

# Factors Influencing Students' Choice of Universities in the 8<sup>th</sup> Macro Region: Policy Brief

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## Abstract

Countries around the world are increasingly recognizing the critical role of universities in fostering national development and advancing knowledge and technology. As a result, development policies are inherently connected to universities, research institutes, and industrial centers. This research explores the factors influencing currently enrolled students' choices of universities in the eighth macro region, employing a sequential exploratory method that integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

**Keywords:** Factors; Influencing; Students' Choice

## Background

Every year, many high school graduates choose which university to attend. Research has been conducted on the decision-making of high school graduates when selecting a university. In Iran, factors identified in previous studies as influencing students' choice of university include: family, friends, availability of the desired program, university reputation, distance from home, and future career prospects. Researchers have also identified university entrance exam scores and tuition costs as factors in decision-making (1-3). In fact, university managers and educational policymakers can transform the university into an attractive environment for students' education by investing in utilizing positive factors or opportunities and reducing the negative impact of challenging factors. The 8th Health Higher Education Macro Region includes the Universities of Medical Sciences in Kerman, Zahedan, Rafsanjan, Jiroft, Zabol, Bam, and the faculties of medical sciences in Sirjan, Iranshahr, and Chabahar located in the region. The National Spatial Planning Document emphasizes

utilizing the social, cultural, and scientific capacities of the country's provinces and regions, and laying the necessary groundwork for maximizing the use of capacities and capabilities of small and dispersed population centers in preserving and maintaining the population, establishing balance in the population distribution pattern by diversifying activities, creating employment, and increasing the role of educational, research, industrial, and service activities that can be established in these centers. This is achieved by limiting the quantitative development of lower levels of higher education in favor of higher levels and enhancing the quality of higher education institutions and their research and technology centers for developing scientific collaborations, including international ones. All countries are certainly striving to emphasize the role of universities in national development and the advancement of knowledge and technology. Therefore, development policies are fundamentally linked to universities, research, and industrial centers (4-6). This research investigated the reasons for choosing universities in the eighth macro region by currently

enrolled students, using a sequential exploratory (qualitative and quantitative) method.

The findings of this research identified five factors as the most important reasons for choosing universities in the macro region, prioritized as follows by students: being a resident and ease of commuting from their hometown to the current university; admission based on their entrance exam rank to the current university; relatives and close family members living in the city where the current university is located; the admission capacity for the specific major at the current university; and the allocation of suitable dormitory facilities from the first semester. These factors accounted for the highest percentages. Notably, reasons such as the university's national ranking, high acceptance rates of graduates into higher degrees at the current university, international ranking of the university, and the role and importance of prominent graduates from the current university received the lowest percentages.

### Suggestions

Considering the results of this study, the Universities/Faculties of Medical Sciences in the 8th Macro Region, with their nine educational university centers, should take steps towards creating a competitive advantage to attract students with top ranks in various academic entrance exams. Based on the opinions of students studying in this macro region, these steps should include:

**Educational Advantages:** Promoting the scientific reputation of university faculty members, implementing modern student-centered educational strategies, utilizing international faculty members, maintaining proper connections with alumni, attracting international collaboration in educational programs, and implementing "brain circulation" among universities in the eighth macro region.

**Advantages Related to Infrastructure and Facilities:** Having equipped dormitories within the university campuses and providing dormitories from the first semester until the end of studies; providing transportation facilities on various land and air routes for student travel and signing memoranda of understanding for student discounts; implementing "University Day" programs for high schools and creating virtual tours to introduce universities; establishing equipped recreational halls and rest areas on university campuses; developing modern educational infrastructure; and providing students with strong internet and information technology access.

### Conclusion

Every higher education institution's goal is to meet its students' needs, fulfill their expectations, and provide

high-quality educational services that enable students to gain a competitive advantage in the job market. However, with today's intense competitive pressure, educational institutions must be able to build their brand and choose marketing tools that convince all stakeholders of their quality. Only by understanding the needs, preferences, motivations, desires, and other characteristics of students can a higher education institution respond to these differences, gain a sustainable competitive advantage among educational institutions, and create practical concepts and strategies for attracting and retaining students, while continuously improving the quality of its services. Higher education institutions can then use this knowledge to formulate policies and target specific groups of students to ensure a favorable learning environment and enhance their image.

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