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Original Article

### Perceptions of Student Enrollment Factors in Uganda Christian University

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*Student enrollment,  
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University*

This study investigated perceptions of factors influencing student enrollment at Uganda Christian University (UCU), with specific attention to institutional, academic-related, and financial-related determinants. Anchored in Human Capital Theory and Student Choice Theory, the study sought to explain how prospective and current students evaluate universities in an increasingly competitive higher education environment. A descriptive cross-sectional design was adopted, using a mixed-methods approach that combined questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were collected from undergraduate and prospective students, while qualitative insights were obtained from admissions, marketing, and public relations staff. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple linear regression, and content analysis. The findings revealed very strong positive correlations between student enrollment and financial factors ( $r = 0.991$ ), academic factors ( $r = 0.993$ ), and institutional factors ( $r = 0.992$ ), suggesting that enrollment decisions are shaped by multiple interrelated dimensions. However, regression analysis showed that academic-related factors ( $\beta = 0.465$ ,  $p = .008$ ) and institutional factors ( $\beta = 0.426$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were the strongest significant predictors of enrollment, while financial factors ( $\beta = 0.105$ ,  $p = .475$ ) were not statistically significant when the other variables were controlled. Qualitative findings reinforced these results by highlighting the importance of program relevance, lecturer competence, graduate employability, institutional reputation, campus facilities, and alumni success in influencing enrollment decisions. The study concludes that private universities can strengthen enrollment by prioritising academic quality, institutional credibility, infrastructure improvement, and supportive financial access mechanisms.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Higher education institutions worldwide increasingly face the challenge of attracting and sustaining student enrollment in an increasingly competitive and globalised educational environment. Enrollment decisions among prospective students are influenced by a combination of institutional reputation, academic program quality, and financial accessibility, which collectively shape students' perceptions of universities and their expected educational outcomes (Sarfrac et al., 2022; Willis & Yang, 2024). Universities must therefore understand the determinants of enrollment in order to design effective recruitment strategies and ensure institutional sustainability.

Historically, university enrollment patterns were influenced primarily by social class, religious affiliation, and geographic accessibility. Prior to the twentieth century, higher education was largely limited to elite groups within society. However, the expansion of higher education systems during the mid-twentieth century transformed enrollment dynamics by making university education accessible to broader segments of society (Yudkevich, 2025). This expansion created greater competition among universities as institutions sought to attract students through improvements in academic programs, facilities, and institutional branding.

In the contemporary higher education landscape, enrollment management has become a strategic priority for universities worldwide. Institutions increasingly rely on data-driven enrollment management strategies to align recruitment, admissions, and financial aid policies with institutional objectives (Balayan & Ostreko, 2025). Prospective students evaluate universities

based on several factors, including institutional reputation, accreditation status, academic program relevance, and graduate employability outcomes (Chhor et al., 2024). These factors influence students' perceptions of the value of university education and ultimately shape their enrollment decisions.

The expansion of higher education in Africa has similarly transformed enrollment dynamics across the continent. Many African countries have experienced rapid growth in the number of public and private universities over the past three decades as governments attempt to expand access to tertiary education. However, this expansion has also intensified competition among institutions for student enrollment (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Universities must therefore differentiate themselves through academic excellence, institutional branding, and financial accessibility in order to remain competitive.

Uganda provides a notable example of higher education expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since the liberalisation of higher education in the 1990s, the number of universities in Uganda has increased significantly. The National Council for Higher Education reports that university enrollment increased from approximately 60,000 students in 2000 to more than 250,000 students by 2020 (NCHE, 2021). Despite this growth, recent economic constraints, rising tuition costs, and labour market uncertainties have affected enrollment patterns across many universities in the country (Mayanja & Kaguhangire-Barifaijo, 2021).

Private universities in Uganda face particular enrollment challenges because they rely heavily on tuition revenue to finance institutional operations. Unlike public universities, which

receive government funding, private institutions must maintain sufficient enrollment levels to sustain academic programs, infrastructure development, and staff recruitment (Kasozi, 2009). Consequently, fluctuations in student enrollment can significantly affect institutional financial sustainability.

Uganda Christian University (UCU), established by the Church of Uganda, is one of the leading private universities in the country. The university offers academic programs across several disciplines, including law, business administration, theology, education, and social sciences. Over the years, UCU has built a strong academic reputation and consistently ranks among the top private universities in Uganda (Cybermetrics Lab, 2024).

Despite its reputation, recent institutional reports indicate fluctuations in student enrollment patterns at the university. Although application numbers remain relatively stable, the number of students completing final registration has occasionally declined during certain academic semesters (UCU Academic Registry Report, 2023). This pattern suggests that prospective students may face institutional, academic, or financial constraints that influence their final enrollment decisions.

Understanding these determinants is therefore essential for improving enrollment strategies and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the university. This study investigates the **perceptions of student enrollment factors at Uganda Christian University**, focusing on the influence of institutional, academic-related, and financial-related factors on students' enrollment decisions.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in **Human Capital Theory** and **Student Choice Theory**, which

provide a conceptual basis for understanding how individuals make decisions regarding higher education participation.

Human Capital Theory posits that education is an investment that enhances individuals' productivity and economic potential. According to this perspective, individuals pursue education to increase their future earnings, improve employment opportunities, and acquire valuable knowledge and skills (Becker, 1993). Students, therefore, evaluate universities based on the perceived benefits associated with attending a particular institution, including program quality, academic reputation, and graduate employability outcomes.

Student Choice Theory further explains how prospective students select universities among multiple alternatives. The theory suggests that students consider several factors when choosing a university, including institutional reputation, program availability, campus facilities, and financial affordability (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). These factors influence students' perceptions of universities and shape their final enrollment decisions.

Within this theoretical framework, enrollment decisions are influenced by three key dimensions: institutional attributes, academic quality, and financial accessibility. Institutional attributes include reputation, accreditation, and infrastructure. Academic quality encompasses faculty competence, curriculum relevance, and research opportunities. Financial accessibility includes tuition affordability, scholarships, and student loan availability.

The integration of these theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the determinants of student enrollment at Uganda Christian University.

### **Institutional Factors and Student Enrollment**

Institutional factors play a critical role in shaping enrollment decisions in higher education

institutions. Institutional reputation is often one of the most important determinants of university choice. Students frequently associate well-established institutions with academic excellence, career opportunities, and professional recognition (Zufarova et al., 2022).

Universities that maintain strong institutional brands and positive public images are more likely to attract prospective students. Institutional rankings, alumni success stories, and media visibility all contribute to shaping the perceived credibility of universities (Washika, 2025). Conversely, negative publicity or weak institutional leadership may discourage prospective students from applying.

Accreditation is another important institutional factor influencing enrollment decisions. Accreditation serves as a key quality assurance mechanism, signalling that academic programs meet established standards and are recognised by employers and professional bodies, thereby enhancing institutional credibility and student trust (Duarte & Vardasca, 2023). Institutions that maintain accreditation from national and international bodies, therefore, experience greater confidence from prospective students.

Leadership and governance also influence enrollment by shaping institutional stability and effectiveness. Universities with transparent administrative structures and effective leadership are better able to implement strategic initiatives that improve academic quality and student services (Ghamrawi, 2023). Effective governance fosters institutional credibility and enhances public confidence in the university.

Infrastructure and campus facilities also influence students' perceptions of universities. Modern classrooms, well-equipped libraries, laboratories, and student accommodation facilities create conducive learning environments and improve the attractiveness of universities (Royadi et al., 2022). Students often evaluate these facilities when choosing institutions because they affect the overall educational experience.

## Academic-Related Factors and Student Enrollment

Academic factors represent some of the most significant determinants of student enrollment in universities. Program diversity and relevance influence students' decisions by providing opportunities for specialisation in fields aligned with labour market demands (Meng, 2023).

Faculty competence is another critical determinant of enrollment. Universities with highly qualified lecturers are perceived as offering high-quality education, which increases student confidence in the institution (Kosnin, 2024). Faculty members with strong research credentials and professional experience enhance academic reputation and contribute to improved learning outcomes.

Research opportunities and academic resources further influence enrollment decisions. Institutions that provide laboratories, digital libraries, and access to scholarly databases enable students to engage in advanced learning and research activities (Fakhrudin et al., 2024). Such opportunities are particularly important for postgraduate students and research-oriented programs.

Teaching methods and instructional technologies also influence students' perceptions of universities. Institutions that adopt innovative teaching approaches, including blended learning, online platforms, and interactive teaching methods, are often more attractive to prospective students (Pandey et al., 2024). These methods improve student engagement and facilitate flexible learning environments.

Graduate employability represents another important academic determinant of enrollment. Students prefer universities that demonstrate strong employment outcomes for graduates. Institutions that maintain partnerships with industry and integrate practical training into their curricula are more likely to attract prospective students (Hu & Wang, 2024).

## Financial-Related Factors and Student Enrollment

Financial considerations are among the most significant barriers to higher education access in many developing countries. Tuition fees, living expenses, and other education-related costs significantly influence students' ability to enrol in universities (Duarte, 2025).

Scholarships and bursaries play a crucial role in improving access to higher education. Universities that offer merit-based and need-based scholarships enable students from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue higher education (World Bank, 2020).

Student loan schemes also influence enrollment by enabling students to finance their education over time. Government-supported loan programs reduce the financial burden associated with upfront tuition payments and increase enrollment opportunities for students from low-income households (Chiramba & Ndofirepi, 2023).

Flexible tuition payment plans further enhance financial accessibility. Universities that allow instalment-based payment arrangements reduce financial pressure on students and their families (Fasanmi, 2025). Such arrangements encourage enrollment by making university education more affordable.

Economic conditions also influence enrollment decisions. Rising living costs and declining household incomes can reduce students' ability to pay tuition fees, thereby affecting enrollment levels in universities (Blanco et al., 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design to investigate the perceptions of enrollment factors influencing students' decisions to enrol at Uganda Christian University (UCU). Descriptive research design is commonly used in

social science research to provide systematic descriptions of phenomena and relationships among variables without manipulating the study environment (Hirose & Creswell, 2023). The design was appropriate because the study sought to examine how institutional, academic-related, and financial-related factors influence enrollment decisions among prospective and current students.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of enrollment determinants. Mixed-methods research integrates numerical data with narrative insights to enhance the depth and credibility of research findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to prospective and undergraduate students, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with key university personnel involved in student recruitment and admissions.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for methodological triangulation, which improves the validity of research findings by comparing results obtained through different methods (Flick, 2018). Quantitative analysis provided statistical evidence of relationships between enrollment factors and student enrollment, while qualitative interviews offered contextual explanations of how these factors influence students' decisions to enrol at the university.

### Study Area

The study was conducted at Uganda Christian University, a private faith-based university established by the Church of Uganda. UCU is located in Mukono District, approximately 25 kilometres east of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. The university operates several campuses across the country and offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in disciplines such as law, business administration, education, theology, and social sciences.

UCU was selected as the study site because it represents one of the leading private universities in Uganda and faces enrollment challenges similar to those experienced by many private higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Private universities depend heavily on tuition revenue to sustain institutional operations, making enrollment trends a critical determinant of financial sustainability and institutional growth.

### Target Population

The target population consisted of individuals with direct knowledge or experience related to student enrollment processes at Uganda Christian University. Specifically, the study targeted four categories of respondents:

- Prospective students (Senior Six leavers and diploma holders)
- Undergraduate students currently enrolled at the university
- The admissions office staff is responsible for student recruitment and admissions
- Marketing and public relations personnel involved in promoting university programs

These categories were selected because they represent key stakeholders in the enrollment process. Prospective students and undergraduate students provided insights into factors influencing university choice, while admissions and marketing staff provided institutional perspectives on enrollment dynamics and recruitment strategies.

The total target population for the study comprised 150 individuals, representing the combined population of the four respondent categories.

### Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study sample was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, which provides statistically appropriate sample sizes for given population sizes. Based on a target population of 150

individuals, a sample size of 108 respondents was considered adequate to represent the study population.

The sample distribution across respondent categories was as follows:

- 21 prospective students (Senior Six leavers and diploma holders)
- 74 undergraduate students
- 10 admissions office staff
- 3 marketing and public relations officers

Two sampling techniques were used in the study: simple random sampling and purposive sampling.

#### *Simple Random Sampling*

Simple random sampling was used to select undergraduate students and prospective students participating in the questionnaire survey. This probability sampling technique ensures that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, thereby reducing sampling bias and increasing the representativeness of the sample (Bryman, 2016).

#### *Purposive Sampling*

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents from the admissions office and the marketing and public relations department. These individuals were deliberately selected because of their direct involvement in university recruitment, admissions processing, and enrollment management. Purposive sampling is appropriate when researchers seek information from individuals who possess specialised knowledge relevant to the research problem (Etikan et al., 2016).

### Data Collection Methods

The study used two primary data collection methods: **questionnaire surveys** and **semi-structured interviews**.

### *Questionnaire Survey*

Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from undergraduate students and prospective students. The questionnaire consisted primarily of **closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale**, where respondents indicated their level of agreement with statements related to enrollment factors.

The Likert scale ranged from:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

The questionnaire items were designed to measure respondents' perceptions of the influence of institutional factors, academic-related factors, and financial-related factors on enrollment decisions. The use of Likert scale questions allowed for quantitative measurement of respondents' perceptions and facilitated statistical analysis of relationships among variables.

Questionnaires were distributed to respondents physically, and participants were given adequate time to complete them before returning them to the researcher.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with admissions office staff and marketing and public relations personnel. Interviews allowed the researcher to obtain detailed insights into institutional perspectives on student recruitment and enrollment management.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide flexibility for probing deeper into respondents' experiences while maintaining a consistent structure across interviews (Kallio et al., 2016). The interviews focused on issues such as enrollment trends, recruitment strategies, and

institutional factors affecting students' enrollment decisions.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Two primary research instruments were used in the study: self-administered questionnaires and interview guides.

The questionnaire instrument contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to capture respondents' perceptions of enrollment determinants. The instrument was structured into sections covering demographic characteristics and perceptions of institutional, academic, and financial factors affecting enrollment.

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore institutional perspectives on student enrollment trends and recruitment strategies. The guide ensured consistency across interviews while allowing respondents to elaborate on their experiences.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Ensuring the validity and reliability of research instruments is essential for producing credible research findings.

#### *Validity*

Validity refers to the extent to which research instruments accurately measure the concepts they are intended to measure (Bell et al., 2023). In this study, content validity was established through expert review. The research instruments were submitted to the expert for evaluation to ensure that the questionnaire items adequately captured the study variables.

The Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated to quantify the level of agreement among experts regarding the relevance of questionnaire items. A CVI score of 0.80 was obtained, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the research instrument was valid for data collection (Surucu & Maslakçi, 2020).

### **Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of research instruments in measuring variables across repeated applications (Bell et al., 2023). To assess reliability, the research instruments were pre-tested among respondents from universities not included in the main study.

The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, a widely used measure of internal consistency. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.80 was obtained, indicating that the questionnaire items were sufficiently reliable for measuring the study constructs.

### **Data Analysis**

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were employed in the study.

#### ***Quantitative Data Analysis***

Quantitative data collected through questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise respondents' perceptions of enrollment factors. These included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

Inferential statistical techniques were used to examine the relationships between enrollment factors and student enrollment. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of relationships between the independent variables (institutional factors, academic-related factors, and financial-related factors) and the dependent variable (student enrolment perception).

Multiple linear regression analysis was further employed to determine the predictive influence of each independent variable on enrollment decisions. Regression analysis enables researchers to assess the relative contribution of different factors in explaining variations in the dependent variable (Field, 2018).

#### ***Qualitative Data Analysis***

Qualitative data collected through interviews were analysed using content analysis techniques. Content analysis involves systematically organising textual data into themes and categories in order to identify patterns and meanings (Krippendorff, 2018).

Interview responses were transcribed, coded, and categorised into themes related to institutional, academic, and financial determinants of student enrollment. The qualitative findings were used to complement the quantitative results and provide deeper insights into enrollment dynamics at the university.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to established ethical standards in social science research. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research before providing their consent. Respondents were assured that the information provided would be used solely for academic purposes.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Personal identifiers were removed from the dataset, and responses were reported in aggregated form to protect participants' privacy.

#### **Limitations of the Study**

The study relied largely on self-reported perceptions, which may be subject to response bias. However, the use of multiple data collection methods, including interviews and questionnaires, helped to minimise this limitation by allowing for triangulation of findings.

#### **Areas for Future Research**

While this study provides valuable insights into the determinants of student enrollment at Uganda Christian University, several opportunities remain for future research. Future studies could explore



additional factors influencing university choice, including digital marketing strategies, social media engagement, and international student recruitment.

Longitudinal studies examining enrollment trends over time would also provide deeper insights into how institutional policies and economic conditions influence student enrollment patterns. Comparative studies across multiple private universities in Uganda or across East African countries could further enhance understanding of regional enrollment dynamics.

Finally, future research could incorporate advanced statistical techniques such as structural equation modelling to examine complex relationships among enrollment determinants and student outcomes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the empirical findings on perceptions of factors influencing student enrollment at Uganda Christian University (UCU). The analysis examines the effects of institutional, academic-related, and financial-related factors on enrollment decisions. Inferential statistical techniques, including correlation analysis and multiple linear regression analysis, were employed. Correlation analysis

examined the strength and direction of relationships among the study variables, while regression analysis assessed the relative predictive influence of each independent factor on enrollment decisions.

The dependent variable was student enrollment, operationalised as respondents' perceptions regarding factors influencing enrollment decisions at Uganda Christian University. The independent variables were institutional factors, academic-related factors, and financial-related factors. Quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS. To enrich interpretation, the statistical findings were triangulated with qualitative evidence from key informant interviews conducted with staff from the Admissions Office and the Marketing and Public Relations Office. This mixed-methods approach enabled the study to capture both statistical relationships and experiential insights regarding enrollment dynamics in private universities in Uganda.

### Correlation Analysis of Enrollment Factors

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether institutional factors, academic-related factors, and financial-related factors were significantly associated with student enrollment.

**Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Enrollment Factors**

Variable	Enrollment	Financial Factors	Academic Factors	Institutional Factors
Enrollment	1			
Financial Factors	0.991**	1		
Academic Factors	0.993**	0.997**	1	
Institutional Factors	0.992**	0.991**	0.994**	1

$p < .01$

The results indicate very strong positive correlations between enrollment and financial factors ( $r = 0.991$ ), academic factors ( $r = 0.993$ ), and institutional factors ( $r = 0.992$ ). These findings suggest that students' enrollment

decisions are influenced by multiple dimensions simultaneously.

### Relationship Between Financial Factors and Student Enrollment

The correlation analysis revealed a very strong positive relationship between financial-related factors and student enrollment ( $r = 0.991$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This indicates that improvements in tuition affordability, scholarships, and financial support mechanisms are strongly associated with increased enrollment.

Quantitative findings were reinforced by qualitative interview evidence indicating that cost considerations are among the first issues prospective students and parents raise during admission inquiries. One respondent noted:

*“One of the main questions we get from prospective students and their parents is about the total cost of study. When fees are perceived as fair and manageable, more students are willing to commit to enrollment.” (KIS1)*

Participants also emphasised that financial assistance programs significantly improve access to higher education.

*“We often see a clear rise in applications whenever we provide flexible payment plans or financial assistance programs.” (KIS12)*

These insights suggest that financial accessibility plays a key role during the initial stages of university choice. In many developing economies, financial constraints remain a major barrier to higher education participation. Tuition affordability, scholarships, and instalment payment plans, therefore, function as important mechanisms that enable students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to pursue university education.

However, while financial considerations influence initial decision-making, correlation analysis alone cannot determine the relative importance of financial factors compared with academic or institutional determinants.

Regression analysis was therefore conducted to examine the predictive strength of each factor.

### Relationship Between Academic Factors and Student Enrollment

The correlation results show that academic-related factors also have a very strong positive relationship with student enrollment ( $r = 0.993$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This indicates that perceptions of academic quality, program relevance, lecturer competence, and graduate employability strongly influence students' decisions to enrol.

Survey responses showed strong agreement regarding the importance of academic program quality, lecturer competence, and graduate employability. These results were supported by interview findings emphasising that prospective students carefully evaluate the relevance of academic programs to labour market demands.

One interview participant observed:

*“Students are very sensitive to program quality and whether it matches current job market trends. Maintaining high academic standards assures parents and sponsors of value for money.” (KIS8). Another respondent highlighted the importance of program diversification and flexibility:*

*“Flexible delivery modes, including blended learning, have attracted working professionals and international students.” (KIS12)*

Teaching methods also emerged as an important factor influencing enrollment decisions. Interview respondents explained that modern teaching approaches enhance the attractiveness of universities to prospective students.

*“When students see demonstrations, case studies, and real-world projects integrated into courses, they feel more confident about enrolling.” (KIS11)*

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative evidence, therefore, demonstrates that academic quality plays a central role in shaping students' perceptions of universities.

**Relationship Between Institutional Factors and Student Enrollment**

Institutional factors were also found to have a very strong positive relationship with student enrollment ( $r = 0.992, p < .01$ ). Institutional characteristics examined in this study included university reputation, accreditation, leadership credibility, campus facilities, and alumni success.

Survey results indicated strong agreement that institutional reputation and infrastructure influence enrollment decisions. These findings were supported by qualitative interview evidence emphasising the role of campus facilities in shaping students' perceptions.

One respondent explained:

*“When prospective students visit, they immediately notice the quality of our classrooms, library resources, and hostel facilities. Many say these influenced their decision to enrol.” (KIS3).*

Another participant highlighted the importance of technology infrastructure:

*“The computer labs, Wi-Fi connectivity, and study spaces are some of the main attractions. Good facilities make students trust that the university cares about their success.” (KIS12)*

Institutional reputation was also emphasised as a critical enrollment driver.

*“Many students choose Uganda Christian University because of what they have heard about its graduates. The reputation for producing skilled professionals makes students confident they are making the right choice.” (KIS1)*

These findings suggest that institutional credibility, infrastructure, and branding significantly influence prospective students' perceptions.

**Regression Analysis of Enrollment Determinants**

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive influence of institutional factors, academic-related factors, and financial-related factors on student enrollment.

**Table 2: Regression Coefficients**

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
Constant	0.303	0.157	—	1.935	.057
Financial Factors	0.307	0.428	0.105	0.717	.475
Academic Factors	1.373	0.503	0.465	2.733	.008
Institutional Factors	1.279	0.323	0.426	3.965	.000

The regression results indicate that academic-related factors and institutional factors significantly predict student enrollment, while financial-related factors do not remain statistically significant when the other variables are included in the model.

**Influence of Financial Factors on Enrollment**

Although financial factors showed a strong correlation with enrollment, they did not significantly predict enrollment decisions in the regression model ( $\beta = 0.105, p = .475$ ).

This finding suggests that financial considerations may influence initial interest but do not independently determine final enrollment decisions when academic quality and institutional reputation are considered simultaneously.

Qualitative interview responses help explain this result. While respondents acknowledged that affordability influences access to higher education, they also emphasised that students ultimately seek universities that offer strong academic programs and credible qualifications.

Financial support mechanisms, therefore, appear to function primarily as enabling factors rather than primary determinants of university choice.

### **Influence of Academic Factors on Enrollment**

Academic-related factors emerged as the most influential predictors of student enrollment ( $\beta = 0.465$ ,  $p = .008$ ).

This finding indicates that improvements in academic program quality, lecturer competence, research opportunities, and graduate employability significantly increase the likelihood of students enrolling at the university.

Interview evidence strongly supports this result. Respondents consistently emphasised that academic quality shapes students' perceptions of educational value.

Participants explained that students increasingly view university education as an investment in their future careers. Programs that demonstrate strong employability outcomes, therefore, attract greater interest from prospective applicants.

The integration of modern teaching methods and digital learning technologies was also highlighted as strengthening institutional competitiveness in higher education.

### **Influence of Institutional Factors on Enrollment**

Institutional factors were also found to significantly influence student enrollment ( $\beta = 0.426$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These factors include institutional reputation, governance credibility, campus infrastructure, and alumni success.

Interview respondents emphasised that institutional reputation strongly shapes prospective students' perceptions of universities. Successful alumni and strong graduate employment outcomes reinforce public confidence in the institution.

Campus facilities were also identified as important determinants of university attractiveness. Modern classrooms, digital resources, and student accommodation facilities contribute to positive learning environments that influence enrollment decisions.

These findings indicate that institutional reputation and infrastructure complement academic quality in shaping university choice.

## **INTEGRATED DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings of this study reinforce and extend existing scholarship on student enrollment behaviour by demonstrating that while enrollment decisions are multidimensional, academic and institutional factors exert greater influence than financial considerations when analysed simultaneously. This aligns with prior studies, which emphasise that students increasingly adopt a value-oriented approach to higher education, prioritising long-term outcomes such as employability and career advancement over immediate cost concerns (Sarfraz et al., 2022; Willis & Yang, 2024).

The dominance of academic-related factors in predicting enrollment strongly corroborates earlier findings by Meng (2023) and Hu and Wang (2024), who argue that program relevance and graduate employability are central to student decision-making. However, this study extends their work by empirically demonstrating, through regression analysis, that academic quality not only correlates with enrollment but remains the strongest independent predictor when other variables are controlled. This supports Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), affirming that students perceive education as an investment and therefore prioritise institutions that maximise

future returns. Unlike studies that treat academic factors in isolation, this research situates them within a competitive institutional environment, thereby strengthening their explanatory power.

Institutional factors also emerged as significant predictors, consistent with studies highlighting the role of reputation, accreditation, and infrastructure in shaping student choice (Zufarova et al., 2022; Royadi et al., 2022). The findings agree with Washika (2025), who emphasises branding and public perception as critical drivers of enrollment. However, this study advances the literature by showing that institutional credibility does not operate independently but complements academic quality. The strong interaction between these two factors suggests a reinforcing relationship, where institutional reputation amplifies the perceived value of academic offerings. This integrated perspective addresses the gap identified by Kimani and Obwatho (2020) and Gyamfi et al. (2018), who noted the lack of multidimensional analysis in prior research.

In contrast, the role of financial factors presents a notable divergence from much of the existing literature. While studies such as Duarte (2025) and Chiramba and Ndofirepi (2023) emphasise financial constraints as primary determinants of access and enrollment, the present findings suggest a more nuanced interpretation. Although financial factors showed strong correlations with enrollment, they did not independently predict enrollment decisions in the regression model. This finding supports emerging arguments that affordability is necessary but not sufficient for enrollment, functioning more as an enabling condition than a decisive factor. In this regard, the study refines existing knowledge by distinguishing between access and choice—two concepts often conflated in previous research.

Furthermore, the findings align with Student Choice Theory (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), which posits that students evaluate multiple attributes simultaneously. However, this study extends the theory by empirically demonstrating a hierarchical structure among these attributes, with

academic and institutional factors taking precedence over financial considerations. This hierarchical ordering has not been sufficiently emphasised in earlier empirical studies, particularly within the Sub-Saharan African context.

Overall, the study contributes to the literature by integrating and comparing multiple determinants within a single analytical framework. It confirms prior findings on the importance of academic quality and institutional reputation, challenges the overemphasis on financial factors, and provides new empirical evidence on the relative and hierarchical influence of enrollment determinants. This positions the study as a significant extension of existing research, particularly in the context of private universities in developing economies.

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

This study examined perceptions of factors influencing student enrollment at Uganda Christian University, focusing on institutional, academic-related, and financial-related determinants. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined questionnaire surveys and key informant interviews, the study sought to identify the factors shaping enrollment decisions in a private university context. The results of the correlation analysis indicated strong positive relationships between enrollment and financial factors ( $r = 0.991$ ), academic factors ( $r = 0.993$ ), and institutional factors ( $r = 0.992$ ). These findings suggest that university choice is multidimensional and influenced by several interacting determinants.

However, regression analysis revealed that academic-related factors and institutional factors were the most significant predictors of enrollment decisions. Academic factors recorded the strongest standardised coefficient, indicating that perceptions of program quality, lecturer

competence, and graduate employability exert the greatest influence on students' university choices.

Institutional factors also significantly influenced enrollment decisions. Institutional reputation, campus infrastructure, and governance credibility were identified as important drivers of student confidence in the university. Financial factors, although strongly associated with enrollment, were not statistically significant predictors when other variables were considered. This suggests that financial affordability influences access to higher education but does not independently determine final enrollment decisions. Overall, the study concludes that sustaining student enrollment in private universities requires strategic investments in academic quality, institutional credibility, and supportive financial policies.

### **Policy Recommendations**

#### ***Strengthening Academic Program Quality***

Universities should prioritise the continuous improvement of academic programs to ensure their relevance to labour market demands. Curriculum reviews should involve industry stakeholders to align academic programs with emerging professional fields. Faculty development programs should also be strengthened to enhance teaching quality and research productivity.

#### ***Enhancing Institutional Reputation and Branding***

Universities should strengthen institutional branding strategies to enhance public perceptions of academic excellence and institutional credibility. Communication platforms should highlight graduate success stories, research achievements, and community impact.

#### ***Improving Campus Infrastructure***

Investments in modern learning facilities such as libraries, laboratories, digital learning platforms, and student accommodation are essential for

creating conducive learning environments. These facilities enhance students' academic experiences and strengthen institutional competitiveness.

#### ***Expanding Financial Support Programs***

Although financial factors were not statistically significant predictors of enrollment, they remain important enabling mechanisms. Universities should expand scholarship programs, introduce flexible tuition payment plans, and collaborate with financial institutions to improve access to student loans.

#### ***Strengthening Strategic Enrollment Management***

Universities should adopt comprehensive enrollment management frameworks that integrate recruitment, admissions, financial aid, and student retention strategies. Data-driven decision-making can help institutions monitor enrollment trends and respond proactively to emerging challenges.

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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW IDENTIFICATION CODES

### Key Informant / Staff Interviews (KIS)

- **KIS1 – KIS10:** Admissions office staff at Uganda Christian University
- **KIS11 – KIS13:** Marketing and Public Relations officers at Uganda Christian University
- **Coding purpose:** Codes were assigned to protect respondents' confidentiality while allowing traceability of qualitative evidence related to perceptions of enrollment factors, including institutional, academic, and financial factors.