A STUDY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS DECISION IN CHOOSING THE UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION
In India higher education is provided by both public and private institutions, which covers central universities, state universities, private universities, open universities etc., A degree programme is a major career development one which lead to employment or self employment opportunities for the students. So, what and where to study higher education is significant in taking a decision by the prospective student. Here the activities of higher education institution plays a vital role in enhancing the students learning experience and to expose the institution to the prospective students.

The present research paper analyses, what are the sources of information accessed by prospective learners, how the higher education provides the required information to the prospective students and how they are influenced and supported in making their decisions.

OBJECTIVES:
4. To analyse the sources of information about higher education institutions

5. To analyse the student support services of higher education institutions

6. To provide the feasible suggestions

METHODOLOGY:
To assess the prospective students views on choice and decision making of University, a feedback is collected from present students and alumni. The paper is based on the survey and personal interview with students, faculty, interaction amongst intellectuals and practical observations.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS CHOICE:
The various factors which influence the prospective student choice are discussed below.

Phase I: Creation of awareness of programmes offered by University: The following source of information are generally consulted while taking a decision.

* University Prospectus and website

* UGC and AICTE websites for recognition of degrees

* Search engines

* Faculty and admission helpdesk and placement cell staff

* Family and friends

* Printed and digital publicity measures

* Alumni experiences

* Present students feedback

* Reviews in social media

* Visit to University and Colleges etc.,

The prospective student may develop the awareness about University based upon his/her individual requirements of higher education like fees, financial support, distance from home, quality teaching & learning methods, placement support etc., Prospective students may be more interested to choose an institution that demonstrates a commitment to addressing their unique needs and providing support services.

Outcome: The awareness about University will result the following

*To develop enthusiasm / interest about Educational Institute

*The prospective learner should develop good academic knowledge & skills.

*The prospective learner should compare higher education with other institutions

*The prospective learner should feel that education with a particular institute is the best.

Phase II: Effective Students Support Services by the University:
The student support services are the same for regular mode, distance mode and online mode education etc., The student support system should be able to provide academic guidance to students, helping them navigate the challenges of their chosen courses.

The effective support system provides timely academic guidance to students, enhance their learning experience, make them overcoming the challenges during the course of study and to complete the programme successfully. So, an effective student support services will develop the learning skills of present learners and influence the decision making of prospective learners.

The following diagram shows the major aspects to be taken care by the University.

Diagram: Role of University in influencing the prospective students choice and deciosn making
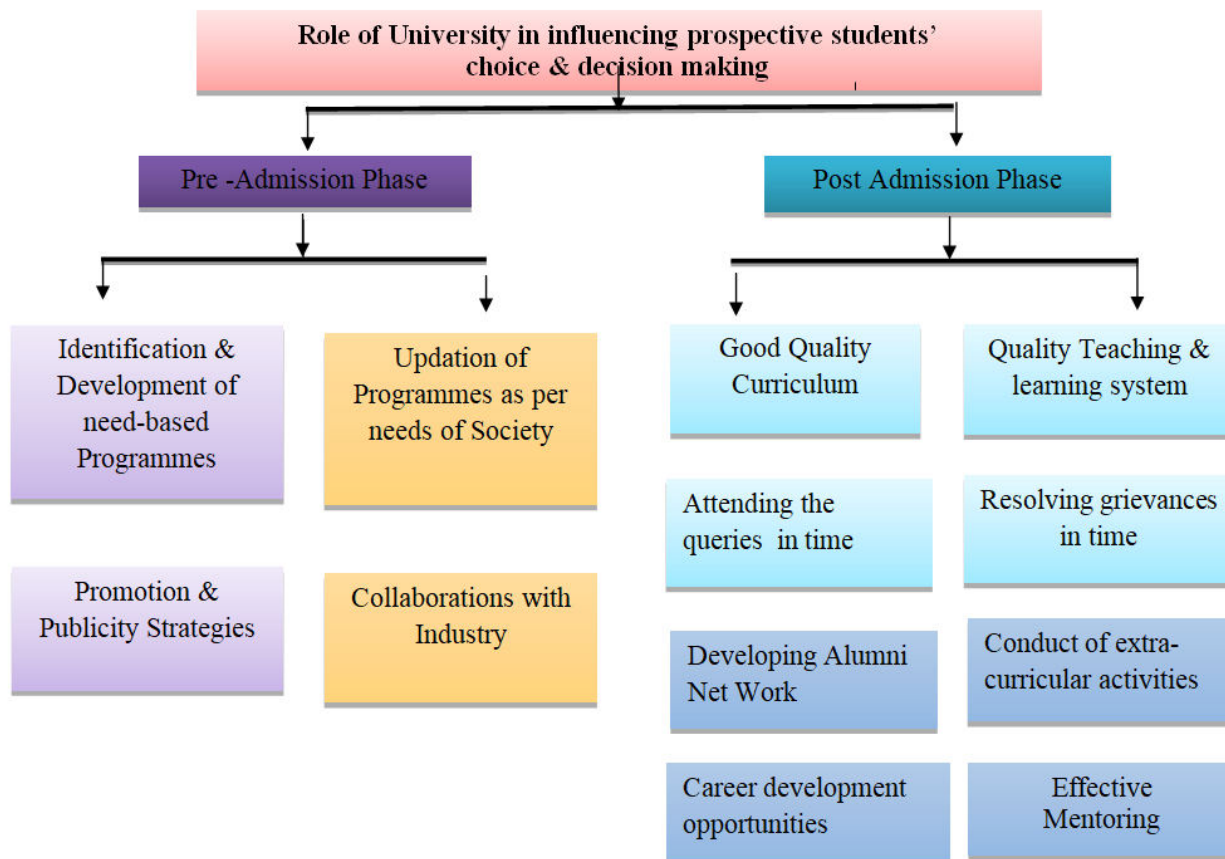
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The pre-admission and post-admission activities are equally important in influencing the prospective students decision making. University has to focus on the following aspects to appeal the significance of higher education.

Pre-admission Phase:
The higher education institutions can publicize their programmes and effectively through both traditional and modern promotional strategies. These strategies aim to enhance their visibility, influence the prospective students and establish a strong reputation. The publicity measures may include,

Digital promotional activities:
8.   University has to maintain an informative, student-friendly and regularly updated website

9.   Website should display the details of programmes, admission criteria, faculty, placements and campus tour etc.,

10. Using social media platforms like You Tube, Facebook, twitter, Instagram etc., to share all academic and non-academic activities

11. Sending personalised emails to potential students with programme details, financial support etc.,

12. Sharing alumni talks on their experience with University

13. Conducting online sessions to interact with faculty

14. Optimizing the website for search engines to improve visibility in search etc

Other promotional activities:

11. Advertising in local news papers

12. Conducting awareness campaigns in colleges and offices to inform about programmes, scholarships, financial aid and fee waivers etc.,

13. Academic collaboration with colleges and professional institutions to create more awareness

14. Delivering talks in television and radio

15. Participation in education fairs

16. Broadcast the advertisements in TV and radio channels

17. Display of posters and banners in all public places

18. Release of press news about new programmes, achievements or collaborations with other institutions etc,

19. Getting additional ranking like NAAC, NIRF etc., to gain credibility

20. Involving the alumni in outreach activities like webinars, orientations, pre-placement trainings etc.,

Post- Admission Phase:

The University has to take of internal development of system, which is also influence the prospective students decision making.

13. Identification & Development of need-based Programmes

14. Good quality curriculum and revision of curriculum as per needs of society

15. Well-structured academic activities Calander

16. Having the faculty with academic experience and industrial experience

17. Updating the skills of faculty periodically

18. Developing online teaching and learning system

19. Financial support system

20. Developing academic, research and employability skills among the students

21. Collaborations with Industry for Internships, placements etc.,

22. Career development opportunities through strong placement cell

23. Resolving the grievance in time

24. Periodical feedback system

Outcome:

The effective strategies, the higher education institutions can publicize their programmes, teaching & learning system, enhance their visibility and attract the diverse prospective students.

FEASIBLE SUGGESTIONS:

By ensuring that students receive the necessary academic support, the University can enhance their learning experience and increase their chances of successfully completing their studies. The Universities have to focus on the following areas to face the today challenges from the competitive world.

1. Website Updation & Publicity activities:

The University need to build a learner friendly website and able to attend the pre-admission and post admission queries both in offline and online.

2. Developing Industry collaborated Programmes:

The present scenario requires more industry collaborated programmes rather than academic oriented programmes. The present teaching & learning system should be able to prepare them as entrepreneurs.

3. Online Teaching & Learning:

All the Universities have adopted the blending learning and online learning systems as per the requirements of prospective learners. At the same time, the University has to invest in producing the effective online teaching and learning system. While using the online teaching & learning method, both the teachers and students need to have pre-training, digital infrastructure and good /sufficient internet facilities for successful teaching & learning.
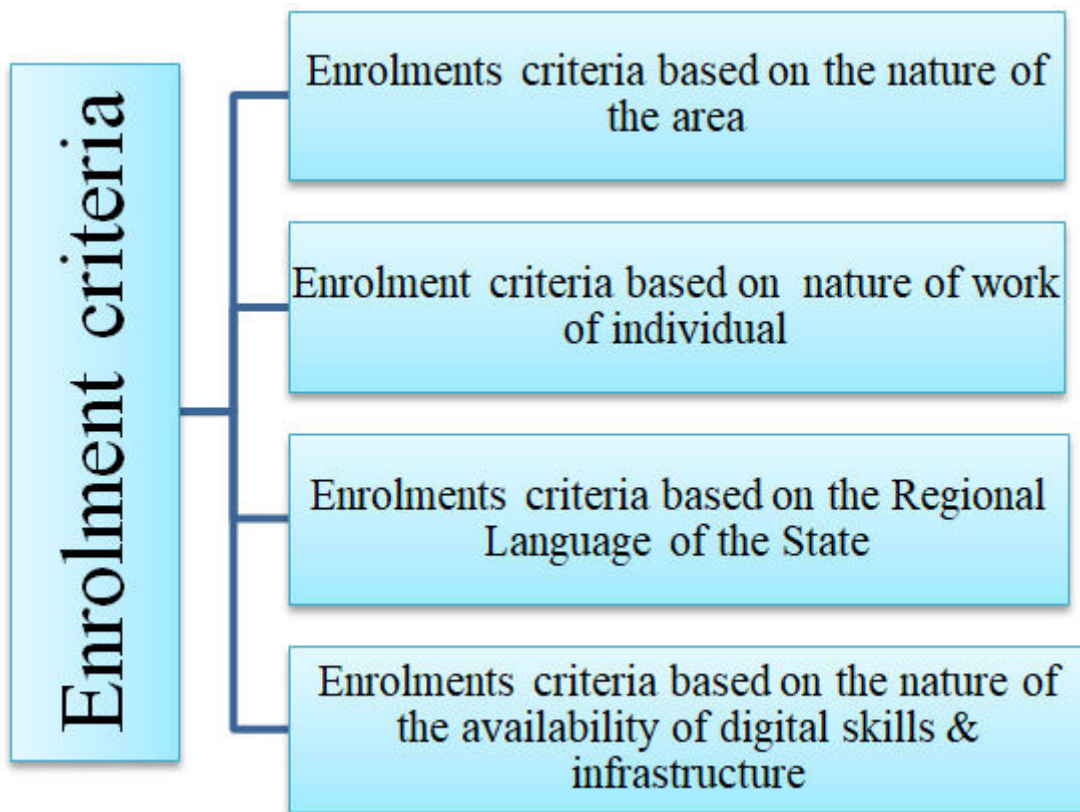

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4. Personalised Guidance:

University need to plan personalised guidance through mentor system for various categories like rural Students, urban students , above average students, average students, below average students etc., The following diagram shows the various enrolment criteria to assess the enrolments for different categories.

Diagram: Enrolment Criteria.

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5. Effective Way of Introducing the New Programmes:

Generally it is noticed that, University launches several programmes based upon the society needs and to get accreditations. But the enrolments in affiliating colleges or autonomous colleges varies depending upon the prospective student choice of study, medium of study, income level, placement opportunities and accessibility etc., Hence, University need to conduct pre-launch surveys before developing the programmes.

Example 1: An ideal way of introducing a Programme to provide effective student support services by the University.

g.   Creating awareness about pre-launch programme through publicity

h.   Developing the skills of faculty through trainings

i. Launch of Programme for identified target groups

j. Activation of additional Programmes in educational institutions

k. Post-launch publicity

l. Admitting learners

6. An ideal Academic Calendar for semester programme

An ideal academic calendar should provide sufficient time for academic activities and able to contribute for overall development of the student.

Example 2: the calendar of Semester based programme may have the following durations,

*Admission Cycle: One month to one and half months

*Teaching & Learning activities: three and half months to four months

*Examinations: one month for examinations.

Whenever University extends the admission cycle extends, the time duration for support services will be reduced.

7. Alumni Engagement

Engaging alumni as mentors, guest speakers, or career advisors can create a strong connection between current and former students. When alumni share their success stories and experiences, it can inspire prospective students to choose the institution.

During the survey, majority alumni expressed the quality teaching & learning is priority criteria, while choosing the university and followed by the career opportunities, learning environment, financial support etc.,

In spite of all these, one should remember that, cost of living plays a vital role in creating higher education opportunities in rural & backward areas. Highly populated area people may prefer short duration job oriented programmes rather than higher education programmes.

CONCLUSION

The systematic planning and implementation of academic and non-academic activities contribute for higher rate of successful completion of programmes & career development of students. A satisfied student is positive ambassador of university and contributes for the enhancement of enrolments and goodwill. At the same time, a dissatisfied student acts as a negative ambassador and ruins the brand image of the university.

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