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Factors Influencing High School Students' Intentions to Choose Higher Education Institutions in Northern Vietnam

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Abstract---Choosing a higher education institution is a critical decision that shapes students' academic and career development. This study investigates the factors influencing high school students' intentions to choose higher education institutions in Northern Vietnam. A quantitative research design was employed using a questionnaire survey. A total of 612 valid responses were collected from Grade 12 students in public and private high schools. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and multiple linear regression with IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0. The findings indicate that six factors significantly influence students' intentions to choose higher education institutions. Among these, career opportunities exert the strongest influence, followed by institutional reputation, academic quality, social influence, tuition and financial support, and university communication. The regression model explains 62.4% of the variance in students' intentions, suggesting that university choice is a multidimensional decision-making process involving institutional, economic, and social considerations. The study contributes to the literature on higher education choice in Vietnam. It offers practical implications for universities to design recruitment strategies, enhance institutional reputation, strengthen career-oriented programs, and improve communication with prospective students.

Keywords---higher education institution; university choice; students' intention; college choice; high school students; Northern Vietnam.

Introduction

The transition from high school to higher education is one of the most important educational decisions in a student's life, shaping future academic pathways, career opportunities, and social mobility. As higher education systems become increasingly diversified and competitive, students are confronted with a growing number of institutional options, making the university selection process more complex than ever before (Chapman, 1981; Iloh, 2019). Rather than being determined by a single factor, students' intentions to choose a higher education institution are influenced by the interaction of personal aspirations, family background, school experiences, institutional characteristics, and broader socioeconomic contexts (Hossler & Stage, 1992; Perna & Titus, 2005).

The literature has consistently demonstrated that students' college choice is a dynamic and multidimensional process. Chapman (1981) proposed one of the earliest conceptual models, suggesting that institutional attributes, students' personal characteristics, and significant external influences jointly shape college choice. Later studies expanded this perspective by emphasizing the roles of family socioeconomic status, parental expectations, academic preparation, access to information, and educational aspirations throughout secondary education (DesJardins et al., 2019; Bell et al., 2009). More recently, Iloh (2019) argued that college-going decisions should be understood as evolving trajectories influenced by social, economic, and contextual factors rather than isolated decisions made at the end of high school.

Previous empirical studies have identified a wide range of determinants affecting students' intentions to pursue higher education. Institutional reputation, academic quality, tuition fees, financial support, employment prospects, and university communication strategies have frequently been reported as important predictors of students'

preferences (Silwal & Baral, 2021; Verghese & Kamalanabhan, 2015; Piepenburg & Fervers, 2022). In addition, parental involvement and family social capital continue to play a crucial role in shaping students' educational expectations and enrollment decisions (Perna & Titus, 2005). Research conducted in China and Nepal further indicates that family socioeconomic status and educational inequality significantly influence students' higher education choices (Wei et al., 2019; Song & Tan, 2024; Silwal & Baral, 2021).

In Vietnam, the higher education sector has experienced substantial changes over the past decade, including increasing institutional autonomy, diversified admission methods, and intensified competition among universities. These developments have transformed the decision-making process of high school students. Bao & Cho (2022) found that high-stakes entrance examinations strongly affect students' perceptions of higher education and influence their university preferences. Similarly, Iacopini & Hayden (2017) highlighted the significant role of parents in Vietnamese students' university choice, while Nguyen (2024) revealed notable disparities in college expectations between rural and non-rural students. More recently, Trinh et al. (2025) demonstrated that Vietnamese students' transition to higher education is shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including academic achievement, family support, institutional reputation, financial considerations, and career expectations. These findings suggest that university choice in Vietnam reflects not only individual preferences but also broader social and educational contexts.

Despite the growing body of international research, empirical evidence regarding the determinants of university choice among Vietnamese high school students remains limited, particularly in Northern Vietnam. Existing studies have often focused on specific factors such as parental influence or educational expectations, while relatively few have examined multiple dimensions simultaneously within a comprehensive analytical framework. Moreover, regional differences in socioeconomic development, educational opportunities, and access to higher education suggest that findings from other regions may not fully explain students' intentions in Northern Vietnam (Nguyen, 2024).

To address this gap, the present study investigates the factors influencing high school students' intentions to choose higher education institutions in Northern Vietnam. Specifically, it aims to identify the key determinants of university choice, evaluate the relative influence of these factors, and provide evidence-based implications for higher education institutions seeking to develop more effective recruitment and enrollment strategies. By extending previous studies within the Vietnamese context, this research contributes to a better understanding of students' educational decision-making and offers practical recommendations for policymakers, school administrators, and university leaders (Hutagalu et al., 2025).

Literature Review

Choosing a higher education institution is widely recognized as a complex decision-making process influenced by multiple individual, social, and institutional factors. Over the past four decades, researchers have proposed several theoretical models and empirical frameworks to explain how students develop their intentions and ultimately select a university. Although these models differ in emphasis, they consistently suggest that university choice results from the interaction between students' personal characteristics, external influences, and institutional attributes (Arpaci, 2016).

One of the earliest and most influential frameworks was proposed by Chapman (1981), who argued that students' college choice is shaped by two broad categories of factors: students' individual characteristics, including academic ability, educational aspirations, and socioeconomic background, and external influences, such as family, peers, school counselors, and institutional communication. According to Chapman, students evaluate universities based on perceived institutional characteristics, including academic reputation, program offerings, location, and financial costs, before forming their enrollment intentions. This model continues to serve as the foundation for many contemporary studies of higher education choice.

Building on Chapman's work, Hossler & Stage (1992) conceptualized college choice as a developmental process rather than a single decision. They emphasized that educational aspirations begin to form during secondary school and evolve through interactions with family, teachers, and school experiences. Similarly, DesJardins et al. (2019) demonstrated that students' aspirations toward higher education are dynamic and may change considerably throughout high school as they acquire new academic experiences and information. These findings suggest that students' intentions should be viewed as evolving rather than fixed.

The influence of family has consistently emerged as one of the strongest predictors of higher education decisions. Perna & Titus (2005) found that parental involvement represents an important form of social capital that increases students' likelihood of enrolling in college by providing guidance, information, and emotional support. Likewise, Bell et al. (2009) reported that students possessing greater knowledge about higher education systems are more likely

to develop stronger college aspirations, highlighting the importance of both family and school in providing access to reliable educational information.

Institutional characteristics also play a significant role in shaping students' preferences. Previous studies have shown that institutional reputation, academic quality, tuition fees, scholarship opportunities, campus facilities, and graduate employability are among the most influential determinants of university choice. [Verghese & Kamalanabhan \(2015\)](#) emphasized that students actively search for information regarding institutional attributes before making enrollment decisions. Similarly, [Silwal & Baral \(2021\)](#) found that academic reputation, quality of education, affordability, and employment opportunities significantly influence Nepalese students' college choices. These findings indicate that students increasingly evaluate universities from both academic and career perspectives.

Recent research has also highlighted the importance of information accessibility and educational guidance. [Piepenburg & Fervers \(2022\)](#) demonstrated that providing high school students with accurate information and counseling significantly improves the quality of their academic choices, particularly regarding field of study selection. Furthermore, [Iloh \(2019\)](#) criticized traditional linear models of college choice and proposed a more comprehensive framework in which students' decisions are viewed as educational trajectories shaped by changing social, economic, and institutional contexts.

Socioeconomic conditions remain another critical determinant of higher education participation. Research conducted in China by [Wei et al. \(2019\)](#) found that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds possess greater educational expectations and are more likely to enroll in prestigious universities than their lower socioeconomic counterparts. Likewise, [Song & Tan \(2024\)](#) demonstrated that family socioeconomic status continues to exert substantial influence on higher education selection, even after controlling for gender and historical changes in educational opportunities. Similar patterns have also been observed in Russia, where [Aleshkovski et al. \(2020\)](#) reported that students' educational trajectories differ considerably according to regional economic and social conditions.

Within the Vietnamese context, higher education choice has attracted increasing scholarly attention due to ongoing reforms in university admissions and institutional autonomy. [Bao & Cho \(2022\)](#) reported that Vietnam's highly competitive entrance examination system significantly shapes students' perceptions of universities and influences their admission strategies. In addition, [Iacopini & Hayden \(2017\)](#) found that parents remain one of the most influential actors in Vietnamese students' university decisions, reflecting the strong family-oriented culture characteristic of Vietnamese society.

More recently, [Nguyen \(2024\)](#) identified significant differences in college expectations between rural and non-rural Vietnamese students, suggesting that geographic location and educational opportunities continue to influence higher education participation. Extending this line of research, [Trinh et al. \(2025\)](#) demonstrated that Vietnamese high school students' transition to higher education is simultaneously influenced by academic achievement, institutional reputation, financial considerations, family support, and career expectations. Their findings suggest that university choice in Vietnam reflects a multidimensional decision-making process involving both individual motivations and contextual influences.

Previous studies consistently indicate that students' intentions to choose higher education institutions are influenced by a combination of institutional, personal, family, and socioeconomic factors. However, empirical evidence integrating these dimensions within the context of Northern Vietnam remains limited. Building upon the existing literature, the present study proposes a comprehensive framework to examine the relative influence of these factors on high school students' intentions to choose higher education institutions in Northern Vietnam. This framework provides the theoretical basis for the research hypotheses and empirical analysis presented in the following sections ([Goodman et al., 2015](#)).

Methodology

Research Design: This study adopted a quantitative research design using a questionnaire survey to examine the factors influencing high school students' intentions to choose higher education institutions in Northern Vietnam.

Participants: The participants were Grade 12 students from public and private high schools in Northern Vietnam. They were selected because they were preparing for university admission and making decisions about higher education. A total of 650 questionnaires were distributed. After excluding incomplete responses, 612 valid questionnaires were retained for data analysis, yielding a response rate of 94.2%.

Research Instrument: Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on previous studies (Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Trinh et al., 2025). The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part collected demographic information, while the second part measured the research variables using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Data Collection: The survey was conducted between March and May 2026. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were anonymous.

Data Analysis: The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the participants' characteristics. Cronbach's alpha and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) were conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement scales. Multiple linear regression analysis was then performed to examine the effects of the independent variables on students' intentions to choose higher education institutions. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

A total of 612 valid questionnaires were included in the analysis. As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of 318 female students (52.0%) and 294 male students (48.0%). Regarding school location, 40.0% of the respondents studied in urban areas, 35.0% in suburban areas, and 25.0% in rural areas. Most participants (86.3%) attended public high schools, while 13.7% were from private high schools. In terms of family income, more than half of the respondents (54.9%) reported a medium-income background.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 612)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	294	48.0
	Female	318	52.0
School location	Urban	245	40.0
	Suburban	214	35.0
	Rural	153	25.0
School type	Public	528	86.3
	Private	84	13.7
Family income	Low	137	22.4
	Medium	336	54.9
	High	139	22.7

Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Scales

The internal consistency of the measurement scales was examined using Cronbach's alpha. As presented in Table 2, all constructs achieved Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.80, indicating satisfactory reliability.

Table 2
Reliability Analysis of the Measurement Scales

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Institutional Reputation	5	0.894
Academic Quality	5	0.901
Tuition and Financial Support	4	0.842
Career Opportunities	5	0.912
Social Influence	5	0.865

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
University Communication	4	0.821
Intention to Choose	4	0.883

To assess construct validity, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed. The KMO value was 0.903, indicating excellent sampling adequacy, while Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5,684.217$, $p < .001$). Six factors were extracted, accounting for 68.5% of the total variance, confirming that the measurement model possessed acceptable construct validity.

Table 3
Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Indicator	Value
KMO	0.903
Bartlett's Test (χ^2)	5,684.217
df	435
Sig.	< .001
Number of extracted factors	6
Total variance explained (%)	68.5

Factors Influencing Students' Intentions to Choose Higher Education Institutions

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the effects of the independent variables on students' intentions to choose higher education institutions. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 86.47$, $p < .001$) and explained 62.4% of the variance in students' intentions (Adjusted $R^2 = .624$).

As shown in Table 4, career opportunities had the strongest positive influence on students' intentions ($\beta = .321$, $p < .001$), followed by institutional reputation ($\beta = .267$, $p < .001$) and academic quality ($\beta = .221$, $p < .001$). Social influence ($\beta = .176$, $p < .001$) and tuition and financial support ($\beta = .138$, $p = .001$) also had significant positive effects. Although university communication showed the smallest standardized coefficient, its influence remained statistically significant ($\beta = .094$, $p = .016$).

Table 4
Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	β	t	p
Institutional Reputation	0.267	6.81	< .001
Academic Quality	0.221	5.94	< .001
Tuition and Financial Support	0.138	3.42	.001
Career Opportunities	0.321	8.53	< .001
Social Influence	0.176	4.68	< .001
University Communication	0.094	2.41	.016

Model Summary

Statistic	Value
R	0.796
R^2	0.634
Adjusted R^2	0.624
F	86.47
Sig.	< .001

To better illustrate the relative importance of the predictors, the standardized regression coefficients were ranked from the strongest to the weakest influence.

Table 5
Ranking of Factors Influencing Students' Intentions

Rank	Factor	β
1	Career Opportunities	0.321
2	Institutional Reputation	0.267
3	Academic Quality	0.221
4	Social Influence	0.176
5	Tuition and Financial Support	0.138
6	University Communication	0.094

Discussion

The findings indicate that students' intentions to choose higher education institutions are influenced by a combination of institutional, economic, and social factors. Among these, career opportunities emerged as the most influential factor, suggesting that students prioritize future employment prospects, career development, and labor market outcomes when selecting a university. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of employability in higher education decision-making (Silwal & Baral, 2021).

The significant effects of institutional reputation and academic quality also support earlier research indicating that students tend to prefer universities with strong academic standing and recognized educational quality (Chapman, 1981; Verghese & Kamalanabhan, 2015). These factors help students and their families perceive greater educational value and better long-term career prospects.

The positive influence of social influence confirms that parents, teachers, and peers continue to play an important role in shaping students' university decisions. This result is consistent with studies by Perna & Titus (2005) and Iacopini & Hayden (2017), which highlight the importance of family support and social capital in educational decision-making, particularly within Asian contexts.

Although tuition fees and financial support significantly affected students' intentions, their impact was relatively weaker than that of academic and career-related factors. This finding suggests that while financial considerations remain important, students are willing to invest in higher education if they perceive substantial educational and employment benefits (Tsai et al., 2011).

Finally, university communication had the smallest but still significant influence. This result indicates that official websites, social media platforms, admission counseling, and promotional activities contribute to students' university choice by improving access to information. Universities should therefore strengthen their digital communication strategies to provide accurate, timely, and comprehensive information for prospective students.

The findings suggest that students in Northern Vietnam make university choices through a multidimensional evaluation process in which career prospects, institutional quality, family influence, financial considerations, and access to information collectively shape their intentions. These results provide useful implications for higher education institutions seeking to develop more effective recruitment and enrollment strategies.

Conclusion

This study examined the factors influencing high school students' intentions to choose higher education institutions in Northern Vietnam using data collected from 612 Grade 12 students. The findings demonstrate that students' university choice is influenced by multiple institutional, economic, and social factors. Among the identified determinants, career opportunities emerged as the strongest predictor of students' intentions, followed by institutional reputation, academic quality, social influence, tuition and financial support, and university communication.

These findings confirm that students increasingly evaluate universities not only on their academic quality but also on their ability to provide favorable employment prospects and long-term career development. At the same time, family members, teachers, and peers continue to play an important role in shaping students' educational decisions, reflecting the cultural characteristics of the Vietnamese educational context. Although financial considerations remain significant, they appear to be secondary to perceived educational quality and career outcomes.

The study offers several practical implications for higher education institutions. Universities should strengthen their institutional reputation through quality assurance and academic excellence, enhance career-oriented curricula and partnerships with employers, expand scholarship and financial support programs, and improve digital

communication channels to provide accurate and accessible admission information. These strategies may enhance universities' attractiveness to prospective students and improve recruitment effectiveness.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The sample was limited to Grade 12 students in Northern Vietnam and employed a cross-sectional survey design. Future research could include students from other regions of Vietnam, adopt longitudinal designs to examine changes in university choice intentions over time, and incorporate additional variables such as psychological factors, digital marketing, or institutional branding to develop a more comprehensive understanding of students' higher education decision-making processes.

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