

Factors Affecting Students' Choice of Programmes: Implications to Students' Utility and Output in Higher Education Institutions in the South West Region of Cameroon

Sophie Ekume Etomes, PhD

Faculty of Education, University of Buea

Email: [sophie.ekume\[at\]ubuea.cm](mailto:sophie.ekume[at]ubuea.cm)

Abstract: *This study investigates the factors that determine students' choice of programmes and how this affects their utility and output in the South West Region of Cameroon. Three specific objectives were examined which includes the extent to which cost of programmes, expected benefits of a programme, and admission requirements affects the choice of students' programme. One hypothesis that examines the significant effects of students' choice of programmes on their utility was tested. The sample of the study included 398 final year students from the faculty/school of management sciences. Questionnaire was used to collect data. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings revealed that the expected benefits of a programme influenced students' choice of that programme more (84.5%) than the cost of the programme (41.9%) and admission requirements (37.9%). While there exists a positive correlation between choice and utility, the regression analysis showed that admission requirements have a higher impact on students' utility.*

Keywords: Choice of Programmes, Utility, Higher Education, Cameroon

1. Introduction

The expansion of secondary education and the continuous quest for white collar jobs has increased the demand for higher education in Cameroon. This demand has led to the growth of existing higher education institutions (HEIs) and the increase in the number of private and public providers of higher education. This is because higher education institutions provide students with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively integrate into the labour market. In this light, students are admitted to study one of the programmes in higher education institutions. But, the determination and success of whatever we do in life depends on our passion and the benefits of the end results. And what drives this determination is the satisfaction derived from consuming a particular product (utility). In the context of this study, the product is the programmes offered and the utility derived from consuming any product determines leaning outcomes of the students. Therefore, the choice of programmes studied in HE is a major and significant decision for students (Krezel and Krezel, 2017). The question of 'why' and 'how' students make decisions with respect to their programmes is examined in this study.

State and private HEIs in Cameroon run programmes form the undergraduate to the doctorate or PhD levels. These programmes are categorized with respect to faculties and fields of study which include natural sciences, health sciences, social and management sciences, arts, and the humanities. This study focuses on students studying programmes in the management sciences. This is justified by the fact that they constitute the largest population in most HEIs in the South West Region.

It is observed that, though graduates from HEIs in Cameroon keep increasing, issues of dropout, repetition and

unemployment is a major problem in this sector. This has raised major worries to educational managers, parents and students who are the major stakeholders. It is worthy of note that public HEIs in Cameroon are highly subsidized by the government; students pay only a registration fee of 50,000FCFA (approximately 80USD) yearly for undergraduate and post graduate study. In addition, the government also provide subsidies to all accredited HEIs in Cameroon. These are captured in degree No. 93/026 of 19th January 1993 (Republic of Cameroon, 1993). Parents also incur indirect cost with respect to housing, didactic materials, feeding and transportation among others. Repetition, dropout or unemployment of graduate reflects a wastage of the scarce resources deployed in the production of education. One of the factors that may affect students' performance in HEIs is their choice of programme.

Based on the above problem, this study sets out to investigate the factors that determine students' choice of programmes, the challenges that students face with respect to their choice of programmes and how this affects their utility and output. The specific objectives investigate:

- 1) The extent to which cost of a programme affect students choice of programme
- 2) How the expected benefits of a programme affect students' choice of programme
- 3) The extent to which admission requirements affects students' choice of programme

The study tested one hypothesis which stated that, students' choice of programmes has no significant effect on their utility.

The main contribution of this paper is to improve on empirical research on the relevant factors affecting students' choice of programmes in higher education institutions in

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Cameroon and how the utility derived from studying a programme affects their performance. It will provide evidence-based results that are useful to educational managers and administrators to enable them better manage students' enrolment into HEIs and their sustainability and success during their study programmes. Results will inform students to make informed decisions on their choice of programmes. The remainder of this paper looks at literature review, research methodology, results, discussion, conclusion and recommendations. The study presents a model of students' choice, utility and outcome that is beneficial for policy makers, students, managers and administrators of higher education institutions.

2. Literature Review

The existence of higher education institution in Cameroon started with the creation of the first state university in 1962 known as the Federal University of Cameroon following decree No. 62-DF-28 of 9 July 1962 (Republic of Cameroon, 1962), today known as the University of Yaounde I. The objective of this university was to train students in science, education and technology. Today, the higher education sector has experienced tremendous growth with eleven state universities, three which are newly created and a host of private higher education institutions to meet the ever-increasing demands for education. These institutions provide programmes in various disciplines hosted by different faculties and schools which include Natural Sciences, Health Sciences, Management Sciences, Social Sciences, Education, Engineering and Technology and Arts. However, the choice of which HEI to attend and which programme to study is a major decision for students which has never been an easy one as this has implications to individuals and their families. This decision has a spill over effect on students output and career prospects.

It is therefore relevant for the state and private providers of education to know the factors that influence students' choice of programmes so that the supply of programmes will meet their demands. According to Diamond et al. (2012), while good choices by well-informed students matter for public policy because they result from weighing-up the full range of potential opportunities, unrestricted by perceived social norms, peer-pressure or limited exposure to higher-education, it is also a matter for higher education providers who recognise that a good choice is not just about attracting large numbers of students in through the front-door, but attracting students who will get the most out of their experience and who will also stay, engage and succeed. From an economics perspective, HE certification guarantees better job and higher earnings. But today, students are not just concerned with gaining employment but the need to maintain a stable employment and experience growth in the job market (Abdrasheva, Morales, & Sabzalieva, 2022).

Choice of HEI is defined as "a complex, multistage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advanced vocational training" (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989, p. 234). The concept of "choice" connotes there are alternatives that one can choose from

Kolmar (2017) calls this decision 'choice set' denoted by $X = \{x^1, x^2, \dots, x^n\}$, where $x_i, i=1, \dots, n$ is one of the possible alternatives, and assume that the total number of alternatives n is finite. The idea of the choice set implies your choice is a sub-set (alternatives) of a particular set of goods (programmes) (ibid). But one's decision to consume a particular product is backed by availability of the product, income, needs, ability and time. With these limitations, individuals do not always choose what they prefer. In the context of this study, a student may want to study programme 'A', but may not have the opportunity to do so due to either limitations in finances or subject requirements for that particular programme. As such, he/she may choose the next best alternative, call it 'B', which he/she either has the ability or eligibility. In this case, the utility (satisfaction) that the students will derive from studying programme 'A' will be greater than the alternative programme 'B'.

There are two types of utilities, that is, marginal utility and total utility. Total utility is the total satisfaction derived from consuming a particular good or services while marginal utility is the satisfaction derived from consuming and additional unit of a good or service (Kolmar (2017). Marginal utility of education choice in a master's degree which is not part of the scope of this study. The study is limited to total utility since it focuses only on undergraduate studies.

While a significant volume of literature exists conceptualizing and theorizing choice of higher education, empirical research linking choice, utility and students' output remain limited especially in Cameroon. Some of the few identified are discussed below. Using a focus group discussion and a survey, Gasparand Soares (2021), identified study characteristics (teaching quality, lecturer qualification level, HE reputation, etc), future perspectives (opportunity to prosper in professional career, intellectual and personal development, desire to find a good job, etc), HE friendliness (class size, subject approval ease, administrative staff attendance quality, classrooms conditions, etc), external influences (family opinion, family recommendations and parents financial conditions), location and study cost (close to home and city, fee and support materials) and individual interest (moving out of parents home, socialize with other students) as factors that influences students' choice of higher education institutions in Angola. Of all these, the most important factor that determines choice of higher education is intellectual and personal development of students to enable them get better jobs. A similar study was carried out by Callender and Dougherty (2018) on the idealizations and illusions of student choice and marketization in higher education policy in England. Results revealed that students' choice rationale which includes increased and wider access, improved institutional quality and greater provider responsiveness to the labour market was largely not met. The paper concludes that students' choices are socially constrained and stratified, reproducing and legitimating social inequality. Ajibola, Emeghe, Oluwumi and Oni (2017) studied students' choice of programmes in Covenant University in Nigeria. The study revealed that personal interest (90%) and parent's decision (79.4%) determined students' choice of Programmes. In addition, approximately 69.9% of the students dislike the University which may be a

factor to be considered in their academic performances. The study concluded that parents should discuss issues related to students' choice of programmes with them to know their aspirations rather than imposing on them. The study of Mbawuni and Nimako (2015) focused on the critical factors underlying 153 masters' students' choice of public institutions in Ghana. Using exploratory factor analysis, results revealed seven latent factors that affected students' choice of masters' programmes which includes cost, student support quality, attachment to institution, recommendations from lecturers and other staff, failure to gain alternative admissions and location benefits.

A study by Diamond et al. (2012) examines the economic perspective on the behavioural approaches to understanding students' choice of higher education in UK. The applied insights from behavioural economics to understand the how and why prospective students make choices on what and where to study at HEIs and ways to improve student engagement, satisfaction, retention, success, employability and in turn social mobility – outcomes which are all in the interest of both prospective students and the sector. According to these authors, behavioural economics thus offers a more realistic description of human decision-making that can be used to better understand and guide the choices that people make in relation to HE participation. The most significant findings from their study that influences prospective students' decision of higher education were academic reputations and institution location. Others include sources of information in the process of choosing a university course, socio-economic status, parental and peer influence, and fees.

The study made use of the econometric models. The fundamental notion underlying econometric (or economic) models for explaining choice of HEI is that students maximize a utility (e.g., high quality, low cost), often using cost-benefit analysis (Hossler et al., 1999, p. 142). The econometric model assumes that in the choice process, students consider the pros and cons of each, associate a utility or a value with the attributes of each, make reasonable assumptions about the outcomes of one decision over another, and then choose more or less rationally in order to maximize benefits and reduce costs (Hossler et al., 1999, p. 142). Two main branches of econometric models of college choice exist. The first expresses institutional or national enrolments as a function of characteristics of potential enrollees and existing schools (Vrontis et al., 2007). The second explains enrolment decision of an individual student as his revealed preference among the available schooling and work alternatives. The second branch puts the focus on the individual student rather than the institutions.

Previous research work on the choice of HE revealed inadequacy especially in the African context. In addition, no study of this nature known to the researcher has been conducted in Cameroon. The relevance of contextual view justifies research into this field in Cameroon. In contribution to research, this study investigates the factors that affect students' choice of programmes, the challenges faced and how this affects the output and utility in HEIs in Cameroon.

3. Methodology

The study used an exploratory survey research design of quantitative approach.

Sample and sampling techniques: The sample of the study constituted 398 students selected from a population of 809 students from 9 HEIs using proportionate and purposive sampling techniques. Only final year undergraduate students in the faculty/school of management sciences in all private and state higher education institutions in the South West region of Cameroon were selected for the study. The final year students were selected for the study because their experiences over the years will enable the researcher to measure their utility with respect to their choice of programme.

Instrumentation: A researcher designed questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions was used to collect data from students. The questionnaire was designed with respect to the research objectives. One of the institutions which is part of the population but not be part of the sample population was used for a pilot study. Results from the pilot study were used to restructure some of the questions to reduce ambiguity. Administration of question was done using the face-to-face approach and online using Google forms. The online platforms used were emails and WhatsApp.

Empirical Strategy: Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 25.0), frequency count and percentages while the data from the open-ended questions were analysed thematically with sample quotations. The Spearman's rho test was used in testing the hypothesis. The McFadden's random utility model for optimizing choices (McFadden, 1981) was adapted for the study to measure students' level of utility with their choices made.

$$CP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 C_i + \beta_2 Exp_i + D_i DR + e_i \dots \dots \dots$$

Where CP= Choice of programme; C=Cost of programme; Exp =Expected benefit; DR=Admission requirements, D_i is the parameters for admission requirements.

Students are expected to choose from a set of programmes (P) within the field of management, that is $P = \{p^1, p^2, \dots, p^n\}$ where $p^{1 \dots n} = (1, 2, \dots, n)$ are one of the programmes that students are expected to choose from. They include banking and finance, accounting, supply chain, economics, human resource management, management, marketing, transport management, project management, business management, entrepreneurship, and financial management.

Choice probability depends on the cost of the programme, admission requirement and expected benefits which are a function of individual alternatives and individual characteristics.

Ethical consideration: Participants' consent was solicited before participation. Each participant clearly read the

consent form and agreed to participate in the survey. Participants were not pressured to participate against their will. Participants were given at least a week and at most two weeks to respond to the survey. This gave ample time to read the information sheet and consent form and make their decision whether to participate or not. Anonymity of participants was ensured as names and personal characteristics of participants were excluded in the presentation of results. In addition, a letter of authorization was given by the University of Buea research unit where researcher is attached to, to carry out this research project. This guaranteed access to other higher education institutions.

4. Results and Discussion

Choice of Programme

Being part of each study programme in HEIs is a function of the choice of students during the application process. Findings revealed that a majority of the students (87.9%) made a personal decision to study their programme while

11% were influenced by parents and relatives and 5% were influenced by friends. This finding supports that of Ajibola et al. (2017) who found that students' choice of programmes in higher education is mostly influenced by personal interest (90%) and parent's decision (79.4%). However, their study indicates a higher influence (68.4%) of parent's decision than present study. These programmes vary with respect study periods and end of course certificate. Most of the students (52.8%) are in the three years bachelor's programme while 43.7% are in the Higher National Diploma programme and 3.5% are in four years professional bachelor's programme.

How cost of programme affects students' choice of programme

One of the factors that determined the consumption of a particular product is the cost of the good and the willingness to pay also determines the satisfaction derived. Table 1 presents the extents to which the cost of a programme determines student's choice.

Table 1: Cost and students' choice of programme

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enrolled in this programme because my parents do not have the resources to sponsor the programme I wish to study.	30 (7.5%)	32 (8.0%)	128 (32.2%)	206 (52.3%)
I do not have any challenge with financing my education	50 (12.6%)	126 (31.7%)	130 (32.7%)	92 (23.1%)
My programme is quite expensive and I do not think I will be able to complete	30 (7.5%)	78 (19.6%)	154 (38.7%)	136 (34.2%)
Number of years for a programme determines the cost of a programme	124 (31.2%)	180 (45.2%)	56 (14.1%)	38 (9.5%)
Number of years of a programme determines my choice of programme	82 (20.6%)	100 (25.1%)	150 (37.7%)	66 (16.6%)
Multiple Response Set (MRS)	316 (15.9%)	516 (26.0%)	618 (31.1%)	538 (27.1%)

Source: Field study, 2022

Findings from table 1 revealed that 84.5% of the students' choice of programme is not linked to cost of financing by their parents while 76.4 agreed that the number of years in a study programme determines the cost of the programmes. This justifies why only 3.5% of the students are in the professional bachelor's programmes (four years) which is much more expensive than the three years programme. However, 45.7% of the students agreed that the number of years of a study programme determined their choice of programme. As such, up to 35.7% of the students are in the higher national diploma programme which is just a two years programme. Overall, findings revealed that cost has a low effect (15.5%) on students' choice of programmes.

This supports findings from the open-ended question on how cost affects students' choice of programmes as 33.7% of the students reported that high cost of a programme determines their choice. As such, even if they study the programme at the undergraduate level, it will be difficult for them to continue at the post graduate level. Therefore, they prefer to choose programmes that they can afford even at the postgraduate level. This has affected their aspirations of higher education. As expressed by some of the sampled quotations: "the cost of programme affected my choice of programme because it is expensive and difficult to continue"; "the high cost of a programme made me to change my programme and this is acting as a barrier to my dream". This implies parents' income background also determines students' choice of programme. However, students reported that other issues related to cost is the number of years of a

programme and employment opportunities as captured in one of the sampled quotations: "some programmes are so expensive and in addition, it takes a longer period of time to get a job".

Table 2 below presents students' estimated cost for a programme a year, which takes into consideration direct and indirect cost.

Table 2: Students' estimated cost for programme a year (in FCFA)

An estimated cost for programme a year	Frequency	Percentage	Additional information
Less than 300,000	42	10.6	Minimum cost=100,000 Maximum cost=3500,000 Std. Deviation=566171.223
300-500,000	107	26.9	
501-800,000	86	21.6	
801-1,000,000	92	23.1	
Above 1 million	71	17.8	
Total	398	100.0	

Source: Field study, 2022

Findings on students' estimated cost of a programme a year revealed that 10.6% (42) spend less than 300,000, 26.9% (107) spend 300-500,000, 21.6% (86) spend 501-800,000, 23.1% (92) spend 801-1,000,000 and 17.8% (71) spend above a million. However, the minimum cost incurred is 100,000FCFA while the maximum cost incurred is 3,500,000 per annum.

Based on the students' report, parents have little or no challenge in financing their studies at higher education. This

implies the cost of providing higher education by both the private and the state is affordable for students who meet the admission requirements. However, this cost varies with respect to state and private HEIs. Contrary to this finding, cost was identified by Mbawuni and Nimako (2015) as one of the major determinants of the choice of students' programmes in Ghana. This cost estimated with respect to

the fees that different higher education institutions offer for the same programme, charges for practical work and scientific experiment, cost of books and study materials, feeding, accommodation, among others.

How the expected benefits of a programme affect students' choice of programme

Table 3: Students' expected benefits and choice of programme

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I choose this programme because it will be easier for me to gain employment after graduation	162 (40.7%)	176 (44.2%)	42 (10.6%)	18 (4.5%)
This programme will enable me to become self-employed	142 (35.7%)	198 (49.7%)	36 (9.0%)	22 (5.5%)
I choose this programme because graduates from my programme of study are highly paid in the job market	98 (24.6%)	194 (48.7%)	88 (22.1%)	18 (4.5%)
This programme will give me an opportunity for career advancement	168 (42.2%)	208 (52.3%)	8 (2.0%)	14 (3.5%)
Multiple Response Set (MRS)	570 (35.8%)	776 (48.7%)	174 (10.9%)	72 (4.5%)

Source: Field study, 2022

Finding revealed that expected benefit from a programme has a high effect (84.5%) on students' choice of programmes. As such, a majority of the students 94.5% choose their programme because of career advancement opportunity. In the same light, 85.4% and 84.9% of the students agreed that their choice of programme will provide skills that will enable them to easily gain employment and will also enable them to become self-employed respectively. In addition, 73.3% (292) of the students also choose their programme because graduates from the programme are highly paid in the job market.

This finding supports the research work of Fajčíková and Urbancová (2019) on factors influencing students' motivation to seek higher education in a state university in the Czech Republic. Their findings revealed that development of competences and the relationship between education and employment are some of the determinants of students' choice of higher education. This was captured in the students' report where 88.7% reported that they expect higher income, and better career growth prospects (86.7%) after obtaining a university degree.

How admission requirements affect students' choice of programme

Table 4: Admission requirements and students' choice of programme

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am studying this programme because I did not meet up with the admission requirements of the programme I wish to study.	40 (10.1%)	32 (8.0%)	96 (24.1%)	230 (57.8%)
I did not have knowledge of the admission requirements which affected my choice of programme	20 (5.0%)	58 (14.6%)	144 (36.2%)	176 (44.2%)
I did not have any challenge with the admission requirements	138 (34.7%)	164 (41.2%)	60 (15.1%)	36 (9.0%)
Multiple Response Set (MRS)	198 (16.6%)	254 (21.3%)	300 (25.1%)	442 (37.0%)

Source: Field study, 2022

Based on admission requirements and students' choice of programme, while most of the students (75.9%) did not have a challenge with the admission requirement, 19.6% did not have knowledge of admission requirements which affected their choice of programme. In addition, 18.1% are studying programmes that they do not like because they did not meet up with the admission requirements. This is in line with the open-ended questions as students (n=32) reported that insufficient grade points at the advanced level (secondary education) prevented them from studying their desired programme. few of the students (n=12) reported that they had to repeat the advanced level certification examination in other to top up their grade points to enable them to study what they desired to study. This delayed their admission into higher education. This is indication most students were not aware of the admission requirements with respect to the various programme at the level of secondary education. This inadequate information affected their choice and aspirations for higher education. This supports the findings of Etta et al.

(2022, 5, 6) on students' re-imagination of the future of higher education in Cameroon. Findings revealed that "higher education expectations and realities are invisible for students at the secondary school level in the area of selecting programme choices. Students relied on the knowledge of their peers and business agents who assisted them in completing their application forms".

Results also revealed that most of the students who did not meet up with the admission requirements are among the group of students who did not have knowledge of the admission requirements. Cumulatively, 18.1% (72) of the students agreed that admission requirement negatively affected their choice of programme which is quite high because it has the probability of affecting students' performance negatively. The failure or repetition of one student has a negative effect on economic development because it is a wastage of private and public investment on

education. Talk less of having 72 (18.1%) students at risk of repetition or dropout from higher education.

It is a common practice for undergraduate admission seekers in Cameroon to provide first, second or third choice of programme depending on the institution’s policy. Providing admission to students on their first choice of programmes serve as an intrinsic motivation that stimulates higher performance and timely completion of programme. students’ performance is a major indicator of the productivity of

higher education. As such, should be a major concern in all aspect. This is in line with the research work of Oluwumi and Oni (2017) which revealed that 69.9% of students in Covenant University in Nigeria disliked their university because they did not like their choice of programme and this negatively affected their performance.

Figure 1 presents a summary of the descriptive analysis on the influence of cost, expected benefits and admission requirement on students’ choice of programmes.

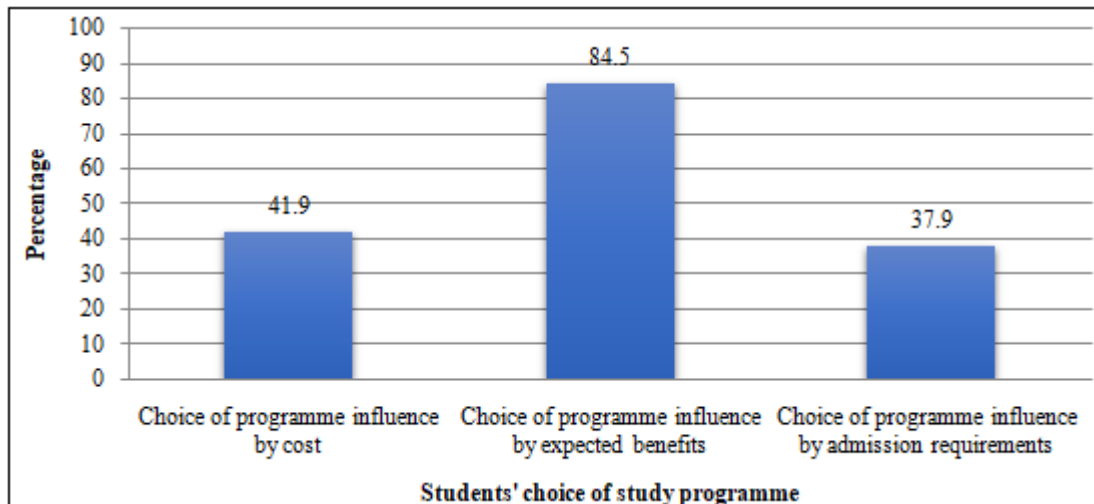


Figure 1: Factors that determined students’ choice of programme

Findings from figure 1 showed that expected benefits from a programme influenced students’ choice of programme (84.5%) more than the other factors. This was followed by

cost of programmes (41.9%) and lastly admission requirements (37.9%). Table 5 presents how students’ choice of programme affects their utility.

Table 5: Students’ Choice of programme and utility

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am satisfied with my choice of programme	214 (53.8%)	142 (35.7%)	26 (6.5%)	16 (4.0%)
I hope to gain employment after completion of my programme	198 (49.7%)	194 (48.7%)	4 (1.0%)	2 (0.5%)
I am satisfied with the training process	104 (26.1%)	214 (53.8%)	60 (15.1%)	20 (5.0%)
This programme has a lot of career prospects in the labour market	148 (37.2%)	216 (54.3%)	28 (7.0%)	6 (1.5%)
Class size is small which makes teaching effective	132 (33.2%)	150 (37.7%)	52 (13.1%)	64 (16.1%)

Source: Field study, 2022

With respect to students’ utility based on their choice of programme, most of the students (89.5%) are satisfied with their choice of programme in terms of employment opportunities and effective teaching, career prospects. 98.5% of the students agreed that they hope to gain employment after graduation while 91.5% agreed that their programme has a lot of career prospects in the labour market. In addition, 79.9% of the students agreed that they are satisfied with the teaching and learning process which is also encourage by the small class size (70.9%) that encourage effective teaching.

This study supports the findings of Tandilashvili (2019) which revealed a positive correlation between academic programme and students’ satisfaction in Georgian State University. It is also worthy of note that students’ satisfaction in a particular programme determines their output or performance. As such, 94.5% of the students reported that they are sure to graduate within the specified time prescribed for the programme while 92.5% of the students participate effectively in the teaching-learning

process such as assignments and class work due to their satisfaction with the programme. This indicates that satisfaction in a programme reduces repetition and dropout as reported by 79.9% and 88.4% respectively.

Table 6 presents the correlational analysis on the effects of choice of programme on students’ utility.

Table 6: Perceived effect of programme choice on utility

		Choice of programme	Utility
Spearman's rho	R-value	1	.211**
	P-value	.	.000
	N	398	398

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field study, 2022

Statistically, findings show that choice of program has a significant and positive effect on utility (R-value =0.211 **, p-value 0.000< 0.05). The positive sign of the correlation indicates that students’ satisfaction from studying a particular programme is dependent on their choice of

programme which is a function of the admission requirements, cost of a programmes and expected benefits of the programme. Although results indicated a moderate correlation (0.211), a p-value of 0.000 which is far below 0.05 shows a high significant level.

Regression analysis

Model specification; $CP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 C_i + \beta_2 Exp_i + D_i DR + e_i$, adapted from McFadden's Random Utility model for optimizing choices

Where: CP= Choice of programme; C=Cost of programme; Exp =Expected benefit; DR=Admission requirements

Table 7: Regression Analysis Depicting the Overall effect Cost, Expected Benefits and Admission Requirements on Choice of Programme

Variables	Statistics		
	Coefficient value	t-value	P-value
Cost of programme	.167	4.148	.000
Expected benefit	.453	12.304	.000
Admission requirements	.479	11.078	.000
(Constant)	16.746		
Multiple R	.653		
R-squared	.426		
Adjusted R squared	.422		
Std. Error of the Estimate	2.89727		
F test	96.952		
Prob> F	.000		

a. Dependent variable: Choice of programme

b. Predictors: (Constant): Cost of programme, expected benefit and admission requirements.

Source: Field study, 2022

Statistics from the regression analysis shows that cost of programme (.167**), expected benefit (.453**), and admission requirement (.479**) affect choice of programme by 42.6% (R-squared value= .426) and the variability explained by the model was significant (F-test=96.952, p-value =0.000, <0.05). The total variation explained by the model was 65.3% (Multiple R =.653) while 34.7% was not explain. 34.7% are factors other than cost, admission requirement and expected benefit can affect students' choice of programmes but these three factors have a greater effect (65.3%). Findings showed that admission requirement affect choice of programme more than the other factors, this was followed by expected benefits and lastly cost of the programme. Therefore, if students have an in-depth knowledge on a particular programme which matched their benefits, they will put in strategies to meet up with the admission requirements and cost of the programme. Even though a majority of the students (75.9%) agreed that admission requirement did not affect their choice of programme, the remaining 24.1% who were affected have a greater impact on utility, which has a multiplier effect on the performance and career path. It is worthy of not that students' performance is a major determinant of educational productivity. As such, educational system, at no point in time should risk poor performance which may lead to repetition and dropout. This supports the research work of Etta et al. (2022) which revealed that admission requirements in higher education institutions in Cameroon resulted to poor performance and some students changing

programmes during their second year and start all over due to dissatisfaction of their choice of programme.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the factors that determine students' choice of programmes in higher education institutions in the South West region of Cameroon. The study also brings out the relationship between the choice of programmes and utility. Three major factors were identified in this study as a major determinant of students' choice of programme which includes cost, expected benefits and admission requirements. Findings revealed that the expected benefits of a programme influenced students' choice of that programme more (84.5%) than the cost of the programme (41.9%) and admission requirements (37.9%). While there exists a positive correlation between choice and utility, the regression analysis showed that admission requirements have a higher impact on students' utility, followed by expected benefits of the programme and lastly cost of the programme. In this light, institutions need to answer three major questions with respect to admission policy: what is the institutional policy for selecting students for a programme? How do students choose their programme of study? What are the sources of students' information on admission requirement for programmes? This study concluded that the choice of a programme determines students' satisfaction for that programme in terms of their career prospects, employment opportunities and higher earnings. However, students' utility determines their output performance which affects institutional productivity. The following recommendations were made to improve on students' satisfaction and output.

- 1) Admission into HEIs takes into consideration the grade points and subjects passed at the high school. HEIs should make provision for information for students at the secondary education level on the various programmes offered and the admission requirements. This should start at least in form three. In addition, they should exploit many sources of information such as social media, websites, brochures and face- to – face outreach activities.
- 2) Prospective students should be well informed of the expected benefits of each programme in relation to the labour market

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