

# A LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY CHOICE PROCESS: MODELS, CHOICE DETERMINANTS, INFLUENTIAL FACTORS AND A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR TURKEY

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of the article is to investigate the literature of university choice process with models, choice determinants, and influential factors. A conceptual framework is developed by study to explore the determinants that influence students' university choice decision in Turkey and make recommendations for further research in this field. The approach for this study entailed extensive searches of proper higher education databases. The aim is to ensure that, as much as possible, all literature in the field is reviewed. The conceptual framework, which is obtained by this study, will be useful Turkish universities. Due to changes in Turkish higher education in the recent years, literature needs many new studies about it. This issue will be examined the university choice process in details and so the study will be the first step for future researches. Despite intensive literature in other countries, because of the limited search in Turkey on the university choice process, the article is also important.

**Keywords** Higher education, University choice process, Turkey

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the governance of higher education has dramatically changed. Higher education has been transformed from dependency of funding by government to the competitive market (Maringe, 2006). To meet the increasing social demand for higher education, governments must seek alternative sources of funding for such expansion. The raising number of students who want to study in a university and inability of the state budget mean that new ways of funding is necessary. The growth of private higher education worldwide is a kind of proof that state supported education cannot provide sufficient access.

Like all world because of increasing demand and government budget constraints, the higher education system has changed in Turkey. The privatization of higher education has gained importance. The first Turkish private university, Bilkent, was established with the foundation university status in 1984 according to the law 2547. In 1992, Koç family established the second private university. In 1994, Başkent University was founded and after six universities were opened in 1996, eight universities opened in 1997 and today there are 175 universities in Turkey, 68 of which are foundation and 107 of which are state universities. These numbers clearly show that with the developments of the last years in Turkish higher education. There are many alternatives for students and the availability of so many options has complicated the student choice process of university. The rise of foundation universities causes new competition and dynamism to higher education. Therefore, the university clearly needs to position itself against competitors in order to remain attractive for student.

The rising numbers of higher education institutions, students are becoming more critical and analytical in their selection of educational institutions (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). In order to improve the strategies about student recruitment, to understand of how and why students select a university is very important. Understanding choice process is an instrument for develop strategy to obtain a position against competitors. The article examines the literature of the models and the factors of university choice process. The models of university choice process are examined the following categories: *economic models, status-attainment- sociological models, combined models and marketing approach models*. The article identifies also the main factors, which effect students' decision to prefer a university, by classifying into two categories. One of them is determinants of university choice and the other is influential factors. Then, university choice process will be assessed for Turkey. At the end of the study, a conceptual framework will be emerged based on the literature. These findings will be useful for the higher education institutions to plan and develop their strategies and the higher education institutions can renew themselves in this competitive and transforming area, understanding these factors.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The models of university choice process

These models have been beneficial to understand the university choice process with determinants of university choice and influential factors. The major differences between the models are that the descriptions of variables and how they define institution activity to encourage student enrollment (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). Several conceptual approaches have been developed to describe the factors that influence students' decisions to select a university. Each of them describes the different processes by which a high school student selects a university. In the article, four models are examined. According to Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) most of the studies that tried to understand the university choice process could be included in one of the following categories: *economic models*, *status-attainment- sociological models* and *combined models*. Another model is *marketing approach*, which is explained the university choice process with internal and external influences and supplemented by communication efforts.

- a. **Economic models:** These approaches are based on the assumption that a student wants to maximize their utility and minimize their risks. Economic models of college choice are based on the assumption that students act rationally by evaluating all the information available to them according to their preferences at the time of the decision (DesJardins & Toutkoushian, 2005). They emphasize the rational decision-making process of students and their families and the variety of ways in which different students' rate and use the university attributes to make their final university choice (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). According to Fernandez (2010), individuals are assumed to act rationally in ways that maximize their utility, given their personal preferences. The research indicates that individuals will select a higher education institution, if the benefits of attending outweigh the perceived benefits of attending other higher education institution or a non-college alternative (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1985). According to the approach of human capital investment, the students realize their possible choices and evaluate them by determining 'whether or not a college education is worthwhile by comparing the expected benefits with the expected costs associated with an investment in a college education' (Paulsen, 2001, pp. 56–57). Hence, students are supposed to choose the college with 'the highest utility of net expected benefits' (DesJardins & Toutkoushian, 2005, p. 193). To focus only on the rationality of the students is the limitation of economic models.
- b. **Status-attainment- sociological models:** In these models, different social and individual factors are emphasized by leading to a student's occupational and educational aspirations. The Jackson's model (1982) proposes that a student has three stages to making a selection. The first is the preference stage where the academic achievement has the strongest effect. The second is the exclusion stage where the students make an eliminating. The last one is the evaluation stage where the students get their final decision. In the derivative model developed by Blau and Duncan (1967), family, socioeconomic background and student academic ability are predicted to have a joint positive effect on aspirations for college. Sociological models of college choice (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1985) have focused on the identification and interrelationship of factors including parental encouragement (Sewell & Shah, 1978), influence of significant others (Chapman, 1981) and academic performance (Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969) as indicators of enrollment in higher education intentions. According to Kotler and Fox's (1995) model is status-attainment models are based on Social Theory. It is a kind of processes, which is focus on socialization, academic conditions, the role of the family, and social networks. This model rejects the assumption of students and their families being rational deciders. Sociological approaches focus on the influence of the cultural and social capital, such as the socioeconomic background, prospects, and the academic achievements of students, when choosing a college (Perna, 2006). The limitation of the sociological models is to focuses on social factors as influences of choice.
- c. **Combined models:** Combined models try to capture the essence of both previous models and these kinds of models allow a considerable amount of analytical power, as they combine sociological aspects with a rational decision (Raposo and Alves, 2007). These approaches use the most powerful indicators in the decision-making process from the economic and social models, providing a conceptual framework. A three-stage model (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982) and a multi-stage model typically containing between five and seven stages are most important combined models. Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) *three-stage model* emphasizes the stage of predisposition, search, and choice. The predisposition phase is first step where students decide whether they will go on to their education. The search stage is where students get some information about universities. The last step is choice stage in which students select the university that they will enroll. Perna (2006) is another important person who explains the university choice process with combined model. Her ideas focused on the decision of which university to choose and specifically included sociological as well as economic approaches. She also says, "Calculations of expected costs and earnings are nested within several layers of context" (Perna, 2006, p. 116). These layers are *the individual habitus* such as demographic characteristics, cultural effects; *the organizational habitus* like the support of college teachers;

*the higher education context; the comprehensive social, economic, and policy context such as demographic changes, unemployment rates.*

- d. **Marketing approach model:** To understand the models of university choice process, *the marketing approaches* also must be mentioned. These models are not necessarily directly referring to sociological and econometric concepts. Nonetheless, these approaches are incorporated in the consumer choice models in terms of internal (cultural, social, personal, psychological characteristics) as well as external (e.g., social, cultural, product and price stimuli) influences, supplemented by communication efforts of the provider (Obermeit 2012; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Gilley (1989) explained how radio, television newspaper and magazine can be used to attract publicity. According to Mayer et al. (1999), communication technologies, such as CD's and DVDs in university advertising and web page properties (Erdal, 2001), have been considered before. Steele (2002) conducted studies on how to build effective communication with college and university students using the catalogue, application tools, and program materials. Brochures, posters, meetings, sponsorships and billboards, web pages, TV and newspaper advertisements are mostly used as some communication tools for university selection (Yamamoto, 2006).

In literature, consumer behavior models are related with university choice process in marketing approach models. The university choice is compared to a buying process with subsequent stages (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2006; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). The students start with a comparably extensive awareness set of higher education institutions that is successively narrowed down to a consideration and choice set (Blackwell et al., 2006; Kotler & Fox, 2002; Shocker, Ben-Akiva, Boccara, & Nedungadi, 1991). The notion of prospective students as consumers is not undisputed (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006), but the development and application of consumer behavior models of the university choice has gained acceptance (Obermeit 2012). Next to sociological and economic factors, the impact of actions taken by universities (e.g., recruitment activities, financial aid offers) on the students' decisions are deliberately included in this approach (Bergerson, 2009). Vrontis, Thrassou and Malenthio's model (2007) includes five step. The steps are need *recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase and consumption and lastly, post-consumption* evaluation. According to Vrontis et al. (2007), similar causes and effects occur in relation to pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives though here branding appears to play a vital role in decision-making. Purchasing and consumption stage depends on financial, individual and some environmental determinants. The financial factors can be the students' ability to pay high fees. Individual determinants refer to attitudes and values relating to personal freedom and the drive for individual achievement. In addition, the environmental factors are a combination of economic and demographic factors affecting students' choice of higher education institution. Finally, Post-consumption evaluation differences relate to the mass-word-of-mouth phenomenon and greater relative weight of the purchase and consumption experience (Vrontis et al., 2007).

## Determinants of university choice

### General literature

In order to regulate the recruitment strategies, universities need to know which factors influence the decision to enroll at an institution (DesJardins et al., 1999; Litten, 1982; Maringe, 2006). There are many studies, which include various criteria, which students use to select a major in a college (Strasser, Ozgur, Schroeder, 2002). They said that these factors were classified three groups' *interest in study, influence of others, and careers*. According to these factors, some students are interest in the subject (personal preference; ability in handling the subject matter; rigorous/challenging; and enjoyable/fun). Others affect some of them like advisors, parents and peers. Some of them are interest in career (compensation – earning potential and earnings growth; job availability and growth – employment opportunity and advancement opportunity; job requirements – dealing with people and teamwork). Webb (1993) said that *academic reputations, accreditations, proximity, costs, potential marketability of the degree* are important factors. Chapman (1993) proposed that *quality of faculty, quality of degrees, overall academic reputation is significant*. Coccari and Javalgi (1995) showed the factors as follows: *Quality of faculty, degree programs, cost, variety of offerings, classroom instruction*. Kallio (1995) emphasized that *residency, academic environment, reputation and institution quality, course diversity, size of the institution, financial-aid*. Donnellan (2002) examined *the influence of personal contacts, parents, location, and social life*. Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2005) said that *proximity to home, quality/variety of education, cost of living/tuition, friends study, family recommendation, safety* effect the choice process are important factors. Holdsworth and Nind (2006) displayed *the importance of quality and flexibility degree/course combinations, availability of accommodation, costs and proximity to home*.

Kaynama and Smith (1996) found the influence of others important for pre-business students and mentioned about *job availability* influencing a student's decision. Findings from research based on the survey that contained 20,000 people was conducted in England (Connor et al., 1996; Tackey and Aston, 1999) show that *the availability of subject of interest* is the most important determinant of choice of university, followed by *tuition and other costs*. Soutar

and Turner (2002) assorted the factors into two categories; first is university related factors and second is personal factors. The university related factors are as follows: *the type of course, the academic reputation of the institution, the campus, the quality of the teaching staff and the type of university*. Personal factors are *distance from home, what their family thinks about each university and the university their friends wish to attend*. While Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) identified six broad categories: *institution characteristics, knowledge and awareness of the host country, recommendation from friends and relatives, environment, cost, social link and geographic proximity*. Belanger et al. (2002) said that *campus staff, students, and other networking efforts* are important factors that influence the students' choice of university. Hoyt and Brown (2003) listed the most important choice factors as *academic reputation, quality of faculty and instruction, location, cost, scholarship offers, financial aid and student employment opportunities*. Other important factors found from these studies were: *size of institution, surrounding community, friendly/personal service, availability of graduate program, variety of course offered, extracurricular programs, admission requirements, admission to graduate school, affiliation (with another reputable institution), attractiveness of campus facilities, class size and quality of social life*. Price, Matzdorf, Smith, and Agahi, (2003) have conducted face-to-face interviews with 87 students from four different universities in England and they emphasize *the quality of education, academic prestige, availability of major, library and IT facilities* for determinants of choice of university. In another research by Sidin et al. (2003), five factors were defined as *personal, academic quality and facilities, campus, socialization, and financial aids*. According to Donaldson and McNicholas (2004), *the reputation, nature of the courses, location and address, financial considerations, facilities, social climate of the department, program structure and accreditation* factors influence student choice of institution and course for postgraduate studies. Maringe, F. (2006) surveyed 387 students about 35 university choice factors. The most important factors are about *job prospects*. Veloutsou, Lewis and Paton (2004) surveyed high school seniors in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England and they found the *programs, academic prestige of departments, academic prestige of the university, dormitory and campus facilities, and job placement of graduates* are the most significant choices factors. Briggs (2006) in a study of 650 first-year undergraduate students in two disciplines, accountancy and engineering, across six Scottish universities identified ten factors that influence student choice of higher education. These factors include *academic reputation, distance from home location, own perception, graduate employment, social life nearby, entry requirements, teaching reputation, quality of the faculty, information supplied by university and research reputation*. Raposa and Alvez (2007) survey 1024 freshmen in Portugal and they said that *academic excellence, job market prospects and location* matter are the most. Strayhorn, Blakewood and Devita (2008) suggest that three sets of factors influence university choice decisions: *academic, financial, and individual traits or experiences*. Foskett, Maringe and Roberts (2006) found that *flexibility of fee payment, availability of financial aid, and reasonable accommodation costs* exert a significant influence on students' choice of a higher education institution. Ho and Hung (2008) determined the fourteen factors. These factors can be classified five categories. They are *including living (location, convenience, and campus), learning (faculty, curriculum, and research), reputation (academic reputation and alumni reputation), economy (tuition fee, subsidies, and employability) and strategy (exam subjects, exam pass rate, and graduation requirements)*. *Employability, curriculum, academic reputation, faculty, and research environment* were the most important factors found in this study.

### The list of university choice factors in literature

- a. **Peer:** Studies in Asian countries predominantly found that reference groups such as siblings, friends, peers, relatives, teachers and other influential people influence a student's choice of a university (Kusumawati et.al, 2010). Sometimes they decide according to their peers. Peers are not only one of the influential factors but also for some students, it is a reason to selecting a university. Several studies (Shanka, Quintal and Taylor, 2005 and Fletcher, 2012) examined the correlation between university-bound students' interaction with other students and their enrollment at particular universities. The results of Fletcher (2010) are consistent with those of Pimpa (2005) who said that Thai students' selection of Australian universities was effected by peers' suggestions. According to Fletcher (2012), peers' preferences create a social norm, which is called *acceptable choices* within high school students. This means that peers may constrain and guide the university options for an individual.
- b. **Family:** The influences from family are identified as finance, information, expectation, persuasion, and competition. Pimba (2004) showed the family support as a financial factor. Financial support can limit their decision or expand. If their families have enough budgets, they can support them. If they do not have enough budgets, they can constrain their child's choice. Many searches showed that there is a certain relation between the decision to university choice and family. Students noted that financial support which is from parents or family might limit the choice of the university, as their financial sponsors may influence them to study in certain destinations or study programs (Kusumawati et.al., 2010).
- c. **The reputation of an institution:** The reputation of an institution is also a factor in a student's university selection. This is one of the factors ranked high in US surveys (Kim & Gasman, 2011; Maringe, 2006;

Pampaloni, 2010; Teranishi et al., 2004; Tierney, 1983). Isherwood (1991) found reputation of the college as one of the major determinates. Soutar & Turner (2002) said that one of the major criteria of university choice is the reputation of an institution. Hoyt and Brown (2003) found the reputation of a university as an important factor in choosing process of a college. Veloutsou, Lewis and Paton (2004) also highlighted the university's reputation. Ming (2010) proposed that the reputation of an institution is a powerful influence. Walsh and Beatty (2007) and Hillenbrand and Money (2007) studies showed that the reputation of a university plays an important role in a student's choice. This factor was indicated to be the most important factor in a study, which is made in South Africa (Wiese et al. 2009; Beneke & Human 2010). Ancheh et al. (2007) asserted that reputation of the institutions is the strongest criteria in students' selection process. Briggs (2006) also noted that reputation is one of ten factors that influence the selection decision.

- d. **University attributes-institutional characteristics:** Research has also showed that students' choice of universities is influenced by university attributes. These attributes mean that staff quality, type of institutions, availability of desired programs, curriculum, international reputation, quality of facilities such as library, computing facilities and social facilities), campus and class size and availability of financial aid. Many study demonstrated that academic factors, availability of desired program, academic reputation and quality of teaching were the main reasons affecting to the students to select a university. In Portuguese, Tavares et al. (2008) specified main institutional characteristics contain teaching quality, scientific research quality, prestige, infrastructure, computer facilities, library, location, quality of the curricula, administrative support, extra-curricular factors (sports, leisure, canteens, etc.) and the availability of exchange programs with foreign universities as influential factors. The curriculum offered, especially the intended major or the availability of programs, for instance for students who need to work (Hoyt & Brown, 2003), is crucial as well (Clinton, 1990; Galotti & Mark, 1994; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Maringe, 2006; Moogan et al., 1999; Pampaloni, 2010). The type of institution is another identified factor influencing the decision of students (Galotti & Mark, 1994). Another substantial category of institutional characteristics is 'quality'. McDuff (2007) indicates that quality is an important determinant of school choice and that students in the US are willing to accept large tuition fee increases in exchange for a higher quality education. Quality is certainly a broad concept in higher education area. All perspective of quality concept is very important for a university. Thus, many factors that refer to the quality of a university are always contained in university choice models. The perceived quality of a university can be related to the services of universities. Since the better quality universities offer services that bring long and short-term returns, they are more likely to be preferred by candidate students. Soo & Elliot (2010) found that quality of education is related positively to number of applicants. Quality also can be seen the research for a university. Keskinen et al. (2008) stress that teaching and the research characteristics of the department comprise an influential choice for school-leavers in Western Australia were course suitability, academic reputation, job prospects offered by a qualification from the university and teaching quality.
- e. **Personal Factors:** Personal factors mean that every student has his/her own set of circumstances quite independent from the others, hence. Age, gender, family background or ethnicity can be seen personal factors. The studies on choosing a university explore the influence of personal factors. Sidin et. al. (2003) found the personal factor as an important part of students' university choices criteria. Nora (2004) identified that all students, regardless of their ethnicity, were more likely to re-enroll if they felt accepted, safe, and happy at their colleges. Yamamoto (2006) showed that personal preference was the most influential factor in university selection for Turkish students. Raposo and Alves (2007) noted that personal factors show the greatest positive influences on student choice of a university in Portugal. However, Tavares (2008) revealed that in Portugal, students' choices seemed to be influenced by gender and family background. Students made a rational decision by considering their social economic factor before making a choice (Kusumawati et.al, 2010).
- f. **Location:** This factor refers the city, which is located of the university, the proximity of home or proximity of city center. Veloutsou (2004) said that the location of the university and the geography of its surroundings were some of characteristics that were of pivotal importance for students. In terms of location, Raposo and Alves (2007) and Dawes and Brown (2005) emphasized that proximity to home is one of the substantial effects in the choice process of university. The distance from home is important for both American and German students (Briggs, 2006; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Tierney, 1983). The location of the institution is another relevant variable in the United States (Galotti & Mark, 1994; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Maringe, 2006; Moogan et al., 1999; Pampaloni, 2010). Studies show that students prefer socially and culturally active big cities, like London (Soo & Elliot, 2008) or Amsterdam (Oosterbeek et al., 1992), as well as locations where they have family and friends (Keskinen et al. 2008). Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) said that the reputation, nature of the courses, location and address, financial considerations, facilities, social climate of the department, program structure and accreditation factors influence student choice of institution and course for post graduate studies. Gonca Telli Yamamoto (2006) said that "in the large city like Istanbul with more than 10 million people live, proximity to home, easy transportation are critical factors in selecting a university." The proximity to home

and easy transportation are critical factors in selecting a university (Telli, 2006). Persson (2007) proposed that the location is one of the most important physical-internal resources of a university. Lindong (2007) said, "If the location of the college is close to a housing area, it will be a big advantage for them". In study of Hacifazlıoğlu and Özdemir about the expectations of students in foundation universities (2010), the half of the participants stated that the location of the university affected their selecting university decision.

- g. Job prospects:** Student wants to maximize their utility and minimize their risks in selecting process. The increasing job prospect can be seen the most important factor to maximize their utility. Kaynama and Smith (1996) found the influence of others important for pre-business students and mentioned about job availability influencing a student's decision. Strasser, Ozgur and Schroeder (2002), said that job availability, employment opportunity and job requirements are very important for students. A similar situation was proposed in Australia (Soutar & Turner 2002) and in Turkey (Tatar & Oktay 2006). Raffan and Deaney (2006) discovered that according to post-16 year old students the most popular reasons for wanting to enroll in university are the enjoyment of the subject, need for a degree for a career, better job, new subject areas and the enjoyment of student life. Maringe, F. (2006) surveyed 387 students about 35 university choice factors. The most important factors are about job prospects. Băcilă et al. (2008) found that the most important factors when students select their faculty are job opportunities.
- h. Cost of university:** Cost of university is very substantial criteria for students. It does not only mean fees of university and it can include accommodation or transportation costs. Distance from home is a kind of cost element, which has a negative relationship with school choice (Soutar & Turner, 2002; Jepsen & Montgomery, 2009; Briggs & Wilson, 2007; Keskinen et al., 2008). Many researchers have examined the influence of cost in the selection of a university process. For example, Webb (1993), Coccari and Javalgi (1995), Donnellan (2002), Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2005), Holdsworth and Nind (2006) displayed the importance of costs on university choose process of students. Wagner & Fard (2009) found that the cost of education has significant relationships with a students' intention to study at a university. Many researchers have demonstrated a negative relationship between fees and demand (Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; McDuff, 2007). However, there are also studies that indicate different results about costs. For instance, Soo & Elliot (2008) find that the fees charged do not influence the decision of the students or Briggs & Wilson (2007) indicated costs ranked only twenty in order of importance from among twenty-two factors. Heller (1997) shows that low-income students are more sensitive to price changes than those are higher income students. In addition, Bezmen & Depken (1998) emphasized that the demand for foundation universities is more cost sensitive than public ones. Long's (2004) study, displayed that the role of cost decreased and the study said that the importance of cost depends on the income and quality of the student. Foskett, Maringe and Roberts (2006) found that flexibility of fee payment and reasonable *accommodation costs* exert a significant influence on students' choice of a higher education institution.
- i. Financial aid-scholarship:** The impact of financial aid is another significant factor, which effect students' university choice decisions. For some students the choice of an institution is constrained by financial aspects and financial aid-scholarship can be useful to expand to their choices. Financial aid that reduces the costs shouldered by students is found to be an important factor influencing school choice in the reverse direction (Leslie & Fife, 1974). Kallio (1995) emphasized financial-aid. Hoyt and Brown (2003) said that financial aid was a considerable factor that influenced student choice of a university. Financial aid-scholarship, loans or grants are very importance for students (Clinton, 1990; Galotti & Mark, 1994; Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Pampaloni, 2010; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008; Tierney, 1983). Foskett, Maringe and Roberts (2006) found that *availability of financial aid* exert a significant influence on students' choice of a higher education institution.

#### **Information sources used on choice process**

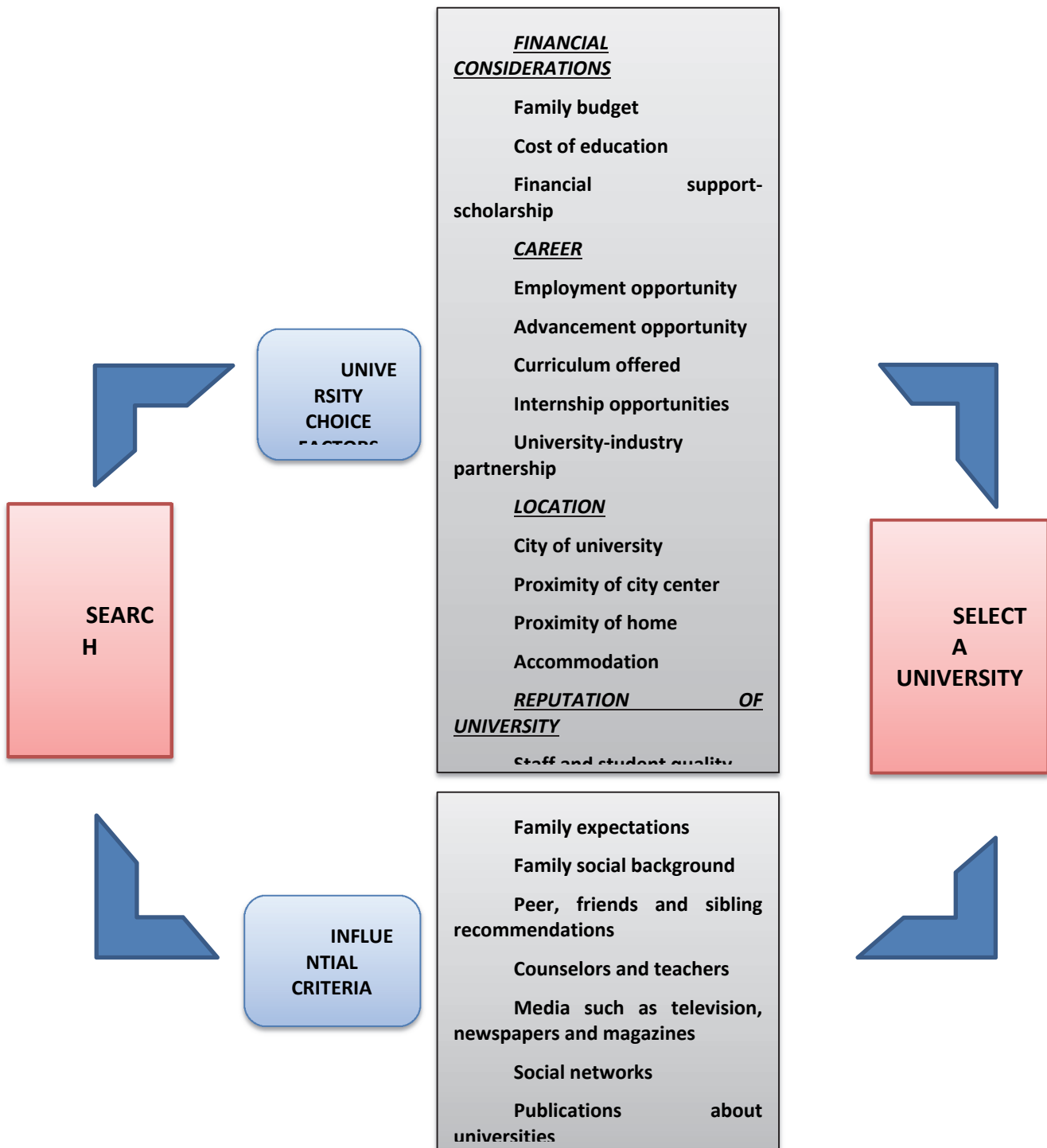
- a. Internet and websites:** The internet is definitely the main source of information nowadays. If the universities use effectively online social networks and their web sites, they can positively affect the candidate students. Many research especially emphasizes websites and social networks (Facebook, tweeter, instagram etc.) influences on students' choice decisions (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009; Brown et al., 2009; Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Kinzie et al., 2004; Yamamoto 2006; Pampaloni, 2010).
- b. Publications:** Another source is publications on students' choice decisions. They have been the most used and best rated source. Despite the internet, they still are important (Briggs, 2006; Galotti & Mark, 1994; Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Kinzie et al., 2004; Moogan & Baron, 2003; Veloutsou et al., 2005).
- c. Media:** Media such as television, newspapers and magazines are used by universities to place advertisements (Kinzie et al., 2004). Media can be used by universities by not only advertisement but also giving some information about their education and social facilities.

- d. **Reference groups:** A lot of research discusses the important effect *parents* have on a student's choice of university. Reference groups such as siblings, friends, peers, relatives, and teachers influence a student's choice of a university. Moogan and Baron's (2003) study found parental impact is important in the initial stages. Pimpa (2003 and 2004); Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2005) found that family influence is a major factor in higher education select decisions. The opinions of family members may exert different types of influence on one's behavior (Pimpa, 2004). Raposo and Alves (2007) underlined that parents have a strong influence in the choice process of selecting a university, as well as schoolteacher's recommendations. Almost all students talk with their parents about their plans after school (Kim & Gasman, 2011; McDonough, 1998). American universities identified the important role of parents and included them in their marketing efforts (Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Moogan et al., 1999; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Terenzini et al., 2001). In addition, students appear to be treated differently according to their background and academic ability (Chapman, 1981; Reay, 1998). *Counselors* in public schools need to care for too many students to help each one extensively, while those in private schools can really assist and support their candidates (Kim & Gasman, 2011; McDonough, 1998; Reay, 1998). Yamamoto (2006) emphasized that parents and friends are external influences to the student choice of university. Ceja (2006) also contend that parents and siblings as influential people on their choice of university. Teachers from secondary school, and parents, for example, can exert a strong influence on students' decision-making in Thailand (Pimpa & Suwannapirom 2008).

#### UNIVERSITY CHOICE PROCESS FOR TURKEY

The student enrollment of higher education in Turkey increases day by day. In 1981, the number of student enrollment was 237.369; in 1991, the number of student enrollment was 695.730; in 2000, the number of student enrollment was 1.503.981; in 2006, the number of student was 2.342.898; in 2010, the number of student enrollment was 3.529.334. Since 2006, student enrollments in higher education have increased by percentage 50. This increasing number of enrollment shows clearly the increasing demand of higher education. With the debate on the idea that public universities are not able to fulfill the increasing demand for higher education in terms of number, capacity and quality, foundation universities gained central importance to Turkish higher education. The first of foundation universities established in 1984 and the number of foundation universities has reached 68 in the year 2013. As of today, totally, there are 175 universities with 107 public and 68 foundation universities. The result of these developments, the availability of so many options has complicated the students' university choice process. In order to improve the strategies about student recruitment, Turkish universities managers should understand of how and why students select a university is very important. In this research, we determine university choice factors and influential criteria on the basis the literature and Turkish higher education environment.

University choices factors are five categorized as follows: **Financial considerations:** *Family's solvency, cost of education, financial aid-scholarship.* **Career opportunities:** *Employment and advancement opportunity, curriculum offered, internship opportunities and university-industry partnership.* **Location:** *City where is located, proximity of city center, proximity of home, accommodation.* **University attributes-institutional characteristics:** *Reputation of university, staff quality, student quality, quality of facilities (library services, technical infrastructure), teaching quality, education quality, accreditations and language policy, physical condition (size of institutions and social environment on campus).* **Personal factors** are as social (peer)-family background. Based on the intensive literature, influential criteria are categorized six parts. They are *family expectations and their social background; peers' and friends' recommendations; counselors and teachers; media such as television, newspapers and magazines; publications about universities; internet with social networks and web sites.* The students who have decided to take university education after graduating from high school, university selection process is as follows.



**Figure 1: A conceptual framework about university**

**CONCLUSION**

Understanding the choice process of a university is an instrument for develop strategy to obtain a position itself against competitors for a university. Based on the intensive literature, university choice process have noted in two main phases. One of them is search stage; the other is selecting a university. In searching period, the students can be affected



by choice and influential factors. First, one is choice factors, which can be clustered into five themes namely: financial considerations, career opportunities, location, university attributes-institutional characteristics, and personal factors. Second is an influential criterion. They are defined namely: family expectations and their social background, peers' and friends' recommendations, counselors and teachers, media such as television, newspapers and magazines, publications about universities, internet with social networks and web sites.

In the article, all factors are presented in a conceptual framework in figure 1. The suitable process that has created with a literature review will be useful for the Turkish higher education intuitions to plan and develop their strategies. We suggest also the development of the university choice models, methodologies and an enhancement of choice criteria with background factors possibly influencing the university choice of prospective Turkish students.

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