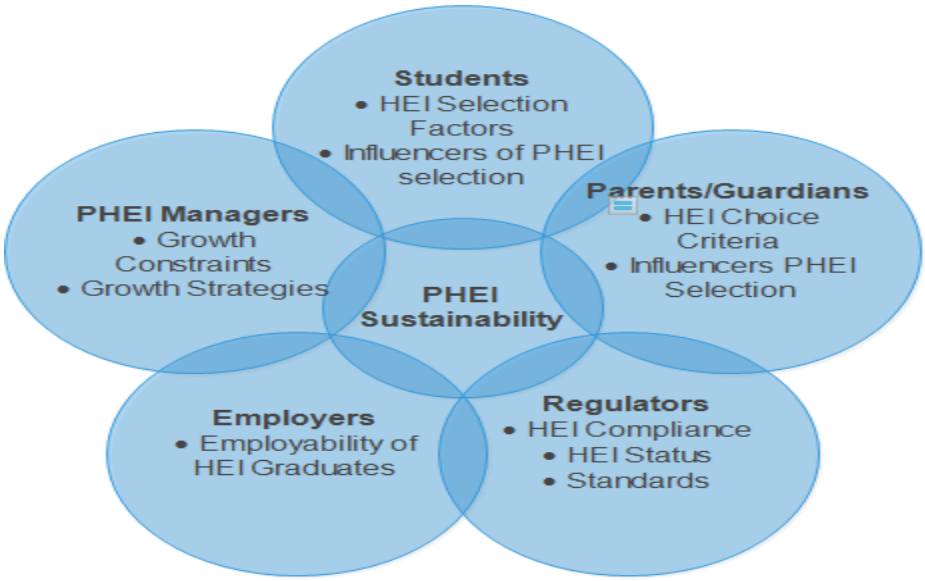
## 5.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the conceptual framework guiding the study and the various hypotheses explored.

## 5.1 Conceptual Framework

**A Stakeholder Model for Private Higher Education Institution Sustainability**

**Figure 5. 1: A Stakeholder Model for Private Higher Education Institution Sustainability**




Source: Author's constructs

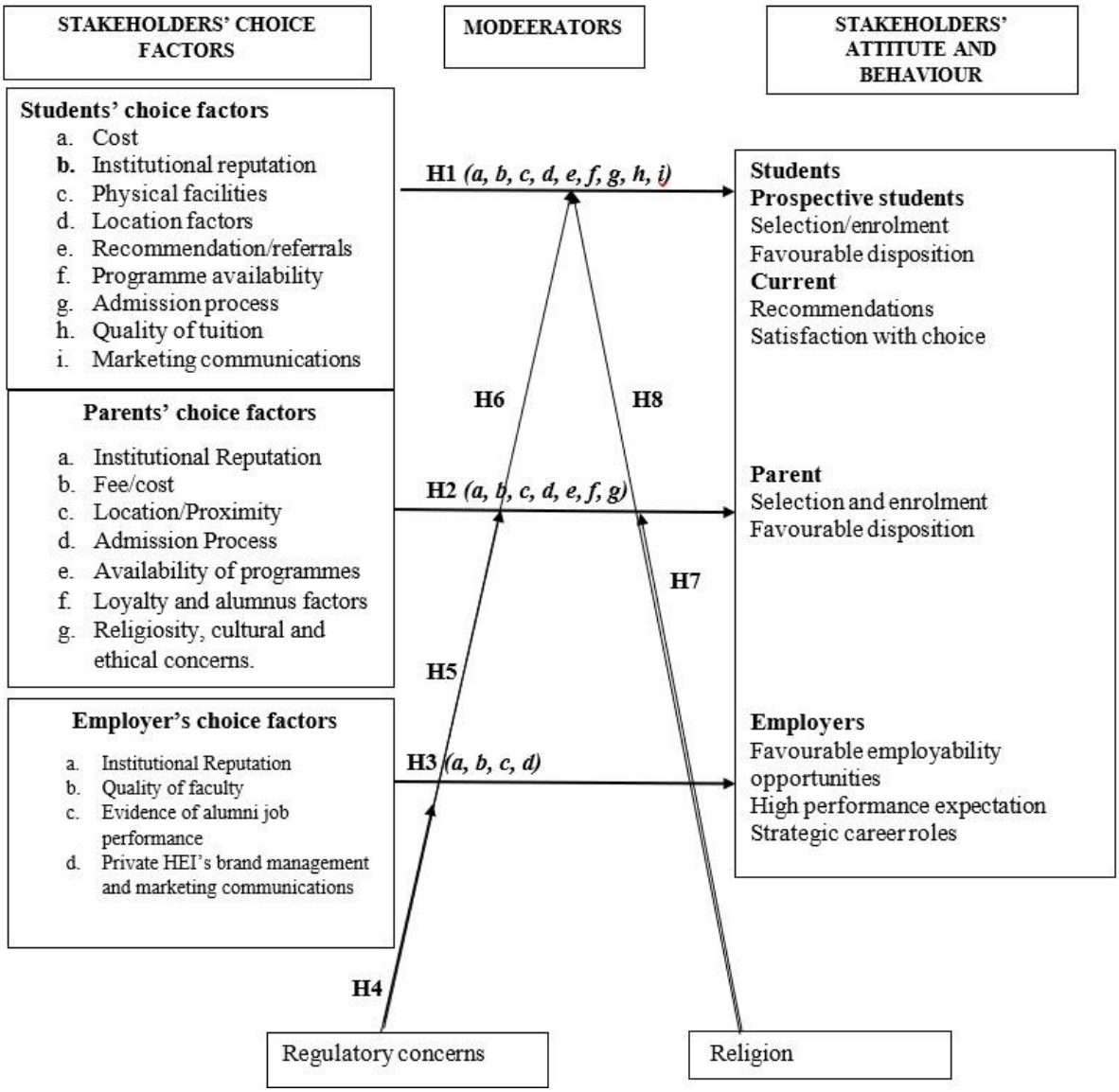
Operationalising this study as shown in Figure 5-1 above, a prospective student's selection of a particular HEI may be influenced by a number of stakeholders such as parents, employers, regulators, current students of PHEIs and managers of PHEIs. A prospective student may take the advice or seek information from parents as to the choice of HEI to attend. Students are likely to consult their parents due to the fact that parents are their primary source of financing. Also, prospective students, through seminars, social media and other sources of information, get to know about the expectations of human resource managers (employers). These expectations may include employability skills and brand image of the institution attended. In a bid to meet such expectations of employers, a prospective student would consider a HEI that can deliver on

that. Another stakeholder captured in the model is the regulator of HEIs, which in the context of the study is the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). The regulator is responsible for the institutional and programme accreditation of tertiary education. As part of its role, it occasionally publishes tertiary institutions in good standing and revokes or sanctions others for non-compliance with regulatory requirements. Again, some its requirements put PHEI under mentorship and affiliation to public universities. Such regulatory arrangements tend to influence the perception of prospective students about private HEIs, including their choice decisions.

Every PHEI has its own vision, mission and strategy to attract students for enrolment. One of the strategies is to develop marketable programmes that meet the expectations of prospective students, employers and parents. However, the strategy that PHEIs employ will determine whether or not prospective students may apply to enrol in their institution. Finally, the experiences of current students in PHEIs when shared with prospective students may attract or discourage prospective students to enrol. The combined effect of the issues discussed from this stakeholder model will determine the growth and sustainability of PHEIs.

Figure 5-1 has been further developed into Figure 5-2 for effective operation of the constructs. As shown in Figure 5-2, selection of PHEI is influenced by three main choice criteria as follows: (1) students' choice factors; (2) parents' choice factors and (3) employers' choice factors. In fact, the students' choice factors will be influenced by both prospective and current student disposition.

Parents' choice in selecting a PHEI will be influenced by the parents' disposition, while the employer choice will be influenced by the employer's disposition. There are two moderators, i.e., regulatory concern and religion, that will either strengthen or weaken the proposed relationships.




**[moderators; attitude; religion (not religion); use of capitals slightly inconsistent.]**

**Figure 5. 2: Operationalised Concept Framework**

Several hypotheses have been developed in line with the conceptual framework (Figure 2) in the subsequent sections of this study.

### 5.1.1 Hypotheses Development

A private higher education institution, like any other business, needs to understand its customers' needs, wants, and especially choice criteria if it is to remain competitive and survive among higher education providers (Yusuf & Ahmad, 2020; Rezaeian, 2020). Similar to the service industry, higher education is people-based and places a premium on building and maintaining positive connections with its students (Erickson, 2020). Education is "intangible," "heterogeneous," "inseparable from the person delivering it," "perishable," and "requiring the customer's (the student's) participation," as Erickson (2020) put it. Due to the nature of the service that is marketing in higher education, there is enough differentiation between it and the marketing of products. Marketing a university and establishing a point of differentiation that emphasises the institution's strengths and encourages prospective students to enrol is the responsibility of university administration. To accomplish this, higher education institutions need to be well-versed in service marketing, since they function in a service sector (Yusuf & Ahmad, 2020; Rezaeian, 2020). The decision to enrol in a higher education institution has the ability to alter a person's life; hence, it is a crucial aspect of recruitment management. This analysis reveals several parameters for selecting a private higher educational institution.

### 5.1.2 Students' Choice factors (Both Prospective and Current)

The decision theory in summarise postulate that individuals are influenced by financial, environmental, psychological, and sociological factors when making decisions (Mongin & Baccelli, 2021). The theory posits that stakeholders are influenced by a blend of these factors, which in turn affects an individual's inclination to choose a particular PHEI.

Choosing an institution of higher education is significant to a person's life in terms of deciding his or her career goals (Ferrer et al., 2022). During the transitional period between high school and college/university, students (both prospective and current) are compelled to choose a

certain university, in this case a private university (Ferrer et al., 2022). Several factors are taken into consideration which have been explained in the form of hypotheses as follows:

#### *5.1.2.1 Cost factor*

Financial factors of the decision theory comprise availability of funds to finance the cost of PHE. The expense of education influences students' (i.e., both prospective and current) selection of a certain university (Dynarski et al., 2018; Koricich et al., 2018). The evaluation of the cost of education extends beyond simple categorisations such as high, low, or expensive. It also involves an assessment of how the ability to afford these costs, the perception of their magnitude, and the sensation or feeling towards them relate to the practicality, convenience, and suitability of accessing specific postsecondary institutions (Primadini et al., 2019).

The components that make up the price of educational expenses encompass a variety of aspects (Ferrer et al., 2022). These include registration or re-registration fees at the commencement of each semester, tuition fees that cover not only the provision of education but also items related to the enhancement and promotion of curricular and extracurricular activities (such as funds for books and equipment) on a per- semester basis, costs per academic credit, contributions towards building construction, examination fees, and other related expenses. The extant literature (e.g., Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022) has demonstrated that tuition accounts for roughly half of the total cost of attending PHEIs, given that other costs may include accommodation, transportation, food, books, and other miscellaneous charges. When considering university education as an investment in one's future, it is better to spend the least amount of money feasible while maximising the return on that investment (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022).

There is evidence that, each year, prospective students receive offers to attend the institution or university of their choice, and that some of them decline such offers. According to conventional

opinion, cost is a crucial issue in these students' decisions (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022). Recent research by Shaturaev (2021) concur that college fees deter students from attending their preferred Higher education institution. From the foregoing discussion, it was conceivable to hypothesize that:

*H1a: There is a positive relationship between cost and the choice of PHEI among prospective students.*

*H2a: There is a positive relationship between cost and the choice of PHEI among current students.*

#### *5.1.2.2 Institutional Reputation Factor*

Reputation refers to the overall impression that individuals form about something or someone (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022; Chen & Esangbedo 2018). The reputation of an object, person, or company hinges on the beliefs, emotions, conventions, perspectives, appropriate behaviours, and perception that someone has of it. Furthermore, university reputation (UR) is a construct that is defined by the opinions of both the general public and students or staff at the university, making the unique and comparable evaluation with other similar HEIs. (Shaturaev, 2021). Institutional reputation is the common understanding of how the university should function. Additionally, university reputation may be viewed as external renowned, corporate reputation, and identity (Pérez & Torres, 2017). Parents and guardians have faith in the institution, the university's leadership is highly regarded, and students believe that the university's image positively affects the worth of their degree. In these changing times, prospective students are more likely to choose prestigious universities with a sterling reputation. Different research on the impact of the mark on higher education revealed that the university's reputation corresponds to the primary sign that distinguishes the institution's exceptionality (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022). Academic reputation is one of the determinants of the effectiveness of university marketing initiatives. The level of university reputation is a point of

debate, partly because there is no general agreement on the relationship between reputation and success in higher education, despite the fact that reputation draws staff, students, and financial investments in research (Chen & Esangbedo, 2018).

From the above discussion, this study agrees with the proposition that reputation affects choice of educational institution. Therefore, the study hypothesizes that:

*H1b: There is a positive relationship between institutional reputation and the choice of PHEI among prospective students*

*H2b: There is a positive relationship between institutional reputation and the choice of PHEI among current students.*

#### *5.1.2.3 Physical Facilities*

Inspired by decision theory, physical facilities affect the decision-making process of individuals (Hunt et al., 2021). The prestige of the faculty, the availability of exchange programmes with foreign universities, the quality of the curriculum, the quality of the scientific research conducted at the institution, the calibre of the administrative support provided, the quality of the library and computer resources, the location of the institution, and the quality of the extracurricular activities offered (sports, recreation, dining halls, etc.) are all examples of important institutional characteristics (Manzoor et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). According to research by Wang et al. (2020), if a school has good facilities, it is more likely to attract students. This study also concurs with this assertation. A university's location is a trade-off between its size and its proximity to services and industry; however, if the school is located in or near an area where students can easily get internships, connect with industry, implement projects in collaboration with firms, and visit the organisation to enhance their practical knowledge, then that's a huge plus (Manzoor et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

*H1c: There is a positive relationship between physical facilities and the choice of PHEI among prospective students*

*H2c: There is a positive relationship between physical facilities and the choice of PHEI among current students.*

#### *5.1.2.4 Location Factor*

Proximity to home is a major factor in the decision-making process when picking a university (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022). Geographical context has been deemed crucial in prior studies as well (Sitanggang et al., 2021). Location has a significant effect on the college experience of potential students. State, city size, and local community all have an impact on a student's school years. A university in a major city may offer prospective students more internships with large corporations or non-profit organisations, but a school in a smaller town may have a larger campus and more on-campus activities and possibilities. Considerations such as these are vital for making the proper decision when selecting the ideal university (Ishii, 2022; Sitanggang et al., 2021; Fissha, 2020).

In addition, the location of the university that a prospective student chooses can influence the intended career sector. A suburban institution may offer a variety of on-campus employment and internships, but not nearly as many opportunities as an urban college. A student at an urban college will have the opportunity to work with many of the local firms through internships and part-time employment. This provides real work experience and is an excellent way to gain entry- level employment (Ishii, 2022; Fissha, 2020). Priorities for extracurriculars should be considered when determining a student's location and whether they will attend an urban university in a rural or urban setting.

Colleges in the city centre can provide a vast array of activities. Whether a student enjoys sports, art, movies, plays, or simply going for a daily run, the city surrounding an urban college can provide it all. Prospective students will not have to give up any of the activities they enjoyed as children; in fact, they may even get to enjoy them more. It is possible that rural and suburban schools are in a more "bubble" community. This can contribute to a tranquil lifestyle in the college district. However, a student will likely find fewer neighbourhood activities than at a college located in the core of a major city (Ishii, 2022; Shamsudin et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020). The location of the desired institution can also have a significant financial impact on the college experience of a student. Being a student at a downtown university enables you to travel quickly and affordably between locations. If you do not have a car, you will not need one because everything a student needs is nearby. In the same way that it is simple to spend money in a city, it is also simple to amuse yourself without spending a lot of money (Ishii, 2022; Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

*H1d:* *There is a positive relationship between location and the choice of PHEI among prospective students*

*H2d:* *There is a positive relationship between location and the choice of PHEI among current students.*

#### *5.1.2.5 Recommendations/Referrals Factor*

Research has also shown that a student's decision about which college to attend is heavily influenced by their reference group, which can include anyone from siblings and friends to parents and teachers (Ishii, 2022; Shamsudin et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020). High school students construct a social norm known as "acceptable choice" based on the preferences of their peers. This implies that peers may limit an individual's university options.

Counsellors and teachers have a significant impact on pupils. They aid and assist candidates during the selection procedure (Ishii, 2022; Shamsudin et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

*H1e:* *There is a positive relationship between recommendation and the choice of PHEI among prospective students*

*H2e:* *There is a positive relationship between recommendation and the choice of PHEI among current students.*

#### *5.1.2.6 Personal Aspiration Fixed Institutional Characteristics*

In today's world, being successful in college and beyond involves more than just being brilliant and well-versed in a discipline's content (Sitanggang et al., 2021). College students and graduates must be prepared for the real-world demands of job, citizenship, and existence in a society that is always evolving and complex (Sitanggang et al., 2021). Higher education's purpose is to go beyond discipline-specific information to support the development of critical intelligence, workforce preparedness, and the development of the individual as a whole person (Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020). As a result, the personal development variables that shape a student's totality influence the student's choice of university. Other studies (see Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022) have also claimed that personal factors show the greatest positive influences on a student's choice of a university. In an ideal world, general education courses would expose students to basic information and life skills that span across academic fields (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022). Gaff (1989) defines a well-educated person as having "a broad range of knowledge; skills to communicate clearly, think logically and critically, and get along with different types of people; the ability to work independently and as part of a team to solve problems" (Gaff, 1989: 11). Despite these goals, personal development training is

typically excluded from most universities' coursework, as foundational life skills are often assumed to be innate or "common sense." Thus, a preferred choice for university education should encompass the attributes of personal development. The personal development that assists students with the move to college and degree completion also facilitates their transition into the workforce (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022).

From the discussion, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

*H1f:* *There is a positive relationship between personal development and the choice of PHEI among prospective students*

*H2f:* *There is a positive relationship between personal development and the choice of PHEI among current students.*

#### *5.1.2.7 Programme Availability Factor*

Research has been concentrating on students' selection of higher education programmes for some time, recognising it as the first significant choice teenagers must make about their future (Callender & Melis, 2022). The objective of this research is to understand the intricate process of selecting a higher education programme and how to assist students in making optimal choices (Jabbari et al., 2023). This focus is particularly relevant since approximately one third of students may regret their programme choice and may even leave the programme (Jabbari et al., 2023). Recent studies that delve into students' experiences in the higher education programme choice process highlight the crucial role that interests play (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022).

Interests, in this context, refer to activities, ideas, and objects that students identify with and aim to engage with repeatedly over time (Akkerman & Bakker 2019; Barron 2006; Dewey 1913). Since interests are inherently oriented towards the future, they inform and influence life choices (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022). Students have been found to evaluate and compare their multiple interests when making higher education choices, considering which interests are most

vital for them to pursue in educational and career contexts. This process encompasses an exploration of how interests correlate with available programmes, since not all interests, or combinations thereof, are feasible or can be pursued within the constraints of specific study programmes (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, & Akkerman 2020).

When students commit to a programme, it signifies that they intend to enrol in that specific programme. There is a general belief that the programme choice process concludes once students are committed to a programme. After deciding on the specific programme that aligns with their most valued interests, there seems no reason to continue exploring or considering other programmes. However, various studies have indicated that students might break their commitment to a programme and choose to enrol in another one (Callender & Melis, 2022).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

*H1g: There is a positive relationship between programme availability and the choice of PHEI among prospective students*

*H2g: There is a positive relationship between programme availability and the choice of PHEI among current students.*

#### *5.1.2.8 Admission Process Factor*

While college admissions are considered a druidical process steeped in mystery, most admissions officers base their decisions on a foundation of common elements (Callender & Melis, 2022). The admission process or requirements will ultimately influence student choice of a particular university. This includes issues such as the ease of application for admission to the institution, the cut-off point of grades required for admission to a preferred programme and the high possibility of being admitted to a programme in the institution (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, & Akkerman 2020).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H1h: There is a positive relationship between admission process and the choice of PHEI among prospective students*

*H2h: There is a positive relationship between admission process and the choice of PHEI among current students.*

#### *5.1.2.9 Quality of Tuition Factor*

The quality of a university's academic faculty is a pivotal factor in the university selection process. Cevira et al. (2021) identified the quality of tuition as one of the major determinants in choosing a university, a sentiment echoed by Ilgan et al. (2018) who noted the quality of tuition as a significant criterion. Various studies (see e.g., Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, & Akkerman 2020; Callender & Melis, 2022) have emphasised the importance of a university's academic excellence, specifically in terms of tuition quality, in the selection process. Research has further illustrated that students' university choice decisions are shaped by specific university attributes. These include staff quality, the type of institutions, the availability of desired programmes, curriculum, international reputation, quality of facilities (such as library and computing facilities), social facilities, campus and class size, and the availability of financial aid.

Many studies confirm that academic factors, availability of the desired programme, academic reputation, and quality of teaching are the primary reasons influencing students' university selection (Jabbari et al., 2023). Quality is a crucial determinant in school choice, indicating that students are prepared to accept significant tuition fee increases if this translates to a higher quality education (Jabbari et al., 2023). In the context of higher education, quality is indeed a multifaceted concept. The perceived quality of a university may relate to the services offered or to the quality of teaching and research programmes. Universities providing better quality services are more likely to be favoured by applicants. This is corroborated by Long (2022), who observed that the quality of education has a positive correlation with the number of applicants.

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

*H1i: There is a positive relationship between quality of tuition and the choice of PHEI among prospective students*

*H2i: There is a positive relationship between quality of tuition and the choice of PHEI among current students.*

#### *5.1.2.10 Marketing Communication Factor*

The quality of a university's academic faculty is a pivotal factor in the university selection process (Long, 2022). Vulperhorst et al. (2020) and Callender and Melis (2022) have highlighted the significance of a university's academic excellence, particularly on the quality of education, in the selection process. Research has shown that students' judgements on which institution to attend are influenced by particular university characteristics. These include staff quality, the type of institutions, the availability of desired programmes, curriculum, international reputation, quality of facilities (such as library and computing facilities), social facilities, campus and class size, and the availability of financial aid (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, & Akkerman 2020; Callender & Melis, 2022).

Many studies confirm that academic factors, availability of the desired programme, academic reputation, and quality of teaching are the primary reasons influencing students' university selection. In the context of higher education, quality is indeed a multifaceted concept. The perceived quality of a university may relate to the services offered or to the quality of teaching and research programmes. Universities providing better quality services are more likely to be favoured by applicants (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, & Akkerman 2020; Callender & Melis, 2022).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

*H1j: There is a positive relationship between marketing communication and the choice of PHEI among prospective students*

*H2j: There is a positive relationship between marketing communication and the choice of PHEI among current students.*

### 5.1.3 Parents' choice factors

Parental influence can be used as a sort of pressure to coerce students into prescribed PHEIs, regardless of the child's potential, actual needs, or ego, and this can happen in a variety of circumstances (Dhaliwal, 2022). Perceived parental expectations had a higher influence than a student's socioeconomic situation; however, this influence was exerted indirectly through determinants of a student's vocational expectation, which influenced the student's choice of institution (Dhaliwal, 2022). The student's perception of the expectations placed on them by their parents is a major component of the students' choice criterion. In general, extant literature has claimed that student perceptions of parental expectations may play a substantial role in institution selection (Wong et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Parental influence has a significant impact on pupils' educational attainment, particularly the socioeconomic level of parents. Re-entry into school is more likely if the prospective student comes from a high socioeconomic class family. Academic achievement is favourably associated with parents who follow house rules. A child's behaviour or character is influenced by his or her family. Parents play an important part in building the groundwork for their children's careers by selecting a university (Dhaliwal, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020).

Prospective students were aided by their parents in developing criteria for choosing a university, and parents were encouraged to encourage their children to investigate their vocational interests and abilities, in addition to other occupational alternatives (Dhaliwal, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020).

According to these pupils, participating in these activities enhanced their level of motivation to take part in the earliest stages of the preparation process. In addition, research has indicated that many students who reported feeling supported by their parents were more likely to participate in university exploratory activities connected to the career path chosen by their parents (Kong, 2023). However, several individuals said that their parents dictated their activities and choices regarding which institution they would attend (Kong, 2023). Despite their children's desires, some of these parents made it a point to inflict or force their own values and beliefs on the decisions that their children made (Young et al., 2001). In addition, some students have voiced their displeasure at the fact that their parents were not consulted during the procedure to choose their educational establishment.

#### *5.1.3.1 Institutional Reputation*

Reputation refers to the overall impression that individuals form about something or someone (Kon, 2023). An object, a person, or a company's reputation consisted of the beliefs, emotions, conventions, perspectives, appropriate behaviours, and perception that someone had of it. Moreover, university reputation (UR) is a construct characterised by the attitude of students or staff of the institution as well as the general public, which makes the distinctive and comparable evaluation of qualities (Dhaliwal, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). Institution Reputation is the common understanding of how the university should function. Additionally, university reputation may be viewed as external renowned, corporate reputation, and identity (Dhaliwal, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). Parents and guardians have faith in the institution, the university's leadership is highly regarded, and students believe that the university's image positively affects the worth of their degree. In these changing times, parents are more likely to choose prestigious universities with a sterling reputation for their wards. Different research on the impact of the mark on higher education revealed that the university's reputation corresponds to the primary sign that distinguishes the institution's exceptionality (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, & Akkerman 2020;

Callender & Melis, 2022). Academic reputation is one of the determinants of the effectiveness of university marketing initiatives. In addition to the variable of courses and campus location, the reputation of the institution was found to be the most important factor in a parents' choice of a place of further study (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, & Akkerman 2020; Callender & Melis, 2022). The level of university reputation is a point of debate, partly because there isn't general agreement on the relationship between reputation and success in higher education, despite the fact that reputation draws staff, students, and financial investments in research (Dhaliwal, 2022).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H3a: There is a positive relationship between institutional reputation and the parent choice of PHEI.*

#### *5.1.3.2 Cost*

Parents' choice of university for their children is affected by the cost of education (Dynarski et al., 2018; Koricich et al., 2018). The cost of education can be evaluated not only in terms of high, low, and expensive, but also in terms of how the ability, perception, and sensation of the costs are related to the practicability, convenience, and appropriateness of accessing particular postsecondary schools (Primadini, Rizky, & Bangun, 2019). The price component for education costs includes: registration/re-registration fee at the beginning of each semester; tuition fees, which include fees for providing education as well as matters relating to the development and promotion of curricular and extracurricular activities such as money for books, equipment, etc. per semester; cost per credit; building construction contribution money; exam fees and others (Dhaliwal, 2022. The extant literature (e.g., Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022) has demonstrated that tuition accounts for roughly half of the total cost of attending PHEI, given that other costs may include accommodation, transportation, food, books, and other

miscellaneous charges. When considering university education as an investment in one's future, it is better to spend the least amount of money feasible while maximising the return on that investment (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022). There is evidence that each year, prospective students receive offers to attend the institution or university of their choice, and that some of them decline such offers. According to conventional opinion, cost is a crucial issue in these parents' decisions.

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H3b: There is a positive relationship between cost and the parent choice of PHEI.*

#### *5.1.3.3 Location/Proximity*

Proximity to home is one of the strong influences in the parents' choice process of selecting a university. Previous research also considered geographic location as an important factor (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022). Geographical context has been deemed crucial in prior studies as well (Sitanggang et al., 2021). Location has a significant effect in the college experience of potential students. State, city size, and local community all have an impact on a student's school years. A university in a major city may offer prospective students more internships with large corporations or non-profit organisations, but a school in a smaller town may have a larger campus and more on-campus activities and possibilities. Considerations such as these are vital for making the proper decision while selecting the ideal university (Ishii, 2022; Fissha, 2020).

In addition, the location of the university that a prospective student chooses can influence the intended career sector. A suburban institution may offer a variety of on-campus employment and internships, but not nearly as many opportunities as an urban college. A student at an urban college will have the opportunity to work with many of the local firms through internships and

part-time employment. This provides real work experience and is an excellent way to gain entry-level employment (Ishii, 2022; Shamsudin et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020). Priorities for extracurriculars should be considered while determining a student's location and whether they will attend an urban university or a school in a rural or urban setting. Colleges in the city centre can provide a vast array of activities. Whether a student enjoys sports, art, movies, plays, or simply going for a daily run, the city surrounding an urban college can provide it all. Prospective students will not have to give up any of the activities they enjoyed as children; in fact, they may even get to enjoy them more. It is possible that rural and suburban schools are in a more "bubble" community. This can contribute to a tranquil lifestyle in the college district. However, a student will likely find fewer neighbourhood activities than at a college located in the core of a major city (Ishii, 2022; Shamsudin et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020). The location of the desired institution can also have a significant financial impact on the college experience of a student. Being a student at a downtown university enables you to travel quickly and affordably between locations. If you do not have a car, you will not need one because everything a student needs is so nearby. In the same way that it is simple to spend money in a city, it is also simple to amuse yourself without spending a lot of money (Ishii, 2022; Shamsudin et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H3c: There is a positive relationship between location and the parent choice of PHEI.*

#### *5.2.2.8 5.1.3.4 Physical Facilities*

Fissha (2020) noted that for many institutions, facilities, where provided to a high standard, were perceived as having an important influence on parents' choice of institutions. Although the

location of the university is a compromise between its size and proximity to services and industry, if the university has state-of-the-art infrastructure on a mid-sized campus and is in or near an area where students can easily get internships, connect with industry, implement projects in collaboration with firms, and visit the organisation to enhance their practical knowledge, it is an added benefit (Koricich et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H3d: There is a positive relationship between physical facilities and the parent choice of PHEI.*

#### *5.1.3.5 Recommendations/Referrals Factor*

Research has also shown that a parent's decision about which college his or her ward will attend is heavily influenced by their reference group, which can include anyone from siblings and friends and teachers (Ishii, 2022; Shamsudin et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020). High school students construct a social norm known as "acceptable choice" based on the preferences of their peers. This implies that peers may limit an individual's university options. Counsellors and teachers have a significant impact on pupils. They aid and assist candidates during the selection procedure (Ishii, 2022; Shamsudin et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020). *** much of the above repeated

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H3e: There is a positive relationship between recommendation and the parent choice of PHEI.*

#### *5.1.3.6 Loyalty and Alumnus factors*

Alumni are vital to institutions of higher education (Pedro & Andraz, 2021). Whether they are volunteering their time on committees, participating in campus events, or giving financially, they are crucial to the survival of the institution. Alumni serve as ambassadors for the university to their communities and states (Maulana et al., 2023). Visible alumni success (CEOs, corporate vice- presidents, etc.) in their careers are often determining factors in recruiting other students to the university. Students' and alumnis' loyalty is a priority for many higher education institutions, and it is quite reasonable because higher education institutions as any kind of other business organisations have their customers (Iskhakova et al., 2021).

The direct customers are students and alumni. In higher education institutions, loyalty must be based on strong relationships with students, because these students determine the financial success of a university (Pedro & Andraz, 2021; Maulana et al., 2023; Iskhakova et al., 2021). Loyalty is also considered to be a 'strategic competitive advantage' for two reasons: firstly, attracting new students is much more expensive than retaining the existing ones; secondly, if students' loyalty is higher, after graduation they help universities not only by word of mouth communication but also they are ready to contribute to universities' development financially and, even more, they are eager to employee graduates of the university (Rojas-Mendez, Vasquez-Parraga, Kara, & Cerda-Urrutia, 2009). Loyal students and alumni are the guarantee of financial success of a university and not only; loyal students/alumni promote universities through the word-of-mouth communication (Pedro & Andraz, 2021; Maulana et al., 2023; Iskhakova et al., 2021).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H3f:* *There is a positive relationship between loyalty alumnus factors and the parent choice of PHEI.*

### *5.1.3.7 Programme Availability Factor*

When making a decision on the choice of university for their wards parents take into consideration programme availability (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022). Research aims to comprehend the complexity of the higher education programme choice process and how parents can be supported in making the best decisions (Agormedah et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022), as approximately a third of students may start regretting the programme choice they have made (Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020) and may drop out of a programme. Recent studies on students' experiences in the higher education programme choice process have shown the critical role of students' interests (e.g., Holmegaard 2015), which parents take into consideration. Interests are therefore inherently future- oriented and inform life choices (Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020). Parents therefore weigh and contrast the multiple interests of their children in order to make a higher education choice, considering what interests are most important for them to pursue in an educational and career context (Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020; Vulperhorst et al. 2018). This process includes an exploration of how interests relate to available programmes, as not all interests and combinations of interests are realistic or can be pursued in more or less set study programmes (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, and Akkerman 2020). When students commit to a programme, this means that they aim to enrol in that specific programme (Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al., 2020).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H3g: There is a positive relationship between programme availability and the parent choice of PHEI.*

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### *5.1.3.8 Admission Process Factor*

While college admissions are considered a druid process steeped in mystery, most admissions officers base their decisions on a foundation of common elements (; Fissha, 2020; Calitz et al.,

2020). Admission process or requirements will ultimately influence parent choice of a particular university. Issues such as the ease of application for admission to the institution, the cut-off point of grades required for admission to a preferred programme and the high possibility of being admitted to a programme in the institution (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, & Akkerman 2020).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H3h: There is a positive relationship between admission process and the parent choice of PHEI.*

### 5.1.4 Employers' choice factors

One of the purposes of universities, together with scientific, technical and cultural development, is to train the professionals that society requires (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, and Akkerman 2020). The extant literature has documented that employers consider several factors in recruiting potential employees. Thus, the university that a potential employee attended will influence the decision of a particular employer when it comes to recruitment (Hosain et al., 2021). Previous literature (see Succi & Canovi, 2020) has identified some of the following factors: institutional reputation, quality of faculty, evidence of alumni job performance and private HEI's brand management and marketing communications as forming part of the employer choice factors when it comes to choosing a higher education institution, particularly a private higher education institution. As it is unlikely that all graduates will become independent entrepreneurs, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of graduates in a country will seek suitable entry-level jobs based on their knowledge, skills, and previous performance (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Governments and international rankings frequently use graduate employment rates as a performance indicator to determine the value of higher education (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, and Akkerman 2020). As a result, prospective students consider employment opportunities

when choosing a university to further their education. This also applies to prospective employers in their recruitment drive.

#### *5.1.4.1 Institutional Reputation*

Reputation refers to the overall impression that individuals form about something or someone (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, and Akkerman 2020). An object, a person, or a company's reputation consisted of the beliefs, emotions, conventions, perspectives, appropriate behaviors, and perception that someone had of it. Moreover, university reputation (UR) is a construct characterised by the attitude of students or staff of the institution as well as the general public, which makes the distinctive and comparable evaluation of qualities (Vulperhorst, van der Rijst, and Akkerman 2020). Institution Reputation is the common understanding of how the university should function. Additionally, university reputation may be viewed as external renowned, corporate reputation, and identity (Succi & Canovi, 2020).

Employers have faith in the institution, the university's leadership is highly regarded, and students believe that the university's image positively affects the worth of their degree. In these changing times, employers are more likely to choose prestigious universities with a sterling reputation for their potential employees. Different research on the impact of the mark on higher education revealed that the university's reputation corresponds to the primary sign that distinguishes the institution's exceptionality (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Academic reputation is one of the determinants of the effectiveness of university marketing initiatives (Succi & Canovi, 2020). From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H4a: There is a positive relationship between institutional reputation and the employer choice of PHEI*

#### *5.1.4.2 Quality of faculty*

Faculty members are considered the backbone of any reputable institution around the globe. A strong faculty contributes to an enormous change in societies (Kong, 2023). Faculty members play a critical role in ensuring the quality of students' curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities, and thus in managing the quality of education. Employers may have interest in institutions with the requisite faculty members since that will guarantee the quality of graduates emerging from such an institution (Kong, 2023). The faculty role is crafted according to the expectations of stakeholders and self in order to make it comprehensive and clear to one and all. A well-crafted faculty role can be enriched at all levels to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the functioning of the institutions. It serves a variety of purposes at institutional and individual level (Succi & Canovi, 2020). It may have a cumulative effect in improving the performance of the individuals as well as institutes over a period of time. Thus, employers will base their recruitment drive on the quality of faculty members at university, which will in turn influence the choice of a particular university (Succi & Canovi, 2020).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H4b: There is a positive relationship between faculty quality and the employer choice of PHEI.*

#### *5.1.4.3 Evidence of Alumni Job performance*

Alumni are the only constituents that have a lifelong relationship with a higher education institution and that seek to protect and improve its image in order to ensure that their own degrees are perceived to be of value (Kharaishvili et al., 2022). Alumni are individuals who have successfully received the products and services of an institution of education. Likewise, alumni are individuals who have collectively completed an educational experience with the same institution. The student experience establishes the foundation for a lifelong relationship

between an individual and an institution of higher education. Employers' choice of a particular private higher institution for their employees will be influenced by alumni job performance factors. If an employer has seen exceptional performance from an employee from a private higher education institution, the tendency for such employer to recommend the same university to other students is high (Kharaishvili et al., 2022). The extant literature has documented a strong relationship between loyalty and alumnus factors and employer choice of a private university.

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H4c: There is a positive relationship between alumni job performance and the employer choice of PHEI.*

### 5.1.5 General Perception of Candidates from Private HEIs

The perception of candidates from private higher education institutions will influence employers' choice of a particular private higher education. The quality of private university education has been a source of concern, due to the commercialisation and 'profitisation' mindset of the proprietors of these universities (Thirunavukarasu et al., 2020). It is common knowledge that nearly all private universities worldwide are self-financing and profit oriented. The notion therefore subsists that graduates of private universities may not have been adequately prepared for the workplace (Abelha et al., 2020). Stakeholders particularly have opined that the graduates of private universities may not have been adequately prepared for the 'world of work', especially since many of the students were those who did not attain the grades to gain admission into the public universities (Abbas & Sagsan, 2020). Also, that many of them may not be intellectually at par with their counterparts from the public universities at the workplace. One of the ways of measuring the quality of university graduates is through the assessment of the end products, especially from the evaluation of the employers of labour, as part of the quality assurance measurement of private universities. Assessing the public perception of graduates of private

universities is critical at this time when graduate unemployment is linked to non-suitability of graduates for the world of work. This is against the backdrop that the majority of students in private universities are those who were unable to secure placement in competitive public universities (Thirunavukarasu et al., 2020; Abbas & Sagsan, 2020).

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H4d: There is a positive relationship between general perception of candidates from private HEIs and the employer choice of PHEI.*

### 5.1.6 The moderating role of regulatory concerns

Drawing from the assumptions of the stakeholder and institutional theories, educational regulators are crucial in fostering the expansion and progress of tertiary educational institutions worldwide. Governments have a responsibility to guarantee that their population receives a high-quality education, regardless of its origin (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). Within the realm of public sector schools, it is crucial to create mechanisms that ensure the availability of highly qualified teaching staff, top facilities, state-of-the-art technology, and high-quality materials, all while working within the limitations of the allocated funds (Anthonysamy et al., 2020). Within the realm of private sector provision, the same principles apply. The focus is on establishing monitoring and control mechanisms to ensure that both public and private sectors deliver services of the highest quality (Aithal & Aithal, 2019; Anthonysamy et al., 2020). This is the domain where the educational regulator's role becomes significant.

Governments have complete jurisdiction to impose rigorous inspection and rules on individuals who wish to establish private schools and higher education institutions (HEIs), and private universities recognise and respect this right. Prestigious educational institutions recognise the importance of well-crafted regulatory frameworks that include methods for quality assurance (QA). These frameworks act as a protective measure against low-quality providers who may weaken the private sector market, especially in situations where the demand is not very selective

(Bamberger et al., 2019; Chankseliani et al., 2021; Aithal & Aithal, 2019; Anthonysamy et al., 2020). An essential factor in guaranteeing the long-term sustainability, both economically and politically, of the private education sector in developing nations is the establishment of a regulatory framework that promotes the private sector and guarantees the quality of private supply. The market's assessment of the quality of private education is crucial and susceptible to being negatively impacted (Bamberger et al., 2019; Chankseliani et al., 2021; Aithal & Aithal, 2019; Anthonysamy et al., 2020). Negative publicity regarding private providers that deliver substandard education can damage the sector's brand, undermine its credibility as a viable option to public providers, and result in policy reversals even from favourable governments.

Thus, this study also contends that, the moderating role of regulators in private higher education is crucial for maintaining educational standards, protecting students, and ensuring that institutions operate fairly and transparently. By balancing oversight with flexibility, regulators help private institutions thrive while serving the best interests of students and the broader educational landscape.

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypotheses

*H5a: Regulatory concerns moderate the positive relationship between prospective students' choice factors and the attitude and behaviour toward the choice of PHEI.*

*H5b: Regulatory concerns moderate the positive relationship between current students' choice factors and the attitude and behaviour toward the choice of PHEI.*

*H5c: Regulatory concerns moderate the positive relationship between parents' choice factors and the attitude and behaviour toward the choice of PHEI.*

*H5d: Regulatory concerns moderate the positive relationship between employers' perception and PHEI brand and their products.*

### 5.1.7 The moderating role of religion

Stakeholder theory asserts that organisations must account for the interests and effects on all stakeholders on their activities, rather than solely shareholders, in their decision-making processes (Tetteh et al., 2024). This theory further elucidates the intricate linkages and responsibilities associated with managing complexities and uncertainties within higher education, and how religious bodies moderate these relationships. Similarly, the institutional theory addresses the impact of social, cultural, and administrative contexts on organisations. This theory also elucidates how higher education institutions bargain complicated influences and expectations from religious entities in their decision-making processes (Cai & Mehari, 2015).

Our experiences, environment and even genetics form our beliefs and attitudes (Ashraf et al., 2017). In turn, these beliefs influence our behaviour and determine our actions. Beliefs that are widely accepted become part of our culture and, in many ways, shape the society we live in (Ritonga et al., 2020). Religion is probably the strongest belief system, and has existed for thousands of years. In many ways, it is a code of conduct, a rule book that allows believers to function in a non-primitive or cultured manner (Daniels & Gustafson, 2011). The earliest forms of religion were established to facilitate social bonding. In fact, it is also believed that religious practices are adaptive and have emerged to sustain survival and reproductive advantages through gene selection or gene-culture coevolution dynamics (Ritonga et al., 2020). This therefore suggests that religion influences the choices humans make, including the choice of higher educational institution. It is important to note here that although religious belief may play a causal role in some of the actions, it is not the only factor that influences behaviour. Rather, it is an important factor in a pool of other factors like genetics, environment, parenting, drives, and needs that determine our behaviour (Asad et al., 2021). There is evidence that there is a correlation between religious beliefs and behaviour, but does this necessarily mean that there is causality? (Ashraf et al., 2017).

The impact of religious organisations on higher education can be a multifaceted and nuanced discussion. Although numerous individuals contend that religion can enhance the educational milieu, there are various potential adverse effects. Bartkowski and Bartkowski (2019) assert that religious institutions may put limitations on scientific study, especially in areas that contradict religious principles. This may restrict the breadth of study and scholarly discussion, potentially hindering innovation and critical analysis. Pusztai and Fényes (2022) assert that institutions with robust religious affiliations may prioritise religious doctrines over secular or scientific viewpoints, perhaps leading to an unbalanced curriculum. This may impact pupils' access to varied perspectives and critical evaluation.

Alternative schools of thought contend that religious institutions frequently prioritise ethical conduct, community engagement, and moral advancement (Ritonga et al., 2020; Niklová & Hanesová, 2024). This can cultivate a robust sense of values and social responsibility in learners, motivating them to actively contribute to society (Ritonga et al., 2020). In this context, religious organisations are viewed as significant stakeholders with power and legitimacy in the provision of education globally. In Ghana, several private universities are operated by faith-based organisations (Kobo, 2016).

Thus, it may be inferred that religion has a significant role in shaping the decisions made by individuals, including their selection of a higher education school. Religious affiliation frequently factors into the decision-making process of students and parents when evaluating potential college options.

From the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

*H6a: Religion moderates the positive relationship between prospective students' choice factors and the attitude and behaviour toward the choice of PHEI.*

*H6b: Religion moderates the positive relationship between current students' choice factors and the attitude and behaviour toward the choice of PHEI.*

*H6c: Religion moderates the positive relationship between parents' choice factors and the attitude and behaviour toward the choice of PHEI.*

*H6d: Religion moderates the positive relationship between employers' perception and PHEI brand and their products.*

## 5.2 Chapter Summary

In this chapter the conceptual framework as well as the resulting hypotheses were formulated and discussed. The hypotheses sought to examine the relationship between the factors identified to influence student choices of PHEI.

# CHAPTER SIX METHODOLOGY

## 6.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology used for the study. It explains the diverse methods, tools and techniques used at each stage of the research process. The methodology chapter is discussed in three sections: research design, data collection methods and data analysis techniques. First, the research design discusses the philosophical assumptions, including the research paradigm, the ontological position, the epistemological orientation and axiological dimensions guiding the study, the research approach adopted and the specific research method used in achieving the research objectives. Second, the data collection methods provide information about the target population, sample and sampling technique, data collection instruments and ethical considerations. The last section deals with the data analysis techniques adopted to analyse the empirical findings from the research. These sections will be explained in detail in the subsequent subsections.

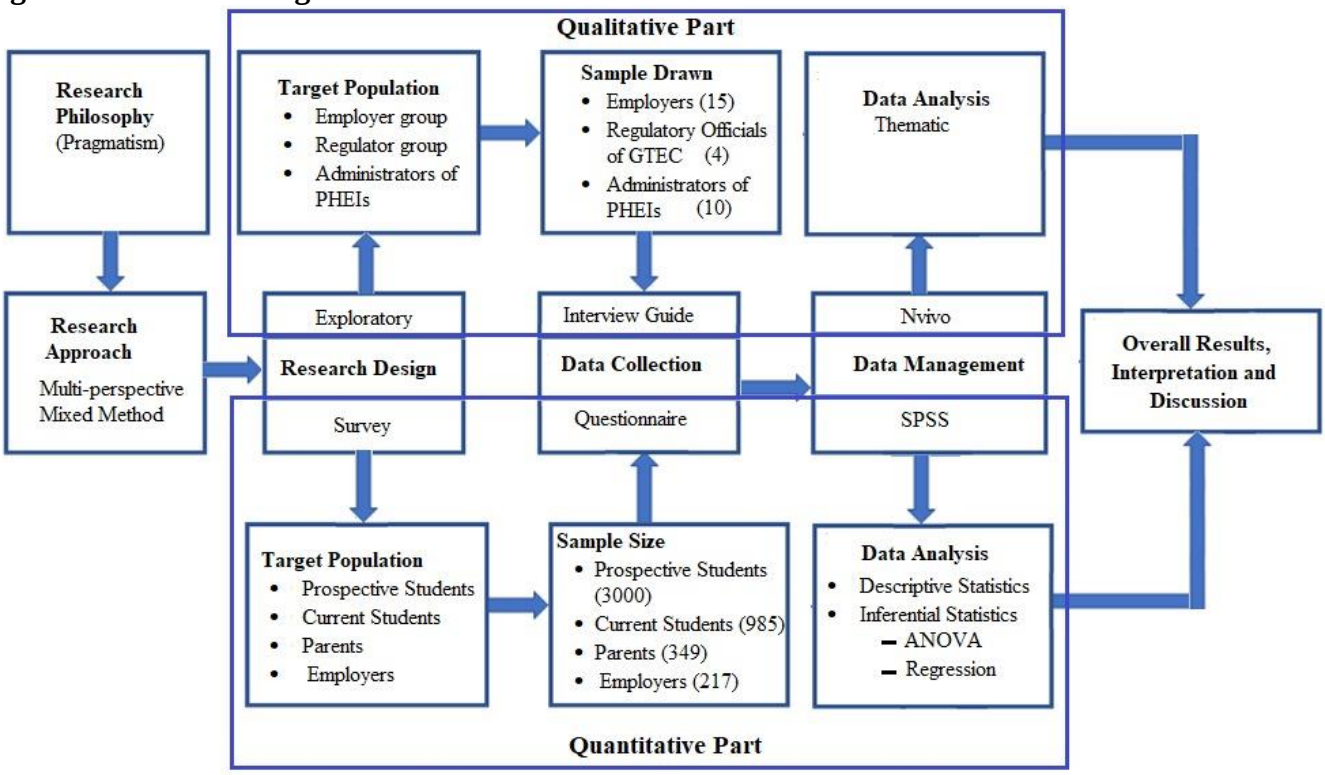
## 6.1 Methodological Framework

A methodological framework is a structured approach that guides a researcher on how to conduct their study, particularly in terms of data analysis, tools used, and the process followed. Here's the methodological framework deployed for the study: The research design followed a multi perspective mixed research approach involving both quantitative and qualitative research. In this study, a combination of surveys by means of questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. For the quantitative part of the study, data was analyzed using both descriptive statistics (i.e., mean standard deviation, minimum, maximum, kurtosis, skewness) and inferential statistics using regression analysis). For the qualitative part of the study, data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes, among others.

Below is a step-by-step description of how the research was carried out in terms of the methodological framework:

1. Step 1: Defining the Research Problem: There is growing existential threat that confronts the survival, growth and sustainability of private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Ghana in the face of continuous decline in student enrolment.
2. Step 2: Selecting Participants: to address the research problem a survey involving both questionnaire and interviews were designed. Participants for the study were current and prospective students to private higher institutions, parents of students, employers in Ghana and regulatory bodies responsible for regulating the private higher education institution.
3. Step 3: Data Collection: data collection took several months using face-to-face administration of the instrument, questionnaire and interview guides.
4. Step 4: Data Analysis: In the analysis of data, descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the data. In this context, the mean, the standard deviation was computed. Measurement models' assessment was also done to assess the validity and reliability of the instrument and the collected data. Moreover, regression analysis was done to make inferences about the population and the various theoretical relationships proposed. Additionally, thematic analysis was done to identify themes in terms of parents and employers' choice of the selection of Private higher education. The same approach was used to analyze the regulators' perspective on private higher education.
5. Step 5: Drawing Conclusions: After the data analysis, discussions of the findings were done to situate the findings within the research questions and the literature.

**Figure 6. 1: Methodological Framework**




## 6.2 Research philosophy

A research philosophy is a set of assumptions about how information about a phenomenon should be gathered, analysed, and applied. It is a set of principles for conducting research based on assumptions about the world and the nature of information (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Assumptions, data, and the study's overall makeup all have to be cultivated during this phase (Saunders et al., 2023). The assumption is interpreted as an initial statement of reasoning, but it is founded on the philosopher's acquired wisdom and perceptions. Because of this, it's possible that researchers' presuppositions about the nature of truth, knowledge, and their acquisition will vary. Several authors have distinguished and discussed four major schools of thought within research philosophy: positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and realism.

## 6.3 Research paradigms

A researcher's worldview, or the abstract set of beliefs and perspectives that shape his or her perceptions of, interpretations of, and responses to, phenomena in the real world, is referred to

as a "research paradigm" (Lather, 1986). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that a researcher's philosophical orientation is reflected in his or her choice of research paradigm, which in turn affects the researcher's choice of research topics to investigate, methods for conducting the research, and interpretation of the findings. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) are of the view that the research paradigm affects every decision in the research process, including the research methods and approaches, the data collection techniques and how the empirical data will be analysed.

### 6.3.1 Positivism

A positivist paradigm is the view that empirical methods of inquiry, such as experimentation, observation, experience, and logic, provide the foundation for and are the only legitimate means of expanding human knowledge and understanding (Saunders et al., 2023; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857) was the first to propose positivism. Researchers who hold the view that there is one universal truth that can be generalised and interpreted in terms of observable, measurable, and verifiable facts are common users of this term. To positivist researchers, the goal of their inquiry is to develop a theory that can universally account for all instances of human behaviour. The goal is to study the interplay of elements in their unaltered state to determine the causes and effects of any changes.

To provide explanations for a social phenomenon and make predictions based on measurable results, positivism employs a deductive reasoning approach that includes identifying theories, formulating hypotheses, testing hypotheses using mathematical equations, extrapolations, and expressions accepted by a research community. The findings of positivist researchers are based on four presumptions, which are laid out by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000). Determinism, empiricism, simplicity, and generalisability are all examples. Determinism is the view that all social phenomena can be traced back to a common set of antecedents, and as such,

researchers must anticipate and mitigate confounding variables that may affect their dependent variable. Also, according to empiricists, only empirical data can be used to test hypotheses formulated in support of a theoretical framework when looking into a research problem. Generalisability is the belief that research results in one context can be applied to other contexts and, thus, we can form law-like generalisations that can be tested in all circumstances; parsimony is the effort of explaining research results in the most economical way possible. As a result, researchers who subscribe to this paradigm are more likely to rely on a large sample size and quantitative techniques when conducting their studies.

The realist ontology, the pragmatist epistemology, and the consequential axiology all play a role in shaping a positivist paradigm. Realist ontology holds that there is one and only one truth about any given phenomenon that can be known through sensory experience (Putnam, 2012). They assume an empirical, or "objectivist," epistemology, in which they place their faith in knowledge that can be observed, tested, and generalised. Put another way, our knowledge of the world improves in its objectivity to the extent that we have quantifiable empirical data to verify a particular understanding of it. By defaulting to a consequentialist axiology, scientists only care about how to best benefit their study subjects and the world at large from their findings. Also, they put as much emotional distance as they can between themselves and the data, reasoning that the researcher must be detached from the information to conduct an objective study.

Early positivism saw widespread use in the scientific community for investigating the natural world. Since this framework is now being used to investigate social phenomena, some of the underlying assumptions no longer hold. Guba (1990) argues that unlike the natural world, the social world has values and thus cannot be studied objectively. When it comes to predicting social phenomena, it's important to keep in mind their complexity (Saunders et al., 2023). In

response, the post-positivism paradigm emerged, emphasising the importance of considering alternative possibilities to the traditional determinism. Post-positivists, in contrast to positivists, believe that reality is never fully understandable and can only be approximated (Guba, 1990). That said, they believe that the purpose of any scientific study is to persevere in the pursuit of the truth by employing a variety of measures and observations, acknowledging that all scientific methods and observations are fallible and error prone.

While post-positivists disagree with interpretivists' embrace of relativism, they do acknowledge that scientists' quests for truth are coloured by their own unique sets of values and worldviews (Kuhn, 1962). As a result of this shift in perspective, it is now possible to draw conclusions based on empirical evidence without conducting additional experiments or posing new hypotheses (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Positive models and experimental designs have made it possible for qualitative researchers to model their observations (Saunders et al., 2023).

Internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity are all ways in which positivists and post-positivists validate their research findings. The degree to which modifications to an outcome variable can be ascribed to a specified independent variable is a measure of internal validity.

Reliability is the process of making people believe in a study's findings by proving beyond a reasonable doubt that changes to an independent variable are the only plausible explanation for any observed changes to a dependent variable. Albers and Kratochwill (2010) state that there are three main criteria that must be met to establish internal validity. Firstly, we have temporal precedence, which proves that the independent variable comes before the dependent one. The second is to show that there is a correlation between the dependent and outcome variables, and the third is to rule out all other possible explanations for the results. This is investigated using a

range of experimental designs, including randomisation, justification of independent variables in the model, holding certain factors constant, and statistical adjustments.

The extent to which the results of a study can be applied to different settings is known as its "external validity." This demonstrates that the sampled data accurately represent the intended population and that the results can be reproduced by other researchers. Measures of reliability refer to how well the study's data hold up over time and whether the results varied significantly between measurements (Kirk & Miller, 1986). The term "objectivity" refers to how far removed from the phenomenon the researcher is to present a neutral account of it. Attempting to minimise subjective and personal biases necessitates that the researcher be as forthright and open as is humanly possible.

### 6.3.2 Interpretivism

Knowledge, according to the interpretivist paradigm, is a social construction; as such, the only way to gain access to reality is through other social constructions, such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, values, and beliefs (Saunders et al., 2023; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), all of which are rooted in specific cultural contexts and historical epochs. Interpretivists, in contrast to positivists, seek to understand the subjects' perspectives by considering their thought processes and the significance they ascribe to their actions. It gives more weight to people's own impressions of a social phenomenon and the meanings they assign to their own interactions with others (Saunders et al., 2023). Since interpretivists immerse themselves in the context they are studying, they look to the participants for explanations of phenomena.

Originating in the eighteenth century, the philosophy of interpretivism can be traced back to the work of Giambattista Vico, an Italian political philosopher who believed that, unlike the natural

world, human history is the product of human creation. According to this theory, theoretical speculation is sparked by empirical inquiry. Interpretivist philosophy can be broken down into four distinct schools of thought: phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, and verstehen (Saunders et al., 2023). The Verstehen approach, often associated with Max Weber, seeks to understand social phenomena from the perspectives of research participants in order to inquire into the reasons for the phenomenon's existence and behaviour. To put it simply, hermeneutics is the study of deciphering the hidden meanings in texts and other written documents. The Bible, philosophical texts, poems, and works of literature were all subject to this method of interpretation. Social interactions, which include the meanings and perceptions humans ascribe to their experiences and actions, are central to symbolism interactionism's view that such a view is necessary for a full grasp of any given phenomenon. Phenomenology is the study of how participants in a phenomenon interpret and describe their own experiences (Saunders et al., 2023).

Relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and equidistant axiology all inform an interpretivist paradigm. Since relativist ontology is assumed, researchers are compelled to look for competing interpretations of a social phenomenon in order to better understand it. On the other hand, subjectivist epistemology encourages researchers to interpret data based on their own unique

perspective and mental processing of their interactions with research participants. Given that it is assumed that data collection involves dialogue that creates shared meanings between the researcher and the research participants, it is acceptable for the researcher to share his own experiences of the real-world context. Given this premise of balanced axiology, he can expect his research to produce findings that are fair to both the participants' and his own values (Saunders et al., 2023).

#### *6.3.2.1 Credibility*

In qualitative research, credibility refers to how trustworthy and believable the findings are. It ensures that the research truly reflects the participants' perspectives and experiences. To ensure credibility several strategies such as triangulation and pro;onged engagement on the field were deployed in this study. This involves using multiple data sources and methods (i.e., interviews with students and parents, focus groups, document analysis of school brochures, and institutional data). By comparing different perspectives and data types, the validity of the findings is strengthened. In this context, after an interview with a parent about why they chose a private university for their child, we provided them with a summary of the key points they mentioned (i.e., reputation, cost, and location, facilities) to ensure these reflect their true opinions. Moreover, there was prolonged engagement with participants to fully understand their decision-making processes. This might involve conducting multiple rounds of interviews and attending events where students and parents were actively involved in choosing institutions.

#### *6.3.2.2 Transferability*

Transferability refers to how applicable the findings are to other settings or groups. To ensure transferability, the study used Thick Description. This provided rich detailed descriptions of the context, including information about the students, parents, and the private institutions being considered. Moreover, the study describes factors such as location, socio-economic background, and motivations. Additionally, the study provided the demographic profile of the participants (i.e., age, income levels, cultural background), so readers can judge whether the results might apply to other similar contexts.

#### *6.3.2.3 Dependability*

Dependability ensures that the research process is consistent and could be replicated. To establish dependability the study employed audit trail to keep a detailed record of all decisions

made during the research process, from data collection to analysis. This includes why certain participants were chosen, how interview questions were developed, and how coding was conducted. Furthermore, the study adopted the code-recode strategy so that during data analysis, initial code and a break were taken after which we returned to the data to recode it. The codes were then compared to check for consistency. Multiple rounds of coding were done to ensure that the process was clear and can be followed by other researchers.

#### *6.3.2.4 Confirmability*

Confirmability ensures that the findings are shaped by the participants' responses rather than researcher bias. To ensure confirmability, the study employed reflexivity which suggests that the researcher reflects on their own biases and how they might influence the research process. A reflexive journal was maintained where notes on assumptions were taken and how they may impact data interpretation. Audit trail was also used to keep records of how interpretations and conclusions were drawn, linking them back to the actual data i.e., quotes from interviews. At the outset of the study, the position of the researcher was explicitly stated and how it might shape the interaction with the data. This was continuously evaluated as the study progresses.

#### *6.3.2.5 Member Checking*

Member checking involves confirming the accuracy of the data with the participants themselves. To implement member checking, the researcher, after analyzing interviews shares the interpretations with the students and parents to ensure that it accurately captured their views. Additionally, the researcher encourages participants to provide feedback, correct any misunderstandings, and add more detail to their responses. In this context, after conducting interviews, the researcher sent a summary of the themes back to the participants. One student clarified that while affordability was important, the campus culture was an equally significant factor, which the researcher then incorporated into the analysis.

#### *6.3.2.6 Data Bracketing*

Data bracketing involves setting aside the researcher's own assumptions and biases while analyzing the data. To ensure effective bracketing at the beginning of the study, the researcher listed out any preconceived notions and expectations about students' and parents' decision-making processes when choosing a private higher institution. This was continually revisited and "bracket" them, i.e., set them aside during data collection and analysis to focus on the participants' perspectives.

### 6.3.3 The Critical /Transformative Paradigm

Knowledge, according to the interpretivist paradigm, is a social construction; as such, the only way to gain access to reality is through other social constructions, such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, values, and beliefs (Saunders et al., 2023; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), all of which are rooted in specific cultural contexts and historical epochs. Interpretivists, in contrast to positivists, seek to understand the subjects' perspectives by considering their thought processes and the significance they ascribe to their actions. It gives more weight to people's own impressions of a social phenomenon and the meanings they assign to their own interactions with others (Saunders et al., 2023). Since interpretivists immerse themselves in the context they are studying, they look to the participants for explanations of phenomena.

Originating in the eighteenth century, the philosophy of interpretivism can be traced back to the work of Giambattista Vico, an Italian political philosopher who believed that, unlike the natural world, human history is the product of human creation. According to this theory, theoretical speculation is sparked by empirical inquiry. Interpretivist philosophy can be broken down into four distinct schools of thought: phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, and verstehen. The Verstehen approach, often associated with Max Weber, seeks to understand social phenomena from the perspectives of research participants in order to inquire into the

reasons for the phenomenon's existence and behaviour (Harrison et al., 2020). To put it simply, hermeneutics is the study of deciphering the hidden meanings in texts and other written documents. The Bible, philosophical texts, poems, and works of literature were all subject to this method of interpretation. Social interactions, which include the meanings and perceptions humans ascribe to their experiences and actions, are central to symbolism interactionism's view that such a view is necessary for a full grasp of any given phenomenon. Phenomenology is the study of how participants in a phenomenon interpret and describe their own experiences (Harrison et al., 2020).

Relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and equidistant axiology all inform an interpretivist paradigm. Since relativist ontology is assumed, researchers are compelled to look for competing interpretations of a social phenomenon in order to better understand it. On the other hand, subjectivist epistemology encourages researchers to interpret data based on their own unique perspective and mental processing of their interactions with research participants. Given that it is assumed that data collection involves dialogue that creates shared meanings between the researcher and the research participants, it is acceptable for the researcher to share his own experiences of the real-world context. Given this premise of balanced axiology, he can expect his research to produce findings that are fair to both the participants' and his own values (Saunders et al., 2023).

Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are the four main criteria used to validate interpretivist research (Saunders et al., 2023). Credibility refers to how much you can believe the results of the study. Participants in the study should be able to independently confirm the accuracy of the researcher's reported findings. Positivists rely on internal validity while interpretivists prioritise credibility. A system is reliable if it consistently produces the same outcomes when applied to the same or similar circumstances. Participants in a study should

provide the same response to the same question regardless of the researcher asking the question or the time period being studied. But Guba (1981) argues that human behaviour is inherently fluid, contextual, and open to different interpretations in different settings. Therefore, findings emerging from the data should be of greater concern to interpretivist researchers. However, confirmability refers to how easily the findings can be replicated by other researchers. The purpose of this criterion is to lessen the influence of researchers' own preferences and biases on their findings. When conducting research, interpretivists should do their best to ensure that their findings are more in line with the responses of the participants than with the researcher's own opinions and traits (Harrison et al., 2020). That a study's findings can be applied to other situations depends on how well the researcher establishes the study's context for the reader.

### 6.3.4 The Pragmatic Paradigm

According to proponents of the pragmatic paradigm, there are limits to the generalisability of a paradigm-centred approach to reality (Harrison et al., 2020). Therefore, there is a requirement for pluralistic approaches that make use of a variety of methods and focus on the actual behaviour of research participants, the factors that influence that behaviour, and the potential outcomes of any deviations from the norm (Saunders et al., 2023). Pragmatists are known for always looking for the most effective way to investigate a given social phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2023).

Pragmatists put more stock in the nature of experience than in the nature of reality (Harrison et al., 2020). Pragmatism rejects the positivist belief in universal truths by arguing that social actions and realities are inextricably bound to the circumstances in which they occur. Additionally, consequences are highly situation dependent, meaning that even if you repeat the same actions, the results will be different once the situation changes (Saunders et al., 2023). This method depends on a value-laden axiology, a relational epistemology, and a relativist ontology.

Assuming a relativist ontology allows researchers to ask participants to explain their behaviour, and a relational epistemology allows them to study relationships in whatever way they see fit. As an added bonus, the value-laden axiology aids the researcher in paying attention to the participants' values (Saunders et al., 2023).

### 6.4 Elements of the Paradigms

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify three factors that affect the researcher's choice of research paradigm: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Research paradigm components have underlying beliefs, assumptions, norms, and values that direct researchers' decisions about which methods to use and why.

#### 6.4.1 Ontology

The study of what constitutes the ultimate reality of a social phenomenon falls under the purview of ontology, a branch of philosophy (Guba, 1990). That is to say, it centres on the presumptions people make when deciding whether or not to accept an assertion as true. What can be known about the world is shaped by the researcher's epistemology, or the set of core beliefs and assumptions that inform the researcher's approach to the study of the world (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) claim that a researcher's ontological philosophy discloses their worldview and their understanding of the elements that make up their sense of self. Whether or not a researcher thinks that there is only one reality that exists in objects in the social world or that there are multiple realities that exist depending on one's perspective is the most crucial issue that reveals ontological position (Saunders et al., 2023).

Researchers need to ask themselves the following questions to gain an understanding of ontological philosophy. What exactly is the nature of the phenomenon that is the focus of this investigation? How many alternate realities are possible, if any, and which one will be revealed?

Who verifies what the general public accepts as truth? The answers to them can be found at the poles of realism and relativism, two different ontologies (Saunders et al., 2023). Both naive realists and scientific realists agree that there is only one reality, and that this reality can be investigated, experienced, and comprehended through the application of proper methods and theory (Saunders et al., 2023). That is to say, the reality of a phenomenon is unrelated to how actors interpret its presence. This means that the social phenomenon is true whether or not social actors or the researcher are involved.

In contrast, relativists hold that different people's subjective experiences of the same phenomenon in different locations and times shape their conceptions of reality (Creswell, 2009). Within a given geographical, cultural, moral, or social group (bounded relativists), they hold that reality's construction can be uniform across space and time; however, once we move beyond that boundary and into the future, their view of reality shifts (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Reality, then, is not fixed but rather is the product of the thoughts and deeds of people involved in a social phenomenon at a given moment in time, and these realities can vary across geographic and chronological distances.

A researcher's outlook on a research problem, the significance of the problem, and the methods used to contribute to its solutions are all influenced by their philosophical stance.

### 6.4.2 Epistemology

The study of how people come to know what they know is the focus of epistemology (Saunders et al., 2023). Simply put, it explores questions related to the origin, structure, and dissemination of human knowledge. Schwandt (1997) claims that epistemology sheds light on the foundations of knowledge and provides researchers with the rationale they need to go beyond and dig deeper into the accepted body of knowledge.

How did we know what we know? is one crucial question that needs to be asked in epistemology. To what extent does one rely on books or life experience to fill in the gaps in one's knowledge?

How does the researcher relate to what is already known? Investigating what is commonly referred to as knowledge or truth begins with seeking out answers to these types of questions. In other words, once we accept something as knowledge, we need to test its veracity by asking factual questions about its provenance, including whether or not it should even be considered knowledge. This is crucial because the ultimate goal of any research endeavour is to advance human knowledge (Saunders et al., 2023).

Intuitive knowledge, authoritative knowledge, logical knowledge, and empirical knowledge are the four main types of knowledge discussed (Saunders et al., 2023). Intuitive knowledge comes from relying on one's own beliefs, faith, and intuition, while authoritative knowledge comes from consulting books and other authoritative figures. Comparatively, empirical knowledge relies on direct experience and observable evidence, while logical knowledge relies on theorising and deducing to arrive at its conclusions (Saunders et al., 2023). Intuition can be used to choose a research problem, authority can be gained through a literature review, empirical knowledge can be used during data collection, and logical knowledge can be used during data analysis. Knowing where information comes from influences how we go about discovering new information about the social phenomena we're interested in studying, and gives researchers more confidence in their findings. With the knowledge that is already available, epistemology places the researcher in an advantageous position from which to gain new insights (Saunders et al., 2023).

### 6.4.3 Axiology

By "axiology" we mean the moral concerns that should be kept in mind throughout the study (Mill, 1969). Ethical research involves making judgments about how to interact with participants, data, and the research audience. According to Finnis (1980), axiology is a philosophical methodology

that takes into account the human values of all individuals involved in the study. It aims to provide explanations for the following issues. What norms should be upheld in this field of study? How do I take into account the moral and cultural concerns of the participants? How does one win over the trust of those who will be taking part in a study? In what ways can I ensure a harmonious and respectful research environment?

Mixed methods research may be fundamentally based on two principal philosophical positions: Pragmatism and Realism. These roles are sometimes termed dialectical positions that connect postpositivist and social constructivist paradigms, as well as pragmatic and transformative viewpoints (Coates, 2021). A pragmatic perspective utilises effective methods, embraces varied approaches, emphasises the significance of the study problem and question, and appreciates both objective and subjective knowledge (Baškarada & Koronios, 2018).

Realist techniques emerged primarily in reaction to the perceived necessity for research that would be beneficial to policymakers, probing into the underlying dynamics of socially intricate circumstances (Shan, 2022). Nevertheless, there have been appeals to adopt pragmatism as the optimal philosophical basis for mixed methods research (Bashir, Syed & Qureshi, 2017; Moroi, 2021).

This research utilises the pragmatism paradigm to conduct the investigation. The pragmatism permitted the researcher to employ both qualitative and quantitative approaches, facilitating a more thorough comprehension of intricate challenges in PHEI administration. This approach also underscored real-world applications and consequences, rendering research pertinent and actionable for addressing actual issues in the PHEI business. Through the implementation of the pragmatism paradigm, this investigation is of the opinion that it has established a study that is not only methodologically sound but also profoundly connected to the real-world challenges and requirements of PHEI management in a developing country.

## 6.5 Research Design

Plans and procedures for conducting research, including everything from overarching hypotheses to granular details about how data was collected, analysed, and interpreted. Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods were the three overarching frameworks for conducting research.

### 6.5.1 Deductive and Inductive Reasoning

To analyse the choices of students, parents, employers, regulators, and administrators regarding private higher education institutions (HEIs) using Stakeholder Theory, Decision Theory, and Institutional Theory, both deductive and inductive reasoning were employed. These reasoning approaches help frame the analysis of the decision-making processes across different stakeholder groups. The section below discusses how deductive and inductive approaches were applied to different stakeholder groups.

#### *6.5.1.1 Deductive Reasoning*

In deductive reasoning, the study started with general theories and applied them to specific cases. The study used Stakeholder Theory, Decision Theory, and Institutional Theory as a

foundation to predict and analyze why different stakeholder groups might choose specific private HEIs.

Stakeholder theory emphasizes that organizations must consider the needs and interests of all stakeholders, not just the primary ones like students. This means that private HEIs must address the goals and values of students, parents, employers, regulators, and administrators when making decisions.

The application of Deductive Reasoning: From the students' perspective, deductive reasoning based on Stakeholder Theory suggests that students are a primary stakeholder group, so private HEIs would focus on providing programs that align with their needs (e.g., employability, financial aid, quality education). From the perspective of parents, Stakeholder Theory posits that parents as financial contributors will prioritize institutions with strong reputations, safe environments, and opportunities for upward mobility for their children. From the perspective of employers, stakeholder theory suggests that employers may seek HEIs that produce skilled graduates who can meet industry demands. Deductively, you could assume that HEIs will cater to employers by ensuring that their curriculum aligns with workforce needs in the areas of apprenticeships, internship opportunities, etc. From the perspective of regulators, deductive reasoning would lead to the conclusion that they focus on institutions' adherence to national education standards, accreditation, and quality control measures. As internal stakeholders, administrators will focus on institutional sustainability, reputation, and compliance, making strategic decisions that balance profitability and educational quality.

Decision Theory explores how stakeholders make choices under uncertainty, considering both rational and boundedly rational decision-making processes. This involves weighing options, risks, and potential outcomes based on available information. Using Decision Theory,

deductively, the study hypothesized that students would choose the highest perceived value (e.g., program reputation, tuition cost, and future earning potential). Parents' decision-making may involve risk minimization—choosing an HEI that guarantees safety, affordability, and location for their children. They might also rely on rankings and reputations as indicators of quality. Employers potentially make decisions based on the reliability of HEIs to produce graduates who can meet specific industry needs, focusing on institutions with established partnerships with businesses. Regulators, using decision theory, will emphasize compliance and reputation, preferring institutions that show a track record of following guidelines and meeting quality benchmarks. Administrators might use decision theory to balance various priorities such as profitability, reputation, and educational quality, making decisions that ensure long-term sustainability for the institution.

Institutional Theory emphasizes that organizations conform to the rules, norms, and expectations of the environment in which they operate. This conformity helps them gain legitimacy and survive in a competitive market. Deductively, it was hypothesized that students may choose institutions that conform to societal expectations of educational quality (accreditation, ranking, or prestige), as these signals offer legitimacy. Parents might also gravitate toward institutions that have societal approval, viewing well-established institutions as a safer option. Employers may prefer institutions that have gained legitimacy through their alignment with industry norms and professional standards, such as offering certified programs or industry-recognized qualifications. According to Institutional Theory, regulators will favor HEIs that align with governmental standards and norms, showing strong adherence to regulations and accreditation processes. Administrators, aiming for legitimacy, will adopt best practices that align with both market demands and regulatory standards, ensuring that their institution is seen as credible and legitimate in the eyes of stakeholders.

#### *6.5.1.2 Inductive Reasoning*

Inductive reasoning works by gathering specific observations and drawing broader conclusions from them. In this case, you would collect data from each stakeholder group and use that data to develop insights that may lead to broader generalizations or theories. By collecting qualitative data (i.e., interviews, surveys) from employers, regulators, and administrators, the study

observed the actual factors influencing their choices. From these observations, the study identified patterns and themes. Thus, by combining deductive and inductive reasoning, the study gained a comprehensive understanding of how students, parents, employers, regulators, and administrators make decisions about private HEIs, incorporating both theoretical models and real-world observations.

### 6.6 Research Approach Adopted

The study follows multi perspective mixed research methods. Incorporating multiple stakeholders—students, parents, employers, regulators, and administrators into the analysis of the choice of private higher education institutions involves using a multi-perspective design to capture the distinct priorities, concerns, and decision-making factors each group brings to the table. A Multi-Perspective Design is an ideal approach for a study involving multiple stakeholder groups, such as students, parents, employers, regulators, and administrators, when analyzing their choices and perspectives regarding private higher education institutions (HEIs). This design allows researchers to capture diverse viewpoints and experiences, providing a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing decisions and the complexities of each group's priorities.

### 6.6.1 Application of the Multi Perspective Mixed Design

The application of multi perspective mixed method design (MPMMD) follows several steps. First, there was the need to identify the various stakeholders involved in the study. In this context, the stakeholders were students, parents, employers, regulators of HEI, and Administrators of the PHEI.

In terms of the students, the focus is on their motivations, priorities, and expectations when choosing a private HEI. In the case of the parents, the focus is on exploring their concerns and preferences in terms of cost, safety, and reputation among others. The employers focus on the institutional reputation, skills and qualifications they seek from graduates of private HEIs. Regulators on their part will understand their role in ensuring quality standards and compliance with educational policies. Administrators of HEIs: Examine their strategies for attracting students and maintaining institutional reputation.

The next step in the application MPMMD was the development of stakeholder-specific data collection methods. In this context, different data collection techniques for each group were used to ensure the study gathered appropriate and relevant data. Mixed Methods Approach involving the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure that the study captures a comprehensive picture of each stakeholder's perspective.

For the students and the parents, surveys via questionnaire were used to gather data on factors such as reputation, location, and career prospects among others. For the employers, surveys and interviews were used to explore the choice in terms of institutional reputation, quality of faculty, qualifications, and readiness of HEI graduates for the workforce. For the regulators in-depth interviews were used to assess compliance, accreditation standards, and regulatory challenges. For the administrators, interviews focus on marketing strategies, enrolment issues, and institutional priorities among others.

Thus, the study administered structured surveys with closed-ended questions to students, parents, and employers. These included Likert scales or multiple-choice questions to measure choice or satisfaction levels. Moreover, the study conducted in-depth interviews or focus groups with parents, employers, regulators, and administrators to gain nuanced insights into their decision-making processes and perspectives.

### 6.6.2 Justification for Using Multi-Perspective Design

Competition and strategies about private higher education institutions involve a wide range of stakeholder interests, from financial and regulatory concerns to academic and employability factors. The multi-perspective design allows for the systematic exploration of each stakeholder group's priorities, ensuring no viewpoint is overlooked. For example, regulators focus on compliance, while students and parents prioritize educational quality and outcomes.

Additionally, the private higher education sector operates within a complex ecosystem involving regulatory oversight, student and parent expectations, and the labor market's needs. By incorporating multiple perspectives, this design provides a more comprehensive understanding of how these institutions operate and the factors that drive their success or failure in meeting stakeholder expectations. It also helps identify potential tensions or synergies between different stakeholder groups.

Furthermore, private higher education institutions need to balance the demands of students, parents, employers, and regulators while maintaining financial stability. The findings from a multi-perspective study can help administrators make informed decisions about program offerings, marketing strategies, and operational policies that consider the needs and priorities of all stakeholders.

With the above design, the methodology was split into part 1 involving qualitative and part 2 involving quantitative. These two parts are discussed below:

### 6.6.3 Part one: Qualitative

Given that this research has not been undertaken in Ghana, it is reasonable to employ an exploratory approach (Aaker et al., 2007). This is because it was important to collect preliminary data, corroborate the selected themes and theoretical frameworks, which would assist in identifying issues and generating hypotheses, and collect preliminary data (Kotler et al., 2006). A thorough literature review was conducted to determine the theoretical framework associated with student choice factors in university selection, and then multiple research topics and constructs are analysed to determine the questions to be investigated. In order to establish a set of variables to include in the main study of this research, the study used exploratory research to: (1) explore and identify employers' perceptions of private HEI brands and their products; (2) explore the challenges faced by managers of PHEIs in Ghana; and (3) explore the role do regulators play in PHEIs' sustainability.

#### *6.6.3.1 Population*

The participants in the qualitative part are outlined in this section. According to Malhotra (2018), the elements or objects that contain the information sought by the researcher and from which inferences are to be made constitute the research population. Participants in this study include employers, private university administrators/managers and regulatory officials from GTEC.

#### *6.6.3.2 Sample and Sampling Technique of the Study*

Even though qualitative researchers have different views on sample sizes, they can all agree that extremely small numbers are necessary for research. A typical sample size for qualitative

studies is 12, with the number kept at that until the researchers reach saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Stebbins, 2001). Whether or not you need a large number of people to participate in your study depends on the methodology you employ, the degree of background similarity among your participants, how easy it is to access them, and whether or not you reach saturation. In this investigation, the researcher used a snowball sampling method that involved some element of subjective judgment to reach out to the participants of the study.

The sample size for the employer group was fifteen (15), four (4) regulatory officials from GTEC, and ten (10) administrators/managers of PHEIs. The sample size for each group was not predetermined, but was determined after attaining data and theoretical saturation, with no new difficulties appearing from subsequent interviews, as proposed by Saunders et al. (2018). Saturation was a vital component of this research's qualitative aspect, as the study aspires for research rigour.

#### *6.6.3.4 Data Collection*

Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. The interviewer does not strictly follow a formalised list of questions in a semi-structured interview but instead lets the participants' responses steer the dialogue. It is beneficial for this research since it enables participants to submit increasingly thorough responses (Kothari, 2004). Asking questions and then following up on respondents' responses allows a researcher to organise his thoughts and get more in-depth knowledge about respondents (Myers, 2013). Also, their questioning is extensive, resulting in a thorough narrative of events.

#### *6.6.3.5 Data Management and Analysis*

The data analysis used thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2023) and followed Creswell's instructions (2007). Initial open coding of the data gave way to axial coding, in which codes

were structured and categorised according to their commonalities and features. Throughout the coding process, constant comparisons were made between participant replies and coding, coding and categories, and categories and participant responses. Experts in the field of research were consulted and their input was incorporated into the pre-testing of both qualitative instruments in this study to guarantee their validity (Zikmund, 2003). During or after the initial interview, questions were modified, or new ones created to test reliability (Silverman, 2001). With the participants' permission, their comments during the interviews were recorded on audio to verify the truthfulness of the data collected. When the study was first conducted, the researcher took notes in the form of distinct themes and indicators that were later transcribed verbatim.

### 6.6.3 Summary of Data Analysis and Collection Approach

The qualitative data collection and analysis framework by Braun and Clarke's (2006) was adopted for this study. Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six-Stage Framework for Thematic Analysis is widely used for qualitative data analysis. This approach provides a clear guide for systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within qualitative data. Below are the six stages along with a schematic diagram representing the process that was adopted in this study.

Stage 1: Familiarization with the Data

This initial phase involves the researcher immersing in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts or data sources. The goal is to get a broad understanding of the content. In this study the researcher re-read interview transcripts multiple times and noted any initial thoughts or potential themes.

Stage 2: Generating Initial Codes

This stage involves organizing the data into meaningful groups (codes). Codes are basic units of meaning and help in identifying interesting elements in the data. In this study the researcher highlights phrases or sentences that seem relevant to the research question and labels them with descriptive codes.

Stage 3: Searching for Themes

After coding, the next step is to examine the codes and begin identifying overarching themes. Themes are broader than codes and represent a patterned response or meaning within the dataset. In this study the researcher grouped similar codes together into broader categories and themes with the help of Nvivo Software.

Stage 4: Reviewing Themes

In this phase, the researcher refines the themes by reviewing them in relation to the data. This involves checking if the themes are coherent, distinct from one another, and supported by the data. In this case, the researcher read through the data and assessed whether the identified themes accurately represent the data.

Stage 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Once themes have been refined, they need to be clearly defined and named. This step involves formulating detailed definitions for each theme and ensuring that they align with the research question. In this regard, the researcher provided clear descriptions for each theme, explaining its significance and how it relates to the data.

Stage 6: Producing the Report

The final step is to present the findings in a clear and coherent report. This stage involves weaving the themes together and presenting them in a way that answers the research question. In this context, the researcher provided a detailed analysis, incorporating evidence from the data to support each theme.

**Figure 6. 2: Schematic Diagram of the Six-Stage Thematic Analysis Process**




**Source: Adopted from Braun and Clarke (2013)**

### 6.6.4 Part Two: Quantitative

The quantitative part was the creation of a structured survey questionnaire in order to collect quantitative data from respondents.

#### *6.6.4.1 Population*

The study's population for this part of the study is outlined here, along with information about the quantitative analysis. The target population of this study include students at senior high school (SHS) of private higher education institutions and parents/guardians. SHS within the Central Region of Ghana served as the study's geographic context. The region has a mix of endowed and poor SHSs, which represents the different parts of the country. The selection of the schools was done using the Ghana Education Service categorisation of second cycle schools. These categorisations put SHS into four categories based on their resource endowment. Additionally, the selection also considered single sex and mixed schools within the region.

*6.6.4.1.1 Geographical Context of selected SHS*

Ghana has sixteen administrative regions, one of which being the Central Region Central and it constitutes the geographical context of the selected SHS for this study. The region is shares boundary to the north with the Ashanti and Eastern regions, to the west with the Western region, to the east with the Greater Accra area, and to the south with the Gulf of Guinea.

A number of reasons were considered for the selection of this region. First, hosts some of the top education institutions in Ghana. The region has 59 SHSs, 3 public universities and 4 private universities. It also has a number of collages of education, nursing training colleges, technical and vocation schools. Also, the region has a mix of endowed and poor SHSs, which fairly represents the educational and socio-economic characteristics of Ghana.

The Central Region's economy is also built on a wealth of education, industrial minerals, agriculture and tourism. Numerous tourist destinations, including beaches, forts, and castles scattered over the region's coastline, may be found in the Central area. Services lead the region's economy, with mining and fishing coming in second and third. Two notable UNESCO World Heritage Sites that serve as reminders of the Transatlantic slave trade are Cape Coast Castle and Elmina Castle. Ghana's Central Region is home to national parks and beaches.

The geographical maps of the context are presented in Figure 6-0-3 and Figure 6-0-4.

**Figure 6. 3: The Map of Ghana**

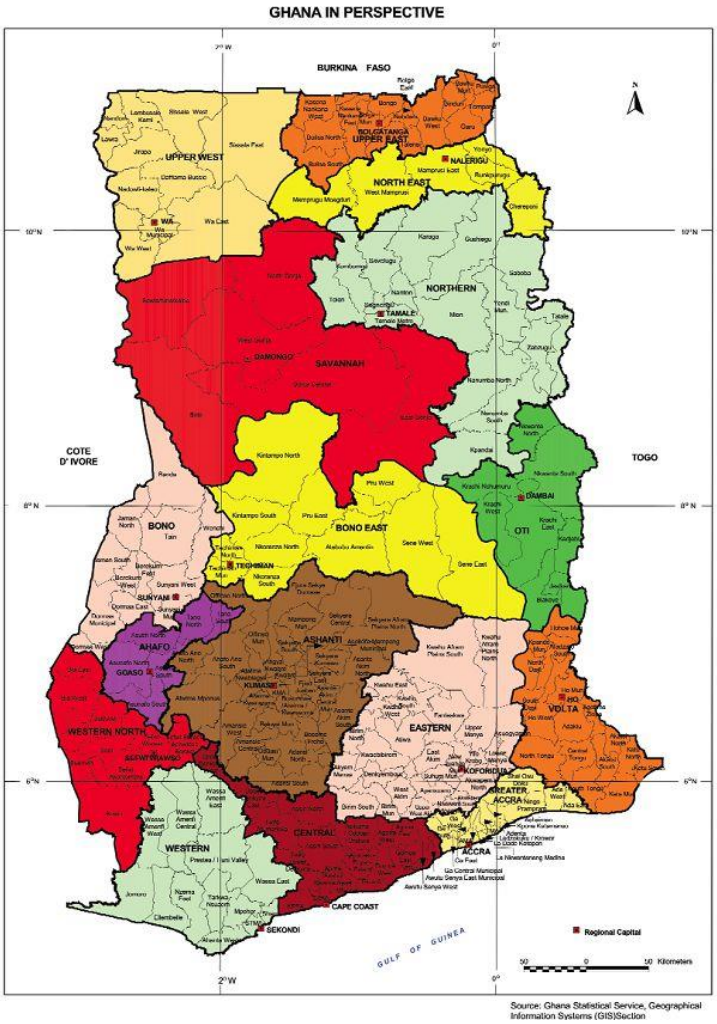



**Figure 6. 4: The Map of Central Region**



### *6.6.4.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size*

The list of central region SHSs maintained by the Ghana Education Service (GES) served as the sampling frame for this research. Determining an adequate sample size depends on a number of aspects, including those listed above as well as the resources at your disposal, the level of precision you need in your estimates, and the potential for generalisation of your results. Cochran's suggested sample size approach was used in the study (1977). If you know how precisely you want your results and how confident you want to be in those results, as well as the estimated proportion of the attribute in the population, you can use the Cochran (1977) formula (See below) to determine the optimal sample size.

$$n = \frac{p(1-p)z^2}{e^2}$$

Where

$n$ = sample size

$p$ = the population proportion or variability

$e$ = acceptable sampling error or level of precision or significance

In this context, it was assumed that p = 0.5 and a 95% confidence interval was needed and at least 5% – plus or minus precision level. A 95% confidence interval gives a Z values of 1.96, per the normal standard deviation tables. Cochran's formula is considered especially appropriate in situations with large populations and unknown population size. The formula together with the above parameters produced a minimum acceptable sample of 385 for each SHS. Thus, the study distributed questionnaires to 450 students across each of the twelve (12) Senior High Schools, resulting in an estimated total sample size of 5,400 prospective students.

**Table 6. 1: Estimated and Actual Sample Size**

| Schools | Estimated Sample Sise | Actual Sample Size |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 450 | 257 |
| 2 | 450 | 245 |
| 3 | 450 | 231 |
| 4 | 450 | 244 |
| 5 | 450 | 239 |
| 6 | 450 | 253 |
| 7 | 450 | 265 |
| 8 | 450 | 250 |
| 9 | 450 | 263 |
| 10 | 450 | 251 |
| 11 | 450 | 243 |
| 12 | 450 | 259 |
| **Total** | **5,400** | **3,000** |

Of the 5,400 questionnaires given, only 3,000 were deemed usable for data analysis from prospective students. Following the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014), a preliminary check was done to flag incompleteness, inappropriateness, missing values. 1,400 of the questionnaires received was rejected for incomplete, missing information and unengaged responses. Therefore, the remaining 3000 questionnaires were deemed usable for further analyses in respective of the prospective students. This constitutes a response rate of 56%. of the sample size, presenting good data for analysis (Malhotra et al., 2017).

In terms of the selection of the current students from the ten (10) PHEIs, the study distributed questionnaires to 120 students across each of the 10 PHEIs, resulting in an estimated total sample size of 1,200 current students. Only 985 of the 1,200 questionnaires distributed were deemed suitable for data analysis by prospective students. A preliminary check was conducted in accordance with the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014) to identify incompleteness, inappropriateness, and absent values. 215 of the questionnaires that were received were rejected due to incomplete, absent, or unengaged responses. Consequently, the remaining 985 questionnaires were determined to be suitable for additional analyses in the context of the

current students. This represents a response rate of 82% of the sample size, which provides valuable data for analysis (Malhotra et al., 2017).

Another group of participants were parents. Parents and guardians play an important role in their children's lives and in the HEIs they choose for them (Liu, 2021). Parents and family members typically absorb and pay a large percentage of a student's higher education costs, such as tuition. Consequently, it is imperative to explore parents' and guardians' motivation and perspectives on the choice of higher education for their wards. As a result, 985 parents/guardians were also sampled to represent the same sample size of the current students since the population of parents and guardians of the students is not readily available. The parents/guardians were approached in public places such as churches, mosques, markets and during parent-teacher association meetings.

In order to select the sample from the population, the population was stratified or partitioned into homogeneous groups. In the case of the students, it was stratified into grade A, Grade B and Grade C as per the GES classification criteria where SHSs are classified as such. In the case of the parents/guardians, the population was stratified into single parent and non-single parent. The reason for employing stratified sampling is that it decreases random sampling error, assures the representativeness of all groups in the sample, and ensures group homogeneity (Saunders et al., 2023).

Finally, a total of 231 questionnaires were distributed to the employers for the purpose of selecting them for the study, and 222 responses were received. A preliminary check was conducted in accordance with the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014) to identify incompleteness, inappropriateness, and absent values. In total, five questionnaires were rejected due to incomplete, absent, or unengaged responses. Consequently, 217 responses were

determined to be suitable for further analysis in the context of the respective employers. This constitutes an approximate response rate of 93.93%.

#### *6.6.4.3 Operationalisation of Construct*

Operationalisation refers to the defining of the major components of a given notion to make it measurable (Saunders et al., 2023). Researchers have proposed that good literature research could yield a previously operationalised idea and its applicable measurement scales (questionnaire items) (Rowley & Slack, 2004). As a result, after a thorough assessment of the literature, the survey items used in this study were selected from relevant scales. Nevertheless, the multi-stage strategy was employed in this study to identify and choose the appropriate measuring scales as follows:

1. The key variables used in this study were classified as follows: Parent Influence, Cost, Physical Facilities, Location, Institutional Reputation, Recommendation/Referrals, Personal Development and Admission Process were classified as the independent variable; Student Choice Criteria was considered as dependent variable. The questionnaire items were adapted from the previous studies (see Erickson, 2020; Manzoor et al., 2021). When deciding which studies to adapt the questionnaire items from, the scale features (ratio, interval, ordinal, and nominal) were considered (Saunders et al., 2011).
2. The 5-point Likert scale intervals from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree were used in this study after thorough deliberation (see Appendix A).

### 6.7 Pilot Testing

Before the actual data collection, a pilot test was conducted using the questionnaire to check the validity of the questions and the likely dependability of the data to be acquired. The chosen pilot unit consisted of 45 SHS students drawn from the Greater Accra Metropolitan area. The informants in the pilot testing, 45 in all, were directly contacted face to face and encouraged to

respond to the questionnaire and provide comments on the structure and content of the questionnaire. Upon consenting to the request, copies of the questionnaire were left with them and collected a week later. Largely the feedback was positive and encouraging, except for some minor challenges raised concerning the phrasing of the sentences and length of the questionnaire. Additionally, on average, a respondent was expected to use about thirty-five (35) minutes to respond to the questionnaire. From the feedback, the questionnaire was modified for the last time. For example, some redundancies were identified and deleted to decrease the length of the questionnaire and the time it took to answer the questions. Also, formatting was done to reduce the number of pages and to make the questionnaire more attractive.

### 6.7.1 Reliability Validity and Sensitivity

When pretesting a questionnaire about students' and parents' choice of private higher education institutions (HEIs), the concepts of reliability, validity, and sensitivity are critical to ensure the quality of the instrument.

#### *6.7.1.1. Reliability*

Reliability refers to the consistency of the questionnaire as to whether it yields the same results under consistent conditions. In the context of pretesting, the study wanted to ensure that if the questionnaire were administered multiple times, the responses would remain stable. In this regard, Test-Retest Reliability and internal consistency were used. For the Test-Retest Reliability, the questionnaire was administered to the same group (i.e., students, parents and employees) of respondents at two different times. The results were consistent and in this case the questionnaire was considered reliable. From the internal consistency perspective, Cronbach alpha (CA) was calculated for the several questions about factors influencing choice (e.g., cost, reputation, academic programs), the responses should correlate with one another if they are measuring the same underlying concept of choice.

#### *6.7.1.2 Validity*

Validity refers to whether the questionnaire accurately measures what it is supposed to measure. For this questionnaire, it's important to ensure that it truly captures the factors influencing students' and parents' employers' choices of private HEIs. Content Validity was considered to ensure that the questionnaire covers all relevant aspects of the decision-making process for choosing an HEI. Specifically, experts (i.e., education professionals, parents) review the questionnaire to ensure it includes all necessary factors influencing HEI choice. Construct Validity was also considered to ensure whether the questionnaire truly measures the theoretical construct it is designed to measure. In this case, the constructs were the factors influencing HEI choice. Pretesting data was used to confirm that the questions align with theoretical understanding of how students and parents make decisions. Face Validity was considered to ensure whether, on the surface, the questionnaire appears to measure what it is supposed to. During pretesting, the researcher asked participants whether the questions seem relevant and clear to them.

#### *6.7.1.3 Sensitivity*

Sensitivity refers to the questionnaire's ability to detect differences in responses, even if they are subtle. In this context, the questionnaire should be sensitive enough to capture the nuanced factors that affect students' and parents' and employers' decisions about HEIs. In this context, the study ensures that the questionnaire offers a sufficient range of response options, particularly for questions about preferences and decision-making. Additionally, the study ensures that questions were not phrased in a way that pushes respondents towards extreme answers, making it hard to detect subtle differences in preferences. Moreover, the questionnaire design was sensitive enough to differentiate between closely related concepts.

### 6.8 Ethical Considerations

First of all, letters seeking approval were sent to the heads of the various institutions where the study was to be conducted. Second, several ethical concerns would be observed during the data gathering procedure in order for this study to adhere to the highest ethical standards. The right to withdraw and informed consent are the fundamental ethical considerations. All participants were informed of the study's goal and the vital role they play in giving questionnaire replies. Respondents also had the option to opt out of the study at any moment without having to offer a reason. Participants were also informed about the study's academic character. In addition, because some of the respondents were minors, written consent was sought from their headteachers before they were allowed to participate in the study. The promise of confidentiality as well as the use of data strictly for academic purposes was assured during the interview. In addition, all resources used in this study have been duly credited to their original authors with both in-text citations and referencing at the conclusion. Finally, during the data collection, all Covid-19 prevention protocols were observed.

### 6.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has featured the research philosophy, approach and strategy adopted for this study, as well as the choice of research method used. Furthermore, this chapter presented the steps and sequences of techniques in performing the research analysis in this study.

# CHAPTER SEVEN RESULTS/FINDINGS – QUALITATIVE

## 7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results/findings from the study. Specifically, the chapter presents the findings/results from the qualitative studies. The chapter start off with the presentation of the demographic profiles and the themes and the findings.

## 7.1 Qualitative Findings Presentation

This subsection presents findings from the various interviews conducted with the study participants.

### 7.1.1 Demographic profile of participants

The participants were made up of three groups, namely employer group, managers of private HEIs group, and regulator group.

#### *7.1.1.1 Employer Group*

The employer group comprises 15 employers, 9 female and 6 male. The age of this group ranges between 35 and 55 years of age. The experience levels were between 10 to 25 years of experience. The participants cut across different industrial sectors, such as manufacturing, including mining, and the services sector. Specifically, 11 were in the services sector while the remaining 4 were in the manufacturing sector. To select the participants, initial calls were made to these employers and mutually agreed date was fixed for the interview. The employers in Ghana have an association called Ghana Employers Association. The members meet on annual basis to discuss business- related issues. At their meeting held in May 2022, the participants were identified, and they agreed to take part in the study. All 15 participants were identified as founders and chief executive officers of their respective organisations and as such had the

authority and knowledge about the subject matter. The interviews were conducted face to face in their respective offices and the lasted on average 45 minutes. Before the interview, consent forms were given to participants to sign. The participants were identified with abbreviations and the data collected was analysed together so as to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

#### *7.1.1.2 Managers of private HEIs Group*

The managers of the private HEIs Group comprised the administrators and the executive who are currently in charge of managing the private HEIs. A total of 10 participants from this group participated in this part of the study, 6 male and 4 female. They occupy various positions such as the president, provost, and academic registrar, among other positions. Specifically, 1 was in the position of president, 3 were in the position of provost, and 6 were in the position of academic registrar. The experience of the participants ranges from 8 to 15 years of managing private HEI. The participants were within the age bracket of 42 and 57 years of age. To select the participants, initial calls were made to several private HEIs. During the call permission was sought from the gatekeepers for the interviews. Enquiries were then made about the most appropriate respondent to represent the HEIs. These managers were then contacted and mutually agreed date was fixed for the interviews. All 10 participants had the authority and knowledge about the subject matter given their experience and the position they occupied. The interviews were conducted face to face in their respective offices and the lasted on average 51 minutes. Before the interview, consent forms were given to participants to sign. The participants were identified with abbreviations and the data collected was analysed together to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

#### *7.1.1.3 Regulators of private HEIs Group*

The main regulator of the private HEIs in Ghana is the GTEC, and for that reason officials from this regulator participated in the study. Four (4) officials were engaged in an interview. These officials, all male, had combined experience of 35 years. Three had been in this role for 25 years

and one have been in the role for 10 years. To select the participants, initial calls were made to the GTEC. During the call permission was sought from the gatekeepers for the interviews. Enquiries were then made about the most appropriate respondent to represent the regulator. The actual respondents were then contacted and mutually agreed date was fixed for the interviews. All 4 participants had the authority and knowledge about the subject matter given their experience and the position they occupied as senior officers at GTEC. The interviews were conducted face to face in their respective offices and this lasted for an average 55 minutes. Before the interview, consent forms were given to participants to sign. The participants were identified with abbreviations and the data collected was analysed together to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

### 7.1.2 Themes and sub-themes

During the analysis of the data, several themes emerged, and these themes have been analysed in line with the identifiable groups as detailed above. The main themes that emerged from the qualitative data were as follows:

1. Employers' perception
2. PHEI managers' perception
3. Regulator role

#### *7.1.2.1 Employer Perception*

This theme deals with employers' perceptions of private HEI brands and their products. The sub- themes that emerged from the main theme are as follows:

1. Institutional reputation
2. Quality of faculty
3. Lack of resources

*7.1.2.1.1 Institutional Reputation*

Employers have faith in the institution, the university's leadership is highly regarded, and students believe that the university's image positively affects the worth of their degree. In these changing times, employers are more likely to choose prestigious universities with a sterling reputation for their potential employees.

On this theme some of the employers asserted as follows:

> *"Some employers in both the public and private sector believe that graduates from private universities are substandard, inferior in quality compared with those from public universities." (PC 12); "Some employers perceive that graduates from private universities lack skills and knowledge and cannot perform satisfactorily on the job." (PC 11)*

Other employers had this to say:

> *"I guess that public universities are better than private universities and, given a choice, most potential students would prefer to enrol in public universities." (PC 03); "I think Private universities need to carve a niche for themselves in the university sector. They need to research the job market to identify the gaps in academia-industry and capitalise on them." (PC 07)*

Different research on the impact of the mark on higher education revealed that the university's reputation corresponds to the primary sign that distinguishes the institution's exceptionality (Rach- madhani et al., 2018; Keh & Xie, 2009). Academic reputation is one of the determinants of the effectiveness of university marketing initiatives (Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Ho & Hung, 2008).

*7.1.2.1.2 Quality of Faculty*

Faculty members are considered the backbone of any reputable institution around the globe. A strong faculty contributes to enormous change in societies (Hall & Thomas, 2005). Faculty

members play a critical role in ensuring the quality of students' curricular, co-curricular, and extra- curricular activities, and thus in managing the quality of education. Employers may have interest in institutions with the requisite faculty members since that will guarantee quality of graduates emerging from such an institution.

The following were some of the assertions by the respondents:

> *"Private universities face a wide variation in the quality of their faculty members with most of them not having terminal qualification." (EC 15); "The majority of private universities rely heavily on part-time lecturers, owing to their limited financial resources to hire permanent teaching staff." (EC 10)*

Another respondent had this to say about this theme:

> *"Most of their teaching staff hold master's degrees. This is, however, contrary to the recommendation of the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, which requires that the minimum qualification for university teaching in Ghana is a PhD." (EC 01)*

These assertions by the respondents support the position in the literature to the effect that private universities face serious reputational threats, which, if not properly addressed, could result in a significant number of them closing down (Hermans, 2007; Kjelland, 2008; Krahn et al., 2000).

*7.1.2.1.3 Lack of resources*

Private universities have fewer financial resources and less education infrastructure relative to public universities. HEIs often suffer from resource shortages while maintaining huge institutional operating and academic research costs; thus, administrators must make additional efforts to maintain resources effectively and efficiently (Kraatz & Zajac, 2001; Ryan, 2005). Furthermore, Ryan (2005) held that institutions should input reputation and resources including institutional support, budget, and financial resources

Some of the respondents commented as follows:

> *"I think the shortage of funds for running the school has become a barrier to the development of private colleges and universities." (EC 14); "I believe the actors within the private colleges don't have enough resources to conduct their operations." EC 09); "my perception is that private universities in Ghana lack the requisite resources to function." (EC 11)*

The above responses suggest that employers have a perception that the private universities are not resourced enough to function as expected.

#### *7.1.2.2 The challenges faced by Managers of PHEIs*

This theme deals with challenges faced by managers of private HEIs in Ghana. The sub-themes that emerged from the main theme is as follows:

1. Declining enrolment
2. Rising drop-out rates
3. Increased competition
4. Inadequate resources
5. Inadequate capacity development
6. High cost of accreditation
7. Institutional autonomy and identity crisis

##### *7.1.2.2.1 Declining enrolment*

In recent years, many higher education institutions have witnessed declining enrolment numbers and recruitment challenges (Shah et al., 2019). These struggles have not been restricted to a certain type of school, even though enrolment challenges do hit institutions differently. From large public institutions to smaller private colleges, to community colleges, drawing students into the enrolment process is crucial for longevity and campus success (Levy, 2013).

On this theme some of the respondents commented as follows:

> *"... we used to have increment in enrolment year-over-year, for the last 5-8 years, it's been on a steady decline." (MR 01)*
> *"... but it's disappointing to see the downward trend in college enrolment continue for another year, even as the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic has eased substantially." (MR 10)*
> *"After two straight years of historically large losses, it is particularly troubling that numbers are still falling, especially among freshmen." (MR 07)*
> *"Our numbers in terms of enrolment have seen a downward reduction ... affecting our finances as well." (MR 05)*

The approaching decline in the number of college students applying to PHEIs has been identified as an existential threat to the future of the private universities (Shah et al., 2013). The prospects are especially dire for tuition-dependent private colleges, and some observers have predicted that the majority of universities will soon perish (Christensen & Eyring, 2011). The response from the participants aligns with the position of the literature to the effect that declining enrolment presents a challenge for the managers of private higher institution of learning.

*7.1.2.2.2 Rising drop-out rates*

College administrators, even those who claim to have strong admission criteria, say that an increasing number of tiny schools are being compelled to be less selective. When there's a rush to meet enrolment targets, they admit students who can't compete intellectually or financially, which leads to a spike in dropouts. We occasionally see universities reduce tuition to the point where they are educating students at a net loss – clearly not a sustainable approach.

Some of the respondents asserted as follows:

> *"A surge in the number of students dropping out would put a squeeze on university finances, depriving us of much-needed fee income and potentially putting the sector into difficulties." (MR 02)*

*"I've observed a certain trend in terms of dropouts among our students" (MR 04)*

*"Some of our students are unable to complete their program of study…they just dropout affecting our budget." (MR 09)*

*"Student dropout has a tremendous negative impact not only on individuals but also on universities and socioeconomic of the country." (MR 04)*

*Dropout is a critical indicator of an educational system's quality because it demonstrates the persistence of significant failures in direction, transition, adaptation, and student promotion." (MR 06)*

Universities are bracing themselves for a record number of students dropping out as the cost-of- living crisis bites. Students are being squeezed by rising prices and a lack of parental support as family incomes also take a hit, forcing many to reconsider their decision to go into higher education (Long & Noor, 2023). The result is consistent with the position posited in the literature, which suggests that student dropout will negatively affect universities, particularly PHEIs.

*7.1.2.2.3 Increased competition*

The competition in higher education is severe, with more universities operating than ever before, including small speciality colleges, and an inflow of online education and training possibilities. Competition in higher education, particularly between research universities, has evolved into a competition between institutions rather than just between people and nations, creating a multi- level form of competition around the world and turning research universities into rivals (Musselin, 2018).

On this theme some of the respondent express the following sentiments

*"Competition is fierce among educational institutions, with institutions striving to deliver programmes, courses, activities, and surroundings…" (MR 01)*

*"Competition has become more intense, and its nature has changed, while new forms*

*of formal collaboration between higher education institutions ..." (MR 02)*

*"We're faced with a lot of competition from all angles ... affecting our operational aspiration." (MR 08)*

*"Majority of the PHEIs run programmes in the humanities, in particular business-related programme ... Diversity in programme offering is virtually absent resulting in increased competition among PHEIs."*

Competition can affect the price and quality of goods and services in a market. This is a key argument in the education literature (e.g., Hoxby 2000; Lubienski 2003; Lubienski & Lubienski 2006; Buckley & Schneider 2007; Rothstein 2007). Sameness in programme offerings has resulted in increased competition among the players in the private higher education sector. This problem is informed by the fact that mounting research, science, engineering and technology-based programmes demand for huge infrastructure and financial outlay that the PHEIs can hardly afford. In contrast, the public universities are already grounded both in name and programmes in the business and humanities, making it difficult for the PHEIs to compete in that space. Higher education is also affected by competition (Hoxby, 1997), but the market is complicated by the fact that colleges compete for students, faculty, and funding, among other things (Goldman et al., 2004). The results align with the literature to the effect that competition among universities is a challenge for PHEIs.

*7.1.2.2.4 Inadequate resources*

Resources such as physical and financial resources contribute a lot to the operational development of PHEIs. The ability of higher education institutions to obtain enough funding to ensure the day- to-day running of the administration, teaching and research of universities has become a major obstacle for many countries in the world, including Ghana.

The following are some of the comments by the respondents:

> *"Private universities have fewer financial resources and less education infrastructure relative to public universities …" (MR 03)*
> *"We are facing challenges of debt financing as most, apart from the mission or faith-based private universities that get support from religious bodies sponsoring them, are unable to service their bank loans." (MR 07)*
> *"… as a matter of fact, we're unable to meet our aspirations due to inadequate resources*
> *… both financial and physical." (MR 10)*
> *"… the resource situation makes it increasingly difficult for private universities to advertise extensively to attract potential students, pay salaries and utility bills, and meet other financial obligations." (MR 08)*

Inadequate resources are among the main causes of private universities not having the required infrastructure and technologies needed for smooth operations (Wright & Horst, 2013). This situation has forced some private universities to lay off staff, cease infrastructure development, delay payment of salaries, and reduce funding for research activities. The responses are in line with the literature about how resources, particularly financial resources, affect the operations of PHEIs.

*7.1.2.2.5 Inadequate capacity development*

Capacity development factors, encompassing staff roles and responsibilities, academic leadership and development, and programme design, including curriculum design, have implications for PHEIs. There is a significant variation in the quality of faculty members within private universities in Ghana. Based on the data provided by the Ghana Accreditation Board, these private universities employ a total of 4,858 academic staff members, and, among this number, merely 1,133 (23%) hold terminal degrees, such as PhDs.

On this theme, some of the respondents commented as follows:

> *"we're faced with capacity development issues. A majority of our teaching staff hold master's degrees. This is, however, contrary to the recommendation of the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, which requires that the minimum qualification for university teaching in Ghana is a PhD." (MR 06)*
>
> *"The majority of private universities rely heavily on part-time lecturers, owing to their limited financial resources to hire permanent teaching staff. However, the part-time lecturers tend to combine multiple part-time teaching appointments, with a negative impact on their teaching." (MR 05)*
>
> *"The vast majority of private universities offer courses in the social sciences, art and humanities rather than science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), subjects that require more capital investment but are the central focus of government policies." (MR 04)*
>
> *"Thus, private universities offer a limited menu of academic programmes. The net effect is that private universities are unable to compete with the public universities for the increasing number of students inclined towards STEM subjects." (MR 09)*

These responses suggest that lack of capacity development presents operational challenges for PHEIs. The notion of capacity building, interchangeably referred to as capacity development (ACBF, 2011), has emerged as a significant component of the developmental framework in recent times. Specifically, capacity building is directed towards the enhancement and assurance of human capabilities within a society. The ultimate goal of this concept is to foster improved governance and comprehensive development.

#### *7.1.2.2.6 High cost of accreditation*

All private higher education institutions are enjoined by law to be accredited by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). The accreditation process also requires PHEIs to affiliate with a public university. Beyond these, PHEIs are supposed to raise a bank guarantee of not less than 2 million Ghana cedis. These serve as a huge financial burden on any developing PHEI. These costs eventually find their way into tuition fees.

On this theme, some of the respondents asserted as follows:

> *"... we spend a lot of money on accreditation and reaccreditation ... putting huge financial burden on us" (MR 06)*
> *"We are under a lot of pressure when it comes to accreditation and reaccreditation with GTEC." (MR 09)*

The responses reflect the position in the literature to the effect that accreditation and reaccreditation fees affect the private universities' financial resources.

*7.1.2.2.7 Institutional autonomy and identity crises*

It is apparent that PHEIs in Ghana had a faulty beginning. Through the process, the affiliate PHEIs must undergo mentoring and tutelage from a supervisory public university. Their faculty and academic programmes must be overseen and supervised by the public affiliate university, which competes with them across the public space for all manner of resources, including students. This affects their academic and institutional independence. Additionally, the affiliation process prevented the PHEIs from independently issuing their own certificate/degrees to their graduating students. Until a PHEI is granted a charter by the state, its degrees and certificates must come from its mentor universities.

On this theme some of the respondents expressed the following sentiments:

> *"In fact, there is lack of institutional autonomy on the part of the PHEI ... we're at the mercy of our affiliate institutions." (MR 07)*
> *"... that some institutions that were mentoring in turn were not giving us value for money*
> *... They are charging so huge an affiliation fees, they were not providing the level of supervision we were expecting them to provide." (MR 03)*
> *"... we're not allow to issue our own certificate until we obtained charter status ... affiliate institutions do that on our behalf." (MR 04)*
> *"Our mentor institutions somehow compete with us for resources including*

*students…this same institution issues our certificates … Meanwhile, when it comes to the issuing of transcripts, the PHEIs are permitted to issue those in their own name." (MR 02)*

The responses suggest that institutional autonomy and identity crisis present a challenge for the PHEIs.

#### *7.1.2.3 Regulator's Role*

This theme deals with the role that regulators play in PHEIs sustainability. The sub-themes that emerged from the main theme are as follows:

1. Quality assurance
2. Annual reporting
3. Promoting transparent governance and best practices
4. Accreditation and reaccreditation

##### *7.1.2.3.1 Quality Assurance*

The internal and external evaluation of a college or university's effectiveness and performance, known as quality assurance, has always been essential to maintaining and enhancing the best aspects of what higher education has accomplished in the past and laying the foundation for the future. Academic independence, institutional autonomy, and social responsibility are among the "best" principles (Eaton, J2021). The GTEC's role in the provision of quality assurance mechanism to the PHEIs cannot be overemphasised. As higher education faces the difficulties of change and innovation, quality assurance has been increasingly crucial in upholding basic principles. While we continue to work to increase access to higher education and equity, we also build new sorts of institutions, work with new types of education providers, and place a high priority on quality assurance.

On this theme, the respondent had this to say:

> *"You know, we do provide quality assurance to all tertiary educational institutions.* We're *aware of the ongoing responsibility to sustain and strengthen quality assurance values, not only to protect quality but also to play a central role in building the future of colleges, universities and, going forward, many other providers." (FGD 1)*
> *"We are witnessing a major expansion of higher education providers, going beyond traditional institutions and degrees to online education offered not only by higher education but also civil society and the business world. We seek to ensure that the PHEIs will provide the highest of quality and conform to quality standards." (FGD 03)*
> *"Faculty, academic administrators, students and employers are all engaged in quality assurance and its key processes of self-study, peer review and institutional evaluation." (FGD 04)*

Quality assurance plays a key role even as we adopt new teaching and learning practices, develop new types of institutions, engage new types of education providers and continue our commitment to expand access and equity in higher education. The responses above are in line with the fact that quality assurance is among the roles of the education regulator – in this case the GTEC – in ensuring the sustainability of PHEIs.

*7.1.2.3.2.Annual Reporting*

Higher education institutions (HEIs) operate with substantial autonomy. Such independence makes it essential for the governance and management structures of these institutions to remain accountable to both internal and external stakeholders in a coherent and regulated way. Recent advancements in annual reporting, along with a focus on "harmonisation" on both national and international levels, mandate that annual reporting aligns with generally accepted practices. Education regulators establish a framework for annual reporting for both private and public HEIs. The purpose of this framework is to guarantee that the reporting by governance structures adheres to minimum standards.

The following are some of the comments from the respondents:

> *"We ensure that higher education providers comply with annual reporting obligations in line with best practices." (FGD 04)*
> *"On our part as GTEC, we provide annual report on the performance of the PHEIs and identify areas of improvement." (FGD 01)*
> *"Annual reporting is essential both GTEC and the PHEIs to ensure compliance with regulation." (FGD 02)*

The responses suggest that annual reporting is part of the role of the regulators of educational institution to ensure the sustainability of PHEIs.

*7.1.2.3.3 Transparent governance and best practices*

The governance structure delineates the framework of an organisation's governance, encompassing the rules, procedures, and roles of responsibility that shape the organisation. The structure of higher education systems is influenced by numerous factors, such as national cultures and traditions, policy objectives, student expectations, and labour market requirements. With the rising demand for higher education in recent decades, systems have broadened both in size and scope. Consequently, the challenge of crafting the most pertinent and fitting system structures remains a consistently significant matter on the policy agenda across many countries. On this theme some of the respondents commented as follows:

> *"Good governance ensures consistency …P HEIs needs to make sure that governance is repeatable – from the top of the institution, trickling all the way down. As a result, overall productivity and efficiency are boosted." (FGD 01)*
> *"Transparency and visibility are the priority for an institution once they adopt good governance … GTEC ensures that the governance framework reflects transparency and accountability." (FGD 03)*
> *"We know that practising good governance naturally builds institutional reputation. The output of good governance means putting the right products and services out onto the market. In doing so, the institution experiences an escalation of business performance and the possibility of market domination." (FGD 04)*

Good governance ensures an organisation's stakeholders that the organisation is in good hands and functioning at its highest regulatory potential. By consolidating its ethical code, the reputation of the company is boosted. The responses reflect the fact that part of the responsibilities of the regulator lie in the governance structure and adoption of best practices. This will ensure the sustainability of PHEIs.

*7.1.2.3.4 Accreditation and Reaccreditation*

Accreditation and reaccreditation are globally recognised standards that establish guidelines for delivering quality products and services. Consequently, many institutions and individuals seek to achieve these accreditations. The process of accreditation serves two primary purposes: ensuring the quality of the institution or programme and aiding in its improvement. Specifically, accreditation is a status bestowed upon an educational institution or programme that has been determined to meet or surpass established criteria of educational excellence.

> *"An institutional accrediting body considers the characteristics of whole institutions. For this reason, an institutional accrediting body gives attention not only to the educational offerings of the institutions it accredits, but also to other such institutional characteristics as the student personnel services, financial conditions, and administrative strength." (FGD 03)*
>
> *"Institutional improvement is encouraged by an institutional accrediting body through the requirement that the accredited institution conducts periodic self-evaluations seeking to identify what the institution does well, determining the areas in which improvement is needed, and developing plans to address needed improvements." (FGD 04)*
>
> *"Institutional improvement is also encouraged by the institutional accrediting body through the advice and counsel provided by the visiting team, which comprises experienced ducators drawn primarily from accredited institutions, and by the publications of the accrediting body." (FGD 02)*

Accreditation is a well-established practice in the educational sector as well as in various other fields. Typically, the organisations that oversee institutional accreditation operate on a national or regional level and consist of institutions that have attained and sustained accreditation. The importance of accreditation and reaccreditation is highlighted by the fact that they are vital components of the regulator's responsibilities to ensure the sustainability of PHEIs.

# CHAPTER EIGHT RESULTS/FINDINGS – QUANTITATIVE

## 8.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results/findings from the study. Specifically, the chapter presents the findings/results from both qualitative and quantitative studies. The chapter begins by presenting the findings from the qualitative studies and then moves on to presenting the results from the quantitative studies in line with the hypotheses set in this study.

## 8.1 Quantitative Results Presentation

This section provides an analysis and presentation of the quantitative results from the study. The analysis and the presentation have been structured based on the key participants in this study as follows:

1. Prospective students
2. Current students
3. Parents
4. Employers

### 8.1.1 Prospective Students Analysis and Presentation

This subsection provides analysis and presentation of the results from the prospective students.

#### *8.1.1.1 Data Preparation*

Data screening or preparation refers to the process of cleaning and organising data to ensure that it is suitable for further statistical analyses. The purpose of this process is to validate that the data is usable, reliable, and applicable for testing causal theories. In this particular study, data preparation encompassed the examination of missing data, outliers, normality, linearity, and multicollinearity.

- Missing data: The absence of data can lead to various issues, notably the lack of sufficient data points required to perform analyses. Complex models require specific data quantities to compute estimates, with the requisite number escalating in line with the model's intricacy (Hair et al., 2014). While a threshold for missing data exists, general practice dictates that missing more than 10% of responses on a variable or from a respondent may be problematic (Hair et al., 2014). In this research, missing data did not pose a problem, as all respondents furnished the required information.
- Outliers: Outliers can substantially affect results by deviating the mean from the median. Two categories of outliers are recognised: individual variable outliers and model outliers. Since this study employed a Likert scale, outliers were not an issue.
- Normality: Normality pertains to the distribution of a variable's data. Though normal distribution is commonly assumed, it may not always be the case. Normality can be assessed through shape, skewness, and kurtosis, with skewness and kurtosis being the chosen methods in this study.
- Skewness: This refers to the unequal distribution of responses, either heavily weighted toward the right or left end of the scale. Skewness is evaluated using two rules, defining the acceptable range for non-skewed data.
- Kurtosis: Kurtosis involves the analysis of data distribution outliers. Large kurtosis indicates the presence of outliers, while low kurtosis signifies their absence. The rule for assessing problematic kurtosis is consistent with the second rule for skewness, regarding the absolute value of kurtosis being less than three times the standard error.

By employing the criteria for normality in skewness and kurtosis, it was evident from Table 8.1 that normality was not a concern in this study, as the data complied with the norms for a normal distribution.

**Table 8. 1*: Normality test using Skewness and Kurtosis***

| | **Skewness** | | | **Kurtosis** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constructs | Statistic | Std. Error | 3x standard Error | Statistic | Std. Error | 3x standard Error |
| Cost | -0.626 | 0.241 | 0.723 | 0.213 | 0.478 | 1.434 |
| Institution Reputation | -0.385 | 0.241 | 0.723 | 0.468 | 0.478 | 1.434 |
| Location | -0.643 | 0.241 | 0.723 | 0.675 | 0.478 | 1.434 |
| Personal Aspiration | -0.476 | 0.241 | 0.723 | -0.287 | 0.478 | 1.434 |
| Physical Facilities | -0.062 | 0.241 | 0.723 | 0.711 | 0.478 | 1.434 |
| Prospective Student Choice | -0.499 | 0.241 | 0.723 | 0.902 | 0.478 | 1.434 |
| Programme Availability | -0.254 | 0.241 | 0.723 | 0.783 | 0.478 | 1.434 |
| Recommendation | -0.267 | 0.241 | 0.723 | 0.541 | 0.478 | 1.434 |
| Admission Process | -0.572 | 0.241 | 0.723 | 0.763 | 0.478 | 1.434 |
| Quality Tuition | -0.564 | 0.241 | 0.763 | 0.489 | 0.478 | 1.434 |
| Marketing Communication | -0.415 | 0.241 | 0.763 | 0.574 | 0.478 | 1.434 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

Linearity refers to the steady rate of change that illustrates the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable. This concept is crucial in understanding how the variables are interconnected, and there are many methods to test for linearity. In this particular study, the deviation from linearity test was employed, available within the ANOVA test in SPSS.

The general guideline for assessing linearity stipulates that if the significant value for deviation from linearity falls below 0.05, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is considered non-linear, which may present complications. However, as indicated in Table 8.1 of this study, all the significant values for deviation from linearity were found to be greater than 0.05. This finding effectively dispels any concerns regarding linearity issues, confirming that the relationship between the variables examined is indeed linear.

**Table 8. 2*: Linearity results – ANOVA Table***

| Constructs | | | Significant Value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prospective Student Choice * Cost | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.042 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | 0.129 |
| Prospective Student Choice * Institution Reputation | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.004 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | 0.132 |
| Prospective Student Choice * Location | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.236 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | 0.880 |
| Prospective Student Choice * Personal Aspiration | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.005 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | 0.120 |
| Prospective Student Choice * Physical Facilities | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.001 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | 0.126 |
| Prospective Student Choice * Recommendation | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.065 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | 0.259 |
| Prospective Student Choice * Programme Availability | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.045 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | 0.125 |
| Prospective Student Choice * Admission Process | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.049 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | 0.242 |
| Prospective Student Choice * Quality Tuition | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.062 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | 0.192 |
| Prospective Student Choice * Marketing Communication | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.055 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | 0.395 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

Multicollinearity refers to a situation where the independent variables in a regression model are highly correlated, meaning that they have strong linear relationships with each other. This leads to the variance that the independent variables explain in the dependent variable overlapping, resulting in them not explaining unique variance in the dependent variable. It can create difficulties in distinguishing the individual effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. To test for multicollinearity, a variable inflation factor (VIF) is often calculated for each independent variable after conducting a multivariate regression. The general guidelines for assessing VIF are as follows: a VIF value of less than 3 is typically considered to indicate that multicollinearity is not a problem (Hair et al., 2014; O'Brien, 2007). In this specific study, the VIF values were detailed in Table 8.3, and it was observed from this table that all the VIF values fell below the established thresholds. Consequently, this alleviated any concerns regarding multicollinearity issues, confirming that the independent variables were indeed explaining unique variances in the dependent variable.

**Table 8. 3*: Multicollinearity Test (VIF Value)***

| **Constructs** | **VIF** |
|---|---|
| Cost | 2.257 |
| Institution Reputation | 1.878 |
| Location | 2.318 |
| Personal Aspiration | 2.029 |
| Physical Facilities | 1.950 |
| Recommendation | 2.678 |
| Programme Availability | 1.672 |
| Admission Process | 1.281 |
| Quality Tuition | 1.254 |
| Marketing Communication | 1.930 |

Source, Author's Compilation, 2023

### *8.1.1.2 Response rate analysis*

Of the 5,400 questionnaires given, only 3,000 were deemed usable for data analysis from prospective students. Following the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014), a preliminary check was done to flag incompleteness, inappropriateness, missing values. 1,400 of the questionnaires received was rejected for incomplete, missing information and unengaged responses. Therefore,

the remaining 3000 questionnaires were deemed usable for further analyses in respective of the prospective students. This constitutes a response rate of 56%. of the sample size, presenting good data for analysis (Malhotra et al., 2017).

### 8.1.2 Demographic Profile of the Respondents – Prospective Students

Twelve senior high schools (SHS) were selected to participate in this study. But due to confidentiality and anonymity considerations, these twelve schools have been represented with numbers as per the Table 8.4 below:

**Table 8. 4*: Participating Senior High Schools***

| Schools | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 257 | 9% |
| 2 | 245 | 8% |
| 3 | 231 | 8% |
| 4 | 244 | 8% |
| 5 | 239 | 8% |
| 6 | 253 | 8% |
| 7 | 265 | 9% |
| 8 | 250 | 8% |
| 9 | 263 | 9% |
| 10 | 251 | 8% |
| 11 | 243 | 8% |
| 12 | 259 | 9% |
| **Total** | **3000** | **100%** |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

An average of 250 students representing 8% were selected from each SHS to participate in this study.

The respondents' demographic profiles such as gender, programme of study, parent/guardian level of education and the profession of parent/guardian were assessed.

#### *8.1.2.1 Gender*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of gender in the sample. As shown in Table 8.5, majority participants were male (n = 1590, 53%), while 1410 participants (47%)

were female. The results for the gender distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.6.

**Table 8. 5*: Frequency table of gender distribution in the sample***

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 1590 | 53% |
| Female | 1410 | 47% |
| Total Sample | 3000 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

### *8.1.2.2 Programme of Study*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of programme of study in the sample. As shown in Table 8.6, the majority of participants were general arts students (n = 780, 26%), while 750 participants (25%) were business students. The results for programme of study distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.6.

**Table 8. 6*: Frequency table of Programme of Study distribution in the sample***

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| General Science | 690 | 23% |
| Business | 750 | 25% |
| General Arts | 780 | 26% |
| Visual Arts | 630 | 21% |
| Technical/Vocational Studies | 150 | 5% |
| Total Sample | 3000 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

### *8.1.2.3 Parent/guardian level of education*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of parent/guardian level of education in the sample. As shown in Table 8.7, the majority of participants had parents/guardians with university/tertiary level education (n = 960, 32%), while 750 participants (25%) had their parents/guardians with senior high school level of education. The results for the parents/guardians distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.7.

**Table 8. 7*: Frequency table of parent/guardian level of education distribution in the sample***

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| University/Tertiary | 960 | 32% |
| Senior High School | 750 | 25% |
| Junior High School | 570 | 19% |
| Others | 720 | 24% |
| Total Sample | 3000 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

### 8.1.3 Descriptive Statistics – Prospective Students

Descriptive statistics refers to the method of summarising and illustrating the main features of a dataset. It involves using simple techniques to condense large quantities of data points from a sample into a collection of summary values and graphical representations. This process helps the researcher to gain insights and visualise the data, rather than merely sifting through sets of raw numbers. The goal of descriptive statistics is to provide a clear understanding of the data's essential characteristics, whether related to an entire population or a specific sample. By employing measures such as mean, median, and standard deviation, descriptive statistics enable researchers to present data in a meaningful and accessible way, facilitating the interpretation of trends and patterns within the data (Hair et al., 2010).

**Table 8. 8*: Descriptive Statistics***

| Constructs | Mean | Min | Max | Standard deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cost | 3.557 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 1.090 | 3000 |
| Institution Reputation | 3.659 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 1.079 | 3000 |
| Location | 3.686 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 1.053 | 3000 |
| Personal Aspiration | 3.285 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 1.109 | 3000 |
| Physical Facilities | 3.748 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.879 | 3000 |
| Prospective Student Choice | 3.443 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 1.107 | 3000 |
| Recommendation | 3.634 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 1.066 | 3000 |
| Programme Availability | 3.613 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 1.045 | 3000 |
| Admission Process | 3.152 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.978 | 3000 |
| Quality Tuition | 3.565 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 1.104 | 3000 |
| Marketing Communication | 3.736 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 1.002 | 3000 |

Source: Author’s Compilation, 2023

Descriptive statistics for cost reveal an overall mean score of 3.557 (SD = 1.090). additionally, the mean value for institution reputation was 3.659 with standard deviation (SD) of 1.079. The details of the descriptive statistics are captured in the Table 8.9.

### 8.1.4 Reliability Measures – Prospective Students

Reliability, also known as precision, reproducibility, consistency, or repeatability (Hair et al., 2022), refers to the degree of consistency with which a variable can be measured. Specifically, it addresses the extent to which a variable is reproducible, yielding nearly identical values each time it is measured (Hair et al., 2022). This attribute plays a crucial role in strengthening the power of a study.

In a broader context, reliability is concerned with the dependability or stability of scores derived from a measurement or assessment technique over different instances in time and across various settings or conditions (Hair et al., 2022). If a measurement technique demonstrates high reliability, it signifies a reduced likelihood that the resultant scores are influenced by random factors or measurement errors, thereby ensuring a more accurate and trustworthy evaluation.

To check for reliability, several methods have been recommended in the literature such as: the traditional measure – Cronbach's alpha (a more conservative approach), the modern measure – composite reliability (a more liberal approach) and between these two is Rho_a (something in the middle / between the two). The recommended threshold value is >= .70 (Hair et al., 2022).

**Table 8. 9*: Reliability Measures***

| Constructs | Cronbach's alpha (CA) | Composite reliability (rho_a) | Composite reliability (rho_c) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cost | 0.862 | 0.868 | 0.901 |
| Institution Reputation | 0.902 | 0.909 | 0.922 |
| Location | 0.903 | 0.908 | 0.932 |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.868 | 0.889 | 0.899 |
| Physical Facilities | 0.927 | 0.930 | 0.945 |
| Prospective Student Choice | 0.907 | 0.910 | 0.931 |
| Recommendation | 0.924 | 0.930 | 0.938 |
| Programme Availability | 0.756 | 0.799 | 0.847 |
| Admission Process | 0.826 | 0.891 | 0.910 |
| Quality Tuition | 0.785 | 0.842 | 0.897 |
| Marketing Communication | 0.823 | 0.885 | 0.912 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.9 that reliability was achieved using all the three recommended approaches for testing reliability. The reliability scores for all the constructs were above the recommended value of 0.7.

### 8.1.5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) – Prospective Students

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is a statistical method employed to validate the factor structure of a group of observed variables (Hair et al., 2022). This approach enables the researcher to statistically test a hypothesis regarding the existence of a relationship between the observed variables and their corresponding underlying latent constructs. Guided by theoretical understanding, empirical research, or a combination of both, the researcher proactively posits the expected pattern of relationships and subsequently assesses the hypothesis through statistical testing (Hair et al., 2022). The purpose of CFA is to confirm whether the theoretically established

model aligns with the empirical data, providing a robust validation of the constructs involved. Several statistical tests such as convergent validity, discriminant validity, and common method bias, among others, are performed within the context of CFA. These tests are discussed in the next subsections.

#### *8.1.5.1 Convergent Validity*

Convergent validity is a specific form of construct validity. Construct validity pertains to the degree to which a test accurately measures the concept it is intended to measure (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity, as a more detailed aspect, assesses whether constructs that should theoretically correlate with each other do indeed exhibit this correlation. In other words, it examines whether two tests that are anticipated to be closely related are actually related (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010).

A primary metric for evaluating convergent validity is the average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE gauges the proportion of variance captured by a construct in comparison to the variance attributable to measurement error. As a general guideline, an AVE of at least 0.50 is strongly recommended to ensure adequate convergent validity. An AVE lower than 0.50 indicates that the items in the construct explain more of the error variance than the actual variance in the construct. Therefore, in any measurement model, the AVE must be computed for each construct and should be no less than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2012).

**Table 8. 10*: Convergent Validity***

| Constructs | Average variance extracted (AVE) |
|---|---|
| Cost | 0.646 |
| Institution Reputation | 0.597 |
| Location | 0.775 |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.597 |
| Physical Facilities | 0.775 |
| Prospective Student Choice | 0.729 |
| Recommendation | 0.655 |
| Programme Availability | 0.715 |
| Admission Process | 0.673 |
| Quality Tuition | 0.589 |
| Marketing Communication | 0.653 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.10 that all the constructs had AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.5, thus satisfying the convergent validity criteria.

#### *8.1.5.2 Discriminant Validity*

Discriminant validity is a specific form of construct validity, focused on determining the degree to which a test accurately measures the intended concept. Unlike convergent validity, which examines the correlations between related constructs, discriminant validity specifically assesses whether constructs that should not theoretically be connected are indeed unrelated (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010).

The importance of discriminant validity lies in its ability to demonstrate whether the test precisely measures the construct of interest, without inadvertently reflecting other unrelated constructs. This precision hinges on the accuracy of the operationalisation process, where abstract theoretical concepts are transformed into observable and measurable variables (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010).

In the literature, several methods have been proposed to evaluate discriminant validity, including the Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross-loading criterion, and the heterotrait-monotrait

ratio (HTMT). These tests ensure that the measurement tool is accurately targeting the specific construct without confusion or overlap with other unrelated constructs (Hair et al., 2022).

#### *8.1.5.3 Fornell-Larcker criterion*

The Fornell-Larcker criterion is one of the most widely adopted techniques for assessing the discriminant validity within measurement models. Under the purview of this criterion, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) by a given construct must surpass the correlations between that construct and any other constructs in the model. When this particular condition is met, it serves to establish discriminant validity, affirming that the constructs are distinct from one another and that the measurements are appropriate for the intended concept (Hair et al., 2022).

**Table 8. 11*: Fornell-Larcker Criterion***

| Constructs | CS | IR | LC | PA | PF | PSC | RC | PRA | ADP | QUT | MKC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cost | **0.804** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Institution Reputation | 0.270 | **0.773** | | | | | | | | | |
| Location | 0.282 | 0.452 | **0.880** | | | | | | | | |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.290 | 0.216 | 0.169 | **0.773** | | | | | | | |
| Physical Facilities | 0.373 | 0.343 | 0.280 | 0.810 | **0.880** | | | | | | |
| Prospective Student Choice | 0.412 | 0.295 | 0.361 | 0.192 | 0.271 | **0.854** | | | | | |
| Recommendation | 0.337 | 0.359 | 0.430 | 0.170 | 0.260 | 0.568 | **0.809** | | | | |
| Programme Availability | -0.147 | -0.211 | -0.145 | -0.354 | -0.382 | -0.088 | -0.084 | **0.846** | | | |
| Admission Process | 0.201 | 0.117 | 0.075 | 0.323 | 0.341 | 0.209 | 0.171 | -0.550 | **0.820** | | |
| Quality Tuition | 0.429 | 0.432 | 0.366 | 0.396 | 0.530 | 0.334 | 0.273 | -0.304 | 0.210 | **0.767** | |
| Marketing Communication | 0.401 | 0.403 | 0.311 | 0.442 | 0.557 | 0.278 | 0.223 | -0.332 | 0.227 | 0.812 | **0.808** |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.12 that the square root of the AVEs shown in the diagonal in bold are always greater than the correlation of the constructs.

#### *8.1.5.4 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio*

The heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio, was introduced by Henseler et al. (2015) as a means of estimating the correlation between two underlying latent variables. This approach draws upon the multitrait-multimethod (MTMM) matrix, where correlations are contrasted to evaluate discriminant validity (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). In their research and simulation study findings, Henseler et al. (2015) recommend a threshold value of 0.90 for models incorporating constructs that are conceptually akin. In other words, an HTMT value exceeding 0.90 indicates a lack of discriminant validity. Conversely, when the constructs within the path model are more distinct in concept, a threshold of 0.85 for HTMT may be deemed appropriate (Henseler et al., 2015).

**Table 8. 12*: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio***

| Constructs | AP | CS | IR | LC | MC | PA | PF | PRA | PSC | QT | RC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Admission Process | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cost | 0.138 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Institution Reputation | 0.205 | 0.496 | | | | | | | | | |
| Location | 0.136 | 0.511 | 0.593 | | | | | | | | |
| Marketing | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 0.349 | 0.181 | 0.242 | 0.157 | | | | | | | |
| Communication | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.249 | 0.684 | 0.415 | 0.615 | 0.204 | | | | | | |
| Physical Facilities | 0.097 | 0.837 | 0.463 | 0.809 | 0.169 | 0.706 | | | | | |
| Programme Availability | 0.476 | 0.164 | 0.308 | 0.223 | 0.600 | 0.192 | 0.198 | | | | |
| Prospective Student | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Choice | 0.096 | 0.391 | 0.739 | 0.435 | 0.146 | 0.279 | 0.354 | 0.208 | | | |
| Quality Tuition | 0.496 | 0.136 | 0.225 | 0.100 | 0.665 | 0.117 | 0.102 | 0.697 | 0.158 | | |
| Recommendation | 0.223 | 0.638 | 0.395 | 0.518 | 0.278 | 0.734 | 0.771 | 0.241 | 0.311 | 0.150 | |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.12 that all the HTMT ratios were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, thus satisfying discriminant validity under the HTMT criterion.

#### *8.1.5.5 Common method bias assessment*

Common method bias (CMB) refers to a phenomenon rooted in the measurement methodology often employed in social science studies, rather than arising from the relationships between latent variables within the investigated model (Kock, 2015). For instance, instructions placed at the beginning of a questionnaire might guide the responses of various participants in a consistent direction, leading the indicators to reflect some degree of shared variation. Another potential source of CMB could be the unspoken social preference to respond to questions in a certain manner, thereby resulting in a similar shared variation among indicators (Kock, 2015).

In the context of collinearity assessment, Kock and Lynn (2012) introduced the full collinearity test as an exhaustive method for the simultaneous evaluation of both vertical and lateral collinearity (see also Kock & Gaskins, 2014). This approach, fully implemented within the SmartPLS 4 software, generates variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all latent variables in a given model. A VIF exceeding the value of 3.3 is considered a sign of pathological collinearity and may indicate contamination by common method bias within the model. Thus, if all VIFs derived from a full collinearity test are equal to or less than 3.3, the model may be deemed free from common method bias. Table 8.13 illustrates the VIFs determined for all latent variables in the studied models through a full collinearity test. As is evident, the model is uncontaminated by common method bias, with all VIF values falling below the prescribed threshold of 3.3 (Kock & Lynn, 2012).

**Table 8. 13*: CMB Test with VIF***

| Constructs | **VIF** |
|---|---|
| Cost | 2.257 |
| Institution Reputation | 1.878 |
| Location | 2.318 |
| Personal Aspiration | 2.029 |
| Physical Facilities | 1.950 |
| Recommendation | 2.678 |
| Programme Availability | 1.672 |
| Admission Process | 1.281 |
| Quality Tuition | 1.254 |
| Marketing Communication | 1.930 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

### 8.1.6 Hypothesis – Prospective Student

A research hypothesis represents a statement outlining an expectation or prediction that will undergo verification through scholarly investigation. It acts as the foundational premise for any exploration, converting research inquiries into specific prognostications. Components of a research hypothesis encompass aspects such as the variables involved, the targeted population, and the relationship between these variables. Essentially, a research hypothesis is employed to examine the connections between two or more variables (Hair et al., 2010). In the context of this study, a total of ten (10) hypotheses were formulated and subsequently examined within the segments dedicated to regression results and hypotheses evaluation.

#### *8.1.6.1 Regression Estimation*

Regression analysis was used in this investigation to shed light on the connection between the variables examined and the prospective students' selection criteria. A dependent variable, hypothesised to be affected by one or more independent variables, must be specified for the analysis of regression (Hair et al., 2010). The model for estimation is stated as follows:

$PSC = \partial 0 + \beta 1CS + \beta 2PF + \beta 3LC + \beta 4IR + \beta 5RC + \beta 6PA + \beta 7PRA + \beta 8AP + \beta 9QT + \beta 10MC + \varepsilon$ …… (1) Where:

PSC = Prospective Student Choice;

$\partial 0$ = Constant;

$\beta 1$, $\beta 2$, $\beta 3$, $\beta 4$, $\beta 5$, $\beta 6$, $\beta 7$, $\beta 8$, $\beta 9$, $\beta 10$ = the Beta Coefficient. CS = Costs.

PF = Physical Facilities.

LC = Location.

IR = Institutional Reputation.

RC = Recommendation/Referrals. PA = Personal Aspiration.

PRA = Programme Availability. AP = Admission Process.

QT = Quality Tuition.

MC = Marketing Communication. $\varepsilon$ = error term.

#### *8.1.6.2 Hypotheses Evaluation and Results*

The study evaluated the significance and relevance of the relationships (i.e., the path coefficients). This was done in relation to the various hypotheses of the study.

##### *8.1.6.2.1 Cost factor and Prospective Student Choice*

**H1a: There is a positive relationship between cost and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether cost positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that cost has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution ($\beta$ = 0.183, SE = 0.090, T =2.033, P = 0.043), hence H1a is supported.

*8.1.6.2.2 Institutional Reputation and Prospective Student Choice*

**H1b: There is a positive relationship between institutional reputation and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether institutional reputation positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that institutional reputation has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.220, SE = 0.101, T =2.178, P = 0.031), hence H1b is supported.

*8.1.6.2.3 Physical Facilities and Prospective Student Choice*

**H1c: There is a positive relationship between physical facilities and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether physical facilities positively influence prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that physical facilities have a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.197, SE = 0.091, T =2.165, P = 0.032), hence H1c is supported.8.2.7.2.3 Location and Prospective Student Choice

**H1d: There is a positive relationship between location and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether location positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that location has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.197, SE = 0.091, T =2.165, P = 0.032), hence H1d is supported.

*8.1.6.2.4 Recommendation and Prospective Student Choice*

**H1e: There is a positive relationship between recommendation and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether recommendation positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that recommendation has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.341, SE = 0.105, T =3.257, P = 0.001), hence H1e is supported.

*8.1.6.2.5 Personal Aspiration and Prospective Student Choice*

**H1f: There is a positive relationship between personal aspiration and the choice of private higher education institution**.

This hypothesis evaluates whether personal aspiration positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that personal aspiration has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.252, SE = 0.117, T =2.150, P = 0.033), hence H1f is supported.

*8.1.6.2.6 Programme Availability and Prospective Student Choice*

**H1g: There is a positive relationship between programme availability and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether programme availability positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that programme availability has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.258, SE = 0.110, T =2.345, P = 0.020), hence H1g is supported.

*8.1.6..2.7 Admission Process and Prospective Student Choice*

**H1h: There is a positive relationship between admission process and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether admission process positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that admission process has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.194, SE = 0.092, T =2.109, P = 0.036), hence H1h is supported.

*8.1.6.2.8 Quality Tuition and Prospective Student Choice*

**H1i: There is a positive relationship between quality tuition and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether quality tuition positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that quality tuition has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.227, SE = 0.101, T =2.248, P = 0.026), hence H1i is supported.

*8.1.6.2.9 Marketing Communication and Prospective Student Choice*

**H1j: There is a positive relationship between marketing communication and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether marketing communication positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that marketing communication has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.264, SE = 0.098, T =2.694, P = 0.008), hence H1f is supported.

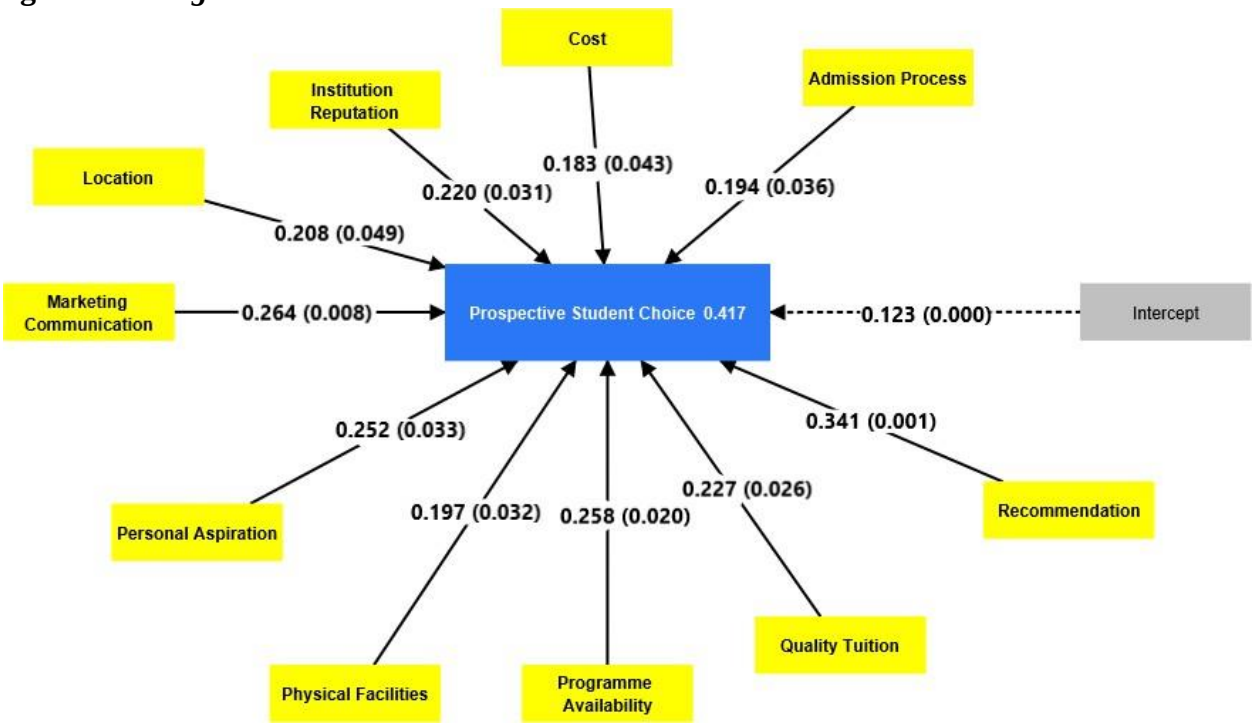
**Table 8. 14*: Regression Results Summary***

| Constructs | Unstandardised coefficients | SE | T value | P value | 2.50% | 97.50% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cost | 0.183 | 0.090 | 2.033 | 0.043 | 0.179 | 0.324 |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.220 | 0.101 | 2.178 | 0.031 | 0.045 | 0.485 |
| Physical Facilities | 0.197 | 0.091 | 2.165 | 0.032 | 0.196 | 0.470 |
| Location | 0.208 | 0.105 | 1.981 | 0.049 | 0.108 | 0.524 |
| Recommendation | 0.252 | 0.117 | 2.150 | 0.033 | 0.019 | 0.486 |
| Programme Availability | 0.258 | 0.110 | 2.345 | 0.020 | 0.206 | 0.480 |
| Admission Process | 0.194 | 0.092 | 2.109 | 0.036 | 0.118 | 0.324 |
| Quality Tuition | 0.227 | 0.101 | 2.248 | 0.026 | 0.174 | 0.341 |
| Marketing Communication | 0.264 | 0.098 | 2.694 | 0.008 | 0.112 | 0.254 |
| Intercept | 0.123 | 0.031 | 3.968 | 0.000 | 0.142 | 0.314 |
| R Square | 0.417 | | | | | |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.351 | | | | | |
| F | 11.775 | | | | | |
| Prob. F | 0.000 | | | | | |
| OBS | 3000 | | | | | |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

The summary of the results from the hypotheses are presented in the Table 8.14. All the hypotheses were supported as evidenced by the results in Table 8.14 and Figure 8.1.

**Figure 8. 1*: Regression Results***



### 8.2 Current Students Analysis and Presentation

This subsection provides an analysis and presentation of the results from the current students.

#### 8.2.1 Data Preparation

Data screening or preparation entails the process of ensuring that the data is meticulously cleaned and primed for subsequent statistical analyses. The integrity, reliability, and validity of data must be verified to make it suitable for causal theory testing. In this investigation, data preparation was concentrated on several key areas, namely: missing data, outliers, normality, linearity, and multicollinearity.

Missing data: The absence of data can result in various complications, primarily due to an inadequate number of data points required for analyses such as CFA, and path models. The number of required data points escalates with the model's complexity (Hair et al., 2014). While the threshold for missing data is somewhat flexible, missing more than 10% of responses on a specific variable or from a particular respondent can pose issues (Hair et al., 2014). In this study, the problem of missing data was mitigated, as all respondents supplied the requisite information.

Outliers: Outliers can significantly sway the results by displacing the mean from the median. Outliers can be classified into two categories: those related to individual variables and those related to the model. In this study, which employed a Likert scale, outliers were not a concern.

Normality: This refers to the data distribution for a given variable, where an assumption of normal distribution is commonly made, even if not always realised. Normality is evaluated through several indicators such as shape, skewness, and kurtosis. This study employed skewness and kurtosis for normality assessment.

Skewness: Skewness indicates an imbalance in the response distribution, with a heavy weighting towards one end of the scale. Two rules apply to skewness: (1) Positive skewness (greater than 1) indicates right skewing, negative skewness (less than -1) indicates left skewing, and values in between signify no skewness. (2) If the absolute skewness value is less than thrice the standard error, the data is considered not skewed.

Kurtosis: Kurtosis pertains to the distribution's outliers. High kurtosis suggests the presence of outliers, while low kurtosis indicates their absence. The normal distribution's excess kurtosis is 0. The guideline for evaluating problematic kurtosis mirrors the second rule above for skewness. If the absolute kurtosis value is less than thrice the standard error, then the kurtosis is not significantly divergent from that of the normal distribution, resolving any issues related to kurtosis.

The focus on these aspects in data preparation ensures that the dataset is conditioned and optimised for reliable analysis, aligning with the requirements and complexities of the research model.

**Table 8. 15*: Normality test using Skewness and Kurtosis***

| | Skewness | | | Kurtosis | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constructs | Statistic | Std. Error | 3x Std. Error | Statistic | Std. Error | 3x Std. Error |
| Cost | 0.253 | 0.125 | 0.375 | -0.72 | 0.249 | 0.747 |
| Current Student | | | | | | |
| Choice | -0.215 | 0.125 | 0.375 | 0.311 | 0.249 | 0.747 |
| Institutional Reputation | | | | | | |
| | 0.323 | 0.125 | 0.375 | -0.247 | 0.249 | 0.747 |
| Location | -0.355 | 0.125 | 0.375 | -0.252 | 0.249 | 0.747 |
| Personal | | | | | | |
| Aspiration | -0.234 | 0.125 | 0.375 | 0.686 | 0.249 | 0.747 |
| Physical Facilities | 0.692 | 0.125 | 0.375 | 0.448 | 0.249 | 0.747 |
| Recommendation | -0.321 | 0.125 | 0.375 | -0.291 | 0.249 | 0.747 |
| Programme Availability | | | | | | |
| | -0.221 | 0.125 | 0.375 | 0.261 | 0.249 | 0.747 |
| Admission Process | -0.313 | 0.125 | 0.375 | 0.342 | 0.249 | 0.747 |
| Quality Tuition | -0.322 | 0.125 | 0.375 | 0.351 | 0.249 | 0.747 |
| Marketing Communication | -0.214 | 0.125 | 0.375 | 0.446 | 0.249 | 0.747 |

Source: Author’s Compilation, 2023

Using the normality criteria for both skewness and kurtosis, it is obvious from Table 8.15 that normality is not an issue in this case as the data exhibit normality.

Linearity – The term linearity in statistical analysis pertains to the steady gradient of transformation, revealing the connection between an independent variable and a dependent variable. There are numerous methods for ascertaining linearity, yet in this investigation, the deviation from linearity test, obtainable through the ANOVA test in SPSS, was employed. A general guideline asserts that if the p-value for deviation from linearity is beneath 0.05, the association between the independent variable and dependent variable is nonlinear, thereby creating potential problems. Referring to Table 8.14, it can be observed that all the p-values for the deviation from linearity surpass 0.05, hence dispelling any concerns related to linearity.

**Table 8. 16*: Linearity results – ANOVA Table***

| Constructs | | | Significant Value |
|---|---|---|---|
| CSC * Cost | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.000 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.121** |
| CSC * Institutional Reputation | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.245 |
| | | Linearity | 0.013 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.308** |
| CSC * Location | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.030 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.416** |
| CSC * Personal Aspiration | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.000 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.129** |
| CSC * Physical Facilities | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.015 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.694** |
| CSC * Recommendation | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.000 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.219** |
| CSC * Programme Availability | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.010 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.115** |
| CSC * Admission Process | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.000 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.154** |
| CSC * Quality Tuition | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.001 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.121** |
| CSC * Marketing Communication | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.011 |
| | | Linearity | 0.000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.135** |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

As can be seen from Table 8.16, all the significant value for the deviation from linearity are greater than 0.05, thus alleviating any linearity issues.

Multicollinearity – The term multicollinearity refers to a situation where the variance that independent variables explain in the dependent variable overlaps, meaning that they do not each explain unique variance in the dependent variable. This condition can complicate the interpretation of the model and affect the statistical inferences that can be drawn from the data. To diagnose multicollinearity, one common method is to calculate the variance inflation

factor (VIF) for each independent variable after conducting a multivariate regression.

If the VIF for an independent variable is significantly high, it may indicate the presence of multicollinearity, thereby suggesting that the variable may not be providing unique information in the prediction of the dependent variable. The rules of thumb for the VIF are as follows: VIF < 3: not a problem (Hair et al., 2014; O'Brien, 2007). In this study the VIF values are presented in Table 8.17. It can be seen from Table 8.18 that all the VIF values were less than the thresholds, thus alleviating any multicollinearity issues.

**Table 8. 17*: Multicollinearity Test (VIF Value)***

| Constructs | VIF Values |
|---|---|
| Cost | 1.527 |
| Institutional Reputation | 1.588 |
| Location | 1.376 |
| Personal Aspiration | 1.372 |
| Physical Aspiration | 1.284 |
| Recommendation | 1.437 |
| Programme Availability | 1.287 |
| Admission Process | 1.443 |
| Quality Tuition | 1.676 |
| Marketing Communication | 1.211 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

#### *8.2.1.1 Response rate analysis*

A total of 985 questionnaires were administered to the current students of which all were received. Following the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014), a preliminary check was done to flag incompleteness, inappropriateness, and missing values. None of the questionnaires received was rejected for incomplete, missing information and unengaged responses. Therefore, all 985 questionnaires were deemed usable for further analyses in respective of the current students. This constitutes a response rate of 100%.

### 8.2.2 Demographic Profile of the Respondents – Current Students

The respondents' demographic profiles such as age, gender, level of study, programme of study, parent/guardian level of education and the profession of parent/guardian were assessed.

#### *8.2.2.1 Age*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of age in the sample. As shown in Table 8.18, the majority of participants were within the age bracket of 18-23 (n = 463, 47%), while 295 participants (30%) were within the age bracket of 24-29. The results for age distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.19.

**Table 8. 18*: Frequency table of age distribution in the sample***

| Age | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 18-23 | 463 | 47% |
| 24-29 | 295 | 30% |
| 30 and above | 227 | 23% |
| Total Sample | 985 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

#### *8.2.2.2 Gender*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of gender in the sample. As shown in Table 8.19, the majority participants were female (n = 510, 52%), while 475 participants (48%) were male. The results for the gender distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.19.

**Table 8. 19*: Frequency table of gender distribution in the sample***

| Gender | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 475 | 48% |
| Female | 510 | 52% |
| Total Sample | 985 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

### *8.2.2.3 Level of Study*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of level of study in the sample. As shown in Table 8.21, the majority of participants were within level 200 (n = 345, 35%), while 234 participants (24%) were within level 300. The results for the level of study distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.20.

**Table 8. 20*: Frequency table of level of study distribution in the sample***

| Level of Study | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Level 100 | 212 | 22% |
| Level 200 | 345 | 35% |
| Level 300 | 234 | 24% |
| Level 400 | 194 | 20% |
| Total Sample | 985 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

### *8.2.2.4 Programme of Study*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of programme of study in the sample. As shown in Table 8.21, the majority of participants were in business studies (n = 556, 56%), while 304 participants (31%) were in arts and humanities. The results for the programme of study distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.21.

**Table 8. 21*: Frequency table of programme of study distribution in the sample***

| Program of Study | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Science & Engineering | 125 | 13% |
| Business Studies | 556 | 56% |
| Arts & Humanities | 304 | 31% |
| Total Sample | 985 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

### *8.2.2.5 Parent/guardian level of education*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of parent/guardian level of education in the sample. As shown in Table 8.22, the majority of participants were within the university/tertiary education level (n = 674, 68%), while 173 participants (18%) were within the senior high school education level. The results for the parent/guardian level of education distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.22.

**Table 8. 22*: Frequency table of parent/guardian level of education distribution in the sample***

| Parent/Guardian Education Level | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| University/Tertiary | 674 | 68% |
| Senior High School | 173 | 18% |
| Junior High School | 55 | 6% |
| Others | 83 | 8% |
| Total Sample | 985 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

#### *8.2.2.6 Profession of parent/guardian*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of parent/guardian profession in the sample. As shown in Table 8.24, the majority of participants had a white collar job (n = 295, 30%), while 267 participants (27%) were business owners. The results for the parent/guardian profession distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.23.

**Table 8. 23*: Frequency table of profession of parent/guardian distribution in the sample***

| Parent/Guardian Profession | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| White collar employee | 295 | 30% |
| Business Owner | 267 | 27% |
| Petty Trading | 251 | 25% |
| Artisans/Craftsperson | 172 | 17% |
| Total Sample | 985 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

### 8.2.3 Descriptive Statistics – Current Students

Descriptive statistics is a method used to articulate the features of a dataset. It constitutes a straightforward approach that encapsulates, presents, and synthesises data in a significant manner. Rather than engaging with potentially extensive numbers of data points in the raw data, descriptive statistics boils them down to particular summary values and visual representations, such as graphs. This process facilitates the researcher in understanding and visualising the data, instead of merely navigating through voluminous sets of numerical data. Descriptive statistics enable a researcher to characterise not only a specific sample but also an entire population, providing a vital tool in data analysis (Hair et al., 2010).

**Table 8. 24: Descriptive Statistics**

| Constructs | No. Observation | Mean | Min | Max | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cost | 985 | 2.776 | 1 | 5 | 1.184 |
| Institutional Reputation | 985 | 2.151 | 1 | 5 | 0.941 |
| Physical Facilities | 985 | 2.293 | 1 | 5 | 0.904 |
| Location | 985 | 3.245 | 1 | 5 | 0.892 |
| Personal Aspiration | 985 | 3.565 | 1 | 5 | 0.893 |
| Recommendation | 985 | 3.026 | 1 | 5 | 0.973 |
| Current Student Choice | 985 | 3.764 | 1 | 5 | 0.818 |
| Programme Availability | 985 | 3.317 | 1 | 5 | 0.542 |
| Admission Process | 985 | 3.286 | 1 | 5 | 0.637 |
| Quality Tuition | 985 | 3.436 | 1 | 5 | 0.745 |
| Marketing Communication | 985 | 3.171 | 1 | 5 | 0.817 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

Table 8.24 shows that the number of observations is 985. Cost has a mean of 2.776, with a standard deviation of 1.184. The minimum and the maximum ranges between 1 and 5 respectively. Details of the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 8.24.

### 8.2.4 Reliability Measures – Current Student

Reliability, also known as precision, reproducibility, consistency, and repeatability, refers to the degree to which a variable can be reproduced with nearly identical value upon repeated measurements (Hair et al., 2022). This quality is of substantial importance, influencing the robustness and power of a study. Generally, reliability pertains to the consistency or dependability of a measurement technique, focused on the stability and uniformity of the score derived from a particular measure or assessment across various times, settings, or conditions (Hair et al., 2022). A reliable measurement diminishes the likelihood that the obtained score is influenced by random factors and measurement error, thereby ensuring a more accurate representation of the variable being assessed.

To check for reliability, several methods have been recommended in the literature such as: the traditional measure – Cronbach's alpha (a more conservative approach), the modern measure – composite reliability (a more liberal approach) and between these two is Rho_a (something in the middle / between the two). The recommended threshold value is >= .70 (Hair et al., 2022).

**Table 8. 25*: Reliability Measures***

| Construct | Cronbach's alpha (CA) | Composite reliability (rho_a) | Composite reliability (rho_c) |
|---|---|---|---|
| COST | 0.937 | 0.911 | 0.922 |
| Current Student Choice | 0.819 | 0.824 | 0.881 |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.933 | 0.913 | 0.944 |
| Location | 0.916 | 0.929 | 0.937 |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.939 | 0.921 | 0.941 |
| Physical Facilities | 0.933 | 0.934 | 0.949 |
| Recommendation | 0.783 | 0.773 | 0.848 |
| Programme Availability | 0.902 | 0.891 | 0.917 |
| Admission Process | 0.861 | 0.797 | 0.874 |
| Quality Tuition | 0.828 | 0.753 | 0.896 |
| Marketing Communication | 0.901 | 0.891 | 0.929 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.25 that reliability was achieved using all the three recommended approaches for testing reliability. The reliability scores for all the constructs were above the recommended value of 0.7.

### 8.2.5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) – Current Student

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is a specific statistical method employed to authenticate the factor structure within a collection of observed variables (Hair et al., 2022). It enables researchers to statistically examine a hypothesis concerning the relationships between the observed variables and their underlying latent constructs. To do this, the researcher draws upon theoretical understanding, empirical studies, or a combination of both, to formulate the expected relationship pattern in advance. The hypothesis is then statistically tested to ascertain whether the postulated relationships between the variables hold true, providing a rigorous method for validation (Hair et al., 2022).

Several statistical tests such as convergent validity, discriminant validity, and common method bias, among others, are performed within the context of CFA. These tests are discussed in the next subsections.

#### *8.2.5.1 Convergent Validity*

Convergent validity is a specific form of construct validity, which reflects how accurately a test gauges the concept it is intended to measure (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010). Unlike the broader construct validity, convergent validity focuses on the theoretical relationship between constructs that should be connected. It determines whether two tests, which should be significantly related, are indeed connected as theorised (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010).

A vital component in the assessment of convergent validity is the average variance extracted (AVE), which quantifies the proportion of variance captured by a construct compared to the variance attributed to measurement error. For satisfactory convergent validity, it is generally recommended that the AVE should be at least 0.50. If the AVE falls below this threshold, it indicates that the errors within the items are explaining more than the variance in the corresponding constructs. In any given measurement model, it is imperative that the AVE is computed for every construct and must meet or exceed the 0.50 benchmark (Hair et al., 20212).

**Table 8. 26*: Convergent Validity***

| Constructs | Average variance extracted (AVE) |
|---|---|
| Admission Process | 0.592 |
| Cost | 0.798 |
| Current Student Choice | 0.649 |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.712 |
| Location | 0.748 |
| Marketing Communication | 0.547 |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.733 |
| Physical Facilities | 0.791 |
| Programme Availability | 0.541 |
| Quality Tuition | 0.778 |
| Recommendation | 0.583 |

Source: Author’s compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.26 that all the constructs had AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.5, thus satisfying the convergent validity criteria.

#### *8.2.5.2 Discriminant Validity*

Discriminant validity, a particular facet of construct validity, evaluates the accuracy with which a test measures the intended concept. More specifically, it assesses whether constructs that, in theory, should not be correlated are indeed unrelated (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010).

The significance of discriminant validity lies in its capacity to determine whether a test precisely focuses on the intended construct or mistakenly measures unrelated, albeit interconnected, constructs. This precision relies heavily on the proper operationalisation of the test, meaning the capacity to translate abstract ideas into observable and measurable variables (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010).

Various methodologies have been presented in the academic literature to examine discriminant validity. These include the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the cross-loading criterion, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). Each of these tests offers a different approach to validating that the constructs being measured are distinctly separate from one another (Hair et al., 2022).

#### *8.2.5.3 Fornell-Larcker criterion*

The Fornell-Larcker criterion is as one of the most widely adopted techniques for assessing discriminant validity within measurement models. Under the purview of this criterion, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) by a given construct must surpass the correlations between that construct and any other constructs in the model. When this particular condition is met, it serves to establish discriminant validity, affirming that the constructs are distinct from one another and that the measurements are appropriate for the intended concept (Hair et al., 2022).

**Table 8. 27*: Fornell-Larcker Criterion***

| Constructs | AP | CS | CSC | IR | LC | MKC | PA | PF | PRA | QT | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Admission Process | | **0.769** | | | | | | | | | |
| COST | | 0.052 | **0.893** | | | | | | | | |
| Current Student Choice | | 0.106 | 0.163 | **0.806** | | | | | | | |
| Institutional Reputation | | -0.003 | -0.562 | -0.124 | **0.844** | | | | | | |
| Location | | 0.096 | 0.233 | 0.305 | -0.341 | **0.865** | | | | | |
| Marketing Communication | | 0.024 | 0.128 | 0.1 | -0.051 | 0.066 | **0.589** | | | | |
| Personal Aspiration | | 0.047 | 0.125 | 0.476 | -0.212 | 0.425 | 0.064 | **0.856** | | | |
| Physical Facilities | | 0.046 | 0.205 | 0.347 | -0.09 | 0.251 | 0.028 | 0.216 | **0.889** | | |
| Programme Availability | | 0.021 | -0.033 | 0.044 | 0.046 | 0.017 | 0.052 | 0.078 | 0.041 | **0.736** | |
| Quality Tuition | | 0.777 | 0.097 | 0.073 | -0.056 | 0.095 | 0.071 | 0.015 | 0.066 | 0.023 | **0.882** |
| Recommendation | 0.09 | | 0.215 | 0.639 | -0.116 | 0.286 | 0.096 | 0.397 | 0.439 | 0.044 | 0.097 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.27 that the square root of the AVEs shown in the diagonal in bold is always greater than the correlation of the constructs.

#### *8.2.5.4 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio*

The heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), a metric developed by Henseler et al. (2015), serves as a tool for assessing the correlation between two latent variables. The present methodology uses the multitrait-multimethod (MTMM) matrix, a framework that involves comparing correlations to assess discriminant validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). According to the research and simulation study conducted by Henseler et al. (2015), it is recommended that a threshold value of 0.90 is used for models that include constructs that are conceptually similar. To clarify, when the HTMT value surpasses 0.90, it signifies a deficiency in discriminant validity. On the other hand, if the constructs in the path model exhibit greater conceptual differentiation, a threshold value of 0.85 for the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) may be considered suitable, as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015).

**Table 8. 28*: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio***

| Constructs | AP | CS | CSC | IR | LC | MKC | PA | PF | PRA | QT | RC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Admission Process | | | | | | | | | | | |
| COST | 0.078 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Current Student Choice | 0.101 | 0.184 | | | | | | | | | |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.061 | 0.61 | 0.131 | | | | | | | | |
| Location | 0.104 | 0.252 | 0.345 | 0.374 | | | | | | | |
| Marketing Communication | 0.079 | 0.095 | 0.09 | 0.053 | 0.056 | | | | | | |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.067 | 0.131 | 0.542 | 0.21 | 0.453 | 0.05 | | | | | |
| Physical Facilities | 0.052 | 0.215 | 0.393 | 0.103 | 0.271 | 0.056 | 0.229 | | | | |
| Programme Availability | 0.067 | 0.035 | 0.052 | 0.07 | 0.057 | 0.087 | 0.07 | 0.034 | | | |
| Quality Tuition | 0.955 | 0.107 | 0.077 | 0.074 | 0.095 | 0.069 | 0.038 | 0.071 | 0.058 | | |
| Recommendation | 0.095 | 0.242 | 0.792 | 0.141 | 0.326 | 0.089 | 0.453 | 0.516 | 0.06 | 0.11 | |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.29 that all the HTMT ratios were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, thus satisfying discriminant validity under the HTMT criterion.

#### *8.2.5.5 Common method bias assessment*

Common method bias (CMB) is a prevalent issue in social science research, characterised by a measurement technique that influences the results rather than the actual causal relationships between latent variables (Kock, 2015). Indicators may display a certain level of shared variation when, for example, the instructions provided at the beginning of a questionnaire influence respondents to provide similar responses. One potential source of common method bias is the presence of implicit social desirability, which leads individuals to respond to questionnaire items in a manner that aligns with societal expectations. This tendency can result in shared variation among the indicators (Kock, 2015).

The comprehensive collinearity test was introduced by Kock and Lynn (2012) as an exhaustive method to simultaneously assess vertical and lateral collinearity (also referred to as Kock and Gaskins, 2014). The process of generating variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all latent variables in a model is fully automated using the SmartPLS 4 software programme. The presence of pathological collinearity is posited to occur when the variance inflation factor (VIF) exceeds a threshold of 3.3, indicating that the model is influenced by the confounding effect of common method bias. Hence, the model can be considered devoid of common method bias if all variance inflation factors (VIFs) obtained from a comprehensive collinearity test are found to be less than or equal to 3.3. The variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all latent variables in our models have been presented in Table 8.29 following the completion of a thorough collinearity assessment.

**Table 8. 29*: CMB Test with VIF***

| Constructs | VIF |
|---|---|
| COST | 1.527 |
| Institutional Reputation | 1.588 |
| Location | 1.376 |
| Personal Aspiration | 1.372 |
| Physical Facilities | 1.284 |
| Recommendation | 1.437 |
| Programme Availability | 1.287 |
| Admission Process | 1.443 |
| Quality Tuition | 1.676 |
| Marketing Communication | 1.211 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

The VIF values in this study are all below the 3.3 threshold recommended by Kock and Lynn (2012), suggesting that the model is not affected by common method bias.

### 8.2.6 Hypothesis – Current Student

The primary objective of engaging in research is to empirically validate or refute hypotheses. The initial stage of any investigation involves the development of testable hypotheses. Variables, the population, and the interplay between these variables collectively constitute an integral component of the phenomenon under investigation. Hair et al. (2010) assert that researchers employ hypotheses to investigate the relationship among three or more independent variables. The study has assessed the ten hypotheses through separate sections dedicated to statistical testing and hypothesis testing.

#### *8.2.6.1 Regression Estimation*

Regression analysis was used in this investigation to shed light on the connection between the variables examined and the prospective students' selection criteria. A dependent variable, hypothesised to be affected by one or more independent variables, must be specified for the analysis of regression (Hair et al., 2010). The model for estimation is stated as follows:

$$CSC = \partial 0 + \beta 1CS + \beta 2PF + \beta 3LC + \beta 4IR + \beta 5RC + \beta 6PA + \beta 7PRA + \beta 8ADP +$$

$\beta 9QUT + \beta 10MKC + \varepsilon$ …… (1) Where:

CSC = Current Student Choice

$\partial 0$ = Constant

β1, β2, β3, β4, β5, β6, β7, β8, β9, β10 = the Beta Coefficient CS = Costs

PF = Physical Facilities LC = Location

IR = Institutional Reputation RC = Recommendation

PA = Personal Aspiration

PRA = Programme Availability ADP = Admission Process QUT = Quality Tuition

MKC = Marketing Communication ε = error term

### *8.2.6.2 Hypotheses Evaluation and Results*

The study evaluated the significance and relevance of the relationships (i.e., the path coefficients). This was done in relation to the various hypotheses of the study.

#### *8.2.6.2.1 Cost factor and Current Student Choice*

**H2a: There is a positive relationship between cost and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether cost positively influences current student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that cost has a positive effect on current student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.127, SE = 0.046, T =2.761, P = 0.006), hence H2a is supported.

#### *8.2.6.2.2 Institutional Reputation and current Student Choice*

**H2b: There is a positive relationship between institutional reputation and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether institutional reputation positively influences current student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that institutional reputation

has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.105, SE = 0.040, T =2.625, P = 0.009), hence H2b is supported.

*8.2.6.2.3 Physical Facilities and Current Student Choice*

**H2c: There is a positive relationship between physical facilities and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether physical facilities positively influence current student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that physical facilities have a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.161, SE = 0.042, T =3.833, P = 0.000), hence H2c is supported.

*8.2.6.2.4 Location and Current Student Choice*

**H2d: There is a positive relationship between location and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether location positively influence current student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that location has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.243, SE = 0.044, T =5.523, P = 0.000), hence H2d is supported.

*8.2.6.2.5 Recommendation and Current Student Choice*

**H2e: There is a positive relationship between recommendation and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether recommendation positively influences prospective student choice for a private higher education institution. The results revealed that recommendation has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.501, SE = 0.045, T =11.133, P = 0.000), hence H2e is supported.

*8.2.6.2.6 Personal Aspiration and Current Student Choice*

**H2f: There is a positive relationship between personal aspiration and the choice of private higher education institution**

This hypothesis evaluates whether personal aspiration positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that personal aspiration has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.248, SE = 0.044, T =5.636, P = 0.000), hence H2f is supported.

*8.2.6.2.7 Programme Availability and Current Student Choice*

**H2g: There is a positive relationship between programme availability and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether programme availability positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that programme availability has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.245, SE = 0.070, T =3.500, P = 0.001), hence H2g is supported.

*8.2.6.2.8 Admission Process and Current Student Choice*

**H2h: There is a positive relationship between admission process and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether admission process positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that admission process has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.198, SE = 0.082, T =2.415, P = 0.016), hence H2h is supported.

*8.2.6.2.9 Quality Tuition and Current Student Choice*

**H2i: There is a positive relationship between quality tuition and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether quality tuition positively influences prospective student choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that quality tuition has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.184, SE = 0.071, T =2.592, P = 0.010), hence H2i is supported.

*8.2.6.2.10 Marketing Communication and Current Student Choice*

**H2j: There is a positive relationship between marketing communication and the choice of private higher education institution.**

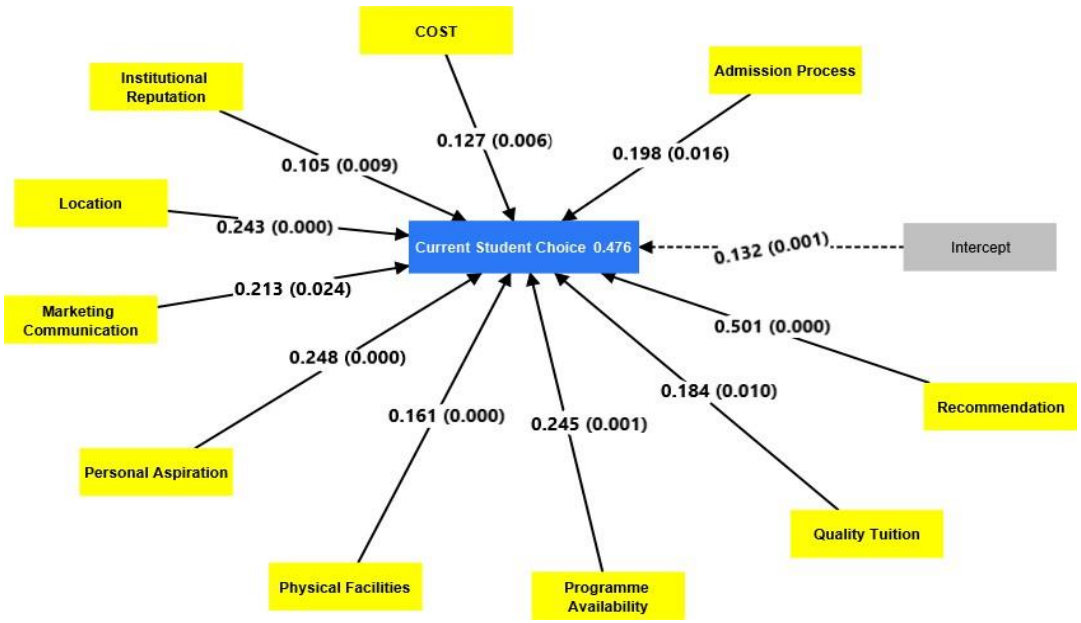
This hypothesis evaluates whether marketing communication positively influences prospective student choice for a private higher education institution. The results revealed that marketing communication has a positive effect on prospective student choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.213, SE = 0.094, T =2.266, P = 0.024), hence H2j is supported.

**Table 8. 30*: Regression Results Summary***

| Construct | Unstandardised Beta coefficients | SE | T value | P value | 2.50% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cost | 0.127 | 0.046 | 2.761 | 0.006 | 0.184 |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.105 | 0.040 | 2.625 | 0.009 | 0.103 |
| Physical Facilities | 0.161 | 0.042 | 3.833 | 0.000 | 0.022 |
| Location | 0.243 | 0.044 | 5.523 | 0.000 | 0.144 |
| Recommendation | 0.501 | 0.045 | 11.133 | 0.000 | 0.414 |
| Programme Availability | 0.245 | 0.070 | 3.500 | 0.001 | 0.113 |
| Admission Process | 0.198 | 0.082 | 2.415 | 0.016 | 0.130 |
| Quality Tuition | 0.184 | 0.071 | 2.592 | 0.010 | 0.101 |
| Marketing Communication | 0.213 | 0.094 | 2.266 | 0.024 | 0.121 |
| Intercept | 0.132 | 0.038 | 3.474 | 0.001 | 0.124 |
| R Squared | 0.476 | | | | |
| Adjusted R Squared | 0.462 | | | | |
| F-Statistics | 67.068 | | | | |
| Prob. F | 0.000 | | | | |
| OBS | 985 | | | | |

**Source: Author's Compilation, 2023**

**Figure 8. 2*: Regression Results***




## 8.3 Parents and Guardian Analysis and Presentation

This subsection provides analysis and presentation of the results from the parents of both current and prospective students.

### 8.3.1 Data Preparation

The primary objective of data screening or preparation is to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the data, thereby establishing its suitability for use in subsequent statistical analyses. The process of screening data is imperative in order to ascertain its suitability for testing hypotheses pertaining to causal relationships. The data cleaning and transformation procedures employed in this research placed particular emphasis on addressing missing values, outliers, adherence to normality assumptions, linearity assumptions, and the presence of multicollinearity.

Insufficient data - The presence of missing information can give rise to numerous challenges. Insufficient data availability poses a significant obstacle in performing the required analyses. A

minimum threshold of data points is required to obtain estimates from the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and path models. According to Hair et al. (2014), there is a positive correlation between the level of complexity in the model and the corresponding figure. There is no universally agreed-upon threshold for determining the number of missing responses that warrant action (Hair et al., 2014). However, it is commonly acknowledged that the presence of missing data becomes problematic when the proportion of missing responses exceeds 10% for a specific variable or respondent. This study exhibits a complete dataset, as all participants diligently completed the questionnaire, thereby eliminating any data gaps.

Outliers have the potential to introduce bias in the results, leading to a divergence between the mean and median. Distinguishing between individual outliers and model-level outliers is possible. The implementation of Likert scales in this study effectively mitigated the potential influence of outliers on the results.

The data distribution of a specific variable is considered to be "normal" if it adheres exclusively to a normal distribution. Despite its infrequent occurrence, it is customary for us to assume that the data adheres to a normal distribution. Three methods for assessing normality include shape, skewness, and kurtosis. In this study, the statistical measures of skewness and kurtosis were employed to assess the normality of the data.

Skewness refers to the deviation from a normal distribution, indicating that the responses exhibited a significant concentration towards one end of the scale rather than being evenly distributed. There are two principles pertaining to skewness: according to the observed skewness value, if it exceeds 1, the data is positively skewed; if it falls below -1, the data is negatively skewed; and if it lies between these values, the data is considered to be not skewed. If the

magnitude of the skewness is smaller than three times the standard error, it can be concluded that the data does not exhibit skewness.

Kurtosis pertains to the extreme values or outliers present in the distribution of data. Datasets that contain outliers exhibit high kurtosis. Data that does not contain outliers exhibits a low level of kurtosis. The kurtosis, also known as excess kurtosis, of the normal distribution is equal to zero. The criterion for determining whether the kurtosis is problematic remains consistent with the second rule mentioned earlier. This implies that if the magnitude of the kurtosis is smaller than three times the standard error, then the kurtosis is not statistically distinguishable from that of the normal distribution, thereby mitigating issues related to kurtosis.

**Table 8. 31*: Normality test using Skewness and Kurtosis***

| Constructs | Skewness Statistics | Standard Error | 3x Std Error | Kurtosis Statistics | Standard Error | 3x Std Error |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cost | -0.030 | 0.112 | 0.336 | -0.052 | 0.199 | 0.597 |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.064 | 0.112 | 0.336 | -0.186 | 0.199 | 0.597 |
| Recommendation | 0.002 | 0.112 | 0.336 | -0.209 | 0.199 | 0.597 |
| Physical Facilities | 0.072 | 0.112 | 0.336 | -0.349 | 0.199 | 0.597 |
| Location | 0.443 | 0.112 | 0.336 | 0.145 | 0.199 | 0.597 |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.147 | 0.112 | 0.336 | 1.021 | 0.199 | 0.597 |
| Parent Choice Criteria | 0.258 | 0.112 | 0.336 | 0.168 | 0.199 | 0.597 |
| Programme Availability | 0.314 | 0.112 | 0.336 | 0.192 | 0.199 | 0.597 |
| Admission Process | 0.259 | 0.112 | 0.336 | 0.264 | 0.199 | 0.597 |

**Source: Author's Compilation, 2023**

Based on the normality criteria for both skewness and kurtosis, it is evident from Table 8.31 that normality is not a concern in this instance, as the data demonstrate adherence to a normal distribution.

Linearity pertains to the consistent rate of change that characterises the association between an independent variable and a dependent variable. There are numerous methodologies to assess linearity. However, the present study employed the deviation from linearity test provided

by the ANOVA test in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). According to conventional practice, if the p-value for the test of deviation from linearity is below 0.05, it indicates that the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is non-linear, thereby raising concerns. Based on the data presented in Table 8.33, it is evident that all the observed values for the deviation from linearity surpass the threshold of 0.05. Consequently, any concerns regarding linearity are effectively mitigated.

**Table 8. 32:** ***Linearity results – ANOVA Table***

| Construct | | | Significant Value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parent Choice Criteria * Cost | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.917 |
| | | Linearity | 0.097 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.949** |
| Parent Choice Criteria * Institutional Reputation | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.619 |
| | | Linearity | 0.157 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.637** |
| Parent Choice Criteria * Location | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.195 |
| | | Linearity | 0.220 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.201** |
| Parent Choice Criteria * Personal Aspiration | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.925 |
| | | Linearity | 0.047 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.938** |
| Parent Choice Criteria * Physical Facilities | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.838 |
| | | Linearity | 0.494 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.833** |
| Parent Choice Criteria * Recommendation | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.022 |
| | | Linearity | 0.335 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.122** |
| Parent Choice Criteria * Programme Availability | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.012 |
| | | Linearity | 0.235 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.913** |
| Parent Choice Criteria * Admission Process | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.242 |
| | | Linearity | 0.313 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.156** |

**Source: Author's Compilation, 2023**

As evident in Table 8.32, the observed significant values for the deviation from linearity exceed the threshold of 0.05, thereby mitigating concerns regarding linearity.

Multicollinearity refers to a situation where the explanatory power of independent variables in relation to the dependent variable overlaps, resulting in a lack of unique explanatory power for each independent variable. One method to assess this is by computing the variable inflation factor (VIF) for each independent variable subsequent to conducting a multivariate regression analysis. The guidelines for the VIF are as follows: According to previous studies conducted by Hair et al. (2014) and O'Brien (2007), a VIF value below 3 is considered to be within an acceptable range and does not pose any significant issues. The VIF values are provided in Table 8.33 within the context of this study. An examination of Table 8.33 reveals that all of the VIF values were found to be below the established thresholds. Consequently, this observation indicates the absence of any significant multicollinearity concerns.

**Table 8. 33*: Multicollinearity Test (VIF Value)***

| Construct | VIF Values |
|---|---|
| Cost | 1.006 |
| Institutional Reputation | 1.017 |
| Location | 1.006 |
| Personal Aspiration | 1.009 |
| Physical Facilities | 1.008 |
| Recommendation | 1.008 |
| Programme Availability | 1.071 |
| Admission Process | 1.022 |

**Source: Author's Compilation, 2023**

*8.4.1.2 Response rate analysis*

A total of 365 questionnaires were administered to the parents of both prospective and current students, of which all were received. Following the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014), a preliminary check was done to flag incompleteness, inappropriateness, missing values. In all, 16 questionnaires received were rejected for incomplete, missing information and unengaged responses. Therefore, 349 responses were deemed usable for further analyses in respective of

the parent of the students. This constitutes a response rate of approximately 95.6%.

### 8.3.2 Demographic Profile of the Respondents – Parent

The respondents' demographic profiles such as age, gender and level of education were assessed.

#### *8.3.2.1 Age*

A frequency table was created in order to provide a description of the age distribution within the sample. The data presented in Table 8.35 shows that a significant proportion of the participants fell within the age range of 40-49, comprising 192 individuals or 55% of the total sample. Additionally, 91 participants, equivalent to 26% of the sample, were found to be within the age range of 30-39. The tabulated data in Table 8.34 displays the distribution of respondents according to age.

**Table 8. 34*: Frequency table of age distribution in the sample***

| Age | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 30-39 | 91 | 26% |
| 40-49 | 192 | 55% |
| 50 and above | 66 | 19% |
| Total Sample | 349 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

#### *8.3.2.2 Gender*

A frequency table was created in order to provide a description of the gender distribution within the sample. According to the data presented in Table 8.35, a significant proportion of the participants were identified as female (n = 185, 53%), whereas 164 participants (47%) were identified as male. The tabulated data in Table 8.35 displays the distribution of respondents based on gender.

**Table 8. 35*: Frequency table of gender distribution in the sample***

| Gender | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 164 | 47% |
| Female | 185 | 53% |
| Total Sample | 349 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

#### *8.3.2.3 Level of Education*

A frequency table was constructed in order to provide a descriptive analysis of the distribution of parental education levels within the sample. The data presented in Table 8.36 shows that a significant proportion of the participants possessed a bachelor's degree (n = 143, 41%), whereas a smaller percentage of participants (n = 66, 19%) held a master's degree. Table 8.36 displays the distribution of respondents according to their level of education.

**Table 8. 36*: Frequency table of level of education distribution in the sample***

| Education Level | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Middle School Certificate | 17 | 5% |
| Junior High School | 49 | 14% |
| Bachelors | 143 | 41% |
| Master's | 66 | 19% |
| PhD | 35 | 10% |
| Others | 38 | 11% |
| Total Sample | 349 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size [senior high school? why missing?]

### 8.3.3 Descriptive Statistics – Parents

Descriptive statistics is a branch of statistics that pertains to the analysis and interpretation of the characteristics exhibited by a given dataset. The technique under consideration is a straightforward method for effectively describing, visually representing, and succinctly summarising data. The process of descriptive statistics entails the transformation of a potentially large set of data points within a sample into concise summary values and visual representations that convey meaningful information. The methodology enables the researcher to gain valuable insights and effectively represent the data, as opposed to solely analysing raw numerical datasets. Descriptive statistics allow researchers to provide a comprehensive description of both a complete population and a specific sample (Hair et al., 2010).

**Table 8. 37*: Descriptive Statistics***

| Constructs | N | Mean | Min | Max | Standard deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cost | 349 | 3.398 | 1 | 5 | 0.882 |
| Institutional Reputation | 349 | 3.063 | 1 | 5 | 1.005 |
| Recommendation | 349 | 3.016 | 1 | 5 | 0.928 |
| Physical Facilities | 349 | 2.721 | 1 | 5 | 0.918 |
| Location | 349 | 1.887 | 1 | 5 | 0.865 |
| Personal Aspiration | 349 | 1.743 | 1 | 5 | 0.880 |
| Parent Choice Criteria | 349 | 2.394 | 1 | 5 | 1.133 |
| Programme Availability | 349 | 3.328 | 1 | 5 | 0.957 |
| Admission Process | 349 | 2.431 | 1 | 5 | 0.849 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

The data presented in Table 8.37 shows that the total number of observations amounts to 349. The cost variable exhibits a mean value of 3.398, accompanied by a standard deviation of 0.882. The minimum and maximum values fall within the range of 1 and 5, respectively. The mean of institutional reputation was 3.063, with a standard deviation of 1.005. The descriptive statistics are provided in Table 8.37.

### 8.3.4 Reliability Measures – Parent

Precision, reproducibility, consistency, and repeatability are further terms for reliability (Hair et al., 2022). The degree to which a variable is reproducible, with virtually the same value each time it is measured, determines how reliable it is (Hair et al., 2022). That significantly affects how effective the study is. Reliability often refers to a measurement technique's dependability or consistency (Hair et al., 2022). Reliability is more precisely concerned with the consistency or stability of the result of a measure or assessment procedure through time and in various environments or conditions. There is less of a possibility that the resulting score is the result of random variables and measurement error if the measurement is reliable.

Several methods have been recommended in the literature to check for reliability, including: the traditional measure – Cronbach's alpha (a more conservative approach), the modern measure - composite reliability (a more liberal approach), and Rho_a (something in the middle/between the two). The recommended threshold value is >= .70 (Hair et al., 2022).

**Table 8. 38*: Reliability Measures***

| Constructs | Cronbach's alpha (CA) | ɔsite reliability (rho_a) | ɔsite reliability (rho_c) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cost | 0.721 | 0.730 | 0.841 |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.738 | 0.737 | 0.818 |
| Location | 0.909 | 0.711 | 0.908 |
| Parent Choice Criteria | 0.906 | 0.924 | 0.93 |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.905 | 0.906 | 0.921 |
| Physical Facilities | 0.883 | 0.757 | 0.865 |
| Recommendation | 0.908 | 0.902 | 0.924 |
| Programme Availability | 0.871 | 0.834 | 0.897 |
| Admission Process | | | |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.37 that reliability was achieved using all the three recommended approaches for testing reliability. The reliability scores for all the constructs were above the recommended value of 0.7.

### 8.3.5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) – Parent

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is a statistical technique used to validate the factor structure of a given set of observed variables (Hair et al., 2022). The use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) allows researchers to empirically examine the hypothesis that a correlation exists between observed variables and the latent constructs they represent. The researcher employs existing knowledge of the theory, empirical research, or a combination of both to formulate a conjecture regarding the pattern of relationship. Subsequently, the hypothesis is subjected to statistical testing (Hair et al., 2022). In the context of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), various statistical tests are conducted, such as assessments of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and common method bias. The aforementioned tests are encompassed within the subsequent sections.

### *8.3.5.1 Convergent Validity*

Convergent validity is considered a subtype of construct validity. The construct validity of a test refers to its ability to accurately measure the specific concept it was designed to assess (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity is a multifaceted concept, as it evaluates the extent to which constructs that are theoretically expected to be associated with one another demonstrate actual associations. Convergent validity is a statistical assessment used to ascertain the degree of association between two tests that are expected to be strongly correlated (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010). The calculation of the average variance extracted (AVE) is a significant metric in assessing the degree of convergent validity. The construct's ability to account for variance in relation to the variance attributed to measurement error is quantified as the average variance extracted (AVE).

A minimum average variance extracted (AVE) value of 0.50 is strongly advised as a general guideline to ensure satisfactory convergent validity. However, if the average variance extracted (AVE) is less than 0.50, it suggests that the items in your study are explaining a greater number of errors than the variability in your constructs. In order to evaluate the reliability of a measurement model, it is necessary to compute the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct. It is generally recommended that the AVE should exceed a minimum threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2021). Table 8.39 displays evidence of convergent validity.

**Table 8. 39*: Convergent Validity***

| Constructs | Average variance extracted (AVE) |
|---|---|
| Admission Process | 0.723 |
| Cost | 0.643 |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.566 |
| Location | 0.650 |
| Parent Choice Criteria | 0.725 |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.572 |
| Physical Facilities | 0.527 |
| Programme Availability | 0.802 |
| Recommendation | 0.607 |

Source: Author’s Compilation, 2023

Table 8.39 shows that all of the constructs had AVE values greater than the recommended threshold of 0.5, indicating that they met the convergent validity criteria.

#### *8.3.5.2 Discriminant Validity*

A subtype of construct validity is discriminant validity. In other words, it demonstrates how well a test measures the concept for which it was designed. Discriminant validity specifically assesses whether constructs that should theoretically be unrelated are, in fact, unrelated (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010). Discriminant validity is significant because it indicates whether the test accurately targets the construct of interest or if it evaluates separate, unintentionally related constructs. This is dependent on the operationalisation's accuracy – that is, the ability to convert abstract concepts into measurable variables or observations (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010). To assess discriminant validity, several tests have been proposed in the literature, including the Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross-loading criterion, and heterotrait monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Hair et al., 2022).

#### *8.3.5.3 Fornell-Larcker criterion*

The Fornell-Larcker criterion is a popular technique for testing the discriminant validity of measurement models. The square root of the average variance extracted by a construct must be greater than the correlation between the construct and any other construct, according to this criterion. Discriminant validity is established once this condition is met (Hair et al., 2022).

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**Table 8. 40*: Fornell-Larcker Criterion***

| Constructs | AP | CS | IR | LC | PCC | PA | PF | PRA | RC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Admission Process | **0.85** | | | | | | | | |
| Cost | 0.024 | **0.802** | | | | | | | |
| Institutional | | | | | | | | | |
| | 0.053 | 0.063 | **0.753** | | | | | | |
| Reputation | | | | | | | | | |
| Location | 0.063 | 0.045 | 0.016 | **0.806** | | | | | |
| Parent Choice Criteria | 0.089 | 0.048 | 0.087 | 0.072 | **0.851** | | | | |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.017 | 0.101 | 0.036 | 0.079 | 0.108 | **0.268** | | | |
| Physical Facilities | 0.088 | 0.082 | 0.031 | 0.046 | 0.023 | 0.042 | **0.726** | | |
| Programme | | | | | | | | | |
| Availability | 0.126 | 0.002 | 0.107 | 0.088 | 0.065 | 0.047 | 0.037 | **0.895** | |
| Recommendation | 0.094 | 0.008 | 0.028 | 0.052 | 0.075 | 0.027 | 0.017 | 0.074 | **0.779** |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.40 that the square root of the AVEs shown in the diagonal in bold are always greater than the correlation of the constructs.

#### *8.3.5.4 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio*

Henseler et al. (2015) proposed the HTMT as an estimator for the correlation between two latent variables. It is based on the multitrait-multimethod (MTMM) matrix, which compares correlations to determine discriminant validity (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). Henseler et al. (2015) propose a threshold value of 0.90 if the path model includes constructs that are conceptually very similar (that is, an HTMT value greater than 0.90 indicates a lack of discriminant validity). However, when the path model's constructs are conceptually more distinct, researchers should consider 0.85 as the HTMT threshold (Henseler et al. 2015).

**Table 8. 41*: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio***

| Constructs | AP | CS | IR | LC | PCC | PA | PF | PRA | RC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Admission Process | | | | | | | | | |
| Cost | 0.037 | | | | | | | | |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.099 | 0.134 | | | | | | | |
| Location | 0.076 | 0.070 | 0.085 | | | | | | |
| Parent Choice Criteria | 0.074 | 0.053 | 0.089 | 0.056 | | | | | |
| Personal Aspiration | 0.055 | 0.065 | 0.096 | 0.051 | 0.043 | | | | |
| Physical Facilities | 0.056 | 0.116 | 0.078 | 0.055 | 0.032 | 0.063 | | | |
| Programme Availability | 0.125 | 0.039 | 0.096 | 0.119 | 0.054 | 0.052 | 0.042 | | |
| Recommendation | 0.132 | 0.051 | 0.095 | 0.077 | 0.056 | 0.071 | 0.053 | 0.092 | |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.42 that all the HTMT ratios were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, thus satisfying discriminant validity under the HTMT criterion.

#### *8.3.5.5 Common method bias assessment*

The phenomenon of common method bias (CMB) is caused by the measurement method used in most social science studies, rather than by the network of causes and effects among latent variables in the model being studied (Kock, 2015). For example, the instructions at the top of a questionnaire may influence the answers provided by different respondents in the same general direction, resulting in a certain amount of common variation among the indicators. Another possible source of common method bias is the implicit social desirability associated with answering questions in a questionnaire in a specific way, causing the indicators to share some common variation (Kock, 2015).

Kock and Lynn (2012) proposed the full collinearity test as a comprehensive procedure for assessing both vertical and lateral collinearity at the same time (see, also, Kock & Gaskins, 2014). Variance inflation factors (VIFs) are generated for all latent variables in a model using this procedure, which is fully automated by the software SmartPLS 4. The presence of a VIF greater than 3.3 is suggested as an indication of pathological collinearity and that a model may be contaminated by common method bias. As a result, if all VIFs from a full collinearity test are equal to or less than 3.3, the model is free of common method bias. Table 8.42 displays the VIFs obtained from a full collinearity test for all of the latent variables in our models.

**Table 8. 42*: CMB Test with VIF***

| Constructs | Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Values |
|---|---|
| Cost | 1.006 |
| Institutional Reputation | 1.017 |
| Location | 1.006 |
| Personal Aspiration | 1.009 |
| Physical Facilities | 1.008 |
| Recommendation | 1.008 |
| Programme Availability | 1.071 |
| Admission Process | 1.022 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

As we can see, the model is free of common method bias because all of the VIF values are less than the recommended threshold of 3.3. (Kock & Lynn, 2012).

### 8.3.6 Hypothesis – Parent

A research hypothesis is a proclamation of expectation or prediction that will be explored through scientific investigation. This is the earliest stage of any investigation in which research questions are translated into hypotheses. It comprises variables, the population, and the relationship between variables. A research hypothesis is a hypothesis used to examine the association between two or more variables (Hair et al, 2010). In this study, eight (8) hypotheses were proposed, and they were evaluated in the subsections titled Regression Results and Evaluation of Hypotheses.

#### *8.3.6.1 Regression Estimation*

Regression analysis was used in this investigation to shed light on the connection between the variables examined and the parent choice criteria. A dependent variable, hypothesised to be affected by one or more independent variables, must be specified for the analysis of regression (Hair et al., 2010). The model for estimation is stated as follows:

$$PACC = \partial 0 + \beta 1CS + \beta 2PF + \beta 3LC + \beta 4IR + \beta 5RC + \beta 6PA + \beta 7PRA + \beta 8ADP + \varepsilon$$

…… (1) Where:

CSC = Current Student Choice

$\partial 0$ = Constant

$\beta 1$, $\beta 2$, $\beta 3$, $\beta 4$, $\beta 5$, $\beta 6$, $\beta 7$, $\beta 8$ = the Beta Coefficient CS = Costs

PF = Physical Facilities LC = Location

IR = Institutional Reputation RC = Recommendation

PA = Personal Aspiration

PRA = Programme Availability ADP = Admission Process

$\varepsilon$ = error term

### *8.3.6.2 Hypotheses Evaluation and Results*

The significance and relevance of the relationships were assessed in the study (i.e., the path coefficients). This was done in relation to the study's various hypotheses.

#### *8.3.6.2.1 Institutional Reputation factor and Parent Choice*

**H3a: There is a positive relationship between institutional reputation and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether institutional reputation positively influences parent choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that institutional reputation has a positive effect on parent choice of a private higher education institution ($\beta = 0.257$, SE = 0.041, T =6.268, P = 0.000), hence H3a is supported.

#### *8.3.6.2.2 Cost factor and Parent Choice*

**H3b: There is a positive relationship between cost and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether cost positively influences parent choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that cost has a positive effect on parent choice of a private higher education institution ($\beta = 0.173$, SE = 0.047, T =3.681, P = 0.000), hence H3b is supported.

*8.3.6.2.3 Location factor and Parent Choice*

**H3c: There is a positive relationship between location and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether location positively influences parent choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that physical facilities have a positive effect on parent choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.153, SE = 0.031, T =4.935, P = 0.000), hence H3c is supported.

*8.3.6.2.4 Physical Facilities factor and Parent Choice*

**H3d: There is a positive relationship between physical facilities and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether physical facilities positively influence parent choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that physical facilities have a positive effect on parent choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.237, SE = 0.061, T =3.885, P = 0.000), hence H3d is supported.

*8.3.6.2.5 Recommendation factor and Parent Choice*

**H3e: There is a positive relationship between recommendation and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether recommendation positively influences parent choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that recommendation has a positive effect on parent choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.233, SE = 0.051, T =4.569, P = 0.000), hence H3e is supported.

*8.3.6.2.6 Personal Aspiration factor and Parent Choice*

**H3f: There is a positive relationship between personal aspiration and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether personal aspiration positively influences parent choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that personal aspiration has a positive effect on parent choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.277, SE = 0.041, T =6.756, P = 0.000), hence H3f is supported.

*8.3.6.2.7 Programme Availability factor and Parent Choice*

**H3g: There is a positive relationship between programme availability and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether programme availability positively influences parent choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that programme availability has a positive effect on parent choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.206, SE = 0.070, T =2.943, P = 0.003), hence H3g is supported.

*8.3.6.2.8 Admission Process factor and Parent Choice*

**Table 8. 43*: Regression Results Summary***

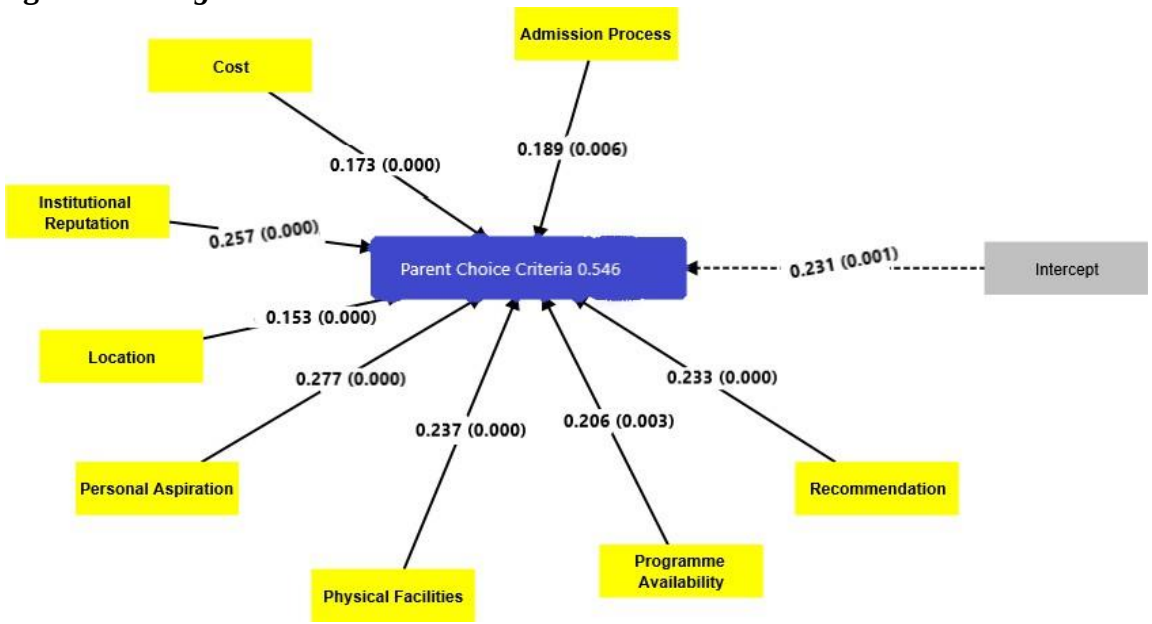
| Construct | Unstandardised Beta coefficients | SE | T value | P value | 2.50% | 97.50% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional Reputation | 0.257 | 0.041 | 6.268 | 0.000 | 0.024 | 0.137 |
| Cost/Fees | 0.173 | 0.047 | 3.681 | 0.000 | 0.153 | 0.307 |
| Location | 0.153 | 0.031 | 4.935 | 0.000 | | |
| Admission Process | 0.189 | 0.069 | 2.739 | 0.006 | 0.072 | 0.182 |
| Programme Availability | 0.206 | 0.070 | 2.943 | 0.003 | 0.111 | 0.243 |
| Recommendation | 0.233 | 0.051 | 4.569 | 0.000 | 0.147 | 0.133 |
| Loyalty and Alumnus | 0.277 | 0.041 | 6.756 | 0.000 | 0.157 | 0.303 |
| Religion cultural ethical | 0.237 | 0.061 | 3.885 | 0.000 | 0.117 | |
| Intercept | 0.231 | 0.071 | 3.254 | 0.001 | 0.180 | 0.318 |
| R Squared | 54.56% | | | | | |
| Adjusted R Squared | 53.97% | | | | | |
| F-Statistics | 15.67 | | | | | |
| Prob. F | 0.000 | | | | | |
| OBS | 349 | | | | | |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

**H3h: There is a positive relationship between admission process and the choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether admission process positively influences parent choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that admission process has a positive effect on parent choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.189, SE = .069, T =2.739, P = 0.006), hence H3h is supported.

**Figure 8. 3*: Regression Results***




### 8.3.7 Employers' Choice Analysis and Presentation

This subsection provides analysis and presentation of the results from the employers' choice.

#### *8.3.7.1 Data Preparation*

Data screening or preparation is the process of ensuring the data is clean and ready for the conducting of further statistical analyses. Data must be screened to ensure the data is useable, reliable, and valid for testing causal theory. The data preparation in this study focused on the following: missing data, outliers, normality, linearity and multicollinearity.

Missing data – If data is missing, this can cause several problems. The most apparent problem is that there simply won't be enough data points to run the analyses. The EFA, CFA, and path models require a certain number of data points to compute estimates. This number increases

with the complexity of the model (Hair et al., 2014). The threshold for missing data is flexible, but generally, if you are missing more than 10% of the responses on a particular variable, or from a particular respondent, that variable or respondent may be problematic (Hair et al., 2014). In this study, three respondents had unengaged responses and two respondents had missing data and were therefore removed from the study.

Outliers – Outliers can influence the results, pulling the mean away from the median. Two types of outliers exist: outliers for individual variables, and outliers for the model. Given that this study used the Likert scale, outlier was not an issue.

Normality – Normality refers to the distribution of the data for a particular variable. We usually assume that the data is normally distributed, even though it usually is not. Normality is assessed in many ways: shape, skewness, and kurtosis. In this study skewness and kurtosis were used to assess normality.

Skewness: Skewness means that the responses did not fall into a normal distribution but were heavily weighted toward one end of the scale. There are two rules on skewness: (1) If the skewness value is greater than 1 then you are positive (right) skewed, if it is less than -1 you are negative (left) skewed, if it is in between, then the data is not skewed. (2) If the absolute value of the skewness is less than three times the standard error, then the data is not skewed.
Kurtosis refers to the outliers of the distribution of data. Data that have outliers have large kurtosis. Data without outliers have low kurtosis. The kurtosis (excess kurtosis) of the normal distribution is 0. The rule for evaluating whether the kurtosis is problematic is the same as rule two above. This means that if the absolute value of the kurtosis is less than three times the standard error, then the kurtosis is not significantly different from that of the normal distribution, thus alleviating kurtosis problems.

**Table 8. 44*: Normality test using Skewness and Kurtosis***

| Constructs | Skewness Statistics | Std. Error | 3 x Std Error | Kurtosis Statistics | Std. Error | 3 x Std Error |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional Reputation | -1.151 | 0.064 | 0.192 | 1.475 | 0.128 | 0.383 |
| Employers Choice Criteria | -0.872 | 0.064 | 0.192 | 0.715 | 0.127 | 0.381 |
| Quality of Faculty | -1.412 | 0.064 | 0.192 | 2.261 | 0.128 | 0.383 |
| Evidence Alumni Job Performance | -0.985 | 0.064 | 0.192 | 0.941 | 0.127 | 0.382 |
| General Perception of Candidates | -0.761 | 0.064 | 0.192 | 0.261 | 0.128 | 0.383 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

Using the normality criteria for both skewness and kurtosis, it is obvious from Table 8.44 that the data did not achieve normality. Nonetheless, given that this is a Likert scale response, not achieving normality is not an issue (DeWees et al., 2020; Norman, 2010).

Linearity – Linearity refers to the consistent slope of change that represents the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable. There are dozens of ways to test for linearity. Nonetheless, this study used the deviation from linearity test available in the ANOVA test in SPSS. The rule of thumb is that if the significant value for deviation from linearity is less than 0.05, the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable is not linear, and thus is problematic. As can be seen from Table 8.45, all the significant values for the deviation from linearity are greater than 0.05, thus alleviating any linearity issues.

**Table 8. 45:** ***Linearity results – ANOVA Table***

| Construct | | | Significant Value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employers Choice Criteria * Alumni Job Performance | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.142 |
| | | Linearity | 0.197 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.213** |
| Employers Choice Criteria * General Perception | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.080 |
| | | Linearity | 0.067 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.069** |
| Employers Choice Criteria * Institutional Reputation | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.111 |
| | | Linearity | 0.230 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.101** |
| Employers Choice Criteria * Quality Faculty | Between Groups | (Combined) | 0.970 |
| | | Linearity | 0.097 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | **0.876** |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

As can be seen from Table 8.45, all the significant value for the deviation from linearity are greater than 0.05, thus alleviating any linearity issues.

Multicollinearity – Multicollinearity means that the variance that the independent variables explain in the dependent variable are overlapping with each other and thus not each explaining unique variance in the dependent variable. The way to check this is to calculate a variable inflation factor (VIF) for each independent variable after running a multivariate regression. The rule of thumb for the VIF is as follows: VIF < 3: not a problem (Hair et al., 2014; O'brien,

2007). In this study the VIF values are presented in Table 8.46. It can be seen from Table 8.45 that all the VIF values were less than the thresholds, thus alleviating any multicollinearity issues.

**Table 8. 46*: Multicollinearity Test (VIF Value)***

| Constructs | VIF Values |
|---|---|
| Alumni Job Performance | 2.551 |
| General Perception | 2.823 |
| Institutional Reputation | 2.702 |
| Quality Faculty | 2.048 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

#### *8.3.7.2 Response rate analysis*

A total of 231 questionnaires were administered to the employers of which 222 were received. Following the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014), a preliminary check was done to flag incompleteness, inappropriateness, and missing values. In all, 5 questionnaires received were rejected for incomplete, missing information and unengaged responses. Therefore, 217 responses were deemed usable for further analyses in respective of the employers. This constitutes a response rate of approximately 93.93%.

### 8.3.8 Demographic Profile of the Respondents – Employers

The respondents' demographic profiles such as age, gender and level of education were assessed.

#### *8.3.8.1 Age*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of age in the sample. As shown in Table 8.48, the majority of participants were within the age bracket of 40-49 (n = 105, 48%), while 75 participants (35%) were within the age bracket of 30-39. The results for the age distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.47.

**Table 8. 47*: Frequency table of age distribution in the sample***

| Age | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 30-39 | 75 | 35% |
| 40-49 | 105 | 48% |
| 50 and above | 37 | 17% |
| Total Sample | 217 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

### *8.3.8.2 Gender*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of gender in the sample. As shown in Table 8.48, the majority participants of were male (n = 123, 57%), while 94 participants (43%) were female. The results for the gender distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.49

**Table 8. 48 *Frequency table of gender distribution in the sample***

| Gender | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 123 | 57% |
| Female | 94 | 43% |
| Total Sample | 217 | 100% |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

### *8.3.8.3 Level of Education*

A frequency table was generated to describe the distribution of level of education of employers in the sample. As shown in Table xx [?], the majority of participants had master's degree (n = 111, 51%), while 85 participants (39%) had bachelor's degree. The results for the level of education distribution of the respondents are presented in Table 8.49.

**Table 8. 49*: Frequency table of level of education distribution in the sample***

| Gender | N | % | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Middle School Certificate | 0 | | 0% |
| Junior High School | 0 | | 0% |
| Bachelors | 85 | 39% | |
| Master's | 111 | 51% | |
| PhD | 5 | | 2% |
| Others | 16 | | 7% |
| Total Sample | 217 | 100% | |

*Note*. N: Sample Size

### 8.3.9 Descriptive Statistics – Employers

Descriptive statistics describes the characteristics of a dataset. It is a simple technique to describe, show and summarise data in a meaningful way. Descriptive statistics involves taking a potentially sizeable number of data points in the sample data and reducing them to certain meaningful summary values and graphs. The process allows the researcher to obtain insights and visualise the data instead of having to work through sets of raw numbers. With descriptive statistics, the researcher can describe both an entire population and an individual sample (Hair et al., 2010).

**Table 8. 50:** ***Descriptive Statistics***

| Constructs | N | Mean | Min | Max | Standard deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional Reputation | 217 | 4.362 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.747 |
| Quality of Faculty | 217 | 4.362 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.807 |
| Evidence Alumni Job Performance | 217 | 4.147 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.865 |
| General Perception Candidates | 217 | 3.987 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.924 |
| Employers Choice Criteria | 217 | 4.258 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 0.748 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

Table 8.50 shows that the number of observations is 217. Institutional Reputation has a mean of 4.362 with a standard deviation of 0.747. The minimum and the maximum ranges between 1 and 5 respectively. Quality of Faculty had a mean of 4.362 with a standard deviation of 0.807. Employers Choice Criteria had a mean score of 4.258 with a standard deviation of 0.748. Details of the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 8.50.

### 8.3.10 Reliability Measures – Employers

Precision, reproducibility, consistency, and repeatability are further terms for reliability (Hair et al., 2022). The degree to which a variable is reproducible, with virtually the same value each time it is measured, determines how reliable it is (Hair et al., 2022). That significantly affects how effective the study is. Reliability often refers to a measurement technique's dependability or consistency (Hair et al., 2022). Reliability is more precisely concerned with the consistency or stability of the result of a measure or assessment procedure through time and in

various environments or conditions. There is less of a possibility that the resulting score is the result of random variables and measurement error if the measurement is reliable.

Several methods have been recommended in the literature to check for reliability, including: the traditional measure – Cronbach's alpha (a more conservative approach), the modern measure – composite reliability (a more liberal approach), and Rho_a (something in the middle / between the two). The recommended threshold value is >= .70 (Hair et al., 2022).

**Table 8. 51*: Reliability Measures***

| Constructs | Cronbach's alpha | Composite reliability (rho_a) | Composite reliability (rho_c) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alumni Job Performance | 0.936 | 0.937 | 0.946 |
| Employers Choice Criteria | 0.862 | 0.865 | 0.906 |
| General Perception | 0.893 | 0.895 | 0.926 |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.909 | 0.913 | 0.93 |
| Quality Faculty | 0.872 | 0.872 | 0.921 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.51 that reliability was achieved using all the three recommended approaches for testing reliability. The reliability scores for all the constructs were above the recommended value of 0.7.

### 8.3.11 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) - Employers

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is a statistical method for confirming the factor structure of a set of observed variables (Hair et al., 2022). CFA enables researchers to test the hypothesis that there is a relationship between observed variables and their underlying latent constructs. The researcher uses prior knowledge of the theory, empirical research, or both to postulate the relationship pattern and then statistically tests the hypothesis (Hair et al., 2022). Several statistical tests, including convergent validity, discriminant validity, and common method bias, are performed in the context of CFA. These tests are covered in the following sections.

### *8.3.11.1 Convergent Validity*

A subtype of construct validity is convergent validity. Construct validity indicates how well a test measures the concept for which it was created (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity is more nuanced in that it assesses whether constructs that should theoretically be related to each other are, in fact, related to each other. Convergent validity determines whether two tests that should be highly related are in fact related (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010). The average variance extracted is an important measure of convergent validity (AVE). The amount of variance captured by a construct in relation to the amount of variance due to measurement error is measured as AVE.

An AVE of at least 0.50 is highly recommended as a rule of thumb and for adequate convergence. However, an AVE less than 0.50 indicates that your items explain more errors than the variance in your constructs. An AVE must be calculated for each construct in any measurement model and must be at least 0.50. (Hair et al., 20212). Convergent validity is shown in Table 8.52.

**Table 8. 52*: Convergent Validity***

| Constructs | Average variance extracted (AVE) |
|---|---|
| Alumni Job Performance | 0.662 |
| Employers Choice Criteria | 0.708 |
| General Perception | 0.757 |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.690 |
| Quality Faculty | 0.796 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

Table 8.52 shows that all of the constructs had AVE values greater than the recommended threshold of 0.5, indicating that they met the convergent validity criteria.

### *8.3.11.2 Discriminant Validity*

A subtype of construct validity is discriminant validity. In other words, it demonstrates how well a test measures the concept for which it was designed. Discriminant validity specifically

assesses whether constructs that should theoretically be unrelated are, in fact, unrelated (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010). Discriminant validity is significant because it indicates whether the test accurately targets the construct of interest or if it evaluates separate, unintentionally related constructs. This is dependent on the operationalisation's accuracy – that is, the ability to convert abstract concepts into measurable variables or observations (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2010). To assess discriminant validity, several tests have been proposed in the literature, including the Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross-loading criterion, and heterotrait monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Hair et al., 2022).

#### *8.3.11.3 Fornell-Larcker criterion*

The Fornell-Larcker criterion is a popular technique for testing the discriminant validity of measurement models. The square root of the average variance extracted by a construct must be greater than the correlation between the construct and any other construct, according to this criterion. Discriminant validity is established once this condition is met (Hair et al., 2022).

**Table 8. 53*: Fornell-Larcker Criterion***

| Constructs | Alumni Job Performance | Employers Choice Criteria | General Perception | Institutional Reputation | Quality Faculty |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alumni Job Performance | **0.814** | | | | |
| Employers Choice Criteria | 0.919 | **0.842** | | | |
| General Perception | 0.804 | 0.838 | **0.87** | | |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.766 | 0.864 | 0.616 | **0.831** | |
| Quality Faculty | 0.674 | 0.804 | 0.54 | 0.67 | **0.892** |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.53 that the square root of the AVEs shown in the diagonal in bold are always greater than the correlation of the constructs.

### *8.3.11.4 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio*

Henseler et al. (2015) proposed the HTMT as an estimator for the correlation between two latent variables. It is based on the multitrait-multimethod (MTMM) matrix, which compares correlations to determine discriminant validity (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). Henseler et al. (2015) propose a threshold value of 0.90 if the path model includes constructs that are conceptually very similar (that is, an HTMT value greater than 0.90 indicates a lack of discriminant validity). However, when the path model's constructs are conceptually more distinct, researchers should consider 0.85 as the HTMT threshold (Henseler et al. 2015).

**Table 8. 54*: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio***

| Constructs | Alumni Job Performance | Employers Choice Criteria | General Perception | Institutional Reputation | Quality Faculty |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alumni Job Performance | | | | | |
| Employers Choice Criteria | 0.657 | | | | |
| General Perception | 0.605 | 0.549 | | | |
| Institutional Reputation | 0.628 | 0.576 | 0.68 | | |
| Quality Faculty | 0.745 | 0.537 | 0.608 | 0.753 | |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

It can be seen from Table 8.54 that all the HTMT ratios were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, thus satisfying discriminant validity under the HTMT criterion.

### *8.3.11.5 Common method bias assessment*

The phenomenon of common method bias (CMB) is caused by the measurement method used in most social science studies, rather than by the network of causes and effects among latent variables in the model being studied (Kock, 2015). For example, the instructions at the top of a questionnaire may influence the answers provided by different respondents in the same general direction, resulting in a certain amount of common variation among the indicators. Another possible source of common method bias is the implicit social desirability associated with answering questions in a questionnaire in a specific way, causing the indicators to share some common variation (Kock, 2015).

Kock and Lynn (2012) proposed the full collinearity test as a comprehensive procedure for assessing both vertical and lateral collinearity at the same time (see, also, Kock & Gaskins, 2014). Variance inflation factors (VIFs) are generated for all latent variables in a model using this procedure, which is fully automated by the software SmartPLS 4. The presence of a VIF greater than 3.3 is suggested as an indication of pathological collinearity and that a model may be contaminated by common method bias. As a result, if all VIFs from a full collinearity test are equal to or less than 3.3, the model is free of common method bias. Table 8.54 displays the VIFs obtained from a full collinearity test for all of the latent variables in our models.

**Table 8. 55*: CMB Test with VIF***

| Constructs | VIF Values |
|---|---|
| Alumni Job Performance | 2.551 |
| General Perception | 2.823 |
| Institutional Reputation | 2.702 |
| Quality Faculty | 2.048 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

As we can see, the model is free of common method bias because all of the VIF values are less than the recommended threshold of 3.3 (Kock & Lynn, 2012).

### 8.3.12 Hypothesis – Employers

A research hypothesis is a proclamation of expectation or prediction that will be explored through scientific investigation. This is the earliest stage of any investigation in which research questions are translated into hypotheses. It comprises variables, the population, and the relationship between variables. A research hypothesis is a hypothesis used to examine the association between two or more variables (Hair et al, 2010). In this study, six (6) hypotheses were proposed, and they were evaluated in the subsections titled Regression Results and Evaluation of Hypotheses.

### *8.3.12.1 Regression Estimation*

Regression analysis was used in this investigation to shed light on the connection between the variables examined and the employers choice criteria. A dependent variable, hypothesised to be affected by one or more independent variables, must be specified for the analysis of regression (Hair et al., 2010). The model for estimation is stated as follows:

$ECC = \partial 0 + \beta 1IR + \beta 2EAJP + \beta 3GPC + \beta 4QOF + \varepsilon$ …… (1) Where:

ECC = Employers Choice Criteria;

$\partial 0$ = Constant;

β1, β2, β3, β4 = the Beta Coefficient; IR = Institutional Reputation;

EAJP = Evidence of Alumni Job Performance;

GPC = Brand Management and Marketing Communication; QOF = Quality of Faculty;

ε = error term

### *8.3.11.2 Hypotheses Evaluation and Result*

The significance and relevance of the relationships were assessed in the study (i.e., the path coefficients). This was done in relation to the study's various hypotheses.

#### *8.3.11.2.1 Institutional Reputation and Employers Choice Criteria*

**H4a: There is a positive relationship between institutional reputation and the employer choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether institutional reputation positively influences employer choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that institutional reputation has a positive effect on employer choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.292, SE = 0.008, T =37.477, P = 0.000), hence H4a is supported.

*8.3.11.2.2 Quality of Faculty and Employers Choice Criteria*

**H4b: There is a positive relationship between quality of faculty and the employer choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether quality of faculty positively influences employer choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that quality of faculty has a positive effect on employer choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.257, SE = 0.007, T =37.909, P = 0.000), hence H4b is supported.

*8.3.11.2.3 Evidence of Alumni Job Performance and Employers Choice Criteria*

**H4c: There is a positive relationship between evidence of alumni job performance and the employer choice of private higher education institution.**

This hypothesis evaluates whether alumni job performance positively influences employer choice of a private higher education institution. The results revealed that alumni job performance has a positive effect on employer choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.295, SE = 0.010, T =29.192, P = 0.000), hence H4c is supported.

*8.3.11.2.4 Brand Management marketing communication and Employers Choice Criteria*

**H4d: There is a positive relationship between the brand management marketing communication and the employer choice of private higher education institution.**

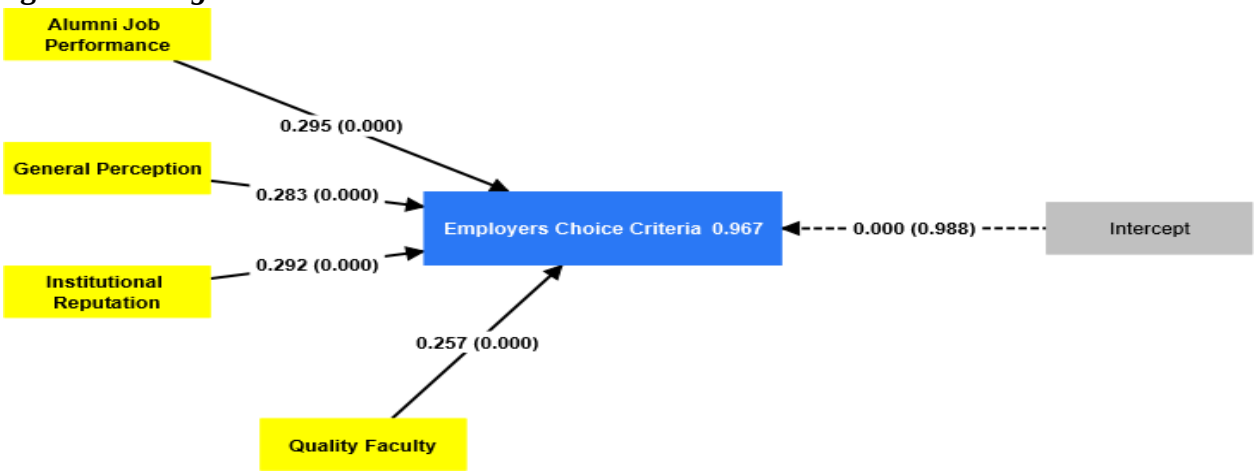
This hypothesis evaluates whether brand management marketing communication influences employer choice for a private higher education institution. The results revealed that brand management marketing communication has a positive effect on employer choice of a private higher education institution (β = 0.283, SE = 0.008, T =35.504, P = 0.000), hence H4d is supported.

**Table 8. 56*: Regression Results Summary***

| Constructs | Unstandardised Beta coefficients | SE | T value | P value | 2.50% | 97. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional Reputation | 0.292 | 0.008 | 37.477 | 0.000 | 0.277 | 0 |
| Quality Faculty | 0.257 | 0.007 | 37.909 | 0.000 | 0.244 | 0 |
| Alumni Job | | | | | | |
| Performance | 0.295 | 0.010 | 29.192 | 0.000 | 0.275 | 0 |
| Brand Management | 0.283 | 0.008 | 35.504 | 0.000 | 0.267 | 0 |
| Intercept | 0.000 | 0.005 | 0.015 | 0.988 | -0.009 | 0 |
| R Squared | 0.967 | | | | | |
| Adjusted R Squared | 0.967 | | | | | |
| F-Statistics | 10769.217 | | | | | |
| Prob. F | 0.000 | | | | | |
| OBS | 217 | | | | | |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

**Figure 8. 4*: Regression Results***




## 8.4 Moderation Analysis

A moderator variable is a third variable used to investigate the strength of the relationship between an independent and dependent variable. In other words, a moderator describes the level of change between independent and dependent variables quantified by the linear regression coefficient of the product term (Hair et al., 2014). In this study, two moderators, i.e., religion and regulation concerns, were proposed as moderators that will investigate the strength of the relationship between students' choice factors, parents' choice factors and employers' choice factors. An analysis of the moderators is presented below.

Note: the analysis has been separated into three parts:

1. Students' choice criteria (both prospective and current)
2. Parents' choice criteria
3. Employers' choice criteria

### 8.4.1 Prospective Students' Choice Criteria and Regulatory Concerns

A moderation test was run, with the composite of the ten prospective students' choice factors (CPSCF) as the predictor, prospective student choice (PSC) as the dependent variable and regulatory concerns as a moderator (see Table 8.57). There was a significant main effect found between CPSCF and PSC, β= 0.256, BCa CI [0.077, 0.435], Tstats=2.818, p < .005, and significant main effect of Regulatory Concerns on PSC, β= 0.95, BCa CI [0.270, 0.520], Tstats=6.260, p <.000. There was a significant interaction found by Regulatory Concerns on CPSCF and PSC, β = -0.061, BCa CI [0.002, 0.105], Tstats=1.998, p =.049. It was found that higher than average levels of Regulatory Concerns experienced a greater effect of CPSCF on PSC (β= 0.419, BCa CI [0.209, 0.628], Tstats=3,499, p <.000), when compared to average or lower than average levels of Regulatory Concerns (β= 0.256, Bca CI [0.077, 0.435], Tstats=2.818, p <.005, β= 0.093, Bca CI [-0.186, 0.371], Tstats=0.655, p < .514, respectively). From these results, it can be concluded that the effect of CPSCF on Prospective Student Choice (PSC) is moderated by Regulatory Concerns.

**Table 8. 57*: Regulatory Concerns on CPSCF and PSC***

| | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Constructs** | **Coefficient** | **SE** | **Tstats** | **Pvalue** | **LLCI** | **ULCI** |
| Constant | 9.862 | 0.200 | 49.349 | 0.000 | 9.467 | 10.256 |
| CPSCF | 0.256 | 0.091 | 2.818 | 0.005 | 0.077 | 0.435 |
| Regulatory Concerns | 0.395 | 0.063 | 6.260 | 0.000 | 0.270 | 0.520 |
| CPSCF_x_Regulatory Concerns | 0.061 | 0.021 | 1.998 | 0.049 | 0.002 | 0.105 |

| **Simple Slopes** | | | | 95% Confidence Interval | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Regulatory Concerns** | **Estimates** | | **SE** | **Lower** | **Upper** | **Tstats** | **Pvalue** |
| Low (-1SD) | -3.184 | 0.093 | 0.141 | -0.186 | 0.371 | 0.655 | 0.514 |
| Average | 0.000 | 0.256 | 0.091 | 0.077 | 0.435 | 2.818 | 0.005 |
| High (+1SD) | 3.184 | 0.419 | 0.106 | 0.209 | 0.628 | 3.944 | 0.000 |

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

### 8.4.2 Current Students' Choice Criteria and Regulatory Concerns

A moderation test was run, with the composite of the ten current students' choice factors (CCSCF) as the predictor, current student choice (CSC) as the dependent variable and

regulatory concerns as a moderator (See Table 8.58). There was a significant main effect found between CCSCF and CSC, β= 0.117, BCa CI [0.013, 0.220], Tstats=2.220, p < .027, and significant main effect of Regulatory Concerns on CSC, β= 0.209, BCa CI [0.106, 0.312], Tstats=3.986, p < .000. There was a significant interaction found by Regulatory Concerns on CCSCF and CSC, β = -0.086, BCa CI [0.002, 0.173], Tstats=2.019, p =.044. It was found that higher than average levels of Regulatory Concerns experienced a greater effect of CCSCF on CSC (β= 0.205, BCa CI [0.061, 0.348], Tstats=2,807, p <.005), when compared to average or lower than average levels of Regulatory Concerns (β= 0.117, BCa CI [0.013, 0.220], Tstats=2.220, p <.027, β= 0.029, BCa CI [-0.095, 0.154], Tstats=0.046, p < .645, respectively). From these results, it can be concluded that the effect of CCSCF on current Student Choice (CSC) is moderated by Regulatory Concerns.

**Table 8. 58*: Regulatory Concerns on CCSCF and CSC***

| | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constructs | Coefficient | SE | Tstats | Pvalue | LLCI | ULCI |
| Constant | -0.027 | 0.051 | -0.520 | 0.603 | -0.128 | 0.074 |
| CCSCF | 0.117 | 0.053 | 2.220 | 0.027 | 0.013 | 0.220 |
| Regulatory Concerns | 0.209 | 0.052 | 3.986 | 0.000 | 0.106 | 0.312 |
| CCSCF_x_Regulatory Concerns | 0.086 | 0.043 | 2.019 | 0.044 | 0.002 | 0.173 |

| Simple Slopes | | 95% Confidence Interval | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regulatory Concerns | Estimates | SE | Lower | Upper | Tstats | Pvalues |
| Low (-1SD) | -1.001 | 0.029 | 0.063 | -0.095 | 0.154 | 0.046 | 0.645 |
| Average | 0.000 | 0.117 | 0.053 | 0.013 | 0.220 | 2.220 | 0.027 |
| High (+1SD) | 1.001 | 0.205 | 0.073 | 0.061 | 0.348 | 2.807 | 0.005 |

### 8.4.3 Parent Choice Criteria and Regulatory Concerns

A moderation test was run, with the composite of the eight parent choice factors (CPCF) as the predictor, parent choice (PC) as the dependent variable and regulatory concerns as a moderator (see Table 8.59). There was a significant main effect found between CPCF and PC, β= 0.170, BCa CI [0.069, 0.271], Tstats=3.304, p < .001, and significant main effect of Regulatory Concerns on PC, β= 0.199, BCa CI [0.097, 0.300], Tstats=3.833, p < .000. There was a

significant interaction found by Regulatory Concerns on CPCF and PC, β = 0.103, BCa CI [0.013, 0.193], Tstats=2.258,

p =.045. It was found that higher than average levels of Regulatory Concerns experienced a greater effect of CPCF on PC (β= 0.273, BCa CI [0.133, 0.412], Tstats=3.844, p <.000), when compared to average or lower than average levels of Regulatory Concerns (β= 0.170, BCa CI [0.069, 0.271], Tstats=3.304, p <.001, β= 0.067, BCa CI [-0.064, 0.198], Tstats=0.006, p < .315, respectively). From these results, it can be concluded that the effect of CPCF on Parent Choice (PC) is moderated by Regulatory Concerns.

**Table 8. 59*: Regulatory Concerns on CPCF and PC***

| | | | | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constructs | Coefficient | SE | Tstats | Pvalue | LLCI | ULCI |
| Constant | -0.029 | 0.051 | -0.577 | 0.564 | -0.129 | 0.071 |
| CPCF | 0.170 | 0.514 | 3.304 | 0.001 | 0.069 | 0.271 |
| Regulatory Concerns | 0.199 | 0.052 | 3.833 | 0.000 | 0.097 | 0.300 |
| CPCF_x_Regulatory Concerns | 0.103 | 0.046 | 2.258 | 0.045 | 0.013 | 0.193 |

| Simple Slopes | | 95% Confidence Interval | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regulatory Concerns | Estimates | SE | Lower | Upper | Tstats | Pvalues |
| Low (-1SD) | 1.001 | 0.067 | 0.066 | -0.064 | 0.198 | 1.006 | 0.315 |
| Average | 0.000 | 0.170 | 0.051 | 0.069 | 0.271 | 3.304 | 0.001 |
| High (+1SD) | 1.001 | 0.273 | 0.071 | 0.133 | 0.412 | 3.844 | 0.000 |

### 8.4.4 Employers Choice Criteria and Regulatory Concerns

A moderation test was run, with the composite of the four employers' choice factors (CECF) as the predictor, employers' choice (EC) as the dependent variable and regulatory concerns as a moderator (See Table 8.60). There was a significant main effect found between CECF and EC, β= 0.209, BCa CI [0.106, 0.312], Tstats=3.986, p < .000, and significant main effect of Regulatory Concerns on EC, β= 0.117, BCa CI [0.013, 0.220], Tstats=2.220, p < .027. There was a significant interaction found by Regulatory Concerns on CECF and EC, β = 0.087, BCa CI [0.002, 0.173], Tstats=2.019, p =.044. It was found that higher than average levels of Regulatory Concerns experienced a greater effect of CECF on EC (β= 0.297, BCa CI [0.156, 0.437],

Tstats=4.147, p <.000), when compared to average or lower than average levels of Regulatory Concerns (β= 0.209, BCa CI [0.106, 0.312], Tstats=3.986, p <.000, β= 0.121, BCa CI [-0.006, 0.248], Tstats=1.881, p < .061, respectively). From these results, it can be concluded that the effect of CECF on Employers Choice (EC) is moderated by Regulatory Concerns.

**Table 8. 60*: Regulatory Concerns on CECF and EC***

| | | | | 95% Confidence Interval | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constructs | Coefficient | SE | Tstats | Pvalue | LLCI | ULCI |
| Constant | -0.027 | 0.051 | -0.520 | 0.603 | -0.128 | 0.074 |
| CECF | 0.209 | 0.052 | 3.986 | 0.000 | 0.106 | 0.312 |
| Regulatory Concerns | 0.117 | 0.053 | 2.220 | 0.027 | 0.013 | 0.220 |
| CECF_x_Regulatory Concerns | 0.087 | 0.043 | 2.019 | 0.044 | 0.002 | 0.173 |

| Regulatory Concerns | Estimates | | SE | Lower | Upper | Tstats | Pvalues |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low (-1SD) | 1.001 | 0.121 | 0.064 | -0.006 | 0.248 | 1.881 | 0.061 |
| Average | 0.000 | 0.209 | 0.052 | 0.106 | 0.312 | 3.986 | 0.000 |
| High (+1SD) | 1.001 | 0.297 | 0.072 | 0.156 | 0.437 | 4.147 | 0.000 |

### 8.4.5 Prospective Students' Choice Criteria and Religion

A moderation test was run, with the composite of the ten prospective students' choice factors (CPSCF) as the predictor, prospective student choice (PSC) as the dependent variable and Religion as a moderator (See Table 8.61). There was a significant main effect found between CPSCF and PSC, β= 0.467, BCa CI [0.370, 0.564], Tstats=9.454, p < .000, and significant main effect of Religion on PSC, β= 0.238, BCa CI [0.136, 0.341], Tstats=4.556, p < .000. There was a significant interaction found by Religion on CPSCF and PSC, β = 0.106, BCa CI [0.026, 0.185], Tstats=2.609, p =.009. It was found that higher than average levels of Religion experienced a greater effect of CPSCF on PSC (β= 0.563, BCa CI [0.434, 0.691], Tstats=8,600, p <.000), when compared to average or lower than average levels of Religion (β= 0.467, BCa CI [0.370, 0.564], Tstats=9.454, p <.000, β= 0.371, BCa CI [0.258, 0.484], Tstats=6.452, p < .000, respectively). From these results, it can be concluded that the effect of CPSCF on Prospective Student Choice (PSC) is moderated by Religion.

**Table 8. 61*: Religion on CPSCF and PSC***

| | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constructs | Coefficient | SE | Tstats | Pvalue | LLCI | ULCI |
| Constant | -0.060 | 0.043 | -1.411 | 0.159 | -0.144 | 0.024 |
| CPSCF | 0.467 | 0.049 | 9.454 | 0.000 | 0.370 | 0.564 |
| Religion | 0.238 | 0.052 | 4.556 | 0.000 | 0.136 | 0.341 |
| CPSCF_x_Religion | 0.106 | 0.041 | 2.609 | 0.009 | 0.026 | 0.185 |

| Simple Slopes | | 95% Confidence Interval | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Religion | Estimates | SE | Lower | Upper | Tstats | Pvalues |
| Low (-1SD) | -0.908 | 0.371 | 0.057 | 0.258 | 0.484 | 6.452 | 0.000 |
| Average | 0.000 | 0.467 | 0.049 | 0.370 | 0.564 | 9.454 | 0.000 |
| High (+1SD) | 0.908 | 0.563 | 0.065 | 0.434 | 0.691 | 8.600 | 0.000 |

### 8.4.6 Current Students Choice Criteria and Religion

A moderation test was run, with the composite of the ten current students' choice factors (CCSCF) as the predictor, current student choice (CSC) as the dependent variable and Religion as a moderator (see Table 8.62). There was a significant main effect found between CCSCF and CSC, β= 0.477, BCa CI [0.380, 0.574], Tstats=2.220, p < .027, and significant main effect of Religion on CSC, β= 0.248, Bca CI [0.146, 0.351], Tstats=4.566, p < .000. There was a significant interaction found by Religion on CCSCF and CSC, β = 0.116, Bca CI [0.036, 0.195], Tstats=2.619, p =.010. It was found that higher than average levels of Religion experienced a greater effect of CCSCF on CSC (β= 0.573, Bca CI [0.444, 0.701], Tstats=8.610, p <.000), when compared to average or lower than average levels of Religion (β= 0.477, Bca CI [0.380, 0.574], Tstats=9.464, p <.000, β= 0.381, Bca CI [0.268, 0.494], Tstats=6.462, p < .000, respectively). From these results, it can be concluded that the effect of CCSCF on current Student Choice (CSC) is moderated by Religion.

**Table 8. 62*: Religion on CCSCF and CSC***

| | | 95% Confidence Interval | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constructs | Coefficient | SE | Tstats | Pvalue | LLCI | ULCI |
| Constant | -0.050 | 0.053 | -1.401 | 0.169 | -0.134 | 0.034 |
| CCSCF | 0.477 | 0.059 | 9.464 | 0.000 | 0.380 | 0.574 |
| Religion | 0.248 | 0.062 | 4.566 | 0.000 | 0.146 | 0.351 |
| CCSCF_x_Religion | 0.116 | 0.051 | 2.619 | 0.019 | 0.036 | 0.195 |

| Simple Slopes | | 95% Confidence Interval | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Religion | Estimates | SE | Lower | Upper | Tstats | Pvalues |
| Low (-1SD) | -0.908 | 0.381 | 0.067 | 0.268 | 0.494 | 6.462 | 0.000 |
| Average | 0.000 | 0.477 | 0.059 | 0.380 | 0.574 | 9.464 | 0.000 |
| High (+1SD) | 0.908 | 0.573 | 0.075 | 0.444 | 0.701 | 8.610 | 0.000 |

### 8.4.7 Parent Choice Criteria and Religion

A moderation test was run, with the composite of the eight parent choice factors (CPCF) as the predictor, parent choice (PC) as the dependent variable and Religion as a moderator (See Table 8.64). There was a significant main effect found between CPCF and PC, β= 0.426, BCa CI [0.354, 0.498], Tstats=11.558, p < .000, and significant main effect of Religion on PC, β= 0.440, BCa CI [0.362, 0.517], Tstats=11.169, p < .000. There was a significant interaction found by Religion on CPCF and PC, β = 0.104, BCa CI [0.164, 2.044], Tstats=3.401, p =.000. It was found that higher than average levels of Religion experienced a greater effect of CPCF on PC (β= 0.331, BCa CI [0.242, 0.421], Tstats=7.282, p <.000), when compared to average or lower than average levels of Religion (β= 0.426, BCa CI [0.354, 0.498], Tstats=11.558, p <.000, β= 0.520, BCa CI [0.428, 0.613], Tstats=11.117, p < .000, respectively). From these results, it can be concluded that the effect of CPCF on parent Choice (PC) is moderated by Religion.

**Table 8. 63*: Religion on CPCF and PC***

| | 95% Confidence Interval | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constructs | Coefficient | SE | Tstats | Pvalue | LLCI | ULCI |
| Constant | 0.051 | 0.033 | 1.550 | 0.122 | -0.136 | 0.116 |
| CPCF | 0.426 | 0.037 | 11.558 | 0.000 | 0.354 | 0.498 |
| Religion | 0.440 | 0.039 | 11.169 | 0.000 | 0.362 | 0.517 |
| CPCF_x_Religion | 0.104 | 0.031 | 3.401 | 0.000 | 0.164 | 2.044 |

| Simple Slopes | 95% Confidence Interval | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Religion | Estimates | SE | Lower | Upper | Tstats | Pvalues |
| Low (-1SD) | -0.908 | 0.520 | 0.047 | 0.428 | 0.613 | 11.117 | 0.000 |
| Average | 0.000 | 0.426 | 0.037 | 0.354 | 0.498 | 11.558 | 0.000 |
| High (+1SD) | 0.908 | 0.331 | 0.046 | 0.242 | 0.421 | 7.282 | 0.000 |

### 8.4.8 Employers Choice Criteria and Religion

A moderation test was run, with the composite of the four employers' choice factors (CECF) as the predictor, Employers Choice (EC) as the dependent variable and Religion as a moderator (See Table 8.65). There was a significant main effect found between CECF and EC, β= 0.217, BCa CI [0.113, 0.320], Tstats=4.124, p < .000, and significant main effect of Religion on EC, β= 0.309, BCa CI [0.206, 0.412], Tstats=5.895, p < .000. There was a significant interaction found by Religion on CECF and EC, β = 0.186, BCa CI [0.102, 0.273], Tstats=4.286, p =.000. It was found that higher than average levels of Religion experienced a greater effect of CECF on EC (β= 0.215, BCa CI [0.061, 0.348], Tstats=2.944, p < .003), when compared to average or lower than average levels of Religion (β= 0.127, BCa CI [0.013, 0.220], Tstats=2.413, p < .016, β= 0.039, BCa CI [- 0.095, 0.154], Tstats=0.619, p < .536, respectively). From these results, it can be concluded that the effect of CECF on Employers Choice (EC) is moderated by Religion.

**Table 8. 64*: Religion on CECF and EC***

| | 95% Confidence Interval | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constructs | Coefficient | SE | Tstats | Pvalue | LLCI | ULCI |
| Constant | 0.073 | 0.051 | 1.426 | 0.155 | -0.028 | 0.174 |
| CECF | 0.217 | 0.053 | 4.124 | 0.000 | 0.113 | 0.320 |
| Religion | 0.309 | 0.052 | 5.895 | 0.000 | 0.206 | 0.412 |
| CECF_x_Religion | 0.186 | 0.043 | 4.286 | 0.000 | 0.102 | 0.273 |

| Simple Slopes | 95% Confidence Interval | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Religion | Estimates | SE | Lower | Upper | Tstats | Pvalues |
| Low (-1SD) | -1.001 | 0.039 | 0.063 | -0.095 | 0.154 | 0.619 | 0.536 |
| Average | 0.000 | 0.127 | 0.053 | 0.013 | 0.220 | 2.413 | 0.016 |
| High (+1SD) | 1.001 | 0.215 | 0.073 | 0.061 | 0.348 | 2.944 | 0.003 |

## 8.5 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the results of the study. Four separate analyses were done for prospective students, current students, parents of students and employers. Various statistical analyses were done including EFA, CFA and multiple linear regression. Additionally, moderation analysis was done for the two moderators, i.e., regulatory concerns and religion. The discussion of these results is presented in chapter eight.

# CHAPTER NINE DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

## 9.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the study. Specifically, the chapter addresses the research objective/questions and situates them in the context of the literature. This is a combined discussion involving both the qualitative and quantitative phases.

## 9.1 Students' choice criteria for considering and selecting private HEIs

The study has revealed that several factors account for the choice that students make during the selection of private HEIs. On the part of students (i.e., current and prospective students), it was identified from the qualitative exploratory studies that Cost, Institution Reputation, Location, Personal Aspiration, Physical Facilities, Programme Availability, Recommendation, Admission Process, Quality Tuition and Marketing Communication are all factors that students take into consideration in selecting a private higher education institution. This finding was corroborated by the quantitative explanatory studies, which identified positive and statistically significant relationship between cost, institution reputation, location, personal aspiration, physical facilities, programme availability, recommendation, admission process, quality tuition and marketing communication and student choice criteria. These results are consistent with the previous studies (See Dynarski et al., 2018; Koricich et al., 2018; Primadini et al., 2019; Chen & Esangbedo, 2018; Ishii, 2022; Shamsudin et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020).

The results from the study can be situated in the context of decision theory. Decision theory aims to explain how people make decisions in the face of uncertainty and risk (Fisher & Hamilton, 2021). When it comes to making decisions, Främling (2020) argues that the things to consider are prospects, which can be viewed as either gains or losses (Rieger & Wang, 2006; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992; Wakker, 2003). Thus, prospective student makes a choice based on the expected gains or losses associated with the decision. In this context the gains or losses

are the various factors identified such as cost, institution reputation, location, personal aspiration, physical facilities, programme availability, recommendation, admission process, quality tuition and marketing communication. The decision theory fits the current study's scope and issues under interrogation. The student choice for private higher education hinges on an ideal HEI, which is a choice to be made between private and public HEIs. Between the ideal and the suitable alternatives are factors that are both positive and negative gains that influence the final decision.

The variables for student selection of PHEIs were evaluated based on both prospective and current students. The prospective students are those pursuing admission to PHEIs after graduating from senior high school. According the quantitative results from the field, the factors: location, personal aspiration, physical facilities, programme availability and recommendation were the most significant predictors of PHEI selection.

Geographic/location concerns entail evaluating convenience, living expenses, and closeness to one's residence. The location significantly influences social life, employment prospects, and the entire student experience, rendering it a vital consideration in the decision-making process for selecting PHEIs. The predictor was complemented by institutional reputation, whereas students' long-term objectives and career aspirations are crucial factors. They prefer institutions that correspond with their personal and professional aspirations, directing their selections towards programs that facilitate their goals. The variety of programmes provided by the PHEIs directly impacted the selection of potential students. In the Ghanaian environment, certain PHEIs are recognised for their programme reputation, attracting students to those universities. This indicates that prospective students frequently pursue colleges offering particular courses or fields of study that correspond with their professional aspirations, rendering program availability a crucial determinant in their decision-making process.

From the perspective of current students, recommendation, marketing communication and programme availability. For example, cost was identified as a critical factor in the selection of a PHEI. Students evaluate the financial implications of their decisions by comparing tuition fees to the prospective return on their investment, as per the decision theory (Främling, 2020). This implies that students may be discouraged by a high cost unless it is justified by perceived quality and outcomes. In terms of reputation as a determinant, according to decision theory, students might use rankings, alumni achievements, and employer perceptions as biases to assess quality that informs their choice of PHEI. This element implies that a robust reputation frequently bolsters faith in the institution, positively affecting decisions current and prospective students in the selection of PHEI.

Further, with regard to choice actualization, the results also revealed that prospective and current students' coping with the predictive factors of whether or not they enter the PHEI they intended to choose. Specifically, financial, environmental, psychological and social factors which are the constructs of the theory all increased the likelihood of actualizing the choice intention. The correlations identified between decisional choice factors and attitudes and behaviours regarding the selection of PHEIs align with previous research utilising decision theory elements (Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Främling, 2020; Fisher & Hamilton, 2021). However, the current study's findings regarding the positive influence of physical facilities on students' choice of PHEI contradict those of Hunt et al. (2021), who reported the opposite. This discrepancy may be attributed to variations in geographical contexts and cultural backgrounds of the respondents.

Interestingly, the findings regarding the cost, quality of tuition and admission process were low predictors from the perspective of prospective and current students. While the students evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of selecting a particular PHEI based on those variables, they were not prioritised relative to the most influential per the results. The inference

from this data suggests that selection of PHEIs is predominantly comprised of individuals from economically advantaged backgrounds (what Regenwetter et al., 2022; Ladrón de Guevara Cortés, Tolosa and Rojo, 2023), leading them to see cost as a less significant determinant in their selection of PHEIs relative to other considerations.

### 9.2 Parents' choice criteria for selecting particular private HEIs for their wards

The study has revealed that several factors account for the choice that parents make during the selection of private HEIs. On the part of the parents, it was identified from the qualitative exploratory studies that institutional reputation, fee/cost, location/proximity, admission process, availability of programmes, personal aspiration, recommendation, and physical facilities are all factors influencing parent choice of private HEI. The quantitative explanatory phase of the study corroborated these factors as having a positive and statistically significant association with parents' choice criteria of private HEI. The extant literature (e.g., Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Kumar, 2016; Wong et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020) has documented these parent choice factors as influencing their selection of private HEI for their wards.

From the analyses of the findings, the study discovered that there is a significant influence between parents' roles and students' PHEI choices since the hypothesis was confirmed. PHEI choice-making is a complex decision since many factors determine students' choice of higher education institution. The students should be properly guided for them to make a good decision on a career. The influences of parents' roles on students' choice of PHEI cannot be overemphasized. Empirical support of this study is Dhaliwal (2022) who emphasized the parents' roles in students' choice of higher education, and he stated that the parents influence the making of decisions and children's career development and also stated that parents have a major function to play in influencing their children. To support this study, Zhang et al. (2020) stated that parents' occupation influences the students' career choice since they observe their parents

progressing in their profession. Parents influence the students through advice, counselling, as a model, career they are into etc. From the findings, we can conclude that parents' roles and influence are paramount to the choice of PHEI.

Similar to the first research objective, when making decisions, Ladrón de Guevara Cortés, Tolosa, and Rojo (2023) and Mongin and Baccelli (2021) contends that prospects, which can be perceived as gains or losses are important elements of the decision-making process. As a result, the parent makes a decision based on the predicted advantages or losses from the decision. The numerous elements highlighted as wins or losses in this context include institutional reputation, fee/cost, location/proximity, admission process, availability of programmes, personal aspiration, recommendation, and physical amenities. The study has clarified the importance of decision theory based on the findings from the parents' perspective. The parent's choice of private higher education is dependent on an ideal HEI, which must be chosen between private and public HEIs. Between the ideal and suitable alternatives are aspects that influence the final selection, and this range from positive to negative gains.

### 9.3 Employers' perceptions of private HEI brands and their products

Employers have perceptions about the private HEI products and brands. From the qualitative phase of the study, it was identified that employers' perceptions of private HEI are influenced by the institutional reputation of the HEI, quality of faculty of the HEI and the resources of the HEI. The qualitative phase of the study corroborated the results from the quantitative phase by identifying the following factors: institutional reputation, quality of faculty, evidence alumni job performance as having positive and statistically significant relationship with employers' choice of private HEI. The results are consistent with the literature (Knight & Yorke 2004; McNair 2003; Sin & Neave, 2016; Hosain et al., 2021; Bailly, 2008; Succi & Canovi, 2020). It been noted that employers generally have confidence in higher education and value the college

degree (Bailly, 2008; Succi & Canovi, 2020). They believe that a liberal education or preparation for more than a specific job provides knowledge and skills that are important for career success. Interestingly, employers say, college graduates from private HEIs are more effective at explaining what they bring to the table (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Personal aptitudes and mind-sets also play a role in the career success of private HEI students. Breadth and depth of learning are essential to long-term performance (Sin & Neave, 2016). Completion of active and applied learning experiences in college gives job applicants a clear advantage in the hiring process, which is what the PHEIs aspire to achieve.

Due to the nature of their curriculum, grooming, and emphasis on preparing their students for the real-world employment market, graduates of private universities can remain ahead of their public university counterparts (Bennett, 2019; Helyer & Lee, 2014; Cheng et al., 2022). The curricula are designed with employability in mind. The development of interpersonal skills, such as improved communication, is emphasised. Regular interactive sessions facilitate networking opportunities for university students with potential employers (Bennett, 2019; Helyer & Lee, 2014; Cheng et al., 2022). These are some of the factors that continue to put private university graduates ahead of their public university counterparts in corporate and other rapidly expanding private sector positions. The study revealed that effective links with industry players make the career pathway easier for private university students (Bennett, 2019; Helyer & Lee, 2014; Cheng et al., 2022).

Positioning the results within the stakeholder theory of the theoretical framework of this study, the findings validate the assertion that employers are essential stakeholders in the formulation and execution of higher education curricula, especially regarding their urgency and legitimacy. The study confirms that companies, confronted with urgent demands for competent workers, are compelled to push for particular competences and knowledge areas in curriculum. For

example, during periods of swift technological progress, industries may urgently require graduates proficient in data analytics, coding, or cybersecurity. Consequently, the employers in this study have confirmed their significant influence in identifying which PHEIs they consider the most exemplary in providing education. This urgency guarantees the relevance of educational programmes and ensures that graduates are equipped to fulfil contemporary market demands as put forward by earlier studies (see e.g., Khoshtaria et al., 2020; Asiedu et al., 2020).

This study affirms that employers, with substantial competence in their domains, offer legitimacy to their contributions to curriculum building within the framework of stakeholder theory. The interview indicated that their first-hand understanding of employment requirements and workforce trends renders their insights significant in influencing pertinent learning outcome. Furthermore, employers serve as a vital stakeholder group in the job market. Their participation can augment the legitimacy of educational programs, indicating to students that the university is attuned to industry demands and expectations.

Inference from the findings suggests that employers, as stakeholders in higher education, possess both legitimacy and urgency in the curriculum development process. The skills and competencies that are taught can be significantly influenced by employers' insights and demands, thereby ensuring that graduates are adequately prepared for the world of work. Nevertheless, it is imperative for educational institutions to strike a balance between academic objectives and industry expectation.

On the other side, the demands of employers about programme offerings and curricular development conflict with the requirements of affiliates and regulators sometimes, ultimately presenting obstacles for managers of PHEIs and creating a complex and uncertain environment for them to navigate. The subsequent section covers the challenges encountered by

administrators of private higher education institutions in Ghana in attempt to balance the demand of all stakeholders.

### 9.4 The challenges faced by managers of private HEIs in Ghana

Despite the dramatic growth in their numbers, private universities face serious threats from public universities which, if not properly addressed, could result in a significant number of them closing down. The study identified several problems confronting the mangers of PHEIs. Among them are: declining enrolment, rising drop-out rates, increased competition, inadequate resources, inadequate capacity development, high cost of accreditation, institutional autonomy, and identity crisis.

The existing literature indicates that PHEIs in Ghana are facing a major issue: they are unable to recruit the necessary number of students because of the rapid expansion of public universities (Tetteh et al., 2021; Awotwe et al., 2020). The current circumstances suggest a challenging outlook for private universities, as their public counterparts, which also serve as mentors to PHEIs, have adopted the strategy of establishing satellite campuses across the country. This includes using second-cycle school buildings and some of the campuses of the private universities and colleges to offer academic programmes (Tetteh et al., 2021; Awotwe et al., 2020).

The enrolment of students in private higher education institutions is on a consistent downward trend across all academic levels. The enrolment of non-research master's degrees has seen a downward trend from the academic year of 2013/2014. Moreover, the Education Sector Performance Report for the year 2016, which can be accessed on the official website of the Ministry of Education (MoE), provides explicit evidence of a decline of 4% in student enrolment for the academic year 2014/2015 in comparison to the preceding year, 2013/2014.

Based on the figures, it is evident that there has been a decline in enrolment levels for quite some time (Njifen, 2023). The findings of this study are consistent with this observed trend.

Added to their predicament is the fact that they are unable to advertise to attract students due to the financial constraints facing them following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (Alam & Tiwari, 2021). The recent Covid-19 pandemic is currently posing a significant risk to the financial viability of private tertiary institutions (PTIs). Their capabilities are restricted to the successful execution of their assigned tasks and their capacity to deliver high-quality educational programmes and materials to individuals across various fields of study. The issue of financial sustainability in educational institutions often has far-reaching consequences that progressively intensify, owing to the reduction in government financing and the loss in student enrolment (Wu 2017; Marginson 2017). Between 2004 and 2012, an average of 104 each year of private tertiary colleges in the United States ceased operations due to financial sustainability challenges (Greenwell, 2017).

In the African context, PHEIs face numerous financial challenges. According to Ahmed (2015), in Nigeria, it has been observed that PHEIs face a deficiency in the necessary resources required to effectively pursue their objectives. According to Mugo and Ngahu (2015), numerous PHEIs in Kenya have faced outright closure due to their financial inability to sustain themselves. According to Addo (2018), a significant number of private universities in Ghana are currently facing severe challenges and are in a precarious state. Prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, many private universities in Ghana had already implemented workforce reductions as a strategic measure to ensure their financial sustainability. At present, PHEIs are actively evaluating various strategies for implementing cost reduction initiatives. The primary source of income for private higher education institutions (PHEIs), namely tuition fees, is seeing a decline because of intense competition from public educational institutions. Most administrators in

private educational institutions are voicing concerns over the prevailing pattern of enrolment competition. This is due to the substantial amount of effort required to admit a maximum of 1,000 students within a single academic year (Nsowah-Nuamah, 2017; Donkor, 2017; Siaw, 2018; Bediako, 2019). According to Alhassan (2017) and Eide (2018), there is a prevailing expectation among educational professionals that PHEIs will cease to operate prior to the year 2028. The aforementioned projections necessitate collaborative endeavours to address the myriad challenges and obstacles faced by PHEIs. This is because of the substantial influence these institutions have on the socio- economic development of the global economy through their provision of enhanced access to superior educational opportunities (Yanka, 2017).

The institutional theory is associated with the empirical results of this investigation. The aforementioned theory offers a framework for comprehending the operations of organisations, particularly private higher education institutions, within their social, cultural, and regulatory contexts. This thesis asserts the challenges encountered by managers and administrators of PHEIs in reconciling institutional autonomy with external factors.

Institutional autonomy denotes the capacity of higher education institutions to self-govern, make independent decisions, and formulate their educational programs without excessive external influence (Eaton, 2021). Autonomy is essential for the PHEIs in Ghana to preserve their distinct identity, mission, and educational philosophy, enabling them to innovate and successfully address student needs. These educational institutions must obtain legitimacy from several stakeholders, including regulatory organisations, accrediting agencies, affiliates and the public, to ensure their existence and ongoing acceptance within the community. This endeavour has constrained their autonomy, necessitating adherence to external standards and rules.

While the PHEIs seek legitimacy, they concurrently endeavour to preserve their uniqueness and principles. This balancing effort influences their operational decisions and curriculum

development. To maintain relevance within the institutional landscape, the PHEIs in Ghana, as shown by the findings, must embrace techniques from other successful PHEIs and public HEIs to bolster their legitimacy and competitiveness.

The study findings indicated that professional norms and expectations from affiliate institutions and accrediting agencies influence institutional practices, necessitating alignment with these norms to attain credibility, hence further constraining autonomy. Lepori (2016) and Dee and Leišytė (2016) denote this as complexities in the management of higher education. It should not be overlooked that PHEIs frequently possess distinct missions grounded in religious, philosophical, or pedagogical beliefs. Preserving autonomy enables them to fulfil these tasks and cultivate a distinctive educational atmosphere. The effort to manage these complexities and uncertainties ultimately leads to a certain homogeneity in educational programmes, potentially affecting their autonomy.

In sum up, institutional theory offers significant insights into the intricate link between institutional autonomy and the external constraints encountered by PHEIs in Ghana. Although these PHEIs endeavour to preserve their uniqueness and address community requirements, they must also contend with the legitimacy expectations set by salient stakeholders such as regulatory authorities, professional standards setters and associations, not ruling out the market forces as well. Comprehending this dynamic can assist PHEIs in reconciling their autonomy with the imperative of adjusting to a changing educational environment.

### 9.5 The role that regulators play in PHEIs' sustainability

Educational regulators play a critical role in the growth and development of tertiary educational institutions across the globe. The results from the study indicate that the regulator's role in the sustainability of the PHEIs lies within the areas of quality assurance, annual reporting, the promotion of transparent governance and best practices, and accreditation and reaccreditation.

It is incumbent upon governments to ensure that their populations are afforded a quality education, regardless of the source from which it is obtained (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). In the context of public sector schools, it is imperative to establish systems that guarantee the provision of teaching staff, facilities, equipment, and materials of the highest quality within the constraints of available funding (Anthonysamy et al., 2020). In the context of private sector provision, similar principles are applicable, where the imperative is in the development of monitoring and control mechanisms to assure the delivery of services by both public and private sectors at the highest level (Aithal & Aithal, 2019; Anthonysamy et al., 2020). This is where the role of the educational regulator comes in.

The regulation of private education should aim to guarantee the provision of education of superior quality, while also fostering investment, especially in emerging nations where there is a significant demand for education and limited government resources (Chankseliani et al., 2021). Frequently, government regulations seem to be intentionally crafted to deter private investment, with no corresponding improvement in the quality of education. One prevalent characteristic of the regulatory framework is the tendency for government funding policies to exhibit a preference for public provision over private provision. This preference is observed despite the potential negative effects on equity and efficiency within the sector, and the absence of any discernible public policy justification for this distinction (Bamberger et al., 2019). The regulatory and finance structures in numerous nations are inadequate to foster the expansion of private education. In the long run, it is probable that the quality and sustainability of the private education industry will be diminished, hence limiting the potential benefits it may offer to the education sector of a given nation (Bamberger et al., 2019; Chankseliani et al., 2021; Aithal & Aithal, 2019; Anthonysamy et al., 2020).

Governments possess the whole authority to implement stringent scrutiny and regulations on individuals seeking to establish private schools and higher education institutions, and private universities acknowledge and respect this prerogative. Educational institutions of high calibre acknowledge the value of well-designed regulatory frameworks, which encompass mechanisms for Quality Assurance. These frameworks serve as a safeguard against substandard providers who may undermine the private sector market, particularly in cases where the demand is not as discerning as it could be (Bamberger et al., 2019; Chankseliani et al., 2021; Aithal & Aithal, 2019; Anthonysamy et al., 2020). The long-term political and economic viability of the private education industry in emerging nations also depends on a regulatory environment that fosters the private sector and guarantees the calibre of private services. Market perceptions of PHE quality are crucial and are easily damaged (Bamberger et al., 2019; Chankseliani et al., 2021; Aithal & Aithal, 2019; Anthonysamy et al., 2020). Unfavourable press concerning PHE providers that deliver subpar training to students can damage the industry's standing, make it harder for it to be regarded as a reliable substitute for PHE providers, and even force governments to apply austere policies that are detrimental to the growth and development of PHEIs. This is especially true in nations where the private education industry has only recently been established (Bamberger et al., 2019; Chankseliani et al., 2021; Aithal & Aithal, 2019; Anthonysamy et al., 2020). In essence, educational regulators assist in the sustainability of PHEIs in diverse ways, as discussed in this current study. There is still more work to be done in Africa to improve regulatory frameworks for private school education. Implementing a well-formulated, enabling legislative and regulatory framework is critical to supporting the development of private higher education in emerging nations. This framework should create the circumstances for private schools and tertiary education institutions to operate successfully and efficiently, while also guaranteeing that education is of high quality.

The findings provide an example of a situation in which a key external stakeholder, the regulator, exerts coercive pressure on public higher education institutions to be responsible and accountable in the areas of quality assurance, annual reporting, the promotion of transparent governance and best practices, as well as accreditation and reaccreditation. According to the institutional theory and the stakeholder theory, various interest groups exert varying degrees of pressure on an organisation and have varying expectations (Scott, 2013; Simoni, Bini, & Bellucci, 2020). This is the case according to both theories.

The fact that the regulator was the source of the most significant institutional constraints on higher education institutions in Ghana was not surprising. This is in contrast to other jurisdictions, where civil society organisations play a significant role for developing the educational landscape of higher education institutions. The regulatory body requires public higher education institutions to comply with laws and procedures in order to deliver excellent education in order to reach the sustainable development target 4 by the year 2023. However, it also puts pressure on PHEIs to pay accreditation fees regardless of whether or not they generate sufficient cash from student enrolment.

The regulator is the most prominent stakeholder possessing power, legitimacy, and urgency, as it has the authority to grant or revoke the operational licence of the PHEIs. Contrary to the results of several studies in the institutional and stakeholder domain (e.g., Appe & Barragán, 2017; Calderón-Hernández et al., 2020), it was not entirely evident in the case of the PHEIs that rules and regulations were the primary determinants of accountable governance in higher education. Nongovernmental entities, including civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations, primarily influence higher education institutions' commitment to delivering quality education.

The significance of regulators lies in the enhancement of a PHEI's legitimacy and public acceptance upon their engagement. The PHEIs are addressing the issues highlighted by the regulator concerning accreditation, reaccreditation, and curricular quality, as the Ghanaian regulator has recently adopted a strategy of "naming and shaming" higher education institutions for failing to comply with regulatory standards.

### 9.6 The Moderating role of regulatory concerns and religion

The field of higher education has been subject to extensive control by state authorities and has predominantly been under public ownership. Initially, it was perceived to advance society's modernisation efforts, and later, it was recognised as a mechanism for facilitating social mobility and fostering economic progress (Teixeira & Amaral, 2001). The regulation of private universities and colleges in Ghana is overseen by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). This governmental body is responsible for monitoring and managing the creation, presence, and operations of these educational institutions. To lawfully function, private universities and colleges are required to obtain accreditation from the GTEC. State regulation influence stakeholders' perception about HEIs and in particular PHEIs (Chankseliani et al., 2021; Bamberger et al., 2019). A high level of regulation will provide a quality assurance mechanism for stakeholders, thus increasing stakeholders' confidence in the choice and selection of PHEI.

The selection of a higher education institution can pose considerable challenges for secondary school students and their families. The inclusion of religious considerations during this process may introduce further complexity (Baliyan, 2016; Noel-Levitz, 2012; Nurnberg et al., 2012). In addition to the factors typically taken into account by most students, certain high school seniors incorporate religious considerations into their complex decision-making process. For certain individuals, religion holds a preeminent position in the decision-making process,

surpassing other factors in significance. Historically, institutions of higher education have been closely linked to religious faith, as evidenced by the fact that numerous private schools and universities were initially established under the auspices of Christian denominations (Mixon et al., 2004).

According to Sider and Unruh (2004), there is a belief that religious practices serve an adaptive purpose and have arisen as a means to promote survival and reproductive advantages through the processes of gene selection or gene-culture coevolution dynamics. Thus, it may be inferred that religion has a significant role in shaping the decisions made by individuals, including their selection of a higher education school. Religious affiliation frequently factors into the decision-making process of students and parents when evaluating potential college options. The consideration of several factors is crucial in the development of one's college selection. It is imperative to acknowledge that while religious beliefs may exert a causal influence on certain activities, they do not constitute the sole determinant of conduct.

# CHAPTER TEN SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

## 10.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of and conclusion to the study. Specifically, the chapter provides the key findings of the study, the contribution of the study, managerial and practical implications, policy implications and the study's limitations.

## 10.1 Summary

The paramount role higher education (HE) plays in economic and human capital development has been widely acknowledged. However, private universities and colleges in Ghana have been witnessing a continuous decline in student enrolment compared to public HEIs. This situation poses a serious existential threat to their survival and sustainability if left unaddressed.

The study had the purpose of investigating the relevant stakeholders' choice criteria of PHEIs in Ghana. Specifically, the study addresses the following objectives: 1) To analyse students' choice criteria for considering and selecting private HEIs, 2) To examine parents' choice criteria for selecting particular a private HEIs for their wards, 3) To explore employers' perception of private HE brands and their products, 4) To investigate the challenges of enrolment faced by managers of private higher education institutions in Ghana, 5) To assess the role of regulatory agencies and religion in the survival of PHEIs.

The study adopted a mixed method approach: a qualitative method was used to explore the phenomenon and a quantitative method was then used to corroborate the results. The first chapter of this research introduced the study: the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives and the corresponding research questions. Further, the significance of the study and the organisation of the whole study were also presented. The second chapter discussed

the unique context of the study and the conditions under which private higher education institutions in Ghana operate. A detailed description of Ghana in which the study is situated was provided as well as the nature of higher institutions that exist in the country. The chapter also highlights the challenges that confront private higher institutions and the need for coordinated efforts by all stakeholders to help manage the complexities and uncertainties that threaten their growth, survival, and sustainability. The third chapter of this thesis dealt with the various theories that were identified in this study to influence the behaviour of prospective students as it pertains to student choice. In all a total of five theories, namely, stakeholder, prospect, institutional, planned behaviour and decision theory, were integrated for the purposes of explaining the various factors that influence stakeholders' choices and perception of PHEIs. The fourth chapter dealt with the literature governing the factors that affect higher education. The chapter discusses issues such as the sustainability of PHEIs, price sensitivity, performance of PHEIs, geographical aspects and many others. In essence this chapter sought to bring to bear the various factors in the literature that have been identified to influence student of choice of PHEI. The fifth chapter presented the conceptual framework as well as the resulting hypothesis. In all a total of 16 hypotheses were discussed. These hypotheses sought to examine the relationship between the factors identified to influence student choices of PHEI. The sixth chapter featured the research philosophy, approach and strategy adopted for this study, as well as the choice of research used. Furthermore, this chapter presented the steps and sequences of techniques performed in the research analysis of this study. Specifically, a sequential mixed method was used in this study.

The seventh chapter discusses both the qualitative and quantitative results of the study. Specifically, the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data were on the themes and variables below:

1. Student choice criteria
2. Parent choice criteria
3. Employers' perception
4. PHEI managers' perception
5. Regulator and religious role

From the perspective of student choice criteria (i.e., both prospective and current student), it was identified that Cost, Physical Facilities, Location, Institutional Reputation, Recommendation, Programme Availability, Admission Process, Quality of Tuition, Marketing Communication were some of the factors influencing students' selection of private higher educational institution. From the perspective of parent choice criteria, it was identified that Institutional Reputation, Fee/Cost, Location/Proximity, Admission Process, Availability of Programmes, Personal Aspiration, Recommendation, and Physical Facilities were some of the factors influencing parents' choice of a PHEI. From the perspective of employers, it was identified that Institutional reputation, Quality of faculty, and Lack of resources constitute some of the perceptions of employers regarding services and products from the PHEIs. From the perspective of managers of PHEIs several challenges were identified as influencers of the sustainability of PHEIs. Among them are: Declining enrolment, Rising drop-out rates, Increased competition, Inadequate resources, Inadequate capacity development, High cost of accreditation, Institutional autonomy, and Identity crisis. From the perspective of the regulators – the GTEC – the study identified some of their roles in the sustainability of PHEIs as follows: Quality Assurance, Annual reporting, Promoting transparent governance and best practices, and Accreditation and reaccreditation.

Despite the study utilising a multi-perspective research design and not anticipating convergence between quantitative and qualitative results, several themes that emerged from the qualitative

analysis were congruent with the quantitative findings. Specifically, the quantitative results indicated that Cost, Physical Facilities, Location, Institutional Reputation, Recommendation, Programme Availability, Admission Process, Quality of Tuition, and Marketing Communication positively and significantly influence students' choice from both the prospective and current students' perspective. Additionally, the results indicate that Institutional Reputation, Fee/Cost, Location/Proximity, Admission Process, Availability of Programmes, Personal Aspiration, Recommendation, and Physical Facilities positively and significantly influence parents' choice of a PHEI for their wards. Furthermore, the results indicate that Institutional Reputation, Evidence of Alumni Job Performance, General Perception Candidates, and Quality of Faculty positively and significantly influence employers' choice and perception of the products from the PHEIs.

The moderation analysis involving regulatory concerns and religion showed that these factors moderated the positive relationship between student choice factors (i.e., both prospective and current students) and the selection of a particular PHEI. Additionally, the results revealed that regulatory concerns and religion moderate the positive relationship between parent choice factors and the selection of a particular PHEI.

## 10.2 Conclusion

The researcher set out with the intention of achieving five goals related to the relevant stakeholders' choice criteria of HEIs in Ghana. The following are the study's conclusions, which are organised primarily by the study's specific objectives.

### 10.2.1 Students' choice criteria for considering and selecting private HEIs

Researchers have examined many factors that influence the college selection process (Dynarski et al., 2018; Koricich et al., 2018; Primadini et al., 2019; Chen & Esangbedo 2018; Ishii, 2022;

Shamsudin et al., 2018; Fissha, 2020). Through the data analysis from the field, the current study uncovered the following: Cost, Physical Facilities, Location, Institutional Reputation, Recommendation, Programme Availability, Admission Process, Quality of Tuition, and Marketing Communication are the factors that prospective and current students consider in selecting a PHEI in Ghana.

The findings validate decision theory by demonstrating that the availability and accessibility of information are essential in influencing student choices. In Ghana, students frequently depend on several sources, such as internet platforms, social media, university open days, and recommendations from peers and family on the examined factors. The significance of information is paramount in a swiftly changing educational environment, where prospective students aim to understand not only the available programmes but also the institution's culture and values, particularly regarding the distinctiveness of the programmes and the prestige associated with the degrees conferred by those PHEIs. This indicates that PHEIs that proficiently convey their strengths and offer transparent information about outcomes are more likely to enrol more students to the university.

Also, central to decision theory is the principle of utility maximisation, wherein individuals make selections intended to optimise their satisfaction or advantages. For Ghanaian students, the choice to enrol in a specific private university frequently depends on perceived benefit. Elements including as programmes quality, faculty qualifications, campus amenities, and institutional prestige are crucial determinants. Students in this study evaluating degree programmes may assess the PHEIs' reputations and industry links relative to tuition costs. PHEIs with a proven history of graduates obtaining work are more likely to get enrollment of more students, since potential enrollees recognise increased value for future job opportunities. Consequently, the decision theory remains pertinent in the research on decision-making within higher education setting.

### 10.2.2 Parents' choice criteria for selecting particular a private HEI for their wards

From the data analysis, it was established that parents' selection of a PHEI is influenced by a myriad factors such as Institutional Reputation, Fee/Cost, Location/Proximity, Admission Process, Availability of Programmes, Personal Aspiration, Recommendation, and Physical Facilities. The results are consistent with the literature to the effect that the factors that affect students' selection process are varied and include the influence of parents. The finding from this study is consistent with what the previous studies have established (see Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Kumar, 2016; Wong et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Thus, this study provides an additional layer of evidence from the context of Ghana in support of the extant literature.

The results substantiate decision theory by illustrating that, within the realm of private higher education, parents or guardians are required to conduct risk assessments, scrutinising the uncertainties linked to the decisions made for their dependents. The financial commitment for private education might be substantial, prompting parents or guardians to evaluate the prospective returns on work prospects and pay expectations. The idea suggests that parents or guardians may assess the hazards of enrolling in a lesser-known school with lower tuition compared to a reputable PHEI with higher fees but superior job placement rates. This risk assessment method often entails a thorough study of market trends, industry demand for particular capabilities, and the general economic environment. This precisely informs the choices of parents and guardians based on the data collected, which aligns with their decision-making on the education of their wards in Ghana.

Nonetheless, parents' interests and values undeniably complicate the decision-making process. Parents may emphasise particular characteristics such as campus atmosphere, class size, or extracurricular offerings. Some parents may favour institutions that provide a more individualised educational experience with smaller class numbers, whereas others may prioritise comprehensive extracurricular programs. Parental preferences can differ markedly, affecting their decisions and the general diversity of the parent community at PHEIs.

### 10.2.3 Employers' perception of private HE brands and their products

One of the pre-condition s of higher education is to produce entrepreneurs and employable graduates who can serve their respective organisations, society and the country in general through their dedication and innovative skills. Among many issues in the research of transition from higher education to the world of work, an important topic is concerned with how the potential of degree holders is perceived by employers. The study revealed that employer's perception of PHEI is influenced by several factors, including Institutional Reputation, Evidence of Alumni Job Performance, Brand Management and Marketing Communication, and Quality of Faculty. PHEIs may potentially create effective strategies to support their graduates' future employment by understanding the elements and processes influencing employers' opinions on PHEI employability. Employers' perceptions of educational output are ultimately shaped by a graduate's real performance and productivity at work, as the private learning process suggests. It is no longer considered effective to develop educational courses without seeking the advice and opinions of employers regarding the skills and competencies that graduates should possess.

The study's findings indicate that in the realm of private higher education, particularly in emerging nations such as Ghana, the significance of PEHIs has increased. As these schools endeavour to establish robust reputations and draw students, comprehending the opinions of essential stakeholders, especially employers, is imperative. Salient stakeholder theory serves as a significant framework in this study for analysing employers' perceptions of PHEI brands and the graduates they yield.

Organisational decisions are believed to be more significantly influenced by stakeholders who are perceived as more salient, according to the theory. PHEIs can enhance their brand image and align their programs with labour market demands by comprehending how employers perceive their institutions and graduates. The qualitative study's conclusions indicate that the

salient stakeholder theory offers a valuable perspective for comprehending employers' perceptions of private higher education brands and their graduates. PHEIs can strategically position themselves to meet the labour market's requirements by acknowledging the factors that influence these perceptions. In the end, the alignment of academic programs with employer expectations by the PHEIs in Ghana will not only improve the reputation of private institutions but also contribute to the broader objective of fostering a skilled workforce that is capable of propelling economic growth in Ghana. This implies that in order to guarantee that their graduates are adequately prepared for the challenges of the contemporary workplace, PHEIs must prioritise their relationships with employers in the Ghanaian educational environment that is becoming increasingly competitive on a daily basis.

### 10.2.4 The challenges of enrolment faced by managers of private higher education institutions in Ghana.

The country's general poverty and socioeconomic instability have left managers of PHEIs in Ghana facing a plethora of difficulties, including those related to accessibility, affordability, hiring and retaining faculty and inadequate infrastructure. A further key threat to HE in Ghana continues to be the declining financial resources and the rising demand for participation. This recent study enumerated some of the difficulties facing PHEIs, including decreasing enrolment, growing dropout rates, unbridled competition, scant resources, poor capacity development, expensive accreditation costs, institutional autonomy, and identity crises.

From the standpoint of institutional theory, the private higher education industry in Ghana has experienced substantial expansion, providing a variety of programs to satisfy the increasing demand for tertiary education. Nonetheless, enrolment difficulties continue to affect the viability and expansion of these institutions. The interview findings indicate that institutional theory offers a significant framework for comprehending the impact of external constraints,

norms, and legitimacy on the operations and enrolment tactics of PHEIs.

Institutional theory asserts that organisations are shaped by the prevailing rules, practices, and beliefs in their contexts. The PHEIs persist in pursuing legitimacy by adhering to external pressures from employers, authorities, faith-based organisations, market needs, and society standards. Managers must adeptly manoeuvre these dynamics to recruit and retain students while guaranteeing compliance and institutional legitimacy.

The results indicate that the enrolment issues encountered by managers of private higher education institutions in Ghana are intricate and multifarious, shaped by diverse institutional constraints. Utilising the ideas of institutional theory, managers can get insight into the external forces influencing their operations and formulate plans to improve enrolment. This may entail establishing institutional legitimacy via quality assurance, efficient marketing, and robust community engagement. Addressing these problems will be essential for the viability and success of private higher education institutions in Ghana as the landscape continues to shift. Ultimately, cultivating a favourable impression of private higher education institutions and showcasing their worth in delivering quality education will be essential for surmounting enrolment challenges and attaining institutional objectives.

### 10.2.5 Assessing the role of regulatory agencies and religion in the survival of PHEIs

The regulation of private education should aim to assure the provision of high-quality services, while also promoting investment, especially in emerging nations where there is a significant demand and limited government resources. This study identified Quality Assurance, Annual

reporting, Promoting transparent governance and best practices, and Accreditation and reaccreditation as some of the essential roles of the regulator in the sustainability of the PHEIs.

The objective of regulating private education should be to ensure the delivery of education that is of excellent quality, while also promoting investment, particularly in developing countries where there is a substantial need for education and limited government resources (Chankseliani et al., 2021). Quality assurance, annual reporting, promoting transparent governance and best practices, and accreditation and reaccreditation combine to help in regulating the PHEI.

The National Accreditation Board and National Council for Tertiary Education under one umbrella called Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) other regulatory bodies in Ghana establish the framework within which private higher education institutions operate. The function of regulatory agencies is intricately linked to the survival of private universities in Ghana, as elucidated by institutional theory and salient stakeholder theory. The legitimacy, quality standards, and adaptability to change of these institutions are influenced by the regulatory bodies that provide the framework within which they operate. Furthermore, private universities are compelled to prioritise compliance and relationship-building efforts due to the power, legitimacy, and urgency of regulatory agencies as stakeholders.

PHEIs can improve their chances of survival and success by strategically navigating and comprehending these dynamics. It will be essential to maintain the trust of students and the community at large and sustain growth in a competitive educational landscape by nurturing strong stakeholder relationships and aligning with regulatory standards. In conclusion, the significance of institutional legitimacy and stakeholder engagement in the higher education sector is emphasised by the interaction between regulatory agencies and PHEIs.

The findings suggest that religion influences the selection of PHEIs by both parents and students. In Ghana, some of the PHEIs frequently maintain relationships with religious organisations. The sustainability of these PHEIs, especially those linked to religious

organisations, is intricately connected to the roles these entities provide, as highlighted by institutional theory and prominent stakeholder theory. Religious ties confer legitimacy, shape educational values, and establish normative expectations that affect institutional actions. Moreover, religious organisations serve as influential stakeholders whose endorsement can greatly affect the operational sustainability of PHEIs.

Consequently, it was not surprising that the alignment of certain PHEIs with the values of their religious affiliates not only reinforces institutional identity but also cultivates loyalty among students and the community. The study's findings indicate that in Ghana's competitive educational environment, the interaction between religious organisations and PHEIs highlights the significance of stakeholder involvement and institutional legitimacy for attaining sustainability and growth.

### 10.3 Theoretical, empirical and practical implications of the study

The study's implications for theory, literature, policy, and practice cannot be overstated. By way of theory, the study integrates five theoretical approaches (i.e., stakeholder theory, institutional theory and decision theory) in explaining the stakeholders' choice of PHEI and the challenges facing the PHEIs. These theories are interconnected in the context of competition and strategy in higher education, providing insights into the complex interactions among stakeholders, institutional environments, decision-making processes, and behavioural factors that influence the competitive dynamics of the higher education sector. By considering these theories, higher education institutions, and particularly PHEIs, can develop more informed and effective strategies to navigate competition and achieve their goals. The justification for the existence of a higher education institution can be derived from its stakeholder relationships. According to Kettunen (2015), a variety of internal and external stakeholders have the potential to exert an impact on higher education objectives, including factors such as the enhancement of

teaching quality and the establishment of collaborative research initiatives. Therefore, to enhance connections with stakeholders, it is imperative to develop inclusive strategies that guarantee the cooperation and involvement of stakeholders (Stocker et al., 2020). Higher education institutions are currently functioning as quasi-commercial entities, and their effectiveness is contingent upon their capacity to implement efficient management strategies (Cho, 2017). In the context of these institutions, it is crucial to acknowledge the intricate network of stakeholders. Failing to prioritise and nurture relationships with these stakeholders might result in restricted achievements and inadequate generation of value (Kettunen, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to identify and analyse the various stakeholders involved in order to understand their interests and demands, as this is crucial not only for the overall benefit of society but also for the long-term viability of these institutions.

From the standpoint of decision theory, the research illustrates that comprehending the selection of private higher education in Ghana is intricate and varied. Students and parents traverse an environment characterised by multiple alternatives, each accompanied by distinct advantages and disadvantages. Utility maximisation, risk assessment, information availability, cost-benefit analysis, societal factors, individual preferences, and behavioural biases collectively influence the decision-making process. As private universities expand and develop, comprehending these dynamics will be essential for students pursuing optimal educational opportunities and for institutions aiming to accommodate a progressively diverse student body. Utilising ideas from decision theory, management of PHEIs can improve the educational framework, hence fostering the cultivation of a skilled workforce in Ghana.

The research further substantiates the idea that institutions frequently function amid ambiguity, when results are not assured. In the realm of private higher education in Ghana, variables such as shifting legal frameworks, variable enrolment statistics, and changing labour market

requirements create considerable complexity. Consequently, PHEIs may employ scenario planning to foresee diverse future changes and formulate strategic responses. By examining alternative scenarios-such as alterations in government legislation or variations in student and parental preferences-managers can formulate adaptable techniques that facilitate adjustment in unpredictable contexts.

The decision theory also emphasises the significance of stakeholder analysis in formulating institutional strategy. In the competitive realm of private higher education, comprehending the requirements and expectations of diverse stakeholders-students, businesses, regulatory agencies, and the community-is essential. Involving stakeholders in the decision-making process can result in more informed and widely approved plans. Establishing advisory boards with industry representatives helps match academic programs with labour market requirements, thereby improving employability and institutional prestige.

The ramifications of decision theory on competitiveness and strategy within private higher education in Ghana are enormous. PHEIs can more effectively navigate the difficulties of the educational landscape by comprehending and implementing the principles of decision-making under uncertainty, risk management, stakeholder involvement, data utilisation, strategic differentiation, and adaptation. As competition escalates, institutions that utilise these insights will be more strategically positioned to prosper, securing their sustainability and expansion in a fluctuating climate. A strategic strategy based on decision theory can improve the resilience and effectiveness of PHEIs in Ghana.

To thrive in a highly competitive environment, HEIs must cultivate additional characteristics that were not previously emphasised. These include developing and strengthening institutional brands, closely monitoring student performance, skilfully managing relationships with students, and providing them with the tools they need for the workforce (Mainardes et al., 2010).

Moreover, it is expected that HEIs will actively promote the sharing of research and teaching initiatives relevant to the development of new knowledge and the support of innovative production methods (Jongbloed et al., 2008).

Students can also be seen as a distinct category, capable of taking on two distinct responsibilities. On the one hand, students are individuals who consume educational services from higher education institutions (HEIs) can be considered customers and external stakeholders. This is due to their dual role as both consumers of educational services and financial contributors who invest resources to obtain these services. In contrast, the teaching activity is distinguished by its extended duration of student engagement, wherein students serve as co-producers of the activity. They take on the role of internal stakeholders by actively participating in the process and adding value through their degree of involvement (Lourenço and Mano, 2017). Stakeholder theory suggests that building strategic and reciprocal relationships with stakeholders improves value creation (Harris & Bosse, 2013). Identifying and meeting the needs of a wide range of stakeholders has become essential to the effectiveness of an organisation, especially in the field of education (Ferrero-Ferrero et al., 2018).

The institutional and stakeholder theories also have some implications for theoretical contributions. Institutional theorists argue that the survival of an organisation can be attributed to its legitimacy. The success of a university is contingent upon the collective agreement that it fulfils the criteria of being a school. Conversely, a school is deemed unsuccessful if it fails to garner the belief and recognition of being a university, irrespective of its effectiveness in providing instruction or facilitating socialisation (Meyer et al.,1981).

The application of institutional theory facilitates comprehension of the forces driving institutions towards homogeneity, thereby resulting in a decline in institutional diversity.

Organisations strive to adhere to widely recognised and socially acceptable norms within their respective industries, hence enhancing their legitimacy. The concept of institutional theory elucidates the process through which institutions, whether intentionally or inadvertently, come to reflect the prevailing norms, values, and ideologies within a given organisational sector. Consequently, organisations that exhibit the anticipated attributes of the environment acquire legitimacy and demonstrate their merit in obtaining resources from society and the wider environment (Toma, Dubrow, & Hartley, 2005). When an institution surpasses these expectations, the prevailing environment perceives these features as deviant and reduces the likelihood of allocating resources to them.

The institutional theory framework imposes constraints on institutions, restricting their ability to undertake specific strategic actions, and exerts pressure on institutions to conform. The focal point of institutional theory lies in highlighting the normative influence exerted by the environment on the activities of organisations. HEIs operate within an institutional context, were external stakeholders play a role in shaping the expectations for organisational behaviour and practices. Accordingly, institutional theory posits that the organisational options available to campus leaders are determined by the environment and are constrained by the level of discretion they possess. The presence of external pressures to conform significantly influences the spectrum of decision-making options that institutions have at their disposal.

The study's theoretical contribution can be seen from the context of using these theories to explain the phenomenon of competition and strategy. These theories are interconnected in the context of competition and strategy in HE, providing insights into the complex interactions among stakeholders, institutional environments, decision-making processes, and behavioural factors that influence the competitive dynamics of the higher education sector. By considering these theories, higher education institutions, particularly PHEIs, can develop more informed and effective strategies to navigate competition and achieve their goals.

Colleges and universities function within a specific organisational context, wherein multiple external stakeholders provide guidance on the operational aspects of these institutions, hence characterising them as institutional organisations. Government authorities, accreditation bodies, and disciplinary groups all endeavour to oversee and regulate the operations of higher education institutions. When educational institutions adhere to established criteria and acknowledged norms, external stakeholders in turn also perceive them as a credible participant in the realm of HE. The environment within which HEIs operate also provides support in the form of funding, high-quality faculty, and enthusiastic students to those who demonstrate compliance and legitimacy. Consequently, the encompassing context characterised by normative norms exerts influence through both positive and negative reinforcement mechanisms, thereby moulding the conduct of institutions. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the expectations and demands faced by organisations can be conceptualised as an iron cage. This metaphor highlights how colleges are compelled to adopt behaviours and methods that are similar to those of other institutions in higher education, a phenomenon known as isomorphism. HEIs exhibit isomorphic tendencies by adopting the qualities of other institutions that are perceived as effective within their own niche or the broader HE landscape.

By way of contribution of the study to the empirical literature, this study has provided both qualitative and quantitative empirical bases for stakeholders' choice criteria. Numerous factors that affect college selection have been studied by scholars; nevertheless, this study has provided a comprehensive view of the PHEIs from the perspective of students, parents, employers, managers of PHEIs and the regulators in this context GTEC. Studies on the dynamics of strategies and competition in the PHEI sector are scarce in Ghana, and the present study seems to be one of the few looking into the subject. In actuality, the PHEIs are in grave danger, and in order to fully understand the complexities of the situation, extensive research must be done. Therefore, by offering actual data regarding stakeholder choice in relation to PHEI, this study bridges this gap.

Consequently, this will help develop methods aimed at tackling these existential concerns, which primarily stem from falling enrolment rates. By way of managerial implications, the study has identified the criteria prospective students and their parents used in selecting PHEIs. Managers of PHEIs should endeavour to create strategies around these factors to ensure attracting potential students. This will in turn reduce if not eliminate the enrolment conundrums facing PHEIs.

By way of contribution of the study to policies and practices, the study reinforces the necessity for PHEIs to establish comprehensive data analytics systems to inform strategic decisions by contributing to policies and practices. PHEIs can improve their competitiveness by making informed decisions based on data on student demographics, enrolment trends, and labour market demands. Scenario planning techniques should be implemented by managers to foresee a variety of prospective futures and their implications for institutional strategy. Conducting routine risk assessments can assist in the identification of vulnerabilities and the development of contingency plans for the myriad challenges that confront the management of PHEIs which were identified. Managers of PHEIs could develop strategies aimed at reducing the negative effects of these challenges. To this extent, the managers of PHEIs should build their own capacity to actively raise funds. Investors and sponsors of PHEIs should make fund raising an important and integral appraisal index for their rectors and the governing council members. By way of policy implications of the study, the government could develop a deliberate policy to ensure the sustainability of PHEIs.

To bridge the theoretical and practical divide in private higher education, administrators must blend academic ideas with practical implementations. Managers ought to interact with educational researchers and faculty to synchronise challenges arising from theoretical frameworks with real requirements. This may encompass collaborative projects, lectures, or

workshops that promote knowledge transfer. Industry collaborations are essential for engaging with stakeholders, such as employers, to acquire insights into market demands, hence informing curriculum development and augmenting program relevance. This integration will boost the relevance and efficacy of educational programmes while preparing students for the difficulties of the contemporary workforce. A synergistic strategy that prioritises both theory and practice will also enhance the sustainability and success of PHEIs.

Finally, reconciling the theoretical and policy divide in private higher education necessitates that administrators synchronise academic knowledge with regulatory structures and institutional tactics. Managers ought to proactively collaborate with governmental entities and accreditation organisations to contribute insights on policies impacting private higher education. By disseminating ideas from scholarly research, they can contribute to the formulation of rules that are more informed and pragmatic. Engaging in policy dialogues through attendance and contributions to forums, conferences, and discussions centred on higher education policy is crucial for closing the theoretical and policy divide in Ghana's higher education sector. Interacting with policymakers enables managers to champion the requirements and obstacles encountered by private entities.

Furthermore, management of PHEIs ought to use insights from academic research to guide policy formulation within the PHEis. Managers ought to motivate lecturers to engage in policy discussions by disseminating pertinent research and theoretical perspectives. They should promote research on policy issues by assisting faculty and researchers in examining the ramifications of existing policies and formulating evidence-based proposals for enhancement and sustainability of their institutions.

### 10.4 Recommendations

Taking into account the results and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are made. To begin with, to thrive in the field, it is imperative for every private institution to establish and cultivate a distinct and exceptional approach to delivering its academic programmes. This initiative has the potential to be established through a collaborative effort with the industry, wherein students can engage in internships and attachments with various industries. This approach aims to facilitate the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical experience, thereby bridging the gap between academia and real-world application. This has the potential to facilitate a smooth transition from the educational setting to the professional realm.

Also, it is advisable for private universities to establish collaborative alliances. This is a potential approach via which multiple private institutions may amalgamate to establish a larger consolidated university. These collaborations would enable the institutions to consolidate their constrained resources and effectively distribute expenses related to student recruiting and admission. One such approach could involve the establishment of a collaborative admissions board tasked with receiving and processing applications on behalf of the participating colleges within the partnership.

Furthermore, private universities require a robust affiliation to cultivate cohesion among their institutions, articulate shared perspectives, and cultivate political influence in order to advocate for governmental assistance such as financial grants, tax exemptions, infrastructural support from the Ghana Education Trust Fund, and other policies that impact their functioning.

Lastly, private universities must be innovative in their income generation to diversify their sources of revenue to lessen the over-dependency on tuition fees. The innovation strategies could

embrace the establishment of strong alumni who are made to feel like part of the university and desire to contribute towards the growth and survival of their alma mater.

### 10.5 Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of the study is the number of participating SHSs. There are sixteen regions in Ghana, but the study focuses on only one region for the selection of participants. Nonetheless, the characteristics of these regions are not different and because of the homogeneous nature of the regions, using only one region will not alter the findings. Additionally, the study should have utilised an exploratory sequential design to evaluate the statistical significance of themes emerging from the qualitative data, so establishing convergence or divergence; however, this was not implemented. Nevertheless, the qualitative findings offer insights for theoretical validation, while the quantitative component supplies the necessary data for statistical generalisation of those variables in nations with comparable contextual characteristics to Ghana.

Finally, the researcher restricted the sample selection for the interview to solely employers, managers, and regulators of the PHEIs in Ghana, excluding faith-based organisations and civil society organisations that have recently been identified as assuming regulatory roles in matters of public interest in Ghana (Tetteh et al., 2024). However, this is substantiated by the fact that the regulator is the sole public organisation legally authorised to oversee the operational activities of PHEIs in Ghana, independent of their affiliation with faith-based organisations. One of the key objectives of this research was to investigate how complexities and uncertainties are managed by PHEI managers to attain sustainability, which could only be discerned from the key players involved in this study.

### 10.6 Suggestion for future study

Future research in this domain should seek to rectify the methodological limitation of this study by employing an exploratory sequential design, wherein the same population interviewed will also respond to questionnaire derived from established themes in the qualitative data. This will facilitate the identification of data convergence or divergence to ascertain which choice factors are theoretically prevalent and statistically significant in the PHEI choice literature.

Moreover, future study ought to include faith-based organisations and civil society organisations to assess their viewpoints concerning the examined domain. Civil society organisations and religious groups are essential to the domain of private higher education choice research (Pusztai & Fényes, 2022; Niklová & Hanesová, 2024). Their functions in advocacy, information dissemination, support services, quality assurance, cultural influence, research, and networking profoundly affect students' choices and institutional practices. Understanding their contributions can yield more thorough insights into the dynamics of private higher education, ultimately promoting a more effective management of complexities and uncertainties in private higher education landscape.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### COMPETITION AND STRATEGY IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA: MANAGING COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY

**Research Questionnaire**

Dear Respondent, I am a Ph.D student from University of the Witwatersrand undertaking a study on Competition and Strategy in Higher Education in Ghana. In particular, I am looking at factors that influence the students' choice of private higher education institutions in Ghana.

**This questionnaire is to be completed by final year students who are 18 years and above.**

This study is for educational purpose and your assistance in filling this questionnaire will also be beneficial to the sustenance of private universities and colleges. I want to assure you that information provided will be used solely for research work and you are guaranteed of secrecy and privacy of information provided.

**Demographic Information**

Gender [ ] Male [ ]

Female Programme [ ]

General science

[ ] Business

Studies [ ]

General arts

[ ] Visual Arts

[ ] Technical/Vocational Studies

**In each statement, kindly express your opinion by ticking appropriate box on this 5-point Likert Scale. Each abbreviated alphabet on the Likert Scale is explained as follows:**

**Strongly Disagree = SD Disagree = D Neutral = N Agree = A Strongly Agree =SA**

**As a prospective Student, which factors will influence your choice of higher education institution? Kindly indicate you opinion on each of these statements.**

| | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A. Cost** | | | | | |
| 1. Cost of tuition fees will influence my decision to choose a HEI | | | | | |
| 2. Cost of accommodation will influence my decision to choose HEI | | | | | |
| 3. Living expenses will influence my decision to choose HEI | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **B. Physical Facilities** | | | | | |
| 1. Library facilities will influence my decision to choose HEI | | | | | |
| 2. Hostel Facilities will influence my decision to choose HEI | | | | | |
| 3. Recreational/ Sports facilities will influence my decision to choose HEI | | | | | |
| 4. Laboratory facilities will influence my decision to choose HEI | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **C. Location** | | | | | |
| 5. The proximity of the school to my town will influence my choice of the institution | | | | | |
| 6. The proximity of the school to the city centre will influence my choice of the institution | | | | | |
| 7. Accessibility of transport to the school will influence my choice of the institution | | | | | |
| 8. The proximity of the institution to the regional /national capital will influence my choice of the institution | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **D. Institutional Reputation** | | | | | |
| 9. I will consider the brand image of the institution when making the decision | | | | | |
| 10. The ranking of the institution will influence my choice of the school | | | | | |
| 11. Degree recognition of the school will influence my choice of the school | | | | | |
| 12. I consider local and international accreditation to influence my choice of a higher education | | | | | |
| 13. I will consider the availability of the course I want to pursue | | | | | |
| 14. Programme/ course diversity offerings will influence my choice of higher education | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15. Reputation of faculty will influence my choice of university | | | | | |
| 16. Availability of international exchange programmes will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 17. I will consider favourable media coverage and presence of the institution | | | | | |
| 18. Population diversity of students and faculty will influence my choice of the institution | | | | | |
| 19. I will consider the public/employers' recognition of the degree/certificate given by the issued by the institution as a major factor | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **E. Recommendation** | | | | | |
| 20. I will highly consider my parent's/guardian's recommendation of the institution I should attend | | | | | |
| 21. I will consider my siblings' recommendation of the institution I should attend | | | | | |
| 22. I will consider my teachers recommendation of the institution I should attend | | | | | |
| 23. I will consider media recommendation of the institution I should attend | | | | | |
| 24. I will consider my religious leaders' recommendation of the institution I should attend | | | | | |
| 25. I will consider my mentors recommendation of the institution I should attend | | | | | |
| 26. I will consider my school's alumni recommendation of the institution I should attend | | | | | |
| 27. The institutions that my friends will choose will influence my decision | | | | | |
| 28. Religion will play a key role in selecting an institution | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **F. Personal Development** | | | | | |
| 29. I will consider my own perception about the institution before I choose | | | | | |
| 30. I will consider my career prospects before I make a choice of the institution | | | | | |
| 31. I will consider the strength of my grades when making a choice | | | | | |
| 32. I will consider scholarship availability when making a choice | | | | | |
| 33. I will consider the competitiveness of graduates of the institution in the job market | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **G. Admission Process** | | | | | |
| 34. I will consider ease of application for admission to the institution | | | | | |
| 35. I will consider the cut-off point of grades required for admission to my preferred programme | | | | | |
| 36. I will consider the high possibility of being admitted to a programme in the institution | | | | | |
| 37. I will consider the institutions that my family members attended when choosing an institution | | | | | |

**Factors that influence the choice of private Higher educations by a prospective student**

| **A. Cost** | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Affordability of cost of tuition will influence my decision to choose private institution | | | | | |
| 2. Affordability of cost of accommodation will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 3. Affordability of living expenses will influence my decision to choose private institution | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **B. Physical Facilities** | | | | | |
| 4. The availability and accessibility of Library facilities will influence my decision to choose private institution | | | | | |
| 5. The availability and accessibility of hostel facilities will influence my decision to choose the private institution | | | | | |
| 6. The availability and accessibility of recreational/ Sports facilities will influence my decision to choose private Institution | | | | | |
| 7. The availability and accessibility of laboratory facilities will influence my decision to choose the private institution | | | | | |
| 8. The availability and accessibility of internet facilities will influence my decision to choose private institution. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **C. Location** | | | | | |
| 9. The proximity of the school to my town will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 10. The proximity of the school to the city centre will influence my choice | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. Accessibility of transport to the school will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 12. The proximity of the institution to the regional/national capital will influence my choice | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **D. Institutional Factors** | | | | | |
| 13. The brand image of the institution will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 14. The local and global ranking of the institution will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 15. The affiliated university of the private institution will influence my decision | | | | | |
| 16. Student-lecturer ratio / Class size will influence my decision to attend private institution | | | | | |
| 17. Possibility of no-strike in private institutions will influence my decision to choose private institutions. | | | | | |
| 18. Less pressure on physical facilities in private higher institutions will influence my decision | | | | | |
| 19. The strength of my grade can easily get me admission into a private institution | | | | | |
| 20. There is no cut-off point in private institutions that will influence the programme I want to offer | | | | | |
| 21. The perception that private institutions offer quality tuition will influence me to choose private institutions | | | | | |
| 22. The degree/certificate recognition of the school will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 23. The institution's local and international accreditation will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 24. The availability of programmes in private institutions will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 25. The programmes/courses diversity will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 26. The reputation of faculty will influence my choice | | | | | |
| 27. The availability of international exchange programmes will influence my decision | | | | | |
| 28. The favourable media coverage and presence of the institution will influence my decision | | | | | |
| 29. The school's population diversity of students and faculty will influence my decision | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30. The public/employees recognition of the degree/certificate given by the school influenced my decision | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 31. Religion will play a key role in selecting private institution | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **E. Recommendation** | | | | | |
| 32. I will choose a private institution because my family members attended private institutions | | | | | |
| **33.** I will choose private institutions because they support students with internship opportunities. | | | | | |
| 34. I will choose private institutions because they offer courses that meet my career aspirations | | | | | |

## APPENDIX B

## COMPETITION AND STRATEGY IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA: MANAGING COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY

### Research Questionnaire

Dear Respondent, I am a Ph.D student from the University of the Witwatersrand undertaking a study on Competition and Strategy in Higher Education in Ghana. In particular, I am looking at factors that influence the choice of private higher education institutions in Ghana.

This study is for educational purpose and your assistance in filling this questionnaire will also be beneficial to the sustenance of private universities and colleges. I want to assure you that information provided will be used solely for research work and you are guaranteed of secrecy and privacy of information provided.

**Demographic Information**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | [ ]18-23 | [ ] 24-29 | [ ] 30 and above | |
| Gender | [ ] Male | [ ] Female | | |
| Level | [ ] Level 100 | [ ] Level 200 | [ ] Level 300 | [ ] Level 400 |

**In each statement, kindly express your opinion by ticking appropriate box on this 5-point Likert Scale. Each abbreviated alphabet on the Likert Scale is explained as follows:**

**Strongly Disagree = SD Disagree = D Neutral = N Agree = A Strongly Agree =SA**

**As a Current Student of Private Higher Education Institution, which factors influenced your choice of current institution? Kindly indicate you opinion on each of these statements.**

**Factors that influenced Current Student's choice of private higher institution**

| F. Cost | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 35. Affordability of cost of tuition influenced my decision to choose the Institution | | | | | |
| 36. Affordability of cost of accommodation influenced my decision to choose the Institution | | | | | |
| 37. Affordability of Living expenses influenced my decision to choose the Institution | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **G. Physical Facilities** | | | | | |
| 38. The availability and accessibility of Library facilities influenced my decision to choose the Institution | | | | | |
| 39. The availability and accessibility of hostel Facilities influenced my decision to choose the Institution | | | | | |
| 40. The availability and accessibility of recreational/ Sports facilities influenced my decision to the Institution | | | | | |
| 41. The availability and accessibility of laboratory facilities influenced my decision to choose the Institution | | | | | |
| 42. The availability and accessibility of internet facilities influenced my decision to choose the institution. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **H. Location** | | | | | |
| 43. The proximity of the school to my town influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 44. The proximity of the school to the city centre influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 45. Accessibility of transport to the school influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 46. The proximity of the institution to the regional/national capital influenced my choice | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **I. Institutional Reputation** | | | | | |
| 47. The brand image of the institution influence my choice | | | | | |
| 48. The local and global ranking of the institution influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 49. The degree/certificate recognition of the school influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 50. The institution's local and international accreditation influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 51. The availability of the course I wanted to pursue influenced my choice | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 52. The programmes/courses diversity influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 53. The reputation of faculty influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 54. The availability of international exchange programmes influenced my decision | | | | | |
| 55. The favourable media coverage and presence of the institution influenced my decision | | | | | |
| 56. The school's population diversity of students and faculty influenced my decision | | | | | |
| 57. The public/employees recognition of the degree/certificate given by the school influenced my decision | | | | | |
| 58. Religion played a key role in selecting this institution | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **J. Recommendation** | | | | | |
| 59. My parents/guardians chose the institution for me | | | | | |
| 60. I chose the institution myself but I was influenced by my parents/guardian | | | | | |
| 61. I was influenced by my siblings in choosing the institution | | | | | |
| 62. My teachers recommended the institution to me | | | | | |
| 63. My religious leaders recommended the institution to me | | | | | |
| 64. My mnetors recommended the institution to me | | | | | |
| 65. My school's alumni recommended the institution to me | | | | | |
| 66. I chose the institution because my friends were going there | | | | | |
| 67. I did not get admission to a public university | | | | | |
| 68. I did not get programme of my choice in the public university | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **K. Personal Development** | | | | | |
| 69. My own perception about the institution influenced my decision | | | | | |
| 70. My career aspirations influenced my decision | | | | | |
| 71. The strength of my grades influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 72. The availability of scholarships influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 73. The competitiveness of graduates of the institution in the job market influenced my decision | | | | | |
| 74. The facilitation of internship opportunities by the institution influenced my choice | | | | | |
| 75. I chose this institution because my family members attended the same institution | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **L. Personal Experience** | | | | | |
| 76. My expectations for choosing the institution have been met | | | | | |
| 77. The learning environment is conducive in this Institution | | | | | |
| 78. The faculty is friendly and supportive of my development | | | | | |
| 79. I will recommend this institution to every prospective student | | | | | |
| 80. I have regretted for attending this institution | | | | | |

**APPENDIX C**

**COMPETITION AND STRATEGY IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA: MANAGING COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY**

**Research Questionnaire**

Dear Respondent, I am a Ph.D student from the University of the Witwatersrand undertaking a study on Competition and Strategy in Private Higher Education in Ghana. In particular, I am looking at factors that influence the choice of private higher education institutions in Ghana.

This study is for educational purpose and your assistance in filling this questionnaire will also be beneficial to the sustenance of private universities and colleges. I want to assure you that information provided will be used solely for research work and you are guaranteed of secrecy and privacy of information provided.

**Demographic Information**

Age [ ]30-39 [ ] 40-49 [ ]50 and above Gender [ ] Male [ ] Female

Level of Education [ ] Middle School Leaving Certificate

[ ] Junior High School [ ]

Bachelors [ ]

Masters [ ]

PHD

[ ] Others

In each statement, kindly express your opinion by ticking appropriate box on this 5-point Likert Scale. Each abbreviated alphabet on the Likert Scale is explained as follows:

Strongly Disagree = SD Disagree = D Neutral = N Agree = A Strongly Agree =SA

As a parent/guardian, which factors will influence your choice or recommendation of higher education institution for your ward? Kindly indicate you opinion on each of these statements.

**Parents choice factor considerations**

| **A. Cost** | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I consider cost of tuition fees when choosing an institution for my child | | | | | |
| 2. I consider cost of accommodation when choosing an institution for my child | | | | | |
| 3. I consider the living expenses of my child in that institution when choosing it | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **B. Physical Facilities** | | | | | |
| 4. I consider facilities that support the academic work of my child | | | | | |
| 5. I consider the availability of hostel facilities when choosing an institution for my child | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **C. Location** | | | | | |
| 6. I consider the proximity of the institution to my home location | | | | | |
| 7. I consider the proximity of the school to the city centre | | | | | |
| 8. I consider the ease of transport to the institution | | | | | |
| 9. I consider the proximity of the institution to the regional /national capital | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **D. Institutional Reputation** | | | | | |
| 10. I consider the brand image of the institution when making the decision | | | | | |
| 11. I consider the institutional ranking of the institution | | | | | |
| 12. I consider the recognition and value of the degree/certificate awarded to the products of the institution | | | | | |
| 13. I consider which institution is awarding the certificate/degree | | | | | |
| 14. I consider whether or not the institution is accredited | | | | | |
| 15. I consider the availability of the programme offerings of the institution | | | | | |
| 16. I consider the reputation of faculty in the institution | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17. I consider the availability of international exchange programmes in the institution | | | | | |
| 18. I consider favourable media coverage and presence of the institution | | | | | |
| 19. I consider the school's population diversity of students and faculty | | | | | |
| 20. I consider the public/employees recognition of the degree/certificate given by the school | | | | | |
| 21. Religion plays a role in choosing an institution for my child | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| **E. Recommendation** | | | | | |
| 22. I consider the institutions where my friends are taking their wards to when choosing a school for my child | | | | | |
| 23. I consider the advice of my religious leaders when choosing an institution for my child | | | | | |
| 24. My personal/close relations experiences influence my choice | | | | | |

**APPENDIX D**

## COMPETITION AND STRATEGY IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA: MANAGING COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY

### Research Questionnaire

Dear Respondent, I am a Ph.D student from the University of the Witwatersrand undertaking a study on Competition and Strategy in Higher Education in Ghana. In particular, I am looking at factors that influence the choice of private higher education institutions in Ghana.

This study is for educational purpose and your assistance in filling this questionnaire will also be beneficial to the sustenance of private universities and colleges. I want to assure you that information provided will be used solely for research work and you are guaranteed of secrecy and privacy of information provided.

**Demographic Information**

Age [ ]30-39 [ ] 40-49 [ ]50 and above Gender [ ] Male [ ] Female

Level of Education [ ] Middle School Leaving Certificate

[ ] Junior High School [ ]

Bachelors [ ]

Masters [ ]

PHD

[ ] Others

In each statement, kindly express your opinion by ticking appropriate box on this 5-point Likert Scale. Each abbreviated alphabet on the Likert Scale is explained as follows:

Strongly Disagree = SD Disagree = D Neutral = N Agree = A Strongly Agree =SA

As an employer, what factors do you consider when recruiting a potential employee who graduated from a private higher education institution? Kindly indicate you opinion on each of these statements.

**Employer choice factor considerations**

| | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A. Institutional Reputation** | | | | | |
| 1. I consider the brand image of the institution when making the decision | | | | | |
| 2. I consider the institutional ranking of the institution | | | | | |
| 3. I consider the recognition and value of the degree/certificate awarded to the products of the institution | | | | | |
| 4. I consider which institution is awarding the certificate/degree | | | | | |
| 5. I consider whether or not the institution is accredited | | | | | |
| 6. I consider the availability of the programme offerings of the institution | | | | | |
| 7. I consider the reputation of faculty in the institution | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| B. **Quality of Faculty** | | | | | |
| 8. Faculty experience | | | | | |
| 9. Faculty qualification | | | | | |
| 10. Faculty research output | | | | | |
| C. **Evidence of Alumni Job Performance** | | | | | |
| 11. Previous dealings with products of PHEI graduates | | | | | |
| 12. Positive References and referrals by other employers on PHEI graduates | | | | | |

**APPENDIX E**

## COMPETITION AND STRATEGY IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA: MANAGING COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY

### Semi-structured interview guide for employers/HR managers

Dear Respondent, I am a Ph.D student from University of the Witwatersrand undertaking a study on Competition and Strategy in Private Higher Education in Ghana. In particular, I am looking at factors that influence the students' choice of private higher education institutions in Ghana.

This study is for educational purpose and your assistance in filling this questionnaire will also be beneficial to the sustenance of private universities and colleges. I want to assure you that information provided will be used solely for research work and you are guaranteed of secrecy and privacy of information provided.

**Section D: Demographic Information**

D1 Position: ……..…

D2 Organisation: ……..…

D3 Number of Years in Service: ……

D4 Gender: …….……

D5 Educational Background: ……...

1. Kindly introduce yourself and indicate your position?
2. Does an institution one attended (whether public or private) influence your selection/employment decisions? How? Why?
3. To what extent does a brand image of a university influence your employment of decisions? Why?
4. What is your perception of graduates from private universities? Why?
5. Do you see any significant difference between graduates from private and

public institutions in your organisations? How? Why?

6. In your opinion, what should private institutions do to improve employability of their graduates?
7. Will your organisation collaborate in any way with private universities to enhance their competitiveness and sustenance? Why? How?

**APPENDIX F**

## COMPETITION AND STRATEGY IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA: MANAGING COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY

### Semi-structured interview guide for regulator - GTEC

Dear Respondent, I am a Ph.D student from University of the Witwatersrand undertaking a study on Competition and Strategy in Private Higher Education in Ghana. In particular, I am looking at factors that influence the students' choice of private higher education institutions in Ghana.

This study is for educational purpose and your assistance in filling this questionnaire will also be beneficial to the sustenance of private universities and colleges. I want to assure you that information provided will be used solely for research work and you are guaranteed of secrecy and privacy of information provided.

**Section D: Demographic Information**

D1 Position: ……..…

D2 Organisation: ……..…

D3 Number of Years in Service: ……

D4 Gender: ……..……

D5 Educational Background: ……...

1. Kindly introduce yourself and indicate your position?
2. Do you think any of your regulatory requirements affect enrolment in private universities in any way? How? Why?
3. How do regulatory restrictions curtail or improve private institution enrollment in any way?
4. How do your regulations facilitate growth and sustenance of private higher education?

**APPENDIX G**

**COMPETITION AND STRATEGY IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA: MANAGING COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY**

**Semi-structured interview guide for private higher education managers**

Dear Respondent, I am a Ph.D student from University of the Witwatersrand undertaking a study on Competition and Strategy in Private Higher Education in Ghana. In particular, I am looking at factors that influence the students' choice of private higher education institutions in Ghana.

This study is for educational purpose and your assistance in filling this questionnaire will also be beneficial to the sustenance of private universities and colleges. I want to assure you that information provided will be used solely for research work and you are guaranteed of secrecy and privacy of information provided.

**Section D: Demographic Information**

D1 Position: ……..…

D2 Organisation: ……..…

D3 Number of Years in Service: ……

D4 Gender: …….……

D5 Educational Background: ……...

1. Kindly introduce yourself and indicate your position?
2. What are the constraints to growth in enrolment?
3. What are some of your strategies for attracting prospective students?
4. What accounts for decline in enrolment in PHEIs?
5. What are the strategies for growth and sustenance of private institutions?

**APPENDIX H**

Participant Information Sheet for GTEC

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Andrew Kwesi De Roy a PhD student at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating ***Competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana,*** under the supervision of Prof. Thomas Anning Dorson. The aim of this research project is to find out about the continuous decline in students' enrolment in private higher education institutions in Ghana.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview session. This interview will involve answering questions and will take around 40 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. This recording will be stored on my passworded computer and only the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after five years.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview / audio recording will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Andrew Kwesi De Roy

Researcher:
Andrew Kwesi De Roy
2514563@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor:
Associate Prof. Thomas Anning Dorson
thomas.dorson,anning@wits.ac.za

## APPENDIX I

Participant Information Sheet for HR Managers/Employers

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Andrew Kwesi De Roy a PhD student at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating ***Competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana,*** under the supervision of Prof. Thomas Anning Dorson. The aim of this research project is to find out about the continuous decline in students' enrolment in private higher education institutions in Ghana.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview session. This interview will involve answering questions and will take around 40 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. This recording will be stored on my passworded computer and only the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after five years.

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Yours sincerely,
Andrew Kwesi De Roy

Researcher:
Andrew Kwesi De Roy
2514563@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor:
Associate Prof. Thomas Anning Dorson
thomas.dorson,anning@wits.ac.za

**APPENDIX J**

Participant Information Sheet for Managers of PHEIs

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Andrew Kwesi De Roy a PhD student at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating ***Competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana,*** under the supervision of Prof. Thomas Anning Dorson. The aim of this research project is to find out about the continuous decline in students' enrolment in private higher education institutions in Ghana.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview session. This interview will involve answering questions and will take around 40 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. This recording will be stored on my passworded computer and only the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after five years.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview audio recording will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Andrew Kwesi De Roy

Researcher:
Andrew Kwesi De Roy
2514563@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor:
Associate Prof. Thomas Anning Dorson
thomas.dorson,anning@wits.ac.za

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**
R14/49 Deroy

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** **PROTOCOL NUMBER: H22/02/02**

**PROJECT TITLE** Competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana: Managing complexity and uncertainty

**INVESTIGATOR(S)** Mr A Deroy

**SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT** Wits Business School/

**DATE CONSIDERED** 18 February 2022

**DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** Approved
Risk Level: Minimal

**EXPIRY DATE** 11 December 2025

**DATE** 12 December 2022 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Professor T Anning Dorson

---

**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)**

To be completed in duplicate and **A SIGNED COPY** returned to the Secretary electronically. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I/we agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low Risk studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

_____ _____/_____/_____
**Signature** **Date**

**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES**

# GHANA EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION

GEA.RD.0522

25TH MAY, 2022

**To all Human Resource Directors / Managers.**

Dear GEA Member,

**Introduction of Mr. Andrew Kwesi Deroy of student ID: 2514563**

The Ghana Employers' Association (GEA) would like to introduce Mr. Andrew Kwesi Deroy, a doctoral student in Management at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. Mr. Deroy is currently conducting research titled "**Competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana**" and hence requires data from your outfit to enable him complete the research.

The findings of the study are envisaged to provide empirical insight into the challenges and sustainability of private higher education institutions in Ghana.

We shall therefore be grateful if you could provide him the needed audience and assistance with the data he requires.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

**ALEX FRIMPONG**
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

P.O. Box 2616 Accra, Ghana Telephone: 233 (0) 302 67 84 55 / 67 84 49 / 96 09 35 / 96 29 02

# GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

*In Case of reply the number and date of this letter should be quoted*

**Your Ref……**
**My Ref: GES/DG/PERMISSION/08**

**HEADQUARTERS**
**Ministry Branch Post Office**
**P.O.Box MB-45**
**Accra**
**3rd May, 2022**

**REPUBLIC OF GHANA**

Dear Mr. Andrew Kwesi Deroy,

**RE: ACCESS TO COLLECT DATA FROM SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN GHANA**

With reference to your letter dated 15th March 2022 on the above subject matter, the Ghana Education Service (GES), the regulator of all Senior High Schools in Ghana, hereby grants you access to collect data from the senior high schools in Ghana for your research.

You are to tender a copy of this letter to individual heads of the various government assisted senior high schools as evidence of authorization from GES.

All heads are by a copy of this letter enjoined to provide the needed assistance.

We believe this will help you in your research.

Yours Faithfully,

**Dr. Kwamena B. Tandoh**

**Deputy Director General, Quality and Access**

Cc, All Heads of Senior High School.

# COUNCIL OF INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITIES, GHANA

P. O. BOX DS 2310, DANSOMAN TEL.: +233-20 871 8546

CIU


CIU/INTRO/01/001 31st May, 2022

Registrars of CIU Institutions
Ghana

Dear Sir/Madam,

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION - MR. ANDREW KWESI DEROY**

I have the pleasure to introduce **Mr. Andrew Kwesi Deroy**, a Ghanaian doctoral student in Management at the Business School of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa with the Student ID number 2514563 under the supervision of Prof. Thomas Anning-Dorson, an Associate Professor at the University of Witwatersrand.

Mr. Deroy is conducting research for his PhD degree titled **"Competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana".** As part of his research, he needs to collect data from private higher education institutions in Ghana. It is worthy to note that the findings of this research will provide empirical insight into the challenges and sustainability of private higher education institutions in Ghana.

I, therefore, respectfully request your kind assistance for Mr. Deroy to administer his questionnaire in your institutions.

Counting on your usual cooperation.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Anne Marie Amoah-Ahinful
Executive Secretary, CIU

cc: Chairman, CIU


E-mail: chpug@hotmail.com / info@ciughana.org

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REF: CES12/10/24

# INVOICE

**CLIENT:**
Andrew Deroy

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**GHC 3800.00***

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PROFESSOR CRAIG MACKENZIE | EDITOR & LITERARY CONSULTANT
Formerly Professor and Chair of English, University of Johannesburg
*BA (Hons), MA (Natal), PhD (Rhodes)*

6 March 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that I edited 'Competition and strategy in private higher education in Ghana: managing complexity and uncertainty', by Kwesi Andrew Deroy.

All errors identified were corrected electronically and marked with the 'track changes' function. In cases where formulations were unclear or where there were other problems and anomalies, these were flagged for the author's attention.

The document was edited in accordance with the latest conventions of English style and expression.

Sincerely



Prof. C. H. MacKenzie

email: craighughmac@gmail.com; cell: 27-83-969-3029