

Internal factors influencing students' decisions in choosing a public health study program, faculty of public health, Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, 2024

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 24(02), 609–617

Publication history: Received on 25 September 2024; revised on 04 November 2024; accepted on 06 November 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.2.3356>

Abstract

Background: The existence of public health colleges is very important to train professionals to handle various public health challenges. Data shows that Indonesia has 3,107 universities, of which 95.97% are private universities. In the field of public health, the Faculty of Public Health of Halu Oleo University (UHO), which was established in 2011, shows significant development with two study programs and six specializations relevant to the needs of the community. The increasing interest in the UHO Public Health Study Program, which is accredited B, reflects the high public interest in this field. Public health graduates have broad employment opportunities, thanks to the interdisciplinary skills they acquire. This study aims to analyze the factors that affect students' decisions in choosing a specialization in the UHO Public Health Study Program, which is expected to provide insights for curriculum development and strategies to increase learning interest in the field of public health.

Methods: The research method uses a quantitative approach with an exploratory research type. The sample in this study is active students of each batch in the public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University. The number of samples was 392 respondents. The sampling technique uses Proportionated Stratified Random Sampling. Data analysis using SMARTPLS 4.

Results: The results showed that there was no influence of image with a *path coefficient output value* of 0.040 and a construct value below 1.96 of 0.089 and a p value of 0.373 >0.05; there was an influence of interest with a *path coefficient output value* of 0.327 and a construct value above 1.96 of 6.854 and a p value of 0.000 <0.05; there was a psychological influence with a path coefficient output value of 0.327 and a construct value above 1.96 0.265 and the construction value above 1.96 is 5.270 and the p value is 0.000 <0.05; There is an influence of lecturers with a *path efficiency output* value of 0.308 and a construct value above 1.96 which is 6.854 and a p value of 0.000 <0.05 with a student decision in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo university.

Conclusion: There is an influence of interest, psychology, and lecturers on students' decisions in choosing the Public Health study program and there is no influence on the student's decision in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University. Therefore, the management of the study program needs to improve the quality of academic services and organizational development within the scope of FKM UHO by implementing various organizational development strategies through expanding academic access, providing infrastructure and facilities, and improving human resources. And the faculty needs to develop cross-sector cooperation to improve student competence so that the graduates produced are competent and ready to work

Keywords: Decision; Interest; Psychological; Lecturer; Public Health.

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1. Introduction

Every country aspires to a bright future, which can be achieved through superior human resources rather than relying solely on natural resources. Quality human resources who master science and technology are the key in shaping the direction and pattern of community economic development. One of the efforts to realize quality human resources is through education. Because of the important role of education in the progress of nation building, many countries place the development of the education sector as a top priority (1).

The scientific paradigm has shifted from a reductionist-deterministic approach to a holistic-synergistic approach that encourages the use of science in a more integrated manner. Although various disciplines evolved to research specific things, many real problems show a close interconnection between various elements. Therefore, a multi-, inter-, or trans-disciplinary approach is increasingly needed. Today, this kind of scientific approach is seen as something inevitable in the face of the complexity of life, where one element plays an important role for the other element in the network of relationships. In other words, the separation of knowledge in rigid disciplines is no longer able to provide a comprehensive answer to the existing reality.

Higher education is an educational institution that provides education at a higher level. The purpose of higher education is to master science and technology that plays a role in improving people's welfare. Higher education is one of the main pillars that is expected to be able to bring change to a nation through improving the quality of human resources. As a non-profit organization, educational institutions focus on serving consumers, which include pupils, students, students, and the wider community known as "stakeholders." (2).

According to the Statistics Indonesia report, there were 3,107 universities in Indonesia in 2022, a decrease of 0.25% from the previous year which amounted to 3,115 universities. Most of them, namely 2,982 universities or around 95.97% of the total universities in Indonesia in 2022, are private universities (PTS)(3).

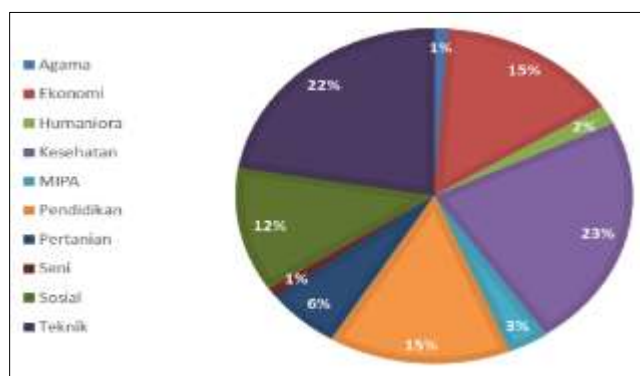


Figure 1 Percentage of distribution of fields of science in Eastern Indonesia

In Eastern Indonesia, the percentage of distribution of fields of knowledge shows variations in educational focus in various disciplines. The Health Sciences sector dominated with 23%, followed by the Engineering Sciences at 22%. The fields of Economics and Education each contributed 15%, while the Social Sciences Field reached 12%. The field of agricultural sciences has a percentage of 6%, the field of science and natural sciences has a percentage of 3%, and other fields, such as humanities and arts, 2% and 1%, respectively. The field of Religious Sciences was also recorded at 1%(4).

Public health education is currently growing rapidly due to the high need for health workers to improve public health degrees. Competence in public health education is crucial to produce qualified and professional graduates. Public health education institutions act as a forum to design and formulate competencies for public health scholars.

The Faculty of Public Health UHO was established in 2011 based on the Rector's Decree Number: 410a/SK/UN29/PP/2011. At that time, the Faculty of Public Health only had one Study Program, namely the Public Health Study Program. After eight years of establishment, the Faculty of Public Health has two Study Programs, namely the Public Health Study Program and the Nutrition Study Program. The Public Health Science Study Program has actually been opened since 2002 based on the Rector's Decree Number: 150/SK/J29/PP/2002 as an Internal Study program at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences and began to accept regular afternoon students. In 2004, the Public Health Study Program was definitive based on the decision of the Director General of Higher Education on the Establishment of the Public Health Study Program Number: 3065/D/T/2004, dated August 9, 2004. And in that year

Halu Oleo University began to accept regular morning class students through local selection. Efforts to improve the status of the Public Health Study Program to the Department of Public Health continue to be carried out and stipulated by the Rector's Decree Number: 12a/H29.SK/PP/2011, dated January 26, 2011 (5).

The Community Health Study Program of FKM UHO currently has 6 (six) specializations, namely (1) Health Policy Administration (2) Environmental Health (3) Occupational Safety and Health (4) Epidemiology (5) Health Promotion (6) Health Nutrition. In 2018 the Kesmas Study Program was again accredited B by the Independent Accreditation Institute for Indonesian Health Higher Education (LAM-PTKes) as evidenced by the Decree of the Management of the LAM-PTKes Association Number: 0150/LAMPTKes/Akr/Sar/III/2019 (5).

The public health study program is one of the most in-demand study programs every year in the health sector (sultra.tribunnews.com). The process of accepting new students of the UHO Public Health Study Program is taken through 3 (three) paths, namely: (1) National Selection for State University Entrance (SNMPTN); (2) Joint Selection for State University Entrance (SBMPTN); and (3) Independent Selection for State University Entrance (SMMPTN). The number of applicants who will continue their studies at UHO has increased significantly from year to year, both in terms of the number and origin of the candidates. The development of new student admissions for FKM UHO 2017-2020 is as follows.

Table 1 Profile of the number of applicants and New Students Accepted for the FKM UHO Health Study Program

Study Program	2017/2018		2018/2019		2019/2020		2020/2021	
	Register	Accepted	Register	Accepted	Register	Accepted	Register	Accepted
Kesmas	789	357	698	309	751	346	895	391
Sum	789	357	698	309	751	346	895	391

Source: FKM UHO, 2022.

From the analysis of new student admissions, FKM UHO has a large number of students accepted. This is because FKM UHO is the only Public Health Study Program from a state higher education provider university in Southeast Sulawesi Province and FKM UHO and also has an Accreditation score of B.

Public health science is a science that focuses on disease prevention, longevity, and improvement of physical and mental health. Because this science covers public health broadly, graduates of the Department of Public Health have a very wide range of job opportunities, both in the health field and outside the field. In addition to health, students of this department also study other sciences, such as social sciences, thus allowing them to work in various sectors, both in private companies and government agencies. Public Health graduates can have careers as researchers, social workers, public health extension workers, or in product and health quality control, with salaries that vary according to the type of job and workplace. Therefore, the author is interested in researching "Internal Factors Influencing Students' Decisions in Choosing the Public Health Study Program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, 2024".

2. Method

The research method uses a quantitative approach. The sample in this study is active students of each batch in the public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University. The number of samples was 392 respondents. The sampling technique uses Proportionated Stratified Random Sampling. The research variables include: image, psychological, interest and lecturer factors. Data analysis using SMARTPLS 4.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Univariate Analysis

3.1.1. Gender

Based on gender, most of the female gender is 354 people or 90.3% and male as many as 38 people or 9.7%. This shows that students of the Public Health study program are more predominantly female and are more involved as subjects in this study than males.

Table 2 Distribution of Respondent Frequency by Gender in the Public Health Study Program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University in 2024

Gender	Number (n)	Percent (%)
Woman	354	90,3
Man	38	9,7
Total	392	100

Source: Primary data, 2024

3.1.2. Year of the Class

Table 3 Distribution of Respondent Frequency Based on Cohort Year in the Public Health Study Program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University in 2024

Year of the Class	Number (n)	Percent (%)
2018	6	1,5
2019	6	1,5
2020	21	5,4
2021	71	18,1
2022	73	18,6
2023	70	17,9
2024	145	37,0
Total	392	100

Source: Primary data, 2024

Based on the year of the batch, the respondents in this study were dominated by the class of 2024 as many as 145 people or 37%, then followed by the 2022 class of 73 people or 18.6%, 2021 as many as 71 people or 18.1% and at least the 2018 and 2019 batches of 6 people or 1.5% respectively.

3.2. Hypothesis Testing

Table 4 Path coefficient hypothesis

Var	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	Tstatistics (O/STDEV)	pvalues
Image-> K	0.040	0.044	0.045	0.089	0.373
Lecturer -> K	0.308	0.306	0.052	5.868	0.000
Interest -> K	0.327	0.324	0.048	6.854	0.000
Psychological -> K	0.265	0.266	0.050	5.270	0.000

Source: Primary data processed by SMARTPLS 4, 2024

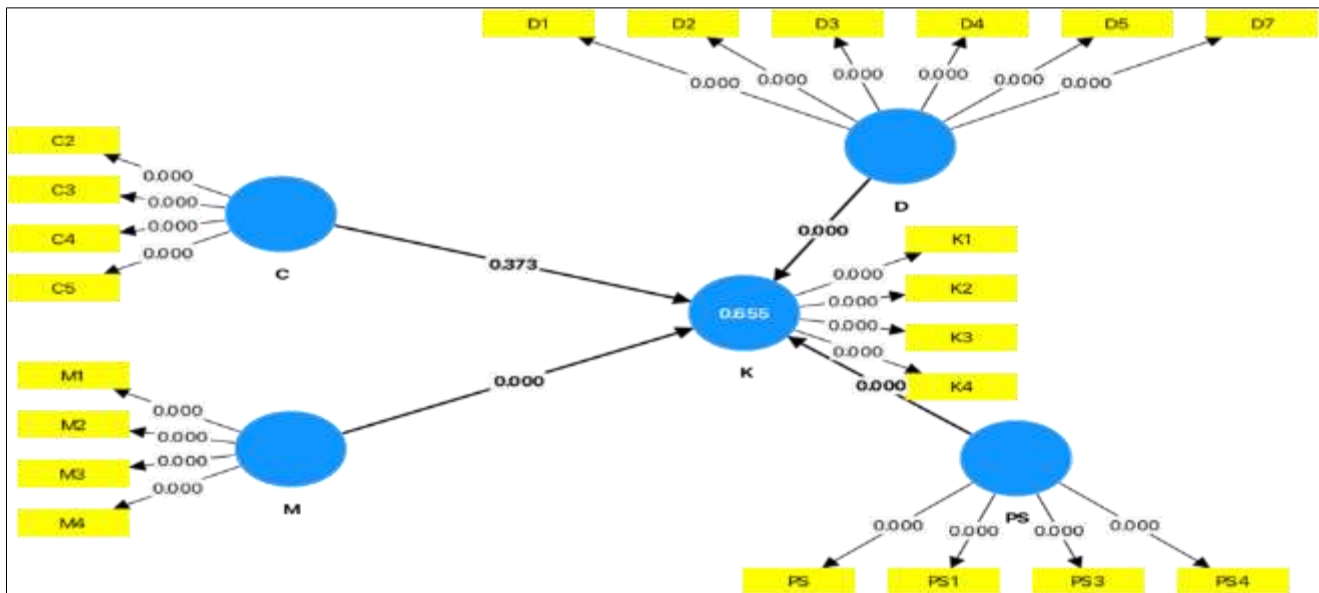


Figure 2 Bootstrapping model Hypothesis

Source: Primary data processed by SMARTPLS 4, 2024

There was no influence between the image and the student's decision in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University with a coefficient value of 0.006. The result is a t-statistic for a construct below 1.96 which is 0.124 and a probability value (p-value) greater than 0.05 which is 0.901 so that it can be concluded that H_a is rejected and H_o is accepted.

Citra did not affect students' decisions in choosing a study program at the Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University. This can be due to several factors, such as: The student's decision may be more influenced by other factors such as cost, job prospects, educational facilities, or the social environment at the university. It could be that students already have a relatively uniform perception of the university's image, so that the image is no longer a significant differentiating factor in decision-making.

In addition, the influence of image can also not be felt in the context of a study program that already has a certain reputation or guarantee in the eyes of prospective students. In previous studies, image was often associated with students' decision to choose a study program or university. Several studies show that the image of educational institutions has a significant influence on student decisions.

Research by Ivy (2010) states that the image of a university plays an important role in attracting prospective students, especially in universities with an international reputation (6). In this study, the positive image of educational institutions can increase students' interest and decision to enroll. Research by Sultan and Wong (2019) found that the perception of an educational institution's image, along with the quality of service and academic experience, has a significant influence on the decision to choose a university, especially in countries with fierce college competition (7).

However, recent research has also shown that in certain contexts, other factors such as scholarship availability, location, career prospects, and internal academic quality (such as lecturers and facilities) are prioritized by students over the image of the university. Research by Cheng et al. (2022) shows that students are more influenced by cost factors and the availability of career prospects than the image of the university, especially in the context of health education in developing countries. Students are more pragmatic in considering study programs that can provide real results for their future. While the image of a university can be an important factor in some contexts, in many other cases, students may focus more on practical aspects such as career prospects and the availability of support facilities, especially in health education (8).

3.3. Lecturer

There is an influence of lecturer factors with student decisions in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University with a coefficient value of 0.266. The result is a t-statistic for a construct above 1.96

which is 4.717 and a probability value (p-value) less than 0.05 which is 0.000 so that it can be concluded that H_a is accepted and H_o is rejected.

The influence of lecturers is very important in students' decisions to choose a study program. Lecturers may be considered as a direct representation of the academic quality and learning experience that students will receive. Lecturers who are competent, reputable, and active in academic and research activities are often an attraction for prospective students. This influence can also include aspects such as: 1) Teaching quality: Lecturers who are known for being good at delivering learning materials will increase the attractiveness of the study program. 2) Reputation and experience of lecturers: Students tend to choose study programs that have lecturers with good reputation, both at the national and international levels. 3) Involvement in research and projects. Students may be interested in the opportunity to engage in faculty research that is relevant to their interests.

In some previous studies, the lecturer factor was often considered as one of the key elements in students' decision to choose a study program or university. Research by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that the quality of lecturers and academic staff is one of the main factors influencing the choice of international students in choosing a university (9). The quality and competence of lecturers provide added value in the educational experience desired by students. Research by Gbadamosi and de Jager (2009) shows that students' perceptions of lecturers, including teaching skills, interpersonal relationships, and academic guidance, have a significant influence on course choices, especially in fields that demand high academic interaction such as health sciences (10).

The importance of lecturer factors in choosing study programs, especially in the context of health higher education. For example: Research by Chen et al. (2021) revealed that the quality of lecturers and access to qualified academic mentors are one of the main factors in the decision to choose a health study program (11). Lecturers who are active in research and have international connections increase the attractiveness of the study program. Research by Wahyuni et al. (2022) in Indonesia also found that lecturer factors, including good teaching and lecturer involvement in the professional community, have a major impact on students' interest in choosing a health study program. The lecturer factor has a significant influence on students' decisions in choosing a study program. This finding is consistent with previous and recent research that highlights the importance of the quality and reputation of lecturers in attracting students, especially in the field of health education (12).

3.4. Interest

There is an influence of interest with the student's decision in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University with a coefficient value of 0.248. The result is a t-statistic for a construct above 1.96 which is 4.744 and at probability values (p-values) less than 0.05 which is 0.000 so that it can be concluded that H_a is accepted and H_o is rejected.

Student interest plays an important role in determining the decision to choose a study program. Interest is one of the internal factors that greatly influences how students respond to various academic choices. Students who have an interest in public health are likely to be more motivated to choose the study program.

Interest can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as: 1) Awareness of the importance of public health: Students who have a strong interest in public health usually understand the relevance and benefits of this field for the future. 2) Personal or social experiences: Students may have a personal background or experience that drives their interest in this field, for example family experiences related to health. 3) Attractive career prospects: Interest can be influenced by the perception that the program offers good job opportunities in the future.

In some previous studies, interest has often been a strong predictor in students' decisions to choose a course or university: Research by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) shows that intrinsic interest and motivation play a significant role in students' academic decisions, especially when they are faced with a choice of course related to personal interests (13). Research by Chapman (1981) also found that interest and desire to delve into a particular topic is one of the main motivations in choosing a study program, especially in fields that require deep academic commitment such as health sciences (14).

Recent research also confirms the importance of interest as a key factor in students' academic decisions: Research by Kusumawati et al. (2020) found that academic interest has a significant influence on students' decisions in choosing a study program, especially in the field of health sciences. Students who have a strong interest in relevant topics tend to be more motivated and actively involved in the learning process (15). Research by Gunawan et al. (2021) shows that interest in the field of study, including motivation to contribute to society, plays an important role in students' decisions

to choose a public health program. This interest is often driven by social aspirations and a desire to make changes in the health field (16).

Interest has a significant influence on students' decisions in choosing the Public Health study program at Halu Oleo University. These findings are consistent with previous research that emphasized the importance of interest as a motivational factor in academic decision-making. In this context, students' interest in public health can be driven by career aspirations and intrinsic motivation to delve into topics that are considered socially important.

3.5. Psychological

There is a psycholistic influence on the student's decision in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University with a coefficient value of 0.266. The result is that the t-statistic for the construct above 1.96 is 4.067 and the probability value (p-values) is less than 0.05 which is 0.000 so that it can be concluded that H_a is accepted and H_o is rejected.

Significant psychological influence shows that students' decisions are not only influenced by external factors such as image or lecturers, but also by internal factors, namely their own psychological condition. Students who are highly motivated and confident in their future career choices in the field of public health are more likely to choose this study program. Psychological factors include aspects such as: 1) Intrinsic motivation: Students who have psychological impulses from within, such as a deep interest in the field of public health, will be more likely to choose the study program. 2) Confidence: The decision to choose a course may also be influenced by the student's confidence that they will be able to overcome academic challenges in this field. 3) The need to excel: Some college students have a psychological need to achieve achievement in a particular field, and this can affect their academic choices.

Previous research has also shown that psychological factors play an important role in students' academic decisions: Research by Eccles & Wigfield (2002) highlights the importance of psychological factors such as expectations, motivation, and personal goals in academic choices. Intrinsic motivation is proven to be a strong factor in determining students' educational decisions (17). Research by Kusumawati et al. (2021) found that psychological motivation, including the need to achieve academic achievement, influences students' choice of health study programs. Students with strong psychological motivation are more likely to choose a program that they are interested in and believe in accordance with their potential (18). Research by Nurhadi et al. (2022) shows that psychological factors such as interest, confidence, and intrinsic motivation have a significant impact on students' decisions in choosing a public health study program, especially in Indonesia. This factor even beats external influences such as institutional image (19).

Psychological factors play an important role in a student's decision to choose a Public Health study program at Halu Oleo University. These findings are in line with previous and recent research that emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation, confidence, and the need for achievement in determining students' academic choices.

4. Conclusion

There is no influence of the image of the study program with the student's decision in choosing the public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University.

There is an influence of interest with the student's decision in choosing a public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University.

There is the influence of lecturers with student decisions in choosing the public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University.

There is a psychological influence on students' decisions in choosing the public health study program at the Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University.

Suggestion

The management of the Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University needs to hold activities that can stimulate student interest, such as seminars, workshops, and professional introduction programs in the field of public health.

The management needs to ensure that the lecturers who teach have high competence through continuous training, research, and publications. In addition, creating an environment that supports positive interaction between lecturers and students is also very important.

The management needs to provide counseling services for students to help them in making decisions related to education and career. Orientation programs that emphasize psychological aspects can also help students feel more comfortable and motivated in choosing a study program.

Management should also periodically monitor and evaluate the programs carried out to ensure that all initiatives and policies taken are really effective in supporting student decisions.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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