

## The Impact of University Choice Factors on University Life Satisfaction and Intention to Persist in Studies

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of university choice factors on university life satisfaction and intention to persist in studies among first-year university students, and to verify the mediating effect of university life satisfaction in the relationship between university choice factors and intention to persist in studies. A survey was conducted with first-year students at H University located in Chungcheongnam-do, and a total of 279 valid questionnaires were used for the final analysis. The measurement instruments consisted of items assessing university choice factors, university life satisfaction, and intention to persist in studies. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0, including exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

The results indicated that, first, among university choice factors, university awareness and educational excellence had significant effects on education satisfaction, while university usability and educational excellence had significant effects on services and facilities satisfaction. Second, among the sub-factors of university life satisfaction, education satisfaction had a significant effect on intention to persist in studies, whereas services and facilities satisfaction did not show a significant effect. Third, university usability, educational excellence, and admission probability among university choice factors had direct effects on intention to persist in studies. Finally, university life satisfaction was found to partially mediate the relationship between university choice factors and intention to persist in studies.

These findings suggest a structural relationship in which students' expectations and perceptions formed during the university choice process influence their university life experiences and subsequently lead to academic persistence behaviors. This study provides foundational data for developing strategies for student recruitment and retention, highlighting the importance of educational quality and education satisfaction in higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** University Choice Factors, University Life Satisfaction, Intention to Persist in Studies, Education Satisfaction, University Usability.

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### 1. Introduction

In recent years, declining school-age populations and rapid changes in the higher education environment have emerged as major challenges for universities worldwide. In South Korea, the structural entrenchment of ultra-low fertility rates has led to a substantial reduction in the college-age population, directly and indirectly affecting student recruitment, financial sustainability, and the maintenance of educational quality in higher education institutions (Statistics Korea, 2023). The number of live births decreased sharply from 640,000 in 2000 to 261,000 in 2021, resulting in a structural mismatch in which university enrollment capacities exceed the available pool of prospective students (Korean Council for University Education, 2022).

The impact of these demographic changes has been particularly severe for regional universities compared to institutions located in metropolitan areas. Regional universities face structural disadvantages in student recruitment due to relatively weaker geographic accessibility and limited educational resources. These conditions have contributed to declining institutional competitiveness and, in some cases, threats to departmental sustainability. Recent admissions cycles in Korea have reported a growing number of academic departments with no applicants, most of which are concentrated in regional universities, underscoring the seriousness of the issue (Yonhap News, 2023).

Within this changing context, universities are increasingly viewed not merely as selective institutions but as educational service organizations that must actively attract and retain students. Shin (1997) emphasized the need for a conceptual shift that recognizes students as consumers in the college choice process, arguing that an understanding of students' decision-making behavior is critical to institutional sustainability. This perspective has been widely supported in subsequent international higher education research.

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) conceptualized the college choice process as a multistage sequence involving information acquisition, preference formation, and final decision-making. Chapman (1981) further proposed that institutional characteristics such as reputation, faculty quality, educational costs, and geographic location interact to shape students' college choice decisions. Building on these frameworks, Perna (2006) argued that college choice represents a multidimensional decision-making process influenced by both individual socioeconomic backgrounds and broader institutional and policy contexts.

More recent studies suggest that college choice factors extend beyond institutional prestige or brand recognition to encompass more functional and experience-based dimensions, including educational quality, learning environment, employability outcomes, and overall institutional usability (Soutar & Turner, 2002; Briggs, 2006). Kuo and Chen (2014) demonstrated that students' perceptions of educational quality and learning experiences significantly influence long-term academic persistence, while Alstete (2020) noted that intensifying competition in the higher education sector has led students to adopt increasingly rational and strategic criteria when selecting universities.

University life satisfaction has been identified as a critical mediating variable linking college choice factors to students' academic behaviors. Elliott and Shin (2002) defined university life satisfaction as students' overall evaluation of educational services and reported that it has a direct effect on academic engagement and persistence intentions. Similarly, Kuh et al. (2008) and Robbins et al. (2004) provided empirical evidence that the quality of students' collegiate experiences predicts key outcomes such as sense of belonging, academic achievement, and persistence.

Tinto's (1993) student departure theory further supports this relationship by positing that academic persistence is largely determined by students' levels of academic and social integration within the institution, thereby positioning university life satisfaction as a key antecedent of persistence intention. In addition, Baker and Robnett (2012) and Braxton et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of the pre-enrollment phase, demonstrating that students' expectations and perceptions formed prior to admission are closely linked to post-enrollment evaluations and subsequent academic behaviors.

Previous studies conducted in Korea have similarly reported significant relationships among college choice factors, university life satisfaction, and academic persistence intention (Lim, 2019; Yoon, 2017). However, many of these studies are limited by fragmented analyses of individual variables or insufficient differentiation of college choice factors. Moreover, empirical research that comprehensively examines the structural relationships among college choice determinants, university life satisfaction, and academic persistence intention particularly among first-year students at regional universities remains relatively limited.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to identify key determinants of college choice and to examine their effects on university life satisfaction and academic persistence intention. In addition, this study seeks to explore differences based on students' characteristics in order to derive practical implications. By clarifying the structural relationships linking college choice, university life experiences, and academic persistence behaviors, this study aims to provide empirically grounded insights relevant to the contemporary Korean higher education context.

## 2. Research Method.

### 2.1. Participants

This study selected participants who were deemed capable of contributing to the development of marine leisure sports in small and medium-sized cities. The selection criteria were experts with experience, specialized knowledge, and expertise related to marine leisure sports. Purposeful sampling, a nonprobability sampling technique, was used for the sampling method. Based on previous research on the Delphi technique [9], which suggests that a consensus group of around 20 experts is appropriate, a total of 17 individuals were ultimately selected. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, and <Table 1> shows the composition of the expert group.

Table 1. characteristics of respondents (N=279)

	category	frequency	proportion
gender	male	166	59.5%
	female	113	40.5%
typeofcollegeadmission	early admission	197	70.6%
	regular admission	82	29.4%
fieldofstudy	humanities & social sciences	97	34.8%
	engineering & science	40	14.3%
	arts & physical education	51	18.3%
	undeclared major	91	32.6%
typeofhighschoolattended	general high school	257	92.1%
	specialized high school	2	0.7%
	autonomous private high school	7	2.5%
	vocational high school	9	3.2%
	others	4	1.7%
typeofresidence	dormitory	193	69.2%
	living alone	68	24.4%
	commuting	18	6.5%

### 2.2. Survey Tool

This study employed a questionnaire-based empirical design to examine the effects of university choice factors on university life satisfaction and intention to persist in studies. The questionnaire was developed by adapting measurement items from previous studies to reflect the specific context of the present research.

The survey instrument consisted of four sections: (1) demographic characteristics, (2) university choice factors, (3) university life satisfaction, and (4) intention to persist in studies. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

#### 2.2.1. University Choice Factors

University choice factors were conceptualized as the determinants influencing students' decisions to select a university. Measurement items were derived from instruments used in previous studies by Kim (2008) and Lim (2020). A total of 22 items were included to assess university choice factors in this study.

#### 2.2.2. University Life Satisfaction

University life satisfaction was measured using items adapted from the university customer satisfaction scale of the National Customer Satisfaction Index (NCSI) and the measurement instrument employed in the study by Han (2008). University life satisfaction was operationalized as a two-factor construct consisting of education satisfaction and services and facilities satisfaction.

#### 2.2.3. Intention to Persist in Studies

Intention to persist in studies was conceptualized as students' willingness to continue their academic studies at the university. Based on Shin's original measurement instrument, items used in studies by Yoon (2014), Seung (2017), and Lee (2017) were adapted for the present research. Intention to persist in studies was measured using four items.

### 2.3. Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Instruments

To assess the construct validity and factor structure of the measurement variables used in this study, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted. Principal component analysis was employed as the extraction method, and Varimax rotation was applied. As shown in <Table 2>, four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted for the university choice factors, accounting for 73.05% of the total variance. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha indicated acceptable internal consistency, with all constructs demonstrating values of .763 or higher.

Table 2. factor analysis of university choice factors

Construct (cronbach' s $\alpha$ )	measurement items	factor loading	communality	eigenvalue	explained variance
university usability (.867)	convenient urban environment	.828	.706	4.617	20.988
	tuition level	.775	.639		
	scholarship programs	.762	.666		
	commuting time	.748	.564		
	dormitory and amenities	.710	.706		
	operation of extracurricular programs	.586	.625		
	university fairs and information sessions	.526	.524		
	friends' recommendation	.522	.464		
university awareness (.869)	university reputation/brand	.800	.712	4.377	19.894
	graduate employment rate	.760	.673		
	checking potential for growth	.716	.604		
	history of the university	.648	.551		
	quality of faculty	.620	.665		
	official website and sns	.582	.586		
	personal interest	.579	.615		
educational excellence (.801)	quality of practice/training facilities	.808	.731	2.596	11.799
	opportunities for field	.793	.698		
	training/internships	.620	.649		
	specialization of the major	.578	.619		
	systematic structure of major programs				
admission probability (.763)	because of likelihood of acceptance	.860	.770	2.272	10.328
	reflecting expected admission scores	.797	.682		
	university admissions system	.676	.553		
KMO= .883 Bartlett test of sphericity= 3143.150, p< .01, total explained variance= 63.777%					

The results of the factor analysis for university life satisfaction are presented in <Table 3>. Two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted, accounting for 64.021% of the total variance. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha demonstrated high internal consistency, with all constructs exhibiting values of .888 or higher.

Table 3. factor Analysis of university life satisfaction

Construct (cronbach's $\alpha$ )	measurement items	factor loading	communality	eigenvalue	explained variance
education satisfaction (.916)	satisfaction with my major	.806	.713	5.381	35.876
	social reputation	.781	.634		
	teaching method satisfaction	.734	.719		
	major satisfaction	.727	.670		
	current life satisfaction	.722	.644		
	necessity in life	.695	.486		
	quality of education	.674	.721		
	interpersonal relationships	.661	.473		
	social reputation	.575	.492		
services and facilities satisfaction (.888)	campus living facility satisfaction	.847	.717	4.222	28.145
	welfare facilities	.814	.692		
	administrative services	.743	.706		
	administrative system	.736	.719		
	general education satisfaction	.617	.614		
	research facility satisfaction	.606	.604		
KMO= .929 Bartlett test of sphericity= 2879.820, p< .01, total explained variance= 64.021%					

For intention to persist in studies, the factor analysis results shown in <Table 4> indicated a single-factor structure explaining 62.508% of the total variance. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha revealed a coefficient of .868, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Table 4. factor Analysis of intention to persist in studies

construct (cronbach's $\alpha$ )	measurement items	factor loading	communality	eigenvalue	explained variance
academic persistence intention (.868)	importance of graduation	.904	.818	2.885	72.114
	willingness to graduate	.901	.812		
	willingness to overcome academic constraints	.821	.675		
	intention to enroll	.762	.3580		
KMO= .800 Bartlett test of sphericity= 594.360 p< .01, total explained variance= 72.114%					

## 2.4. Data Processing

The collected data were statistically analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Frequency analysis was conducted to examine the demographic characteristics of the participants. Exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis were performed to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine relationships among the study variables, and multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate the effects among variables. In addition, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine differences according to participants' characteristics.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Effects of University Choice Factors on University Life Satisfaction

To examine the effects of university choice factors on university life satisfaction, multiple regression analyses were conducted using education satisfaction and services and facilities satisfaction as dependent variables.

The results of the analysis examining the effects of university choice factors on education satisfaction indicated that the regression model was statistically significant ( $F = 53.367$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Among the university choice factors, university awareness and educational excellence were found to have statistically significant effects on education satisfaction.

Table 5. Effects of University Choice Factors on Education Satisfaction

	$\beta$ (t-value)	VIF	F	$R^2$	Dubin-Watson
constant	1.369(7.363)**	-			
university usability	.056(1.261)	1.419			
university awareness	.297(5.369)**	2.110	53.367	.438 (.430)	1.901
educational excellence	.305(5.658)**	1.744			
admission probability	.008(.201)	1.172			

\*  $P < .05$ , \*\*  $P < .01$

The results of the analysis examining the effects of university choice factors on services and facilities satisfaction indicated that the regression model was statistically significant ( $F = 29.582$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Among the university choice factors, university usability and educational excellence were found to have statistically significant effects on services and facilities satisfaction.

Table 6. Effects of University Choice Factors on Services and Facilities Satisfaction

	$\beta$ (t-value)	VIF	F	$R^2$	Dubin-Watson
constant	1.374(5.755)**	-			
university usability	.349(6.134)**	1.419			
university awareness	.112(1.579)**	2.110	29.582	.302 (.291)	2.028
educational excellence	.218(3.160)**	1.744			
admission probability	-.047(-.891)	1.172			

\*  $P < .05$ , \*\*  $P < .01$

### 3.2. Effects of University Life Satisfaction on Intention to Persist in Studies

The results of the hypothesis testing using multiple regression analysis indicated that the regression model was statistically significant ( $F = 126.446$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Among the components of university life satisfaction, satisfaction with university education was found to have a statistically significant effect on intention to persist in studies.

Table 7. Effects of University Life Satisfaction on Intention to Persist in Studies

	$\beta$ (t-value)	VIF	F	$R^2$	Dubin-Watson
constant	1.442(8.320)**	-			
satisfaction with university education	.809(12.373)**	2.003	126.446	.478 (.474)	1.828
university services and facilities satisfaction	-.096(1.694)	2.003			

\*  $P < .05$ , \*\*  $P < .01$

### 3.3. Effects of University Choice Factors on Intention to Persist in Studies

The results of the hypothesis testing using multiple regression analysis indicated that the regression model was statistically significant ( $F = 54.592$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Among the university choice factors, university usability, educational excellence, and admission probability were found to have statistically significant effects on intention to persist in studies.

Table 8. Effects of University Choice Factors on Intention to Persist in Studies

	$\beta$ (t-value)	VIF	F	$R^2$	Dubin-Watson
university usability	1.643(8.355)**	-			
university awareness	-.181(-3.853)**	1.419			
educational excellence	.289(4.951)**	2.110	54.592	.444 (.435)	1.935
admission probability	.407(7.140)**	1.744			
	.111(2.562)	1.172			

\*  $P < .05$ , \*\*  $P < .01$

The research model of this study aims to comprehensively examine the effects of university choice factors on intention to persist in studies, with university life satisfaction serving as a mediating variable. Accordingly, the proposed research model was tested by examining the mediating effect of university life satisfaction. The Sobel test was employed to assess the significance of the mediation effect.

The results indicated that, in the regression analyses including both the independent variables and the mediating variable, both sets of variables exerted statistically significant effects on intention to persist in studies. These findings suggest the presence of partial mediation. In other words, university choice factors influence intention to persist in studies both directly and indirectly through university life satisfaction.

Table 9. Mediation Analysis

	university life satisfaction	intention to persist in studies	
	$\beta$ (t-value)	$\beta$ (t-value)	$\beta$ (t-value)
factors affecting university selection	.675(12.109)**	.652(10.453)**	.339(4.813)**
university life satisfaction	-	-	.465(7.583)**
F, $R^2$	F= 146.636, $R^2$ = .346	F= 109.257, $R^2$ = .283	F= 94.518, $R^2$ = .406
sobel test	partial mediation, .861(Z>1.96)		

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

To examine differences based on respondents' academic major fields, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for the study variables. The results indicated statistically significant differences in the university choice factors of university awareness, educational excellence, and admission probability across major fields.

With respect to university awareness, students majoring in humanities and social sciences reported the highest levels, followed by those in engineering and science and undeclared majors, while students in arts and physical education reported the lowest levels.

Regarding university life satisfaction, education satisfaction showed statistically significant differences across major fields. Students in arts and physical education reported lower levels of education satisfaction compared to students in other academic fields. Similarly, for intention to persist in studies, students majoring in arts and physical education exhibited significantly lower levels than those in other groups.

Table 10. Differences by Academic Major Field (ANOVA)

construct		humanities & social sciences (n=97)	engineering & science (n=40)	arts & physical education (n=51)	undeclared major (n=91)	F
factors affecting university selection	university usability	2.54	2.69	2.47	2.31	1.919
	university awareness	3.71(c)	3.41(b)	2.62(a)	3.22(b)	20.985**
	educational excellence	3.98(b)	3.89(b)	3.04(a)	3.83(b)	18.675**
	admission probability	3.77(b)	3.74(b)	3.41(a)	3.89(b)	3.270*
university life satisfaction	education satisfaction	3.79(b)	3.80(b)	3.30(a)	3.66(b)	5.676**
	services & facilities satisfaction	3.30	3.44	3.30	3.09	1.950
intention to persist in studies		4.25(b)	4.26(b)	3.49(a)	4.19(b)	14.078**

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , Duncan Test  $a < b < c$



#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to examine the effects of university choice factors on university life satisfaction and intention to persist in studies among first-year university students, and to empirically test the mediating role of university life satisfaction in the relationship between university choice factors and intention to persist. Based on the findings, the discussion is presented as follows.

First, the relationship between university choice factors and university life satisfaction was examined, and the results indicated that university choice factors exerted partially significant effects on university life satisfaction. Specifically, university awareness and educational excellence had positive effects on education satisfaction, while university usability and educational excellence significantly influenced satisfaction with services and facilities. These findings suggest that, when evaluating their university life, students place greater importance on pre-established perceptions of the institution and the quality of education they experience, rather than solely on physical environments or admission-related conditions. This result is consistent with previous studies asserting that expectations and perceptions formed during the college choice stage continue to shape students' evaluations of university life after enrollment.

In particular, the finding that educational excellence influenced both education satisfaction and services and facilities satisfaction is noteworthy. This suggests that students perceive educational quality not merely in terms of instructional content or faculty competence, but as a broader concept encompassing the overall learning environment and educational support systems. In this regard, educational excellence functions as a comprehensive evaluative criterion for students' university experiences, indicating that universities should pursue holistic improvements in educational environments to enhance their educational competitiveness.

Next, the analysis of the effects of university life satisfaction on intention to persist in studies revealed that education satisfaction had a statistically significant effect, whereas satisfaction with services and facilities did not. This finding implies that students' decisions to continue their academic studies are driven more by learning experiences, major satisfaction, and perceptions of academic achievement than by convenience-related facilities or administrative services. These results align with theoretical perspectives emphasizing the central role of academic integration in student persistence and empirically demonstrate that meaningful learning experiences strengthen students' intentions to persist in their studies.

In addition, the direct effects of university choice factors on intention to persist in studies were examined. The results showed that university usability, educational excellence, and admission probability had statistically significant effects on intention to persist. This indicates that the practical considerations and expectations students hold at the time of university selection may be closely associated with their subsequent academic behaviors. Among these factors, educational excellence emerged as a particularly influential determinant, suggesting that expectations regarding educational quality formed prior to enrollment play a critical role in shaping students' academic engagement and persistence intentions.

The finding that admission probability significantly affected intention to persist suggests that students who enter university with a relatively stable and confident admission decision may be more inclined to continue their studies. This result implies that uncertainty and anxiety experienced during the admission process could influence subsequent persistence behaviors, highlighting the need for more in-depth analysis in future research.

Finally, the mediating effect of university life satisfaction in the relationship between university choice factors and intention to persist was examined. The results indicated that university life satisfaction played a partial mediating role. This suggests that university choice factors influence intention to persist not only directly but also indirectly through university life satisfaction. In other words, expectations and perceptions formed during the university selection stage are reshaped through actual university experiences, and the quality of these experiences subsequently contributes to students' persistence behaviors.

In summary, this study provides empirical evidence clarifying the relationships among university choice factors, university life satisfaction, and intention to persist in studies, thereby offering an integrated understanding of the process linking university selection, university life experiences, and academic persistence. In particular, the



findings highlight that educational excellence and education satisfaction serve as key determinants of persistence intention, suggesting that universities should place educational quality at the core of both student recruitment and retention strategies.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study empirically examined the effects of university choice factors on university life satisfaction and intention to persist in studies among first-year university students. University choice factors were categorized into four dimensions—university usability, university awareness, educational excellence, and admission probability—and both their direct and indirect effects on university life satisfaction and intention to persist were analyzed. Through this approach, the study sought to clarify the structural relationships linking the university selection stage to subsequent academic persistence behaviors.

First, the results demonstrated that university choice factors significantly influenced university life satisfaction. Specifically, university awareness and educational excellence were found to have significant effects on education satisfaction, while university usability, university awareness, and educational excellence significantly influenced satisfaction with services and facilities. These findings indicate that students' satisfaction with university life is shaped not only by functional or physical aspects of the institution, but also by their prior perceptions of the university and the quality of education they experience.

Second, university choice factors were found to have significant effects on intention to persist in studies. In particular, university usability, university awareness, and educational excellence—factors that were also influential in shaping university life satisfaction—were shown to significantly affect students' intention to persist. This suggests that universities should continuously manage and strengthen these factors not only at the recruitment stage but also throughout students' academic experiences.

Third, additional analyses revealed statistically significant differences in university choice factors, university life satisfaction, and intention to persist according to students' academic major fields. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that universities may benefit from developing differentiated support and management strategies tailored to students' disciplinary backgrounds, particularly during the early stages of university life.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by empirically examining the relationships among university choice factors, university life satisfaction, and intention to persist in studies among first-year students. By identifying key factors and their interrelationships, the study provides both theoretical insights and practical implications for understanding student persistence in higher education.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, to enhance the generalizability of the findings, future studies should include a more diverse range of universities. Given variations in institutional characteristics such as geographic location, institutional reputation, and specialization, further research across different types of universities is warranted. Second, although this study examined differences across academic major fields, future research may benefit from more fine-grained analyses that simultaneously consider institutional characteristics and disciplinary contexts. Such approaches would allow for a more nuanced understanding of student decision-making and persistence behaviors in higher education.

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