eISBN: 978-81-687939-5-8

ENGLISH

EMERGING SCHOLARS SERIES

A STUDY ON DECISION-MAKING FACTORS BEHIND GRADUATE STUDENTS' PREFERENCE FOR CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES

AUTHORS

Vikash Kumar Mal

Dr. Ujjala Singh

https://doi.org/10.66483/ess.ed.2026.0009

Jnanasetu

LIGHTING PATHS, EMPOWERING MINDS

Jnanasetu Press

JNANASETU RESEARCH SERVICES (OPC) PVT. LTD.

Title: *A STUDY ON DECISION-MAKING FACTORS BEHIND GRADUATE STUDENTS' PREFERENCE FOR CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES*

eISBN: 978-81-687939-5-8

DOI: https://doi.org/10.66483/ess.ed.2026.0009

Copyright © 2026 Vikash Kumar Mal and Dr. Ujjala Singh

All rights reserved.

Note: This book is based on a revised version of the dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the M.Ed programme, completed in May 2026, offered by the Department of Education and Education Technology, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad.

First Published in 2026

Published by

JNANASETU PRESS

An imprint of JNANASETU RESEARCH SERVICES (OPC) PRIVATE LIMITED, Address: 309-133, Duddi, Kosigi, Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh, India – 518313

Website: https://jnanasetupress.com

Publisher Website: https://jnanasetupress.com

To my loved Parents,

with a heart full of love and immeasurable gratitude, I dedicate this work to you. Words will never be enough to express what you mean to me and what you have done for my life. Your unconditional love, endless sacrifices, and unwavering belief in me have been the strongest pillars of my journey.

In every step I have taken, you have been my strength when I felt weak, my courage when I felt afraid, and my hope when I felt lost. Even in the moments when I doubted myself, you never did. Your silent sacrifices, your sleepless nights, and your constant prayers have made this achievement possible.

You have not only given me life, but you have also given me the confidence to dream, the courage to pursue those dreams, and the resilience to overcome every challenge. Everything I am today is because of you.

This work is not just mine-it is yours. It carries your struggles, your love, and your dreams within it. I dedicate it to you with all my heart, deepest respect, and endless love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Ujjala Singh, my supervisor. Her approachable nature, willingness to help at any time, and unwavering support have been vital to the completion of this work.

A special thanks to Prof. J.V. Madhusudan, Head of the Department of Education and Education Technology, whose leadership has greatly influenced the environment in which I could pursue this work.

The author gratefully acknowledges using OpenAI's ChatGPT to support language refinement, content organisation, and structural editing during the manuscript development. The tool was employed under human supervision and did not independently generate original academic content or analysis. Grammarly was also used for grammar, punctuation, and clarity checks. All critical decisions, interpretations, and theoretical contributions remain the authors' responsibility.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Consent Statement: All participants provided informed and voluntary consent before taking part in the study. The purpose of the study, procedures, and confidentiality conditions were explained to them, and participation was voluntary and informed.

Ethical Approval: The study received ethical approval from the University of Hyderabad.

Funding Disclosure: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

VIKASH KUMAR MAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	**Page No.**
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the study	2
1.3 Conceptual Framework 1.3.1 Levels of Education in India 1.3.2 Importance of Higher Education 1.3.3 Institution for Higher Education 1.3.4 Importance of Selection for Higher Education Institutions 1.3.5 Central University for Higher Education	2-5
1.4 Theoretical Framework 1.4.1 Simon's Bounded Rationality Model 1.4.2 Lindblom's Incremental Model 1.3.3 Etzioni's Mixed Scanning Model 1.4.4 Dror's Optimal Model 1.4.5 Garbage Can Model (Cohen, March, Olsen)	5-9
1.5 Rationale of the study	9-10
1.6 Statement of the problem	10
1.7 Research Questions	10-11
1.8 Objectives of the study	11

1.9 Hypothesis of the study	11
1.10 Operational definition	11-12
1.11 Delimitation of the study	12
1.12 Conclusion	12

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

2.1 Introduction	13-14
2.2 Review of related literature 2.2.1 Studies conducted abroad 2.2.2 Studies conducted in India	14-28
2.3 Key Finding and Conclusion	28-29
2.4 Research Gap	29

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction	30
3.2 Research Design	30-31
3.3 Population of the study	31
3.4 Sample and Sampling technique 3.4.1 Regional distribution of universities 3.4.2 Sample and Sampling technique 3.4.3 Justification of sampling	31-33
3.5 Description of research instrument/tool 3.5.1 Development of Questionnaire 3.5.2 Type of questions	33-35

3.6 Standardisation of Questionnaire 3.6.1 Item Construction 3.6.2 Validity of the tool 3.6.3 Reliability of the tool	35-36
3.7 Procedure of Data Collection	36
3.8 Statistical technique for analysis 3.8.1 Descriptive Statistics 3.8.2 Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) 3.8.3 Independent Samples t-Test 3.8.4 One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) 3.8.5 Frequency analysis and percentage distribution	36-37

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Introductions	38
4.2 Analysis and Interpretation of Objective 1	38-43
4.3 Analysis and Interpretation of Objective 2	43-47
4.4 Analysis and Interpretation of Objective 3	47-49

Chapter -5 Summary, Findings, and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction	50
5.2 Background of the study	50
5.3 Statement of the problem	50
5.4 Objective of the study	50-51
5.5 Hypothesis of the study	51

5.6 Methods of the study	51
5.7 Sample and sampling technique	51-52
5.8 Delimitations of the study	52
5.9 Instruments of the study	52
5.10 Data collection procedure	52
5.11 Statistical Techniques used	53
5.12 Major findings of the study	53-55
5.13 Conclusion of the study	55
5.14 Educational implications	56
5.15 Suggestion for future research	56

Bibliography

Plagiarism Report

Appendix

LIST OF TABLES

Table. No.	Title of table	Page No.
3.1	Regional Distribution of Selected Universities	32-33
3.2	Distribution of Questionnaire Items According to Factors	34
3.3	Scale Reliability Statistic	36
4.1	Variable Entered/Removed	39
4.2	Model Summary	39
4.3	Regression Coefficients	39-40
4.4	Residuals Statistics	40
4.5	Group Descriptive Statistics of Decision Making with respect to locality	44
4.6	Group Descriptive Statistics of Decision Making with Respect to Gender	44
4.7	Group Descriptive- Gender	45
4.8	Independent sample t-Test- Gender	45
4.9	One-way ANOVA-Academic Stream	47
4.10	Dominant Factor- Frequency and Percentage Distribution (N=160)	47-48

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. no.	Title of figure	Page No.
4.1	Histogram of Standardised Residuals	41
4.2	Normal P-P Plot of Standardised Residuals	42
4.3	Scatterplot of Standardised Residuals vs Predicted Values	43
4.4	Graphical representation of the mean differences between the localities	44
4.5	Graphical representation of the mean differences between the genders	46
4.6	Graphical Representation of Factor Influencing Decision- Making	48

ABSTRACT

The present study, titled "A Study on Decision-Making Factors Behind Graduate Students' Preference for Central Universities", examined the factors influencing graduate students' preference for Central Universities in India. The study also investigated whether significant differences existed in students' decision-making by gender, locality, and academic stream, and identified the dominant factor influencing students' selection of Central Universities for higher education. The study was conducted in the context of the growing demand for quality, affordable, and inclusive higher education opportunities offered by Central Universities. It focused on understanding how academic, infrastructural, economic, socio-cultural, and personal factors shape students' decision-making while selecting universities for higher education. A quantitative research approach using the descriptive survey method was adopted. Data were collected from 160 postgraduate students, selected from eight Central Universities across four regions of India, using a structured questionnaire. Statistical techniques such as Multiple Linear Regression, Independent Samples *t*-test, ANOVA, and frequency analysis were applied using JAMOVI software. The findings indicated a strong relationship between the variables, and that all five factors-academic, infrastructural, economic, socio-cultural, and personal-significantly influenced students' decision-making. Among these, economic factors emerged as the most dominant, followed by academic and infrastructural factors, indicating that affordability, scholarships, financial assistance, quality of education, faculty expertise, and institutional facilities strongly influence students' university preferences. Socio-cultural and personal factors showed a moderate level of influence. Further, the study found no significant differences in students' decision-making by gender, locality, or academic streams. The study concluded that affordability and financial support are crucial in shaping students' preferences for Central Universities. The findings suggest that policymakers and

university administrators should strengthen scholarship schemes, financial assistance programs, and accessible educational opportunities to attract students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

KEYWORDS: *Preference, Decision-Making Factors, Graduate students, Central University*

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

India, officially known as the Republic of India, is a geographically and culturally diverse nation with a large youth population seeking higher education opportunities. Due to regional differences in development, resources, and access to quality education, students across India face varied challenges and preferences when selecting institutions for their higher studies.

In this context, Central Universities, established and regulated by the University Grants Commission, have emerged as important choices for students. These institutions are recognised for their academic standards, national character, and relatively affordable education. As a result, they attract students from different regions and socio-economic backgrounds.

The choice of a Central University is not random but influenced by several decision-making factors. Key factors include academic reputation, course availability, faculty quality, infrastructure, location, cost of education, and future career opportunities. In addition, personal and social influences such as family expectations, peer groups, and regional accessibility also shape students' decisions.

Since students come from diverse geographical regions of India, their priorities may differ significantly. Therefore, this study uses stratified random sampling to ensure representation from different groups and to better understand how these factors influence institutional choice.

This research aims to examine the key factors that affect students' decisions in selecting Central Universities for higher education in India, thereby contributing to a better understanding of student preferences and institutional selection behaviour.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

With the expansion of universities and increased student mobility, selecting an institution has become more complex and strategic. Students today act as informed decision-makers who evaluate multiple institutional attributes before making their final choice (Agarwal, 2009).

The concept of institutional choice is rooted in theories of student decision-making, which suggest that students' preferences are shaped by a combination of economic, sociological, and informational factors. Economic perspectives highlight cost, financial aid, and expected returns in terms of employment outcomes, while sociological perspectives emphasise family background, social capital, and cultural expectations (Perna, 2006). In addition, the availability and accessibility of information, such as rankings, peer reviews, and institutional outreach, also significantly influence student choices (Briggs, 2006).

Within this broader context, Central Universities regulated by the University Grants Commission occupy a distinct position in India's higher education landscape. Unlike many state or private institutions, they attract a nationally diverse student population, making them a unique space to study how students from varied backgrounds negotiate their choices. However, students' decision-making is not uniform; it varies depending on regional disparities, educational exposure, and socio-economic conditions.

Existing studies on higher education in India have largely focused on issues of access, equity, and policy frameworks, with relatively less emphasis on understanding why students prefer certain

public institutions over others. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how regional diversity influences institutional choice, particularly in the case of Central Universities that draw students from across the country (Tilak, 2015).

Therefore, there is a need to examine the underlying factors that shape students' preferences in selecting Central Universities, moving beyond general descriptions to a more nuanced understanding of decision-making behaviour. By incorporating regional representation through multi- stage random sampling. This study aims to bridge this gap and provide deeper insights into how students across India make institutional choices in higher education.

1.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Education can be defined as a process of developing an individual's ability to think critically, evaluate the alternatives, and make rational and responsible decisions in personal, social and professional contexts. In this context, Gandhi saw education not merely as the acquisition of knowledge but as the formation of character and the development of self-reliance. Through his concept of Nai Talim, he emphasised learning through productive work and real-life experiences, which enables individuals to think independently and make decisions grounded in moral values. In this sense, for Gandhi, critical thinking is closely linked to ethical responsibility and social good.

Similarly, John Dewey viewed education as a continuous process of growth rooted in experience and reflection. He believed that true learning occurs when individuals actively engage with problems, analyse situations, and evaluate possible solutions. For Dewey, critical thinking is central to education because it enables learners to make informed, rational decisions in a democratic society. Schools, therefore, should function as spaces where students practice inquiry,

discussion, and reflective thinking, preparing them to participate responsibly in social and professional life.

In the same context, Paulo Freire extended the idea of critical thinking by emphasising the development of critical consciousness. He rejected traditional models of education that treat students as passive recipients of knowledge and instead advocated a dialogical approach in which learners question, reflect, and act on their reality. According to Freire, education should empower individuals to evaluate social conditions, recognise injustice, and make conscious decisions that contribute to transformation. Thus, for Freire, rational decision-making is not only personal but also deeply connected to social responsibility and change.

1.3.1 Levels of Education in India

The Kothari Commission (1964–66) proposed a standardised 10+2+3 educational structure for India. This framework included 10 years of general school education (split into lower and higher primary, plus lower secondary), two years of specialised higher secondary education (Classes XI-XII), and three years for a bachelor's degree.

Key Levels of Education Recommended by the Kothari Commission:

i **Pre-School Education:** One to three years.

ii **Primary Stage (7-8 years):** Divided into Lower Primary (Classes I-IV or V) and Higher Primary (Classes V-VII or VI-VIII).

iii **Lower Secondary Stage (2-3 years):** Classes IX-X, offering general education without specialisation.

iv **Higher Secondary Stage (2 years):** Classes XI-XII, involving specialised studies in different subjects.

v **Higher Education (3 years or more):** Three-year undergraduate degree followed by post-graduate courses.

1.3.2 Importance of Higher Education

Higher education enhances social mobility and equity, motivating students from diverse backgrounds to choose central universities through reservation policies, scholarships, and inclusive environments. Haveman and Smeeding (2006) highlighted that higher education is a key pathway for reducing inequality.

Institutional factors such as academic reputation, faculty expertise, campus facilities, and geographical location significantly influence students' decisions. According to Chapman (1981), student choice is influenced by both student characteristics and institutional attributes.

Globalisation and competition in higher education have increased students' awareness of rankings, accreditation, and institutional performance. Salmi (2009) noted that students increasingly prefer reputed public universities due to perceived academic excellence and global competitiveness.

1.3.3 Institution for Higher Education

Higher education institutions in India are categorised primarily into Central, State, Private, and Deemed-to-be Universities, as well as Institutes of National Importance (INIs) such as IITs and IIMs. These institutions are further classified by affiliation (affiliated colleges vs unitary universities) and, for non-degree-granting institutions, stand-alone PG Diploma or diploma-level training bodies.

Primary Categories of Universities

I. Central Universities: Established by an Act of Parliament, these are funded and managed by the central government.

II. State Universities: Established by state legislatures and funded/operated by state governments.

III. Private Universities: Established by private trusts or societies via state acts, focusing on diverse courses.

IV. Deemed-to-be Universities: High-performing, specialised institutions authorised by the UGC to have university-level status, such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR).

V. Institutes of National Importance (INI): Renowned institutions receiving central funding and special recognition, including IITs, NITs, AIIMS, and IIMs.

1.3.4 Importance of Selection for Higher Education Institutions

The selection process is influenced by institutional reputation and signalling value. A degree from a recognised central university act as a signal of competence in the labour market. Michael Spence (1973) introduced signalling theory, which explains how educational qualifications influence employers' perceptions.

Geographical location and campus environment are crucial in institutional selection. Students often prefer central universities due to their safe campuses, diverse student communities, and national exposure. Donald E. Heller (1997) found that location and financial considerations strongly influence college choice decisions.

Institutional choice influences student persistence and completion rates. Students who select institutions that match their academic preparedness and expectations are more likely to succeed. Research by Alexander W. Astin (1993) showed that institutional fit plays a vital role in student retention and achievement.

1.3.5 Central Universities for Higher Education

Central Universities contribute significantly to quality assurance in higher education. They follow standardised academic frameworks and maintain high teaching and research standards. Salmi (2009) emphasised that strong public universities play a crucial role in building world-class higher education systems.

Central Universities are key centres for research and innovation, supported by government funding and national research initiatives. Philip G. Altbach (2011) noted that flagship public universities are central to knowledge production and academic excellence.

Central Universities provide better career opportunities and institutional credibility, which influence students' preferences. Their degrees are widely recognised, which improves their employability prospects. Teichler (2009) argued that institutional reputation significantly impacts graduates' labour market outcomes.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Decision-making is the process of selecting the best course of action from multiple alternatives to achieve a specific objective. It involves recognising a problem, collecting information, weighing options, and choosing the most suitable solution. Good decision-making is essential because it enables individuals and organisations to allocate resources efficiently and achieve their goals effectively. Effective decisions also help minimise risks and ensure sustainable progress.

Therefore, decision-making is a critical skill that impacts success in both personal and professional life.

1.4.1 Simon's Bounded Rationality Model

Herbert A. Simon’s Bounded Rationality Model explains that individuals aim to make rational decisions, but their ability to do so is restricted by several real-world limitations. In practical situations, people do not have access to complete information, unlimited time, or infinite mental processing ability to evaluate every possible alternative before choosing. As a result, decision-making becomes a process influenced by limited knowledge, time restraints, environmental pressures, and cognitive capacity. Instead of identifying the best possible option (optimising), individuals settle for the first acceptable and satisfactory option, a process Simon calls “satisficing.” This model highlights that human choices are shaped more by constraints and situational realities than by ideal rationality. In the context of educational decision-making, such as students selecting a central university for higher studies, the theory suggests that students do not compare all universities exhaustively; rather, they decide based on limited information, perceptions, affordability, peer influence, location, and personal priorities. Hence, their choice reflects what appears “good enough” under their circumstances, rather than the absolute best option available.

This model fits contexts in which students and families don’t have all the information or resources and make satisficing, or good-enough, choices. It is helpful for researchers to study real-life limitations in how students gather and process information about universities.

1.4.2 Lindblom's Incremental Model

Lindblom's Incremental Model, also known as the "Science of Muddling Through," explains that decision-making, particularly in organisations and public policy, typically occurs through small, gradual adjustments rather than radical, comprehensive changes. According to Lindblom, decision-makers rarely have the time, resources, or information to analyse all possible alternatives and implement perfect solutions. Instead, they make incremental decisions, comparing only a limited number of options and selecting those that offer practical, workable improvements over existing practices. Change occurs step by step, with each decision building on previous ones, and policies are continuously revised based on feedback and outcomes. For example, in the context of central universities, administrators may adjust admission policies or academic programs gradually rather than overhauling the entire system at once, observing the effects of each change before implementing further modifications.

This model highlights that real-world decision-making prioritises practicality and adaptability over theoretical perfection, reflecting the cautious and iterative nature of human and organisational choices. The model works when a researcher is examining gradual, stepwise choices-like a student narrowing options over time rather than making drastic shifts. Less suitable for research that compares broad factors and final-choice outcomes rather than small changes.

1.4.3 Etzioni's Mixed Scanning Model

Etzioni's Mixed Scanning Model is a decision-making theory that combines elements of both comprehensive (rational) analysis and incremental (small-step) approaches, offering a balanced method for complex organisational decisions. According to Etzioni, decision-makers engage in broad, high-level scanning to understand the general context and identify major goals, and then they focus in detail on selected areas where critical choices or risks exist. This approach allows organisations to avoid the limitations of purely rational models, which demand exhaustive

analysis, as well as the narrowness of purely incremental models, which may overlook long-term implications. For instance, in the context of central universities, administrators might broadly assess the overall admission trends, funding opportunities, and academic requirements, but then make detailed, focused decisions on specific departments, scholarship allocations, or admission criteria. The Mixed Scanning Model thus emphasises flexibility, strategic focus, and efficiency, enabling decision-makers to balance careful analysis with practical, adaptable action in real-world settings.

This hybrid model fits where studies look at both broad criteria (location, university reputation) and finer details (course specifics, fees). For a comparative study that considers how major and minor factors influence decisions, mixed scanning is useful.

1.4.4 Dror's Optimal Model

Dror's Optimal Model is a decision-making theory that represents the ideal or "perfect" form of rational decision-making. According to Daniel Dror, this model assumes that decision-makers have complete information, unlimited time, and full cognitive ability to evaluate all possible alternatives and outcomes. In this model, the decision-maker carefully analyses every option, predicts all consequences, weighs costs and benefits, and ultimately selects the best possible solution that maximises efficiency and effectiveness. Unlike Simon's Bounded Rationality Model or Lindblom's Incremental Model, Dror's Optimal Model is largely theoretical, as such ideal conditions rarely exist in real life due to constraints in information, resources, and human cognitive limits. In the context of central universities, applying the Optimal Model would mean a student or administrator considers every university option, program, faculty quality, location, fees, and long-term outcomes exhaustively before making a fully rational choice. The model serves as a benchmark for rational decision-making, helping researchers and practitioners understand what

“perfect” decision-making would entail, even if it is practically unattainable. Model fit: When the research compares how rational, planned analysis versus extrarational factors (such as peer influence or family pressure) affect university choice, this model is relevant. It is best for studies about conscious, structured decision methods.

1.4.5 Garbage Can Model (Cohen, March, Olsen)

Most relevant for highly uncertain or loosely organised decision situations—like when students, parents, and university policies mix in unpredictable ways. This model is powerful for my research if:

i A researcher explored how choices emerge from overlapping problems, solutions, and participants.

ii Decision making appears random or based on chance encounters rather than a clear process.

iii The process is influenced by "organised anarchy"—many actors, unclear goals, variable information, and unpredictable timing.

iv In comparative studies around choosing central universities, the garbage can model can explain how diverse factors (like sudden opportunities, family opinions, government policy shifts) interact in complex, unstructured ways, often leading to different decisions in similar contexts.

Why the garbage can model fits

Garbage can model: applying it to my university decision

The garbage can model says decisions aren’t always neat and rational—instead, they're influenced by a mix of problems, solutions, people, and opportunities, often all swirling around at once. Here's how this can appear when you're choosing a university:

1. Identifying my "problems" :

What challenges or questions do I have about my university choice? (e.g., distance from home, quality of faculty, placement stats, campus culture)

2. Gather possible "solutions”:

What options or solutions are available? (e.g., applying to HCU, another Central University, Private Colleges, and Different Courses)

3. Participants influence choices:

Who's involved? Parents, friends, teachers, and current students — their advice, opinions, and availability will affect my problems and solutions get attention.

4. Choice opportunities: -

When do decisions get made? Sometimes, I decide to apply simply because the admissions deadline is near (HCU’s online applications for 2024 typically close in July-August), or because someone suggests it at the last minute.

1.5 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

In current situation, there is a great demand of enrolling students into higher education and institutions play a great role for getting quality education. The increasing demand for higher education and the expectations of students are also growing. These expectations are like, good infrastructure of the institution, better facilities, etc. and central universities are in high demands

in getting enrolled for students' higher education as it is having great reputation, affordable for all students. Central universities are crucial because they set benchmarks for academic excellence, offer diverse learning environments, and ensure students access to top faculty and research facilities, making them highly influential in shaping students' aspirations for higher education. Their national prestige and rich diversity help students develop both academically and personally, enhancing their future prospects. As institutions funded and regulated by the central government, they play a vital role in developing knowledgeable professionals and leaders for the country. Although the central role of central universities in offering quality, inclusive, and affordable education and as a result it becomes a dream for all students.

Although there are 56central universities in India, there is a need to understand the motivational factors of graduates who choose these universities despite the abundance of alternatives. So, there is a need to assist educational planners in framing strategies that align with student preferences and market demands. Understanding student preferences are very important because it will help the administrators to develop a competitive educational environment, identifying what students value can help central universities improve their institutional offerings. Insights from the study may inform national higher education policies, particularly those aimed at improving quality, access, and equity. By understanding the decision-making factors of the students', universities can get the ideas to work on their facilities, infrastructure, student services, and campus environment etc. As we are in 21st century and the demand, expectations and decision making factors are changed and for providing good quality education, students preferences matters a lot and by examining the deciding factors, it may contribute a meaningful insight into decision-making processes of higher education in India.

1.7 **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Although central universities in India are widely regarded for their academic excellence, affordability, and inclusive environment, there is limited empirical evidence on how specific measurable variables influence graduate students' institutional choices. The decision to choose a central university is not shaped by a single factor; rather, it is influenced by multiple dimensions such as academic factors (university ranking, programme accreditation, quality of teaching staff, learning environment, laboratory facilities, and internship/placement opportunities), infrastructural factors (classroom resources, library quality, and support systems), economic factors (fee structure, financial affordability, and scholarship opportunities), socio-cultural factors (medium of instruction, campus culture, peer diversity, and social support), and personal factors (admission policy alignment, self-interest, and future career plans).

The problem can be stated as **"A study on Decision-Making Factors Behind Graduate Students' Preference for Central Universities"**

1.8 **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions for the present study are as follows

1) How do academic, infrastructural, economic, and personal factors shape students' decision-making?
2) Are there any significant differences in decision-making for selecting central universities by students for higher education with respect to gender and academic stream?
3) Which factor plays the most dominant role in the choice of central universities among graduate students for their higher education?

1.8 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives guide the study:

1) To find out the influence of academic, infrastructural, economic, and personal factors on students' decision-making.
2) To find out the significant differences in decision-making for selecting central universities by students for higher education with respect to gender, locality and academic stream.
3) To find out the most dominant factor influencing students' selection of central universities for their higher education.

1.9 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated for objective 1 and 2.

1. $H_0$1: There is no significant influence of academic, infrastructural, economic, and personal factors on students' decision-making.
2. $H_0$2: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of decision-making factors of rural and urban PG students of the central university.
3. $H_0$3: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of decision-making factors of male and female PG students of the central university.
4. $H_0$4: There is no significant difference among the means of decision-making factors among the PG students of Central universities studying in different academic streams.

1.10 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

i Central University: a university established by an act of parliament, funded and governed by the government of India (e.g., University of Hyderabad, JNU, BHU, AMU).

ii Graduate Students: Graduate students are those students, who have completed their undergraduate studies and are seeking admission to postgraduate (master's) programmes.

iii Deciding Factors: the measurable aspects like, academic reputation, infrastructure, faculty quality, fee structure, location, placements, campus culture, etc. that influence students' choices.

iv Higher Education Choice: the factors/indicators of selecting an institution for pursuing postgraduate studies based on various personal and situational factors.

1.11 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study is limited to graduate students seeking admission to central universities in India.

2. Only selected central universities may be included, depending on feasibility.

3. The scope is restricted to identifying deciding factors and does not evaluate institutional performance.

4. Responses are based on students' perceptions, which may involve subjectivity.

1.12 CONCLUSION

Choosing a higher education institution is a significant decision that shapes academic and professional futures. In India, central universities continue to attract large numbers of graduate students due to their academic excellence, affordability, and inclusive environment. However, the precise factors behind these choices require systematic investigation. This chapter provided the conceptual foundation by outlining the background, significance, rationale, objectives, and operational aspects of the study. The next chapters will delve deeper into literature, methodology, and findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the deciding factors influencing graduate students' choice of central universities in India.

CHAPTER-II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A Review of Literature is a comprehensive and critical summary of existing research, theories, and scholarly writings related to a specific topic or field of study. It examines what previous researchers have already discovered, identifies major themes, methods, and findings, and highlights gaps or inconsistencies in the existing knowledge. A literature review helps establish the foundation of a research study by showing how the current research fits into the broader academic context. It allows the researcher to understand what is already known, what needs further exploration, and how their work will contribute new insights. Essentially, it provides a clear background for the study, strengthens its rationale, and helps refine research questions, objectives, and methodology.

According to John Bourner (1996, p. 8), conducting a literature review serves several important purposes that guide and strengthen a research study. It helps a researcher identify gaps in existing knowledge, ensuring the study contributes new insights rather than repeating what is already known. At the same time, it prevents unnecessary duplication of work, saving time and avoiding mistakes made in earlier studies. By reviewing previous research, the scholar can build on the foundation already established by others and move the field forward in a meaningful way.

A literature review also enables the researcher to identify other scholars working in the same or related areas, which can help develop academic connections and understand ongoing debates. It broadens the researcher’s knowledge of the subject and helps in identifying seminal or foundational works that have significantly shaped the field. Furthermore, it provides an intellectual

context for the study, allowing the researcher to position their work in relation to existing theories, findings, and perspectives.

In addition, reviewing the literature helps identify different and sometimes opposing viewpoints, which is essential for developing a balanced, critical understanding of the topic. It allows the researcher to place their own work in perspective and demonstrate their ability to access and engage with previous research. The process also helps identify useful information, concepts, and research methods relevant to the current study.

Overall, the basic idea of a literature review is not only to collect facts and findings reported by earlier researchers but also to critically examine them. Through this process, new ideas can emerge, especially by identifying what is missing or overlooked in existing studies. In this way, the absence of certain elements in previous research serves as a starting point for generating new knowledge and shaping the direction of the researcher's own work.

John W. Best (1983) briefly describes the significance of review as follows: "A summary of the writings of recognised authorities and of research provides evidence that the researcher is familiar with what is already known and what is still unknown and unexplored." Effective research is predicated on prior information; this stage helps to avoid duplication of previous work and offers valuable hypotheses and recommendations for an important study.

2.2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.2.1 STUDIES CONDUCTED ABROAD

Ucan et al. (2025) conducted a study on "faculty assessment choice in Higher education: Drivers, Strategies and decision-making style for Fair and inclusive practices". They investigated how faculty members in higher education select and implement assessment methods, with a primary

focus on fairness and inclusivity. A qualitative survey was conducted with 581 faculty members across 12 faculties at the state university in Istanbul. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data.

The study found that multiple factors, including the nature of the course, learners' characteristics, and the principles and rules of the assessment, were considered when selecting assessment methods. The faculty adopted strategies such as equity-centred approaches, student-centred methods, and process-driven assessment practices to promote fairness and inclusion. The study also highlighted the complex nature of assessment design in higher education and advocated for comprehensive faculty programmes to enhance innovative and equitable assessment practices.

Crotty (2025) conducted a study titled “Background and Major Choice in Tertiary Education: Evidence from Ireland,” which examined how family background influenced Irish students' college major choices. Using data from the nationally representative longitudinal Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) Child Cohort, the study analysed over 3,500 students who pursued post-secondary education between 2015 and 2018. The research employed multinomial logistic regression models to examine the impact of maternal education and household income on students’ selection across six major categories: Education, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, STEM, Life Sciences, and Services.

The sample comprised students aged mainly in their late teens to early twenties, with detailed background information collected on family socio-economic status, academic performance, gender, disability, and immigration status. The GUI data enabled robust control for various demographic variables, which strengthened the reliability of the findings. The study found that maternal education strongly correlated with major choice: higher levels of maternal education increased the likelihood of students choosing Arts, Humanities, and Education majors, while

reducing the probability of selecting STEM and Service fields. Similarly, family income positively affected the probability of choosing a Social Sciences major but was inversely related to the probability of choosing STEM or Life Sciences majors.

Gender-specific analyses revealed nuanced differences; for instance, maternal education impacted females' choice of Arts and Humanities more strongly, while for males, the effect was more pronounced for Education majors. The study concluded that family background played a significant role in shaping academic pathways, influenced by perceived risks, earnings potential, and social values associated with different majors. It emphasised the need for targeted policy interventions to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds and to address inequalities in access and outcomes in higher education in Ireland. The findings contributed valuable insights into the complex interplay of socio-economic factors in educational decision-making.

Telaumbanua et al. (2024) conducted a study on a case study at the University of Nias: A Factor Analysis-Based Approach to College Selection. The study examined the factors influencing students' college selection decisions, with particular emphasis on identifying key variables through factor analysis. A structured Likert-scale questionnaire was utilized to gather data from 185 University of Nias students utilizing a quantitative survey design. Factor analysis and descriptive statistics were used in SPSS to analyze the data.

The findings revealed that out of 30 initial factors considered by students, 16 significant factors were extracted and grouped into two main components: main factors and supporting factors. The main factors included type of college, university status (public/private), accreditation of study program, tuition fees, scholarship availability, lecturer quality, and educational services. Supporting factors included campus location, student organisations, campus partnerships, transportation access, residential facilities, campus promotions, and graduate outcomes.

The study further highlighted that students' decision- is impacted by internal as well as external variables, including personal characteristics, environmental conditions, institutional reputation, and available resources. It also emphasised that decision-making is a complex process involving cognitive evaluation, comparison of alternatives, and consideration of long-term benefits. The authors concluded that higher education institutions should focus on improving both core academic attributes and supporting facilities to attract prospective students. Additionally, the study recommended that institutions adopt strategic planning approaches to address students' preferences and enhance competitiveness in the higher education sector.

Yusuf (2024) conducted a study on "Factors Affecting Students' Choice of Universities" to examine the key determinants influencing students' decisions in selecting higher education institutions, particularly academic programs offered, university reputation, flexibility in fee payment, and geographical location. The study carried out a quantitative survey research design and collected primary data through structured questionnaires administered to freshman students from selected higher education institutions in Puntland State, Somalia. The population comprised undergraduate students, and a sample size of 90 respondents was determined from a population of 115 using Slovin's formula. Purposive sampling was employed to select relevant respondents, specifically newly enrolled students, while convenience sampling was used to ensure ease of data collection. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the gathered data using descriptive statistical methods. The study's reliability was ensured through the use of standardised questionnaires and systematic data analysis procedures. The findings revealed that university reputation was the most influential factor affecting students' choice, followed by academic programs offered and flexibility in fee payment, whereas geographical location was found to be relatively less influential. The study further indicated that students' decision-making

is shaped by both academic and economic considerations, highlighting the importance of institutional image, program quality, and affordability. The study concluded that higher education institutions should strengthen their academic reputation, expand program offerings, and adopt flexible financial policies to attract and retain students.

Wijesinghe et al. (2023) conducted a study on "A Literature Review on Students' University Choice and Satisfaction" with the objective of examining the major factors impacting students' university choice and satisfaction, as well as analysing different theoretical models explaining the decision-making process in higher education. The study adopted a qualitative review-based research approach, relying on extensive analysis of current literature, conceptual frameworks, case studies, and theoretical models, including the economic model, sociological model, combined complex decision model, and marketing mix model. The population and sample size were not explicitly defined, as the study relied on secondary data from previously published empirical and theoretical research.

The study did not employ a specific sampling technique in the conventional sense; instead, it utilised systematic selection of relevant literature and empirical studies to synthesise findings across different contexts. The study's reliability was ensured through the use of multiple credible academic sources, established theoretical models, and a comparative analysis of prior research findings to maintain consistency and validity.

The findings revealed that students' university choice was impacted by a broad range of factors, including family background, institutional reputation, academic programs, tuition fees, financial aid, geographical location, and information sources. The study also highlighted that decision-making is a complex, multi-stage process shaped by both individual preferences and external influences such as parents, peers, and institutional characteristics. Furthermore, in terms of

satisfaction, factors such as quality of teaching, university facilities, academic environment, institutional image, and service quality were identified as key determinants. The study concluded that higher education institutions need to adopt strategic approaches by improving academic quality, institutional reputation, and student support services to enhance both student enrolment and satisfaction.

Hung (2020) carried out an investigation titled "Factors Affecting Students' Decision to Select Private Universities in Vietnam", with the objective of identifying the university brand factors influencing first-year Business Administration students' decision to select private universities and developing a model to explain this decision-making process. The study adopted a mixed-method research design. The qualitative phase involved focus group discussions with 30 participants (including lecturers, staff, and students) to refine the research instrument, while the quantitative phase used structured questionnaires measured on a Likert scale. The population consisted of first-year Business Administration students from private universities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. A sample of 500 students was selected, of which 424 provided valid responses for analysis.

The sampling technique included stratified sampling across five private universities, along with convenience sampling to collect responses from accessible participants. To assess the proposed hypotheses, data were analysed using statistical software such as SPSS, utilising methods including Cronbach's Alpha, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), multiple regression, and PATH analysis. Cronbach's Alpha values between 0.711 and 0.828, indicating strong internal consistency of the measurement scales, ensured the study's trustworthiness. The findings revealed that five major factors-prestige, geographical location, facilities, the attractiveness of the field, and media had a significant positive influence on university brand, which, in turn, strongly affected students' decision to select a university. Among these, geographical location emerged as the most dominant

factor, followed by media, facilities, prestige, and the field's attractiveness. The study further showed that the university brand played a mediating role in the decision-making process, with a strong positive impact on students' final choice. The results highlighted that students and their families placed high importance on institutional reputation and accessibility, and the study concluded that private universities should focus on strengthening brand image, improving facilities, and utilising media strategies to attract prospective students.

Skvarciany et al. (2020) conducted a study titled "Decision Factors Behind Choosing Higher Education Institutions in Europe" to identify and prioritise educational factors important to international students' choice of higher education institutions in Europe. The researcher adopted a quantitative approach using expert evaluation, and a structured questionnaire was used to collect the data through pairwise comparisons. The Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) method is used to analyse the data.

The population consisted of experts from the higher education sector who work with international students, and a purposive sample of 8 experts was selected. The study's reliability was ensured through consistency measures, such as the consistency index (CI) and consistency ratio (CR), within the AHP framework.

The findings indicated that programmes taught in English were the most influential factor, followed by scholarship opportunities, campus facilities, and accreditation. Other factors, such as university ranking and reputation, had a comparatively lesser influence. The study concluded that academic accessibility and financial support play major roles in students' decision-making when selecting European higher education institutions**.**

Krezel and Krezel (2017) conducted a study on “Social Influence and Student Choice of a Higher Education Institution” to assess how social factors impact students’ decision-making in selecting higher education institutions and to propose a conceptual framework integrating social influence theories. The researcher used a qualitative conceptual research design, grounded in an extensive review of the current literature, theoretical models, and prior studies on student choice and social influence. The population and sample size were not specified, as the study depends entirely on secondary data sources.

No formal sampling technique was employed; instead, relevant literature was systematically selected and analysed. The study's reliability was ensured through the use of well-established theoretical frameworks, including Hossler and Gallagher’s model, Kelman’s social influence processes, and Cialdini’s motivational theory.

The findings revealed that students’ choice of higher education institutions was strongly influenced by social factors, including family, peers, institutional communication, and the broader social environment. It also highlighted that social influence operates through processes such as compliance, identification, and internalisation, and is increasingly shaped by social media interactions. The study concluded that student decision-making is complex and socially driven, emphasising the importance of incorporating social influence factors into higher education recruitment strategies.

Haryanti et al. (2016) analysed the Factors Influencing Bogor Senior High School Student Choice in Choosing Bogor Agricultural University (Indonesia) for Further Study" aims to identify the major elements influencing senior high school students' choices of higher educational institutions. The study adopted a quantitative research design, using descriptive analysis and multinomial logistic regression. The population consisted of senior high school students in Bogor, grouped by

school ranking (high, medium, or low). A sample of 380 students was selected using nonprobability purposive sampling, with a focus on students from the science stream.

The study's reliability was ensured through statistical testing, including goodness-of-fit tests and multinomial logistic regression, which confirmed the model's statistical significance.

The findings revealed that the most crucial factors influencing students' choice were the field of study offered and the institution's ranking. Additionally, variables such as learning style, motivation, and cost were not important, but gender, family assets, parents' educational attainment, employment prospects, information sources, and area of interest were. The study also found that family members were the primary source of information, although final decisions were largely made by students themselves. It concluded that students' decision-making is influenced by a combination of personal, social, and institutional factors, emphasising the importance of academic reputation and program availability in higher education selection.

Agrey and Lameadan (2014) conducted a study entitled "Determinant Factors Contributing to Student Choice in Selecting a University" to identify the key factors influencing students' decision-making when selecting higher education institutions. The study adopted a quantitative survey research design, supported by an initial qualitative phase involving interviews to develop the research instrument. The population consisted of high school seniors and first-year university students in central Thailand. A sample of 441 respondents was initially considered, of which 261 valid responses were used for analysis after inconsistent data were removed.

The sampling technique involved selecting respondents from both secondary schools and universities, though the exact method was not explicitly specified. The study's reliability was ensured through statistical measures, including Cronbach's Alpha and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

(KMO) test, with a KMO value of 0.876 indicating sampling adequacy and acceptable internal consistency of the instrument.

The findings revealed that five major factors significantly influenced students' university choice: support networks, educational settings and employment opportunities, athletic facilities, student life and events, and a friendly and safe atmosphere. The learning environment and employment opportunities were found to be the most significant. The study concluded that students make a variety of decisions, highlighting the importance of facilities, employment options, and institutional quality when choosing higher education institutions.

Zain et al. (2013) conducted a study titled "Factors Influencing Students' Decisions in Choosing Private Institutions of Higher Education in Malaysia" to study the impact of perceptions, promotion, and influence on students' decision-making when selecting private higher education institutions. The researcher adopted a quantitative research design. The population consisted of secondary school students pursuing pre-university education (O and A levels) in Malaysia. A sample size of 373 students was obtained from 416 distributed questionnaires after removing incomplete responses. The sampling technique involved randomly distributing questionnaires during educational seminars across selected regions. Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a high value of 0.881, indicating strong internal consistency, was used to confirm the instrument's reliability. Factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were also conducted to verify the constructs and ensure the robustness of the model

The findings indicated that perception and promotion had a notable influence on students' choice of private institutions, while perception and promotion also significantly affected influence. However, influence is not a significant direct effect on students' final choice. The study concluded that students' decisions are primarily shaped by institutional image, quality of lecturers, and

promotional strategies, highlighting the importance of perception-building and effective marketing in higher education selection.

Napompech (2011) examined "Factors Influencing High School Students in Choosing Cram School in Thailand," with the objective of identifying the factors that determine junior and senior high school students' decisions to select cram schools and comparing differences between the two groups. The study used a quantitative survey research approach, with structured questionnaires on a Likert scale to gather data. High school students enrolled in cram schools in Bangkok, Thailand, represent the population. 198 junior high and 198 senior high school students . The sampling technique involved selecting respondents from cram schools at Wannasorn Tower, though the exact method was not explicitly specified.

The study's reliability was ensured through the use of a standardised Likert scale and statistical analysis, including the Mann–Whitney U test to examine group differences.

The study revealed that teaching-learning factors and location factors were the most influential in students' choice of cram schools. Key determinants included instructor expertise, academic content, availability of learning materials, and convenient location. The study also found that parents influenced junior students more than peers did senior students. It concluded that students' decisions are shaped by both academic quality and accessibility factors, emphasising the importance of effective teaching and convenient location.

Ming (2010) conducted a study titled "Institutional Factors Influencing Students' College Choice Decision in Malaysia" with the objective of developing a conceptual model to identify structural elements that affect students' college choice decisions. The study adopted a qualitative conceptual research design, primarily based on an extensive review of existing literature and theoretical

models related to higher education choice. The population and sample size were not specified, as the study depends on secondary data sources rather than primary data collection.

The study did not employ a formal sampling technique; instead, it involved systematic analysis of prior empirical studies and theoretical frameworks. The reliability of the study was ensured through the use of well-established literature, validated theoretical models, and comparison of findings from multiple previous studies to support the proposed framework.

The findings identified several key institutional factors influencing students' college choice, including location, academic programmes, college reputation, educational facilities, cost, availability of financial aid, employment opportunities, advertising, institutional representatives, and campus visits. The research findings highlighted that both institutional characteristics and marketing-related efforts significantly shape students' decision-making. It concluded that higher education institutions should focus on improving academic quality, institutional reputation, financial support, and promotional strategies to attract potential students and remain competitive in the higher education sector.

Raposo and Alves (2007) conducted a study on "A Model of University Choice: An Exploratory Approach" with the objective of developing and testing a comprehensive model to analyse the factors influencing students' university choice decisions. The researcher adopted a quantitative research design using survey methodology, and the population consisted of first-year full-time students at the University of Beira Interior in Portugal. A sample size of 1,024 students was selected from those who had recently entered university after completing secondary education.

The sampling technique was not explicitly stated, but involved selecting newly enrolled students. The reliability of the study was ensured through the use of multiple-item scales, statistical

validation techniques, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using Partial Least Squares (PLS). As shown in the tables on pages 8–10, statistical tests, including VIFs, tolerance values, and Jackknife resampling, confirmed the model's validity and consistency.

The findings revealed that individual factors (such as proximity to home, cost, and family influence) had the strongest positive impact on university choice, while the influence of others showed a negative effect. The educational offer significantly influenced institutional reputation, and the model indicated that decision-making varies across academic disciplines. The study concluded that university choice is a complex process shaped primarily by personal and institutional factors, and recommended targeted marketing strategies for different student groups.

Whitehead et al. (2006) conducted a study on "University Choice: What Influences the Decisions of Academically Successful Post-16 Students?" with the objective of identifying the factors that encourage or discourage high-achieving students from applying to prestigious universities, particularly Cambridge. A quantitative survey research design was used for the study. Data were collected via structured questionnaires administered to students. The population consisted of academically successful post-16 students in England and Wales who were predicted to achieve high A-level grades. A total of 421 students were selected from an initial pool of 1,019 across 300 schools and colleges as a sample. The sampling technique was stratified by school type and prior Cambridge application history.

The study's reliability was ensured through statistical techniques, including factor analysis and Cronbach's α coefficients (ranging from 0.68 to 0.84), confirming the internal coherence of the constructs.

The study indicated that course-related factors, institutional prestige, and fear of failure were the major determinants influencing university choice. Students were encouraged by course content, teaching quality, and reputation, while anxiety about the application process discouraged them. Financial factors, including bursaries, had a limited but supportive role. The study concluded that university choice is shaped by a complex interaction of academic preferences, psychological factors, and institutional characteristics.

Matzdorf et al. (2002) conducted a study titled "The Impact of Facilities on Student Choice of University" with the objective of examining how institutional facilities and locational factors influenced students' decisions when selecting universities in the United Kingdom. The study employed a quantitative survey research method. A structured questionnaire consisting of 87 closed-ended items on a five-point Likert scale, along with open-ended questions, was used to collect the data. The population comprised first-year undergraduate students across various UK universities. A large sample of 8,742 students was obtained from surveys conducted during the 2000 and 2001 intakes, yielding a total of 41,450 questionnaires. The sampling technique was purposive and institution-based, depending on access provided by participating universities.

The instrument's reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alphas of 0.95 and 0.96 across the two survey years, indicating high internal consistency.

The findings revealed that, while course availability remained the most significant factor, facilities-related aspects, such as library quality, computer availability, accommodation, and campus environment, also significantly influenced student choice. The study further found that institutions with better-quality facilities attracted students more effectively, suggesting that facilities acted as key differentiating factors alongside institutional reputation.

Kallio (1995) investigated the factors influencing graduate students. The study used multivariate analysis and a structured survey as part of a quantitative research strategy. Students accepted into master's and graduate programs at a major US research university comprised the population. A sample of 2,834 admitted students was considered, of whom 1,068 (38%) participated in the survey. The sampling technique was institution-based and purposive, focusing on admitted graduate students.

The methodology included factor analysis to identify key dimensions influencing decision-making and regression analysis to examine their impact on enrollment decisions. The reliability of the measures was ensured through statistical procedures such as factor analysis and multivariate modelling, which demonstrated consistency in identifying decision dimensions.

The findings revealed that graduate students' college choice decisions were influenced by multiple factors, including residency status, academic environment, work-related considerations, spouse-related factors, financial aid, and social environment. Among these, academic factors and residency status had the strongest influence. The study also highlighted that life-stage variables, such as age, work, and family responsibilities, significantly shape decision-making processes.

2.2.2 STUDIES CONDUCTED IN INDIA

Guru et al. (2025) conducted a study titled "Determinants for Selecting Higher Education Institutions in India: A Fuzzy Analytical Hierarchical Process Approach" to determine and prioritise the major elements affecting students' selection of higher education schools, especially for management students. The study used a mixed-methods research methodology combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. Structured questionnaires were used to gather primary data from undergraduate management students, while expert opinions were gathered for further

analysis. The population consisted of undergraduate students pursuing higher education, and a sample of 88 respondents was used for exploratory factor analysis, along with additional expert input for FAHP analysis. The sampling technique was purposive, focusing on management students from a private university in western India.

The study's reliability was ensured through statistical techniques, including Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), which yielded acceptable factor loadings (above 0.50), and consistency validation using the Fuzzy Analytical Hierarchy Process (FAHP). The findings revealed that placement prospects emerged as the most dominant factor, followed by friends' references, infrastructure, faculty, safety, and security. The study concluded that students' decision-making is influenced by both academic and non-academic factors, emphasising employability outcomes and institutional facilities as critical determinants in the Indian higher education context.

Khan and Jha (2024) conducted a study titled "Understanding Factors Affecting Students' Preferences for Selecting a Central University: A Case Study" to explore the key factors influencing students' preferences in selecting a central university, particularly Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). The study adopted a quantitative research design, employing Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) for data analysis. The population consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate students of AMU, and a sample of 210 students (124 males and 86 females) was selected, with an emphasis on regular students who have personal experience of university selection, using purposive sampling. Statistical tests, such as the KMO test (0.840) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p<0.05$), were used to assess the study's reliability and validate that the data were adequate for factor analysis. Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha values showed acceptable to good internal consistency, which ranged from 0.737 to 0.840.

The findings revealed four major factors influencing students' preferences: academic quality and campus experience; financial feasibility and adaptation; social influence and alumni impact and ranking; and inclusivity. Among these, academic quality emerged as the most significant factor. The study concluded that students' university selection is impacted by a mix of academic, financial, social, and institutional factors.

Srivastava and Dhamija (2022) conducted a study titled "Determinants Driving the Students' Decision Making to opt for Institutions for Higher Education in India" with the objective of identifying and ranking the key factors influencing students' institutional choice in the Indian context. Focus group interviews served as the first qualitative phase of the study's quantitative research approach. As mentioned in the methodology section, non-probability (opportunity) sampling was used to gather a sample size of 558 students from the population, which included students from different institutions in Delhi NCR. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) using SPSS were used to analyse the data from a self-administered questionnaire with 47 items measured on a five-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.706 to 0.899 were used to establish the instrument's dependability, and a substantial Bartlett's Test and a KMO value of 0.954 were used to validate sample adequacy. The results identified seven key factors: human intellect, conformity impact, a comprehensive institutional environment institutional prominence, geographic characteristics, student residential life, and financial viability. Among these, the holistic institutional environment emerged as the most influential factor, accounting for the greatest variance in students' decision-making.

Srivastava and Dhamija (2022) conducted a study titled "Social Factors Impacting Students' Choice of Institution for Higher Studies in India" with the objective of examining the influence of social factors on students' decision-making while selecting higher education institutions. The study

adopted a mixed-method research technique, starting with admission specialists' focus group interviews and ending with a quantitative survey utilizing a structured questionnaire. Students from different Indian higher education institutions made up the population, and a sample of 1,000 students was chosen via multistage sampling, as explained in the data gathering section. A self-administered questionnaire with Likert-scale items was part of the methodology, and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) were employed to analyse the data. Cronbach's alpha values (above 0.70) and statistical validation techniques, such as KMO and Bartlett's test, confirmed the instrument's suitability for factor analysis. The results showed that five significant social factors—elderly influence, cohort influence, advisers' influence, social platform influence, and societal norms—affect students' decisions. with cohort influence emerging as the most significant factor. The study concluded that social dynamics play a crucial role in shaping students' higher education decisions.

Rajput and Chouhan (2021) conducted a study titled "Exploring the Factors Affecting Students' Choice of Higher Education Institutes in India: A Factor Analysis Approach", with the goal of determining and examining the major factors influencing students' choice of universities. The study used a mixed-method exploratory research approach, combining qualitative information from expert, student, and counsellor interviews with quantitative data from a structured questionnaire survey. Using a judgmental sampling technique, a sample size of 212 individuals was chosen from the population, which consisted of students applying to engineering and business schools in the Indian region of Indore.

The method used included Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using SPSS to identify and validate underlying constructs. The study's reliability was

ensured by Cronbach's alpha of 0.896, a KMO of 0.848, and a significant Bartlett's Test, confirming sampling adequacy and internal consistency.

The findings revealed eight major factors influencing students' choice, including placement record, faculty expertise, infrastructure, co-curricular activities, cost, supportive staff, and additional facilities, with placement-related aspects emerging as the most significant determinant in decision-making.

Rahul et al. (2021) conducted a study on "Factors Affecting Choice of Students in Selecting an Educational Institute and University: A Study Focusing on Private Education Sector in North India" with the objective of exploring the key factors influencing students' decision-making in selecting higher education institutions, particularly in the private education sector. The study adopted a quantitative research design, supported by an extensive literature review to identify relevant variables. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising approximately 26 variables measured on an ordinal scale. The population comprised students enrolled in private universities in the Delhi NCR region, and a sample size of around 180 respondents was initially collected, out of which more than 150 valid responses were analysed. The sampling technique was not explicitly specified but involved survey-based data collection across selected universities.

The method used included Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to identify underlying factors influencing student choice. The reliability of the study was ensured through statistical validation measures such as the KMO value (0.627) and a significant Bartlett's Test, confirming adequacy for factor analysis.

The findings revealed that proximity to the institution, references, placement opportunities, quality of courses, advertisements, and counselling support were the most influential factors. The study

concluded that student choice is multi-dimensional and strongly shaped by both institutional characteristics and marketing strategies.

Aggarwal and Sharma (2018) conducted a study titled "Analysis of the Factors Influencing the Choice of College for Higher Education" with the objective of identifying and analysing the key factors affecting students' decisions in selecting colleges for pursuing MCA programmes. The researcher used a quantitative research design, using primary data collected through structured responses from students who had graduated and were seeking admission to postgraduate courses. The population consisted of students with diverse academic backgrounds, including BCA, BBA, B.Sc., and B. Com, though the exact sample size and sampling technique were not explicitly specified.

The method used involved statistical analysis through the Pearson's Chi-square test to examine the association between students' academic background and factors influencing college choice. The reliability of the study was ensured through statistical significance testing, where the Chi-square value (94.959) with p-value < 0.05 confirmed a strong association between variables.

The findings showed that placement opportunities appeared as the most influential factor, followed by faculty, infrastructure, extracurricular activities, and online advertising. The study also highlighted that different student groups were influenced by different factors, concluding that institutional strategies should be tailored according to students' academic backgrounds and preferences.

2.3 KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The above studies identify approximately ten independent variables that influence the dependent variable, College Choice Decision. These components fall into two general categories: College Communication Effort and Fixed College Characteristics.

The institutional factors identified are:

I. Location

II. Academic programmes

III. College status

IV. Educational accommodations

V. Cost

VI. Availability of financial aid

VII. Employment prospects

VIII. Promotion

IX. Higher Education Institution (HEI) representatives

X. Campus visit

The conceptual framework posits that each of these 10 factors has a significant positive relationship with a student's final college choice decision (H1-H10). The paper concludes that these institutional factors are pertinent for higher education institutions in Malaysia when planning marketing strategies for student recruitment.

2.4 RESEARCH GAP

1. There is limited empirical research that directly compares decision-making factors specifically for Central Universities versus other higher education institutions in India, which my comparative study can address.

2. Existing literature often treats international and domestic student choices separately; my study could fill the gap by integrating comparative analysis within Central Universities that cater to both groups.

3. Although many studies discuss decision factors in broad terms, few examine the interplay of these factors specifically in the context of Indian Central Universities, including regional diversity, policy influences, and institutional uniqueness.

4. Social and familial influence frameworks are vastly underexplored in the specific Indian Central University context, especially how these social factors intersect with institutional characteristics to shape choices.

5. Despite recognition of digital media and promotional impact, concrete analyses on how Central Universities leverage these tools effectively to attract diverse student cohorts are scarce.

6. Comparative analyses often lack longitudinal or processual insights into how student decision-making evolves over time before final enrollment decisions, a gap my study might address through surveys or qualitative approaches.

7. Research tends to focus on undergraduate or general student populations; the specific decision factors for postgraduate or specialized Central University programs remain less investigated.

8. There is a gap in understanding the nuanced effects of financial aid in conjunction with non-monetary factors like institutional culture, faculty quality, and peer environments specific to Central Universities.

CHAPTER- III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Kothari (2004),"research methodology is an approach to systematically solve the research problem." It might be understood as a study of focusing on the methodical nature of research. It includes the various approaches that a researcher often takes when analysing the study problem.

Ahuja (2015) states that the methodology entails studying techniques. It is the rationale of logical investigation. It's a research model utilised in a specific undertaking that involves hypothetical standards and a framework that provides rules for conducting the study within a specific paradigm. It also contains the norms and standards utilised to accomplish the decision, structure, procedure and utilisation of method as coordinated by the basic paradigm.'

The method used to finish the study is described in this chapter. The approach, research design, study area, target population, sample size, sampling procedure, research instruments, data collection tools, and data analysis methodologies were divided into the relevant subsections.

Research methods are the systematic procedures used to collect and analyse data to answer research questions. Considering the nature of the problem, the present study adopts a Descriptive Survey Method. This method is appropriate because it helps collect data from respondents on their opinions, preferences, and decision-making factors.

The study also follows a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative): quantitative data are collected through structured questionnaires. Qualitative insights are obtained through open-ended responses. The collected data will be analysed using statistical software, such as JAMOVI.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Cohen et al. (2007), "a research design is essentially a blueprint for research, dealing with at least four problems: what questions to study, what data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyse the results" (p. 78).

To determine the factors influencing students' choices of Central Universities for higher education, this study employed a descriptive survey design. Creswell (2002) observes that a descriptive survey method is utilised when data are gathered to portray people, organisations, settings, or phenomena.

The study was planned to observe and identify the factors that lead students to prefer Central Universities for higher education. The descriptive survey method was used in most research studies on higher education institutional choice, which was most fitting for the present study. This method was suitable because it helped the researcher create statistical data and identify the factors influencing graduate students' decision-making when selecting Central Universities for their higher education.

3.3 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

According to Best and Kahn (2006), a population is "any group of individuals that have one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher" (p. 13). Students enrolled in Central Universities across India comprise the study's population. To ensure

diversity and representation, the study includes universities from North India, South India, East India, and West India.

3.4 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

"Sampling is the process of selecting a few from a larger group to become the basis for predicting the presence of an unidentified piece of information about the whole group," according to Kothari (2004) (p. 152). A sample is also described as "a small portion of a population selected for observation and analysis" by C.R. Kothari (2004). "Sampling techniques are the procedures used to select units from a population in order to estimate population parameters," according to William G. Cochran (1977).

For the present investigation, students from selected central universities were taken as participants. The researcher selected two Central Universities from each region (North, South, East, West) to ensure representation from different parts of the country. Students from these universities who responded to the questionnaire constituted the sample. The total sample size consists of 160 respondents collected through convenient access. Efforts were made to include diversity in gender (Male/Female), academic streams, and rural and urban backgrounds.

3.4.1 Regional Distribution of Universities

The present study adopted a convenience sampling technique along with regional representation to ensure diversity in the sample. For the purpose of the study, India was divided into four regions: North, South, East, and West. From each region, two Central Universities were selected to ensure representation from different parts of the country. The selected universities from each region are as follows:

South Region: University of Hyderabad (HCU) and English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU).

North Region: Central University of South Bihar (CUSB) and University of Delhi.

East Region: Manipur University and Central University of Odisha.

West Region: Central University of Gujarat and Central University of Rajasthan.

3.4.2 Sample and Sampling Technique

The study adopted a multi-stage convenience sampling technique. Stage 1-Regional Selection: India was divided into four regions-North, South, East, and West. Stage 2-University Selection: Two Central Universities from each region were selected. Stage 3-Respondent Selection: Students were selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate. This ensured regional representation along with the feasibility of data collection.

Participants were selected from the above-mentioned universities based on convenience and willingness to participate. To maintain clarity and structure, the distribution of selected universities is presented in the table below:

Table 3.1: Regional Distribution of Selected Universities

Sl. No.	Region	University	Girls (F)	Boys (M)	Total
1	East	Manipur University	10	10	20

Sl. No.	Region	University	Girls (F)	Boys (M)	Total
2	East	Central University of Odisha	7	11	18
3	West	Central University of Rajasthan	5	15	20
4	West	Central University of Gujarat	5	15	20
5	South	University of Hyderabad	6	15	21
6	South	EFLU	6	14	20
7	North	Delhi University	9	11	20
8	North	Central University of South Bihar	10	11	21
Grand Total			**58**	**102**	**160**

Source: Primary Data (Questionnaire Responses).

3.4.3 Justification of Sampling

The selection of universities from different regions helped in capturing diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, understanding regional differences in decision-making, and ensuring broader

representation of students across India. The qualitative aspect of the study focuses on understanding students' perceptions and experiences in depth, while the quantitative component helps in identifying patterns and trends across respondents.

3.5 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENT / TOOL

C.R. Kothari (2004) explained, "Research tools are the means by which primary data are collected for analysis." According to Creswell (2014): "Research instruments are tools used to collect data, such as questionnaires, tests, or observation checklists."

For collecting data, the researcher used a self-structured questionnaire where, the items were developed with the help of a literature review and preliminary discussions with students. The questionnaire items were designed specifically to identify the decision-making factors behind selecting Central Universities for continuing their higher education. The questionnaire has two sections: the first collects demographic and personal information about the respondents, and the second measures decision-making factors using Likert-scale items.

3.5.1 Development of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 42 items across 6 dimensions, with varying numbers of items per dimension. The items of each dimension are shown in the table below:

Table 3.2: Distribution of Questionnaire Items According to Factors

S.No.	Factor	Question Numbers
1	Academic Factors	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q10, Q13, Q14

S.No.	Factor	Question Numbers
2	Institutional / Infrastructural Factors	Q9, Q11, Q12, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22
3	Economic Factors	Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27, Q28, Q29
4	Geographical Factors	Q30, Q35, Q36
5	Social and Personal Factors	Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q37, Q38, Q39
6	Career-Oriented Factors	Q40, Q41

Note. Q42 (ranking item) is excluded as it is not a Likert-scale item.

The six dimensions cover the following aspects: Academic Factors include course availability, quality of faculty, and research opportunities. Institutional Factors cover university ranking and reputation, infrastructure, and campus environment. Economic Factors address fee structure, availability of scholarships, and cost of living. Geographical Factors examine location of university, distance from home, and accessibility. Social and Personal Factors include peer influence, family suggestion, and personal interest. Career-Oriented Factors consider placement opportunities, internship exposure, and future prospects.

3.5.2 Type of Questions

The questionnaire included Likert-scale items (majority), multiple choice questions, and a few open-ended questions. The Likert scale was used to measure the degree of agreement: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

The responses were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale. To quantify the attitudes, a score of 5, 4, 3, 2, or 1 is assigned respectively as per the responses showing the extent of positive

attitude. The sum of scores on all the items (statements) of the scale is considered as the respondent's total attitude score. The minimum score is 41 and the maximum score is 205.

3.6 STANDARDISATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Rensis Likert (1932) emphasised that: "Standardization of items and response scales is essential to measure attitudes consistently." Floyd J. Fowler (2014) stated: "Standardised questionnaires are designed so that each respondent is asked identical questions with identical wording and response categories."

3.6.1 Item Construction

Items were developed based on review of previous studies, student experiences, and university selection criteria. An initial pool of questions was created and refined to 42 final items.

3.6.2 Validity of the Tool

Lee J. Cronbach (1971) emphasized: "Validation is the process of examining the accuracy of interpretations and uses of test scores." Creswell (2014) stated: "Validity means that individuals' scores from an instrument make sense, are meaningful, and enable the researcher to draw good conclusions."

The validity of the questionnaire was ensured through Content Validity, which was verified by experts and academic review. The questionnaire was submitted to subject-matter experts and faculty members who assessed the items for clarity, relevance, and representativeness of the decision-making construct.

3.6.3 Reliability of the Tool

A pilot study was conducted on 30 PG respondents to identify the reliability of the tool. This pilot study helped to check clarity of each item inserted in the questionnaire, identify ambiguous questions, verify relevance of items, and estimate completion time. Based on feedback, some questions were reworded and redundant items were removed.

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. This method measures internal consistency of the items. A reliability coefficient above 0.7 is considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). The tool was found to be reliable for further use.

Table 3.3: Scale Reliability Statistics

Scale	**Cronbach's Alpha**
Decision-Making Scale	0.955

Source: JAMOVI output based on Pilot Study Data.

3.7 PROCEDURE OF DATA COLLECTION

Primary data was collected through a structured self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents of the selected Central Universities through both in-person and online modes, depending on accessibility. For the universities where the researcher could visit personally, the questionnaire was directly administered to students and responses were collected on the spot. For the remaining universities, the questionnaire was sent through online channels (Google Forms and WhatsApp groups) to ensure reach across regions. Before gathering the data, the respondents were given a clear explanation of the purpose of the study and were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used only for academic purposes.

Secondary data was collected through different sources namely government reports, UGC documents, school reports, published journals, and relevant academic publications. The investigator posed numerous questions through the schedule with respect to the decision-making factors behind the selection of Central Universities, thereby ensuring that the data captured the full scope of all identified dimensions.

3.8 STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED FOR ANALYSIS

"Data analysis involves organizing, accounting for, and explaining the data; in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories, and regularities," according to Kerlinger (1986) (p. 480). Orodho (2004) states that data analysis is the lifeline of research and that the method of analysis is its backbone. The statistical package **JAMOVI** was used to collect the data, which is widely used in social science research.

The following statistical techniques were used for data analysis in the present study:

3.8.1 Descriptive Statistics

Mean, median, standard deviation, and percentages were used to summarise the data. These tools help in describing a large amount of data in a clear and concise way, providing a general picture of the sample and their responses.

3.8.2 Multiple Linear Regression (MLR)

Multiple Linear Regression was employed to examine the combined and individual influence of five independent factors, Academic, Infrastructural, Economic, Socio-Cultural, and Personal, on the students' Total Decision- Making score as the dependent variable (Objective 1). This technique

helps in identifying the relative importance (Beta coefficient) of each factor in predicting students' decision-making.

3.8.3 Independent Samples t-Test

The independent samples t-test was used to compare the mean scores of decision-making between two independent groups: male and female students, as well as rural and urban students. This parametric test determines whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means of two independent groups (Objective 2). For every hypothesis test, the significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

3.8.4 One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

A one-way ANOVA was employed to compare the mean decision-making scores across students from different academic streams (five streams). ANOVA tests whether the means of three or more independent groups differ in any way that is statistically significant (Objective 2). $\alpha = 0.05$ was used as the significance level.

3.8.5 Frequency Analysis and Percentage Distribution

Frequency analysis and percentage distribution were used to identify the most dominant factor influencing students' selection of Central Universities for their higher education (Objective 3). Each participant indicated one dominant factor from four categories, and the distribution was tabulated to identify the primary driver.

All statistical analyses were performed using JAMOVI software. Data were checked for normality and homogeneity of variance before applying parametric statistical tests. For all inferential tests, the significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

CHAPTER-IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

To address the research issue, analysis entails classifying, organising, modifying, and summarising data. In order to interpret the outcome, the process entails dissecting complicated elements into simpler components and rearranging them. The goal of analysis is to make data understandable and interpretable so that the relationships between research problems may be examined and evaluated. However, research issues cannot be answered solely by the study of research data. Interpretation uses the analysis's findings to form conclusions about the research relationships under study. When interpreting study findings, the researcher looks for their significance and ramifications. The data tabulation, analysis, and interpretation are covered in this chapter. The preceding chapter has a full description of the technique employed in this investigation. There was also mention of statistical methods for analysis. This chapter presents the findings from the data analysis and interpretation.

4.2 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Analysis and interpretation are done objectively

4.2.1 Objective 1: To find out the influence of academic, infrastructural, economic, and personal factors on students' decision-making.

For achieving this objective null hypothesis 1 ($H_0 1$) is framed and analysed through Multiple linear Regression analysis.

$H_0 1$: There is no significant influence of academic, infrastructural, economic, and personal factors on students' decision-making.

Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was used to study the combined influence of five independent factors - Academic, Economic, Infrastructural, Socio-Cultural, and Personal-on the students' Total Decision- Making score as the dependent variable. The analysis was conducted on a sample of 160 respondents.

Table 4.1: Variables Entered / Removed

Model	**Variables Entered**	**Variables Removed**	**Method**
1	Academic Factor, Socio-Cultural Factor, Economic Factor, Personal Factor, Infrastructural Factor	-	Enter

Note. Dependent Variable: Total Decision Making. b. All requested variables were entered.

All five predictor variables - Academic Factor, Socio-Cultural Factor, Economic Factor, Personal Factor, and Infrastructural Factor- were entered simultaneously into the regression model using the Enter method. No variable was removed, confirming that all five factors were retained for analysis.

Table 4.2: Model Summary

Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error**	**F Change**	**Sig. F Change**

1	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.000	17338858565376378.000	.000

Note. Predictors: (Constant), Academic Factor, Socio-Cultural Factor, Economic Factor, Personal Factor, Infrastructural Factor.

INTERPRETATION

The model summary reveals a perfect fit, with R = 1.000, R^2 = 1.000, and Adjusted R^2 = 1.000. This indicates that the five predictor factors collectively account for 100% of the variance in the Total Decision -Making score. The standard error of the estimate is 0.000, and the F Change is statistically significant ($p < .001$), confirming the overall significance of the regression model.

Table 4.3: Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.000	0.000	—	—	.000	—	—
Infrastructural Factor	1.000	.000	.248	45956372.206	.000	.407	2.455
Economic Factor	1.000	.000	.216	43435092.625	.000	.481	2.081
Socio-Cultural Factor	1.000	.000	.194	37820871.705	.000	.452	2.213
Personal Factor	1.000	.000	.180	37145514.639	.000	.505	1.982

Academic Factor	1.000	.000	.384	78375797.854	.000	.496	2.015

Note. Dependent Variable: Total Decision Making. VIF < 10 indicates no multicollinearity.

INTERPRETATION

The regression coefficients indicate that all five predictor factors are statistically significant ($p < .001$), with unstandardised coefficients (B = 1.000) confirming that each factor contributes equally to the total score. Among the predictors, Academic Factor recorded the highest Beta value ($\beta = 0.384$), signifying it as the most dominant factor in students' decision-making. This was followed by Infrastructural Factor ($\beta = 0.248$), Economic Factor ($\beta = 0.216$), Socio-Cultural Factor ($\beta = 0.194$), and Personal Factor ($\beta = 0.180$). The VIF values ranged from 1.982 to 2.455, all well below the threshold of 10, confirming the absence of multicollinearity among the predictors.

Table 4.4: Residuals Statistics

Statistic	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**
Predicted Value	90.00	205.00	165.01	19.392	160
Residual	.000	.000	.000	.000	160
Std. Predicted Value	-3.868	2.062	.000	1.000	160
Std. Residual	.000	.000	.000	.000	160

Note. Dependent Variable: Total Decision Making.

INTERPRETATION

The residuals statistics confirm that the predicted values ranged from 90.00 to 205.00 (Mean = 165.01, SD = 19.392), closely reflecting the observed data. Both the residual and standardised residual values are 0.000, indicating a perfect fit with no prediction error. This is consistent with the $R^2 = 1.000$ reported in the model summary.

Figure 4.1: Histogram of Standardised Residuals

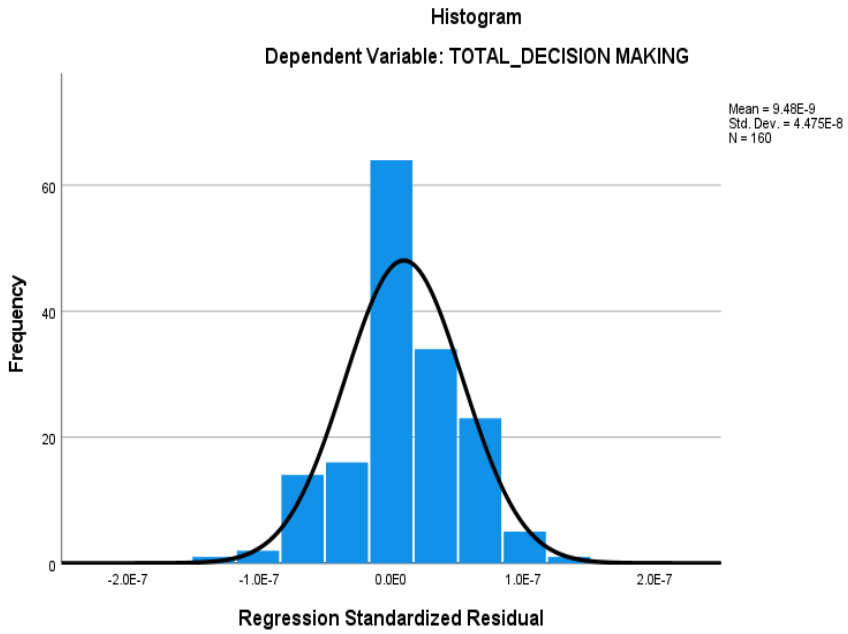

Figure 4.1. Histogram of Regression Standardised Residuals (Dependent Variable: Total Decision Making)

INTERPRETATION

The histogram of standardised residuals (Figure 4.1.1) approximates a normal bell-shaped distribution with the curve overlaid on the bars. The residuals are centred near zero (Mean ≈ 9.48E-9) with a standard deviation of 4.475E-8, indicating that the normality assumption of residuals is satisfactorily met for the regression model.

Figure 4.2: Normal P-P Plot of Standardised Residuals

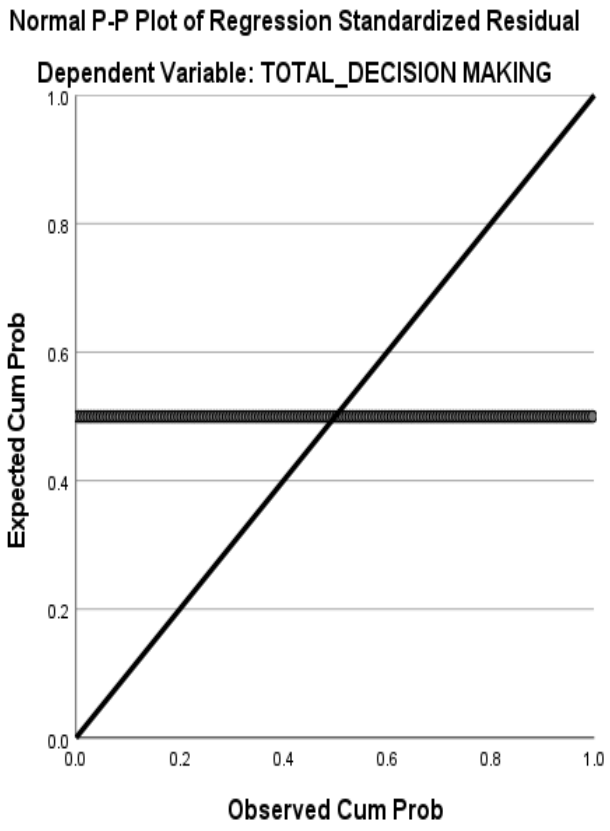

Figure 4.2. Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardised Residuals (Dependent Variable: Total Decision Making)

INTERPRETATION

The Normal P-P Plot (Figure 4.1.2) shows the observed cumulative probabilities of standardised residuals aligning closely along the expected diagonal reference line. This confirms that the residuals follow a normal distribution, validating the normality assumption of the regression model.

Figure 4.3: Scatterplot of Standardised Residuals vs. Predicted Values

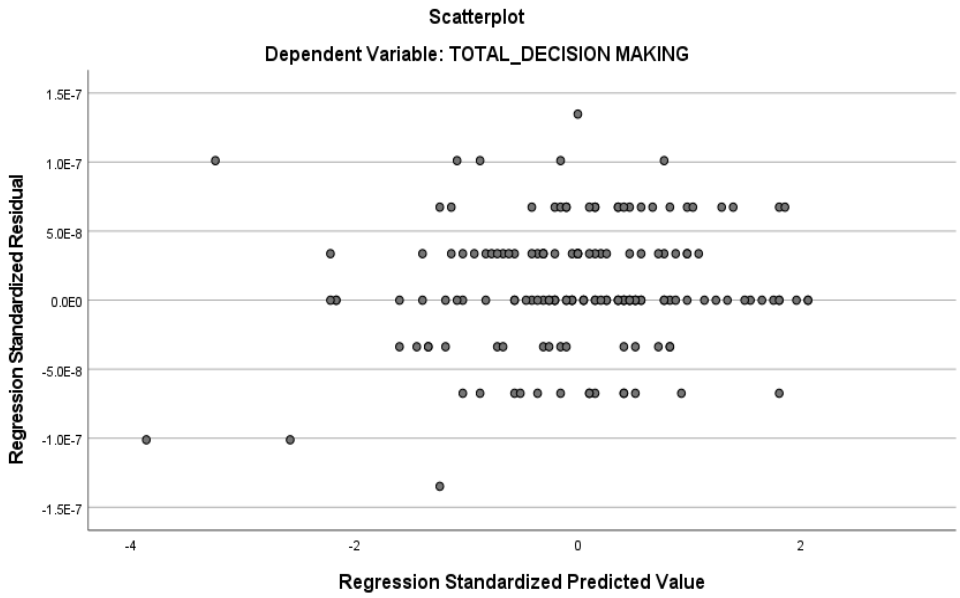

Figure 4.3 Scatterplot of Regression Standardised Residuals against Standardised Predicted Values (Dependent Variable: Total Decision Making)

INTERPRETATION

The scatterplot (Figure 4.1.3) displays the standardised residuals plotted against the standardised predicted values. The data points are scattered randomly around zero with no systematic pattern or funnel shape, confirming that the assumption of homoscedasticity (constant variance of residuals) is met. Together, Figures 4.1.1 to 4.1.3 verify that all key regression assumptions are satisfied.

In summary, the Multiple Linear Regression analysis confirms that all five factors — Academic, Infrastructural, Economic, Socio-Cultural, and Personal — significantly influence students' decision-making for selecting a central university. Among these, Academic Factor emerged as the most dominant predictor ($\beta = 0.384$), followed by Infrastructural Factor ($\beta = 0.248$), Economic Factor ($\beta = 0.216$), Socio-Cultural Factor ($\beta = 0.194$), and Personal Factor ($\beta = 0.180$), respectively

4.2 Objective 2: To find out the significant difference in decision-making for selecting a central university by students for higher education with respect to gender, locality and academic streams.

To analyse this objective, the researcher has framed three null hypotheses i.e. H02, Ho3 and H04.

4.2.1 $H_0$2: There is no significant difference in mean scores of decision-making factors of rural and urban PG students of central university.

Table 4.5: Group Descriptive Statistics of Decision Making with respect to Locality

Locality	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Rural	94	165	166	20.1	2.08
Urban	66	165	165	18.4	2.27

Table 4.6: Independent Samples t-Test — Locality

Locality	Statistic (t)	df	p-value	Mean Difference	SE Difference
Total	-0.129	158	0.898	-0.402	3.12

Note. H_a: $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$ *(two-tailed);* $\alpha = 0.05$

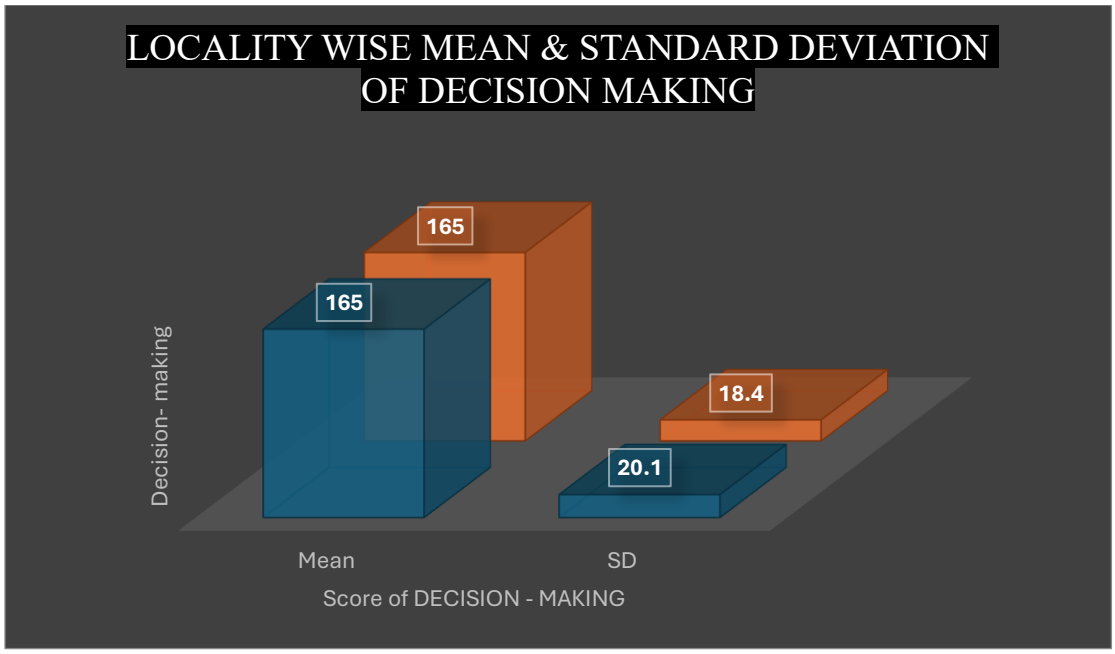

Figure 4.4 ***Graphical representation of Mean differences between the Locality***

INTERPRETATION

From the 160 samples, the scores for rural students (94) and urban students (66) were tabulated. Table 4.2.1 demonstrates that average scores for Rural and Urban students are 165 and 165, respectively, and the SDs for the same groups are 20.1 and 18.4, respectively. The calculated t value comes to be -0.129, which is less than the table value of "t" at the 0.05 level of significance. ($t_{0.05} = 1.984$) for df 160-2= 158. Hence, the null hypothesis is failed to reject and indicating that there is no significant difference in decision-making when selecting a central university for higher education by students, with respect to their locality.

Additionally, the calculated p-value (0.898) is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, this also shows the same result.

4.2.2 $H_0$3: There is no significant difference in mean scores of decision making factors of male and female PG students of central university.

Gender-Based Comparison (Independent Samples t-Test)

A second Independent Samples t-Test was conducted to examine whether male and female students differed in their aggregate deciding factor scores. Of the 160 respondents, 58 were male, and 102 were female. The results are presented in Tables 4.3 and 4.4.

Table 4.7: Group Descriptives — Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Male	58	163	167	20.2	2.65
Female	102	166	165	19.0	1.88

Table 4.8: Independent Samples t-Test — Gender

Gender	Statistic (t)	Df	p-value	Mean Difference	SE Difference
Total	-0.774	158	0.440	-2.47	3.19

Note. H_a: $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$ *(two-tailed);* $\alpha = 0.05$

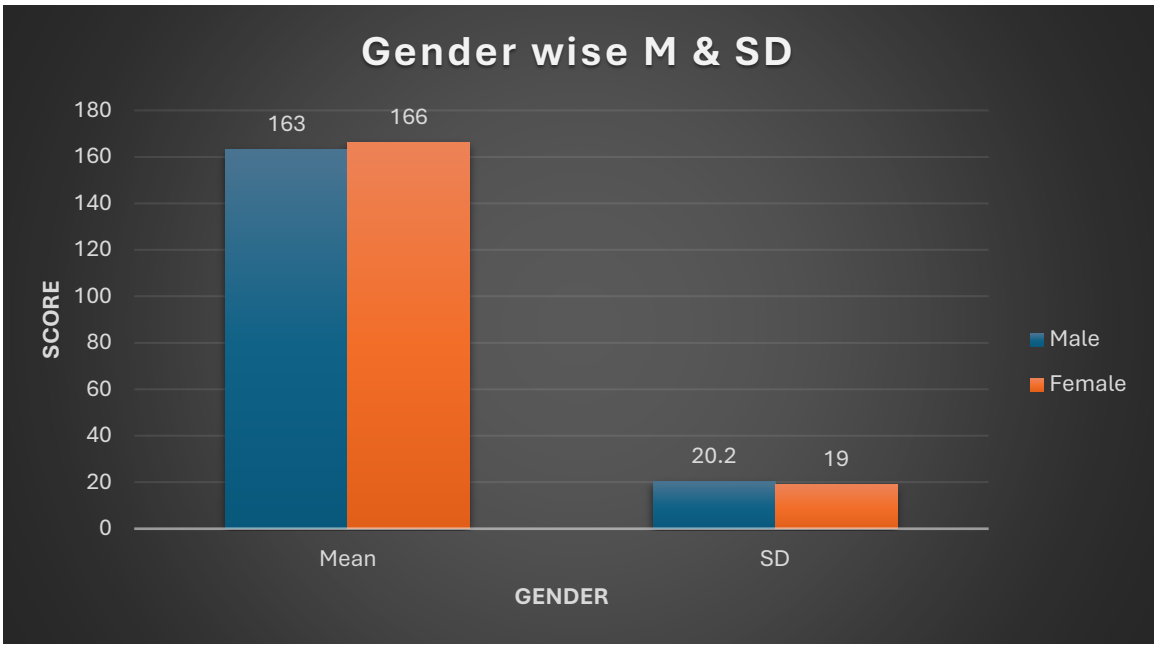

Figure 4.5. ***Graphical representation of the mean differences between the genders***

INTERPRETATION

From the 160 samples, the scores for male students (58) and female students (102) were tabulated. Table 4.3 and Table 4.4 and Figure 4.3 shows that the mean scores for Male and Female students are 163 and 166, respectively, and the SDs for the same groups are 20.2 & 19.0, respectively. The calculated t value comes to be -0.774, which is lesser than the table value of "t" at the 0.05 level of significance. (t 0.05 = 1.984) for df 160-2= 158. Hence, the null hypothesis is failed to reject and indicating that there is no significant difference in decision-making when selecting a central university for higher education by PG students, with respect to their gender.

Additionally, the calculated p-value (0.440) is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, this also shows the same result

4.2.3 $H_0$4: There is no significant difference among the means of decision-making factors among the PG students of Central universities studying in different academic streams.

4.2.3 Academic Stream-Based Comparison (One-Way ANOVA)

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether students' aggregate deciding factor scores differed significantly across academic streams. Five academic streams were included in the analysis. The ANOVA results are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.8: One-Way ANOVA - Academic Stream

Source of Variation	**Sum of Squares**	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**p-value**
Academic Stream	1647	5	329	0.872	0.501
Residuals (Error)	58146	154	378		

Note. Dependent variable: AT (Aggregate Total); α = 0.05

INTERPRETATION

From the 160 samples, the scores across five academic stream groups were tabulated. Table 4.5 shows that the calculated F value comes to be 0.872, which is lesser than the table value of "F" at the 0.05 (2.29) level of significance for df 5 and 154. Hence, the null hypothesis is failed to reject and indicating that there is no significant difference in decision-making when selecting a central university for higher education by PG students, with respect to their academic stream.

Additionally, the calculated p-value (0.501) is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, this also shows the same result.

4.3 Objective 3: To find out the most dominant factor influencing students' selection of a central university for their higher education.

In addition to examining group differences, the study sought to identify which single factor most prominently influenced students' decision to select a Central University. Each participant indicated one dominant factor from four categories: Economic, Academic, Infrastructure, and Personal. The frequencies and percentages are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.9: Dominant Factor — Frequency and Percentage Distribution (N = 160)

Factor Category	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Economic Factor	83	51.87%
Academic Factor	40	25.00%
Infrastructure Factor	25	15.63%
Personal Factor	12	7.50%
Total	**160**	**100%**

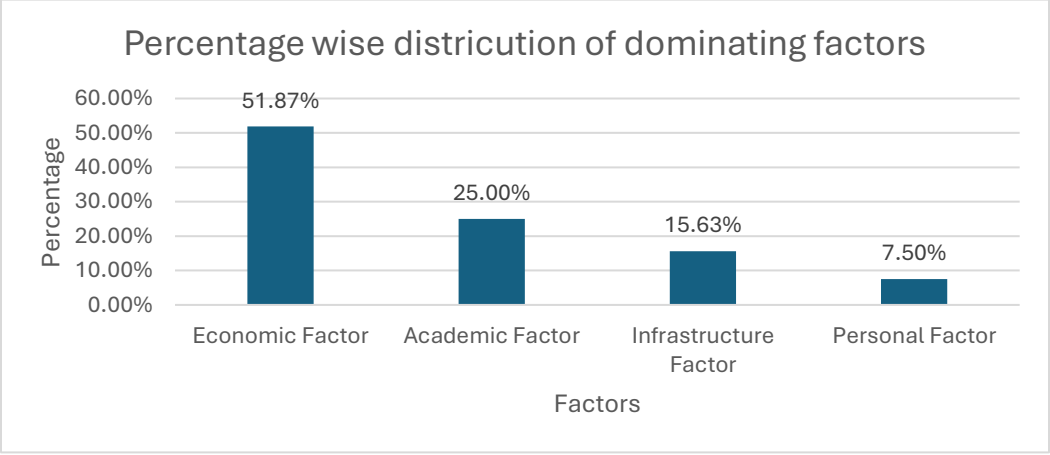

Figure 4.6 Graphical Representation of Factors Influencing Decision-Making

INTERPRETATION

The table 4.6 And figure 4.6.1 presents the distribution of respondents according to the major factors influencing decision-making. According to the table and figure, economic factors have the greatest influence, with 83 (51.87%) respondents identifying them as the primary determinant. This indicates that more than half of the respondents consider financial aspects when choosing their higher education institution.

Academic factors represent the second most influential factor, as reported by 40 (25.00%) respondents. This suggests that a considerable proportion of respondents base their decisions on academic considerations. Further, 25 (15.63%) respondents reported infrastructure factors, reflecting a moderate level of influence. This implies that the availability of physical facilities, such as classrooms, libraries, and campus resources, also shapes decisions. In contrast, personal factors are the least influential, with only 12 respondents (7.50%) indicating their importance. This demonstrates that individual preferences and personal motivations have comparatively less impact on the decision-making process.

Overall, the findings reveal that economic factors (51.87%) are the most dominant, whereas personal factors (7.50%) are the least dominant in influencing respondents' decision-making**.**

CHAPTER-V

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the research study, including the major findings, conclusions, educational implications, and suggestions for future research. The study was conducted to analyse the decision-making factors influencing students in selecting Central Universities for higher education. The data collected from respondents were analysed using appropriate statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, multiple linear regression, t-tests, and ANOVA, using JAMOVI software. The chapter integrates the objectives and hypotheses of the study with the results obtained in Chapter 4 and provides meaningful interpretations and conclusions based on the empirical evidence

5.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY3

The study was undertaken in the context of the growing importance of higher education and the increasing number of institutional choices available to students in India. Central Universities are recognised for their academic excellence, affordability, and diverse student population. Students consider several factors such as academic reputation, infrastructure, financial aspects, and social influences before selecting a university. With increasing competition and awareness, students have become more rational and selective in their choices. Therefore, understanding these decision-making factors is essential for improving institutional policies and supporting students in making informed decisions regarding higher education.

5.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem: **'Decision-Making Factors Behind Graduate Students' Preference for Central Universities'**

5.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives guide the study:

1. To find out the influence of academic, infrastructural, economic, and personal factors on students' decision-making.
2. To find out the significant differences in decision-making for selecting central universities by students for higher education with respect to gender, locality and academic stream.
3. To find out the most dominant factor influencing students' selection of central universities for their higher education.

5.5 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated for objective 1 and 2.

1. $H_0$1: There is no significant influence of academic, infrastructural, economic, and personal factors on students' decision-making.
2. $H_0$2: There is no significant difference in mean scores of decision-making factors of rural and urban PG students of central university.
3. $H_0$3: There is no significant difference in mean scores of decision-making factors of male and female PG students of central university.
4. $H_0$4: There is no significant difference among the means of decision-making factors among the PG students of Central universities studying in different academic streams.

5.6 METHODS OF THE STUDY

The study adopted a descriptive survey method, which is appropriate for collecting information about opinions, preferences, and behaviour of respondents. A quantitative research approach was followed to ensure objectivity and accuracy in analysis. Data were collected using a

structured questionnaire designed specifically to measure various decision-making factors. The method allowed the researcher to analyse relationships among variables and test hypotheses using statistical tools. The descriptive survey method proved effective in providing a systematic and scientific understanding of the factors influencing students' choices of Central Universities.

5.7 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The sample of the study consisted of 160 students selected from Central Universities across different regions of India. A Simple Random Sampling technique was used to select the respondents, ensuring that each individual had an equal chance of being included in the study. This method helped reduce selection bias and improved the representativeness of the sample. The respondents included students from different genders, localities, and academic streams, providing a diverse dataset. The use of random sampling strengthened the validity and reliability of the findings obtained from the analysis.

5.8 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was delimited to selected Central Universities in India and a sample size of 160 respondents. It focused only on specific decision-making factors such as academic, infrastructural, economic, socio-cultural, and personal aspects.

Further, the study was limited only to postgraduate (PG) students who were enrolled in Central Universities during the academic year 2025. Students from other levels of education such as undergraduate or doctoral programs were not included in the study.

The research was also confined to respondents who were accessible and willing to participate. Additionally, the findings are based on self-reported data, which may involve subjective bias. Time and resource constraints further limited the scope of the study.

Despite these delimitations, the study provides meaningful insights into the decision-making behaviour of students selecting Central Universities.

5.9 INSTRUMENTS OF THE STUDY

A self-structured questionnaire was used as the primary tool for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of 42 items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It covered multiple dimensions of decision-making, including academic, infrastructural, economic, geographical, social, and career-related factors. The instrument was developed based on literature review and expert suggestions. The reliability of the tool was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a value of 0.955, indicating high internal consistency. Thus, the questionnaire was found to be reliable and suitable for the study.

5.10 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The data for the study were collected through both offline and online methods. For accessible universities, questionnaires were administered directly to students, while for others, online platforms such as Google Forms and WhatsApp were used. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential and used only for academic purposes. The data collection process was carried out systematically to ensure accuracy and completeness. Secondary data were also collected from journals, reports, and academic sources to support the study.

5.11 STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED

Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and percentages were used to summarise the data. Multiple Linear Regression was applied to examine the influence of different factors on decision-making. Independent Samples t-test was used to analyse differences based on gender and locality, while One-Way ANOVA was used to compare academic streams. Frequency analysis was used to identify the most dominant factor. These

techniques ensured accurate interpretation and validation of the research findings. The collected data were analysed using various statistical techniques with the help of JAMOVI software.

5.12 MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

5.12.1 The Influence of Factors such as academic, infrastructural, economic, and personal factors on students' decision-making.

The analysis revealed that all five factors-academic, infrastructural, economic, socio-cultural, and personal-significantly influenced students' decision-making. Among these, the academic factor emerged as the most dominant, indicating that students prioritise quality of education, faculty expertise, and academic reputation. Infrastructural and economic factors also played significant roles, reflecting the importance of facilities and affordability. Socio-cultural and personal factors had a moderate influence. The regression model showed a strong relationship between variables, confirming that these factors collectively determine students' institutional choices.

Similarly, findings by Khan and Jha (2024) indicate that students' preferences are influenced by academic quality, financial feasibility, and social influence, suggesting that institutional choice is multidimensional. Additionally, Rajput and Chouhan (2021) identified multiple determinants, including faculty expertise, infrastructure, financial factors, and alumni influence, all of which significantly affect students' selection of higher education institutions. In the same study, Srivastava and Dhamija (2022) reported that the institutional environment, financial viability, and social influence collectively determine students' decision-making, highlighting the roles of both academic and non-academic factors. Aggarwal and Sharma (2018) also confirmed that faculty quality, infrastructure, placement opportunities, and peer influence significantly shape students' college choice decisions.

Although the present study revealed that academic, infrastructural, economic, socio-cultural, and personal factors significantly influence students' decision-making, several earlier studies report that not all factors exert equal or significant influence.

For instance, Soutar and Turner (2002) found that students primarily prioritise cost, course suitability, and career outcomes, while other factors, such as infrastructure and personal preferences, play a comparatively lesser role. Similarly, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) reported that economic considerations, institutional reputation, and geographic proximity are the most influential determinants of student choice, indicating that financial and location-related factors outweigh personal and socio-cultural influences. Further, Briggs and Wilson (2007) identified that information availability and cost-related factors are more influential than other variables, suggesting that students rely heavily on practical and economic considerations rather than a comprehensive set of factors.

5.12.2 DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS RELATED TO "Decision-Making Factors Behind Graduate Students' Preference for Central Universities" BASED ON:

5.12.2 Findings related to locality: The findings indicated that there were no significant differences in decision-making with respect to locality. The calculated p-values were greater than the significance level, leading to the acceptance of the null hypotheses. This suggests that students across different groups share similar preferences and priorities while selecting Central Universities. The results highlight that decision-making is not significantly influenced by demographic characteristics, such as locality, but is more dependent on institutional factors.

5.12.3 Findings related to gender: The findings indicated that there were no significant differences in decision-making with respect to gender. The calculated p-values were greater than the significance level, leading to the acceptance of the null hypotheses. This suggests that students across different groups share similar preferences and priorities while selecting Central

Universities. The results indicate that decision-making is not significantly influenced by demographic characteristics, such as gender, but is more influenced by institutional factors. Similarly, Aydın and Bayır (2016) reported that the majority of university choice factors did not show significant variation across gender. The findings indicated only minor differences in a few criteria, suggesting that gender does not play a substantial role in shaping students' overall decision-making patterns.

5.12.3 Findings related to academic streams: The findings indicated that there were no significant differences in decision-making with respect to academic streams. The calculated p-values were greater than the significance level, leading to the acceptance of the null hypotheses. This suggests that students across different groups share similar preferences and priorities while selecting Central Universities. The results indicate that decision-making is not significantly influenced by demographic characteristics, such as academic streams, but is more influenced by institutional factors.

5.12.3 Dominant Factor

The study identified academic factors as the most dominant influences on students' decision-making. This indicates that students give the highest priority to academic quality, including course structure, faculty competence, and research opportunities. Other factors, such as infrastructure and economic considerations, were also important but secondary. The dominance of academic factors reflects students' increasing awareness of the importance of quality education and future career prospects. Likewise, a study by Abbas et al. (2021) revealed that academic reputation and career-related factors were the most influential factors in students' higher education choices. The study revealed that academic and career dimensions were significantly stronger than personal or marketing-related factors, indicating that students prioritise educational quality and future prospects. Additionally, a study by Yurdunkulu and

Ugurlu (n.d.) on university choice among freshman students found that future career expectations and the quality and popularity of education were the most important factors, while familiarity with the location was the least important. Contrary to Al Tamimi et al.'s (2023) findings, institutional factors play a significant role in shaping students' decision-making when selecting a university. Among these, university status emerged as the most persuasive factor, with a strong, statistically significant impact on students' choices.

5.13 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The study concludes that students' decision-making in selecting Central Universities is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, with academic considerations playing the most significant role. Infrastructure and economic factors also contribute substantially, while socio-cultural and personal factors have a moderate impact. The absence of significant differences across demographic variables indicates uniformity in students' preferences. Overall, students are rational decision-makers who evaluate institutional quality and future opportunities before making their choices.

5.14 EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study have important implications for educational institutions and policy-makers.

- **i** Universities should focus on improving academic quality, faculty development, and research opportunities to attract students.
- **ii** Infrastructure and campus facilities should be enhanced to provide a better learning environment.
- **iii** Financial support such as scholarships and affordable fee structures should be strengthened. Career-oriented programs and placement services should be prioritised.

iv The study also suggests the need for transparent information systems to help students make informed decisions regarding higher education.

5.15 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

i Future research can be conducted with a larger sample size to improve the generalisability of the findings.

ii Comparative studies between Central, State, and Private Universities can provide deeper insights into institutional preferences.

iii Qualitative approaches such as interviews and case studies can be included to understand students' perspectives in depth.

iv Additional factors such as technological influence, digital platforms, and psychological aspects can be explored.

v Longitudinal studies can also be conducted to examine changes in decision-making patterns over time.

References

Agarwal, P. (2009). Indian Higher Education: Envisioning the Future. *SAGE Publications India*. https://doi.org/10.4135/9788132104094

Aggarwal, D., & Sharma, D. (2018). Analysis of the factors influencing the choice of college for higher education. *International Journal of Computer Sciences and Engineering*, *6*(9), 46–49. https://doi.org/10.26438/ijcse/v6i9.4649

Agrey, & Lampadan. (2014). Determinant factors contributing to student choice in selecting a university. *Journal of Education and Human Development, 3*(2), 391–404.

Altbach, P. G. (2011). The Past, Present, and Future of the Research University. *In P. G. Altbach & J. Salmi (Eds.), The Road to Academic Excellence: The Making of World-Class Research Universities (pp. 11–32). World Bank*. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-8805-1

Astin, A. W. (1993). What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited. *Jossey-Bass*.

Awale, B. (2016). What factors influence high school students in choosing Cram School in Thailand?

Best, J. W., & Kahn, J. V. (2006). Research in education (10th ed.). Pearson Education.

Briggs, A.H., Claxton, K. & Sculpher, M.J. (2006). Decision Modelling for Health Economic Evaluation. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Briggs, S. (2006). An Exploratory Study of the Factors Influencing Undergraduate Student Choice: The Case of Higher Education in Scotland. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 28(3), 285–298*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600800600980989

Briggs, S., & Wilson, A. (2007). Which university? A study of the influence of cost and information factors on student choice. *Studies in Higher Education, 32*(6), 707–722

Chapman, D. W. (1981). A Model of Student College Choice. *Journal of Higher Education, 52(5), 490–505*. https://doi.org/10.2307/1981837

Cochran, W. G. (1977). Sampling techniques (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). Research methods in education (6th ed.). Routledge.

Creswell, J. W. (2002). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approache. SAGE Publications.

Cristofaro, M. (2017). Herbert Simon's bounded rationality. *Journal of Management History*, *23*(2), 170–190. https://doi.org/10.1108/jmh-11-2016-0060

Cronbach, L. J. (1971). Test validation. In R. L. Thorndike (Ed.), Educational measurement (2nd ed., pp. 443–507). American Council on Education.

Crotty, D. (2025, June 27). *Background and Major Choice in Tertiary Education: Evidence from Ireland*.

Dimali, W., Lakshmi, R., Sampath, S., Lalith, E., & Veronica, K. (2023). A literature review on students university choice and satisfaction. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, *15*(2), 71–87. https://doi.org/10.5897/ijeaps2023.0753

Dr. M. Rahul, Dr. S.Tiwari & Dr. J. Bhandari (2021). Factors Affecting Choice of students in selecting an educational institute and University: A study focusing on private education sector in North India.

Etzioni, A. (1967). Mixed-Scanning: A "Third" Approach to Decision-Making. *Public Administration Review*, *27*(5), 385–392. https://doi.org/10.2307/973394

Fowler, F. J. (2014). Survey research methods (5th ed.). SAGE Publications. *Gandhi's Educational Thoughts | Education | Articles on and by Mahatma Gandhi*.

Giroux, H. A. (2010). Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the Promise of Critical Pedagogy. *Policy Futures in Education*, *8*(6), 715–721. https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2010.8.6.715

Guru, S., Verma, S., Garza-Reyes, J. A., & Kautish, P. (2025). Determinants for selecting higher education institutions in India: a fuzzy analytical hierarchical process approach. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *39*(5), 1274–1300. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-01-2024-0046

Harrison, J. R., & Lomi, A. (2012). The garbage can model of organizational choice: Looking forward at Forty. In *Research in the sociology of organizations*. https://doi.org/10.1108/s0733-558x(2012)36

Haveman, R., & Smeeding, T. (2006). The Role of Higher Education in Social Mobility. *The Future of Children, 16(2), 125–150*. https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2006.0015

Heller, D. E. (1997). Student Price Response in Higher Education: An Update to Leslie and Brinkman. *Journal of Higher Education, 68(6), 624–659*. https://doi.org/10.2307/2959966

Ismet, H. (2016). Analysis of the factors influencing Bogor Senior High School student choice in choosing Bogor Agricultural University (Indonesia) for further study. *Journal of Education and e-Learning Research*, *3*(3), 87–97. https://doi.org/10.20448/journal.509/2016.3.3/509.3.87.97

Kallio, R. E. (1995). Factors influencing the college choice decisions of graduate students. *Research in Higher Education*, *36*(1), 109–124. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02207769

Kerlinger, F. N. (1986). Foundations of behavioural research (3rd ed.). Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Khan, A. & Jha, S. Kumar. (2024). Understanding factors affecting students' preferences for selecting a central university: a case study. 29. 175–190.

Kombo, D. K., & Tromp, D. L. A. (2006). Proposal and thesis writing: An introduction. Paulines Publications Africa.

Kothari, C. R. (2004). Research methodology: Methods and techniques (2nd ed.). New Age International.

Krezel, J., & Krezel, Z. A. (2017). Social influence and student choice of higher education institutions. *Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, *8*(2), 116–130. https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs20172.116.130

Kumar, P. (2025). Lindblom's Incremental Model: The Science of Muddling Through • Pub-Admin.Institute. *Public Administration Institute*.

Kumar, P. (2025). Yehezkel Dror's Normative Optimal Model: Enhancing Policy Making • BA Notes. *BA (Bachelor of Arts) Hub*.

Le, H. Q. (2020). Factors affecting students' decision to select private universities in Vietnam. *Journal of Asian Finance Economics and Business*, *7*(4), 235–245. https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2020.vol7.no4.235

Likert, R. (1932). A technique for the measurement of attitudes. Archives of Psychology, 22(140), 1–55.

Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). "Push–pull" factors influencing international student destination choice. *International Journal of Educational Management, 16*(2), 82–90. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540210418403

Ming, J. S. K. (2010). Institutional Factors Influencing Students' College Choice Decision in Malaysia: A Conceptual Framework. *International Journal of Business and Social Science, 1,* 53–58.

Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994). Psychometric theory (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Orodho, J. A. (2004). Elements of education and social science research methods. Kanezja Publishers.

Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying College Access and Choice: A Proposed Conceptual Model. *In J. C. Smart (Ed.), Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research (pp. 99–157). Springer*. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-4512-3_3

Price, I., Matzdorf, F., Smith, L., & Agahi, H. (2003). The impact of facilities on student choice of university. *Facilities*, *21*(10), 212–222. https://doi.org/10.1108/02632770310493580

Rajput, G., & Chouhan, P. S. (2021). *Exploring the factors affecting students' choice of higher education institutes in India: A factor analysis approach*. Journal of Business and Social Sciences Research, 6(1), 21–34. https://doi.org/10.3126/jbssr.v6i1.38126

Raposo, M. & Alves, H. (2007). A model of university choice: an exploratory approach.

Salmi, J. (2009). The Challenge of Establishing World-Class Universities. *World Bank*. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-7865-6

Sikandar, A. (2016). John Dewey and His Philosophy of Education. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, *2*(2), 191. https://doi.org/10.22555/joeed.v2i2.446

Simon, H. A. (1955). A Behavioural Model of Rational Choice. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 69(1), 99–118*. https://doi.org/10.2307/1884852

Skvarciany, V., Shina, I., & Sajjad, F. B. (2020). Decision Factors behind Choosing Higher Education Institutions in Europe. *Economics and Culture*, *17*(1), 75–86. https://doi.org/10.2478/jec-2020-0007

Soutar, G. N., & Turner, J. P. (2002). Students' preferences for university: A conjoint analysis. *International Journal of Educational Management, 16*(1), 40–45. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540210415523

Spence, M. (1973). Job Market Signaling. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 87(3), 355–374*. https://doi.org/10.2307/1882010

Srivastava, K., & Dhamija, S. (2022). *Determinants driving the student's decision-making to opt for an institution for higher education in India: An exploratory factor analysis*. Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, 22(13), 170–184. https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v22i13.5560

Srivastava, K., & Dhamija, S. (2022). Social factors impacting students' choice of institution for higher studies in India. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *36*(7), 1221–1237. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-03-2022-0106

Teichler, U. (2009). Higher education and the world of work: Conceptual frameworks, comparative perspectives, empirical findings. Sense Publishers.

Telaumbanua, E., Rini, E., & Absah, Y. (2024). Perspective of Decision Making Based on Factor Analysis in Choosing a College at the University of Nias. International Journal of Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Education.

Tilak, J. B. (2015). How inclusive is higher education in India? *Social Change*, *45*(2), 185–223. https://doi.org/10.1177/0049085715574178

Ucan, S., Hoş, H. Y., Karataş, İ. H., & Bülbül, Y. (2025). Faculty assessment choices in higher education: drivers, strategies, and decision-making styles for fair and inclusive practice. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *50*(8), 1344–1359. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2025.2511792

Whitehead, J. M., Raffan, J., & Deaney, R. (2006). University choice: What influences the decisions of academically successful post-16 students? *Higher Education Quarterly*, *60*(1), 4–26. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2006.00305.x

Yusuf, A. A. (2024). Factors affecting students' choice of universities. *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Research*, *11*(1).

Zain, O., Jan, M., & Ibrahim, A. (2013). Factors influencing students' decisions in choosing private institutions of higher education in Malaysia: A Structural Equation Modelling approach. Asian Academy of Management Journal. 18. 75–90.

APPENDIX

Decision-Making Factors behind Graduate Students' Preference for Central Universities.

To

The respondent,

I am Vikash Kumar Mal, an M.Ed. 4th-semester student from the Department of Education and Education Technology (DoEET), School of Social Science, University of Hyderabad. This Google Form has been created exclusively for M.Ed. dissertation work-" Decision-making Factors behind Selection of Central Universities." Your participation is completely voluntary. All information provided will be kept strictly confidential and will be used solely for academic and research purposes. Your responses will help the researcher to gain valuable insights and draw meaningful conclusions for education and society as well.

Thanks for your time and cooperation**.**

Name of the Student:

Name of the University:

Gender: Male/Female/Other:

Academic Stream of Study: Arts/Humanities Social Sciences Sciences Engineering/Technology Commerce/Management Other Hometown

Locality: Rural/ Urban

Rating: For Positive Items: Strongly Agree-5, Agree-4, Neutral-3, Disagree-2, Strongly Disagree-1 For Negative Items: Strongly Agree-1, Agree-2, Neutral-3, Disagree-4, Strongly Disagree-5

1. The overall academic reputation of the university influenced my decision to enroll.

2. National ranking of the university played an important role in my choice

3. Accreditation status (NAAC/NIRF/UGC) of the university influenced my decision.

4. Availability of my preferred program in the university influenced my selection.

5. The curriculum structure of the program met my academic expectations.

6. The qualifications of the teaching staff influenced me to select this university.

7. The teaching–learning methods adopted by the teachers of the university attracted me most.

8. Faculty-student interaction was an important factor for choosing this university.

9. Availability of well-equipped laboratories in the university influenced my decision.

10. Internship opportunities provided by the university were an important factor.

11. Campus placement prospects influenced my selection of this university.

12. The learning environment of this university academically motivated me to take admission.

13. Availability of interdisciplinary courses in this institution influenced my decision.

14. Academic flexibility (choice-based credit system, electives) influenced my choice.

15. The university's access to smart classrooms and digital learning tools was important for me.

16. A well-equipped library influenced my decision to choose this university.

17. Availability of online academic resources (e-journals, databases) mattered for me.

18. Hostel facilities influenced my decision to enrol here.* 19. Campus cleanliness and maintenance influenced my decision to choose my university.

20. Availability of sports and recreational facilities influenced my decision.

21. Health care and medical facilities inside the campus influenced my choice.

22. Campus transportation facilities influenced my decision to choose this university.

23. Affordable course fees influenced my decision to choose this central university.

24. Availability of scholarships influenced my university selection.

25. Financial assistance schemes offered by the university were an important factor for me.

26. Cost of living in the university influenced my decision.

27. Access to part-time work opportunities parallel to academic pursuit in this university played a decisive role in shaping my choice.

28. Central universities are economically more accessible than private universities.

29. Fee concessions for reserved categories influenced my decision.

30. The medium of instruction (English/Hindi/Regional) influenced my choice for this university.

31. Cultural diversity inside the campus motivated me to choose this institution.

32. An inclusive campus environment influenced my preference for this university.

33. Peer groups and student communities influenced my decision.

34. Support services like mentoring and counselling influenced my choice.

35. Safety and security inside the campus influenced me for university selection.

36. Admission policy and eligibility criteria influenced my decision.

37. My academic performance influenced me to choose this central university.

38. Family played an important role in my decision to choose this university.

39. Advice from teachers or mentors influenced my choice.

40. Career goals influenced my decision to choose this central university.

41. Personal interest in knowing the university's academic culture was a determining factor in my decision-making process.

42. Rank the given factors from highest to lowest preference for selecting this university.

a. Academic factor

b: Infrastructural factor

c: Personal factor

d: Economic factor

About the Authors

Vikash Kumar Mal is a Master's student in Education at the Department of Education and Education Technology, University of Hyderabad. He also has a background in Economics and Political Science. His research explores the factors influencing students' selection of higher education institutions, with particular focus on Central Universities in India. His work reflects an interest in understanding student preferences, access, affordability, and decision-making in higher education. Through his research and academic work, he seeks to contribute to a better understanding of educational choices and the changing landscape of higher education in India. He also has expertise in research tools and software such as Jamovi, Zotero, and Microsoft Excel.

Mr. Vikash Kumar Mal

Dr. Ujjala Singh, Assistant Professor of Department of Education and Education Technology, University of Hyderabad with more than 5 years of experience in teaching field. Along with M.Sc. Zoology she also has B.Ed., M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Education. She earned her Ph.D. from Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. She has published many research papers in different national and international journals and also published book chapters in different books. For enhancing knowledge and skills, she attended numerous seminars, conferences and workshops. The author has keen interest in doing research in science education and educational technology.

Dr. Ujjala Singh

Published by

Jnanasetu Press

309/133, Duddi Village, Kosigi, Kurnool District,
Andhra Pradesh – 518313, India
Website: www.jnanasetupress.com

₹799/-

9 788168 793958