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AN ANALYSIS OF SCIENCE MAJOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PREFERENCES FOR PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Student preferences in continuing their studies to the college level are a crucial topic in education, particularly for those transitioning from high school. This study aims to identify and compare these preferences between students in urban and rural high schools. Using a descriptive and comparative quantitative approach, data were collected from 163 students through a questionnaire comprising 26 items developed from previous research. Descriptive analysis and independent samples t-tests were used to examine patterns and differences. The findings indicate that, overall, there are no significant differences in student preferences between urban and rural schools across most indicators, such as prestige, knowledge, location, opportunity, and economy. However, a notable distinction was found in the "campus" indicator, where urban students showed a stronger preference, particularly for facilities, green open spaces, and infrastructure. These results suggest that while student motivations are generally consistent across regions, campus quality holds greater influence for urban students, highlighting the importance of improving campus environments and accessibility to support students in making informed higher education choices.

Introduction

In era of globalization, individuals must equip themselves with information and skills to remain competitive and to help navigate increasingly complex challenges (OECD, 2018). intensifies, the development of high-quality human resources becomes essential (UNESCO, 2021). Education in various forms plays a key role in this era to fase those challenges. Formal education follows a structured and systematic curriculum; non-formal education includes programs outside the official curriculum, such as courses, private tutoring, and extracurricular activities; and informal education refers to learning through family and community experiences conducted independently and responsibly (Syaadah et al., 2023).

Education is vital for all age groups, from youth to the elderly. It involves acquiring knowledge, skills, and values that shape future generations. Through education, individuals gain competencies that foster personal development and societal contribution (Yunus et al., 2021). It influences human growth and development, leading to changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for everyday life (OECD, 2018).

In the context of science education, science process skills (defined as systematic methods used in scientific investigations) help students develop a deeper understanding of concepts and scientific abilities (Etkina & Planinsic, 2024). The three years of high school serve as a critical phase to deepen foundational knowledge and prepare students to engage effectively with their social, cultural, and natural environments. Both students and higher education institutions must consider these factors to improve educational quality and institutional competitiveness. A comprehensive understanding of students' decision-making processes can help universities better prepare future generations to face upcoming challenges (Pramudiyanto et al., 2024).

High school students typically face four major challenges: social problems, academic difficulties, decisions regarding higher education, and the risk of dropping out. Among these, choosing a college or university is one of the most important decisions they must make (Irvan, 2020). Every prospective student who wishes to pursue higher education must decide on a study program choice that significantly influences their future trajectory. Ideally, this choice should align with their perceptions and interests (Putri et al., 2024), as interest is a key driver for achieving optimal learning outcomes (Haikal et al., 2020).

During this process, students face various options and must make informed decisions based on both internal and external motivations (Saputri et al., 2025; Satrianti et al., 2024). Internal factors may include personal interests, while external influences may stem from peers, family, or societal expectations—all of which shape decision-making (Rahmania & Ivada, 2025). Although many variables affect the selection of a major, students' interests and learning motivations play a central role determining what major they will take in college (Saragih & Simbolon, 2022). A lack of understanding about available study programs can lead students to choose majors misaligned with their interests and competencies. Additionally, the desire to conform to social expectations or pursue prestigious programs can also impact their choices (Ulfa et al., 2020).

Interest in a study program significantly shapes behavior and decision-making. Strong interest motivates individuals, influences actions, and drives them to achieve their goals targets (Rafli, 2025). Unfortunately, many students make hasty choices without thorough consideration, often following trends or relying on limited knowledge. Such rushed decisions can result in poor alignment between their academic capabilities and chosen majors, leading to dissatisfaction, program transfers, or even changing universities altogether (Herdiansah, 2020).

This study presents a novel contribution by focusing specifically on the preferences of science-major students from public high schools, comparing those in urban and rural settings. Unlike previous studies that focused on differences between public and private school students, this research identifies specific indicators that influence students' college preferences—such as prestige, academic interest, campus reputation, location, opportunities, and financial considerations (Gulluce et al., 2016). By examining these factors, this study aims to explore and compare the determinants of science students' decisions to pursue higher education based on geographic location. As a key stage in formal education, senior high school plays a decisive role in shaping student personality and future direction. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to further studies and serve as valuable insights for students considering their higher education paths.

Research Methods

This study employed a descriptive quantitative and comparative research design. The population consisted of 200 students from science programs in public high schools located in both urban and rural areas. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample, resulting in a total of 163 students, comprising 70 grade XI students from rural high schools and 93 grade XI students from urban high schools. The sample was limited to three classes, corresponding to the number of grade XI classes available in the rural high school.

Data were collected using a questionnaire on preferences for continuing education, adapted from a study by Gulluce et al. (2016), which aimed to measure differences in educational preferences between urban and rural students. The questionnaire consists of six indicators: 1) Prestige (reputation of the university), 2) Knowledge (information students have about universities), 3) Campus (facilities and infrastructure), 4) Location

(geographical location of the university), 5) Opportunity (chances of being admitted), and 6) Economy (financial cost of education).

The questionnaire was designed using a 5-point Likert scale with the following response options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Responses were scored on a scale of 1 to 5, respectively. The collected data were then analyzed descriptively and comparatively using descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test. Those test applied in order to identify and compare the factors influencing students' preferences for pursuing higher education in both urban and rural areas.

Result and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

The results of the analysis of student preferences using descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Results

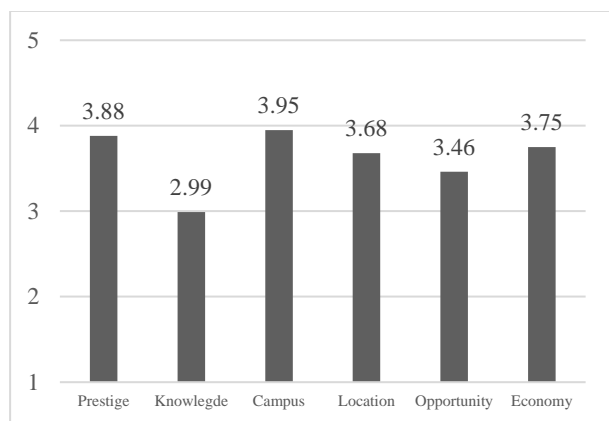|	N	Min	Max	Mean		Std. Deviation	Skewness	
				Statistic	Std. Error		Statistic	Std. Error
Average preference	163	1.88	4.69	3.54	0.05	0.64	-0.49	0.19
Prestige	163	2.00	5.00	3.88	0.04	0.49	-0.73	0.19
Knowledge	163	1.00	5.00	2.99	0.07	0.92	0.14	0.19
Campus	163	2.00	5.00	3.95	0.05	0.61	-0.80	0.19
Location	163	1.80	5.00	3.68	0.05	0.62	-0.78	0.19
Opportunity	163	2.00	5.00	3.46	0.05	0.60	-0.01	0.19
Economy	163	1.33	5.00	3.75	0.06	0.72	-0.64	0.19

Figure 1. Average student preference for continuing studies

Table 1 summarizes responses from 163 students in both urban and rural high schools, focusing on six key indicators: *prestige, knowledge, campus, location, opportunity, and e*conomy. Among these indicators, the campus factor obtained

the highest average score of 3.95, indicating that students place the greatest emphasis on campus-related aspects when considering their decision to pursue higher education.

The standard deviation for the *campus* indicator is 0.61, suggesting a moderate variation in student responses regarding its importance. A lower standard deviation generally reflects greater agreement among respondents. Thus, the value of 0.61 indicates that although many students prioritize campus-related factors, their views still vary to some extent. Students' choices are typically careful and considerate, influenced not only by personal factors but also by external conditions (Siswanto et al., 2021). A supportive academic environment—including a clean campus, low noise levels, and the presence of green open spaces—can significantly enhance student motivation and academic performance. Moreover, access to up-to-date

14

information technology and reliable internet also plays a vital role in learning effectiveness. Environmental aspects such as cleanliness, low disruption, and green spaces contribute positively to learning enthusiasm (Sianipar et al., 2024).

The *prestige* indicator ranks second with an average score of 3.88 and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.49, indicating general agreement among students about the importance of a university's reputation. Prestige has been shown to significantly influence students' college choices (Sopian et al., 2022). In contrast, the *knowledge* indicator has a lower average score of 2.99, close to the neutral midpoint, with a higher standard deviation of 0.92, indicating greater variation in student perceptions. This suggests that decisions to pursue higher education are influenced by more than just available information; factors such as personal interest, academic capability, financial readiness, and institutional reputation also play significant roles (Siswanto et al., 2021).

The *location* indicator has an average score of 3.68 with a standard deviation of 0.62, suggesting a moderate level of agreement. The *opportunity* indicator follows with an average score of 3.46 and a standard deviation of 0.60. Lastly, the *economy*

indicator shows a relatively high average of 3.75 with a standard deviation of 0.72. These findings reinforce the idea that students place more emphasis on campus conditions, prestige, and financial considerations when choosing a university.

A visual representation of these preferences is shown in Figure 1, which highlights the *campus* indicator as the most influential factor in students' decisions to pursue higher education, followed by *prestige* (3.88), *economy* (3.75), *location* (3.68), *opportunity* (3.46), and *knowledge* (2.99). Environmental factors are indeed critical in influencing student learning outcomes. Noisy, dirty, and hot environments tend to reduce learning effectiveness, while clean, cool, and refreshing conditions enhance student focus and academic engagement (Assa, 2022).

Furthermore, Table 2 presents the average scores of each indicator preferences for students from urban and rural schools in pursuing higher education. In urban areas, the campus indicator remains the most highly rated, whereas in rural areas, both the prestige and economy indicators share the highest average scores. Standard deviation values are relatively low across indicators, suggesting consistent responses.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

|	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean		Std. Deviation	Skewness	
					Statistic	Std. Error		Statistic	Std. Error
Average Preferences of Urban High School	93	2.57	2.06	4.63	3.52	0.06	0.56	-0.57	0.25
Prestige	93	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.92	0.04	0.43	-0.87	0.25
Knowledge	93	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.08	0.10	0.96	-0.15	0.25
Campus	93	2.60	2.40	5.00	4.08	0.05	0.53	-0.45	0.25
Location	93	3.00	1.80	4.80	3.66	0.06	0.61	-0.99	0.25
Opportunity	93	2.50	2.25	4.75	3.43	0.06	0.58	0.02	0.25
Economy	93	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.70	0.07	0.70	-0.40	0.25
Average Preferences of Rural High School	70	2.81	1.88	4.69	3.57	0.09	0.72	-0.47	0.29
Prestige	70	2.66	2.17	4.83	3.83	0.07	0.56	-0.54	0.29
Knowledge	70	3.33	1.67	5.00	2.86	0.10	0.84	0.61	0.29
Campus	70	2.80	2.00	4.80	3.77	0.08	0.67	-0.84	0.29
Location	70	3.20	1.80	5.00	3.69	0.08	0.64	-0.56	0.29
Opportunity	70	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.50	0.08	0.63	-0.08	0.29
Economy	70	3.67	1.33	5.00	3.83	0.09	0.75	-0.96	0.29

15
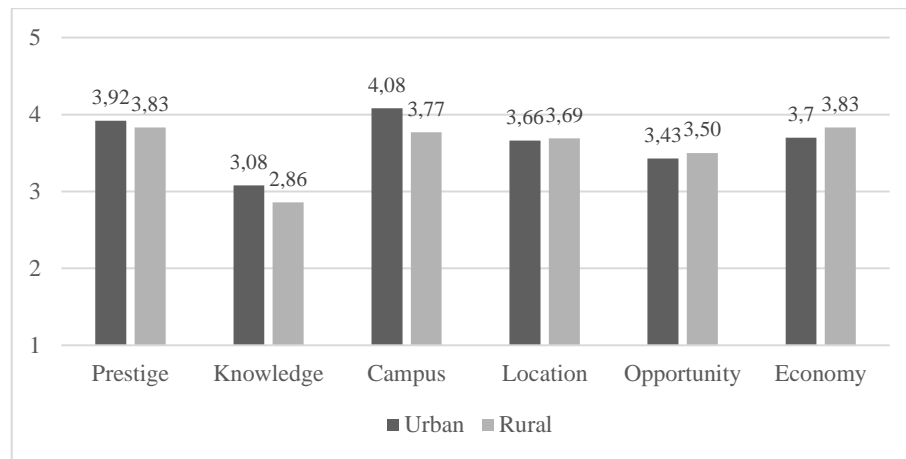
Figure 2. Average student preference for continuing studies

The comparison of these preferences is further illustrated in Figure 2, where urban students show higher scores than rural students in several indicators:

Prestige (Indicator 1): Urban students scored higher (3.92) than rural students (3.83). University prestige is commonly linked to accreditation, which is often a key consideration for prospective students. Accreditation assures academic quality and enhances a university's reputation, making it a vital factor in decision-making (Masnawati & Darmawan, 2023). It is one of the main factors influencing students' interest in a particular institution (Bakar et al., 2022).

Knowledge (Indicator 2): Urban students also scored higher (3.08) compared to rural students (2.86). Access to better information and resources allows students to evaluate study programs, institutional quality, and available facilities more thoroughly. Thus, access to accurate and diverse information plays a crucial role in informed college selection (Masnawati & Darmawan, 2023).

Campus (Indicator 3): Urban students scored 4.08, higher than rural students (3.77). Campus facilities and infrastructure are critical factors that support teaching and learning activities (Pranata et al., 2023). Accreditation also reflects institutional commitment to maintaining adequate facilities and learning environments (Gunada et al., 2024).

Location (Indicator 4): Unlike other indicators, rural students rated location slightly higher (3.69) than urban students (3.66). A strategic and accessible location enhances students' convenience and participation in learning activities.

Effective learning is more likely when the educational institution is situated in a favorable environment (Triyono et al., 2021).

Opportunity (Indicator 5): Again, rural students rated this indicator higher (3.50) than urban students (3.43). This factor includes opportunities for internships and post-graduation employment. Institutions that ensure professional development and real-world readiness tend to attract more students (Nugroho & Nursito, 2019).

Economy (Indicator 6): In this indicator, urban high school students have a lower average score (3.70) than their rural counterparts (3.83). This suggests that economic considerations may carry greater weight for students in rural areas. Consequently, it is essential for universities to be mindful of the cost of education and provide adequate financial support mechanisms to help students achieve their academic aspirations. By doing so, institutions can broaden access to higher education and empower students to make meaningful contributions to society (Harahap et al., 2021).

Comparative test

Based on the averages shown in Figure 1 and 2, the overall student preference for continuing to higher education—when viewed across urban and rural high school students—shows some variation. One notable finding is that Indicator 3 (Campus) has the highest average compared to other indicators. An Independent Samples T-test was conducted to examine whether there is a statistically significant difference in students' preferences between urban and rural high schools. The test results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Preference	Ev assumed	5.37	0.02	0.46	161	0.65	-0.05	0.10	-0.26	0.16
	Ev not assumed			0.44	130	0.66	-0.05	0.11	-0.27	0.16

*Ev=*Equal Variances*

Table 3 displays the results of the Independent Samples T-test comparing student preferences between schools in urban and rural areas. The findings show that the overall difference is not statistically significant, with a mean difference of only -0.05, which does not meet the standard level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$). The average score for urban high schools is 3.52, while rural high schools average 3.56. This suggests that school location does not substantially affect students' preference to pursue higher education.

These small differences further indicate that school location does not significantly influence students' preferences for higher education. In addition, prospective students tend to evaluate multiple aspects of universities, including infrastructure, internet access, extracurricular activities, and more (Lusianti & Santoso, 2023).

Generally, prospective students from urban areas may have different expectations for higher education compared to those from rural areas, largely due to differences in economic competitiveness and lifestyle demands. Financial capabilities vary, but the availability of scholarships can help reduce enrollment disparities, especially in private universities. However, financial factors are not the sole determinants of university choice. Other variables also play a critical role (Lusianti & Santoso, 2023). For more details, see Table 4. Independent Samples Test.

Table 4. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	Std. Error Dif.	Lower	Upper
Prestige	Ev assumed	7.97	0.01	1.10	161	0.27	0.09	0.08	-0.07	0.24
	Ev not assumed			1.06	125	0.29	0.09	0.08	-0.07	0.25
Knowledge	**Ev assumed**	2.52	0.11	1.53	161	0.13	0.22	0.14	-0.06	0.51
	Ev not assumed			1.56	158	0.12	0.22	0.01	-0.06	0.50
Campus	Ev assumed	3.88	0.05	3.33	161	0.00	0.31	0.09	0.13	0.50
	Ev not assumed			3.22	128	0.00	0.31	0.10	0.12	0.50
Location	**Ev assumed**	0.04	0.54	-0.30	161	0.76	-0.03	0.10	-0.23	0.17
	Ev not assumed			-0.30	146	0.77	-0.03	0.10	-0.23	0.17
Opportunity	**Ev assumed**	0.17	0.68	-0.77	161	0.44	-0.07	0.10	-0.26	0.12
	Ev not assumed			-0.76	142	0.04	-0.07	0.10	-0.27	0.12
Economy	**Ev assumed**	0.44	0.51	-0.12	161	0.23	-0.14	0.11	-0.36	0.09
	Ev not assumed			-0.19	144	0.24	-0.14	0.01	-0.37	0.09

*Ev=Equal Variances

According to Table 4, only Indicator 3 (Campus) showed a statistically significant difference between urban and rural schools. The mean for urban high schools is 4.08, while for rural high schools it is 3.77, with a difference of 0.31 on a 5-point scale. Within this indicator, Item 2 stands out with the most substantial difference: Urban = 3.99, Rural = 3.54; Difference = 0.45. This suggests that students consider the "campus" factor to be more influential than other indicators.

The campus environment is crucial to students' educational experiences. Institutions that provide modern infrastructure and quality facilities create a more supportive learning atmosphere. Moreover, environmentally conscious campuses are increasingly favored, especially in urban or metropolitan regions. Given the limited green spaces and high pollution levels in these areas, efforts to create sustainable and green campuses are not only desirable but essential (Subagio et al., 2021). Environmental sustainability can be promoted through initiatives such as tree planting, reforestation, and biodiversity conservation, utilizing green spaces effectively (Mahanani et al., 2024).

The remaining indicators (Prestige, Knowledge, Location, Opportunity, and Economy) did not show significant differences between urban and rural students. The relatively small differences suggest that students from both settings share similar perspectives on these factors. Most students aim to achieve the highest possible education level, and their decision-making process involves comparing key characteristics of universities, including accreditation, affordability, distance from home, and available facilities (Lusianti & Santoso, 2023).

Further supporting this, a study by Saefurahman et al. (2023) found that students were more influenced by family than by friends or teachers. Advertising was found to have a greater impact than social media or promotional activities. In terms of campus facilities, students placed higher value on teaching facilities compared to sports or arts facilities. When considering educational costs, scholarships and affordability played a crucial role in decision-making. Additionally, students showed a preference for universities located closer to home and those that held accreditation, rather than those that were farther away or unaccredited.

Conclusion

The study revealed that while student preferences for continuing to higher education are generally similar between urban and rural high school students, one notable difference lies in the "campus" indicator, where urban students showed a stronger preference. This suggests that students from urban areas place higher importance on campus infrastructure and environmental quality. Meanwhile, other indicators such as prestige, knowledge, location, opportunity, and economy showed minimal differences between the two groups, indicating that these factors are perceived similarly regardless of school location. The findings are supported by previous studies, which highlight that students prioritize family influence, advertising, teaching facilities, scholarships, affordability, proximity to home, and institutional accreditation when selecting a university.

Given these findings, universities should ensure equitable access and improve campus quality to attract students from various backgrounds. Special attention should be given to infrastructure, environmental sustainability, and the availability of financial aid, especially for students from less privileged areas. Moreover, higher education institutions must also enhance their outreach and communication strategies, including leveraging family influence and effective advertising, to better inform and engage prospective students.

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Putri et al

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Putri et al