

## STUDENTS' UNIVERSITY CHOICE REASONS: THE CASE OF AKENTEN APPIAH- MENKA UNIVERSITY OF SKILLS TRAINING AND ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT, MAMPONG CAMPUS (AAMUSTED-M)

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### ABSTRACT

University choice reasons provide an insight into what drives undergraduate applicants in the selection of universities. This necessitates looking into motivations that drive prospective applicants in their choice of AAMUSTED-M. The purpose of the study was to identify key factors that influenced decisions of undergraduate applicants of 2023/2024 Academic Year in the selection of Akenten Appiah-Menka University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development, Asante Mampong Campus (AAMUSTED-M). In this study, university choice motivations are categorised into four areas namely; institutional, economic, social and personal. and results showed that 2023/2024 undergraduate students of AAMUSTED-M, generally, based their choice of the University on more institutional reasons than others as the criteria making the greatest impact as asserted by Agrey and Lampadan (2014).

There were 1,751 respondents who participated in the qualitative study. In-depth self-developed structured questionnaire was employed for data collection, analysis, and discussion of findings. The results showed that, there was a significant relationship between students' personal goals, personal development, quality and supportive staff, accreditation and recognition of programme, image and reputation of institution, security, job prospects, location, influence of family and friends, available programmes, popularity of a programme, programmes that bring students into high social status, and publicity/advertising of programmes. The rest of the motivations which included alumni influence, parent/guardian income, cost of living in Mampong, transportation cost from home to the campus had a slight impact on participants' selection of AAMUSTED-M.

The focus of the study was to identify reasons of freshmen and freshwomen of 2023/2024 Academic Year for choosing AAMUSTED-M, thus, the findings offer a better understanding of the importance of each dimension that influences university choice decisions, and to encourage university authorities, Campus Academic Directorate, Vice-Dean, Office, and the Student Representative Council to either improve or revise their strategies in providing better services to students, and focusing on the key motivations that could significantly affect selection of AAMUSTED-M by prospective students

**Keywords:** Study motivations, Institution Choice Reasons, Society Related Factors, Economic Related Factors, Personal Related Factors

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The information age has provided students with access to vast information on their fingertips and made the search for prospecting universities easier. For higher education institutions, this translates to more students seeking for the edge that will help them get their desired career. Consequently, for these students, making a university choice that is right for them is vital. It comes as no surprise that, the rise of competition between universities is getting more intense both home and abroad.

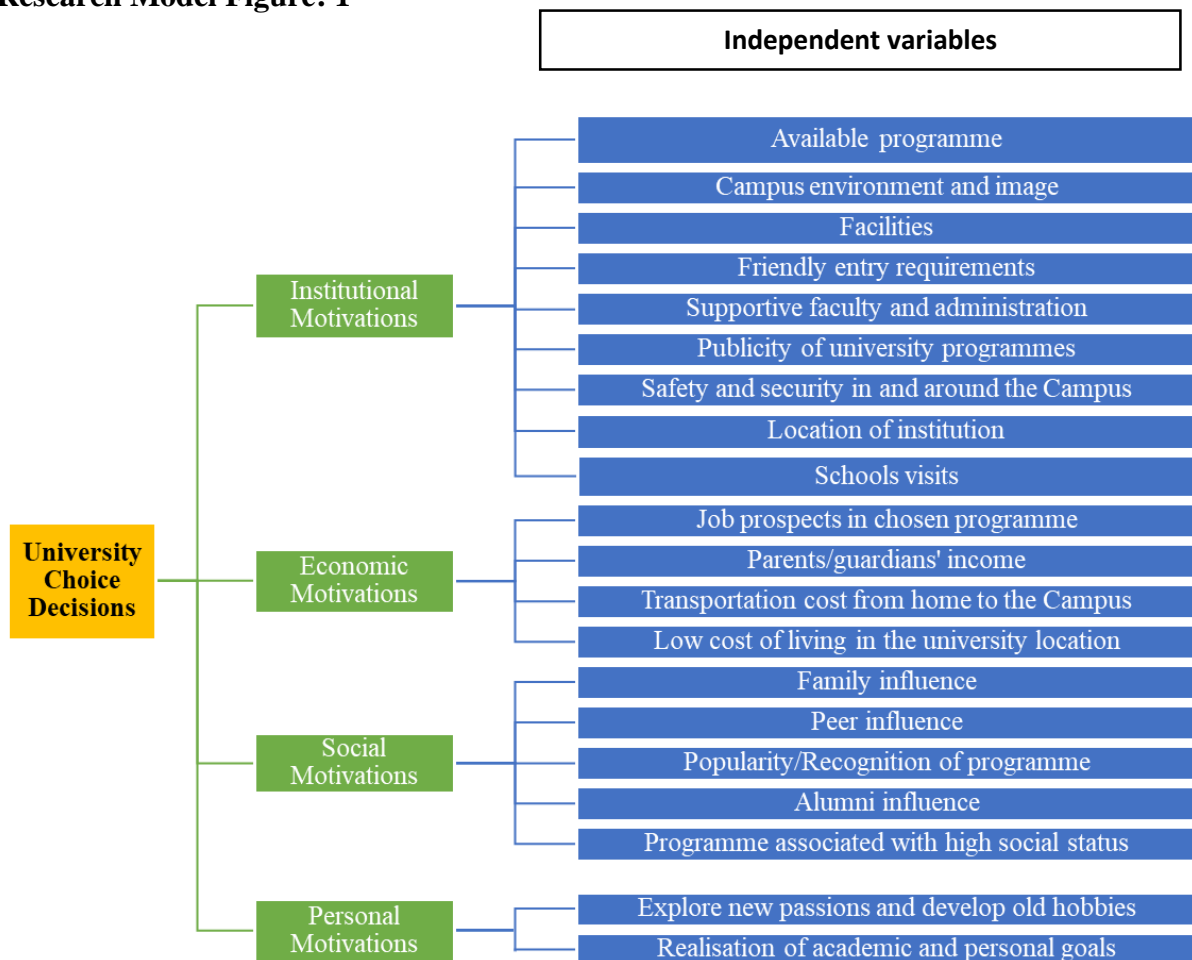
The number of institutions of higher learning in Ghana have increased significantly due to the accelerated demand for university education and an exponential growth in knowledge (Ofosu, 2021). Several of these higher places of learning offer similar programmes resulting in fierce competition among them for prospective students. Owolabi (2010) argues that the survival of an institution and its ability to generate future income is contingent upon the satisfaction of its stakeholders, which is a result of the quality of products and services it offers customers. This assertion has called for public universities to re-strategise and take responsibility for the quality education they offer. The concept of depending less on government subventions has also compelled public universities to reevaluate their strategic orientations to enable them generate funds internally to finance their operations and maintain their relevance in an extremely competitive market (Oldfield & Baron, 2000). This necessitates looking into motivations that drive prospective applicants in their choice of universities to attend. Ming (2010) argues that studying university choice reasons should be looked at as an essential component in improving upon university marketing strategies to increase the chances of students choosing the University over others. In respect of prospective students, decisions to study at particular higher education institutions are also critical in students' ambitions (Echhabi & Al-Hajri, 2018), in that, ambitions are built around the education they receive from such higher education institutions.

Akenten Appiah-Menka University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (AAMUSTED) no doubt also faces fierce competition from other national public universities across the country, to which the Mampong Campus of AAMUSTED is not an exception. The provision of similar programmes by public universities across the country, not counting private universities, gives applicants a wide range of institutions from which to make their selection. This poses a serious threat to the University which, if care is not taken, could result in losing a significant number of its prospective students to her competitors in the future.

## 2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Findings of some authors on reasons that greatly influence applicants' choice of universities to attend differ from one student to another though, generally, students' base choice of their universities on more institutional reasons than others as the criteria making the greatest impact (Yamamoto, 2006; Agrey and Lampadan, 2014). According to research, applicants' rationales for selecting a university reflect institutional, economic, social, and personal as the studies of (Norman, 2017; Shah, Nair and Bennet, 2013; Sarkodie et al, 2020; Connie1 et al, 2022; Nor 2018; Badau, 2013) indicate. Based on the relevant literature reviewed on factors influencing students' choice of universities, the study groups university choice reasons into four (4) categories namely; institutional, economic, social and personal, and, subsequently, a conceptual framework model that demonstrated the relationship between motivations and decision to select a university was developed to guide the current research as shown in Figure

**Research Model Figure: 1**



## 2.1 A Review of Literature on Factors Affecting Students' Selection of Universities

Previous studies have shown that there are a number of rationales ranging from personal and individual interests of students, institutional, economic to social that influence students' choice of which university to attend. Agrey and Lampadan (2014) found five (5) potential reasons emerging as significantly influencing students' decisions in making final choice of a university. They are quality learning environment, job prospects, good sporting facilities, strong student life programme and a safe and friendly environment. Other studies, for instance, by Norman (2017) indicated motivating reasons such as academic programmes offered, image and reputation of the institution, advertising, career fairs, quality of staff, employment prospects of graduates from the institution had a very high influence on the decision by students to choose Botho University as an institution to study at. Whereas reasons such as tuition fees, chance of getting scholarships, and campus visits did not have a very high influence. Shah, Nair and Bennet (2013) reported that student's perception, access and opportunity, learning environments, quality of teachers, course design, and graduate success had a high influence on students' decisions. Sarkodie et al (2020) also identified reputation of institution as a major reason influencing respondent's choice of tertiary institution, followed by parental influence.

The least reason was peer and media influence respectively. The study also unraveled those subject combinations at Senior High School, personal interest, career desire, employment opportunities, recognition of the programme, and academic records were factors influencing students' choice of programme in tertiary education. Finally, results of the study have brought to the fore that cost of the programme, inadequate tools and equipment for practical lessons, and inadequate practical lessons were challenges students face in the choice of programme.

Connie1 et al (2022) in their study examined key reasons that had affected high school students' choices in higher education institutions. The results suggested that there is a significant relationship between programme, university reputation, employment opportunity, tuition fee, security, education and campus facilities, events, location, peers, mentoring, satisfaction and college choice. Gender played a moderating role in the developed model.

Nor (2018) also demonstrated nine (9) most determinant reasons in his study which are: academic quality, learning environment, facilities, course offered, fee, attitude, location, friends and parents influence, image and reputation.

Badau (2013) exploratory study in four (4) tertiary education institutions based on group of conceptual models found five reasons which influence students' decision on choosing tertiary education institutions. Findings include finance, location, physical infrastructure, and industrial expectations were significant factors influencing choice of tertiary education institution.

## **2.2 Observations from the Academic Affairs Directorate in AAMUSTED-M**

The Academic Affairs Campus Directorate is the epicenter of academic administration and is responsible for the management, coordination, and delivery of academic related services within the student life cycle, and student records. It deals with academic affairs of students, and oversees arrangements for student applications and admissions, registration and coordination of examinations and graduation. The Campus Directorate uses several modes to market their programmes to attract applicants. The use of university website, media advertising, and planned enrolment drives are among the platforms utilized by the University to provide first-hand information on the products and services on offer. Planned enrolment drives, whereby, the University visits schools, churches, and community centres in various regions to distribute their flyers and also talk to students and the community about the programmes in the University have also become common these days. Sometimes the enrolment team even takes advantage to assist and address challenges encountered during the completion of the admission application form.

AAMUSTED-M in an attempt to offer opportunities and also narrow the client's choice of universities, has instituted a flexible admission policy for both the working class and the newly completed Senior High Students (SHS) in accordance with the requirements of the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). The policy makes room for West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) or Diploma holders who completed school some years back but could not continue to the University some Reason or the other, to do so. These applicants referred to as "MATURE" are made to write entrance examinations organized by the institution provided they meet the requirements spelt out by the University. Scholarship

opportunities such as the Vice-Chancellor's scholarship is also made available to students to enable them complete their education.

The Campus Directorate goes a bit further to study its applicants by identifying the category of people who enrolled in the previous years, their location and how they got to know about the University. This vital information is extracted from the application system. The application form is designed to capture applicants' data on the following areas to assist the University in planning its enrolment drives and also to come out with strategies to attract potential students from across the globe.

Questions such as:

- How did you hear of the University (University website, print media/social media, friends, alumni, current students).
- The native language (Twi, Ga, Fante, French, Dagbani, Gonja, etc).
- Schools Attended.

The data is then extracted at the end of each admission period and carefully analysed for the subsequent admission season. The admission office also follows up on rejected applications by calling or emailing applicants who did not qualify to read their chosen programmes during the previous admission period to find out if they had met the requirements.

Regardless of these numerous flexible policies and market-driven strategies employed by the University in promoting her products and services, the ultimate responsibility lies with the applicant to select a university based on motivating reasons that have greater impact on achievement, progression, and completion of the programme.

Exploring the likely Motivation/Reasons that Influence Undergraduate Freshmen's Choice of AAMUSTED-M

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Study Design

This study employed a qualitative approach by using self-administered questionnaires to ascertain the reasons that influenced the 2023/2024 entry applicants' choice of AAMUSTED-M. A qualitative study was chosen as it tends to be more exploratory and descriptive, as the process can produce satisfactory evidence. The survey design is useful in describing the characteristics of a large population to ensure a more accurate sample to gather targeted results in which to draw conclusions and make decisions (Salaria, 2012)

### 3.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study used Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination. The formula helped to improve the accuracy level in determining the chunk of the target population to sample at a margin of error of one percent (1%).

Yamane's formula:  $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$

Where  $n$  = sample size,  $N$  = target population (2,504),  $e$  = margin of error (.01)

Therefore  $n = 2504 / (1 + (2504 * .01 * .01)) = 2,002$

There was a sampling constraint due to the unwillingness of some undergraduate freshmen to answer the questions. However, the number of respondents who participated in the survey was made up 87% (1,751) of the calculated sample size of 2,002. This means that only 13% of the target population did not respond to the questionnaire.

### 3.3 Instrumentation

A self-administered questionnaire was sent to respondents via departmental platforms for data collection. The questionnaire had a total of thirty-three (33) questions that were categorised under two (2) sections: a) personal characteristics of respondents, and b) potential factors influencing undergraduate university choice decisions. Respondents were required to answer questions with a dichotomous survey scale which allowed them to provide quick and straight forward answers by choosing between two options; yes or no.

### 3.4 Data Collection

The method used to collect the primary data was online survey. It was an easy method to collect data since respondents use the internet almost all the time. Google forms with a database were created to save respondents' answers. The provision of free internet (wi-fi) access by the University made this means of data collection facile.

### 3.5 Procedure

Google form links were generated and sent to students for their responses. Responses were then saved in excel, and generated by google forms. The data was analysed using excel, and presented in tables, columns, and pie charts. Descriptive analysis, specifically, frequencies and percentages, were used to interpret the results collectively. The analysis focused on identifying motivations that influenced undergraduate freshmen and women of AAMUSTED-M in the selection of the institution.

### 3.6 Results Analysis and Discussion

A sample of 1,751 respondents from a population of 2,504 first-year undergraduate students of AAMUSTED-M who enrolled in the 2023/2024 academic year participated in the survey. The study was conducted on freshmen and women ages ranging from 18 to 44 years old. Responses captured personal characteristics of respondents and potential factors influencing 2023/24 Academic Year undergraduates' selection of the university choice.

### 3.7 Analysis of Personal Characteristics of Respondents

The personal characteristics variables explored in this study included sex, age, faculty of respondent, region where they live, ethnicity, entry grade, religious affiliation occupational status, and educational background of parent/guardian. Results are shown in Table 1.

#### Table 1. Personal Characteristics Data of Respondents



SN	Personal Characteristics of Respondents	Frequencies n= 1751	Percentages (%)
1.	<b>Sex</b>		
	Male	883	50.4%
	Female	868	49.6%
2.	<b>Age</b>		
	18-24	1,101	62.9%
	25-34	606	34.6%
	35-44	44	2.5%
	45-54	-	
3.	<b>Faculty</b>		
	Agriculture Education	177	10.1%
	Science Education	376	21.5%
	Environment and Health Education	893	51%
	Education and General Studies	305	17.4%
4.	<b>Ethnicity</b>		
	Akan	1,157	66.1%
	Ewe	68	3.9%
	Guan	33	1.9%
	Ga-Adangbe	31	1.8%
	Mole-Dagbani	245	14.9%
	Gurma	103	5.9%
	Grusi	79	4.5%
	Mande	18	1.0%
5.	<b>Region where Respondent lives</b>		
	Ashanti	944	53.9%
	Bono, Ahafo, Bono East, Ahafo	184	10.5%
	Central	47	2.7%
	Eastern	39	2.2%
	Greater Accra	49	2.8%
	Northern, Upper East & West, Western	373	19.6%
	North, North East,	21	1.2%
	Volta	65	3.7%
	Western	30	1.7%
	Oti		
6.	<b>Entry grade</b>		
	10-16	469	26.8%
	17-23	772	44.1%
	24-30	411	23.5%
	31-37	98	5.6%
7.	<b>Religious Affiliation</b>		
	Christianity	1,462	83.5%
	Islam	266	15.2%
	African Traditional Religion	12	0.7%
	Hinduism	2	0.1%
	Buddhism	4	0.2%
	Atheism (No religion)	5	0.3%

8.	<b>Occupational Status of Parent/Guardian</b> Government Employee Private Employee Self-employee	249 135 1,368	14.2% 7.7% 78.1%
9.	<b>Educational Background of Parent/Guardian</b> No Formal Education Pre-Tertiary Education Tertiary Education	1,009 420 322	57.6% 24% 18.4%

**Table 1 shows the following**

**Age** - Most of the respondents were aged between 18 and 24 years (62.9%) with the rest aged between 25 and 34 years (34.6%) and 35-44 years (2.5%). This further shows that most of the first-year undergraduate students for the 2023/2024 academic year at this institution were young adults.

**Sex** - Female undergraduate respondents (49.6%) were just a little under 50% while the male undergraduate respondents were (50.4%), a near gender balance.

**Faculty** - Most of the respondents (51%) were coming from Environment and Health Education programmes, indicating increasing interest of students in offering programmes in environmental and health related sciences. The rest of the respondents came from Agriculture Education (10.1%), Science Education (21.5%), and Education and General Studies (17.4%).

**Environment and Health Education:** Most of the respondents (51%), were admitted to read Environment and Health Education programmes

**Table 2.1**

<b>Mode of Entry of Admitted Applicants (%), n = 1,282</b>		
<b>Courses</b>	<b>Mature</b>	<b>Direct</b>
BSc Public Health	20%	80%
BSc Occupational Health & Safety	70%	30%
BSc Environmental Health & Sanitation Education	80%	20%

Table 2.1 indicated that the faculty admitted more mature applicants than direct for both Occupational Health & Safety and Environmental Health & Sanitation Education programmes, with the public health programme having more direct applicants than mature applicants.

**Science Education- Table 2.2**

<b>Mode of Entry of Applicants (%), n = 441</b>
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Courses	Mature	Direct
BSc Mathematics Education	30%	70%
BSc Chemistry Education	5%	95%
BSc Physics Education	-	100%
BSc Integrated Science	40%	60%
BSc Biological Sciences	40%	60%

It is observed from the above table 2.2 that most students were admitted as direct applicants to the faculty with few students admitted as mature applicants. The faculty had more direct students than mature students.

### Education and General Studies – Table 2.3

Mode of Entry of Applicants (%), n = 500		
Courses	Mature	Direct
B.A. English	30%	70%
B.Ed. Junior High Education	50%	50%
B.Ed. Upper Primary Education	75%	25%
B.Ed. Early Grade Education	75%	75%

The faculty had a near balance of mature and direct applicants admitted for the various programmes on offer at the faculty.

### Agricultural Education – Table 2.4

Mode of Entry of Applicants (%), n = 281		
Courses	Mature	Direct
BSc Agricultural Science Education	50%	50%
BSc Natural Resources Management and Education	70%	30%
BSc Agribusiness and Entrepreneurship Education	65%	35%
BSc Agriculture Engineering, Technology, and Innovation Education	-	100%

Agriculture Engineering, Technology, and Innovation Education had 100% direct applicants, while the traditional Agricultural Science Programme had a 50-50 for mature and direct applicants. The rest of the programmes had more mature students than direct.

The lower percentages in students' enrolment in the Agriculture Sciences programmes might call for continuous review of the different disciplines in these subjects by global market demands. In this direction, the faculty could attract more direct applicants as observed from student enrollment for Agriculture Engineering, Technology, and Innovation Education. The

overall observation made from table 2.1-2.4 demonstrates that the 2023/24 Academic Year undergraduate student population was made up of more direct students than mature students.

**Ethnicity:** Diversity is essential in the university experience because students get exposure to different people and their perspectives, and also learn from one another. Moreover, it is important for university authorities to be aware of the ethnicity of her student population to help strengthen enrollment strategies for both underrepresented and majority groups. Table 1 showed that majority of respondents were Akans 66.1%, followed by Northerners with 26.3%. The rest were Ewe (3.9%), Ga (1.8%), and Guan (1.9%). The ethnic distribution of AAMUSTED Mampong Campus; having more Akans and Northerners, might be due to the following reasons: its location in the Ashanti Region of Ghana (forty-eight (48) kilometres north-east of Kumasi) and also being bounded one hundred and thirty-seven (137) kilometres to the north by Kintampo, the geographical centre of Ghana as measured in colonial

**Regions of Ghana where respondents live:** Students seek higher educational institutions that will help them achieve their goals, gain knowledge, and develop their skills and abilities to find productive and meaningful employment. Gaining insights into the regions they live to come and study at the University, would help university authorities to determine where to concentrate resources when attempting to draw prospect students from the various regions of Ghana.

**Entry grades:** The entry grade of majority of respondents ranges between 17-23 (44.1%), followed by 26.8% of respondents with entry grade between 10-16. The rest of the entry grades were 24-30 (23.5%) and 31-37 (5.6%). The percentages of entry grade indicated that respondents' pre-university academic results performance ranged from very good, good, credit to pass. These results would require teaching strategies that would consider pre-university academic results to better student educational experience in the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for success in future careers. This section did not take into consideration the entry mode/classification of respondents with their entry grades.

**Religious Affiliation:** The religious climate of AAMUSTED-M was seemingly Christian with 83.5%, followed by Muslim with 15.2%. This means enrolment drive campaigns should be continued in churches, and intensified in the Muslim Communities. Other religious affiliations have the least membership among respondents with African Traditional religion being (0.7%), Buddhism (0.2%), Hinduism (0.1%), and Atheism (0.4%). Students' religious affiliation could determine which religions are predominant on campus so enrollment drive teams could strategise where to concentrate more resources and intensify student recruitment campaigns.

**Occupational Status of parent/guardian:** Schools may ask for occupation details of parents/guardians in the application form to gain insight into the family's financial situation of students. Knowing the occupational details of parents/guardians enables the University to offer financial assistance packages where available and necessary, to better assist and encourage students toward educational attainment. In AAMUSTED Mampong Campus, 78.1% of respondents indicated that their parents/guardians are self-employed. 14.2% working in government institutions, and 7.7% of parents/guardians in private employment.

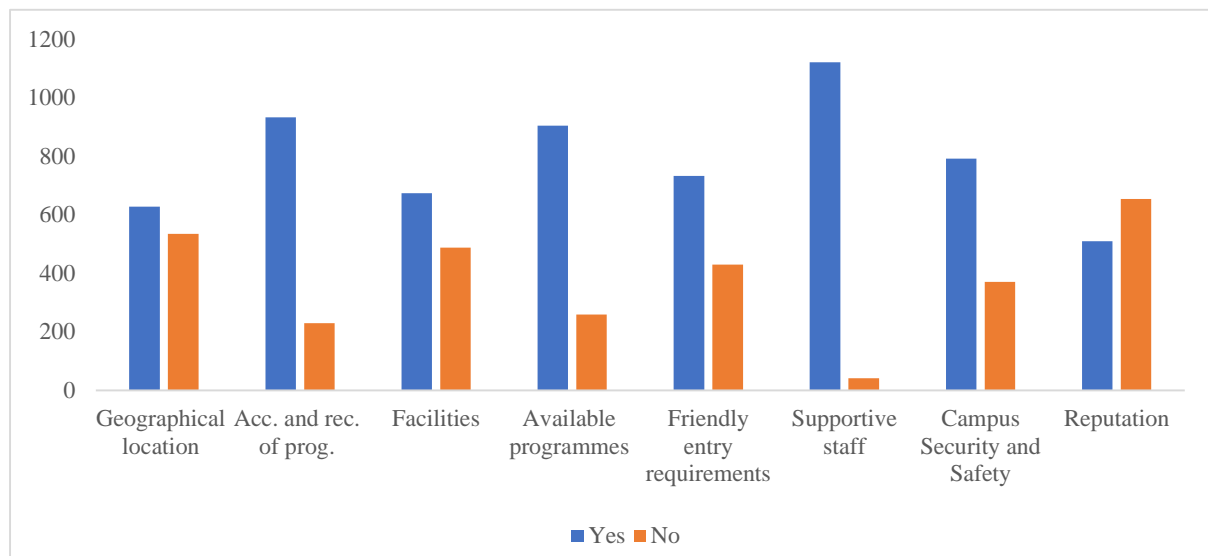
**Educational Background of Parent/Guardian:** Majority of respondents (57.6%) indicated that their parents/guardians had no formal education. 24% of respondents have parents/guardians who had pre-tertiary education, and 18.4% of respondents have parents/guardians who had tertiary education. Providing attractive financial support facilities to needy but brilliant students from less-endowed senior high schools and backgrounds would go a long way to ensure better student outcomes.

**3.8 Potential Motivations/Reasons Influencing the Selection of AAMUSTED-M**

**3.8.1 Analysis of Institution-Related Motivations/Reasons**

The study showed that there are a number of institutional motivations that influenced prospective students’ decisions to select AAMUSTED-M for study as shown in Figure 3. Among such university-related motivations include location of the institution, academic programmes offered, image and reputation of the institution, quality and supportive faculty and administration, facilities, publicity of the University and her programmes, safety and security in and around university campus and friendly entry requirements.

**Figure 3. Institutional Motivations/Reasons**



Results in Figure 3 show that institutional motivations played a significant role in influencing the decision of applicants to enroll at AAMUSTED-M. More specifically, results indicated that:

**Location of Institution:** 51.6% of applicants were influenced by the location of the institution when compared to 48.4% who were not motivated by this factor.

**Accreditation and Recognition of Programmes:** 78.1% of the applicants were of the belief that academic programmes offered by AAMUSTED-M are accredited and recognized, as compared to 21.9% who were not influenced by this reason.

**Reputation and Image of AAMUSTED-M:** Majority of respondents (50.2%) indicated that institutional reputation and prestige was not a factor in their decision to enroll at the institution, while 49.8% were highly influenced by the image and reputation of the institution.

**Available Programmes in AAMUSTED-M:** when compared to 23.4% whose decisions were not influenced at all by available programmes in the institution, 76.6% of the students indicated that their decisions to enroll at the institution were highly influenced by the available programmes on offer at the Campus.

**Supportive Faculty and Administration:** 95.4% of students were highly influenced by the fact that staff at the institution could help them attain their academic and personal goals, compared to 4.6% whose decisions were not influenced by the caliber of staff at the institution.

**Facilities:** 55.7% of students indicated that their decisions to enroll at the institution were highly influenced by the quality of non- educational and educational facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, health facility, residential facility, and recreational facilities, while 44.3% responded that their decisions were not influenced at all by the quality of facilities.

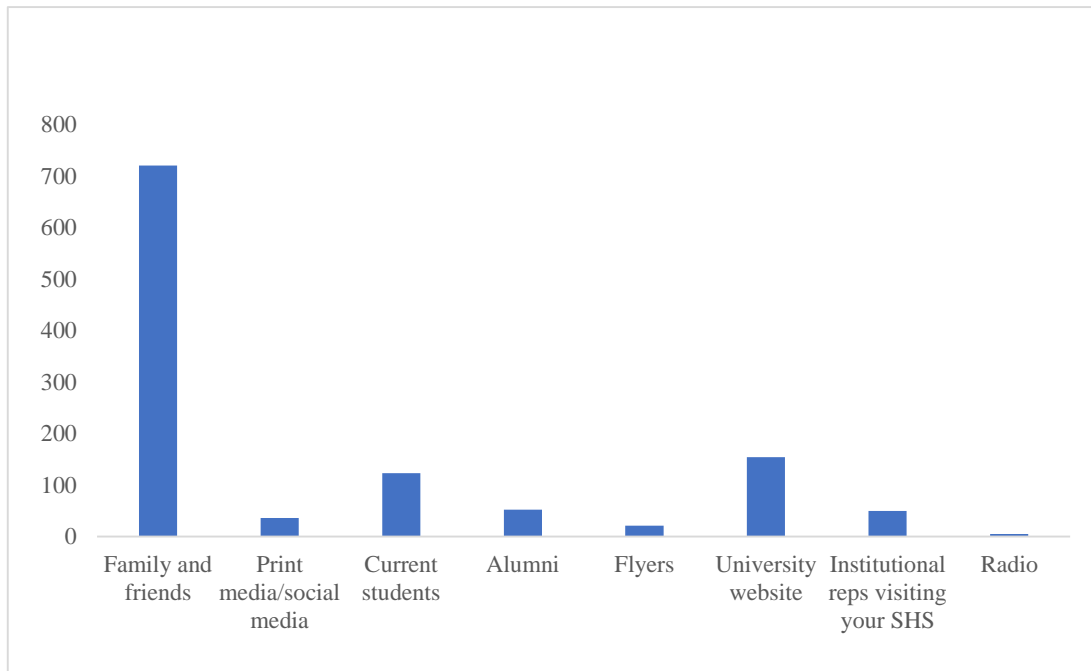
**Entry Requirements:** 60% of respondents admitted that they were influenced by the flexible entry requirements of AAMUSTED-M, while 40% said entry requirements were not decisive in the selection of the institution. The mature and post-diploma entry mode by applicants might have influenced a section of the respondents in their choice of AAMUSTED-M.

**Safety and Security in and around Campus:** 68.1% of respondents were of the belief that the campus was safe and secured and that influenced their decision to enroll at the institution. 31.9% of students were not influenced by this reason. The Campus Security has been working assiduously with the Campus Police Station to boost the security and safety of the Campus.

**Advertising/Publicity Channels:** 61.6% of respondents indicated that family and friends were the channels that influenced the selection of AAMUSTED-M, as compared to 13.2% who were influenced by information on the university website. The rest of the channels which were decisive in students' selection of AAMUSTED-M were as follows: 11.1% by current students, 4.8% by alumni, 4.1% by visits to their campus by institutional representatives. 2.7% by print media, 2.1% by flyers, and 0.3% by radio announcements. In the quest to attract prospective students AAMUSTED-M has embarked on a number of marketing and advertising strategies such as being in local newspapers, creating a strong online presence via the university website and other related websites, university representatives visiting senior high schools and being interviewed at community radio stations, erecting University billboards at vantage sites, and distribution of flyers to schools and communities among others. The study reveals that family and friends have been faithful ambassadors for telling the story of AAMUSTED-M. This calls for prompt and quality service delivery not only to internal but also external stakeholders, intensifying community visits, and active participation of the institution in social activities such as funerals of deceased internal and key external stakeholders. The University website undoubtedly has also been a key advertising channel for attracting prospective students. The

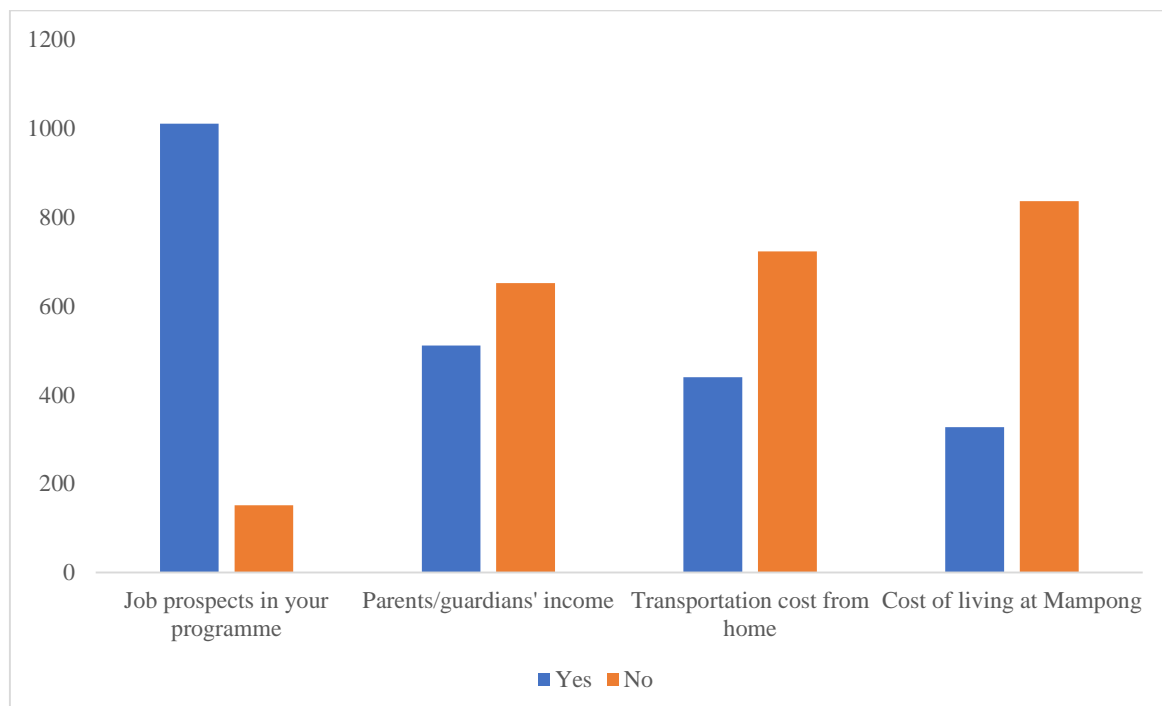
community radio advertisements might have to be intensified as well as frequent visits to churches and mosques.

**Figure 4: Publicity Channels**



## Analysis of Economic Motivations

**Figure 5. Economic Motivations/Reasons**



Generally, there are a number of economic motivations that encourage prospective students to select the University of their Choice which include job prospects in chosen programme, parent/guardian income, transportation cost from home to the campus, and cost of living at the location of the institution. The study showed that in AAMUSTED-M as shown in Figure 4, three (3) reasons were slightly significant in respondents' choice of the institution with the exception of the fourth which highly influenced their choice of AAMUSTED-M.

**Job Prospects in Chosen Programme:** 84.7% of the students felt that there are higher chances of getting employment in their current programmes hence their decision to enroll at the institution, while 15.3% did not consider career prospects in their chosen programmes.

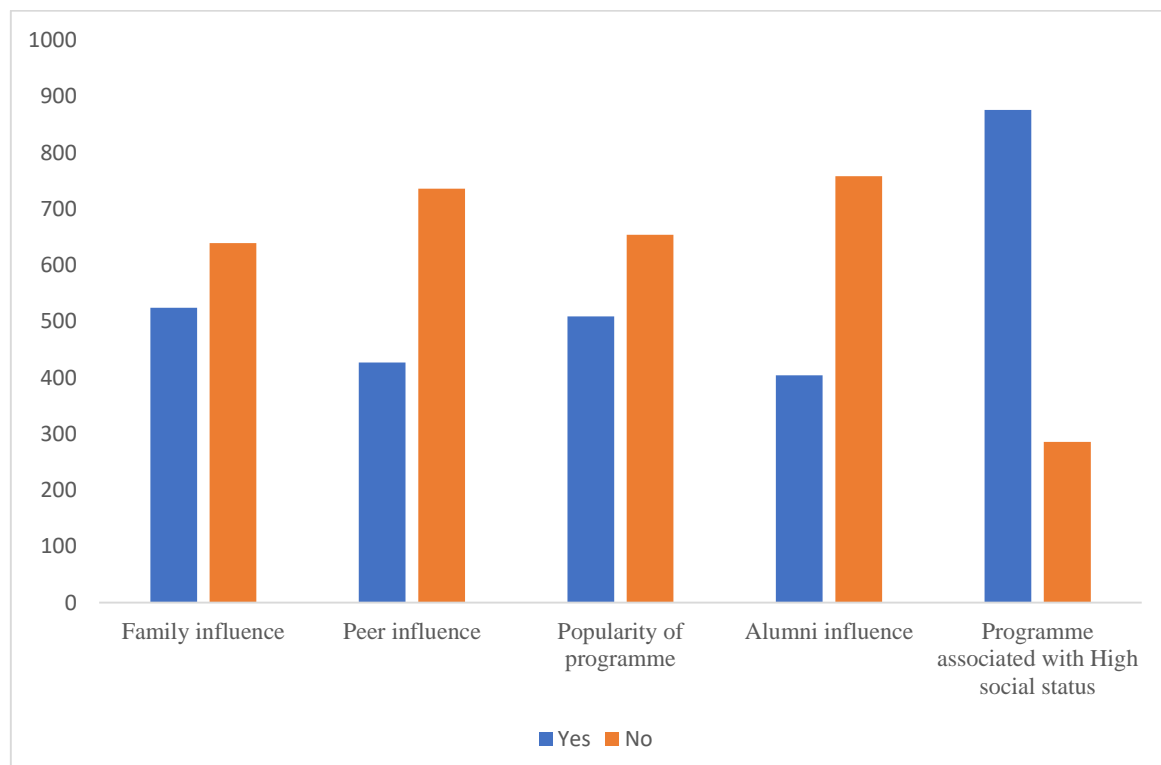
**Parents/Guardian Income:** 44.9% of respondents based their selection of AAMUSTED-M on their parents/guardians' income as compared to 55.1% that did not consider their parents/guardian income in their decision-making process.

**Transportation Cost from Home to Campus:** 60.1% of students indicated that transportation cost from home to campus was not a factor in the selection of AAMUSTED-M, while 39.9% considered that as important.

**Cost of Living in the Mampong Municipality:** 29.4% considered this as a significant factor in choosing AAMUSTED-M, whereas 70.6% did not think this university choice reason is a big deal.

## Analysis of Social Motivations

**Figure 5. Social Motivations/Reasons**





There are a number of social reasons that influence prospective students in the selection of the University of their Choice which include family decision, influence from peers/friends, alumni influence, programme popularity, and programmes that bring students into high social status. Figure 5 shows how social preferences influenced 2023/2024 entry students of AAMUSTED-M.

**Family Decision:** 54.5% of students indicated that selection of AAMUSTED-M to study at was not based on their family's decision as compared to 45.5% of respondents that said their family influenced the selection of the institution. The role the family plays in the selection of AAMUSTED-M appears to be significant. Enrollment campaigns in churches, communities as well as participating in social activities such as funerals of deceased key external and internal stakeholders where representatives take the opportunity to tell the story of AAMUSTED-M should be encouraged

**Influence from Peers/Friends:** 62.9% of students said friends/peers had no influence on their selection of AAMUSTED-M, as compared to 37.1% that indicated that they were influenced by their peers/friends in choosing the institution.

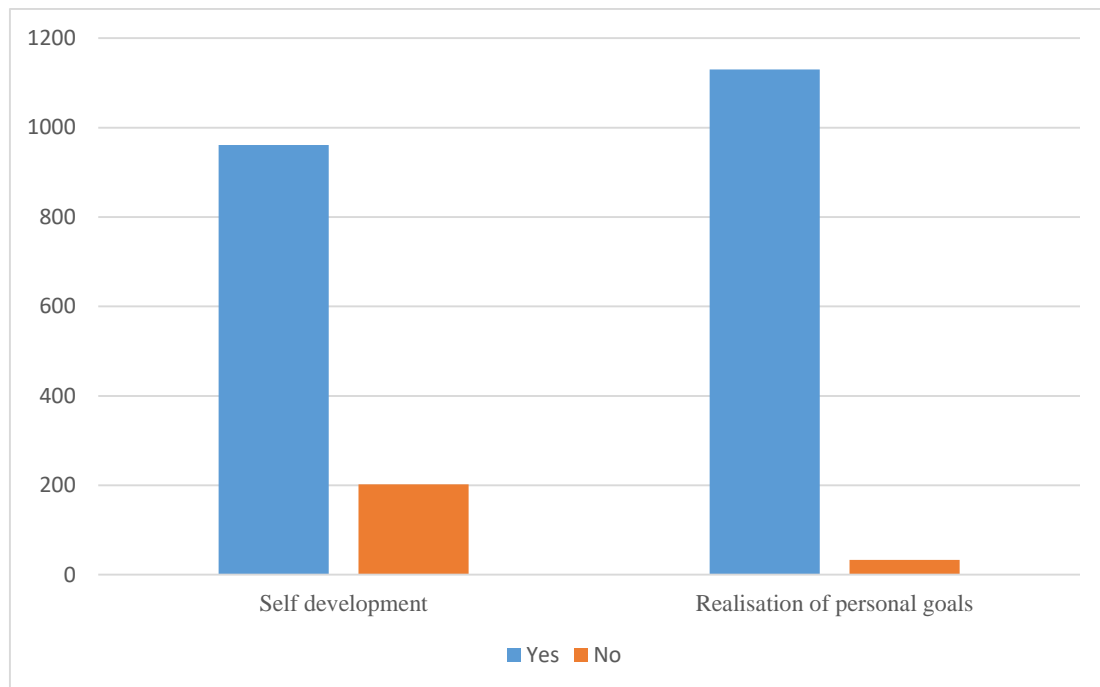
**Alumni Influence:** 35.2% of participants admitted that alumni contributed to the selection of AAMUSTED-M. While 64.8% were not influenced by the alumni of AAMUSTED-M. Building and maintaining relationship with alumni is crucial to the growth of AAMUSTED-M. Alumni can be effective advertising strategy for the institution as graduates who can provide counsel and valuable feedback on AAMUSTED-M's direction, curriculum, career readiness and reputation, among others, to prospective students whom they might know or encounter.

**Popularity of Programme:** 56.2% of the students said the choice of their current programmes was not based on the fact that they are popular or highly recognised in society, as compared to 43.8% that admitted that popularity of programme was significant in the selection of their current programme. The introduction of BSc programme in Nutrition and Dietetics. Post Diploma in Education and other cutting-edge health related programmes would bring new enrollments resulting in new revenue which will help create better student experiences leading to better student outcomes

**Programmes that bring Students into High Social Status:** 74.3% believed that their current programme would bring them into a high social status, whereas 25.7% said this reason was not a factor in the selection of their current programme. Aside job prospects for particular programmes, students would most of the time prefer programmes that are highly recognised by society. This would demand AAMUSTED-M coming up with new programmes that student perceive to have high societal recognition and those that place students in high positions on the job market.

### 3.8.2 Analysis of Personal Motivations

#### Figure 6. Personal Motivations/Reasons



Personal reasons that affect prospective students' choice of universities were personal development and realisation of personal goals.

**Personal Development:** 82.9% of respondents indicated that they believed that the institution could help them to explore new passions, and harness their abilities and potentials, as compared to 17.1% who were of the opinion that this reason played no role in the selection of the university.

**Realisation of Personal Goals:** 96.2% of students believed that AAMUSTED-M would help them to achieve their personal goals, while 3.8% indicated that this reason was not significant in their choice of the institution.

#### 4.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results of this study showed that personal interests/factors which are realisation of personal goals (96.2%) and personal development (82.9%) had a very high influence on respondents' decision to select AAMUSTED-M to study at. In other words, this is how the 2023/2024 entry applicants made decisions about the university to study at.

In the second instance, Institutional motivations as shown in this study include location of the institution, supportive staff, reputation of academic programmes on offer, image and reputation of the institution, quality of facilities, advertising channels, available programmes, entry requirements, safety and security in and around campus. Top three (3) factors or motivations considered by respondents in the selection of the University were supportive staff (95.4%), recognition and accreditation of programmes on offer (78.1%), and Available programmes (76.6%). The following categories of factors also had a positive relationship on the decision-making processes of students in the selection of the University; safety and security in and around campus (66.1%), friendly entry requirements (60%), publicity by family and friends

(61.1%) and facilities (58%) were considered as priorities by participants in their choice of AAMUSTED-M. This confirms an earlier study on factors that influence the decisions of students when selecting a university to study at by Agrey and Lampadan (2014), who indicated that students base the choice of their universities on more institutional factors than others as the criteria making the greatest impact.

Institutional factors/motivations that respondents considered as potential pull factors that influenced their selection of AAMUSTED-M such as supportive faculty and administration is vital in supporting the development and achievement of students. Staff provide academic advice and sufficient support in order to help students minimize their concerns while studying (Connie et al, 2022). Furthermore, respondents were of the belief that the programmes on offer should be accredited and recognized. This was particularly important for students because they would not be investing money in their studies only to find out later that their degrees are not recognized or accredited on both local and international academic and job markets. This could result in setbacks in students' academic success. Availability of programmes also played an important role in affecting applicants' university choice decision as the students tended to make their selection only when they are confident with the programmes on offer, and which could guarantee them better job opportunities in the future (Chapman, 1981). A study by Yusof et al (2008) found that availability of the required programmes is a predictor of how students decide to choose a university to study at. Increasing students' enrolment in available programmes, therefore, might call for continuous review of the different disciplines in these subjects by global market demands.

Economic preferences such as parent/guardian income, transportation cost from home to campus, cost of living at Mampong had little to no effect on applicants' choice of AAMUSTED-M. However, 84.7% of 2023/2024 entry applicants considered job prospects in their programme area as significantly impacting their decision to enroll in the institution.

Results showed that 74.3% of respondents are of the belief that their current programme will bring them into a high social status. However, respondents did not consider such social factors as parent/Guardian's income (44.9%), transportation cost from home to campus (39.9%), and cost of living at Mampong (29.4%) as impacting their decision in choosing AAMUSTED-M to study at.

Social preferences also had a slightly positive correlation with university choice. 45.5% of students were influenced by their family's decision to choose AAMUSTED-M, 43.8% said popularity of their chosen programme influenced their decision, 37.1% were influenced by peers/friends, and 35.2% influenced by past students/alumni.

Though most students seemed to be highly influenced by personal motivations/preferences in the decision-making process of university choice, results in this study confirmed the assertions made by Agrey and Lampadan (2014) in their study which indicated that students base the choice of their universities on more institutional factors than others as the criteria making the greatest impact. This study identified top ten (10) reasons that had high influence on students' decision process to choose a university like AAMUSTED-M to study at. The following made up the category of reasons respondents considered being highly decisive in the selection of AAMUSTED-M which include; two (2) personal - personal goals (97%) and personal

development (82%); one (1) economic - job prospects (84.7%); one (1) social - programmes bringing students into high social status (74.3%) and six (6) institutional – supportive staff (95.4%), recognition and accreditation of programme on offer (78.1%), available programmes (76.6%), safety and security in and around campus (68.1%), friendly entry requirements of AAMUSTED-M (60%), and publicity by family and friends (61.6%).

**Table 7**

S/N	TOP TEN (10) FACTORS IDENTIFIED AS INFLUENCING UNIVERSITY CHOICE	RESPONDENTS (%)
1.	Personal Goals	97
2.	Quality and Supportive Staff	95
3.	Job Prospects	85
4.	Personal Development	82
5.	Recognition and Accreditation of Programmes on Offer	78
6.	Available Programmes	77
7.	Programmes Bringing Students into High Social Status	74
8.	Safety and Security in and around Campus	68
9.	Publicity by Family and Friends	62
10.	Friendly Entry Requirements	60

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

A number of conclusions were made based on the above results. To begin with, it was concluded that personal interests/factors which include realisation of personal goals and personal development had a very high influence on 2023/2024 entry applicants' decision to select AAMUSTED-M to study at., on top of that, characteristics of a university which include location of AAMUSTED-M, supportive staff, accreditation and recognition of academic programmes on offer, image and reputation of the institution, quality of facilities, advertising channels, available programmes, entry requirements, and safety and security in and around campus, were important in influencing students' decisions in the selection of AAMUSTED-M. It was further concluded that though economic and social motivations had slightly positive correlation with university choice, among these motivations, 2023/2024 entry applicants considered job prospects in their programme area and programmes that are associated with high social status as significantly impacting their decision to enroll in the institution.

Ultimately, though personal factors had a higher probability of enhancing the university's chances of being selected as a university of choice by prospective students, more institutional factors were found to significantly influence prospective students' decision to select the institution.

Therefore, aligning enrolment and branding strategies with personal and institutional factors can improve student numbers, satisfaction, and institutional reputation.

## 5.1 Future Research Directions

While the author of this study does not claim generalisation of findings to that of other levels of undergraduate studies in AAMUSTEDD-M, it is cautiously suggested that other levels of

graduate studies both in AAMUSTED-M and other academic institutions may have similar results. The target population was limited to level 100 undergraduate freshmen and freshwomen of 2023/2024 Academic Year. A future study may consider the entry mode of entry of applicants and whether they were admitted into their chosen programmes or otherwise

## 5.2 Recommendations

Applicants' reasons for selecting an institution reflect the priorities and motivations that drive prospective students when choosing a university. These priorities are consistent with research findings from 2014, which found that prospective students consider more institutional-related factors in choosing a university. For AAMUSTED-M to leap forward, distinguish herself from competitor institutions, and increase her share of students' enrolment, this study recommends the following:

## 6.0 INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

### 6.1 Implications for Management

In this study, majority of the respondents are influenced by the programmes offered by the institution; their popularity, availability, and accreditation and recognition by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). Besides, accreditation is tied to the university's reputation which is an important factor that potentially influences prospective applicants' choice decision where they tend to be more confident with the institution if committed to offering programmes that have been approved by the accrediting body. Respondents believed that the university's reputation will be enhanced with the acknowledgement by local and international education authorities.

Most respondents expect AAMUSTED-M to offer cutting edge programmes which have high job prospects after graduation. This may call for AAMUSTED-M to continuously review the different disciplines in the various subjects, as well as develop market-driven curricula through the involvement of both the private and the public sectors to be in sync with industrial needs and global market demands.

Apart from that, the findings also imply that education and non-education facilities are another key factor prospective applicants consider in the selection process as the respondents expect the institution to provide better facilities such as university-owned student accommodation, state-of-the-art laboratories, high-tech teaching and learning, library and computers. high-speed internet connection, as well as leisure facilities such as ICT facilities, sporting or gaming spaces which not only helps the students to relieve stress but also could be another effective way to encourage potential students to spend more time on campus.

This study highlights the importance of the safety and security factor. The University should step up her security operations for students in and around the Campus by mounting guard posts at access routes leading to outside the campus, installation of CCTV cameras at sensitive premises, and ID card system to restrict entrance to certain sensitive areas on campus.

Quality and supportive staff is vital in supporting the development and achievement of students either directly or indirectly. It is a core function that helps students in the attainment of

academic success through teaching and learning. Employment of top-quality faculty and administrators to handle sensitive positions, bring their expertise to bear, and help the growth of students and the University is imperative.

Publicity Channel that has significantly influenced respondents' choice of AAMUSTED-M has been family and friends. The role the family plays in the selection of AAMUSTED-M appears to be significant, therefore, enrollment campaigns in churches, communities, radio announcements as well as participating in social activities such as funerals of deceased key external and internal stakeholders where representatives take the opportunity to tell the story of AAMUSTED-M should be encouraged. Also, most of the friends of the level 100 students, seemingly, might be young adults and constantly use the different social media handles. It is, therefore, imperative that the University engages in aggressive marketing on all social media handles to attract a high volume of young applicants who use the social media all the time.

The University should:

- develop strategies that will enable her to succeed at international recruitment.
- engaging with Education Agents can help reach students in different parts of the world and increase visibility
- forging partnerships with international organisations such as study abroad or exchange programmes can help boost the University's global brand.

## 6.2 Implications for Campus Directorate of Academic Affairs

60% of students admitted to choosing AAMUSTED-M due to her flexible/friendly entry requirements. That is, in addition to the conduct of mature examinations for mature applicants who meet the admission requirements of the University, and admission of diploma certificate holders to read some degree programmes, a preliminary programme also could be designed for candidates with weak passes in the WASSCE who have not obtained the minimum entry requirements for admission into universities in Ghana or other tertiary institutions. Candidates could be offered 12 months of tuition to enable them re-write the WASSCE, and those who obtain the minimum entry requirements after the resit would be admitted into any degree programme of their choice. Such flexible admission policy will narrow down applicants' choice of universities and also position AAMUSTED-M not to lose out on potential students to competitors offering such opportunities to applicants.

The religious climate of AAMUSTED-M seemingly is largely Christian with 83.5%, followed by Muslim with 15.2%. This means enrolment drive campaigns should be continued in churches, and intensified in the Muslim Communities. Other religious affiliations have the least membership among respondents with African Traditional religion being (0.7%), Buddhism (0.2%), Hinduism (0.1%), and Atheism (0.3)

Gaining insights into the regions students live to come and study at the University, will help university authorities to determine where to concentrate resources when attempting to draw prospect students from the various regions of Ghana. The regional classification of students are as follows: Ashanti (53.9%), Bono Ahafo, Bono East, Ahafo (10.5%), Central (3%), Eastern (2.2%), Greater Accra (2.8%), Northern; Upper East & West, Western North, North East



(19.6%), Volta (1.2%), Western (3.7%), Savannah (1.7%), and Oti (1.7%). The regional distribution indicate that majority of respondents come from Ashanti, Northern, and Bono regions. Enrolment drive campaigns might have to be intensified in the rest of the regions with low students' concentrations, and continue in the Ashanti, Northern, and Bono regions.

### 6.3 Implications for the Office of the Vice-Dean of Student Affairs

In a similar manner, the results of this study show that as students pursue academic interests, university authorities should also create enabling environments for students to explore various avenues for personal development in areas of leadership, cultural, religious, and social activities. Respondents of this study highlighted the importance of realizing personal goals (97.2%), exploring new passions, and developing old hobbies (82.6%). Subsequently, it is imperative for the Vice-Dean of Student Affairs Office to provide support to student organisations and clubs to function adequately to add to the student life experience on the campus.

Beneficial and exciting events or club activities organized on campus also provide students with the opportunity to develop personal and interpersonal skills with people from different cultures and backgrounds. Extracurricular events and quality of student life are significantly positive since they add to enriching student study life on the Campus.

Since guidance and counselling are the bedrock for achieving self-actualisation, the office should provide avenues to sufficiently support students during the study-life cycle in order to help minimize their concerns while studying. Besides, the youthful student population would need strong counselling and guidance support for a better campus experience.

### 6.4 Implications for Student Representative Council

Exchange of information during social, cultural, and recreational events allow students to gain an enriching experience. Such activities organized, also provide students with the opportunity to communicate with other students, and develop their potentials and passions to enrich their study life. The student body should be encouraged to organise extra-curricular activities that add up to the quality of student life

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