

External factors influencing students' decisions in choosing a public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, 2024

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Abstract

Background: Higher education plays a crucial role in improving the competence and quality of human resources, as the main pillar of nation building. Data shows that Indonesia has 3,107 universities, of which 95.97% are private universities. In the field of public health, the Faculty of Public Health of Halu Oleo University (UHO), which was established in 2011, shows significant development with two study programs and six specializations relevant to the needs of the community. The increasing interest in the UHO Public Health Study Program, which is accredited B, reflects the high public interest in this field. Public health graduates have broad employment opportunities, thanks to the interdisciplinary skills they acquire. This study aims to analyze the factors that affect students' decisions in choosing a specialization in the UHO Public Health Study Program, which is expected to provide insights for curriculum development and strategies to increase learning interest in the field of public health.

Methods: The research method uses a quantitative approach with an exploratory research type. The sample in this study is active students of each batch in the public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University. The number of samples was 392 respondents. The sampling technique uses Proportionated Stratified Random Sampling. Data analysis using SMARTPLS 4.

Results: The results showed that there was an influence on the role of parents with a *path coefficient output value* of 0.176 and a construct value above 1.96 of 3.995 and a p value of $0.000 < 0.05$; there was an influence of promotion with a *path coefficient output value* of 0.230 and a construct value above 1.96 of 4.311 and a p value of $0.000 < 0.05$; there was an influence of consideration of job availability with a path coefficient output value of 0.230 and a construct value above 1.96 0.508 and the construction value above 1.96 is 9.908 and the p value is $0.000 < 0.05$; There was no peer influence with a *path cognitive output* value of 0.034 and a construct value below 1.96 which was 0.795 and a p value of $0.427 > 0.05$ with the student's decision in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University.

Conclusion: There is an influence of parents, promotion and job availability with students' decisions in choosing the Public Health study program and there is no peer influence on students' decisions in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University. Therefore, the study program management needs to improve the promotion strategy through various media, such as social media, official websites, and other digital platforms or by involving parents in the process of introducing the study program through activities such as educational seminars, parent meetings, or information campaigns about prospective graduates. In addition, the faculty needs to develop cross-sector cooperation to improve student competence so that the graduates produced are competent and ready to work.

Keywords: External factors; Parents; Promotion; Available Jobs; Decision with Friends; Public Health.

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1. Introduction

Every country wants a glorious future. A glorious future will be obtained with high-quality human resources and not just from its abundant natural wealth. Human resources and their quality equipped with mastery of science and technology are factors which determines the pattern and direction of community economic development. One of the ways to realize quality human resources is education. The importance of the role of education for the progress of nation development has made many countries prioritize development in the education sector (1).

There is a change in the scientific paradigm from a reductionist-deterministic approach to a holistic-synergistic approach that emphasizes more on the integration of scientific functions. Although the development of various disciplines tends to examine more specific aspects, many real problems are closely related to each other, so they require multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary studies. This cross-disciplinary study is increasingly considered important in dealing with the complexity of life, considering that each element has a role as an important component in an interdependent network. Thus, the development of science fragmented within the strict boundaries of the discipline is no longer sufficient to provide comprehensive solutions to the realities of life.

Universities, as institutions providing higher education, have the main goal of mastering and developing science and technology to improve people's living standards. Higher education is also one of the main pillars that is expected to be able to encourage the change of a nation through improving the quality of human resources. As a non-profit organization, educational institutions serve a wide range of community groups, including students, students, and the general public, who are collectively referred to as "stakeholders"(2).

Based on the Indonesian Statistics report, in 2022 there will be 3,107 universities throughout Indonesia. This figure has decreased by 0.25% compared to the previous year which reached 3,115 universities. Of these, the majority of universities, namely 2,982 units or 95.97% of the total universities, are private universities (PTS)(3).

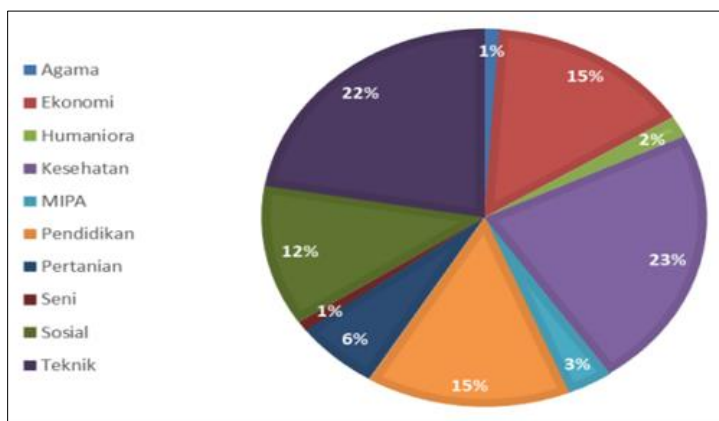


Figure 1 Percentage of distribution of fields of science in Eastern Indonesia

In Eastern Indonesia, the percentage of distribution of science fields shows a diverse distribution. The Health Sciences field is the largest with 23%, followed by the Engineering Sciences field at 22%. The fields of Economics and Education each cover 15%, while the Social Sciences field is at 12%. The Field of Agricultural Sciences has a percentage of 6%, while the Field of Natural Sciences covers 3%. The fields of Humanities and Arts only reached 2% and 1%, respectively, similar to the Field of Religious Sciences which was also at 1%(4). Public health education is currently experiencing rapid development in line with the increasing need for health resources to support the improvement of public health degrees. Competence in public health education is a very crucial aspect in producing qualified and professional graduates. Public health education institutions play a strategic role in designing and formulating competencies that must be possessed by public health scholars.

The Faculty of Public Health (FKM) Halu Oleo University (UHO) was established in 2011 based on the Rector's Decree Number: 410a/SK/UN29/PP/2011. Initially, this faculty only had one study program, namely the Public Health Study Program. After eight years, FKM UHO has developed and added a new study program, namely the Nutrition Study Program, so that it now has two study programs. The history of the Public Health Study Program itself began in 2002 as an internal study program at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences based on the Rector's Decree Number: 150/SK/J29/PP/2002. At that time, this study program began to accept regular afternoon students. In 2004, its status

became definitive based on the Decree of the Director General of Higher Education Number: 3065/D/T/2004, dated August 9, 2004. Since then, Halu Oleo University has begun to accept regular morning class students through local selection. The improvement of the status of the Public Health Study Program to the Department of Public Health continues to be carried out and finally determined through the Rector's Decree Number: 12a/H29.SK/PP/2011 on January 26, 2011 (5).

The Community Health Study Program of FKM UHO currently has 6 (six) specializations, namely (1) Health Policy Administration (2) Environmental Health (3) Occupational Safety and Health (4) Epidemiology (5) Health Promotion (6) Health Nutrition. In 2018 the Kesmas Study Program was again accredited B by the Independent Accreditation Institute for Indonesian Health Higher Education (LAM-PTKes) as evidenced by the Decree of the Management of the LAM-PTKes Association Number: 0150/LAMPTKes/Akr/Sar/III/2019 (5) The public health study program is one of the most in-demand study programs every year in the health sector (sultra.tribunnews.com). The process of accepting new students of the UHO Public Health Study Program is taken through 3 (three) paths, namely: (1) National Selection for State University Entrance (SNMPTN); (2) Joint Selection for State University Entrance (SBMPTN); and (3) Independent Selection for State University Entrance (SMMPTN). The number of applicants who will continue their studies at UHO has increased significantly from year to year, both in terms of the number and origin of the candidates. The development of new student admissions for FKM UHO 2017-2020 is as follows.

Table 1 Profile of the number of applicants and New Students Accepted for the FKM UHO Health Study Program

Study Program	2017/2018		2018/2019		2019/2020		2020/2021	
	Register	Accepted	Register	Accepted	Register	Accepted	Register	Accepted
Kesmas	789	357	698	309	751	346	895	391
Sum	789	357	698	309	751	346	895	391

Source: FKM UHO, 2022.

The Faculty of Public Health (FKM) Halu Oleo University (UHO) has a fairly high number of new student admissions every year. This is due to the status of FKM UHO as the only organizer of the Public Health Study Program from a state university in Southeast Sulawesi Province, as well as its success in achieving B accreditation.

Public Health is a discipline that focuses on disease prevention, prolonging life, and improving people's physical and mental health. This field provides a wide range of job opportunities, not only in the health sector, but also in various other sectors. Students of the Department of Public Health not only study health aspects, but also social sciences, thus providing flexibility for graduates to work in private companies, government agencies, as well as become researchers, social workers, public health extension workers, or product and health quality control personnel. Graduate salary levels also vary, depending on the type of job and the location of the workplace. With this background, the author is interested in researching "Analysis of Factors Influencing Students' Decisions in Choosing a Specialization in the Public Health Study Program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University.

2. Methods

The research method uses a quantitative approach. The sample in this study is active students of each batch in the public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University. The number of samples was 392 respondents. The sampling technique uses Proportionated Stratified Random Sampling. The research variables included: the role of parents, promotions, job availability and peer decisions. Data analysis using SMARTPLS 4.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Univariate Analysis

3.1.1. Gender

Table 2 Distribution of Respondent Frequency by Gender in the Public Health Study Program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University in 2024

Gender	Number (n)	Percent (%)
Woman	354	90.3
Man	38	9.7
Total	392	100

Source: Primary data, 2024

Based on gender data, the majority of students of the Public Health Study Program are women, with a total of 354 people or 90.3%, while male students number 38 people or 9.7%. This shows that female students are more dominant and more involved as subjects in this study than male students.

3.1.2. Year of the Class

Table 3 Distribution of Respondent Frequency Based on Cohort Year in the Public Health Study Program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University in 2024

Year of the Class	Number (n)	Percent (%)
2018	6	1.5
2019	6	1.5
2020	21	5.4
2021	71	18.1
2022	73	18.6
2023	70	17.9
2024	145	37.0
Total	392	100

Source: Primary data, 2024

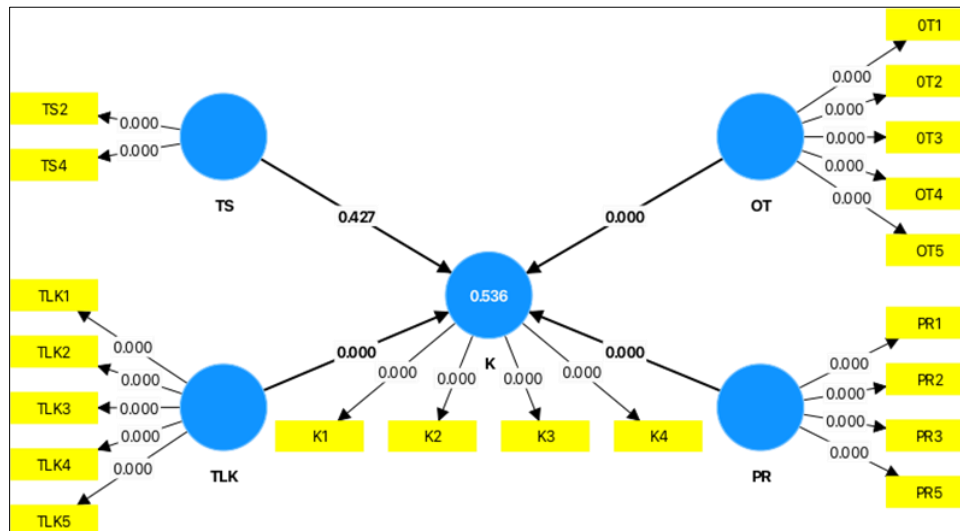
Based on the year of the batch, the respondents in this study were dominated by students of the class of 2024, as many as 145 people or 37%. The class of 2022 is second with 73 people or 18.6%, followed by the class of 2021 with 71 people or 18.1%. Meanwhile, the 2018 and 2019 batches each had the least number of respondents, namely 6 people or 1.5%.

3.2. Hypothesis Testing

Table 4 Path coefficient hypothesis

Var	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
OT->K	0.176	0.179	0.044	3.995	0.000
PR -> K	0.230	0.230	0.053	4.311	0.000
TLK -> K	0.508	0.505	0.051	9.908	0.000
TS -> K	0.034	0.035	0.042	0.795	0.427

Source: Primary data processed by SMARTPLS 4, 2024



Source: Primary data processed by SMARTPLS 4, 2024

Figure 2 Bootstrapping model Hypothesis

3.2.1. Parents

There is an influence of the role of parents with the student's decision in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University with a coefficient value of 0.176. The result is a t-statistic for constructs above 1.96, which is 3.995 and at probability values (p-values) with values smaller than 0.05, which is 0.000, so it can be concluded that H_a is accepted and H_o is rejected.

The parental factor is often considered one of the important elements in students' academic decision-making, especially in a more collective culture like Indonesia. Parents can influence students' decisions through: 1) Financial support: Parents who play a role in financing education can provide direction or recommendations regarding the choice of study program. 2) Influence of family aspirations: Students may be influenced by their parents' expectations or aspirations to choose a certain career that is considered stable or prestigious, such as in the health field. 3) Guidance and advice: Parents who provide guidance or advice regarding career futures also contribute to their child's academic decisions (6)

The significant influence of parents in this decision confirms that students are not completely autonomous in choosing a study program, but involve input from families, especially parents, in decision-making. Research by Hendricks et al. (2019) shows that parents play an important role in providing advice and guidance to their children in choosing a course of study, especially in areas that are considered to have good career prospects, such as public health (7). Research by Santoso et al. (2020) found that the role of parents, especially in providing financial and emotional support, has a significant influence on students' decisions in choosing a study program in higher education, especially in Indonesia (8).

The influence of parents has been proven to have a significant impact on students' decisions in choosing the Public Health study program at Halu Oleo University. This is in line with previous research that shows that parental involvement in their children's educational decisions is one of the key factors. Parents not only provide financial support but also advice and direction regarding academic and career choices.

3.2.2. Promotion

There is a promotional influence with the student's decision in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University with a coefficient value of 0.230. The result is a t-statistic for constructs above 1.96, which is 4.311 and at probability values (p-values) with a value less than 0.05, which is 0.000, so it can be concluded that H_a is accepted and H_o is rejected.

Promotion, in the context of education, can include a variety of marketing and information activities aimed at attracting prospective students, such as: 1) Social media campaigns: The effective use of social media platforms can increase the visibility of the study program and attract the interest of prospective students. 2) Educational exhibitions: Activities such as educational exhibitions or roadshows to schools are an effective means to introduce study programs. 3)

Marketing materials (brochures, websites): Clear and detailed information about study programs, facilities, and career opportunities can influence prospective students in choosing a study program.

Effective promotion not only attracts the attention of prospective students but also provides in-depth information about the study program making it easier for them to make decisions. Previous research has also found that promotion plays an important role in students' academic decision-making: Research by Kotler and Fox (1985) highlighted that effective marketing strategies in education, such as advertising and direct promotion, can influence the perception of prospective students about the quality and attractiveness of the course (9). Research by Ivy (2008) also shows that targeted marketing communication and good promotion strategies can help colleges attract prospective students who fit the profile of the institution.

Research by Wibowo et al. (2020) shows that digital marketing campaigns and interactive approaches, such as webinars and social media, are very effective in attracting students to choose public health study programs, especially in the current digital era (10). Research by Supriyanto and Maulida (2021) found that consistent and sustainable promotion programs through various communication channels, both online and offline, contribute significantly to students' decisions in choosing study programs in higher education (11).

Promotion has been proven to have a significant influence on students' decisions in choosing the Public Health study program at Halu Oleo University. This is in line with previous research which shows that effective promotion strategies can increase the attractiveness of study programs and influence the perception of prospective students. Through proper promotion, study programs can increase the awareness of prospective students and help them in making academic decisions.

3.2.3. Available Jobs

There is an influence of consideration of job availability with student decisions in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University with a coefficient value of 0.508. The result is a t-statistic for a construct above 1.96 which is 9.908 and a probability value (p-value) less than 0.05 which is 0.000 so that it can be concluded that H_a is accepted and H_o is rejected.

The availability of jobs is one of the crucial factors considered by students when choosing a study program. Students tend to be more interested in choosing a study program that provides clear career prospects and high job opportunities after graduation. Some of the reasons why job availability is important in academic decisions include: 1) Future economic security: Study programs with clear job prospects provide students with a sense of security regarding their future. 2) Interest in the field of work: In addition to economic factors, students also consider their interest in jobs in the field of public health. 3) Job market demand: Courses related to fields that have high demand in the job market, such as public health, often attract more students.

Previous research has also shown that job availability is one of the main factors in academic decisions: Research by Perna (2006) shows that job prospects are one of the most important factors in students' decisions to choose a study program, especially in career-oriented fields such as health (12). Research by Fadhli et al. (2020) found that students are more likely to choose study programs that have a direct connection to emerging industries, including public health, because of clear and stable job prospects (13). Research by Alwi and Amalia (2021) also shows that study programs with high job opportunities attract more students because they provide guarantees for their economic future (14).

The availability of jobs has been proven to have a significant influence on students' decisions in choosing the Public Health study program at Halu Oleo University. This is in line with previous research findings that show that job opportunities are one of the main factors in students' academic decisions. With clear job prospects and ever-increasing market demand in the field of public health, this course of study is an attractive option for many students.

3.2.4. Decisions with Friends

There is no peer influence with the student's decision in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University with a coefficient value of 0.034. The result is a t-statistic for constructs below 1.96, which is 0.795 and at probability values (p-values) greater than 0.05, which is 0.427, so it can be concluded that H_a is rejected and H_o is accepted.

Although friends often have an influence in decision-making related to social activities or daily life, in academic contexts such as the choice of course of study, the influence of friends is not always the main factor. This may be due to the

following factors: 1) Individual decisions: The choice of study program is more of a personal decision based on personal interests, career prospects, and desires, as opposed to decisions influenced by social environments such as friends. 2) Stronger factors: Other factors, such as job availability, future prospects, or academic interests, may be more dominant in influencing a student's decision. 3) Family support role: Often, academic decisions are influenced more by family or parents than peers.

Previous studies examining the influence of friends on academic decisions have often shown mixed results.

Research by Eccles and Wigfield (2002) shows that the influence of friends in academic decision-making is limited and more related to the choice of social or extracurricular activities than major academic decisions such as course selection (15). Research by Hossler et al. (1999) confirms that friends can influence a student's social environment, but in large academic decisions, factors such as family support and personal interests play a more important role (16). Research by Jang et al. (2020) found that the influence of friends is stronger on social aspects or togetherness in learning, but less significant in major decisions such as the choice of study program, where students are more likely to prioritize economic factors and personal interests. Research by Syahputra et al. (2021) found that although friends can influence general preferences related to the field of study, in the end students' decisions are more influenced by career prospects and recommendations from family or academic mentors (17).

The decision with friends does not have a significant influence on the student's decision to choose the Public Health study program at Halu Oleo University. This is in line with previous research which showed that in the context of large academic decisions, such as the choice of study program, students are more influenced by internal factors (personal interests, career prospects) and family support, rather than the influence of friends.

4. Conclusion

- There is an influence on the role of parents with students' decisions in choosing a public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University
- There is an influence of promotion on students' decisions in choosing the Public Health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University
- There is an influence of consideration of job availability with student decisions in choosing a public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University
- There is no peer influence with student decisions in choosing a public health study program, Faculty of Public Health, Halu Oleo University

Suggestion

- The Study Program Management needs to improve its promotion strategy through various media, such as social media, official websites, and other digital platforms or by involving parents in the process of introducing the study program through activities such as educational seminars, parent meetings, or information campaigns about prospective graduates.
- The Faculty needs to develop cross-sector cooperation to improve student competence so that the graduates produced are competent and ready to work

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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