

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING THE STUDENT'S CHOOSING OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AS A MAJOR: THE CASE OF ARAB OPEN UNIVERSITY- OMAN BRANCH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research is an attempt to explore and investigate the factors influencing the student's choice of their specialization/major at the tertiary level at Arab Open University- Oman Branch. Specifically, the main objective is to identify those factors that influence and determine student's decision in choosing business administration as a major at Arab Open University (AOU). The research considers factors such as job prospective, image and reputation of the university, influences of the parents, peers, teachers, personal interests and other factors which are discussed below. It is based on a survey conducted in spring 2017 on a sample of 48 students in AOU-Oman Branch, where descriptive statistic and multiple regression analysis were employed to obtain the results. The data analysis in the current research found that personal interests, family members and media have an influence on the student decisions in selecting the above mentioned major.*

**KEYWORDS:** *AOU-Oman Branch, Multiple Regression Analysis, Major Choice, Job Prospective.*

### **Introduction**

The student choice of university major is an important topic for many sectors and universities. This study tries to know the factors which influence student major in Arab Open University-Oman Branch. Oman is a developing country in the Arab world with a high economic growth. Omanis have a satisfied level of education; this creates many opportunities for graduate students to study then work in different sectors in Oman. Arab Open University as an open learning university was established firstly in 2002 in three branches; Kuwait, Lebanon and Jordan. Then in 2003, Bahrain branch, Egypt branch and Saudi Arabia branch were opened. The last branches to open were the Oman branch in 2008 and followed by the Sudan branch in 2013.

Arab Open University offers a range of academic programs under the partnership agreement with the Open University in United Kingdom. In the Oman branch, there are two phases offered; the undergraduate Programs and the post graduate programs. For the Undergraduate programs, the following degree programs are offered namely; Bachelor's Degree Program in Business Studies which includes Management, Marketing, Accounting, Economics, Finance and Human Resource; Bachelor degree in Information Technology and Computing which includes Information Communication Technology and Computing with Business; Lastly, Bachelor Degree Program in English language & Literature.

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The level of students who selected business administration as their major at Arab Open University-Oman branch has increased in comparison with other majors in the university. This may be will lead to close some majors or it create pressure on the university's management and business administration lecturers. The literatures suggested some factors that might influence student's choice of a university major. These factors include personal interest, gender, peers and colleges, family background and career opportunity. A study by Rajabi and strasser (1994), Ozger and Schroeder (2002) reported that the students decide their major during their high school according to the job market requirements. In the same regard, Walstrom et al (2008) revealed that prospects in term of jobs and incomes are significant criteria for the selection of a major. A recent study by Rababah (2016) suggested that families influence on the student's choice of accounting as a major in United Arab Emirates.

To come up with the desired results, this study will utilize a questionnaire to survey factors influencing student's choosing business administration as a major. The questionnaire will identify the following factors; the reputation of university, personal interest, career, media and family and peers influences to identify which ones have the most impact on student's decision making as to the choosing of Business Administration as a major. The questionnaire will be conducted in Oman because the country has a specified tradition and culture. More importantly, the study is to be conducted at Arab Open University-Oman branch so the management can plan and administer the students and courses more effectively.

### Literature Review

Previous studies tested some factors that influence the student choice of major. The next explanation is a summary about these factors:

- **Job Prospective:** Factors related to the profession itself had a greater importance when selecting a major. Studies were conducted where job perspective was considered to have a significant influence on the choice of business majors. Sevier (1998) states that students tend to choose majors that may provide career opportunities. Studies by Paulsen (1990) reveal that final outcome for the students is the employment opportunities after graduation and thus students often make college choices based on job opportunities available in the economy. Several other findings support that earnings, prestige and career advancement are major influences of student's choice of business major (Tan & Laswad, 2006, Maudlin et al 2000, Felton et al, 1994). Thus, employment opportunity is a significant factor that influences college choice decision.
- **Influences of Family Members and Peers:** Parents, siblings, peers, and other family members play a major role in students' choice of college and course of study. High school guidance counselors and advisors, high school teachers and principals, college professors and alumni, special events and career guidance programs also share a certain level of influence on the students. A research conducted by Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) revealed that parents were the most significant factor influencing which major to pursue. Teachers were also indicated as the second most influential by these students.

However, the importance of siblings, peers, and the media combined was found to be less than that of parents. A number of studies have been conducted examining the selection of business as a major where it was discovered that students would seek advice from their parent's due to the common perception that parents have the required information or experience with regards to higher education and thus, parents are usually viewed as a significant credible source of advice (Westbrook and Scott, 2012).

At the same time, there is a long term active part that parent's play in their child's education future such as saving money for university, attending postsecondary preparation workshops, assisting with university applications and forms, and monitoring their child's secondary education (Henry, 2012). Education levels of the parent's also plays the most significant role in shaping an individual's attitude to participate in higher education (Chapman, 1981). Ceja (2006) highlights siblings of the student already attending universities will be more helpful and have some influence in the decision making of students and selection of a major for study. In addition to parents, peers tend to have a significant level of influence in the student's consideration of university.

Fogg and Harrington (2010) discovered that students are more likely to attend a particular degree if their classmates intend to pursue the same too. Additionally, D. Chapman's (1981) research suggested that peer influence was much more impactful influential factor. The influence of others appeared to "shape expectations of what a particular college is like and [consequently]

offered direct advice on where the student should go” (p. 495). Peers serve as an influence on one of the many factors that comprise university choice and this is particularly true if the student seeks counsel from a friend currently enrolled in university, which acts as a major influence in the search process (Broekemier & Seshadri, 2000).

Other studies also showed that students will consult their friends or neighbors when deciding to choose a place to study (Maringe, 2006). While D. Chapman’s research suggested that peers have the most influence on the student’s decision, but this was contradicted by other studies that stated that parents have the most influence at various stages of the search process for the suitable institution (Anctil, 2008; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) agree the same and say that peers have no reported effects on influencing the institutional choice.

Perhaps the best way to conclude these findings is to assume that peers have influence on a student’s perception of college quality, but it does not go as far as having a direct influence on the choice. In other words, peers serve as an influence on one of the various factors that affect university choice.

- **Reputation of the University**

Numerous studies found that students valued the academic reputation immensely and it is among the most important variables that students will consider in selecting their study location. The relationship between students’ choice and the institution’s characteristics is significant because it determines which university students eventually decide to go to (Pope & Fermin, 2003). A research by Keling (2007) discovered that students assess the reputation of the institution before selecting their college of choice.

Noel-Levitz (2012) stated the factors of influences which included “cost, financial aid, academic reputation, size of the institution, recommendations from family and friends, geographic setting, campus appearance, and personalized attention prior to enrollment” (p. 3). Through this study, it was discovered that “academic reputation is a strong factor, ranking as one of the top three enrollment factors across all institution types, with at least seventy percent of students indicating it is important or very important [in their enrollment decision]” (p. 4). Other researches by Ancheh (et al, 2007) and Sia (2010) concluded to the significance of institutional reputation as the main factor for students in choosing their desired place to study. They agreed that a university’s reputation was a significant indicator that influenced higher education institution choice decision. The existence of this relationship explores the positive relationship between college reputation and college choice decisions.

Another research by Hazelkorn (2009) claimed that “Institutional reputation is a key driver of student choice” (p. 81). In contrast, a study by Dolinsky (2010), stated that students failed to rank academic reputation as their top priority when selecting the university. However, he identified other academic elements, which included programs of study and job placement rates, as key drivers in the university choice decision.

- **Personal Interest**

Researches show that genuine interest in a major may be the strongest factor when it comes to choosing a university major (Mahani & Molki, 2011, Misran et al., 2012). Many studies support the significance of interest in the major on student’s decisions regarding university major. Kim et al. (2002) and Strasser et al. (2002) stated that business students considered interest in the field as the most crucial factor when choosing a major, above financial costs and job opportunity.

Adams et al. (1994) and Strasser et al. (2002) concluded that interest in a field is the most influential factor and that it is related to the perceptions of the students regarding work in that field following graduation. Strasser et al. (2002), also provides evidence stating that business students valued interesting work more highly than career benefits and pay and hence, personal interest may be particularly important to management majors.

- **Media**

Mass Media is a factor that plays a key role in the choice made by students in order to seek information on the selection of the major. Information assessed about the majors offered by universities from different channels has been identified in several researches, especially through the university websites (Kim & Gasman, 2011, Pampaloni, 2010). In another study by Hossler, et al. (1990) revealed the influence of media on the selection of majors and reported that radio and television ads provide a

valuable source for institutions to build a good reputation and strong recognition. At the same time, information may be available through publications, educational programme guides, leaflets or brochures (Briggs & Wilson, 2007).

However, it is reported that this type of information may have less influence after in comparison with the information available online (Simões&Soares, 2010). But, the traditional sources of information or the official websites are not considered the most relevant in the research by Maringe (2006) and it is found that the lack of information of an institution through media could be considered as a negative characteristic (Mortimer, 1997).

### **Hypotheses Development**

The initial aim of this study is to examine the factors influencing student's choice of business administration as a major at Arab Open University (AOU). The following parts focus on the main hypotheses related to the importance objective regarding the study factors, which are personal interest, reputation of the university, job prospect, family members and peers, and media, and their influence on the student's choice of business administration as a major. The hypotheses in this study are:

#### **Hypothesis 1**

**H<sub>01</sub>** : Personal interest does not have a significant effect on student's choice of business administration major.

**H<sub>a1</sub>** : Personal interest has a significant effect on student's choice of business administration major.

#### **Hypothesis 2**

**H<sub>02</sub>** : Reputation of the university does not have a significant effect on student's choice of business administration major.

**H<sub>a2</sub>** : Reputation of the university has a significant effect on student's choice of business administration major.

#### **Hypothesis 3**

**H<sub>03</sub>** : Job prospect does not have a significant effect on student's choice of business administration major.

**H<sub>a3</sub>** : Job prospect has a significant effect on student's choice of business administration major.

#### **Hypothesis 4**

**H<sub>04</sub>** : Family members and peers do not have a significant effect on student's choice of business administration major.

**H<sub>a4</sub>** : Family members and peers have a significant effect on student's choice of business administration major.

#### **Hypothesis 5**

**H<sub>05</sub>** : Media does not have a significant effect on student's choice of business administration major.

**H<sub>a5</sub>** : Media has a significant effect on student's choice of business administration major.

### **Methodology**

Questionnaire surveys were used in the current study to determine the factors, which influence students' choice of business administration as a major, specifically at Arab open university-Oman branch. Two hundred copies were distributed to target respondents, who are the Business administration students at the said university. However, only forty-five questionnaires were returned which mean that the response rate is 23% only.

### **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, descriptive statistic, Cronbach alpha, Pearson correlation test, and multiple regression analysis were used. The output from the above analyses were tested and confirmed for their reliability and consistency. In this study, the researcher used Cronbach alpha to measure internal consistency. Sekaran (2003) said that Cronbach alpha has some advantages. Firstly, Cronbach's alpha explains how much the correlation is probable between the items used and all other probable items that are measuring the same variable. Secondly, it measures the squared correlation between the score that is given in a scale and the score of all probable items, which would have been given in any questionnaire in the world. Since alpha can be considered a coefficient correlation, the Cronbach  $\alpha$  is coefficient for

each key variable used in the statistical analysis and Alpha showed more than 70%. We can say that they have considerable reliability because the values exceed conventional levels of acceptability (Sekaran, 2003). Descriptive statistic used in this study to measure the demographic variables, and multiple regression analysis were used to test the relationship between the dependent variable (the students' choice of accounting as a major) and the independent variables (reputation of the university or college, personal interests, job prospect, family members and peers, and media).

## Results

### • Respondents' Characteristics

The profile of the respondents with respect to their gender, age of respondent, level of education, Father's Occupation, Mother's Occupation, Parent's Total Monthly Income, Financing for tuition fees in the university, is shown in table1.

**Table 1: Frequency and Percentage for Demographic Information**

Variable		F	%
Gender	Male	9	12.0
	Female	36	48.0
Age	18-19	0	0.0
	20-21	33	44.0
	21 and Above	12	16.0
Please state the highest level of education achieved by your parents	Secondary School or Lower	15	20.0
	Diploma	9	12.0
	Degree	3	4.0
	Master or Higher	18	24.0
Father's Occupation	Business owner	18	24.0
	Private Sector Employee	3	4.0
	Government Servant	6	8.0
	Others, please specify	0	0.0
Mother's Occupation	Business owner	12	16.0
	Private Sector Employee	3	4.0
	Government Servant	0	0.0
	Housewife or other, please specify:	30	40.0
Parent's Total Monthly Income	OMR 1,000 or Below	12	16.0
	OMR ,001- OMR 2,000	21	28.0
	OMR 2,001- OMR 3,000	9	12.0
	OMR 3, 001 and Above	3	4.0
Financing for tuition fees in the university	Parent	27	36.0
	Loan	6	8.0
	Self-Financing	12	16.0
	Others, please specify	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>75</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 shows that:

- Most of the respondents in the gender group are 48.0% per cent female and are 12.0% male respondents.
- About the age, the respondents are 44.0% per cent in the age group of 20-21 years, 0% per cent are 18-19 years.
- The percentage for "highest level of education" reached (24.0%) from Master or Higher, but the lowest percentage reached (4.0%) for Degree.
- The percentage for "Father's Occupation" reached (24.0%) from Own Business, but the lowest percentage reached (0.0%) for Other, please specify.
- The percentage for "Mother's Occupation" reached (40.0%) from Housewife or other, but the lowest percentage reached (0.0%) for Government Servant.
- The percentage for "Parent's Total Monthly Income" reached (28.0%) from OMR ,001- OMR 2,000, but the lowest percentage reached (4.0%) for OMR 3, 001 and Above.
- The percentage for "Financing for tuition fees in the university" reached (36.0%) from Parent, but the lowest percentage reached (0.0%) for Other, please specify.

- **Reliability**

The idea of "dependability" is by and large used to assess, test or survey that develops in quantitative research, and in addition this idea is utilized as a part of a wide range of inquiries about. Unwavering quality can be characterized as consistency among things of the instrument. The center of the dependability is if the study procedure is predictable and stable crosswise over different strategies and specialists and after some time. In this way, dependability can be characterized as how much a poll produces same results in an analogous situation for all specialists. This is basic that the information uncovers steady and dependable results keeping in mind the end goal to be solid. Pilot study will be led by survey dispersion among factors affecting purchase intentions towards organic food among consumers in Iraq. Cronbach's alpha will use through spss programming to test the unwavering quality.

The dependability of the instrument is finished by utilizing cronbach's alpha. The cronbach alpha testing is connected as it is viewed as the most acknowledged test which guarantees unwavering quality connected by social analyst. In cronbach's alpha unwavering quality examination, the nearer cronbach's alpha to 1.0, the higher the inside consistency dependability. Cronbach measures:

- Dependability under 0.6 considered poor.
- Dependability in the range 0.7 is thought to be satisfactory.
- Dependability more than 0.8 are thought to be great.

In this study, the scientist utilized unwavering quality trial of the variable for measuring the builds, to guarantee that the estimations size of study is very illustrative for every variable, the cronbach's alpha is utilized. The specialist figured the unwavering quality of 5 elements. Builds with cronbach's alpha beneath 0.7 will be erased and the cronbach's alpha is trying whether the figures are free from blunder. The aftereffects of all Cronbach's alpha figuring's regarding the builds are more prominent than 0.7, which implies the developments are with high dependability.

**Table 2: Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)**

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Status
Past Achievements	0.94	Good
Personal Interests	0.88	Good
Job Prospect	0.80	Good
Family Members and Peers	0.93	Good
Media and Publicity	0.84	Good
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>Good</b>

- **The Significant of Model Hypothesis**

Tests of the hypothesis in the desired model were made based on three measures, the significance of correlation coefficients ( $r$ ), the coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) and the multiple regression (beta). Possible correlations range from +1 to -1. As a rule of thumb,  $r$  values of 0 to .2 are generally considered weak, .3 to .6 moderate, and .7 to 1 strong (brace et.al, 2000). The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) is useful because it gives the proportion of the variance of one variable that is predictable from the other variable. It is a measure that allows us to determine how certain one can be in making predictions from a certain model/graph. The multiple regressions measured by beta which is a measure of how strongly each set of predictor variables (independent variables) influence the criterion variable (dependent variable). Using multiple regressions, we can test theories (or models) about precisely which set of variables is influencing our behavior. In general, the correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) measure the relation between only two variables while the multiple regression, beta, measure the relation between a set of variables with one variable. The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) shows the linearity between variables. In this research, we examine  $r$  by using pearson correlation coefficients calculated for pairs of variables to test the significance of correlation coefficients. Beta is measured by applying the linear regression test. The table 3 shows the results of the first major test the hypothesis and sub-hypotheses.

**Table 3: The Results of the Application of the Regression**

Variables	Beta	T	Sig.	R	R Square	F	Sig.
Past Achievements	0.04	0.67	0.50	0.91	0.82	65.219	0.01
Personal Interests	0.53	4.31	0.00				
Job Prospect	0.17	1.27	0.21				
Family Members and Peers	0.51	7.31	0.00				
Media and Publicity	0.33	4.74	0.00				

The following points are based on the above analysis:

- There is no significant relationship between the Past Achievements and student's choice of business as a major, where the values of (Beta, T) reached (0.04, 0.67), and Sig. (0.50). Therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected.
- There is significant relationship between the Personal Interests and student's choice of business as a major, where the values of (Beta, T) reached (0.53, 4.31), and Sig. (0.00). Therefore, the second hypothesis is accepted.
- There is no significant relationship between the Job Prospect and student's choice of business as a major, where the values of (Beta, T) reached (-0.17, -1.27), and Sig. (0.21). Therefore, the Third hypothesis is rejected.
- There is significant relationship between the Family Members and Peers and student's choice of business as a major, where the values of (Beta, T) reached (0.51, 7.31), and Sig. (0.00). Therefore, the Fourth hypothesis is accepted.
- There is significant relationship between the Media and Publicity and student's choice of business as a major, where the values of (Beta, T) reached (0.33, 4.74), and Sig. (0.00). Therefore, the Fifth hypothesis is accepted.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to understand the relative choice criteria used by students while selecting business as a major at AOU (Oman branch). This study attempted to understand if these factors (past achievements, reputation of the university, personal interests, job prospect, family members and peers and media) influence on students when selecting the major. This research revealed that personal interests, family members and media have an influence on the student decisions. The findings confirm with the studies like Adams et al. (1994), Strasser et al. (2002), Pearson and Dellman (1997), Chapman (1981) and Fogg and Harrington (2010), that the major influence affecting choice by students was based on personal factors and family members and peers. The results of the analysis support the study by Baharun et al (2002) and shows that the influence of family or peers is an important attribute which play an important part in determining the final selection of the major. The influence of parents and friends will be more significant when it coincides with the personal interest of the students. The study also reports that the media related factors are also important influential. This study supports Hossler, et al. (1990) theory, as students choosing the business major identified media as a variable that carried significantly more importance.

The respondents agreed that websites of AOU have a strong influence along with information sources such as ads on media, brochures and leaflets. However, the other factors were found to be less important compared with the personal factors, family members and peers and media related factors. Of which some variables which are considered as important factors to influence student's choice but data analysis has shown the opposite in this study. In the studies by Chapman (1981) and R. Chapman and Jackson (1987), institutional reputation is defined by academic and non-academic aspects, but when students were surveyed about its importance neither of them ranked it as very important. Finally, the study's main objective has been accomplished as to which factors students prefer and perceive to be reliable to consider. The research furthers the knowledge of choices made by students which confirms the most influential elements and while the limitations restrict from drawing a substantial conclusion, some insight is provided into the level of importance students place on certain factors, which the management of AOU should focus more on these attributes that are considered relatively important. These results could greatly help the administration of AOU as it has highlighted the need for customization of marketing strategies as per the needs of the students.

### **Limitations**

Several aspects of this research were faced with limitations such as the use of a single university, a small sample size, and a small sample belonging to only the business degree. This study was conducted in Arab Open University-Oman Branch and samples are limited to students at the Oman branch only. A sample size of only 45 students is considered very small which affected the ability to draw substantial conclusions in this study and thus may not be able to represent the whole research and it might affect the accuracy and reliability of the result. Since the majority in this study came from the Oman branch and hence may not be representative of student population in AOU.

This study has been only limited to business students in AOU and could also be conducted to other programs to confirm the result of the study and similar studies could be done in the other branches of AOU to compare the results before generalizations could be made. These elements can limit the generalizability of the study but similarities of the results to previous studies or researches done and the availability of the data make this study acceptable.

### Future Research

This research has provided a general overview of decision criteria that student's take into consideration when choosing a business major in AOU. This arises opportunities for further future research studies on the subject matter, but an expansion of the sample size could help to achieve more substantial findings. At the same time, it is suggested that future research be extended to a larger pool of respondents from AOU and not just confined to the Oman branch but also the other branches in the GCC, which could result in more accurate findings.

It is suggested that future researches be conducted through mixed methods of study which involves qualitative research and a broader range quantitative research, which could enable to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of the students. Besides, future researches could also be extended to respondents from other groups of degrees such as foundation level students, diploma students and also post graduate students. At the same time, the results in this study show only a trend among students choosing the business major and this trend needs to be confirmed with studies on a wider scope.

Future research should be based on more variables than those included in this study. Other factors such as race, gender, access to scholarships, grants, loans, and personal savings would be helpful to gain an understanding on how students interpret the value of choosing the major. A further research should be conducted to explore how three of the emerged critical factors predict students' intentions to pursue the business major. This will aid in developing the understanding of the management in AOU of which factor contributes significantly or the most to students' intentions.

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